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Section Code: C023

Intro:

Liliana Truță¹

On Silence, Quietness and Word

Silence can only exist the very moment the word has already enacted. In a word order, it is definitely a sign of the words' absence. For silence to exist and to be consequently labelled per se, the word should first emerge and be uttered. Thus, silence turns into a second reality, primarily conditioned by a pre-existing presence, that of the words.

Nevertheless, while silence does physically **exist**, quietness is somehow an **artefact**. Silence is emptiness, words are a whole, but both of them are tributaries to that particular flow within silence. Silence and word essentially represent the very breaking in two of this primordial uniqueness that brings peace along. And this is the duality in which one cannot exist in the absence of the other. The word was quietly broken, and thus its opposite – the silence - was born.

But silence does not need words to be articulated. It simply exists. Noise, hustle and bustle, mere movement, may all act as its antonyms, but it can properly exist as well without them, not being afterall predetermined by their presence. This happens since silence still exists

¹ Partium Christian University, Oradea, Romania

both behind and inside of them, it exists before the noise has been made and long after its disappearance, its vanishing into thin air, but also during its full manifestation. Silence is what lies behind everything that is vividly and utterly displayed and it is ready to be felt and tasted the minute the noise suddenly disappears. It can simply be identified before all these and mostly inside all these. One might say that silence is virtuality, formless totality, it is life in its absolute.

Moreover, silence is the very pause between two words, it is the emptiness that interrupts a flow. Being deeply dependent on the existence and respectively the materialization of the word itself, silence is eminently both social and cultural. However, tranquility does belong to nature, it is after all a natural and cosmic experience. Only the one who was given the ability to speak (meaning a human being) can indeed be silent, that is why silence only exists where there are people to utter words. There's no doubt that nature prefers the primordial, not a secondary reality, such as silence. So silence would obviously prefer the tranquility of being, forasmuch as no other creature can practically produce a word and then rest in silence. It is common knowledge that society and culture need words in order to create meaning, but nature articulates itself without them, nature communicates without words, and hence it does not need silence either. It is in itself pure meaning and substance.

Words involve structure, form, cosmicization and rolling of meaning altogether. On the other hand, silence entails rest, retreat, a pause from the "terror" of meaning. The word is both creation and manifestation, but since it is a form, it also stands for a death sentence. Silence suggests the withdrawal in themselves of things, of thoughts, of the idea, implying their non-manifestation, the particular regrouping of offensive dynamics. The offensive is against the world, which words try to subdue by form, in order to force its significances. The indecency of speech, the indelicacy of the word lies in these repeated assaults on a totality that generates terror. Silence is the helpless retreat, the awareness of this fear in the face of the fluid meaning of the world, which refuses to form, eluding the concrete shape. That is why both knowledge and revelation are expected in silence, they do not live in the

presence of words.

Hence the expressions: "I was speechless", "I was tongue-tied". To remain speechless or mute or rather lost for words confronting the reality are reflections of this ancient fear experienced by human beings whenever they are faced with a reality fleeing away from words, a reality always ahead of us, evading us, denying us the meanings we so zealously seek. And exactly where experience rises above the understanding of the limited human being or goes beyond the patterns of conventional naturalness or "normality," there comes silence, darkness, a power break, and all the words that could accurately describe this particular actuality are genuinely gone, they have all disappeared. Consequently, there comes syncope and then silence, because the words become powerless again and the limits of a second reality enhances... There is an obvious need, therefore, for silence, for that regrouping of forces before the actual assault.

But, rarely, in this breach of silence, can we really have access for a moment to a full silence, which is no longer just the emptiness created by the lack of the word, but it stands for much more than that: the leap into the silence primordiality. It is the very leap we make and take from tranquility to silence, that is, to timeless knowledge. Silence derives and initiates from time, just as the word does. Tranquility is any human being's timeless sleep, it covers the spot where the division between word and silence or between mind and heart was not yet born...

Although it seems an ineffable reality, silence can sometimes reach a certain material density. For such moments we have the phrase: "a heavy silence has been laid down".... Here the words have fled again and the silence properly expresses an open tension, which it cannot be hidden or disguised. It resembles a heavy curtain falling over a completed theatrical scene. Apparently, there is simply too much to say and the form has not yet been created or there are too dark feelings that still do not tolerate the light of consciousness. And then there comes silence inserting itself as a disturbing but quite necessary break in a reality that must be ordered again; silence is nevertheless marking a

syncope and the world has to find its inner strength in order to breathe the oxygen of balance again, afterwards.

The expression "to break the silence" also speaks of this peculiar density of quietness. It is somehow the opposite meaning of the above phrase. In this case, there is a limit to the silence, a limit that requires intervention: it must be split, dissipated, violated in order to re-enter the homeland of meaning, in the fluidity and dance of communication. Resting in silence has already become quite unbearable...

Silence is thereby rather the sign of an absence, of a void, of a pause; even if in reference to silence one would usually say that "it is full, or complete", it is the very fullness that actually needs nothing, anyway not words to define itself by the process of opposition. Accordingly, silence is the pause after a spoken sentence, it is the pause between the heartbeats that "speak" the language of life, it is the syncope in a rhythm doomed to never end.

Silence is absence because it definitely marks something that used to be but there is no more. Or something that is not yet, but will be soon. It is the absence of any communication, not only through words: through presence, through body, through thoughts. Everything that exists or has existed and is no longer associated with silence, everything that exists and it is difficult to articulate, everything that exists but it is hidden by and to others – all these eventually turn into silence. Any experience whatsoever can be assumed by silence or by word, but it will always be superior to these two, it will always be above them. We are a sum of silences and a sum of words altogether. And life is the spiraling rhythm of these two undeniable truths: the truth of words and the truth of silence. It is the fluid music of these ever-recurrent swings.

Silence
Literary - 9ms

Le silence
Études littéraires

Dit (s) et non-dit(s) du silence dans *La Traversée* de Mouloud Mammeri

Fatima Boukhelou¹

Résumé

*Le présent article ambitionne de démontrer comment, dans *La Traversée*, publiée en 1982, trente ans après *La Colline Oubliée* (1952), le village appelé Tasga, jadis vibrant à l'unisson du Cosmos, est devenu trente années plus tard un village mouroir où ne prévaut que le silence. A la lumière d'une approche mythanalytique, nous évaluerons, dans un premier temps, les mutations survenues au sein du village à travers le regard du journaliste Mourad. Dans un deuxième temps, nous suivrons Mourad jusque dans le désert, pour assister à un cours dispensé par un maître d'école à des enfants Touareg. Tout au long de notre exposé, nous serons confrontée à des situations de communication assez insolites où ne prédomine que le silence dont nous essayerons d'analyser les dits et les non-dits.*

Mots clefs : *approche mythanalytique, village mouroir, dits et non-dits, communication, silence.*

Abstract

*This article aims to demonstrate how, in “*La Traversée*”, published in 1982, thirty years after “*La Colline Oubliée*” (1952), the village called Tasga, formerly vibrating in unison with the Cosmos, became thirty years later a dying village where only silence prevails. In the light of a mythanalytic approach, we will first assess the changes that have occurred in the village through the eyes of the journalist Mourad. Then, we will follow Mourad to the desert, to attend a course given by a school teacher to Tuareg children. Throughout our presentation, we will be confronted with rather unusual situations of communication where only silence predominate, and we will try to analyze what is said and not said.*

¹ Université Mouloud Mammeri, Tizi Ouzou, Algérie

Key words: *mythanalytic approach, dying village, said and not said, communication, silence.*

Introduction

La Colline oubliée (1952), roman inaugural de l'œuvre romanesque mammérienne, met en scène un village appelé Tasga, Centre du monde accordé au Cosmos, expressions que nous empruntons à Mircea Eliade. Dans ce centre du monde, se trouve *Taasast, axe du monde* et espace sacré, qui, reliant le *Ciel*, la *Terre* et l'*Enfer*, constituait les racines du passé le plus immémorial en même temps qu'elle était l'avant-garde. En plus de cet espace sacré, le village compte d'autres espaces, tout aussi sacrés, car harmonieusement accordés au village et formant un tout homogène et cohérent. Il s'agit de la fontaine, espace féminin par excellence, de la mosquée plusieurs fois séculaire, de la djemaa où se réunissent les vieux du village, gardiens de la sagesse et dépositaires de la parole.

Trente ans plus tard, le même village est mis en scène dans *La Traversée*, ultime roman de l'auteur. Or, les changements survenus au village semblent lui avoir fait perdre « l'âme de son âme ». Les espaces sont désaccordés, l'harmonie a cessé d'être et l'esprit qui animait les lieux et les habitants semble s'être évanoui.

Il nous faut donc, dans un premier temps, revenir à l'ancien Tasga mis en représentation dans *La Colline oubliée* pour appréhender pleinement les changements ayant affecté le village et les comportements de ses habitants dont le mutisme est des plus significatifs. Dans un second temps, nous allons nous rendre au cœur du désert, naguère espace de la liberté, devenu un lieu d'internement/d'internat des enfants Touareg, livrés à la fêrule du maître d'école venu d'Égypte et qui n'ont d'autre recours que le silence à opposer à la pression subie.

1.1. Taasast

Si Taasast était omniprésente dans *La Colline Oubliée*, son absence est criante dans *La Traversée*. L'on pourrait dire que cette absence est elliptiquement mise en scène :

C'était un Tasga fantôme. Les noms des rues, des places, des fontaines étaient les mêmes, mais quel magicien avait enchanté ce décor vide, frappé d'immobilité à jamais ? ²

²*La Traversée*, Paris, Plon, 1982, p.50.

Bien que la disparition de cet espace sacré ne soit pas explicitement évoquée, elle n'en est pas moins amplement suggérée. Les corollaires de cette perte sont alors mis en exergue, soulignant l'importance de la fonction de ce lieu et la symbolique de son existence. *Taasast* était le *centre du centre* et le *sommet du monde*. C'est elle qui « cosmisait » l'univers et c'est d'elle que le village tout entier tirait sa force, sa raison d'être et sa spiritualité. Veillant sur le village tel un pâtre sur son troupeau, *Taasast* était le principe même qui introduisait un « élément d'absoluité » et apportait la dimension de « réel » dont tout espace a besoin pour devenir sacré³, comme l'affirme Mircea Eliade. *Taasast*, temple sotériologique et cosmologique, tirait sa force des profondeurs des régions inférieures pour s'élever vers les plus hautes altitudes et réunissait les deux pôles du village. C'est pourquoi son absence induit des répercussions considérables sur Tasga, qui a fini par devenir un village fantôme.

Naguère debout et fier parce que puisant ses forces de son centre même, ce « nid d'aigle » n'est plus qu'un décor de théâtre. Il semblerait qu'un sortilège ait été jeté à tout le village, sortilège dont les effets s'étendent jusqu'aux habitants. Le passé est en train de mourir, c'est un passé révolu ayant à peine existé. Cette situation dénote le déni fait à toute la culture berbère. Deux éléments mettent en exergue le désir sous-jacent de détruire l'harmonie du village en effaçant ses valeurs et en brouillant son image : il s'agit de la mosquée nouvellement construite avec son minaret doté d'un micro, et des transformations décidées par l'armée, imposant un modèle importé au détriment du modèle originel. Le pouvoir, s'articulant sur le religieux, en assure le contrôle et en garantit l'usage.

On avait construit une mosquée neuve avec un micro sur le minaret. Les ronces avaient envahi les chemins, même celui des fontaines où plus personne ne passait depuis que l'armée avait installé des bornes fontaines⁴.

L'accent est mis sur l'omniprésence des puissances sacerdotale et militaire. Les symboles qui constellent autour de la mosquée évoquent la notion de puissance religieuse surdéterminée par la verticalité du minaret. Le sceptre avec sa verticalité et le glaive avec son effcience sont les garants archétypaux de la toute-puissance, dans le

³ « De ce fait, le réel par excellence est le sacré ; car seul le sacré est d'une manière absolue, agit efficacement, crée, et fait durer les choses ». Mircea Eliade, *Le Mythe de l'éternel retour, (Archétypes et répétitions)*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Idées », 1969, p.23.

⁴*La Traversée, op. cit.*, p.50.

régime diurne de l'image, et à ce niveau, ils sont les symboles de cette double opération d'aliénation et d'annexion de la psyché. Les forces maternelles, féminines et nocturnes sont assujetties, terrassées par les puissances diurnes. Si l'on songe que *Taast* est féminine et que le minaret de la mosquée est masculin, cela corrobore notre thèse qui s'avère pertinente à travers l'exemple suivant : « *Dehors la lune projetait sur la place l'ombre de la mosquée, dont la masse coiffait le haut de la colline. (...) Au pied du minaret tout Tasga était endormi. (...) En quelle province de planète perdue avait poussé cette ville morte ? Quel cri susciterait du néant cet amas de fenêtres aveugles ?* »⁵

1.2. L'ancienne mosquée vs la nouvelle mosquée

C'est ainsi que l'analyse du thème de la phrase, « *on avait construit une mosquée neuve avec un micro sur le minaret* », nous en dit plus long qu'il n'y paraît. Cette simple phrase à la forme active - dont le sens dénote tout autant la préméditation et la précipitation des actions entreprises et ayant pour sujet un pronom indéfini- est plus éloquente qu'un long paragraphe. On sent alors une recrudescence dans la volonté d'acculturation de Tasga. Grâce à cette double information, on apprend que le village est entièrement sous la mainmise du pouvoir en place.

La construction d'une mosquée neuve induit l'idée que l'ancien lieu de culte, plusieurs fois séculaire, est déclaré hors-temps, idée que l'adjonction du micro au minaret renforce et surdétermine. Mais ce qui est surtout éloquent, c'est l'appropriation par le nouvel édifice de toute une dimension naguère encore d'une importance cruciale. Jadis, la mosquée avait un rôle social extrêmement important : elle était non seulement lieu de prière, mais aussi espace d'hospitalité et de retraite, asile pour les voyageurs. Dans *L'Opium et le Bâton*, son rôle est considérablement exalté, parce que magnifique de grandeur séculaire et de sagesse millénaire : elle est ce lieu même d'où va surgir le cri qui va réveiller la mémoire des villageois réduits au silence par la terreur des soldats français, les rappeler au devoir pour les inciter à la résistance contre l'occupant : « *Il poussa la porte de la mosquée aux gros clous de fer rond. Les gonds crissèrent. Quatre siècles ! Elle datait*

⁵ Il faut croire que l'existence du berbère en tant que culture, langue et identité semble être considérée comme une menace par le pouvoir en place, mais aussi comme un anachronisme, à l'éradication duquel il faut s'attacher, car pour reprendre Abdelkader Yafseh : « Tout se passe en effet comme si l'islamisation de l'Algérie (voire de toute l'Afrique du Nord) demeurerait inachevée et incertaine tant que des populations continueraient de parler leur langue plutôt que la langue du Coran. » *La Question du pouvoir en Algérie*, Alger, E.N.A.P., 1990, p.413.

de quatre siècles, la mosquée de Tala! Elle avait vu quatre siècles de prières, de réunions des hommes, quatre siècles de printemps, de labours, de moissons et de fêtes. (...) De là-haut tout Tala était à portée de voix. Les quatre fenêtres du minaret regardaient les quatre points cardinaux. Dans chacune, Smaïl redit l'appel plusieurs fois.⁶ ».

Or, dans ce village livré au chaos, l'espace d'en haut est non seulement « colonisé », mais l'espace ancien, qui réfère à la parole première, est supplanté par la parole/autre que le micro aura à diffuser. Une connivence insidieuse semble s'être instaurée entre les deux forces en présence à Tasga : l'efficacité de l'œuvre accomplie par la mosquée se trouve de la sorte facilitée par la présence de l'armée, qui, non contente d'avoir investi l'espace, veille notamment à ce que la mission assignée au temple se fasse en conformité avec la Loi.

La deuxième partie de l'énoncé prend alors toute sa signification : ce n'est pas sans raison que l'armée a substitué aux fontaines des bornes fontaines. Ainsi et par extension, l'on est amené à méditer le sens de ce paragraphe qui dit en deux phrases tout ce qu'il y a lieu de dire sur la volonté d'effacer toute trace du passé en le réduisant à un vestige. Tout est mis en œuvre dans le but d'investir l'espace et le temps au travers de cette appropriation des domaines de la pensée, de la parole, et même du déplacement : les chemins que l'on traversait jadis, l'esprit en fête et dans la joie, afin d'aller quérir l'eau à la fontaine - symbole de la parole sans cesse alimentée - et qui sont envahis par les ronces, sont désormais désertés et donc déserts, sans vie, surveillés. Derechef, se décèle le souci de réduire et de contrôler la pensée, de l'éradiquer petit à petit. Au travers de cette organisation de l'espace, s'élabore une organisation architecturale fonctionnelle et hiérarchique qui assure le contrôle de l'espace et du déplacement, de la pensée *via* la parole intrusive.

Les thèmes mais surtout les rhèmes des propos sont bien loin d'être anodins. La gradation dans l'information dénote le souci de l'auteur de dire le moins pour faire entendre le plus. L'information de la deuxième phrase qui, de prime abord, pourrait paraître insignifiante, est, au contraire, annonciatrice d'informations éminemment importantes : la mise à mort de tout le village. Dans un style sobre, dépouillé comme l'est le décor qu'il décrit, l'auteur livre l'essentiel du message : Tasga⁷ est réduite au Chaos, dé-livrée de son âme et livrée à la vacuité.

⁶Mouloud Mammeri, *L'Opium et le Bâton*, Paris, Plon, 1965, pp.332-333.

⁷Tasga est féminin dans la mesure où cela fait référence à la *materia prima*, et masculin quand il renvoie au village.

1.3. La substitution des bornes fontaines à la fontaine/Tala

Indéniablement, la substitution des bornes fontaines aux fontaines porte gravement atteinte aux traditions d'antan qui constituaient tout un art de vivre. La fontaine, en effet, représente le seul espace exempt de tabous, c'est le lieu d'échanges et de rencontre entre les jeunes gens et les jeunes filles en âge de se marier. C'est en allant puiser l'eau à la fontaine que les jeunes filles, parées de leurs plus beaux atouts, se laissaient admirer par les jeunes gens avec la complicité tacite de toute la communauté⁸. La disparition de cet espace équivaut à la néantisation du village figurée par l'image désolante de chaos que surdétermine l'absence d'activité, d'animation, d'échanges dans les « *places, venelles, champs orphelins des vrais rôles.* »⁹

Mais plus encore, la fontaine ou source - *Tala*¹⁰ en kabyle, - est la source même de la vie, de l'esprit. L'eau est symbole de la parole, l'eau, soutient Gaston Bachelard, « est la maîtresse du langage fluide, du langage sans heurt, du langage continu, continué, du langage qui assouplit le rythme, qui donne une matière uniforme à des rythmes différents ».¹¹ La substitution des bornes fontaines à la fontaine démontre bien le désir de museler la parole. Ce désir est par ailleurs accentué par l'assignation à résidence de Tamazouzt, la femme référant à la langue maternelle. Un tel isomorphisme se trouve d'autant plus congruent au vu de la déchéance de la culture orale et du déclin de la figure féminine dans *La Traversée*. La figure de Tamazouzt constitue à elle seule le paradigme du sort et du statut faits à toute une dimension de la société et de la culture. *La Traversée* est la mort programmée, annoncée et constatée de la personnalité berbère. Le nouvel ordre avec son cortège d'effets collatéraux - maîtrise du temps et de l'espace, assujettissement de l'esprit à la matière - s'est donc instauré dans ce village témoin d'un passé plusieurs fois centenaire. La voix humaine, porteuse de valeurs immémoriales, symbolisée par la fontaine, est remplacée par le micro. Il y a une indéniable affinité entre la représentation allégorique et les structures de la narration qui devient évidente au travers des deux isotopies : celle du remplacement de

⁸ « J'étais à côté d'Ouali, venu exprès pour la fête et qui voulut bien par déférence baisser les yeux, quand Aazi passa dans la plus éblouissante toilette que je lui eus vu porter. Le dernier groupe venait à peine de disparaître que déjà le premier remontait. Nous eûmes longtemps à attendre parce que le retour est toujours plus lent. Le pâle soleil d'hiver nous quitta vite et quand les dernières paiseuses d'eau eurent tourné le coin de la place, la nuit avait déjà envahi la vallée. » *La Colline Oubliée*, Paris, Plon, 1952, p.94.

⁹ *La Traversée*, op. cit. p.59.

¹⁰Tala est le nom du village de *L'Opium et le Bâton*.

¹¹Gaston Bachelard, *L'Eau et les rêves*, Paris, Librairie José Corti, 1979, p.251.

l'authentique par l'artificiel, de l'esprit par la matière. Cette affinité se vérifie de plus belle dans le désir de réprimer la parole originelle et de lui substituer une parole étrangère. La présence du micro en haut du minaret de la nouvelle mosquée vient comme lien avec un présent imposé et obstacle à un passé frappé d'illégitimité : « *On avait construit une mosquée neuve avec un micro sur le minaret. Les ronces avaient envahi les chemins, même celui des fontaines où plus personne ne passait depuis que l'armée avait installé des bornes fontaines* ».

Les bornes fontaines enferment « la parole originelle », le micro prend le relais, et, diffusant à pleins décibels la nouvelle parole, instaure le règne nouveau. L'enfermement des ondes coulantes, des sources naturelles, participe du désir de figement de toute cette culture du verbe vibrant et de la mémoire vive. C'est une volonté délibérée d'écarter tout un domaine de l'imagination créatrice : « l'imagination par la parole, l'imagination par le parler, qui, selon Bachelard, parle avec volubilité et augmente ainsi le volume psychique de l'être. »¹²

1.4. Les vieux de la djemaa

Tasga, village-mouroir, est un corridor de la mort où les dépositaires de la mémoire ancestrale attendent le moment de rendre l'âme - si tant est qu'ils ne l'aient déjà rendue. Perçue justement par le regard de Mourad, narrateur hétéro-diégétique, personnage principal et journaliste, cette situation prend une amplitude particulière. Ce faisant, l'évaluation de la situation et la performance de cette évaluation sont à leur apogée du fait que l'évaluateur cumule toutes les compétences tant esthétique, éthique, que technologique et linguistique. Se rendant pour la dernière fois à Tasga pour faire ses adieux à sa mère, Mourad prend la pleine mesure du Chaos : le village, plusieurs fois centenaire, n'est que l'ombre de lui-même :

Sur les banquettes parallèles, qui se faisaient face, les vieillards de Tasga se regardaient dans les yeux.

- Que le salut soit sur vous!

Mourad attendit. Rien! Trente regards mornes convergeaient sur lui (...) Les regards le suivaient pendant qu'il traversait la place, Mourad les sentait peser derrière lui, sur ses épaules, mais des lèvres serrées des vieillards aucun son ne sortait¹³.

Indices de parole figée à force d'être muselées, les lèvres scellées des vieillards sont aussi la manifestation d'un silence protestataire. Jadis

¹²Gaston Bachelard, *L'Eau et les rêves*, op. cit., p.198.

¹³ *La Traversée*, op. cit., p.50.

encore, la transmission de la parole et de la mémoire était assurée par les anciens, désormais réduits à des fantômes, dans cette antichambre de la mort. Pour autant, ces statues n'en sont pas moins vivantes, et au travers du regard perçant, pesant, elles suivent le déplacement du transfuge.

Tout se passe comme si l'on avait fait en sorte que le Vivant se fige et que l'Inanimé s'anime. La substitution des fontaines, l'adjonction du micro au minaret, et les vieux figés dans l'attente d'on ne sait quoi, en forment un faisceau complexe éloquent qui appartient au régime diurne. Signe que l'assujettissement des forces féminines et nocturnes du cosmos a effectivement opéré.

1.4.1. Le dit du silence : désapprobation, protestation et refus de compromission

Renvoyant à un passé vécu ayant-été, ces vieillards s'obstinent silencieusement à veiller sur cette mémoire qui demeure justement vivace grâce à eux. Ces consciences qui refusent de s'éteindre présentent un grand isomorphisme avec les montagnes altières qui résistent à l'usure du temps, immémorialement dressées, veillant et gardant le trésor. Pareille idée est suggérée par le poids, la densité et l'intensité des regards que la convergence et le nombre de ces derniers surdéterminent. Le silence est donc doublement éloquent et ambivalent : le refus de répondre au salut se donne à lire comme un refus de compromission et de concession. Une telle posture est révélatrice de la non-concession de ce passé ayant-été avec le présent négateur des valeurs fondamentales. Selon le code de déontologie berbère, tout salut doit être rendu. Or, ces vieux, par ce refus de répondre à la salutation de cet im-probable futur déserteur¹⁴ transgressent le code et indiquent, au travers de leur position, leur rejet du fait accompli. Ainsi, la scène peut donner lieu à l'interprétation suivante : « Nous sommes là, mais nous désapprouvons et refusons de cautionner cette situation, et nous n'avons que notre silence pour le « dire ». » La transgression de la sacralité de la parole par ces chantres du Verbe et sa « prise en otage », c'est-à-dire sa non-utilisation, confèrent à la situation une dimension imprégnée de tragique qui confine au carnavalesque. Conséquemment, au travers de ce silence, s'effectue une dévalorisation de la parole, une disqualification de l'acte jadis extrêmement symbolique, qui a fini par être galvaudé par les idéologues et les épigones : « *Le vent des*

¹⁴Mourad n'est revenu au village que pour mieux le quitter, en effet, ayant démissionné du journal, il envisage de s'exiler pour aller s'installer en France.

promesses, des harangues. »¹⁵

Si bien que seul le silence prévaut et s'impose parce qu'il est éloquent. Par l'absence de la parole, il y a parole, et cette parole est un non! Un non réprobateur, pesant, définitif et sans concession à l'ordre du monde qui les renie, mais qu'à leur tour, ils renient et rejettent. Dans cette antithèse du regard qui perce et parle et dans ces lèvres scellées desquelles aucun son ne sort, il y a surdétermination des valences. La mémoire est là, le passé est vivant, qui revient et transparaît au travers de ces yeux dardant un regard insinuant, lourd de reproches et un mutisme obstiné, réfractaire et protestataire. Comme l'affirme Gilbert Durand : « La pureté confine à la netteté d'une séparation bien tranchée. Tout effort axiologique est d'abord une catharsis. »¹⁶

Déserté par les jeunes, mais aussi par la vie¹⁷, le village est seulement gardé/hanté par les « *vieilles carcasses anachroniques* » qui « *avaient acquis - au prix de quelles épreuves - la stupide rigidité du métal* »¹⁸. La description des vieux est toutefois exempte de toute dévalorisation. En effet, en dépit du vocabulaire connoté péjorativement, se dégage le souci de mettre en évidence l'irréductibilité et la pérennité du passé. Même le substantif « carcasses » dément tout le sens premier de l'énoncé, et tout neutralisé qu'il est par l'adjectif « anachroniques », il n'en a pas moins valeur de symbole marquant, nié certes par ce présent, mais qu'à son tour, il nie de tout le poids de son ossature. Par cette présence, obstinément et profondément enracinée dans le sol, ces vieillards, tels des rochers, s'opposent et opposent silencieusement résistance aux voyageurs pressés. La dernière partie de l'énoncé vient revaloriser le passé immuable, qui sera encore là quand les voyageurs pressés et impatientes auront cessé de passer.

Si, ainsi que le dit Gilbert Durand « La maison tout entière est plus qu'un « *vivoir* », elle est un vivant. La maison redouble, surdétermine la personnalité de celui qui l'habite »¹⁹, il n'est donc guère

¹⁵ « On les avait gavés de harangues, après les avoir repus de misère toute la vie. Ils avaient accepté la faim, les prisons, la torture, puis on les avait oubliés là, sur les dalles de la place, avec les vents...le vent du ciel, le vent des mots ». *La Traversée*, *op. cit.*, p.52.

¹⁶Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire, Introduction à l'archétypologie générale*, Paris, Bordas, coll. « Études », 1969, p.278, p.191.

¹⁷ « Les ronces avaient envahi les chemins, même celui de la fontaine où plus personne ne passait depuis que l'armée avait installé des bornes fontaines », *La Traversée*, *op. cit.*, p.59.

¹⁸*La Traversée*, *op. cit.*, p.52.

¹⁹Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire, Introduction à l'archétypologie générale*, Paris, Bordas, coll. « Études », 1969, p.278.

surprenant que les habitants de ce village fantôme soient devenus des morts-vivants à la voix désincarnée. Ainsi la mère de Mourad elle-même, vivant seule dans la grande maison du haut de Tasga, est à l'exacte image de ces vieillards, qui sont eux-mêmes des morts-vivants. Mourad ne peut s'empêcher d'être frappé par le tragique de la situation :

Sa mère se mit à égrener les jours passés, d'une voix que Mourad ne reconnaissait pas, puis brusquement il comprit : ce ton monocorde, égal, cassé, c'était celui qu'auraient eu les vieillards de la place, s'ils avaient parlé : et le village qu'elle contait ce n'était pas celui que Mourad avait connu, c'était un village fantôme²⁰.

C'est pourquoi les dépositaires des valeurs immémoriales, frappés d'ostracisme, refusent de répondre au salut de l'intrus. Ayant été destitués de leur rôle de détenteurs de la culture - décrétée morte par ailleurs – les vieux se taisent, persistent et résistent par leur silence désapprouvateur, réfractaire et obstiné. La mise entre parenthèses « de cette chaîne de transmission »²¹ vise à parachever l'effacement du passé qui confirme l'œuvre d'épuration et de substitution entreprise depuis longtemps. Les vieux, explique Mammeri, constituent « *le lien avec le passé, la transmission de la culture : même le vieux, qui n'a l'air de rien faire que d'avoir froid, en réalité se profile en tête du tableau comme sa figure de proue, son symbole, (le burnous c'est l'emblème de la personnalité : on s'y enveloppe comme dans un corps de valeurs supérieures)*. Et Mammeri d'ajouter : « *Le transfert de la culture se fait des vieux aux petits-enfants...* »²²

C'est pourquoi la vue de « ces carcasses anachroniques », d'un passé en passe d'être révolu, s'avère insoutenable pour Mourad et le conforte dans sa décision de partir :

Il était inutile de prendre le burnous et de retourner sur la place : les vieillards avaient raison de ne pas répondre au salut des voyageurs pressés (...). Pourquoi dans le réduit clos faisait irruption cet empêcheur de crever en rond ?²³

2. 1. La vérité ou la communion

²⁰ *La Traversée, op. cit.*, p.52.

²¹ Mouloud Mammeri, « Les mots, les sens et les rêves ou les avatars de Tamurt », *Culture savante, culture vécue* (Études 1938-1989), Alger, Tala, 1989, pp.188-197.

²² Mouloud Mammeri, « Les mots, les sens et les rêves ou les avatars de Tamurt », *op.cit.*, p.195.

²³ *La Traversée, op. cit.*, p.51-52.

Mais avant de quitter définitivement l'Algérie, Mourad entreprend un voyage au cœur du Sahara en compagnie d'une équipe de son journal dont Boualem et Souad. Les voyageurs visitent une école située en plein cœur du Sahara, dans un milieu tout à fait spécifique, avec des enfants issus d'une culture tout aussi spécifique. L'État se propose de promouvoir, non la culture endogène en lui fournissant les moyens propices à son épanouissement, mais cette autre culture que Mouloud Mammeri qualifie de « pseudo-moderniste, pseudo-islamique, arabiste »²⁴. Le sous-préfet se fait fort d'appliquer ce programme en y mettant tous les moyens, et il n'est de meilleur moyen d'intégration que l'école comme le proclame ce responsable : « *L'école est un incomparable instrument d'intégration nationale. Naturellement les populations d'ici sont aussi algériennes que vous et moi, mais comment dire ? Il y a les servitudes du climat, celle de l'histoire, des traditions* »²⁵.

L'école, machine éducative et opérateur idéologique inégalable, peut alors jouer pleinement son rôle d'instrument d'intégration. Tous les moyens de coercition et de persuasion utilisés concourent à la concrétisation de cette uniformisation entre le Nord et le Sud. Une détermination sans faille conjuguée à des moyens logistiques judicieux met en place le projet. Les Touareg/Nomades qui refusent de demeurer sur place doivent être amenés d'abord à se fixer puis à prendre goût à cette vie sédentaire à laquelle ils n'étaient pas accoutumés.

Plantée en plein désert, cette école met en exergue le désir de sédentarisation des enfants Touaregs réfractaires à toute civilisation étrangère, et qui font le désespoir du maître d'arabe venu expressément d'Égypte afin d'œuvrer à leur arabisation.

L'histoire que l'on enseigne aux jeunes Touaregs ne correspond

²⁴« De par sa nature en effet, en tout cas son idéologie déclarée :le socialisme, le pouvoir algérien est » populaire et démocratique » :il se doit donc comme tel d'aider et de promouvoir les cultures du peuple. Mais dans le même temps les hommes au pouvoir ont le souci d'intégrer les éléments différents qui composent la nation dans une unité, qu'ils définissent volontiers comme unanimiste et que, à tort ou à raison, ils sentent comme insuffisamment consolidée.

Cette volonté d'intégration nationale dans sa forme la plus totalisante est encore renforcée par l'origine sociale de beaucoup de responsables, souvent de petits-bourgeois : la formation oulémiste de certains d'entre eux, l'affirmation de l'arabo-islamisme comme idéologie officielle en concurrence (complémentaire ? antagonique ?) avec le socialisme, font que l'on nie et au besoin contrecarre tout élément de la culture populaire qui ne va pas dans le sens de ces trois déterminations : pseudo-moderniste, pseudo-islamiste, arabiste. » Mouloud Mammeri, « Culture du peuple ou pour le peuple », *Culture savante, culture vécue* (Études 1938-1989), Alger, Tala, 1989, p.136-152.

²⁵*La Traversée, op. cit.*, p.82.

d'ailleurs pas à la réalité des faits. Ainsi, le cours d'histoire dispensé par un maître égyptien est éloquent à cet égard :

Le maître recommença d'officier. Il soignait sa diction devant cet auditoire venu de la capitale. (...)

Autour de la voix tonitruante du maître le silence était absolu.

-Avant l'Islam c'était les temps d'ignorance. Les ancêtres des Arabes vivaient comme vivent aujourd'hui vos parents; c'était des Barbares, ils enterraient leurs filles à leur naissance. Puis le Koran est venu, apportant la bénédiction, la science, la civilisation....²⁶

2.2. Le non-dit du silence des enfants Touareg

Le maître égyptien, fort du pouvoir que lui confère sa fonction, en use et abuse pour amener les enfants Touareg à répondre à une question existentielle des plus cruciales : *«Allons, dites...Qu'est-ce que vous êtes ? »*²⁷Il les somme de choisir entre la vérité et la communion, selon les dires de Mourad, qui avait suivi la scène avec le plus grand intérêt. Mais, les écoliers *« révoltés par la peur »*, gardent obstinément le silence, et, pour échapper à la voix insistante et insinuante du maître, ils refusent de le regarder, maintenant les yeux *« fichés sur les tables, comme si la réponse devait en sortir »*²⁸. Boualem vient alors à la rescousse du maître et enjoint les enfants de répondre, en allant jusqu' à leur souffler la réponse à plusieurs reprises : *«Dites : des Arabes et des Musulmans »*²⁹. En dépit des pressions exercées sur eux par le maître et par Boualem, les élèves demeurent silencieux, refusant de répondre et de renier leurs origines et leur identité. Seul le silence, dans la situation qui est la leur, prévaut. Quelque jeunes qu'ils soient et tout en étant soumis à un supplice de Tantale, ils sont dans l'incapacité d'opter pour la vérité ou pour la communion³⁰. Il est en effet vrai que seul le silence prévaut dans une situation aussi intolérable. Les enfants sont ici en butte à des pressions intenable pour leur jeune âge et victimes de tout un système qui les accule, les acculture et les dépossède de ce qui, de manière intrinsèque, les constitue. L'école officielle, entrant en compétition avec la culture maternelle, dévalorise cette dernière et la déprécie, dépréciant du même coup l'identité des enfants. Tout l'enseignement - de l'histoire par le biais de la langue - dispensé aux enfants, est aux antipodes des valeurs de la communauté.

²⁶*La Traversée, op.cit.*, pp.83-84.

²⁷*La Traversée, op.cit.*, p.84.

²⁸*La Traversée, op.cit.*, p.84.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p.84.

³⁰*« Ils doivent renoncer à la vérité ou à la communion. Ils ne peuvent pas. Ils sont trop jeunes »*, explique Mourad qui avait suivi la scène avec le plus grand intérêt. *La Traversée, op. cit.*, p.84.

L'adolescent qui doit faire siennes ces valeurs ne peut le faire qu'au risque de se renier et de renier sa culture, d'où l'on conclut que loin de préparer l'enfant à se prendre en charge, l'école algérienne, tout comme l'école coloniale jadis « établit en son sein une définitive dualité »³¹.

Si le silence des vieux de la djemaa était protestataire et pleinement assumé, celui des enfants Touareg est un silence ambivalent, plein de non-dits, d'interdits, de peur de dire et de se dédire. C'est un silence qui semble dire : « Je refuse de me compromettre mais je n'ose pas le dire ». C'est un silence qui crie d'impuissance face à une pression/oppression implacable. Le maître et Boualem recourent à des méthodes d'intimidation, abusant l'un de son rôle d'enseignant et l'autre de son statut d'hôte. Mais en dépit de tout, les adolescents opposent à leurs protagonistes un mutisme inflexible. Et tout imprégné de peur soit-il, ce mutisme n'en dissuade pas moins le maître et Boualem qui s'étaient acharnés sur ces écoliers pour leur arracher un acquiescement qui leur aurait valu une compromission insupportable.

Ce silence, lourd, oppressant va être enfin brisé par les réponses spontanées et unanimes que donneront les adolescents quand Boualem les interrogera sur leur projet d'avenir : « *Chauffeur* », répondent-ils tous. C'est Ahitaghel qui apporte la réponse à l'énigme « *Parce qu'on va où on veut.* »³² Ahitaghel, au nom barbare³³, incarne l'irréductibilité propre à ces hommes libres. Son portrait physique constitue le reflet exact de son caractère indomptable : « *dans le profil d'aigle le regard filtrait à travers la lame mince des paupières mi-closes* »³⁴. La description livre l'essentiel : thème et rhème se complètent dans la distribution de l'information. La métaphore est éloquente qui met l'accent sur le profil aquilin et altier, que vient surdéterminer la lame du regard filtrant sous les paupières mi-closes. Une telle posture est inductive d'une vigilance accrue, d'une incroyable force certes en repos, mais sur le qui-vive. Tout un horizon d'attente est ainsi dessiné qui laisse entendre, qu'en dépit du bras de fer engagé entre le pouvoir et ces jeunes, il y a volonté et détermination égales de la part de ces derniers qui n'ont que leur jeunesse et leur amour de la liberté à opposer à la pression qui leur est imposée.

³¹ Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé*, précédé du *Portrait du colonisateur*, Paris, Julliard, coll. « Corrèa », 1957, p.125.

³² *La Traversée*, op. cit., p.86.

³³ « *Ils ont des noms bizarres* », dit le maître d'arabe égyptien. *Op.cit.*, p.85.

³⁴ *La Traversée*, op. cit., p.86.

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The Universalising of Silence as an act of un-belonging in Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West*

Jillian Curr¹

Abstract

Hamid's fourth novel Exit West is a story about migration. In this novel Hamid attempts to claim that we are all migrants. Characters appear out of magical doors as the gateway to another life. Structured around the story of a young couple from an un-named country Saaed and Nadia who escape through one of these magical doors but in this story the voice of the millions of migrants, refugees are silenced, existing on the periphery, hardly mentioned at all, other than in terms of the streets filling up with tents and people. It is through their inability to speak in universalising the idea that all people are migrants Hamid has silenced the voices and stories of those migrants relegating their existence to a state of unbelonging and human waste at the mercy of countries, traffickers and the conditions they are faced with. In this world of Hamid's, walls are built, police intervention, social disorder, result in state sanctioned violence leading to securitization. Rather than interconnectedness and belonging, a sense of un-belonging and uncertainty prevail. In silencing migrant voices, Hamid says little about or supplies any answers to why all people being migrants ultimately make a better world. In this world time and space collapse into disorder, fear and securitization.

Keywords: *dystopia, human waste magical realism, un-belonging, silence*

1. Introduction

The last decade has seen mass exodus from the fighting in the Middle East with the Internet and TV spewing out pictures of drowned children, perilous sea voyages in overloaded dinghies, hastily erected barbed wire fences, and tent cities teeming with refugees on their way to Europe in the hope of a safe haven. Unfortunately, these images have

¹ University of Western Australia

only fuelled deep seated fears of the collapse of the European way of life. In the public arena, the presence of strangers the results in what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'mixophilia' which can result in "the fear of the unmanageable volume of the unknown, the untameable, off putting and uncontrollable" (Bauman 2016:4) which for many in Europe these refugees and asylum seekers appear. Rather than finding a welcoming Europe these people have found themselves trafficked, exploited as cheap and slave labour, subjected to xenophobic, hostile environments and racism with countries closing their borders. In Mohsin Hamid's fourth novel, *Exit West*, he explores migration in the present global climate presenting this as a continuance of a time honoured practice of migration claiming, in fact, that we are all migrants. As his characters emerge from magical doors puncturing the narrative with images of other stories but this universalising of migration acts to silence the voices of those whose stories he is supposed to be telling. *Exit West* revolves around the lives of Saeed and Nadia who live in an un-named city at the beginning of a civil war. As the war progresses and their position becomes precarious they decide to leave, Their story is told in the third person and the voices of the other characters who appear momentarily vanishing into alleyways and the mass of buildings that dominate contemporary cities. In using a third person, the narrator effectively functions as an instrument of surveillance by allowing the reader access to the feelings, thoughts, mobile phone conversations and actions of Nadia and Saeed. The initials of 'S' and 'N' are onomastic refer to the global South and North, serve to fill in the missing parts of the world emphasizing the interconnectedness of events past, present and future. By leaving the city un-named Hamid is trying to transcend his authorial identification with the protagonists to facilitate reader identification with them but this acts to silence the stories of the refugees by taking the reader away from the real stories of loss, exploitation and their demonization due to their envisaged strangeness which becomes perceived as a threat. Hamid re-directs the reader by focussing on Saeed and Nadia, magical doors and characters popping up from seemingly nowhere to end up on street corners, cupboards and TV screens. Refugees are lumped together as a mammoth whole, faceless and silent.

2. Secuirzation

Zygmunt Bauman argues that in the today's fluid world, fear of the stranger has taken on new meaning. And it is this fear of the stranger which governments have been able to exploit by capitalizing on the anxiety this influx of migrants has caused, depicting them as lowering

wages, meaning less jobs, more unemployment, using of facilities, such as, schools and hospitals leading to less availability of services . Politicians has been able to exploit these anxieties by claiming “their actions a priori of popular approval (2016 25). It is belief in the need for security and therefore securitization that Hamid fails to deal with. By universalising the idea that everyone is a migrant who move through magical doors he inadvertently colludes with this discourse of human waste. By de-voicing the migrants and silencing their stories like waste they are hidden because what is important is the authorial voice disguised as the readers. The reader knows Mohsin Hamid’s family is linked with displacement due to the colonial legacy created by Partition in 1947. He himself lives between London, Lahore and New York, having been born in Lahore in 1971, he spent large amounts of his young life visiting his father who was completing a Doctorate at Stanford University where Hamid himself returned to study himself. He is quoted by Wikileaks as saying that “when I travel I feel more like a nomad than a tourist”.

In *Exit West* Hamid has reimagined the violence of sovereign power in creating a dystopian London where the refugees including Nadia and Saeed are corralled into areas where “drones and helicopters and surveillance balloons prowled intermittently overhead”(142), also, this performs “the historical trope of British capital threatened by foreign invasions” (Popescu & Jahamah 129). This violence is then linked to previous imperial histories which are connected through magical doors which transport migrants from these former colonies to the former imperial powers inverting the tide of people from North to South to South to North and from West to East to East to West which Hamid utilises an onomasticon from the first letters of the title of the book and the names of the two protagonists.

Although it could be argued that Hamid by allowing his readers to envisage their stories as there are endless stories of the influx of migrants fleeing conflict in the Middle East, poverty in Africa and crime and political oppression in South America hides his own elite form of migration. Having lived between Pakistan and the US as a child, then as an adult and presently between Lahore and London Hamid’s nomadism has indeed been privileged. By leaving it up to the reader who would be well aware of images of migrants fleeing, he is in fact exercising his authorial voice by silencing the stories of those who he is supposedly optimistic about their futures. According to Robyn Fivush “narrating our experiences by very definition implies a process of editing and selection, voicing some aspects of what occurred and therefore silencing other aspects” (Fivush 88). In other words, Hamid

allows the readers' voice to inform the silence. But there is more than one way of representing silence. Fivush distinguishes between "*being silenced* and *being silent*, when being silenced is contrasted with voice, it is conceptualised as imposed, and it signifies a loss of power and self" (88/89) In Hamid's novel there is silence and being silenced. Long silences signify the gradual moving apart of his 2 protagonists. It is what is unsaid that informs the reader that Nadia and Saeed will finally part going their separate ways while by silencing the migrants Hamid denies not only that these people have selves but, they are powerless. Being silenced is nearly always conceptualised as negative. By silencing stories this can lead to a distortion of the horror as *Exit West* came out in 2017 when it was reported in *The Guardian newspaper* that up to 4.9 million migrants had uprooted to Europe. Therefore the reader would have seen pictures of migrants crossing the Mediterranean and being tear-gassed at border crossings by border security guards. However Hamid believes that humans have the ability to empathise with others and he bases his view of migration on this premise. In an interview for *The Nation* in 2017 Hamid says

I think that if we can recognise the universality of the migration experience and the universality of the refugee experience – that those of us who have never moved are also migrants and refugees – then the space for empathy opens up (Chandler).

This statement obfuscates the refugees' distinctive stories and experience of violence, loss, and displacement which Hamid would be aware of but Hamid reworks the relationship between time and space through the introduction of magical doors which immobilise or activate the movement of people. According to Amanda Lagji "these doors exacerbate the existing unequal power dynamics between the global North and the global South" (2019:219) and, although Hamid utilises this dichotomy he situates it in terms of a colonial legacy therefore refugee voices become redundant to a universalising concept of migration because the magical doors facilitate the movement of people across spaces in an instant consequently "this device occludes the difficulty and danger of the process of crossing boundaries, on land, or by sea" (Lagji:219). This therefore redirects the reader to focus on Saeed and Nadia's story which at times seems dismissive of the migrants themselves although at the beginning of the novel they are unaware that they will become refugees themselves. Although the refugees themselves are silenced by Hamid's narrative form these silences are not empty spaces. They provide the reader with time for reflection.

In saying this the securitization of this global movement of

people results in the refugees including Nadia and Saeed being reduced to human waste at the bottom of a waiting list struck in labour camps building a new city or living in rooms above a “food cooperative where Nadia worked, there were rooms available, storerooms (Hamid 213), where “workers of good standing” could stay on the proviso they “put in enough extra hours to cover the occupancy” emphasizing their expendability and precarious state of their existence. This highlights the position of people on the margins whose lives depend on their ability to produce otherwise they are deemed as waste to be disposed as Nadia’s right to a place depends solely on her working extra hours and “provided one’s colleagues thought the need to stay was valid”(213).

3. Being Silenced

Writing narratives implies a process of editing and selecting, voicing some aspects and silencing others. Therefore how does voice inform silence and silence inform voice? In other words, what is not uttered can inform the authorial voice. In *Exit West* there are two conceptions of silence. There is being silent, a shared understanding that need not be voiced and there is being silenced which represents a loss of power and self. In this novel Hamid utilises silence as an unspoken shared understanding between the characters Nadia and Saeed while silencing the refugees Hamid not only disempowers them but strips them of self making their stories superfluous, to be hidden away like waste is hidden from sight. According to Robyn Fivush “silencing occurs at the cultural level for experiences that do not fit the culturally dominant narrative” (91) but by leaving them unheard and silenced Hamid reinforces Bauman’s claim that in a world which is driven by perpetual consumerism and production what cannot be utilised is reduced to human waste, hidden and disempowered. On the first page of *Exit West* Hamid refers to the unnamed “city swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace” (2017:1). The use of the word ‘swollen’ seems to suggest the refugees are the cause of some strange ailment and the use of the conjunctive ‘but still’ seems to imply that in fact what they bring is conflict and that it is only by some good fortune that the city is peaceful. As Michael Perfect points out, that, although refugees is the sixth word in the novel occurring before any of the characters the use of the collective form without any descriptive adjectives “or other description assigned to them, and they are marginalized by the very syntax of the prose”(190). This compares starkly with the introduction of the two main characters Nadia and Saeed. We are told immediately that Saeed has a beard and not only

that Hamid qualifies it by adding that it is “not a full beard, more a studiously maintained stubble”(1) providing the reader a glimpse not only to his age but his personality and like his beard Saeed we find out is studious. Nadia is depicted as slightly enigmatic with her flowing black robe “clad from the tips of her toes to the bottom of her jugular notch” (1) nearly orientalisising her as exotic and mysterious and it is only after Saeed notices “a beauty mark on her neck that he speaks to her. It also suggests that she is guarded, private but not too serious. Hamid’s depiction of the impending violence in the city but is rendered incidental to the their relationship reinforcing the marginality of the events which eventually lead to them becoming refugees themselves having to flee the city and making them the central pivot of the plot.

Their city had yet to experience any major fighting, just some shootings and the odd car bombing, felt in one’s chest cavity as a subsonic vibration like those emitted by large loudspeakers at music concerts(2).

Hamid equates the noise of the car bombs exploding to the reverberations of the speakers at a music concert, a place to have fun trivialises the plight of the inhabitants as if war is a kind of virtual war game or of music blaring out of a drive-in movie theatre rather than the fictionalised reality of this un-named city. In fact, it is reminiscent of the film *Apocalypse Now* with its sound track of helicopters flying over Vietnamese villages with Western music played ‘strung out’ soldiers on drugs reeved up to kill. The music is a reminder of Western superiority. Hamid’s novel is punctuated with references to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Hamid weaves references to darker stories of migration and colonial interventions. In linking it to Francis Ford Coppola’s 1979 film, *Apocalypse Now* which is loosely based on *The Heart of Darkness* where Robert Duvall’s character sends the helicopters playing Wagner’s *Ride of the Valkyries* to announce what the audience soon realises is a senseless and unnecessary bombing raid to emphasize America’s military and civilizational superiority by playing a piece associated with high culture and sophistication in terrorizing the Viet Cong. Hamid’s reference to music concerts resonant with Coppola’s music score mixed with gunfire and bombs on defenceless villages much like the civilian population of his un-named city. This acts to numb the audience to the barbarity of the action like Hamid plays down the horror and violence going on around the city directing the reader’s attention to the budding romance between his protagonists. The reference to the growing violence it just mentioned in the middle of the paragraph on Saeed and Nadia. Hamid’s allusion to Conrad’s novel historicises not only the displacement of people as a consequence of the

actions of the colonial powers but triggers attention away from the present action taking place to other conceptualisations of past actions and events directing the reader to a more nuanced view of migration rather than the devastation caused by the bombing as if the suffering of the refugees was just incidental or collateral damage because like the production line these people had no economic value and were therefore no more than human waste to be disposed of and served no importance to the plot.

It is not until the second chapter that Hamid introduces the reader to the increase in numbers of refugees arriving in the un-named city and the growth of refugee camps. The reader and Mohsin Hamid would have been very aware of the appalling conditions of the refugee camp called 'the jungle' in Calais among many other camps, due to the media coverage this camp engendered. However, rather than voice the point of the view of the refugees Hamid reserves his authorial voice to create the scene rather than allowing the reader into the refugees perspective, they remain unvoiced and silenced as if their suffering is irrelevant. By silencing their voice they remain remote, unformed and like a decoration to add an extra coating which if removed doesn't reduce the flavour of the cake. By muting the refugee voices, Hamid is able to draw the readers' attention to remain fixed on the developing relationship between Saeed and Nadia who notice the refugees but their presence has somehow become normalised rather than a clue to the impending eruption of violence that will result in their own displacement but one devoid of death although their lives will be punctuated with deprivation and violence but they will always have accommodation unlike the refugees in their un-named city.

Refugees had occupied many of the places in the city, pitching tents in the green belts between roads, erecting lean-tos next to the boundary walls of houses, sleeping rough on pavements and the margins of streets (23).

These images could describe any city of the homeless and unemployed who live on the streets of most big Western cities like London or Paris rather than refugees, an implied illusion to the growth in Western cities as the need for labour decreases, as industries become obsolete and the highly technological service industry makes the need for labour skills redundant.

According to Zygmunt Bauman governments in framing refugees as threats to national security under the umbrella of terrorism particularly by Muslims has led to the policy of 'securitization' which helps to stifle in advance our – the bystanders – pangs of conscience at its suffering targets; it leads to the 'adiaphorization' of the migrant

issue (2016: 35), resulting in, above all, of them being placed outside the “realm of, and off limits to, moral responsibility – and, above all, outside the space of compassion and of the impulse to care” (35). Thus, Hamid has by silencing the refugees created a scenario where their experiences can never be corroborated as Fivush says “you must have a community of listeners able and willing to validate their experiences” (96) but by handing over his authorial voice to the reader he is leaving it to readers of societies ‘outside the space of compassion’ because the reader cannot ‘hear’ the individual only a distorted mass of noise, silenced, drowned out by the conjecture of Saeed and Nadia.

Some seemed to be trying to recreate the rhythms of normal life, as though it were completely natural to be residing, a family of four, under a sheet of plastic propped up with branches and a few chipped bricks. Others stared out at the city with what looked like anger, or surprise, or supplication, or envy. Others didn’t move at a; stunned, maybe, or resting. Possibly dying. Saeed and Nadia had to be careful when making turns to run over an outstretched arm or leg (23).

Something of a nuisance to Saeed and Nadia having to take more care not to run over these refugees but in using the third person Hamid is not only distancing the characters from the plight of the refugees but the readers empathising the refugees marginality. They are depicted as being between roads and next to boundaries and they slept rough. This also depicts how precarious their situation is as they, in living on the margins places them in harm of being run over. Hamid directs the readers’ empathy away from the refugees in identifying with Saeed and Nadia’s situation. Michael Perfect finds this a paradox in Hamid’s novel when the novel was written at a time “when empathy with refugees as one of the most significant problems of its contemporary moment” (191).

Hamid’s use of conjecture to describe Nadia’s and Saeed’s reaction to the refugees in the above passage, ‘seemed’, ‘maybe’, ‘what looked like’ and ‘possibly’ highlights a complete lack of empathy with the plight of the refugees who are described in terms of clutter what would have been open spaces, pavements in which Nadia and Saeed have to navigate so they don’t run over their body parts but there isn’t any mention as to why these refugees might be angry or envious only speculation as to how they might feel emotionally or more chillingly the threat of death. The refugees are muted and only discussed in terms of their body parts and inconvenient presence making it difficult for Nadia and Saeed to navigate without injuring them. Later on, in the novel we learn that Nadia and Saeed become refugees and it is their plight that Hamid directs our empathy towards.

Hamid's narrative except for the last chapter, twelve, which is set "half a century" (227) later each chapter is punctuated with vignettes of other people travelling through magical doors, appearing in Vienna or Tokyo in an alleyway or Sydney from a closet door emerging in complete darkness, hidden and their stories muted. This silencing of the refugee's stories virtually negates the frequently hazardous and traumatic journeys they embark upon as well as the exploitation they encounter from traffickers and others. In the Tokyo district of Shinjuku where a man is drinking a whisky but this whisky is not Japanese but Irish. He goes outside to smoke a cigarette to find two Filipina girls, "standing beside a disused door to the rear of the bar, a door that was always kept locked, but was at this moment somehow open, a portal of complete blackness" (27). "The girls were dressed strangely, in clothing that was too thin, tropical, not the kind of clothing you normally saw Filipinas wear in Tokyo" (27). This image belies the trafficking of women for the sex trade across the world but also their expediency. "He disliked Filipinos. They had their place, but they had to know their place" (28) going back to Lagji's point about unequal power dynamics between the global North and the global South exposing a darker side to migration that Hamid is seemingly unwilling to admit damaging the credibility of his argument which is based on the premise that as we walk away from our past "we are all migrants through time" (Hamid 209).

4. Silence

Silence is articulated in *Exit West* in the long periods unspoken as the relationship between Nadia and Saeed comes to an end. What is narrated is their feelings of impending loss. Having begun in an old city that was being destroyed, their relationship ends in a new city that is being built. In a sense, Saeed and Nadia migrate away from each other" (Perfect 192).

Robyn Fivush contends that

Silence can also be conceptualised as being silent, a shared understanding that need not be voiced. And in this sense silence can be a form of power, and the need to speak, to voice, represents a loss of power (89).

During their time in London Nadia and Saeed start to drift apart. This moving away or leaving behind your past for Hamid is a form of migration but Saeed returns to his homeland while Nadia remains in the United States as "they grew less worried each other for the other,

less worried that the other would need them to be happy and eventually a month went by without any contact, and then a year, and then a lifetime” (222). Saeed looks back to a home which no-longer exists as a way of making sense of a world which no-longer makes sense, a dislocated, rootless existence while, it is Nadia who negotiates a new hybrid identity where she still wears her black robe which links her to her past which seems to contradict Hamid’s belief that we all walk away from our pasts, but rather our past comes with us throughout life. Hamid associates the end of a relationship with death

For the end of a couple is like death, and the notion of death, of temporariness, can remind us of the value of things, which it did for Saeed and Nadia, and so even though they spoke less and did less together, they saw each other more, although not more often (204), and by doing this is able to depict the sense of loss people who are exiled from their homelands feel and he is therefore able to portray the temporariness and fluidity in a global world while at the time suggesting that it is only when one has left their homeland that they truly understand what has been left behind as in this ever changing world do we know “the value of things” (204).

Not only is Nadia and Saeed’s impending parting inevitable their shared understanding of their fate is unspoken Hamid uses the third person to narrate the end of their relationship the reader is not privy to their actual thoughts or feelings emoting a certain inevitability to the demise of their relationship which seems to replicate the migrants’ break from their own pasts as they cut their ties with their old world for their new lives. It is this shared understanding between the reader and Hamid that we are allowed a window into migrants sense of loss. Hamid repeats his use of the third person to diminish the trauma some migrants endure as they are dislocated from their past. It is Hamid who portrays these silences as if both Nadia and Saeed shared an understanding of the events happening around them and their powerlessness in stopping them. The readers’ focus is directed into an uncertain future. Like the refugees who never speak only Nadia’s and Saeed’s actions are narrated, not their emotions. Hamid seems to offer a semblance of hope to Nadia and Saeed when “one of the tiny drones that kept a watch on their district, ... , crashed into the transparent plastic flap that served as both door and window of their shanty”(204). Even their most intimate moments are under surveillance but the destruction of the drone suggest weaknesses in this securitization that the migrant can capitalise on as they symbolically bury the drone where it had fallen as men in wars were often buried where they fell. Is Hamid suggesting a better future as migrants open up spaces for negotiation?

The burial of the drone suggests renewal as if they were nurturing the soil for a better future, one without wars and surveillance. In fact, Nadia and Saeed are present but not presence because the listener is not privy to their voices. It is the narrator who informs the reader rather than the characters themselves in their own voices, therefore, they are disempowered as others, the narrator, speaks for them and it is the events in the novel which determine their future, the magical doors that take them to unknown destinations and to normally impoverished areas of cities. In Marin, they live in a shanty town, in London they are on the dark side, fenced in and attacked by nativists.

Saeed and Nadia were loyal, and whatever name they gave their bond, they each in their own way believed it required them to protect the other, and so neither talked much about drifting apart, not wanting to inflict a fear of abandonment, while also themselves quietly feeling that fear, the fear of the world they had built together, a world of shared experiences in which no one else would share, and a shared intimate language that was unique to them, and a sense that what they might break was special and likely irreplaceable (Hamid 203).

Hamid uses language that suggests inevitability, they are 'drifting apart' and 'abandonment', words which connote an acceptance of the future before them but this future is beyond their control. The reader is told that Nadia and Saeed hope to "find a firmer footing before they let go" (203) and, although the words 'firmer footing' suggest the possibility of a brighter future, the sense of 'fear' suggests an emptiness at the loss of their past but as if there is a certain trepidation of being taken into a dark unknown. The use of 'might break' and 'irreplaceable' highlight the migrants' sense of loss. The narrator's voice doesn't seem to be offering Nadia and Saeed anything tangible, only hope. Fivush contends that, not only, is "voice and silence socially constructed in conversational interactions, and in this sense silence can be a form of power" (89), however., what the silences between Nadia and Saeed imply is a loss of the ability to speak because what is happening is the breakdown of their former society, norms. Traditions and way of life for an unknown and unknowable future. In negating their voices, so the reader cannot interact with the characters because their most intimate feelings and thoughts are filtered through the narrated voice. What this denial of interaction between reader, listener and speaker, Nadia and Saeed, disallows for empathy because the listener is distanced from Nadia and Saeed as if they are voyeurs, spying on the lovers as their relationships crumbles. We only have an interpretation of their inner most feelings. This distorts the message as the narrator has already informed us that breaking up is like a death because for Hamid there

is no permanence in a global world only 'temporariness' as these magical doors transport people and ideas from and to different destinations but passing through these doors also comes with no security. The text therefore provides a conundrum concerning the movement of goods, ideas and people in this global world of Hamid's which he leaves unanswered. We are never told what happens to the man who was "too dark, with dark skin, woolly hair" (6) emerging out of complete darkness, the "heart of darkness" an intertextual reference to Conrad's novel revising the Conradian racism as "his eyes rolled terribly,...or perhaps not so terribly" suggests this revision of the original text (7). This gradual shift from the certainty of the rolling eyes to 'perhaps', uncertainty and whereas in Conrad's time Africans would have remained immobile fixed to their African land while the Europeans were mobile in Hamid's novel it is the magical doors which transport Africans across time and space as it was "the [pale-skinned] woman who slept" unaware of the man in her bedroom, immobile with her window although "open, only a slit"(6) suggesting escape or freedom of movement was impossible unlike the man. Neither are we told what happens to the 'Filipina girls' who emerged from a magical door in complete blackness "dressed strangely, in clothing that was too thin, tropical" (27). Hamid compresses time and space that the actual refugees actually face so there are no stories of the pain and struggles these migrants endure and it is their inability to speak which defines *Exit West*. We only learn about the suffering and horror of war in the descriptions of the militants as they search for residents "of a particular sect"(79) while Nadia's neighbours' wife and daughter were forced to watch while the father/husband "was held down while his throat was cut"(79), his wife and daughter being "hauled out and away" but Hamid spares the reader in his fictionalised version the end story of these women often stripped naked and sold in slave markets for sex in the real world. Hamid highlights the atrocities committed by the militants drawing attention to other stories of atrocities which were being carried out by the Islamic State at the time he was writing he never addresses the consequences to the victims of these actions. As the war progresses in the un-named city the militants become more brazen "both public and private executions that now took place almost continuously, bodies hanging from street lamps and billboards like a form of festive seasonal decoration" (81). These bodies festooned as decorations were disposable and irrelevant to the new order to be created by the militants, human waste whose worth was reduced to an adornment or some badge of honour to reinforce their power over the city through the visual imaginary of the spectacular. By associating the

dead bodies with festive decorations Hamid exempts these human interrelationships and interactions from moral evaluation as these militants no longer know where to draw the line between good and evil.

5. Conclusion

Exist West attempts to confront earlier stories of human movements and imperialism which have framed discourses of the 'other'. However, by undermining the social constructs of shared understandings between the text and the reader by depriving the refugees voice, as we are only privy to a mediated glimpse of their plight, feelings and emotions by the third person narrator. Rather than build a sense of empathy for the plight of the refugees the reader is left with images from the surveillance cameras and drones that constantly monitor the refugees' movements and conversations. However, I contend the silencing of the migrant voice in Hamid's fictionalised world of magical doors and crossings fails in "merging the aesthetics of a fictionalised happy ending and the aesthetics of ambiguity and uncertainty gesture toward the possibility that his novel can accomplish what lived history has yet to realize"(Naydan 448) leaving Nadia and Saeed as "they embraced and parted and did not know, if that evening would come"(Hamid 229) an evening looking at the stars in the "deserts of Chile" (228). Although there is a hope that they will meet again lives are uncertain in this fluid uncertain global world and the ending trivialises the cataclysmic events that have turned public opinion of migrants to the "category of would-be terrorists ... beyond the realm of, and off limits to, moral responsibility" (Bauman 2016 35) and reader empathy. Rather than a world of migrants we live in a securitized world where governments build more and more fences, barriers and the use of surveillance technology continually monitoring movements of people, catching and detaining those, even sometimes in off-shore detention camps to stem the flow of those who appear through Hamid's magical doors. Even in Hamid's fictionalised version of a type detention facility in London Saeed and Nadia are attacked and beaten by vigilantes encouraged by government rhetoric having been given "a wink and a nob from the authorities" (Hamid 132).

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Silence in the Novel *Here We Are* by Graham Swift

Irina-Ana Drobot¹

Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to show the competing sides of silence in the novel *Here We Are*, recently published, in 2020, by Graham Swift, such as: isolation vs trust, thrill of magic vs loss, and the relationship between silence and respect for rules. Swift challenges the usual one-side associations with silence, positive or negative, by showing that silence can be sometimes negative, and sometimes positive. Sometimes it can be used to communicate even more than by using words. The conclusion is that silence can reveal trust and emotional connection, ensuring protection for Swift's characters in this novel.*

Keywords: *magic, loss, trust, rules, isolation.*

Motivation

Silence has been one of the main features of twentieth-century literature, and it has been noticed in the writings of authors such as Henry James and Samuel Beckett (Dauncey 2003: 1). The preoccupation with silence is continued in twentieth-century literature, and Graham Swift's writings make no exception (e.g. Meneses 2017, Berna 2011, Tatarian, Winsworth, Tollance, and Roblin, in Guignery, ed. 2009).

Silence is presented in connection with another important feature of twentieth-century literature, language, in the thesis by Dauncey (2003), who analyses the literature from 1900-1950. Hassan developed the concept of *the literature of silence*, and he identified two types of this kind of literature: novels preoccupied

¹ Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, Romania.

with moving towards the plenum, e.g. the writings by Miller, and novels preoccupied with moving towards absence, e.g. the work of Beckett. (Dauncey 3). In Swift's latest novel, *Here We Are*, there is an oscillation between plenum and absence, as silence goes through the same transformations as the magic which is the keyword in the novel goes through. Magic is a keyword which also goes through the same positive or negative meanings, and silence becomes a keyword that is related to it. Both words suggest thrill, excitement, trust, emotional closeness, but also loss, falling apart, absence, and not telling everything to the others or admitting certain feelings to oneself. Silence for Swift's characters could be related to "the limitations of language" (Dauncey 12), since language cannot express accurately certain feelings, such as loss and pain, as well as emotional emptiness, and so characters such as Ronnie choose not to share certain happenings from his own childhood with his love Evie. The general conception of a couple is that they should share their burdens and communicate everything to one another. However, this happens as a foreshadowing of the fact that their love story will be gone, in spite of how magic it had seemed. Here magic acquires the meaning of both extraordinary, fairy-tale-like love, as well as an illusion, just like fairy-tales sometimes make us believe that everything is possible. Silence can also be magic, out of the ordinary (when it refers to the way the audience feels about the magic show), but it can also bring characters down to earth (Evie is being realistic when she realizes that she should hesitate in telling her mother about her having fallen in love with a magician, so she keeps silent about this for a while).

In Swift's novel, the characters' moments of silence suggest, on the one hand, their emotional absence and absence of a close relationship to one another, and on the other hand, exactly the opposite, in situations where, through their silence, they protect other characters' secrets, such as Evie not telling the way that magic was done. Silence in this novel can also be linked to magic – since the public is silently waiting, in the thrills of excitement, for the magic show to begin. For Swift's characters, in this novel, silence has both positive and negative connotations, since there are various reasons why they keep silent. Evie keeps silent about the past in order not to hurt her husband, and she does not mention how she went to Evergreen. She does not reveal to her mother right away her love for a magician and her intent of marrying him, this suggesting the tense relationship between

them, as well as the different values and principles between old and new generations. Ronnie does not reveal all his childhood details to Evie, this showing that he is not comfortable about himself, and that he feels defensive to trust her with all his emotional issues. At the same time, this shows that he may not completely trust her, that he feels that she is not so close emotionally to him, or that he does not wish to admit to himself personally certain details of his own life. Through silence, there is an element of surprise and excitement ensured for the reader: the agent does not know how Evie and Jack got together, that first Evie was Ronnie's assistant, and part of his magic show, and then she fell in love with Jack and married him. There are moments of silence present for the reader, in the form of details not revealed in chronological order to the reader or presented in a form that can mislead the reader for wrong conclusions. After the love story between Evie and Ronnie is presented, the story jumps forward in time showing Evie who is married. However, she is not married to Ronnie as the reader expects, but to Jack, and this detail is revealed later in a surprising manner, by leading the reader to expect something, then being told a surprising piece of information that changes everything abruptly. The information is given by resorting to an omission, by silencing some details and then by briskly revealing something that the reader does not expect. The stories are thus told by unreliable narrators (Booth 1961: 158-159), who use silence as a means of not being trustworthy or being misleading at times. While returning to stories, "that is to say novels which turn away from formalist pyrotechnics, and the exhibition of an author's ego, to engage with the world and with plausible stories about people within society" (Evans qtd in Pessó-Miquel 135-147), Swift compensates with unreliable narrators through their silence, prompting the readers to fill in the missing information.

The change in couples from Evie and Ronnie to Evie and Jack is based on various aspects of silence, silence for the reader, silence as surprise, silence as trust, silence as revealing a magic act to the audience, as well as on silence as feeling apart from the other person, on silence as something that they do not admit to themselves, let alone to the other member of the couple. Evie keeps details of her feelings for Ronnie silent for Jack, and Ronnie keeps details from his childhood silent for Evie. In this way, they mirror each other, since each of them is holding something back for the rest of the close ones, or for the ones that they should be

close to. Ronnie also keeps his preoccupation with magic away from his mother, until he finally tells her, and her reaction is not a positive one. Ronnie's silence about magic mirrors Evie's, in relation to their parents and their way of seeing the world.

Silence can stand for problems related to communication, which is a significant feature in twentieth and twenty-first century literature. It stands for the isolation of the characters in Graham Swift's novels. However, Swift challenges this perception of silence in *Here We Are* as isolation, right after building it. By keeping certain details out, characters can show that they care about the others, not revealing to certain persons intimate details. Silence can build a thrilling atmosphere, creating suspension, and unexpected twists in the story, yet it can also mean loss. In a similar way, magic means connecting to the others, in the way that Ronnie manages to connect with the elderly couple, who function as parental figures to whom he manages to build a strong emotional connection, as well as getting distant with the others, e.g. by telling his mother that he has learnt to do magic and that he wishes to pursue this career. Magic helps Ronnie get close to Evie, and to build a magical love story around them, only later to have their story end also because of magic. To Ronnie, magic is both a compensation for not having close relationships with his own parents, and by finding this type of relationship with the elderly couple, and a means of realizing that everything is only an illusion, as he loses his love Evie and finally he disappears himself in a final magic act. His disappearance is the equivalent for losing everything he cared about, as his own career as magician had to do with the audience's preference that could change in time. He also loses what magic brought to him on a personal level, in the form of his love story with Evie. Yet, Evie keeps silent about her still existing affection for Ronnie, as can be seen from her keeping the costume she wore during the magic acts as Ronnie's assistant. Although she does not put it into words, she shows that she cares about her past with Ronnie. This examples shows a continuation of the feature of "a gap [...] registered between the world and language" in twentieth century literature (Dauncey 12), taken over by twenty-first century literature. Images can help replace language in Swift's novel *Here We Are*, and we are talking about images such as the sea and scattering a loved person's ashes in the sea over the pier which are repeated here, if the reader is familiar with other novels where the sea was present, such as *Tomorrow*,

and scattering ashes over the sea from the pier, which appears in the novel *Last Orders* written before *Here We Are*.

Generally speaking, the characters' silence, as well as their confessions, are strongly connected with the issue of vulnerability. The characters keep silent in order to cover their vulnerabilities, or they confess due to the need to come to terms with delicate issues. Swift acknowledges the significant part played by vulnerability in his writings in an interview published in *Contemporary Literature*: "Vulnerability—that's the thing... I am desperate to avoid a sense of the power derived from form. I don't want to say 'look at me being clever!' instead of 'look at me as someone like you!'" (Bernard 229). The paper will analyse ways in which silence explores the characters' vulnerabilities, through issues such as isolation, trust, thrill of magic, loss, as well as their perception of rules, through a close reading of the novel *Here We Are*, explained by criticism about Graham Swift's work.

Silence as Isolation vs Silence as Trust

Silence can be noticed in the form of holding from telling certain details, reminding of repression, in Freud's terms, in all of Swift's other novels. At the same time, there is a need to break free from this silence by telling the story or the missing details from the story.

The move from silence to breaking silence and feeling relieved or simply feeling the need of sharing the story and remember what happened in the past are features of the other novels by Swift. In *Waterland* and *The Light of Day*, the narrator reveals what happened between him and a lady. In *Waterland*, Tom Crick reveals the story of his and Mary's past actions and the consequences of these actions on their lives now. In *The Light of Day*, it is Sarah who suffers consequences of her past actions, but detective George Webb is also affected due to his love feelings for get and to the impossibility of being together. In the novel *Last Orders*, even a character that is dead by the time of the action feels the need if breaking the silence and sharing his part of the story. The same happens in *Out of This World*, where Anna's monologue can be heard even if we know that she is no longer alive by the time we as readers read her perspective on the story and on her relationship with Harry. In these novels, as well as in *Tomorrow*, *Ever After*, *Shuttlecock*, *Wish You Were Here*, and *Mothering Sunday*, at the present time of the narrative, the characters wish to break the silence they had held on to in the past and they resort

to confess, be it to other characters or, mostly, to the readers. In these cases, silence shows their need for close communication and breaking their isolation. It has the same effect as breaking the silence by confession to the therapist by talking freely. In *Tomorrow* we deal with the preparations of a mother for revealing to her teenage twins the fact that their father is not actually their biological father, and that they were born through artificial insemination. All these details are located in the past and were not previously revealed to them, leading them to believe that there was nothing out of the ordinary about their birth. Paula simply feels the need to confess and feel better after breaking the silence over the detail she has kept secret.

Moving from past to present means moving from silence to the need to break the silence. This feature is also visible in *Here We Are*, and it is represented through the need to confess by telling the entire story, with all its details from the past. Ronnie, Jack and Evie all tell the story from their own perspective for the reader to hear, revealing at present details from the past which have been until then held silent and, thus, secret. They remind of the way that untold details were present in another novel by Swift, *Shuttlecock*, where Prentis has undergone a “transformation”, by trying to understand the silence of his father. He comes to doubt that his father was really a hero, and is faced with the choice of finding out the truth from his father or destroying the files, and preserving the silence. Readers are presented the couple for a magic act of Ronnie, the magician, and his assistant, Evie. Yet, in the end, they will not get married. Evie will marry Ronnie’s friend, Jack. Evie’s silence until then about her relationship with Ronnie is broken at present, when her husband Jack is dead.

First of all, the agent has never been told about how Evie and Jack got together as a couple, and he tries to find out after Jack’s death from Evie:

‘So tell me, Evie—all these years and I’ve never really known. How did you and Jack, how did you first really . . .?’ He didn’t know? Such innocence. For over thirty years Jack’s agent? All those lunches with him. Wouldn’t he have got the story anyway, or Jack’s version of it? And now she was going to be put in the position of saying something that conflicted with it? Not on your nelly either, George. Did he think that because a year of her widowhood had respectfully passed, everything might now be up for grabs? He’d be saying next, ‘So tell me, Evie, what

happened, what really happened with that magician chap? I forget his name.' (Swift 87)

Jack has been silent about the way he had met Evie, and so had Evie for the agent and for the general public. Evie does not wish to reveal the story of her first love with magician Ronnie, and then the way she had become more attracted towards his friend Jack. The change of choice made by Evie, from Ronnie to Jack, is a reflection of Evie's changing wishes, from magic and fairy-tales towards realism, although she still shows that she cares for both Ronnie and Jack. This is why she keeps silent to the agent, even now.

There are other occasions where Evie keeps silent to protect her loved ones. She keeps silent to her husband Jack about going to Evergreen, where Ronnie had lived with the elderly couple and learnt magic:

But she could always say, at least to herself, that she had been there. She had done it. What more could she do? And, yes, engraved in the stone archway over the front porch, amid other decorative work—oak leaves, flowers, scrolls—was the name that must once, and for some unknown reason, have been confidently chosen and then sharply chiselled, but was now blotched and eroded by a dark-greenish mould: EVERGREENE. She never told Jack she had gone there. It was another half-century secret. And was it still there now? And who was living in it? (Swift 100)

By going there, she tries to connect more to Ronnie's past, to get closer to him. In contrast, she hadn't been told much about Ronnie's childhood when they were in a relationship, as he had kept silent about its details: "But it wasn't as simple as that. She wanted to ask about the rest of Ronnie's childhood, the 'real' one. There was so much, it seemed, he was still keeping from her. And how anyway—to jump forward—had he got to call himself Pablo?" (Swift 63) The reason for Ronnie doing this might be due to his wish to magically break up with the past and its unhappy moments and focus on the future. According to Freudian theories, the moments of silence show that there is a resistance for the patient, something that the patient is holding back since it is uncomfortable to reveal and thus problematic to him:

Another distinct psychoanalytic use of silence is within the analytic situation itself. The silences of the analysand disclose

meaning to the analyst. In 'Fixation to Traumas - The Unconscious', Freud states that the gaps in dialogue have the potential to communicate the origins of the analysand's symptoms. These silences may denote a point of resistance maintaining the repression and therefore indicate a fuller narrative that remains unarticulated. (Dauncey 72-73)

Ronnie had called himself Pablo as a magician for his show, as he had wished to assume a different identity in order to leave his past behind. He had been unhappy due to the fact that his father was mostly absent. His parents were living separated, and were not very close emotionally to each other. His mother had sold the parrot his father had brought to him as a present, but she had lied to his father, telling him that the parrot had run away. Ronnie had kept silent about the truth in order not to hurt his father and let him know the truth about what his mother felt about him. The way Ronnie's mother feels about his father is not expressed in words, but through actions, and the way she sends the parrot away is symbolic of the way she keeps his father at a distance. The parrot becomes a symbol of Ronnie's mother sending Ronnie's father away, and of Ronnie being attached to his father. What is not expressed through words but is expressed through the image of the parrot instead suggests the fact that silence is dramatic: "Hassan, along with Steiner and Sontag, concentrates attention upon avantgarde writers, such as Kafka and Beckett, by whom silence and absence are given dramatic status." (Dauncey 4) The drama of young Ronnie is expressed silently, through images and actions, not through words spoken directly. Ronnie, through his silence, had hoped to keep his parents united, while his mother, through her silence, had kept his father at a distance. Ronnie's mother expressed her disapproval of Ronnie's father silently, without words. She resorted instead to a symbolic action, by sending the parrot away. By not using words to express her feelings, Ronnie's mother keeps her emotional distance away from her husband and from her son. She displays a passive attitude, while at the same time she makes her point clear. She shows resistance to open communication and to eventual negotiations in the relationship with her husband.

Ronnie's mother is also portrayed as not willing to get close to Ronnie either, through her silence. She does not openly express her feelings to him, and she is not breaking her silence about Evie and her relationship with Ronnie. Here, silence looks as disapproval from his mother's part. For Evie's mother, silence is

temporary, as it expresses a moment of hesitation. The confession of Evie to her mother about her relationship with a magician is filled with hesitations, and, thus, with moments of silence:

She never disclosed any of this to her own mother. One thing at a time. And time enough, she would think, for Ronnie perhaps to get round to telling her himself. First she had to tell her mother about Ronnie anyway, and she left that for a while, to be sure of her ground. But one day, using one of the phones at the Belmont Theatre, she said, 'Guess what, Mum, I'm working with a magician.' And then, not so very long after that, she said, 'Guess what, Mum, I'm going to marry him.' This was not perhaps what every mother wants to hear from her only daughter, but her mother's answer was simple and heartfelt. 'Oh how wonderful, sweetheart. And when am I going to meet him?' No such breathless messages ever passed, it seemed, between Ronnie and his mother. She would come to wonder if Ronnie's mother ever knew of her future daughter-in-law's existence. And just as well, she would also come to think. (Swift 65)

Although Evie's mother also has different principles, she is not portrayed as disapproving in her silence about her daughter's partner, or, at least, this is the way Ronnie is imagining the scene. Both Ronnie and Evie do not know enough about one another due to their silence, due to their not telling each other enough details from their personal lives. Evie does not know what associations railways and mothers have for Ronnie:

But soon she was saying, while Mabel beamed, 'Mum, this is Ronnie.' Evie didn't know (and never would) the particular associations that railway stations and mothers held for Ronnie, that his own nervousness was complicated, but she could see from the sometimes daunted look on his face during this otherwise bracing visit that Ronnie's mother and her own must be a million miles apart. And had Mabel really taken to Ronnie? 'So this is—the magician!' (Swift 66)

Once again, it is not through words that the characters can communicate, but through their intuitions about moments of silence. Since the characters are silent and holding something back, they get distant to one another. Silence can be synonymous with disapproval and keeping other characters at a distance. Silence is about what is difficult to be confessed, not only to the others, but to oneself. Silence can be symbolic for traumatic

moments, such as long pauses are for Ronnie when he remembers the past:

‘Agnes.’ Agnes Dolores. It made the mind again paint pictures. ‘And your father?’ There was a long pause. It was a simple question. ‘Sid.’ There was another long pause. ‘He’s at the bottom of the sea, Evie. Merchant navy. 1940.’ And that closed the conversation. But at least they were more or less as one there. She couldn’t give as many facts about her own father. For all she knew of his whereabouts (she believed he had been called Bill), he might as well have been at the bottom of the sea too. Poor Agnes. Poor Mabel. (Swift 65)

The conversation is closed since it is uncomfortable. However, silence and respecting the silence can be seen as understanding the other’s moments of feeling uncomfortable, and siding with him in not revealing to others what makes him feel bad:

She sometimes fancied she could write a book: ‘I Married a Magician’. It might be interesting for some people, it might shed some light. But of course she’d never write such a book, because it would involve telling, and you could never tell. It was forbidden. Her part in it all, even her part now with the rabbits and the cold frame, you’d never get it from her. Though one thing she might say—it was a different sort of telling—was that it could all get very demanding. What about normal life? (Swift 102)

Evie grows to respect Ronnie’s silence about certain details in his life, and she shows that she can protect him by doing this and that she is trustworthy. If we think about the way a therapist reacts to the needs of his patient, Evie has a similar intuition when it comes to Ronnie. A therapist is not allowed to disclose publicly what a patient confesses to him. By not revealing what Ronnie confesses to her, Evie shows that she cares about him and respects him. In psychotherapy, the therapist understands moments of silence coming from a client as a sign that the client feels uncomfortable and could even be hiding a traumatic incident. By keeping silent about the patient’s confession and silent moments, the therapist shows sympathy and the fact that he can be trusted.

Silence as the Thrill of Magic vs Silence as Loss

Silence is linked in *Here We Are* to magic, and to the excitement it brings along to the audience. "He felt too the strange power of

his silence. He had not spoken a word and had not needed to—he had merely moved. And his silence seemed to have silenced his audience." (Swift 78) The audience expects something extraordinary to happen and does not know what to expect at the same time.

For Evie, silence is related to the amazement she feels about magic and about the way she does not reveal how magic is actually done. By doing this, she shows that she cares for Ronnie and for his creating the magic atmosphere. She is his assistant, but never tells others his secrets as a magician, and this extends to their personal life secrets:

Then the rope would just disappear, it wouldn't be there any more, but between them, arching between them, there would be a rainbow. A rainbow, there wasn't anything else to call it. Stretching right across the stage: a rainbow. The drummer would have stopped, as if himself struck dumb. You could hear the silence, the sound of amazement. And then from somewhere out of the back of the stage would come—was it? Yes it was—the white dove, flying under the rainbow, and it would land on the rim of the glass, looking a bit dazed and as if it could do with a drink. Then there would be a big drum crash (Ronnie must have had a word with Arthur, he must have bought him a pint or two) and all would go black. No rainbow. End of act. (Swift 93)

Evie keeps her silence, just as Ronnie had asked her. Although everyone knows that she knows, she never breaks her silence, and by extension her bond of trust for Ronnie:

And don't ask her, don't ask Evie White. Though she if anyone, apart from Ronnie himself, should have known. Even Jack had said, 'Surely you must know. A fucking rainbow right across the stage. How the bloody hell does he do that?' But she had shaken her head and might even have looked a little shifty and cornered as if she were being forced into some kind of betrayal. Betrayal? What betrayal? And perhaps they'd both looked a bit shabby and edgy and ashamed. Outdone, outshone by a rainbow. (Swift 93)

When it comes to Ronnie, who had disappeared from the lives of Evie and Jack with his last magic act, there is silence associated with a feeling of guilt. Evie had never revealed certain details about her relationship with Ronnie, and he had not pressed her about it. The ring given to Evie by Ronnie is an object surrounded

by silence: nobody mentioned it, Ronnie had not asked it back and Jack had not asked Evie for details about the ring:

How often had she and Jack talked about Ronnie? Not much. A mutual silence about him, a guilty baffled honouring silence, was almost one of the glues—the secrets as they say—of their marriage. And, after all, how did they really know that he wasn't still there? She never told Jack what she'd done with the ring. Though he would have seen that it was suddenly absent. He didn't ask. He might have guessed. She hadn't given it back to Ronnie. Ronnie hadn't asked for it back. In fact she wore it for those last shows—for that very last show—as if it were a vital part of their act. A last little piece of shiny magic. (Swift 95)

Jack, as Ronnie's friend, could feel guilty for taking Evie from him, while Evie can also feel guilty about ending her love story with Ronnie and causing him to disappear. Ronnie has also created an atmosphere of magic and mystery around himself with his unexplained disappearance. His friends never find him after his disappearance act on stage. The novel ends without the readers ever finding out what had happened to Ronnie. We only know that he is silent, synonymous with gone, although his friends are still thinking about him and talking about him, and also preserving his memory through objects that remind of him, such as Evie's ring and her costume as his assistant.

Ronnie starts off as being associated with silence due to the thrill surrounding his magic act, and ends up being associated with the silence that is due to his loss. He makes himself lost to the other characters through his disappearance act. Thus, he disappears without any explanation from the lives of his friends. In turn, he had lost Evie, the girl he loved, echoing his childhood loss of his father's presence and affections of his mother. He gained a harmonious home temporarily, when he was living with an elderly couple. At that time he learnt magic. Afterwards, later in life, he conquered Evie's heart as well as the public's attention with his magic act. However, he finally lost everything. He even lost his own identity.

Silence can be interpreted as both a mark of affection and trust, as well as a sign of not caring and distance. Once Evie does not reveal his secrets related to magic, she is trustworthy. He does not reveal his painful childhood to her. He is in denial. He wishes that it could go away by not talking about it. However, this is not possible, as he is only defying reality. Childhood traumas return

to influence negatively his present relationship. In spite of the temporary success due to the awe of magic, the silence that ends up the story is a very sad one, which is related to his losses. He loses the girl he loves and his friend, and he also loses his job and his identity as a magician. He has lost his friends' affection, or so he thinks, as well as the public's, since tastes change with time and they will prefer other types of entertainment.

Through Ronnie and his uses of silence, Swift's novel recalls "Novels by Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and E. M. Forster, in which communicative difficulties are indissociable from problems of knowledge" (Dauncey 12). Through the difficulties in relationships which Ronnie experiences, he mirrors his personal difficulties. He has issues with finding stable relationships, as he repeats the loss of his parents' presence in his life. In the end, he loses the affection of his audience. His emotional difficulties have consequences not only on his personal relationships, but also on his relationship with the audience as a magician.

Silence and Rules

Once we analyse silence from the point of view of trust and distance in relationships, of magic and loss, we can also analyse it from the point of view of what is and what is not permitted. After all, Evie keeps silent since she is obedient regarding Ronnie and his magic act. She respects his rules, and never reveals what she should not about the magic tricks of their act together. Ronnie does not reveal to his father how his mother had sold the parrot he had given to him as a present, perhaps out of respect for his parents, perhaps out of his wish to see them getting along together and minimising the times they are having misunderstandings. He realizes that some details are better not told.

Silence could also be seen as a sign of psychological fixation, of a taboo wish, or of something that was simply prohibited at the time to be told:

In Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, silence is also of importance but is awarded a radically different role. Freud is concerned with communal prohibitions put in place to control instinctual desires-desires threatening to destroy the community, such as incest. However, instead of removing the desire altogether, the introduction of a prohibition invites its repression: 'A situation is created which remains undealt with -a psychological fixation - and everything else follows from the continuing conflict between the

prohibition and the instinct. 30 A taboo desire, such as incest, is unnameable. To name it would be to inscribe it within civilization and thereby instigate the dissolution of civilization itself. (Dauncey 70)

Evie keeps the ring from Ronnie, but hides it from Jack, feeling that it is a symbol for a prohibited desire for someone else than her husband. The same holds true for her costume as Ronnie's assistant. Like in dreams, the ring and costume are objects associated with a person, with Ronnie, and with everything that is related to him. Evie hides them the same way that she hides her feelings about Ronnie, and places everything under silence. This silence is both a sign of trust as well as not feeling that she is allowed morally to express her love feelings for another man than her husband. Jack keeps some personal details he knows about Ronnie a secret. He tries to protect Ronnie's image, as he feels guilty of hurting him by taking Evie away from him.

Conclusions

Silence has a protective function in the novel *Here We Are*, for Evie and Ronnie. Evie never reveals the secrets behind Ronnie's magic act. In this way, Ronnie feels he can trust Evie. Through trust, their relationship as a couple during the magic act and in their real lives can work. Not revealing the way the trick is done ensures the public's attention and thus the success of their show. The silence is a bond for them, and the bond remains when they are no longer officially a couple. It is kept silently through an object that reminds of the magic act: the costume Evie wore. As a child, Ronnie protects his parents' relationship by not revealing what his mother had done with the parrot. Ronnie also uses silence to protect himself from painful childhood memories and associations by not revealing them to Evie.

Whereas in previous novels by Swift the main conclusion was that it was therapeutic to confess (except for *Shuttlecock*, where the image of Prentis' father as a hero was protected by silence), in *Here We Are* silence generally has a protective function, and it is a sign of an emotional bond among the characters. A specific trait of Swift's novel *Here We Are* is the oscillation of silence between the need to overcome it and the need to keep it, with the conclusion that keeping silent can help characters communicate very well with one another as efficiently or even more efficiently than by using words in some cases. Swift challenges the usual association between silence and isolation. He

shows readers two opposite sides of silence: silence as isolation and silence as trust, silence as mutual understanding without any need of using words to express caring about a person. Silence shows an emotional bond that is even stronger than by communicating in the usual way. Silence is a sign of respect and trust, as well as a sign of hesitating to communicate. By using silence and by not revealing certain incidents from their childhood, characters can underline all the more the particular emotional weight associated with those incidents.

At the same time, silence is a means of marking moments of crisis in the lives of the characters. As Swift notes in *Fishing, Writing and Ted- an Appreciation* (1999), "There is never a moment in life, perhaps, when we should underestimate the latent repercussions" (qtd in Logotheti 6). Indeed, "The hidden potential of any moment in a person's life to explode into a major crisis constitutes the basic tenet of Swift's oeuvre to date." (Logotheti 6). The characters in the novel *Here We Are* explore moments of trauma in their lives, related to family problems as well as to large-scale, public events such as wars. The silence underlines the fact that we deal with problematic moments in their lives, such as loss of dear ones, separations, lack of success in careers. On the other hand, silence is also portrayed as a sign of trust, which appears in a helpful way during problematic moments. Even though at times silence is misleading, due to the missing details left to the readers to imagine, this does not have consequences on the authenticity of the characters' experience and on the way they ask for sympathy. According to Swift, "Revealing truth [...] is not the primary function of fiction. Fiction is about compassion" (Bernard and Menegaldo 13, qtd in Logotheti 6). Silence, thus, becomes a means of achieving sympathy for the characters' experiences. The way certain details are not mentioned has to do with the fact that the characters would have wished for real incidents to have occurred in a different way, the one suggested by the alternative scenarios that the readers are prompted to imagine. For example, readers expect Ronnie to marry Evie; instead, Jack marries Evie. However, the incidents have taken another course and the reasons for this change of the expected scenario are given in the novel.

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Le jeu et les enjeux du silence dans *La soif* d'Assia Djébar

Gada Lydia¹ et Betouche Aini²

Résumé

A travers une approche analytique, nous avons exploré le thème du silence dans La soif,³ premier roman d'Assia Djébar. Négligé par la critique, ce texte mérite une attention particulière, tant il dresse déjà le chemin des luttes égalitaires et construit le socle de l'écriture littéraire de l'écrivaine. Notre article analyse les différents aspects du silence à travers l'évolution de deux personnages féminins, Nadia et Jedla. L'assise théorique de notre travail est la « performativité », concept clé de Judith Butler. Nous avons transposé cette notion et appliqué « le silence performatif » qui est utilisé dans les études du genre. Nous avons démontré que le silence dans La soif n'est pas uniquement une figure de style, mais est aussi porteur de plusieurs connotations. Dans ce roman de Djébar, le silence apparaît comme un appareil subversif et un outil de transgression des codes sociaux. L'objectif principal de l'étude est de présenter les différentes stratégies adoptées par les personnages féminins pour contrer l'oppression et imposer leur affirmation à travers le silence. Notre analyse du roman émet des hypothèses sur le combat de la femme à travers les deux personnages qui utilisent le silence comme moyen de défense et un discours pour se défaire des règles patriarcales.

Abstract

The present paper explores the notion of "Performative Silence" in La soif, the first novel written by the Algerian woman writer, Assia Djébar in 1957. It analyzes this concept through the representations of

¹ Université Mouloud Mammeri, Tizi-Ouzou, Algérie, Laboratoire LARIC (Laboratoire des représentations intellectuelles et culturelles).

² Université Mouloud Mammeri, Tizi-Ouzou, Algérie, Responsable d'une équipe de recherche Laboratoire LARIC (Laboratoire des représentations intellectuelles et culturelles).

³ DJEBAR Assia, *La Soif*, Paris : Julliard, 1957, (Première édition).

the lives of two women characters, Nadia and Jedla. By appropriating and transposing Judith Butler's key concept of Performativity, which is well formulated in feminist and gender studies, we shall try to demonstrate that silence in Djebbar's novel is not only a figure of style; it is rather endowed with many connotations. Its repetition and persistence in the novel has subversive and transgressive purposes. The main task is to present different strategies employed by women to counter gender oppression. Although the female characters portrayed by the author encounter diverse and sometimes opposing circumstances, they tend to share a common plight, which is the need to break free from the constricting fetters of patriarchy. A reading of Djebbar's first narrative reveals that the two characters resort to silence as a means of self-preservation as well as discursive strategies, which reflect an outright protest to show their rejection of gender-based segregation.

Key Words: Silence- Performativity- Resistance- Defense - Transgression

Introduction

De nombreuses études sur la thématique du silence ont été consacrées à l'œuvre d'Assia Djebbar. Nous pouvons citer les travaux de Zahia Salhi,⁴ Mireille Calle Gruber⁵, Roseline Baffet⁶ et Sandra Salomo⁷. Néanmoins, aucune d'elles n'a analysé les jeux et les enjeux du silence dans *La soif*⁸ qui est le premier roman de Djebbar, et nous proposons d'examiner ces aspects sous la perspective de la « performativité », concept clé de Judith Butler. *La soif*, roman à controverse pour sa construction hédonistique en pleine guerre d'Algérie, a reçu peu d'attention de la part des critiques littéraires dont les travaux dans leur ensemble associent

⁴ SALHI-SMAIL Zahia, *Politics, Poetics and the Algerian Novel*, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999.

⁵ CALLE -GRUBER Mireille, *Assia Djebbar*. Publication gouvernementale : Français, 2006.

⁶ BAFFET, Roseline, « Le Silence dans l'œuvre d'Assia Djebbar », *Écriture et silence au XX^e siècle*, Michèle Finck, Yves-Michel Ergal, Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2010 p.59-70 (Actes du colloque « Écriture et Silence au XX^e siècle ». Il s'est tenu à l'université de Strasbourg les 27 et 28 mars 2008, dans le cadre du groupe de recherche comparatiste « L'Europe des Lettres » et du groupe de recherche le CERIEL).

⁷ SALOMO Sandra, *Giving Silence A Voice*, Utrecht : Utrecht University, 2009.

⁸ DJEBBAR, Assia, [1957] *La soif*. Alger, Barzakh, 2017. Toutes les références incérées dans le corps de cet article sont tirées de cette édition.

la valeur du roman algérien à la guerre, les violences et l'engagement de l'écrivaine dans la lutte pour l'indépendance de l'Algérie.

A ce propos, Beida Chikhi souligne que « *La soif, de même que Les impatientes, griffent sur la composante sociale des personnages un fort désir de création de soi, exprimé par des figures originales du jeu de la vie que la romancière s'amuse à faire et à défaire, en apparence peu attentive aux grandes mutations sociales et politiques du moment* »⁹. Dans un tel climat politique, l'identité et l'appartenance socioculturelle et surtout l'engagement de l'écrivaine dans la lutte pour l'indépendance est inévitablement l'un des principaux paramètres de l'évaluation d'une œuvre littéraire. Cette négligence et manque d'intérêt pour le premier roman de Djébar vient sans doute aussi du fait que le réalisme représentait la tradition dominante du roman algérien des années cinquante qui ignorait le caractère spécifique de toute norme esthétique. Pour sa part, Valérie Orlando suggère que *La soif* est « *un bon exemple d'un ouvrage conçu comme expérimental et influencé par le style et les formes littéraires nouvelles de l'époque du nouveau roman français* ». ¹⁰ Cet acte d'écrire novateur dont les processus sous-tendent la politique de la représentation suggère que ce récit est soigneusement conçu et mérite plus d'attention que la précédente critique lui a accordée.

Peut-on, dès lors, émettre une autre hypothèse consistant à mettre en valeur le jeu et les enjeux du silence dans ce récit ? Ce questionnement constitue la pierre angulaire de notre analyse et sous-tend d'autres questions importantes : le silence peut-il se jouer sur un mode performatif dans le récit ? Comment peut-on relier ce silence à une action répétée, effectuée dans un contexte composé de contraintes sociales et culturelles que l'auteure essaie de défaire ? *La soif* conserve-t-il son importance en dehors d'un contexte algérien parce qu'il transforme les préoccupations sociétales urgentes en questions plus durables concernant les relations entre les normes culturelles et les individus ? Nous empruntons à Butler le concept de la performativité qui est d'abord une interpellation sociale. Cette nouvelle relecture permet d'ouvrir une perspective d'une approche qui dépasse le contexte et qui interroge notamment le discours de l'auteure sur la performativité du silence, les conditions sociales de son

⁹ Chikhi Beida, *Assia Djébar, Histoire et Fantasia*, Paris : PUF, 2007, p.12.

¹⁰ ORLANDO Valérie, « *La Soif* d'Assia Djébar : pour un nouveau roman maghrébin », Presse UMMTO, Algérie : *El-Khitab* N° 16, 2013, p.139.

exercice et ses modes d'articulation dans le récit.

Afin d'examiner le silence et de comprendre ses fonctions dans le récit, il est important de noter qu'il est impossible de définir ou de cerner un terme aussi complexe que le silence. David Le Breton précise que sa « *signification ne se donne jamais qu'à travers les circonstances qui le mettent en jeu* ». ¹¹ Dans notre analyse de *La soif*, le concept de « performativité » nous permettra non seulement d'expliquer cette pratique du silence, mais aussi de comprendre ses effets et différents enjeux qui en découlent. Notre intérêt à cette perspective Butlerienne réside notamment dans sa critique des identités de genre et par la démonstration de leur caractère éminemment construit par des mécanismes socioculturels qu'il faut déconstruire et dépasser. Ce cadre théorique d'interprétation fondé sur « la mise en acte » du silence nous permettra de comprendre sa construction, sa reproduction et notamment ses enjeux de lutte contre la domination masculine. Comment penser la capacité des femmes à agir sur des « normes genrées » à travers le silence ? Telle est la question à laquelle cette analyse essaie de répondre par le fait que le silence intervient comme une stratégie langagière qui permet de dépasser le dicible. Afin d'appréhender le caractère spécifique de la question du « silence performatif » qui va nous servir de toile de fond dans notre argumentation, nous employons le terme « performativité » en nous référant à la définition de Judith Butler. ¹² Pour elle, le langage humain est capable de produire des situations nouvelles ou déclencher un certain nombre d'effets, précisant notamment que la performativité caractérise avant tout le fait qu'un énoncé linguistique, au moment de son énonciation, produit quelque chose ou fait advenir un phénomène. Introduit par J. L. Austin, « performativité », terme et concept, ont fait l'objet de plusieurs révisions et altérations, en particulier dans les œuvres de Jacques Derrida, Pierre Bourdieu et Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, pour n'en nommer que quelques-uns. Un énoncé donne vie à ce qu'il dit (fonction illocutoire) ou, conséquence de l'énonciation, produit certains événements (fonction perlocutoire). ¹³ La performativité, concept clé de la théorie de Butler, nous permet de voir pourquoi et comment le silence prend forme dans le récit de Djebbar non seulement du point de vue

¹¹ LE BRETON David, *Du silence. Essai*, Paris : Métaillic, 1997, p.17.

¹² BUTLER Judith, *Rassemblement, Pluralité, performativité et politique*. Trad, Christophe Jaquet. Paris : Fayard, 2016.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.30.

esthétique « un exercice de style », mais surtout de suggérer la possibilité de ses multiples significations comme outil de critique, de confrontation et de résistance. Afin de remonter à la source de ces silences pour bien circonscrire leurs aspects performatifs que nous rattachons au premier texte de Djébar, il est important de présenter dans un premier temps ce qui constitue à notre sens les jeux principaux du silence.

1. Les jeux des silences dans *La soif*

Le silence règne en maître absolu depuis le début du récit jusqu'à sa fin. Il est cité plus de quarante-sept fois à travers les trois parties, scindées en quinze chapitres qui forment les 179 pages du roman. Cette récurrence très fréquente et presque obsessionnelle du silence prend plusieurs formes et une variété de sens que nous analyserons de trois points de vue. Le premier à travers Nadia, la voix narratrice et en même temps personnage principal du roman. Le deuxième aspect du silence qui apparaît et réapparaît intensément par le biais de Jedla, son ancienne amie du lycée, perdue de vue depuis quatre ans. Ensuite, les deux personnages usent du silence volontairement afin d'exprimer des sentiments cachés qui ne peuvent pas se déclarer parce qu'ils sont interdits par des circonstances, par les normes conventionnelles établies et par les contraintes sociales subies par les deux jeunes femmes.

1.1. Silence volontaire, une expression d'un bien-être et d'une quête poétique

Dès le début du récit, un long silence ambigu règne en maître. Il revêt au moins deux significations. D'une part, il représente le bien être qu'offrait « *des nuits fraîches et claires de l'été* » (*La Soif*, p.9).¹⁴ Grâce aux longues promenades au bord de la mer en été, Nadia se met à l'écoute du bruit de l'eau et se laisse pénétrer par sa douceur naturelle d'une « *plage épanouie comme une femme* ». (10) De ce fait, le silence est positif et bien veillant, car il reflète son état d'âme dans sa contemplation intérieure ainsi qu'une écoute de soi. Nadia est très sensible à l'atmosphère de la mer, une découverte du bonheur sensuel qui lui permet de vivre avec elle-même. La mer est le lieu de réflexion et de questionnement sur le sens de la vie et Nadia écoute ce silence de la mer et de la nature s'ajoutant à celui qui règne dans sa vie quotidienne. Cette variété de silence est le résultat de son choix

¹⁴ Désormais, toute référence à *La Soif* sera désignée par le numéro de page entre parenthèse.

de vivre tranquillement loin des autres femmes, notamment de ses sœurs dont le mode de vie ainsi que leurs conversations ne sont plus du goût de la narratrice. Nadia peut réaliser ses désirs d'évasion et embrasse l'isolement au milieu du chaos et des conditions politiques troublées qui l'entourent. Face à l'oppression des normes sociales, sa conscience se transforme en silence et son isolement lui permet de créer une place pour son intimité et son individualité. Après avoir physiquement échappé à son entourage et aux siens, Nadia se transforme dans sa solitude en un être absolu dans l'espace ouvert et infini. Elle s'enterre dans une absence mentale et une écoute de soi. Par exemple, sur le chemin de la plage, elle s'est couchée sur le dos en écoutant le silence, sentant la chaleur du soleil s'imprégner de ses os. Elle attribue une valeur positive au silence qui n'a aucun rapport avec le silence oppressant qui lui est imposé par les normes sociales. La voix de la narratrice précise que Meriem, la sœur de Nadia, est toujours confinée, si diminuée, dans une sphère privée dans laquelle elle s'acquitte de la fonction de mère et d'épouse. Elle est souvent « occupée par ses grossesses ». Sa plus jeune Leila est tout aussi infantilisée par sa dépendance sociale et économique vis-à-vis de son mari. Elle représente les femmes soumises à l'autorité du mari et qui demeurent inactives et dépendantes. A travers la description de ses sœurs, Nadia insiste sur la superficialité et la monotonie de la vie des femmes mariées (Voir *La Soif*, p.71). L'héroïne, à travers sa recherche de la différence, accueille le silence favorablement pour savourer sa vie paisible loin de toutes les normes sociales, un symbole de paix, de sérénité et d'insouciance. C'est un silence qui symbolise le bonheur, un signe d'une harmonie avec soi-même, d'un échange serein entre Nadia et son profond intérieur, une sorte de havre de paix vers lequel elle se tourne afin de se réfugier et de s'éloigner des pressions que sa société exerce sur la femme. Ce genre de silence permet, selon Roseline Baffet, la création d'une écriture de soi. Il offre à chacune des voix un lieu de liberté, où tout devient possible.¹⁵

Le deuxième type de silence est celui de la jouissance qui s'accorde avec son corps jeune et beau; un corps en éveil saisissant les sensations avec des gestes bienveillants. Elle écoute les sensations de son corps et vit au présent, car elle n'aime pas relier sa vie à un passé déjà mort. Nadia aime la musique, du jazz et déteste le discours des gens qui l'entourent : « *J'aimais cet*

¹⁵ Voir BAFFET, *op.cit.*, p.31

enivrement triste, dans la sérénité du soir, j'aimais ma solitude ». (11). Privée de sa mère morte à sa naissance et d'un père aimable, mais toujours absent, Nadia apprend auprès de ses sœurs sereines et aimantes le silence tranquille. Elle est consciente de la société qui l'entoure et la discrimination et les stéréotypes misogynes qu'elle tente de dépasser par la solitude et la distanciation de ses sœurs dont la vision du monde demeure très conservatrice. Nadia n'obéit pas aux présupposés de la loi du père car celui-ci l'a éduquée à « l'Européenne ». (16). A travers cette variété de silence, Nadia se crée un espace intime, une sorte de lieu de refuge, une « chambre à soi-même », pour reprendre l'expression de Virginia Woolf.¹⁶ Ce dernier lui assure une protection et un bien-être singulier. Ce genre d'expérience s'accorde avec la conception de Judith Butler stipulant que « *l'expérience d'une restriction normative se défaisant peut défaire la représentation que nous avons de ce que nous sommes, mais cette fois pour en inaugurer une autre, relativement nouvelle, dont la finalité est une vie plus vivable* ». ¹⁷ L'isolement de Nadia lui assure la tranquillité et la possibilité de mener une belle vie loin des normes sociales. Selon la théoricienne du genre, l'existence de la femme est porteuse de désirs qui ne trouvent pas leur origine dans leur personnalité individuelle. Cette question est rendue plus complexe par le fait que la viabilité de la femme en tant qu'individu est fondamentalement dépendante de ces normes sociales.¹⁸ Le silence de Nadia peut être interprété comme une critique de l'ordre social établi pour la femme ; il est doté d'une capacité à développer une relation critique pour ces normes en établissant une distance. Le but est de suspendre ou de différer la dépendance pour normes sociales. **Ce comportement devient, selon Butler,** une sorte de « *mise en question des termes par lesquels la vie est contrainte, et cela afin d'ouvrir la possibilité de modes de vie différents, non pas pour célébrer la différence en tant que telle mais pour mettre en place des conditions plus inclusives pour la protection et le maintien des vies qui résistent aux modèles d'assimilation.* ». ¹⁹ Il y a en revanche des jours où Nadia laisse aussi s'installer en elle un autre silence cette fois, c'est un silence intrigant qui remet en cause sa « *vie superficielle, tranquille et vide* ». (12).

¹⁶ WOOLF Virginia, *A Room of One's Own*, London : Hogarth Press, 1929.

¹⁷ Butler, 2016, *op.cit.*, p.11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

1.2. Le silence, signe d'aliénation culturelle et d'une crise identitaire

Au fin fond d'elle-même, Nadia souffre d'un marasme et d'un manque qu'elle n'arrive ni à nommer, ni à expliquer facilement ou à combler, car précise-elle, elle avait juste vingt ans. Son incapacité à dire ou décrire son malaise s'ajoute au fait qu'elle ne soit pas sûre de ce qu'elle veut vraiment. Tout ce que dont elle est sûre, c'est sa soif pour les hommes et la découverte d'elle-même. Cette situation nous conduit vers une étape nouvelle de l'interprétation du silence; celle analysée par Frantz Fanon dans *Les damnés de la terre*.²⁰ Dans la lutte idéologico-culturelle menée par les peuples et les cultures dominés dans le monde colonial, l'intellectuel passe par trois phases importantes : celle de l'assimilation, celle d'une aliénation et le désir de retour à la culture du peuple. Cette aliénation culturelle s'applique au malaise de Nadia et s'accorde aussi avec l'instabilité identitaire de l'auteure et sa tentative d'exprimer son déchirement entre deux mondes, deux cultures et deux langues en conflit insensé, déchiré par la cruauté de la guerre. Cette crise identitaire et linguistique du français, langue de sa mère et de l'école coloniale et cette langue « Arabe guttural », héritage de son père qu'elle n'arrive pas à comprendre. Cette référence qui inclue la voix marginale de l'algérienne colonisée, mise hors histoire symbolise et peut être compris comme un acte politique. C'est dans *Les voix qui m'assiègent* que Djébar explique les différentes tonalités qui la harcèlent: « *Celles des personnages dans mes textes de fiction, je les entends, pour la plupart, en arabe, un arabe dialectal, ou même berbère que je comprends mal, mais dont la respiration rauque et le souffle m'habitent d'une façon immémoriale.* ».²¹ De manière significative, le silence de la jeune femme s'élève contre la voix colonialiste qui attribue tous les maux de l'Algérie à la colonisation française. Dans ce cas de figure, le silence peut être interprété comme une stratégie discursive et performative contre la parole dominante qu'incarnent les diverses institutions et vise à déstabiliser l'idéologie et le langage qui la véhiculent. Cette remise en question du pouvoir et savoir dominants est très important chez Butler qui note: « *Intervenir au nom de la transformation signifie précisément bouleverser ce qui était devenu un savoir établi et une réalité maîtrisable par la*

²⁰ FANON Frantz, *Les damnés de la terre*, Paris : Maspéro, 1961, p.157.

²¹ 16- DJEBAR Assia, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, Paris : Albin Michel, 1999, p.29.

connaissance, et utiliser notre irréalité pour faire une revendication qui autrement serait impossible ou incompréhensible [...] On assiste à autre chose qu'à une simple assimilation aux normes dominantes. Les normes elles-mêmes peuvent être ébranlées, trahir leur instabilité et s'ouvrir à la re-signification. ».²²

Il est important de souligner aussi que le silence vécu par la jeune femme dès le début du récit jusqu'à sa fin ne sera jamais vaincu, c'est un silence qui persiste, qui dure et qui s'accorde avec celui de l'auteure elle-même face à l'écriture. C'est «un silence poétique d'intériorisation » qui se réalisera par l'auteure dans sa quête des fondements d'une parole authentiquement littéraire par l'écriture. Ce silence de recul et de retrait est de motivation artistique; il est relié à la sensibilité poétique de Djébar dont la vocation, en tant qu' écrivaine est de se pencher sur l'intimité et d'aller loin dans la vie psychique qui peut conduire le lecteur à des vérités autres que l'enthousiasme politique de son époque. Ce retrait et cette solitude sont expliqués par Julia Kristeva dans son livre intitulé, *Seule une femme* où elle indique: « *Seule, comme seule la femme peut être seule, face à son irréductible singularité, seule face au défi inlassable que constitue la maternité en chacune. Seule encore dans la création, dans ce qu'elle a à dire, elle, et nulle autre qu'elle, à la place de nulle autre, loin des meutes et de tous les communautarismes* ».²³ Ce type de silence peut également être relié aux efforts de Djébar, à ses propres luttes intérieures et à ses propres incertitudes sur l'écriture en tant que femme. De ce fait, le silence est suggestif. Il symbolise l'absence de mots, l'indicible. Il représente l'inquiétude de Assia Djébar quant à ses engagements personnels et professionnels dans une société où la parole, notamment la parole littéraire est réservée à l'homme.

Après une longue période de silence, Djébar commence l'écriture par des problèmes féminins. L'acte d'écrire est non seulement un exutoire, il est surtout une quête de remède aux maux et aux souffrances par leur identification et description. Le silence dans *La soif* de Djébar est-il un choix ou le résultat d'une contrainte sociale imposée, d'une obligation et d'une souffrance ? Il serait prétentieux de répondre par l'affirmative et apporter une réponse sentencieuse tant le silence se manifeste sous différentes formes. Idyllique et poétique, le silence de Nadia, par exemple, est

²² Butler, *op. cit.*, 2006, p.46.

²³ KRISTEVA Julia, *Seule une femme*, Paris : L'Aube, 2013, p.4.

une manifestation de rejet des codes sociaux, une recherche de nouveaux horizons. L'évolution de ce personnage dans le récit rend sa personnalité plus complexe, car Nadia développe un silence de complicité et de solidarité après les retrouvailles avec son ancienne amie du lycée, Jedla. Djébar, par le biais des structures du jeu de rôles des deux personnages féminins, non inspirés de la réalité, comme il est de coutume chez les romanciers algériens, oppose tradition et modernité. La narratrice semble s'éloigner d'un monde fictif pour présenter une sorte de « kaléidoscope sociale », une réalité qui reflète la condition humaine de la femme. A travers les deux personnages féminins, construits comme des « images fluides », l'auteure décrit des traits universels tels que l'amour, la haine, la jalousie à travers des liens affectifs et silencieux entre les deux femmes. Le silence apparaît ainsi dans le texte de Djébar comme un outil subtil afin de nommer l'innommable sensation de l'homosexualité féminine avec ce qu'elle porte en elle comme une infamie, un interdit, une douleur et un blasphème dans la société patriarcale.

2. Le silence interpersonnel et actes corporels subversifs

Dès la première rencontre de Nadia et Jedla, un silence « hésitant » s'installe et perdure jusqu'à la mort tragique et inattendue de cette dernière. Premièrement, le silence s'exprime par leurs « visages fermés » et leurs incapacités à dire des choses. Nadia, « *éblouie par le visage mince de la reine et des yeux si longs sous les cils épais* » de Jedla, note clairement cette difficulté de dire: « *Je l'appelais d'une voix étouffée par une anxiété soudaine* ». (13). Un fois chez elle, Nadia ressent d'étranges sensations; elle fait référence à un autre silence étrange et angoissant qui prend place au fond de son profond être, c'est celui de la maison, « *un silence qui envahit l'âme, un silence d'une espèce rare, un silence que je ne connaissais pas* ». (17). Au cours d'une autre rencontre, Jedla reste toujours silencieuse; elle parle d'une voix brève et hésitante. (voir p.28). La situation indique et reflète une grande contrainte ainsi qu'un profond malaise qui apparaît à travers son regard absent : « *Ses yeux sombres qui restaient ouverts, son regard absent portait loin par delà la fenêtre ouverte* ». (42). Après la chute accidentelle de Jedla qui s'est avérée être plutôt une tentative de suicide dans la douche, Nadia décrit un silence qui devient de plus en plus « opprimant », qu'elle sentait partout comme l'ombre de son amie, un

personnage « alourdi par la laideur » et qui demeure inaccessible. (40). Le silence qui s'installe entre elles est un silence « *lourd comme la mort* », un silence insupportable et « *qui ne pouvait durer, qui allait se rompre comme un élastique trop tendu, qui allait...* ». (40). Cette phrase découpée et inachevée exprime une union sans paroles qui s'échange par la prise d'une main et le regard des yeux. C'est une passion non admise et qui ne peut s'exprimer qu'à travers la parole. Le silence de Nadia et de Jedla s'alourdit toujours davantage, exprimant, comme nous le verrons, l'intensité de l'émotion croissante de la lutte de ses sentiments troublants entre les deux jeunes femmes. C'est un silence « épais » accompagné par « *des chuchotements des voix soucieuses et un calme fou* ». (45) Toutes ces nuances du silence prennent d'autant plus d'importance par les questionnements intérieurs de Nadia : « *Je sentais son regard constamment sur moi; elle me surveillait, je m'en étais vite aperçue: mais pourquoi? Dans quel but? Eternée, je m'étais interrogée. Pourquoi soudain tant d'empressement dans ses invitations? Pourquoi devenait-elle maintenant bavarde, et même spirituelle?* ». (52-53). Ce passage montre que le silence n'est pas vide, il reflète les pensées des deux jeunes femmes. Il n'est pas seulement une souffrance psychique intenable, il est aussi une interrogation qui vise à « *contester l'autorité symbolique, qui n'est pas nécessairement revenir à l'«ego» ou aux notions « libérales » classiques de la liberté. Elle revient plutôt, en suivant l'approche de Butler, à affirmer que la norme, dans sa temporalité ouverte, est susceptible d'être déplacée et subvertie de l'intérieur* ». ²⁴

Il est important de noter que le silence règne aussi bien entre Jedla et son mari Ali, puisque implicitement ils se sont sentis toujours loin l'un de l'autre après une fausse couche et la perte d'un enfant : « *Dans sa robe blanche, elle paraissait fragile, un oiseau perdu* ». (53). Ce type de silence reflète la tourmente morale et la crainte psychologique de la jeune femme, car devant Jedla qui « *ne souriait pas* », Nadia garde le silence et n'arrive pas à parler, à « *briser cette épaisseur* » du silence qui s'installe entre elles. Elle ne veut rien livrer de sa vie intérieure de peur que Nadia ne découvre sa passion, sa peur et sa haine. Cette dernière est troublée par un simple regard de Jedla; elle souffrait sans rien dire : « *Nous sommes rentrées en silence de cette plage éloignée* ». (57). Ce silence persiste non seulement en sa présence, mais aussi quand Jedla est absente : « *Son regard s'arrêta sur*

²⁴ Butler, *op. cit.*, 2016, p.74.

moi; une lueur méchante étincela. Je sus alors que quelque chose finissait ». (61). En effet, même quand Jedla est loin, Nadia dans le silence de sa solitude, ou même quand elle est avec Hassein, n'arrête pas de penser à son amie ; elle voulait connaître ses désirs et le fond de ses pensées: « *Qu'avait-elle ? Que voulait-elle ?* », *s'interroge-elle constamment, s'interroge t'elle en permanence* ». (77).

La relation des deux femmes se transforme et se caractérise par des contradictions; une mêlée de haine et d'amour ; c'est un « *double sentiment* ». Nadia ressent la présence de son amie et apprécie sa compagnie; partout, sa présence se mêle au bonheur que lui procurait la mer: « *Je revenais, chargée d'eau et d'algues, sans me sécher. Elle m'accueillait avec un demi-sourire dont la grâce me faisait tout oublier* ». (103). Parfois, Nadia ressent un étonnement mêlé d'admiration et même de rêve devant la patience avec laquelle Jedla a affronté son mutisme quotidien, non seulement sans jamais traverser un moment d'agacement, mais en paraissant même « *une coulée d'eau froide sur de l'herbe de printemps* » (104), et cela au moment où le silence devient agaçant et de plus en plus pesant pour elle-même. Cette absence de réciprocité augmente la frustration de Nadia. Plus loin, cette admiration se transforme en sentiments d'amour étrange : « *Son visage me frappa : légèrement rose, alors qu'elle était toujours si pâle, et surtout, surtout, ses yeux élargies comme ceux d'une gazelle avant de s'élaner dans le désert, ses yeux qui lui donnaient plus que jamais un air étrange* ». Au cours du temps, Nadia s'habitue au silence de son amie et fait des efforts pour lui pardonner : « *Je m'assis à ses pieds, par terre, et je mis ma tête sur ses genoux. A cette heure, je l'aimais étrangement* ». (106). Le silence que partagent les deux femmes devient « *le lieu du miracle et du fantasme personnel, du « tout est possible »* ».²⁵

Dans la troisième partie du roman, le silence prend d'autres formes. C'est un silence « grand » et « profond », celui qui a effacé la haine et la souffrance pour remplacer le silence né de la lassitude, de l'humiliation et de la soumission car, devant Jedla: « *Je devais me sentir en état d'infériorité. J'étais humiliée* » déclare la voix de la narratrice. (135). Par la suite, Gagnée par un grand dilemme, des choix difficiles à prendre, la disparition de son amie, Nadia est rongée par « un silence nouveau », celui des remords, de souvenirs humiliants d'un passé

²⁵ Baffet, *op. cit.*, p.32.

qui revient la hanter, une grande déception due à un chagrin d'amour : « *Je n'osais rien dire après ces journées d'une alliance muette, elle redevenait lointaine, elle allait m'échapper* ». (145). Nadia recommence ses questionnements en silence et se demande: « *Que veut-elle de moi ? Que je lui tende la main, que je me réjouisse en amie désintéressée, que je me dise gravement : « Je suis heureuse pour toi. Ali va être fou de bonheur ! Tu vois que tu t'es trompée* ». (148). Lorsque Jedla commence enfin à raconter son histoire, Nadia reste à côté en silence et pense. Ses rencontres avec son amie évoquent toujours un sentiment d'atemporalité en elle, créant une autre fracture dans ses efforts pour établir une continuité dans son propre récit. Après l'avortement de Jedla, un silence de peur et d'angoisse envahit le corps et l'âme de Nadia: « *Une peur froide, muette comme une tombe* ». (164). Sa mort laisse « *une terreur confuse* » à son amie qui n'a aucune autre issue que ses yeux pour pleurer de « *rage, de honte et d'attendrissement* » sur sa personne, précise la voix de la narratrice. Le roman se termine de façon ambiguë, sans incident, ni situation marquant une fermeture définitive. Bien que le roman ne décrive pas en détail les causes qui ont poussé Jedla à s'infliger l'avortement, le lecteur peut comprendre que cette action bien réfléchie dépasse le fait descriptif pour devenir un « acte performatif » qui vise à déstabiliser la norme sociale. Il devient une infraction à l'ordre et aux règles sociales établies pour la femme. Nadia donne juste un bref compte rendu de son état de santé par le biais de son corps qui agonise sans cri et sans mot. Elle décrit la souffrance intenable causée par une double douleur physique et surtout psychique: « *Je la vis sortir avec son même air penché et ses yeux ardents, à peine un peu plus pâle; elle avait la tête légèrement inclinée, comme une poupée morte* ». (165). Elle développe une grande sympathie envers son amie, qui, tordue par une douleur insupportable, se contente de « *serrer les dents; il ne lui restait plus que le courage* ». (165). Nadia prend conscience de l'ampleur de sa douleur et de l'humiliation, elle peut endurer en silence. En présence de ce silence, Nadia est rongée par une peur profonde et inexprimable: « *Une peur froide, muette comme une tombe* ». (164). On ne dit pas au lecteur comment Jedla se sent physiquement ou émotionnellement; son silence indique qu'elle n'a pas un contrôle absolu sur son corps. Le lecteur est laissé avec sa propre imagination pour comprendre la douleur insupportable qui ne peut pas être exprimé par le langage, mais se distingue comme une expérience que seul le

corps peut sentir. Nadia reste à court de mots pour décrire la douleur physique et émotionnelle insupportable de son amie. La souffrance décrite dans le roman à travers les expériences de Jedla aide à bien comprendre que le langage et le corps sont fragiles et volatiles.

Il est incontestable que le récit de Djébar présente des ambiguïtés et des incertitudes. Au lieu d'utiliser une narratrice omnisciente faisant autorité, l'auteure construit le roman sur un personnage féminin complexe, Nadia. Celle-ci ne peut pas former un sens fixe, constatant que les mots lui échappent, car son amie reste complètement inconnue pour elle et le récit ne montre pas l'omniscience de la narratrice. L'indétermination dans ses actions et ses remarques aboutit à une déception causée par son échec ultime à donner un sens à sa vie. Malgré les incertitudes dans le récit, le manque d'autorité et l'incapacité de Nadia à atteindre un sens final, le roman se termine par une lueur d'espoir. A la fin du récit, comme le suggère Zahia Smail Salhi, Nadia réussit à vaincre son angoisse et son conflit moral. Elle devient une personne plus forte. La perte de son amie la force à voir le monde autrement; elle décide de se défaire de ses anciennes habitudes de femme désengagée pour se ranger, pour devenir une épouse qui aspire au bonheur de son époux.²⁶

Cependant, le sujet du mariage demeure une question sans réponse. Nadia a souvent critiqué la position des femmes mariées tout au long du récit alors que son mariage avec Hassein contribue-t-il à son épanouissement personnel, à assumer son destin de femme et surtout à désaltérer sa soif ? Il est vrai que Nadia a agi comme un modèle inspirant, à la fois pour les femmes réelles et pour les personnages de fiction. Sa quête de liberté et de bonheur repose sur la sortie auto-choisie des espaces domestiques et auxquels les personnages féminins sont affectés. En ce sens, elle revendique son individualité et son autonomie par ses choix et elle échappe ainsi aux identités que d'autres essaient de lui imposer. Mais, est ce que sa décision de mariage avec Hassein la conduira à l'accomplissement de ses désirs ? Ou, au contraire, la mènera-t-elle dans un format traditionnel de la bonne épouse qui obéit aux caprices de son mari et de sa belle famille ? Djébar opte pour ne pas conclure et fermer le récit sur lui-même, probablement pour ne pas fermer sa lecture sur elle-même. Cette fin ambiguë et nuancée à travers des questions que

²⁶ SALHI, Zahia Smail, *Politics, Poetics and the Algerian Novel*. Lewiston, NY : Edwin Mellen Press, 1999, p.210.

se pose la narratrice: « *Pourquoi soudain, ces fantômes qui m'assiègent ? Je croyais être entrée enfin dans le troupeau de toutes les femmes souillées, épanouies, ouvertes. Même si ses sentiments pour Hassein s'améliorent à la fin du récit, sa jeune femme a choisi de continuer à vivre comme s'il n'existait pas, comme s'il n'avait jamais existé. Même si l'attitude et le silence de Nadia constituent une oppression pour ce dernier. Cependant, dit-elle: « Je croyais avoir appris la vertu, c'est-à-dire la sécurité ».* (176). Cette fin du récit permet d'ouvrir la voie à d'autres interprétations. Son silence indique cette obsession de l'indicible, cette volonté qu'ont les auteurs à saisir l'insaisissable.

3. Silence subit, résultat d'une blessure profonde

Une autre manifestation du silence apparaît surtout à travers le personnage de Jedla, être rattrapée par le danger d'un passé traumatisant qui la poursuit dans tous ses pas et gestes. Le silence que le récit de Djébar suggère à travers un voyage au sein du psychisme et du mystère de Jedla révèle une clôture de la parole, apparente dès les premiers entretiens avec son amie Nadia. Le mutisme de Jedla est le résultat d'une souffrance engendrée par la trahison de son mari et accentué par sa fausse couche générant l'angoisse de la perte de bébés. Son deuil, comme l'explique Judith Butler « *révèle l'emprise que ces relations ont sur nous, relations que l'on ne peut pas toujours dire ou expliquer et qui interrompent souvent le récit conscient de soi que nous pourrions donner de nous-mêmes, remettant en cause notre autonomie et notre contrôle. Car, le « je » y est lui-même remis en cause, de par sa relation avec celui à qui je m'adresse. Cette relation à l'Autre n'abîme pas mon histoire, pas plus qu'elle ne me réduit au silence ; elle encombre invariablement mon discours des signes indiquant qu'il se défait*». ²⁷ Le silence de Jedla et la situation dans laquelle elle décide de l'accueillir, de l'adopter et le prolonger est dû entièrement à des raisons qui lui sont propres, et qui doivent être distinguées du silence de Nadia. C'est un fardeau que porte son corps et son âme envahis par une douleur profonde qui se manifeste dans son apparence physique. Jedla est décrite comme étant laide, maigre et pâle, ce qui la rend malheureuse et peu sûre d'elle à côté de son beau mari, qu'elle pense trop élégant pour elle. En sa présence, le regard de sa femme devient « *trop aigu et fixé vers un but inconnu* ». (50). Son regard absent « dur et pénétrant » n'est jamais tout à fait objectif

²⁷ Butler, 2016, *op. cit.*, p.35.

car il est chargé de beaucoup de réalités intérieures habitant la personne qui regarde. Il fait apparaître une expérience personnelle complexe, dont la vraie nature demeurera toujours son secret. Le silence prend corps dans sa langue bâillonnée et son regard « fixe et lointain ». Jedla se cache et elle tente de dissimuler son âme torturée à travers un jeu où se mêlent l'absence et la réalité, des aspirations ainsi que de profondes déceptions (56). Son silence indique clairement qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une maladie mais plutôt d'une torpeur qui la rend désabusée et amère. Son penchant pour l'isolement ainsi que sa façon d'agir indique clairement qu'elle souffre d'un stress post-traumatique aigu qui la force à prendre la fuite. Son regard « *de oiseau perdu* » prolonge son évasion de toute activité, d'un endroit et d'une pensée qui semble lui évoquer un événement traumatisant ou un sentiment qu'elle s'efforce d'oublier en adoptant un silence et une absence qu'elle semble suivre presque religieusement. Jedla, « *l'air distrait, les yeux dans le vague* » (14) vit en isolement moral de son mari car « *un vide les sépareit* ». (58). Sa solitude apparaît comme un obstacle qui l'empêche de vivre sa vie de façon saine et libre. Son silence est le reflet d'un état dépressif, signe d'une grande tourmente, et d'un mal-être profond. Ce silence qui ronge et torture Jedla est très angoissant ; il annonce et avertit d'un danger mortel qui la guette. Elle se distingue par son mutisme et sa recherche d'une parole capable d'exprimer une douleur qu'elle n'arrive pas à évacuer suite à l'infidélité de son mari et au poids des normes traditionnelles. Infidélité et incapacité d'enfanter sont deux sentiments qui la tourmentent. Son insatisfaction conjugale survient à partir d'une liaison de son mari avec une femme avec laquelle il a eu un enfant, lequel elle est incapable d'avoir. Elle ne comprend pas son comportement et n'arrive pas à lui pardonner. (51). Sa dépression est accentuée par sa souffrance d'amour et surtout par sa conviction qu'elle ne pourra jamais avoir d'enfants après sa fausse couche. (98). Ce sont les deux raisons qui expliquent sa tentative de suicide dans la douche.

Ainsi, Nadia ne se comprend-elle pas elle-même. Sa soif, comme nous l'avons mentionné précédemment, est tout à fait celle de la découverte de soi, de liberté, du sens de l'amour et du plaisir. Elle n'est jamais satisfaite; elle suit sa quête constante de bonheur qui s'arrête avec la mort soudaine de Jedla après son avortement. Ainsi, comme Nadia, Jedla a aussi soif de « *quelque chose d'autre* »; son dilemme se termine par une tendance à

détruire sa vie conjugale, incarnée par la destruction du fœtus qui aurait pu la sauver du désespoir intérieur qui a suivi la fausse couche. Le comportement de Jedla traduit son esprit préoccupé. Son silence est motivé par la méfiance, l'incertitude et le doute. Son mutisme implique une certaine forme d'oppression qu'elle subit et qu'elle ne peut pas exprimer. Elle cache ses besoins sincères en raison d'un manque de compréhension ou d'une crainte qui l'oblige à fuir et à le compenser en parlant longuement d'autres questions (104). Jedla, une présence énigmatique, se retire dans le silence. Son avortement, un agissement réfléchi, peut être interprété comme un acte de dissidence et une transgression de l'ordre social établi pour la femme. Sans être forcée ni par son mari, ni par sa famille ou son entourage, Jedla décide d'avorter sachant qu'un tel acte est criminalisé par la loi et honni par la religion. Cet acte prémédité effectué dans le silence indique sa volonté de mettre fin à son « *corps culturellement constitué dont la morphologie est la conséquence d'un schème conceptuel hégémonique* ». ²⁸ L'avortement ayant entraîné la mort de Jedla a saisi Nadia de remords et de sentiments de culpabilité. La narratrice avoue qu'elle « (...) *s'était servie de moi pour plonger dans la mort, pour fuir* ». (167). Cette phrase inachevée illustre la manière dont le silence s'est emparé de leurs corps de femmes, de leurs désirs inassouvis et de leurs voix bâillonnées. A travers les deux femmes, Djébar entraîne le lecteur dans un jeu, celui de faire et de défaire une multitude de silences qui renforcent leurs rapports à l'ordre social, à la domination et à l'exclusion imposé à la femme. La parole féminine de Nadia est reliée à celle de sa créatrice. C'est une parole qui l'a condamnée au silence en public mais que la plume permet de saisir. Si elle prétend revendiquer une identité entièrement humaine en cherchant une place dans l'arène publique, elle se doit de transgresser les définitions patriarcales de la nature féminine en adoptant le projet d'une autonomie pour la femme algérienne. « *Le bon avocat de la femme, c'est la femme elle-même* ».

Conclusion

En somme, le silence dans *La soif* de Djébar ne relève pas seulement du jeu, du plaisir et de l'imagination. Il expose surtout la réalité culturelle et politique de la domination patriarcale. Le cadre d'analyse de Judith Butler, que nous avons adopté en raison de sa capacité à décrire de manière adéquate la domination

²⁸ Butler, *op.cit.*, 2004, p.43.

patriarcale, nous a permis de démontrer que Djébar, dans un moment culturel en plein cœur d'une lutte sociale et politique, a ouvert une porte sur un style novateur. Ce dernier enrichit la conception du silence au travers la mise en scène de deux personnages féminins à même d'articuler des silences, fruit d'une contemplation et d'un bien être personnel. Le silence est aussi le résultat d'un malaise culturel et d'un néant existentiel qui n'est autre que celui de Djébar elle-même. Il peut être interprété comme un idéal esthétique, une libération des contraintes et des limites du langage verbal, un acte de renoncement emblématique de la méfiance des mots et des signes ou de l'épuisement de leurs possibilités. Il peut aussi s'agir d'une ou des expériences psychologiquement et émotionnellement troublantes et traumatisantes. Celui de Nadia symbolise un creux intime, un manque d'enracinement qui la sépare des membres de sa société. D'autre part, le silence représente une lutte interne d'un personnage féminin qui prend conscience d'un passé douloureux qu'elle n'arrive pas à accepter et un traumatisme à dépasser. Jedla subit forcément le silence, bien que la prise de parole la saisisse intérieurement. Le silence se manifeste sous différentes facettes, insistant et envahit l'espace du récit. Omniprésent dans le roman, il agit tel un chef d'orchestre qui fait jouer et qui contrôle le jeu des deux personnages féminins. *La soif* de Djébar ne fut pas en son temps saluée comme un grand roman. Notre ambition dans le présent article est de proposer une lecture, de montrer que son ignorance par la critique n'est pas justifiée. Le récit est beau, simple et poétique; il nous plonge dans l'intimité de deux personnages féminins et fait ressortir devant le lecteur leurs dilemmes, leurs hésitations, leurs ambiguïtés et la contradiction de leurs sentiments troublés et troublants. *La soif* est aussi un texte de valeur. Dans la grande détresse de la Guerre de Libération, Djébar trouve la force d'écrire, abordant des thèmes aussi délicats que tabous pour l'époque comme la sexualité féminine. Le silence dans le roman, sans équivoque, montre les choix véritables qu'exigeait cette période mouvementée. A travers le personnage de Nadia, Djébar montre bien que la liberté pour la femme doit être reconquise. Ces combats intérieurs et extérieurs permanents forment une clé pour comprendre le sens performatif du silence dans *La soif*. L'auteure sait aussi que la liberté peut être écrasée et la résistance exprimée par le silence. C'est pour promouvoir cette liberté, diminuée dans son pouvoir d'action mais intègre dans son principe, que Djébar écrit. C'est une façon

de contrecarrer l'intention d'anéantir le sujet féminin. C'est un témoignage de résistance, et c'est là que réside l'intemporalité de *La soif*. Cette résistance trouve son arme privilégiée, non pas dans le silence qui exprime des sentiments contradictoires, un combat contre une part de soi-même, mais aussi et surtout dans la parole, dans le dialogue entre soi et l'autre, dans cette communication en laquelle Djebbar croyait si fort pendant toute sa vie et qui forme le socle de toute son œuvre littéraire.

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Pour une poétique du silence chez Jean Amrouche : « Lettres de l’Absent »

Célia Maloum¹ et Fatima Boukhelou²

Résumé

Le dernier recueil de poèmes de Jean Amrouche paru en 1937 est écrit sous le signe de l’absence. Le personnage surnommé « l’Absent » vit en exil loin de sa patrie. Nous nous proposons, dans le présent article, de faire une lecture des trois poèmes intitulés « Lettres de l’Absent » à l’aune du silence qui est le résultat de l’absence. Trois parties sont mises en lumière, celle où l’Absent est confronté à la solitude, celle où il se heurte au silence et celle enfin où il découvre le pouvoir salvateur du mutisme. Tous ces silences constituent des expériences méditatives qui permettent au poète d’aller en quête de l’Enfance perdue.

Mots clés : *silence, absence, solitude, quête, enfance, rêverie.*

Abstract

The last collection of poems by Jean Amrouche published in 1937 is written under the sign of absence. The character nicknamed «The Absent» lives in exile far from his homeland. In this article, we propose to read the poems entitled «Letters of the Absent» in the light of the silence that is the result of the absence. Three parts are highlighted, the one where the Absent is confronted with solitude, the one where he encounters silence and the one where he discovers the saving power of silence. All these silences are meditative experiences that allow the poet to go in search of the lost Childhood.

Key words: *silence, absence, solitude, search, childhood, daydream.*

¹ Université Mouloud Mammeri, Tizi-Ouzou, Algérie.

² Université Mouloud Mammeri, Tizi-Ouzou, Algérie.

Introduction

La poésie de Jean Amrouche a partie liée avec l'absence. Cette absence est tantôt physique, résultant d'une disparition momentanée due à l'exil ou définitive due à la mort, tantôt elle est éloignement provisoire de l'être, absence totale à soi et au monde. Cette absence devient alors la motrice de la création poétique, une source d'où jaillit la plainte silencieuse qui donne naissance au « Chant Profond ». Les recueils de Jean Amrouche, *Cendres d'abord*, puis *Etoile secrète* font entendre, à l'image du spleen baudelairien, un *lamento* personnel empreint de mélancolie et de solitude. Epris de passion pour une Terre/ Etoile dont il sera à jamais l'amant, pour reprendre Tassadit Yacine, Amrouche place son dernier recueil sous le signe de l'absence et du silence. *Etoile secrète*, recueil lyrique et pathétique, relate une longue quête existentielle du personnage surnommé l'Absent. Ce long récitatif se déroule en quatre parties après « l'Assemblée des enfants » : l'ami de l'absent raconte son enfance dans un premier temps, puis l'Absent lui-même prend la parole dans un style épistolaire, enfin on y entend les paroles de l'Ange protecteur et celles de l'Etoile retrouvée. Cette quête de l'Etoile est vécue dans et par l'exil, thématique omniprésente de l'œuvre amrouchienne, un exil physique et personnel qu'il extrapole à l'échelle universelle pour exprimer l'exil de tout homme orphelin.

Comprends-tu ? Je suis orphelin, nous sommes tous des orphelins. A petit bruit pleure ma détresse, une flamme qui va mourir et que nourrit sa propre mort, une détresse sans aucun nom, une détresse d'orphelin parmi les hommes orphelins, qui ont perdu leur Enfance au vent de la terre orpheline. (*Etoile secrète*, 1937, p. 44)

Nous nous proposons ainsi de réfléchir sur les modalités et les significations du « silence » à travers l'absence dans l'œuvre poétique de Jean Amrouche. Nous nous focaliserons principalement sur les trois Lettres de l'Absent pour parvenir à saisir ce que le poète tente de mettre en œuvre par la dualité silence/parole et absence/présence. Il sera question notamment de la manière dont le poète bute contre le silence et comment il le transcende. Nous chercherons la réponse à ces différentes questions en deux étapes : la solitude de l'Absent qui lui impose le silence et puis le silence qui s'avèrera salutaire et salvateur.

1. L'absent solitaire

L'Absent dont parle Jean Amrouche vit un drame multidimensionnel, un drame en l'occurrence historique, familial et personnel. Comme tout orphelin, il vit dans la solitude et qui dit solitude dit silence. L'Absent vit silencieux, d'abord parce qu'il est « séparé », séparé de cette

assemblée où ses frères se réunissent sans lui et séparé de l'Enfance³ qu'il tente de retrouver. Tassa, dit Yacine, explique cet état Sa poésie est plongée dans le passé lointain de l'histoire mais aussi dans le lointain passé de la subjectivité. Ce qui amène Amrouche, « poète africain », à ressentir le poids de la solitude. Cette solitude qui marque l'orphelin issu d'une catégorie bien particulière, car il est précisément « sans patrie ». Cette absence de patrie, de socle, de terre ferme le pousse à aller vers des rivages lointains, boire au calice de fleurs inconnues.⁴

Cette séparation, qui est à l'origine de la solitude du poète constitue pour lui le « *climat de la damnation* ». Jean Amrouche affirme en effet que « *celui qui choisit la solitude s'oriente vers la damnation.* » (*Etoile secrète*, p. 57). Ainsi, le damné qui s'est retiré, absorbé par les affres de la solitude, ne reconnaît-il plus sa voix, il dit « *Je par habitude* »,

Je suis figure de mystère et sanglante destruction. Je suis absent à moi-même et je serai jugé comme si j'étais présent [...] Je dis MOI par habitude et pour me donner l'illusion que c'est vrai. Je me répète mon propre nom afin de croire à mon existence. (*Etoile secrète*, p. 46-47)

Très présente dans la poésie de Jean Amrouche, la voix est vitale pour son écriture, car selon lui « *toute poésie est avant tout une voix* » (*Chants berbères de Kabylie*, p. 49). C'est l'appel singulier de la voix de la mère qui génère le chant profond dont la musicalité silencieuse lui permet de transcender le réel, de s'unir au cosmos afin d'être présent à soi-même et au monde. C'est ainsi que s'effectue une fusion entre la vie intime et la vie extime, et que l'esprit d'enfance « [...] s'épanouit tout naturellement en poésie. Détaché de l'artificiel, de tout le casuel de la vie que nous forgeons, attentif à ce flux intérieur qui chante en lui. L'homme-enfant est merveilleusement libre. » (*Chants*, p. 40.)

Mais la solitude est un monde de perdition : le poète y perd non seulement la voix mais aussi l'Enfance⁵, archétype de l'origine et de l'enracinement. C'est alors que débute sa quête de la source première, de la source maternelle qui lui prodigue poésie salvatrice et chant

3 L'esprit d'enfance qu'Amrouche décrit comme le caractère fondamental d'un type supérieur d'humanité, de la forme achevée de l'homme digne de ce nom. L'homme-enfant est merveilleusement libre ; il sait où il est, et il sait aussi qu'il va où il doit aller, qu'il peut y aller tout en ne voyant pas de ses yeux son point d'arrivée ; il sent qu'il est à sa place, et qu'il remplit la fonction pour laquelle il a été créé. (*Chants berbères de Kabylie*, 1939, p. 40-41 (les références renvoient à l'édition algérienne Zyriab, 2011.))

⁴Tassadit Yacine, *Jean Amrouche, l'éternel exilé*, Alger, Casbah, 2012, p. 14.

⁵ Il est difficile de ne pas citer ici la phrase de Baudelaire « *Le génie, c'est l'enfance retrouvée à volonté.* »

profond, « *la magie nourricière au sein de laquelle vient s'abreuver l'esprit d'enfance sevré de rites et de mythes* »⁶. L'Absent déclare avoir perdu sa voix dans les flots tumultueux des mondes antagonistes auxquels il appartient et dont il est essentiellement absent ; il écrit : Je ne suis Lieu d'aucune chose. Le vent, la pluie me traversent, et la lumière de mes yeux prend sa source au de-là de moi. Je suis le carrefour des voix qui se croisent dans mon silence. A quel signe connaître ma voix parmi les mille voix du monde ? (*Etoile secrète*, p. 45.)

L'Absent exprime par cela l'écartèlement subi, le terme « carrefour » témoigne de manière prégnante de ce déchirement vécu par le poète, à tel point que nous pouvons parler de tumulte, car il est dans un état de mutisme que les multiples voix du monde viennent briser. La voix que le poète attend et espère est la voix apaisante et réparatrice émanant du sein maternel, de la terre ancestrale de l'Enfance. Or, il ne reçoit qu'une multitude de voix qui viennent s'entrechoquer contre le silence. L'image du vent et de la pluie qui s'associent attestent de l'atmosphère glaciale et du temps glacé qui gèlent l'âme infiniment sensible du poète pour la plonger dans l'absence. Dans la strophe suivante, il explique la conséquence d'une telle ambivalence en répondant à la question posée : *à quel signe connaître ma voix parmi les milles voix du monde ?*

Parfois j'ai cherché dans l'absence l'impossible recueillement. Je pensais reconnaître ma voix, tenir dans mes mains mon visage, ce visage à vous tous offert. A moi-même je suis étranger, car dans ma nuit intérieure, je m'étais volatilisé. (*Etoile secrète*, p. 46.)

Les voix multiples qui l'assaillent troublent son silence, le contraignant à trouver refuge dans l'absence ou plus précisément dans le recueillement, ou dans la méditation. Mais le poète découvre que le recueillement n'est que chimère, car il est aussi absent à lui-même, se perdant davantage dans l'absence qu'il pensait pourtant salutaire. Il serait nécessaire de préciser, à ce niveau, les deux aspects de l'absence que recèle ce poème, l'un d'eux est l'absence/silence qui est pour ainsi dire volontaire au sens de méditation ou de retraite qui nécessite l'isolement favorisant les retrouvailles de soi à soi. L'autre aspect est l'absence imposée, c'est-à-dire le mutisme handicapant qui empêche la voix de jaillir, le chant de retentir. Les causes de ce silence sont bien spécifiées dans le poème : il s'agit de sa condition d'orphelin, de la solitude et de l'ambivalence qui sont son lot.

Cette source vocale maternelle est objet de la quête du poète, elle est cette voix perdue parmi les mille autres voix, celle qu'il tente de

⁶Tassadit Yacine, *Jean Amrouche, l'éternel exilé*, op, cit, p. 15.

retrouver dans l'absence silencieuse et qu'il interroge en ces termes :
Source, magie souveraine, respire-tu comme la mer, les fleurs, ou les animaux, du rythme double des astres où vie et mort sont confondues ?
Qui peut te tenir captive, ô source, qui peut te libérer du sommeil ?
(*Etoile secrète*, p. 48.)

Cette strophe exprime la quête de L'Absent, quête de la source première de la voix, origine de la définition même de son être. Jean Amrouche, ne dit-il pas lui-même que c'est « *la position de l'homme dans le cosmos et en face de lui-même que l'on peut appeler la présence à soi-même et au monde.* » (*Chants*, p. 40.) Ainsi, c'est dans cette présence à la source qu'il se sent revivre et où il se reconnaît tel qu'il est réellement. C'est en s'associant avec la source endormie que l'Absent pourrait se sentir enfin Présent. Celui qui se « *répète son propre nom afin de croire à son existence* » est dépendant de la source/mère et de la patrie tel l'orphelin qui cherche le sein maternel pour se connaître et se reconnaître. L'Absent veut tenir cette source « captive », ce qui souligne son propre état d'inertie qui s'oppose au flux libre de la source qui jaillit comme bon lui semble. Ici, le poète n'est pas tout à fait maître de ses états d'âme. C'est là qu'entre en jeu le silence ou l'absence imposée. Il écrit :

Je suis loin de toute source jaillissante, et cette eau prend élan dans mon cœur. Mais si je tends ma bouche gercée, elle se referme sur l'absence ou se remplit d'amertume. Quand je suis pauvre, je suis riche de tout ce qui est loin de moi. (*Etoile secrète*, p. 48.)

La bouche est l'organe de la parole, et c'est par le biais de la parole que l'Absent tente de se définir, c'est d'ailleurs ainsi qu'a commencé le poème/lettre : « *Germé dans la terre des hommes je suis la graine en mal d'amour. Et pour vous, voici des paroles, mes paroles gonflées d'amour.* » (*Etoile secrète*, p. 47). Ce faisant, il place son poème sous le signe de la parole et du sentiment d'amour tant recherché par l'orphelin. Mais, pourquoi absence ou amertume, sommes-nous en droit de demander ? L'absence, le silence et l'inertie sont tributaires de l'incapacité à se connaître, car le poète demeure « figure de mystère », « sanglante destruction », « absent à lui-même », il est l'orphelin en manque d'amour, la graine germée sur une terre inconnue, loin de sa patrie, source première du verbe. C'est dans cette précarité, générée par l'absence de la mère et du père que la parole/source se dérobe, devient insaisissable, voire impossible pour reprendre les termes du poète « l'impossible recueillement ». Quant à l'amertume, elle est la conséquence d'un esprit abattu, déprimé. Après avoir connu l'absence et l'amertume, le poète se contente de la richesse du passé, de l'imaginaire et de la mémoire toujours présente en lui.

C'est ainsi que l'Absent termine cette première lettre par une note amère. A défaut d'être rassasié et assouvi par la fraîcheur de cette source, il se retrouve encore plus assoiffé, plus avide de se connaître, plus avide de l'amour tant refusé à l'orphelin qu'il est encore. Il termine avec ces deux strophes :

Je suis misérable et nu. Des portes monumentales glissent avec lenteur sur des gonds de silence. Et tout à coup me voici Roi. J'ai pour manteau un pan de la voie lactée, pour diadème la couronne boréale, à mon poing l'Aigle étendu palpite, et mon front ruisselant de lumière a plus d'éclat que Sirius à l'aigrette de jade ?

Et tout à coup la pluie de sable gris, de cendre amère qui me dépouille de mes bijoux ? Qui m'abandonne dans l'absence ? Ma royauté je l'ai perdue. Dans ce décor de carton-pâte me voici misérable et nu, et sanglotant à corps perdu au souvenir d'un rêve mort. (*Etoile secrète*, p. 49.)

Nous remarquons un changement brusque dans ces dernières strophes. L'image de la royauté, de ce costume d'apparat décoré à même les symboles de l'univers, sont à envisager comme les phantasmes d'un être nu. Ce miséreux voit sa nudité vêtue de majesté, parée d'étoiles éclatantes, sombrer tout à coup dans l'amertume des cendres. Quel serait donc cet état que Jean Amrouche décrit par cette symbolique astrologique ? La réponse pourrait être encore la source d'eau vive qu'il tente de tenir captive, éveillée en son for intérieur, mais qui lui échappe encore et toujours. C'est la poursuite de l'impossible, car elle l'abandonne dans l'absence totale, il se sent pour lors ou à nouveau « misérable et nu », à nouveau parce que ce processus est circulaire dans le poème. Processus récurrent, obsédant dans le texte amrouchien, qui se traduit par ces dichotomies entre les états d'âme du poète qui subit d'incessants changements contradictoires.

C'est ainsi que se termine le premier acte épistolaire de l'Absent retiré dans des silences imposés et des silences choisis. Le schisme duquel l'on est parti trouve son apogée dans le « souvenir du rêve mort ». Mais est-il réellement mort ? Nous verrons à présent ce qu'est le silence pour l'Absent et comment il en parle.

2. L'Absent silencieux

Cette seconde lettre s'ouvre sur une thématique qui est la mort. Il ne s'agit probablement pas de la mort physique, Jean Amrouche n'avait alors que trente et un ans. Il s'agirait plutôt d'une mort intérieure, une mort métaphysique, se traduisant par une absence absolue, qui témoigne là encore d'une solitude profonde, d'un effroi angoissant et obsédant.

A l'orient de la Mer Morte sommeille le désert d'Engadi. J'ai élu un désert plus âpre à l'extrême de la nudité, du silence ; un pays de fin du monde. Je lui ai donné le nom de Hind : c'est un nom à sa ressemblance, qui a la forme de l'expiration parfaite, dans le dernier hoquet de la mort. (*Etoile secrète*, p. 51.)

Le lexique utilisé dans cette strophe est si macabre que l'on ne peut s'empêcher de demander ce qui tourmente autant l'Absent au point de lui faire ressentir un tel malaise. Le désert, en plus de la nudité et du silence, fait écho au vide, au néant et à l'infini. Amrouche le décrit lui-même :

Le désert [...] est un espace sans forme, sans limites dans sa monotonie, où l'horizon toujours semblable à lui-même, sans fin s'affirme et se dérobe à la prise du regard ébloui. C'est le vide, c'est le rien absolu qui signifie la présence du Tout, où l'homme est pris dans l'alternative du tout ou rien. C'est l'espace irréductible, insécable, vierge et sauvage, destructeur de toute forme éphémère d'existence où l'homme n'entre qu'avec une terreur sacrée. (Préface à *Algérie*⁷)

Le désert peut aussi signifier un rêve de liberté, mais l'âpreté soulignée dans le poème suggère davantage la soif, le silence et le vide, c'est un peu l'exil physique et métaphysique dont souffrait l'Absent. Précisons que Jean Amrouche parle de deux terres, celle qu'il nomme « la civilisation moderne » décrite comme « *la mascarade de l'oubli, d'oubli de la misère humaine.* » et celle qu'il nomme « la terre humaine ». D'aucuns pourraient penser qu'il s'agit de la terre natale, d'autres seraient tentés de rappeler les valeurs humanistes de Jean Amrouche, c'est donc une terre idyllique où il retrouverait son esprit d'Enfance, et à cet effet Amrouche soutient qu'il appartient à « *un monde qui n'aura peut-être jamais d'existence.* »⁸

Dès lors, il enchaîne avec la strophe suivante :

Je suis loin de la terre humaine, sur une planète nue et froide dont le visage est constellé de blessures béantes. Un instinct, un appel de l'âme, oriente mes pas, en ce pays de lune morte où le silence est si pesant qu'on peut le tenir dans les mains. (*Etoile secrète*, p. 51)

⁷ Publié à Lausanne en 1956 par la Guilde du Livre, éditions Clairefontaine, tiré à 10000 exemplaire, il a été interdit à cause de la dédicace suivante : à la mémoire de Zohra, Hafid, et Mohammed Reggui, coupables de révolte contre l'humiliation et la misère, assassinés à Guelma dans la nuit du 17 au 18 mai 1945. Nous nous référons à Tassadit Yacine, *J. Amrouche, L'éternel exilé*, op, cit, p. 87.

⁸Jean Amrouche, « *L'exil intérieur et la foi de l'artiste* », texte extrait d'une conférence inédite donnée en 1939 sur le peintre Delacroix, publié dans la revue Amel. Cité Par dans Tassadit Yacine, *J. A. L'éternel exilé*, op, cit, p. 76.

Ici, le poète oppose la terre humaine à ce pays de « lune morte » qui, dans ce poème, représente le moi poétique, l'être profond de l'Absent. Ce dernier est décrit comme une planète nue et froide. L'on remarque la nudité commune au désert et à cette planète, mais ce qui les sépare c'est la dichotomie froideur/chaleur. Ceci pourrait souligner les états d'âme du poète qui vont d'un extrême à l'autre dans le silence le plus absolu. Les deux espaces sont nus et silencieux, où que l'Absent regarde, toute direction choisie a la même issue : le poète bute contre le silence. Plus il s'éloignait de « la terre humaine », plus il s'éloignait de la vie, et « plus il plongeait dans la profondeur de son être ». Dans son voyage hors du temps, il décrit son ressenti :

Peu à peu s'estompait en moi, se dissolvait dans mes muscles, la douleur perpétuelle de l'exil. Sans doute à mesure que la vie autour de moi s'éteignait, s'éteignait aussi le souvenir de la vie. Et la marche vers le néant des roches, où tout se réduirait aux jeux silencieux de l'ombre et de la lumière, était l'image d'une plongée vers moi-même, vers le profond moi-même perdu

L'Absent se voue ainsi à traduire son état psychologique et existentiel, écartelé et suspendu entre « *un passé perdu et le présent défloré* ». Il décrit à la fois son absence réelle, mais aussi la sensation aiguë de sa propre présence comme une présence imparfaite, inaccomplie, vécue souvent, elle aussi, comme absence. Et l'idée de l'absence absolue se trouve rattachée au « spleen », plus précisément à l'image de la mort, absence par excellence. De ce fait, la poésie ou l'écriture, par l'acte épistolaire, les traces symboliques couchées sur le papier, semblent apporter réconfort à l'Absent qui cherche à muer en présence par ce lien qu'il fait entre le passé et le présent. La poésie le ramène à la vie. Et il n'a d'autre choix que de chercher, creuser en soi, en lui-même pour retrouver cette présence au monde.

L'absent poursuit son voyage, il poursuit sa rêverie matérielle et symbolique vers le désert intarissable de son âme, tout à coup, il bute à nouveau sur le silence : « *Sur tout cela un tel silence qu'il me semblait sentir un souffle planétaire suspendu par l'ordre des suprêmes puissances.* » (*Etoile secrète*, p. 53).

Le poète se heurte incessamment au silence, si bien que sa quête finit par lui sembler absurde et vaine. Pour parvenir à décrire ce jeu des oppositions intérieures, il met chaque strophe en face d'une autre qui la contredit, là où l'on s'attend à l'ombre, surgit la lumière et inversement, ce qui témoigne des contradictions multiples et intérieures dont souffre l'Absent. Aussitôt empli de lumière, aussitôt envahi par les ténèbres :

J'ai reconnu ce paysage comme s'il dormait au fond de moi. Les

pierres blanches avec leur visage d'ossements, ce figuier (noir) témoin de la mort sont mes compagnons de jour. Je voudrais imiter leur mutisme, leur attente ; j'écoute dans une agonie passionnée, au-delà du silence et de la lumière, une éclosion de vie nouvelle. (*Etoile secrète*, p. 53.)

Sur cette note d'espoir, l'Absent décrit un monde enchanté dans la strophe suivante, il donne vie aux falaises, aux étoiles, au lac (décrit comme mort auparavant), et à ces pierres enfin « délivrées ». Il met en relief la lumière qui jaillit de l'intérieur, c'est un moment de répit, de délassément où le poète prend plaisir à l'accalmie. Mais ces instants ne sont que sursis, car quelques instants plus tard, au fond de lui-même, l'amertume se déclenche au souvenir des choses perdues. :

Comprendras-tu cet ensevelissement dans la solitude, cette passion de dénuement qui me feront semblable à ces pierres mortes, à ce figuier mort ? Ne m'accuse pas de lâcheté, d'orgueil, ni d'égoïsme. Tous mes trésors intérieurs je les ai semés sur la route. (*Etoile Secrète*, p. 54.)

Cette agonie laisse entrevoir un espoir, lequel, aussi infime soit-il, est porteur d'apaisement momentané pour l'Absent. Il se demande alors dans le silence le plus intense : Quelqu'un viendra-t-il près de moi ?

3. Le silence salvateur

Afin d'apporter réponse à sa question, l'Absent doit passer dans une autre dimension qui lui permettrait de méditer profondément sur lui-même, en cherchant réparation à ce vide, à ce néant présentés à l'ouverture du poème. Le poète qui butait jusque là contre le silence, n'y trouvant que la solitude la plus extrême et la froideur la plus accablante d'une planète en agonie, devra recourir davantage au silence pour entrevoir la lumière, ce qu'il appelle dans son langage mystique : le Paradis.

La connaissance de la nuit, des confins d'âme où le cœur même est immobile, où l'on avance sans repère, où il faut découvrir le secret d'une autre respiration, exige un parfait abandon dans la plénitude du silence. (*Etoile secrète*, p. 55.)

En ces termes d'abandon, de plénitude, nous saisissons la phrase de Gaston Bachelard au sujet de la « rêverie » : « *Heureux qui connaît, heureux même qui se souvient de ces veillées silencieuses où le silence même était le signe de la communion des âmes !* »⁹. L'Absent comprend à présent la valeur réparatrice du silence, lui qui tentait, en vain, jusque-là, de percer ce silence, de le dépasser, d'en faire son allié

⁹Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de la rêverie*, Paris, PUF, 1960, p. 39.

pour une réelle « éclosion de vie nouvelle ». Lorsque le poète atteint la plénitude du silence, il s'exprime par ces mots :

Je ne puis dire qui j'attends, mais je sais que quelqu'un viendra. Le lac est tellement sombre ! Si je recherche en lui mon visage, il m'apparaît en négatif. (*Etoile secrète*, p.55)

Il va sans dire que c'est là même que réside la prise de conscience de l'Absent. Il décide enfin de dépasser l'état narcissique qu'il cheminait jusque-là. Dans le reflet direct de l'eau du lac décrit comme mort dans les strophes précédentes, son visage, dit-il, lui apparaît en négatif, c'est-à-dire, en obscurité et en opacité. Mais à mesure qu'il plonge dans la profondeur du lac et qu'il se laisse porter par la rêverie hydrique aux tréfonds de l'âme, la lumière et l'espoir jaillissent enfin, il écrit :

J'obéis à la Voix profonde, à une promesse voilée, lointaine, au-delà de la veille et du sommeil. J'entrevois une clarté mourante en ce tabernacle du silence ; elle éclaire un pays sans nom, les sources vives de la vie, loin de la conscience orgueilleuse qui forge des noms comme des pièces fausses. On dirait une île flottante d'alluvions mystérieuses. (*Etoile secrète*, p.55)

Nous comprenons à ce stade que la solitude et le silence et même l'absence à soi- car cette conscience orgueilleuse est un mur qui empêche la rêverie-, sont les choses qui rendent possible la poésie. L'acte d'écriture est constamment affamé de silence, à chaque strophe, le poète pense avoir franchi le seuil du « Paradis », quand plus tard, il se heurte encore et s'aperçoit qu'il faut tout recommencer. Il fallait passer par ce désert vide et sec pour chercher au-delà du silence, au-delà de l'image reflétée sur la surface de l'eau, il fallait plonger dans les profondeurs de l'âme, écouter ce que Amrouche appelle « la Voix profonde », celle qui vient briser ce silence, le paysage nocturne du lac, l'immobilité et la respiration qui forment une sorte de cadre pour la parole qui le brisera. Par cette veine mystique et ontologique que recèle l'écriture amrouchienne, la voix profonde est souvent interprétée comme la voix de l'éternité, la voix de Dieu, c'est une remontée vers les sources premières du Verbe divin, la parole de la sagesse. Ce n'est toutefois pas la seule hypothèse, la Voix profonde peut être celle de la mère, celle la terre natale « *il te faut découvrir ta lumière, l'orient secret de ton sang* » (*Etoile secrète*, p. 59), celle du « paradis perdu » pour reprendre Jean Amrouche, c'est la voix dont nous parlions plus haut, celle qui est à l'origine de toute poésie et c'est celle-là même qui lui apportera réparation. Amrouche dit que sa poésie est établie en amont et en aval, et Pierre Rivas l'explique comme suit :

En amont, c'est les mânes, c'est les ancêtres, disons que ce n'est

pas les ancêtres qui redoublent de férocité de Kateb Yacine, ce sont au contraire des ancêtres, comment dire, fondateurs, où il retrouve une certaine tradition romaine. Et en effet c'est la mort qui, pour lui, se confond avec la mémoire, c'est ce lien qu'il y a chez les écrivains de l'extrême modernité, donc des écrivains qui sont en aval, qui vont vers l'avenir, avec la quête de l'amont, c'est-à-dire de l'origine.¹⁰

Ce sont en effet les mânes fondateurs que cherche l'Absent, lui qui vit dans la civilisation, sur une terre qui lui est inconnue et à laquelle il est et restera étranger. Cette double appartenance brouille son *Je*, il voit un monde opaque et sombre. Parlant d'Amrouche, Aimé Césaire écrivait que sa grandeur pathétique était de « *n'avoir sacrifié ni l'amont ni l'aval, ni son pays ni l'homme universel, ni les Mânes ni Prométhée* ». Ce poème est ainsi une auscultation intérieure et c'est le silence qui rend possible la méditation sur le MOI et ce *Je* si étranges que l'Absent prononce par habitude. Beida Chikhi soutient que la poésie amrouchienne est :

Un croisement de thèmes qui reconstitue la symbolique de l'enfance, de l'Idéal perdu, qui anime tout sujet mystique à travers ses blessures, ses arrachements, sa solitude et sa division, et tente de faire advenir l'Absent au prix de l'occultation de son propre moi et d'un questionnement douloureux qui martyrise la chair et les sens.¹¹

C'est pourquoi le silence est l'un des moyens auxquels le poète recourt pour faire advenir l'Absent. C'est à travers la méditation silencieuse, sa solitude que l'Absent parvient à s'extirper du néant, pour redevenir présence par et dans l'écriture.

La poésie de Jean Amrouche ou plus précisément les lettres de l'Absent, dans leur poursuite incessante de présence par l'écriture et la parole, dans leur élan perpétuel vers une quête du souvenir, du passé, des trésors intérieurs perdus en route, semblent être à l'image de la Création à partir de l'absence absolue, à partir du chaos tel qu'il est décrit dans les trois lettres. Cette présence à travers l'acte épistolaire brise le silence de l'absence et recrée une vie nouvelle dans l'âme du poète. Et cette présence obtenue par le silence profond est susceptible, nous l'avons vu, de remplir les espaces vides et de relier les espaces antagonistes qui sont à l'origine de « la séparation ». Le silence s'avère être une clé pour la création et la re -création, c'est à travers lui que

¹⁰Pierre Rivas, interview de Catherine Pont-Humbert, émission de France Culture, *Une vie une œuvre*, du dimanche 9 décembre 2001, consacrée à Jean Amrouche, transcrite par Taos Aït Si Slimane.

¹¹BeïdaChikhi, « *Jean Amrouche* », In. « *La littérature maghrébine de langue française* », Ouvrage collectif, sous la direction de Charles BONN, Naget KHADDA & Abdallah MDARHRI-ALAOUI, Paris, EDICEF-AUPELF, 1996.

l'Absent donne une substance à son existence. Le poète termine par la phrase explicative de sa quête : « *Je cherche ici pour vous le secret de mon être.* »

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“The Isle is Full of Noises”, Yet Sycorax Cannot Be Heard: Silence in William Shakespeare’s “The Tempest” and Marina Warner’s “Indigo”

Dorel-Aurel Mureșan¹

Abstract: *Postmodernism offered the context for feminist and postcolonial writers to challenge the canon, by rewriting canonical texts from fresh perspectives or by filling the gaps, voicing the silences and narrating the untold stories. Such is the case of Marina Warner’s novel “Indigo”, a lyrical narrative that abounds in intertextual references to William Shakespeare’s “The Tempest”. I argue that Marina Warner uses female characters that in Shakespeare’s play are either absent or simple pawns in the patriarchal game, to give voice to the enslaved natives and to the silenced women and to emphasize the importance of oral history. Marina Warner’s novel is an invitation to look back in order to revisit history, to challenge it and/or to recover it through the act of storytelling. Moreover, storytelling also becomes the instrument that can help in constructing a better future.*

Key Words: *William Shakespeare, Marina Warner, rewriting, postcolonialism, oral history*

Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, or Rumi, how most people know him, was not only a very important Persian mystic, but also a poet, whose vision upon life was that love permeates the entire world. Among Rumi’s most well-known quotes stand “Listen to the silence. It has so much to say” and “The quieter you become, the more you are able to hear”. The implication of these lines is that lack of speech both transmits a message and offers the opportunity to hear better. Rumi continues his

¹ Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania

apology for silence, stating that silence leads to a place “where everything is music”². Rumi’s romantic view on the topic of silence is not singular. Writer, literary critic and philosopher, George Steiner, analyzed the topics of language and silence from different angles, not to provide a full interpretation of their relationship, but to offer a wider perspective on the matter. Starting his essay with the first verse of John’s gospel - “In the beginning was the Word” -, Steiner (283) continues:

We live inside the act of discourse. But we should not assume that a verbal matrix is the only one in which the articulations and conduct of the mind are conceivable. There are modes of intellectual and sensuous reality founded not on language, but on other communicative energies such as the icon of the musical note. And there are actions of the spirit rooted in silence. It is difficult to speak of these, for how should speech justly convey the vitality of silence?

Silence speaks. Or, it offers the necessary space for unspoken (hi)stories to be told. Moreover, more often than not, silence invites to creativity, imagination and rediscovery, especially when the reasons behind it might be unclear. In addition, there is a great chasm between self-imposed silence, like that of monks, poets, lovers, to offer just a few examples, and the silence imposed by exterior factors, by circumstances and contexts or by other people. Such forced silence(s) were noticed in canonical texts and writers across time felt the urge to do them justice, to fill in the gaps, to tell the untold stories.

Postmodernism, with its predilection to interrogate everything, granted the context for challenging the canon and retelling the unheard stories of the silent/silenced. Moreover, postmodernism was a cultural environment in which feminism and postcolonial literature flourished, since both movements found shelter and sustenance under the postmodern umbrella that, according to Rogobete (95), focuses “upon the absences in the text, upon the marginal and the excluded”. Moreover, Docherty (445) points out that “the discourse of postmodernism (...) is the discourse of the periphery, a discourse which imperialism had strenuously silenced but which is now made available”. A multitude of silenced voices, from colonized natives to suppressed and objectified women, are grated mouthpieces through the pen of postmodern authors who bring forth the unheard stories

² All the quotes can be found online on web pages related to famous quotes or on image pages such as Pinterest.

through the rewriting of major literary works.

Such is the case of William Shakespeare's "The Tempest", a play that underwent multiple rewritings. This paper takes a closer look at Marina Warner's rewriting of the play, and especially at the character of Sycorax, a silenced voice in the Shakespearian text. Linda Hutcheon (93) argues that Shakespearean rewritings "may be intended as tributes or as a way to supplant canonical cultural authority". Such a tribute is The Hogarth Shakespeare project, in which contemporary bestselling writers rewrite, reinterpret, retell some of the bard's plays. Warner's "Indigo", however, falls into the latter category. I argue that in her novel Warner has a triple ambition: to give voice to the native, to empower the women and to emphasize the importance of oral history.

Passionate about art, myths, fairytales and literature, critic and novelist Marina Warner writes a novel that accommodates her interests together with biographical data and an expression of her theoretical methodology regarding her passions. Discussing myths in her book called "Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture", Sandra Ponzanesi (101) emphasizes the changeable nature of stories that become "part of a historical process" and undergo transformation "according to context and narration." Therefore, the process of telling or re-telling myths is powerful, since these retold stories become part of the history of a family or nation. However, as previously stated, Marina Warner's "Indigo" contains more than re-visited myths: through her female characters, who are a literary materializations of her theoretical approaches, Warner interweaves myths, fairy tales, real life and history, together with intertextual references to Shakespeare's text, into a magnificent narrative.

In her short book "The Absent Mother: Or, Women against Women in the "old Wives" Tale", Marina Warner (15) suggests that the "storytelling gatherings" of women, special meetings where they were granted their only chance to talk, "to preach", led to a transformation of the fairytales that acquired a femaleness of their own. Warner explains that women were the most common storytellers, pointing out their indisputable fondness for fairytales. Hanțiu (2) agrees that in oral cultures, women like mothers and grandmothers told stories. Hanțiu quotes Angela Carter, who states that:

There exists a European convention of an archtypal female storyteller, 'Mother Goose' in English, 'Ma Mere l'Oie' in French, an old woman sitting by the fireside [...] Obviously, it was Mother Goose who invented all the 'old wives' tales', even if old wives of any sex can participate in this endless recycling process,

when anyone can pick up a tale and make it over. Old wives' tales -- that is, worthless stories, untruths, trivial gossip, a derisive label that allots the art of storytelling to women at the exact same time that it takes all value from it. (Carter, as cited in Hanțiu, 2008:2)

However, patriarchal societies were not kind to the voice of the female, which might overlap or be one and the same with that of the native in postcolonial literature. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (172-5) "language, 'voice', concepts of speech and silence and concepts of mimicry, have been important in feminist theory" as well as in the post-colonial one. Analyzing Spivak's theory concerning the muted native, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin conclude that "the silencing of the subaltern woman extends to the whole colonial world and to the silencing and muting of all natives, male or female." Therefore, the two discourses - postcolonial and feminist-, cooperate to form new postmodern texts from old ones. Returning to Hanțiu's (2) discussion about fairytales, she explains that when it comes to the written form, "the voice of the story teller is generally that of a male." By using women storytellers who mix the written stories of men in their fairytales, Warner redeems the statute of the female voice and challenges the patriarchal versions of history, since her storytellers not only tell stories, but with their discourses also take part in the construction of history.

Shakespearean plays abound in silenced characters, especially abused, overpowered women. Thus, Lavinia and Lucrece are raped and silenced, Hero is the subject of discussion more than a participant in the conversation, Isabella has nothing to say at the Duke's announcement of their future marriage and Hermione becomes a statue, therefore, unable to speak. In Shakespeare's last play, a comedy, violence is reduced, there is an unsuccessful rape attempt, and silence is taken a step further and becomes complete absence. Miranda's mother, who does not even have a name, and Caliban's mother, Sycorax, are two absent characters, which have become central in feminist readings of the play. Orgel (1) states that "the absent, the unspoken" is "the most powerful and problematic presence" of Shakespeare's "The Tempest". According to Callaghan (120) "mothers in "The Tempest" are not well remembered" and there is a reason behind their absence. For Callaghan, Prospero's island is "an absolutely male realm, founded on the exile of Sycorax", where the presence of the two women "constitute not only an alternative, but also an implicit threat to patriarchal history." (120) In addition, Orgel (4) suggests that

Prospero and Miranda's sea voyage could be interpreted as a "fantasy birth", with Prospero taking the role of Miranda's absent mother after his absence both as father and duke. There is significant dichotomy between the two absent characters, since one is depicted as pure whereas the other as evil, but while there is not much to say about the purity of Miranda's mother, the description of Sycorax takes more space in the play. Therefore, Miranda's "fantasy birth" leads to her association only with Prospero, transforming her into a goddess like figure, while Caliban consolidates his image of monstrosity through his association with the foul witch Sycorax.

In her article, "The Return of Prospero's Wife: Mother Figures in The Tempest's Afterlife", Sarah Annes Browns analyzes some of the mother figures present in the rewritings of "The Tempest", asserting the absence of the mother character in the play and suggesting that the reader is faced with the erasure of the mature, complete female. In addition, Busia Abena's "Silencing Sycorax" discusses the colonial interpretations of "The Tempest" with an emphasis on the absence of the female voices. Busia considers that both Caliban and Ariel are "quintessentially male in their activities and objectives". (85) Therefore, Busia's analysis focuses on the absent female representatives, especially on the image of Sycorax, as the witch is the icon of Otherness through both her race as well as her gender. Busia admits that Sycorax is mentioned often, but she adds that "she is invoked only to be spoken of as absent, recalled as a reminder of her dispossession, and not permitted her version of the story. The recounting of her story, [...], is in itself significant for its absences." (86) Moreover, Busia suggests that by offering no information about why Sycorax was banished, or why she was not sentenced to death, the female is rendered voiceless "in a discourse in which sexuality and access to language together form part of the discourse of access to power." (86) Therefore, the silencing of the woman becomes the manner of disempowering her, whilst outlining the dominion of the male. The silence of Sycorax seems even more intense since she is absent from "the isle [...] full of noises" where "sounds and sweet airs [...] give delight and hurt not" (3.2:71). Caliban, the native who receives the gift of language from Prospero and Sycorax's child, is the character who gives this speech exposing the voluntary choice of silencing the sophisticated females whose "noises" and "sounds" might pose a threat to the patriarchal rule.

Since the Shakespearian text offers no explanation concerning what happened to the silenced women, Marina Warner's novel "fills in the gaps and restores other feminine voices." (Williams-Wanquet, 268)

Warner depicts a Sycorax that is so similar to Prospero that both of them might not share the same island. Firstly, both Prospero and Sycorax neglect their duties because of their art. Prospero confesses to Miranda that he was “rapt in secret studies.” and “thus neglecting worldly end, all dedicated/To closeness and the bettering of my mind” he “awaked an evil nature;” (2.1:35-6) in his brother leading to their exile. Similarly, Warner’s (107-8) Sycorax “was captivated and intrigued by herself, by the motions of her inner being, by the extent of her powers, by the leaps and forkings of her wishes and the unpredictability of her pleasures and her skills” to the extent that people from her tribe have to sometimes feed her family. Secondly, the two characters’ art eventually result in their exile, and both Shakespeare’s Prospero and Warner’s Sycorax restore or reestablish their own kingdom after some sort of “magical birth”.

Marina Warner’s novel is constructed on two different timeframes, a past and a present one, depicting the life of the Caribbean islanders before and after the arrival of the colonizers in the past time frame and the postcolonial scars of the past in the present one. Although the characters from the novel “Indigo” start to resemble the characters from “The Tempest” only after the arrival of the colonizers (Frankova, 120), Warner emphasizes the problematic of the unfair patriarchal context by depicting the transformation of Sycorax from a beautiful woman to a “hag” before the arrival of the colonizers. After her repudiation, Sycorax develops her trade with indigo, thus developing a hump and becoming blue and looking more like a monster than like a human being. However, the witch becomes a mythical not only for the natives on the island but also for the English colonizers, who mutilate her even more and eventually cause her death:

Sometimes, in the morning, there was an offering on the threshold. As her own people had done before their captivity, the newcomers laid petitions at the sorceress’ door, clandestinely, while by day the same Englishmen, from a safe distance, mocked and mimicked the bent hag and laughed loudly to show they were not afraid of her. (Warner, 173-4)

The character of Sycorax is not the only female character who is brutally silenced on the Caribbean islands. Ariel, Sycorax’s adoptive daughter, is another symbolic character in the novel. Captured by the colonizers the same night that Sycorax is wounded and taken prisoner, Ariel, who is still strong, tries to take care of her foster mother and even tries to escape together with her. Ariel is characterized by her strength

that comes not only from her fighting abilities, but also from her voice. In addition, her beauty becomes a power tool in her encounter with Kit, the leader of the colonizers. After a night of fighting the strange men who came on her island, Ariel realizes that Sycorax is badly wounded and the only way of saving her life is that of surrender. Out of love for her mother, Ariel puts her weapons down and becomes a captive. After defining herself as a warrior in front of the newcomers, becoming a symbolic figure of the native who fights to protect his liberty, Ariel amazes through her singing. Therefore, through her fighting skills and her voice, Ariel manages to exit the imposed patriarchal frame and become not only an independent strong woman but also a symbol of the whole tribe.

Unfortunately, both women are reduced to silence. Sycorax eventually dies because of her wounds and she receives a special burial ceremony “in a cenote, the kind of grave the islanders reserved for their prophets”. (Warner, 204). Moreover, the voice of Ariel is still strong, since she is the one who insists that a special ceremonial rite is required for the burial of Sycorax, since she had been the shaman of the tribe:

They wound Sycorax’s light dry spoil in two banana leaves, laid lengthwise and sewn together with dried strips of aloe, and then chose to dig a vertical grave at the foot of the saman tree, the designated place [...] Sycorax’s head was nearest to the surface of the ground, slightly tilted so that she would face upwards in death, her mouth near the earth and the living who walked on it. It was at Ariel’s insistence that she was buried there in a cenote, the kind of grave the islanders reserved for their prophets. (Warner, 204)

Dead, therefore physically silenced, Sycorax becomes a sacred figure that keeps speaking while her people are brutally silenced. Sycorax “and the island have become one; its hopes come to her in the wind.” (Warner, 213) The witch “sits hunched under the earth, her head fallen sideways, face up, [...] her mouth [...] gapes open in the direction of the ground above” and hears the prayers of the slaves, but she does not remain silent: “The isle is full of noises [...] and Sycorax is the source of many” (Warner, 77).

Ariel’s voice and her song are also silenced, but not through death. Ariel’s singing inspires the natives and enchants everyone who hears her well before the arrival of the colonizers. The islander also sings after she is captured, but Ariel has a period of muteness after her first failed attempt to escape, that acts like a prophetic symbol of the

silence to come. Ariel tries to escape one more time, but she fails again. After the second unsuccessful attempt, Ariel's voice is never heard again. The unfolding of the story casts an even more powerful meaning to Ariel's muteness, since the silence is recorded in history. A French missionary priest notes in his travel book that he met "an ancient Indian hag", who "could not speak". (Warner, 225) Unfortunately, "she was the last person living to speak the language of the native islanders, so it was a pity that she could no longer use her tongue." (Warner, 226) According to Williams-Wanquet (273), the muteness of Ariel has a double function in the text: on the one hand, it symbolizes the forced silencing of an entire population of natives, and on the other hand, it represents the "erasure of history".

However, Marina Warner offers another version of the erased history by means of collective memory and oral history. Although dead, Sycorax still lives in the hearts of the people, becoming a myth that survives across centuries. The saman tree becomes a place of prayer where people bring offerings to the sorceress that could help them. After the colonization, the famous tree shares the yard with a church, and colonized natives continue to bring their prayers to their shaman, as Sycorax's image remains in the memory of the people generations after generations. Just like Sycorax's myth, the natives can still hear Ariel's famous song after her muteness, and the song also passes from generation to generation:

The juice of the green melon is sweet
The yellow is sweeter, I know,
And there's a fruit that's still riper.
I can't tell you its name,
I won't show you its face,
Or I shan't ever eat it no more, no more. (Warner, 226)

Ariel's song is a reference to Caliban's mistake and functions as a warning for the natives. Caliban "showed thee [Prospero] all the qualities o'th'isle,/The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile" (Shakespeare, 2.1:43) and Prospero benefited from all the wealth of the island, transforming Caliban into a mere slave. Therefore, Ariel's song suggests that the natives' credulity and lack of experience with the outsiders together with their openness and hospitality will eventually lead to their ruin.

The connection between past and present as well as the distinction between memory and history is created through another female character, one of Sycorax's descendants, Serafine. A servant in

the household of the Everard family - descendants of the first colonizers -, Serafine, or Feeny, as the girls that she babysits call her, becomes a unifying voice of the two time frames, through the stories that she tells. Oral history and written history confront each other to bring “the truth” to the surface through the stories that Serafine tells: “It’s come down through years, this story. From first-hand sources, authenticated. Serafine knows it; all her family, working on the Everard lands, knew it; they passed it on.” (Warner, 224-5) This confrontation between possible histories starts on the first page of Warner’s novel, with Serafine telling a story that combines the history of the island where she was born with a fairytale. All the stories that Serafine tells are a combination of fairytales, myths, island history, and moral teaching, most of them also containing some sort of prophetic warning. Moreover, Serafine also teaches Ariel’s song to the girls that she babysits, singing it together with them, thus, transferring the stories of the island to the new generation. Marina Warner purposefully chooses a female character as a storyteller to connect past and present, since the novelist considers that “the figure of the storyteller, bridges division in history as well as hierarchies of class. She offers the suggestion that sympathies can cross from different places and languages, different people of varied status. She also represents an imagined cultural survival from one era of belief to another.” (Warner as quoted in Frankova, 117)

However, Serafine’s voice stands in opposition to that of Ant Everard – her master – who tells the history of the men in his family. Warner points out that some important aspects of that history like the timely deaths of the women in the family; the fact that men married late and therefore had children late; that Admiral Nelson married a local woman on the island; and that Ant’s family ran the place are left unsaid. Moreover, Serafine is described in the context of Ant’s story as a modern day slave: “Serafine in black uniform with white bib filled their glasses from the bottle she carried on a silver tray, and came back to pour for the tea-drinkers.” (Warner, 42) Ant continues his story by describing Flinders - a sport similar to cricket that was invented by Marina Warner and acts like a symbol- , the Empire’s sport, which was played on the island. The white master tells stories in which the island was a plantation where the natives rebelled, leading to enslavement because of the incapability of the islands to recognize England as the mother nation. The game of Flinders is closely connected to the colonization process, and Ant’s victory in the Game is a symbol for Kit, who managed to colonize the island in a short time, “an achievement unique and unforgotten in the fervently chronicled history of the

Game". (Warner, 46) Ant's true, "chronicled" victory is paralleled with Kit's story from one of Ant's books, suggesting that the written version is reliable. However, a painting of the Kit, which "was a copy" as "the original was lost" (Warner, 48), stands next to the story of the colonizer, suggesting that every recount is a copy, and therefore every present version falls under the subjective nature of retelling. Moreover, the presence of Serafine in her servant clothes negates the veracity of Ant's recount of the event, tipping the scales towards the truthfulness of the native's version of the story.

The contrast between Ant Everard, the master "historian", and Serafine, the servant storyteller, is also emphasized by the function of their stories. Ant's stories of the past function as a victory "chronicles", happy ending stories about people who lived once upon a time and created a beautiful empire and a legacy for their descendants. These stories have the purpose to inspire awe towards the deeds of the past and stir up nostalgia for the days long gone, serving no real educational purpose. Moreover, because of their positive nature, they resemble more to fairytales than to history. Serafine's stories, on the other hand, are filled with possibilities since in her stories "everything risked changing shape." (Warner, 4) These stories have the power to stop time, to change things and to build a better future, as they offer an alternative to the errors of the past. The native's voice breaks the boundaries of colonialism and gender, as the storyteller seems to be unaffected by the past and present realities, overpowering all the restricting structures of authority.

The novel starts and ends with Serafine's stories, linking past and present, connecting generations and offering future possibilities. Serafine's connection to the island and to Sycorax allows her to continue hearing the noises of the island, offering her substance for new stories to be told.

There are many noises in her head these befuddled days of her old age; they whisper news to her of this island and that, of people scattered here and there, from the past and from the present. Some are on the run still; but some have settled, they have ceased wandering, their maroon state is changing sound and shape. She's often too tired nowadays to unscramble the noises, but she's happy hearing them, to change into stories another time. (Warner, 402)

Therefore, Warner's intertextual novel creates the context for the noises from Prospero's island to be heard across ages. The silenced

voices from the Shakespearean play become audible through Warner's use of intertextual tools. The female voices from "Indigo" get to tell their version of the story and even challenge the "chronicled" version of history. Orality becomes a powerful tool for the storyteller, who not only recreates the past, but can also influence the future. Thus, while challenging a canonical text, Warner's novel also brings Shakespeare's play to the forefront, asking for new interpretations but also recognizing its importance. The noises that keep bubbling are a constant source for new stories, told by Serafine or by other storytellers that are willing "to unscramble" them, suggesting that there is enough material for more and more rewritings and adaptations. Marina Warner's novel invites new versions of Serafine to continue the storytelling journey, since canonical texts, with their noises and silences, remain a source of inspiration for young and old storytellers.

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On Silence and Voices in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

Delia-Maria Radu¹

Abstract: *Our article, a part of a larger, undergoing, project, focuses on the role of silence and voices in Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*, which begins with the narrator's expressed need to reveal the story of his family and of his life in a race against time in order to leave something behind. While the story is dominated by the need to communicate, by the presence of voices, by the issue of language, the episodes in which silence is referred to are also important, marking crucial moments in the text.*

Keywords: *silence, voices, unspoken words, *Midnight's Children*, stories*

“And there are so many stories to tell,-too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours” (Rushdie, 1991:2)

While most articles focus on the overlapping of moments in the personal history of the narrator, Saleem Sinai, over important moments of Indian history, key moments in the novel are marked by the opposition between speech and silence, each with its own meaning.

Opening Salman Rushdie's novel, readers find themselves in the middle of the story of Saleem Sinai's life and family and of his way to disintegration while attempting to leave something behind. For Saleem, words (i.e. writing) mean life, survival, while silence is emptiness, absence and death. His autobiography is based not on

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

documents but on experience and memory, following the method of Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*, and being, like her, under the pressure of time, while roles are reversed: it is a man who tells the story and a woman who listens to it. According to Robin Jared Lewis, Rushdie makes his language the touchstone of identity in the novel, and Saleem's enormous monologue (is) at times rambling and circuitous, at other moments terse and abrupt (in Stoler Miller, 1994:179).

Language is used as a metaphor for the creative process (see Grant, 2012:24), being compared with the new life growing inside his mother's womb:

“By the time the rains came at the end of June, the foetus was fully formed inside her womb. [...] What had been (at the beginning) no bigger than a full stop had expanded into a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter; now it was bursting into more complex developments, becoming, one might say, a book – perhaps an encyclopedia – even a whole language.” (Rushdie, 1991:57)

As an omniscient narrator, Saleem is constantly tempted to divulge more than he wants, and he must repeatedly restrain himself for the story to follow its natural course. He begins his saga with the image of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, hurting his nose while attempting to pray. Aadam, having returned home after five years of study in Heidelberg, Germany, now sees his world with “travelled eyes”, noticing not the beauty of the valley but its narrowness, perceiving resentment and hostility for his education and change. The incident completes his change, leaving Aadam “unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve” (Rushdie, 1991:4). His inability to pray, while remembering the way his German friends mocked his prayers, represents, on a symbolic level, the silencing of the colonized people by the colonists, who disregarded their opinions, traditions and specific way of life.

An exotic character of the Kashmiri valley is Tai, the old boatman, who transports people and goods across Lake Dali, a lake whose secrets he knows too well. An ageless man with few friends, considered insane by some, Tai attracted Aadam by his chatter which he considered magical:

“his chatter [...] was fantastic, grandiloquent and ceaseless, and as often as not addressed only to himself. Sound carries over

water, and the lake people giggled at his monologues; but with undertones of awe and fear. [...] the boy Aadam [...] fell in love with the boatman Tai precisely because of the endless verbiage which mad others think him cracked. It was magical talk, words pouring from him like fools' money" (Rushdie, 1991:5-6)

The only thing interrupting Tai's chatter was Aadam's audacity of asking about the boatman's real age (and Saleem explains "He had come for stories – and with one question had silenced the storyteller", Rushdie, 1991:6, anticipating for the readers his listener's strategy). The followed silence, "noisier than waterfall" as it is unusual for Tai, is followed by an outburst anticipating the future outbursts of Aadam's wife and reveals another magical feature of 'the spirit of the valley' – he claims to have been there since the beginning of time, a witness to all and a receptacle of information: "I have watched the mountains being born [...] it is your history I am keeping in my head. Once it was set down in old lost books [...] but I know" (Rushdie, 1991:6).

Aadam Aziz becomes the patient doctor and then husband of Naseem, daughter of Ghani the landowner, and after his parents' death, when he is offered a job at Agra University, they move away. Their relationship is also a matter of silence and words, as Naseem's way of punishing her husband would be, on several occasions, silence, the refusal to speak to him. Tensions start from the very beginning, as Aadam tries to open Naseem's mind towards 'the way of the West'.

Focusing on "the question of woman and her national role" (2008:65), Nicole Weickgenannt writes about the outer world, the domain of men imitating the scientific advance of the West versus the inner world, the home, the truly Indian domain where women preserved the self-identity of national culture.

"Travelled" and educated, "Europeanized" Aadam attempts to remould Naseem into a modern wife, while she is horrified by his demands (to move in bed like a woman or to 'walk naked in front of strange men', i.e. come out of purdah), a conflict which turns their marriage into "a place of frequent and devastating warfare" (Rushdie, 1991:17). Enraged by his wife's refusal to give up purdah, Aadam gathers her veils into a tin wastepaper basket and sets fire to them, in order to leave her with no other options.

The couple is not too good at communicating with each other, the traditional Naseem's attempts at seeming modern and open-minded failing completely. When she wants to live up to the image of the supportive and loving wife who nurses her apparently wounded

and blood-stained husband while gently scolding him for his unwise behavior, writes Nicole Weickgenannt (2008:68), she is stopped in mid-track by Aadam informing her that it is Mercurochrome, not blood which she is treating, which makes Naseem feel humiliated. When Aadam returns home after the Amritsar massacre, posing as a modern woman, Naseem casually remarked that he had once more been stained with mercurochrome when, in fact, Aadam had been covered by the blood of the people fallen on top of him, wounded by machine guns:

“When my grandfather got home that night, my grandmother was trying hard to be a modern woman, to please him, and so she did not turn a hair at his appearance. ‘I see you’ve been spilling the Mercurochrome again, clumsy,’ she said appeasingly.

‘It’s blood,’ he replied, and she fainted.” (Rushdie, 1991:18)

As time goes by, we see Naseem, now nicknamed Reverend Mother, strict and authoritative as a nun, withdrawn into the heart of the home, the kitchen, surrounded by a world of traditions meant to establish order and security, in opposition to Aadam’s open mindedness. So, when Aadam Aziz decides to shelter Nadir Khan, the Reverend Mother objects to the idea of having an unknown man in the house with three maidens. Their argument ends with the Aadam’s outburst, forbidding his wife to comment on his decision, in other words, silencing her from his position as ruler of the house, which leads to a war of silence affecting also the world around them:

“(she) hid behind a deafening wall of soundlessness. [...] and the silence filled the house, from wall to wall, from floor to ceiling, so that the the flies seemed to give up buzzing, and mosquitoes refrained from humming before they bit; silence stilling the hissing of geese in the courtyard. The children spoke in whispers at first, and then fell quiet: while in the cornfield, Rashid the rickshaw boy yelled his silent ‘yell of hate’, and kept his own vow of silence” (Rushdie, 1991:28).

Alia, the eldest daughter, is silently courted by a fellow student (“Ahmed Sinai and Alia communed without speech; but although everyone expected him to propose, the silence seemed to have got through to him, too, and the question remained unasked”, Rushdie, 1991:28)), and Mumtaz, the second daughter tends in silence to Nadir

Khan's needs.

Reverend Mother's silence is also meant to teach Aadam a lesson:

“she resolved to do nothing, to keep her silence intact, and let Aadam Aziz discover just how badly his modern ideas were ruining his children – let him find out for himself, after his lifetime of telling her to be quiet with her decent old-fashioned notions”. (Rushdie, 1991:30)

According to Sara Upstone, Rushdie's reflections upon the connections between domesticity and colonial patriarchy resonate with Gayatri Spivak's comments on the silencing of Indian women by colonial, nationalist, and intellectual representations of them (Upstone, 2007: 270). Order in the home seeks to protect it from colonial influence, from the pollution of foreign rule, but turns it into a prison, or, as it happens in Reverend Mother's case, into “an invisible fortress of her own making”, in which “the domestic rules she established were a system of self-defence [...] leaving her, like a large smug spider, to rule her chosen domain”. (Rushdie, 1991:21)

In a house where even the servants were given instructions in sign language, silence can become dangerous. Mumtaz notices that the Reverend Mother is swelling month by month, blown up by the unspoken words accumulated in time. Silence is broken when, after two years of marriage with Nadir Khan, Mumtaz is consulted by her father who discovers she is still a virgin, and the Reverend Mother spills out three years of unexpressed ideas:

“Three years of words poured out of her [...] Who was the weakling, *whatsitsname*, yes, the white-haired weakling who had permitted this iniquitous marriage? Who had put his daughter into that scoundrel's, *whatsitsname*, bed? Whose head was full of every damn fool incomprehensible thing, *whatsitsname*, whose brain was so softened by fancy foreign ideas that he could send his child into such an unnatural marriage? Who had spent his life offending God, *whatsitsname*, and on whose head was this a judgment? Who had brought disaster down upon his house... she spoke against my grandfather for an hour and nineteen minutes and by the time she had finished the clouds had run out of water and the house was full of puddles.” (Rushdie, 1991:32-33)

There is a rather similar scene, later in the novel, when Saleem's son, Aadam Sinai ("a child who heard too much, and as a result never spoke, rendered dumb by a surfeit of sound" (Rushdie, 1991:246), a child "of ears and silence" who made no sounds, is subjected by his mother, Parvati the witch, to an experiment, in a futile attempt to make him talk. She resorts to desperate measures, giving him some medicine, a powder meant to make him speak, after which

"the child's cheeks began to bulge, as though his mouth were full of food; the long suppressed sounds of his babyhood flooded up behind his lips, and he jammed his mouth shut in fury [...] the infant was close to choking as he tried to swallow back the torrential vomit of pent-up sound which the green powder had stirred up". (Rushdie, 1991: 248)

The "stories to tell" are also the stories of the midnight's children, of the children born during the night of Independence, who are endowed with extraordinary powers and who meet in Saleem's head, forming the Midnight's Children's Conference, whose leader he becomes. Before he learns to control their voices, the multitude of children are felt like "noise, deafening manytongued terrifying, inside his head!" (Rushdie, 1991:95). Indian diversity is reflected in the variety of languages spoken by the children whom Saleem hears telepathically:

"the inner monologues [...] jostled for space within my head. In the beginning [...] there was a language problem. The voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Luck-now Urdu to the Southern slurrings of Tamil." (Rushdie, 1991:98)

Saleem's initial difficulty in understanding the other children of midnight, due to the different languages they speak, is overcome when he learns to control their voices and focus on their thoughts instead, or, in other words, on the content/message and not the form. But the difference between the languages spoken in India proves indeed to be a barrier to mutual understanding, as Saleem comments, speaking of language used as a political tool by Prime Minister Nehru, who implemented the recommendations of the States Reorganization Committee in 1956:

"India had been divided anew, into fourteen states and six centrally-administered 'territories'. But the boundaries of

these states were not formed by rivers or mountains, or any natural features of the terrain; they were, instead, walls of words. Language divided us: Kerala was for speakers of Malayalam [...]; in Karnataka you were supposed to speak Kanarese; and the amputated state of Madras – known today as Tamil Nadu – enclosed the aficionados of Tamil.” (Rushdie, 1991:111)

In Marc C. Conner’s view, language proliferates in the book at all levels, socially, from the upper-class, educated language of Saleem to the lower-class, gutter slang of Shiva, nationally, from the many languages of India to those of Kashmir and Pakistan, internationally, from the colonial English of Methwold and the departing British to the Americanisms of Evelyn Lilith Burns. (Conner, 1994:295)

The issue of language dividing India is also discussed by Richard Cronin in his chapter about Indian authors writing in English. For him, modern Indian literature was born in 1981, with Rushdie’s publication of *Midnight’s Children* (in Sturrock, 1996:206). Cronin focuses on Saleem’s sheltered upbringing in a middle-class Bombay enclave built on a hill, i.e. not in contact with the ordinary life of the city, which explains Saleem’s inability to communicate with ordinary people, precisely because of his privileged way of life and lack of connections with the real world. Cronin comments on the episode in the book:

“One day, Saleem loses control of his bicycle, and hurtles downhill, crashing into a procession of strange and intimidating men. It is a language march: Marathis protesting that Bombay should be ceded to Maharashtra, and that Marathi replace Gujarati as the official language. The protestors are incomprehensible to Saleem. Marathi is his worst subject at school, and his Gujarati is just as bad. In this episode Saleem is the true representative of all Indian novelists in English.” (Sturrock, 1996:208)

Although he was accepted as the leader of the Midnight’s Children Conference, notes Uma Viswanathan in her article on the polyphony of midnight’s children, his voice is not the dominating voice in the dialogue in which the children express their various theories as to the meaning of their miraculous powers and the purpose of their life (Viswanathan, 2010:57).

Silence covering secrets is used by Aadam Aziz’s mother who

keeps quiet about her husband's illness and takes over the family business in order to help with the expenses of her son's medical studies covered by a scholarship, and by Saleem himself, when he decides to keep the secret of their birth hidden from Shiva by denying him access to his inner forum:

“I was obliged to come to the conclusion that Shiva, my rival, my changeling brother, could no longer be admitted into the forum of my mind [...] I was afraid he would discover what I was sure I could not conceal from him – the secrets of our birth. Shiva [...] would certainly insist on claiming his birthright [...] I resolved that my destructive, violent alter ego should never again enter the [...] councils of the Midnight's Children Conference: that I would guard my secret – which had once been Mary's – with my very life.” (Rushdie, 1991:166)

Just as he rejects and silences Shiva, his rival whose place he has, in fact, taken, in order to prevent him from finding out the truth, Saleem, as the storyteller, chooses who can take part in the story and when:

“Someone (never mind who) stands beside Padma at my bedside [...] Someone speaks anxiously, trying to force her way into my story ahead of time; but it won't work... [...] Someone will just have to step back and remain cloaked in anonymity until it's her turn; and that won't be until the very end.” (Rushdie, 1991:123)”

That someone is Mary Pereira, the midwife at Saleem's birth, who swapped the two babies as a tribute to Joseph D'Costa, the revolutionary she was in love with, thus offering Saleem a privileged life and condemning Shiva to one of poverty and struggles. Remorseful, Mary – who keeps silent, hiding her secret for a long time – then comes to work for Saleem's family as his ayah (nanny), and reappears years later in his life as the owner of the pickle factory he works for and the person taking care of his son.

The purpose of *Midnight's Children* is to prevent posterity from forgetting what has happened: “I have resolved to confide in paper, before I forget. (We are a nation of forgetters)”, writes Saleem, its narrating voice (Rushdie, 1991:19). In the beginning, Saleem only focuses on the putting the story on paper, thus conveying it to the readers, but then realizes the usefulness of a listener like Padma, his carer and mistress, who is, by her very nature, a critical spirit

(“perhaps our Padma will be useful, because it’s impossible to stop her being a critic.” Rushdie, 1991:15)

In his book, *Children of Silence: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Michael Wood quotes Marcel Proust who believed that “books are the words of solitude and the children of silence. The children of silence should have nothing in common with the children of the word” (Wood, 1999:6), i.e. with criticism. Both are, however, present in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*: the book/text being written and the critical voice.

Sterne’s Tristram Shandy, an acknowledged model for Rushdie, invited readers in his text, allowing them to intervene, to interrupt him, and even to complain when they didn’t understand it. Uma Viswanathan emphasizes that Saleem voices the importance of the output and interaction of reader/audience at various points in the novel (Viswanathan, 2010:57).

One of these interactions occurs in the scene in which Saleem tells his story to his three colleagues in the army, regaining his memory after having been bitten by a snake and “emptying himself” of everything that he had accumulated, triggering their reactions:

“his words flowed so freely that they seemed to be an aspect of the monsoon. The child-soldiers listened, spellbound, to the stories issuing from his mouth, beginning with a birth at midnight, and continuing unstoppably, because he was reclaiming everything, all of it, all lost histories [...] Open-mouthed, unable to tear themselves away, the child-soldiers drank his life like leaf-tainted water [...] There was silence; and then Farooq Rashid said, ‘So much, yaar, inside one person; so many bad things, no wonder he kept his mouth shut!’” (Rushdie, 1991:213-214)

The main audience/commentator of Saleem’s story is, however, the illiterate Padma. She is his “necessary ear”, her views are the necessary counterweights to his own, keeping him on the right track.

Padma is the listener who connects traditional stories, told in front of an audience free to step in any time in the conversation, and postmodern historiographic metafiction, whose reader is invited to contribute to the story. Padma does not listen quietly. She steps in when his digressions seem useless and delaying important moments of the narrative, when she finds the pace of the story too slow, asks for details in advance (‘What happened to the plumpie?’ Padma asks,

crossly, ‘You don’t mean you aren’t going to tell?’, Rushdie, 1991:34), she draws conclusions or protests, as when she finds out that Saleem (changed at birth) is, in fact, an impostor:

“ ‘An Anglo?’ Padma exclaims in horror. ‘What are you telling me? You are an Anglo-Indian? Your name is not your own?’ [...] ‘you tricked me. [...] What thing are you that you don’t even care to tell the truth about who your parents were? [...] You are a monster or what?’ (Rushdie, 1991:69)

Conclusions

Our article has focused on Salman Rushdie’s second novel, *Midnight’s Children*, and of how it deals with issues related to silence, secrets, communication or the lack of it, its orality and the presence of a storyteller, an absolute master of his story, manipulating his readers, characters and effects in the novel in the desire to achieve what had impressed its author so much, as “Rushdie has declared his fascination with the figure of the story-teller who can gather around him an audience of thousands and hold them spellbound, sometimes over days.” (Ten Kortenaar, 2004:22)

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A Dystopian Universe: "Omul din care a fost extras răul" ("The Evil-Free Man") by Matei Vișniec

Adriana Sala¹

Abstract: *Matei Vișniec's play, Omul din care a fost extras răul (The Evil-Free Man)² is a dystopia, casting the partnership between human brain and rat brain as the only possible model for an alleged progress in a society where positive thinking has taken the lead. Rats are called to ease man from the burden of having anything to do with his/her conscience. Man has given up the fight for humanity. This makes man vulnerable to a request expressed by rats to form a man-animal partnership but in which the rats must act like the inner self, like the innermost voice of the conscience. Should man accept such partnership, apart from its nauseating and anxiety-inducing effects, it would mean that man has given up any hope for mankind. Poetry could bring salvation, people need the imprecision, the lack of determination, the space for ambiguity but also for the visionarism which they find in poetical language.*

Key-words: *dystopia, utopian thought, evil, consumerist society, Vișniec*

According to Liviu Petrescu in his book *Poetica postmodernismului (The Poetics of Postmodernism)*, the patterns of scientific thought had something in common with the patterns of utopian thinking. This fact does not refer to any epoch, but is circumscribed to early modernism, in Liviu Petrescu's terms: "(...) în cadrul modernismului timpuriu, tiparele gândirii științifice se vor învecina cel mai adesea, în chipul cel mai strâns, cu anumite tipare ale gândirii utopice" (Petrescu 21). The

¹ M.A. Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

intersection point between early modernism and utopian thinking was the good side of utopian thinking, stirred by the capacity to transform the society based on the evolution of progress in science. However, utopian thinking taken as a model, not as a partial necessity, has generated dystopian universes and also it has modelled with irreversible consequences some states and societies in the East of Europe, in Asia, in Central America, crushing first of all the freedom of speech and the freedom to fight for democracy.

A dystopian model. The rats of the burden-eased man.

Matei Vişniec's play, *Omul din care a fost extras răul (The Evil-Free Man)* is a dystopia, casting the partnership between human brain and rat brain as the only possible model for an alleged progress in a society where positive thinking has taken the lead. The setting is post-communism, the country could be anywhere in Europe. The play has caught some surprising phenomena. There are references to twitter and youtube. Vişniec's play was published in 2014. The mass-circulation of information it speaks about had a totally different level in 2014 as compared to now. 2014 was only the beginning of bloggers and youtubers who turned their posting into a vocation. Now, in 2020, this phenomenon has taken different proportions. The number of visualisations matters more than the actual content and it matters more than the message it conveys. A good part of the so-called journalism without hypocrisy taught by Eric, one of the characters, has permeated all media-channels and it is even more difficult to re-establish the initial truth.

In Matei Vişniec's play, the consequence is that the rats are called to ease man from the burden of having anything to do with his/her conscience. Utopian thinking comes with its negative effect. Man has become unable to integrate whatever contradicts this utopian thinking. Therefore, a denial of crisis is regarded as always better than expressing the truth about crisis. This leads to the perpetuation of the same stereotypes and to the fact that man cannot find in himself/herself the power to be amazed by the dimension of humanity, by kindness and genuine selflessness. According to Reinhart Koselleck, the use of the word "crisis" is a diffuse one, unlike in ancient Greek "krisis", which does not allow us to find a correct diagnosis of the situation (Koselleck 176). But such imprecision could be an example of how man uses language in a connotative way even if he or she had the chance to use it in a denotative way. The tendency to cast off from language all irregularities, all the dirty words and the improper usage has unexpected consequences, it changes man into a being reduced to

vital functions but impaired in the capacity to connect and fulfil his emotions in a balanced way. The TV has as target the tendency to reprogram man's emotions so as to render him a consumerist of their own show. By losing his identity, man becomes a person ready to falsify everything around him and to surround himself by other objects, not by other people (Indrieş 59).

Omul din care a fost extras răul (The Evil-Free Man) shows the moral decay of the contemporary man. The problem nowadays is that man prefers to call himself/herself a victim of the circumstances, just because the environment is corrupt. Man has given up the fight for humanity. This makes man vulnerable to a request expressed by rats to form a man-animal partnership but in which the rats must act like the inner self, like the innermost voice of the conscience. The rat becomes a 'natural' extension of man. Not natural in the sense of acceptance, but in the sense of cause and effect. Man's new attitude has generated this response. Should man accept such partnership, apart from its nauseating and anxiety-inducing effects, it would mean that man has given up any hope for mankind. Only poetry, literature, culture, books, visual arts and any forms of art could give man hope for the future. Also all the innocence of game-playing, the game without stakes, without aiming power or destruction.

Agnes Heller and Riccardo Mazzeo in the book *Wind and Whirlwind: Utopian and Dystopian Themes in Literature and Philosophy* speak about the targets of dystopian fiction: totalitarianism, both Nazi and Bolshevik, technological manipulation, bio-politics, demise of our culture, destruction of the world, the flexibility of human nature, the importance of remembering and of forgetting (Heller, Mazzeo 42). The authors point out to inherent contradictions: if dystopia is undesirable for a society, it is frightening, what exactly should be the desired outcome, what would be the alternative, the better world? The author's list is: happiness? justice? harmony? spirituality? individuality? (Heller, Mazzeo 42).

These questions reflect that there is no black and white solution and some aspects cannot be settled. Utopia and dystopia are interrelated. Utopia was projected as such but it contained its opposite, its contradictions from the very beginning. Mircea Crăciun includes in the discussion utopian versus dystopian the terms identity and alterity as having more to do with this impossibility to divide them in two distinct classes.

”The concern with the failure of finding a proper solution between identity and alterity, paramount in the deconstructive

activity, renders Utopia a space of forbidding institutions, of imposed behavioural patterns, which arrest initiative and the free play of imagination. The prevalence of the dystopian underside of the discourse (with no generic or modal implications) is the mark of the anti-utopias of the twentieth century.

A self-destructing universe, utopia warns that trust in the possibility of imaginatively cancelling the immanent may itself turn out illusory. The dichotomous patterning of the utopian text, its perpetual interrogation of expectations provides for another possibility of transgression. "The subversion comes from within, in a 'world turned upside-down', the evil is ridiculed when faced with the image of the ideal." (Crăciun 222)

Loss of sensitivity, loss of expression. The utopian transparency.

Sensitivity is what allows poetry to survive. The contemporary man is modelled so as to lose sensitivity through everyday exposure to TV. Man has perverted the concept of evil, that is why all these operations can take place. If s/he has become 'an evil-free' man, he has also lost identity and the ability to empathize with his/her fellow beings. He accepts the information that gives adrenaline rush and turns all the people it talks about into objects. The whole world becomes a simple space ruled by consumerism. The lack of feelings becomes the new norm.

In Vișniec's play, after this 'strategic' partnership is voted for in a summit (mimicking real Brussels' summits) and implemented, every man, woman or child walks around surrounded by the rats cleaning the garbage he or she has left behind. Some people cause more waste around them than others, the author expressing here his bitter satire of a consumerist society. The more enveloped in the need to consume goods people are, the more rats they need to clean after them. Some people are surrounded by 92 rats, other by 200 and the most hypocritical and vocal of all characters, the shadow leader, by 800 rats.

"SOPRANELE SIAMEZE: Șobolanul este prietenul omului.

Șobolanul îl ajută pe om să devină perfect.

Numai șobolanul știe să extragă răul din om.

Omul din care a fost extras răul este fericit.

Șobolanul veghează la fericirea omului.

Omul care are un șobolan interior este perfect.

Nimeni nu trebuie să refuze extragerea răului din sine.

Nimeni nu trebuie să refuze conviețuirea cu un șobolan interior. Șobolanul interior este busola noastră morală.” (Vișniec 116)

Somehow, the number of rats becomes a shameful fact. It stirs new political mechanisms; it requires a full transparency which is impossible to keep as such. The people surrounded by more rats try to play down this fact and to make no big deal about it, thus stirring the premises for a generalized hypocrisy. The journalists from different countries are quick to throw the blame on them and to dig in their past about other more atrocious facts that they 'must' have committed, otherwise they would not be so 'unclean' now. The rats are taking the offensive, their voice is continuously heard in a 'common human animal' brain plugged into a station. The rats even require to be given a compensation for those times in history of mankind when they were considered the carriers of diseases, the agents of the plagues and so on. The universe is Kafka-esque. The presence of another is fear-inducing, as the critic Nicolae Balotă said about Kafka. (Balotă 85)

No one will know the future of man as a species, after this so-called partnership. However, Mr. President recognizes the fact that he does not know what poetry is:

”PREȘEDINTELE: Nu știu ce înseamnă poezia și nici nu cred că v-ar folosi să știți ce înseamnă poezia. (...) Pentru mine, personal, poezia nu înseamnă nimic, nu m-a ajutat cu nimic, dar nici nu m-a împiedicat să avansez în viață. (...)

Cred că în acest lucru constă poezia, îți tulbură mintea fără să-ți explice nimic. De altfel, cam acesta cred că e rolul poezilor, să perturbe ordinea gândurilor. Deși nimeni nu le cere acest lucru. (...)

Ce spun eu însă nu e concludent, improvizez acum pe loc pentru că m-ați incitat să o fac. Este prima dată când îmi trece prin minte că poezia ar putea să supraviețuiască în univers după dispariția omului.” (Vișniec 132)

Poetry could bring salvation, people need the imprecision, the lack of determination, the space for ambiguity but also for visionarism which they find in poetical language. Plurisemantism translates the freedom of thinking, the emotion, and gives life to empathy. Thus, art brings us together, makes us more empathetic and sublimates the human side. If poetry dies, words are also useless, so thinking succumbs, the spokesperson herself suffers this verbal amputation: ”Cuvintele ne-au paralizat, cuvintele ne-au murdarit, cuvintele ne-au indepartat de

natura! (...) Cuvintele ne-au. (...). Ne. (...) Unu. Doi. (...) Ușori pînă (...)" (Vișniec 138)

The language in clichés has banned all these notions from the vocabulary of man. In a scene towards the end, the rats devour all the dirty words from books, leaving the books discarded, with holes in them, as if they were Swiss cheese slices with holes in them.

The 'parallel universe' accompanying man in all undertaken deeds seems to be a necessary counterbalance for the immense quantities of litter, debris threatening the planet, since man has become a being that generates too much garbage. While this is true at the first sight only, like in a dystopia, following the model of George Orwell, the model imposed for 'correction' is even more frightening for human race than the status-quo. Accepting and befriending the partnerships with rats that become a kind of inner voice, man has renounced to moral principles and moral faith altogether. Even the faith, man as a religious being, has no room in this universe, in this modelling of the future. The man, due to the collaboration with rats, has become an 'evil-free' being. The philosophy of cleansing negative emotions is taken here to its extremes.

The new consumerist trend as the "future" of the man purged of all evil and contradictions.

The author asks himself what could really happen to man if all evil is extracted from him. Will man become a better being? Will man be ready to do only good deeds and will he or she be the most endearing person on earth towards his fellow beings? The evil-extraction from man is an artificial endeavour showing the great lengths at which utopian thinking can interfere with everyday political thinking.

Man needs to balance his/her easiness to produce waste and consume without giving a second thought, that is very true. But at the same time, the authors draws our attention on facts that could harm humanity as a whole because the solution-oriented models are not always the one that fate human nature the most. Cutting man from the source of his/her contradiction results in creating a new type of man. Communism has labelled this type 'the new man' and, in the countries belonging to the Eastern Bloc, this model has lived its ultimate consequences exposing the failure of such a utopian model. Communism has imposed this also as a form of controlling and standardizing the freedom of man (Cistelean 29).

Vișniec has a clear vision about the intersection of the older utopia of 'the new man' with the newer utopia of man as a being able to remove his/her contradictions at command. The new post-communist utopian

type appears in the first part of the play, under the slogan 'jurnalism fără ipocrizii', namely 'hypocrisy-free journalism':

”După o știre-bombă puneți o știre-mitralieră. Și după știrea-mitralieră puneți o știre-grenadă. Și după știrea-grenadă puneți o știre-palmă. Și după știrea-palmă puneți o știre-trăznet. Și după o știre-trăznet puneți o știre-horror...Un jurnal ideal trebuie să fie un câmp de luptă, o expediție sângeroasă, o operațiune de commando. Iar cuvântul de ordine este MOARTE.” (Vișniec 16)

Man has agreed to become a pseudo-man, so that there is a common ground between him and the rats. The garbage refers both to corruption, manipulation and cowardice and to actual debris and waste. The journalists are the ones who keep offering these dejectures every day: ”o felie din mizeria lumii, o listă de murdării umane, de scabroșenii morale, de lașitate, de cinism, de diaree existențială, de putreziciune și de abandon”. (Vișniec 11)

The idea of a partnership between man and animal with the intention of modelling the man after the animal has been implanted in the minds of the audience during a TV show presented by the character Eric Nowicki, assisted by Vanessa. Eric teaches young journalists how to pack news in the format of emotional dependence, so as to make the audience dependent on the emotions got from TV and how to manipulate the contents so that the adrenaline rush takes the first place. In a strip-tease moment accompanied by drums, he reveals what has been tattooed on his chest: ”Born To Watch TV”. By using the triggers of the strip-tease techniques, he makes his audience delirious, only to undress his back afterwards, where the tattooed message is: ”Born To Have Fun”.

The staging of the moment, although placed at the beginning of the play, in the first scene, seems to be far more important than anything else, than the casting of the actual contents. Using this trick, the actual contents can be anything, even an idea causing moral revulsion. An accompanying act of the characters, throughout the play, is the act of vomiting, showing the rebellion of human conscience against the overgrowing acceptance of the violation of personal boundaries as the new norm. The instinctual act of throwing up in public contrasts with the carefully staged script of the TV show, but it is a form of communication with the inner repressed world of contradictions, dictated by the reminiscent of conscience. Although Eric's presence seems to be very playful, it discloses the highest form of

hypocrisy.

This form of hypocrisy is accepting to tell the truth, to reveal it to its last consequences, only to show that in fact the foundation of the so called disclosure had been a premeditated lie. The journalism without hypocrisy is the biggest hypocrisy as it leaves no choice and no escape to man. The gilded microphone and the message emphasizing all that glitters actually are meant to create a bigger discrepancy between the TV presenter and the spectators. The journalist belongs to the world of the future, the rich world of good choices while the spectators are mocked openly for their so-called ignorance, they do not belong to the world of perfect choices, they are to be destined to a mediocre existence, without the chance to ever become V.I.P-s, they are merely anonymous objects whose feelings must be hijacked for the benefit of humanity.

The quantitative principle is part of this universe which transforms people into objects. According to Dana Sala, the replacement of personality with quantity is metaphysical: man has no other outlet because of the quantitative principle (a man equals a certain number of rats), therefore man cannot find an alter-ego in himself/herself, that is why the rat can take place of this alter-ego. (Sala 137)

Marius Miheț speaks of ontological paralysis for Vișniec's characters: "Basically, Matei Vișniec's dystopia refers to the post-postmodern individual living in the new Platonic cave demanding the ultimate truth." (Miheț 67).

The Ș space is seen as a temple through which what is left of man is morally filtered so as not to produce disgust, but in an artificial way. Matei Vișniec's apocalyptic vision of the condition of humanity shows mankind subjugated by the unbearable cloacae of the subconscious. Here the Evil is established as a form of education and therapy through annihilating it in distortion, but this perpetuates evil at other levels of deeds and of societies. The rat is a loaded symbol with double meaning: on the one hand, it illustrates the vitiated, sickly debris to which the human being has been reduced, all that can be more frightening, more nauseating in an individual; on the other hand, the rat is the reverse of the medal, the one that comes to clean in our dream channels, in our existential slaughterhouses, as well as in the cognitive cemeteries, because it is the only mirror in which we can see our image. Conclusion? The rat's tail is the extension of the rat. The rats are not necessarily responsible for the perpetuation of evil, but man is.

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Spaces and Silences in the Novels of David Lodge

Yulia Terentieva¹

Abstract

Even though silence is conventionally seen as merely absence of sound, emptiness bare of any definition, it can, in fact, have a multiplicity of meanings. It is used to negate, to express a variety of emotions, to maintain the status quo or to threaten it. The use of silence in fiction is of particular interest due to the plurality of ways of expression that a literary text provides.

*Although silence itself is not used as an independent motif in David Lodge's work, many of his narratives use it as a tool to represent certain feelings, power interpersonal relations or relations between people and institutions. One such novel, and the one that focuses on such relations the most, is *Deaf Sentence* (2008), which recounts a process of the loss of hearing by a former professor of linguistics. In my research, I aim to explore the possibility of connecting deafness (and, hence, silence) with the places the character occupies, visits or avoids, and investigate the relations that are built between the main character and the space around him with the involvement of both sound and silence, as well as the balance of noise and silence of the spaces the protagonist occupies as a means of reinforcing the representation of the character development and provide additional levels of understanding of the conflicts touched upon by the novel.*

*While focusing on *Deaf Sentence*, I will draw examples of the use of silence as a tool of representation from other novels written by David Lodge, and examine whether silence of spaces can be identified as influencing the narrative. To do so, I will utilise existing research on silence provided by the works of Judith Butler, Michael Foucault and Maria Tumarkin, as well as relevant findings in the field of space studies.*

Key words: *silence, space, deafness, fiction, David Lodge*

¹ Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

Sound and silence are very often understood as purely presence and absence of noise respectively. The presence of sound is perceived as multiplicity, as the presence of variation, since it, indeed, has a number of objective qualities, such as volume, tone, and pitch, which provide for the existence of an almost endless variety of sounds. Silence, on the other hand, is very often associated with emptiness, and even though the definition of silence through absence can be true from the point of view of physics, it is very often the opposite when it comes to semiotics. “There is not one but many silences,” argues Michel Foucault and goes on to say that silence is often an integral part of discourses, as, in his example, the active avoidance of the topic of sex in educational institutions (Foucault 27). This is one of many instances: silence is not only absence of noise, but also a presence of a diversity of meanings; it can be a momentary silence of unuttered words or an all-consuming silence of deafness after an explosion. The paradox of the combination of the absence from the physical world and the presence of meaning is of particular interest for the present research, since this conflict is what connects silence with space and place.

Since silence is frequently defined as absence and emptiness, it is important to note that both of these words are frequently used to characterise space, and are essentially physical and spatial in their nature. Both sound and silence are closely associated with space, as they are often determined by space: physical boundaries define the movement of sounds and, in a way, contain silences. Sam Halliday introduces the helpful term “sound-space”, which he defines as “the production by specific spaces of distinctive sonic signatures; or, conversely, the inscription of information about such spaces’ size, configuration, inhabitants and so on, by the sounds produced within them” (53). These characteristics can become essential in analysing the spaces fictional characters occupy, as they provide an additional level of understanding of the processes unfolding in the narrative. However, the connection between space and silence is not limited to the laws of the physical world. It is not only space that often defines silence, but vice versa, silence can become a factor that determines space — culturally, politically, spiritually, etc. — when it turns into one of the rules of conduct in particular places. It lies in the realm of common understanding that, for instance, a cemetery is a place that requires silence: in this case, silence — through the nature of place and its requirements — becomes a symbol for mourning and respect. In the dichotomy of noise and silence, silence is usually perceived as a negative notion. Most of the common collocations bear negative denotations and connotations (*awkward, embarrassed, deathly, etc.*,

as opposed to a much smaller number of perceived positive: *companionable*, in a way — *expectant*) (*Oxford Collocations Dictionary* 713). However, due to the neutral nature of the phenomenon, the “positivity” and “negativity” of it are very often subjective, just as the silence itself can be seen as both objective and subjective.

Objective silence is the one that belongs to the physical world, the absence of any sound (a perfect example being outer space); while subjective silence is determined by perception: in such a case, silence is the absence of sound as perceived by an individual or a group of people (for instance, hearing loss after an explosion). This is true not only for the dichotomy of sound and silence, but for the wider spectrum of categories and attributes, as even the changes in the characteristics of silence can be subjective (ééúchewycz 247).

A number of David Lodge’s novels display the connection between spaces and objective silence, as well as between the former two and power. Silence often reinforces the status quo established by the rules and regulations that pertain to certain places. The silence of the Reading Room of the British Museum in *The British Museum Is Falling Down* (1965) serves two functions related to power, protective and restrictive. On one hand, “no sounds of traffic or other human business penetrated to that warm, airless space” (*The British Museum* 44), so the visitors were protected from noise and, hence, could better focus on their work, but on the other hand, the internal silence of the library is not only a result of the scholars being occupied by their work, but also of strict regulations that enjoin one to stay silent in the walls of a library. Such a place of silence, being one of the most distinct and frequently described settings in the novel, paints a picture of the main character as a person who is ready to follow the rule of silence for the benefit of being allowed on the premises.

However, silence can become an act of resistance to the status quo when it appears in the middle of a conversation: not giving an answer to a question, disrupting a conversation by staying silent is something many of Lodge’s characters do. For instance, one of the protagonists of the play *The Writing Game* (1991), Maude, a writer in residence who can use words as her “work tools” and “weapons”, exercises her power over the other characters by not giving her opinion or by expressing silent disagreement with what others — very often to no effect — try to oppose with words (14). Judith Butler explains that in such cases silence questions the authority of the opponent or “attempts to circumscribe a domain of autonomy [of the person] that cannot or should not be intruded upon” (12). Butler explores silence from the

point of view of self-narration, and indeed, sometimes silence provides more for the narrative than words.

Similarly to enclosed spaces of private and public spheres, the urban soundscape Lodge's characters live in and are exposed to calls attention to multiple undertones of the meaning of silence as well. Quiet streets can be eerie and potentially dangerous in their emptiness and silence when suspense is necessary: "the tip-tap of her own heels on the pavement was Bridget's only company during the long walk through the bleak back-doubles" narrates *The Picturegoers* (1960) (160), while the reader is aware that at the end of the deserted street there is a dangerous man waiting to attack Bridget. *Therapy* (1995), on the other hand, describes the quiet and safe streets of a suburban residential area the main character lives in to then juxtapose their silence with "noise not just from the traffic, but also from the high-pitched whine of restaurant ventilator fans" in the noise-polluted streets of central London (*Therapy* 48).

On the level of spirituality, silence also plays a significant role for a number of Lodge's characters in various novels — there is no description of a devoted Catholic without following the character to church, where he or she keeps respectful silence throughout the mass. But silence is a feature that is representative not only of the books' characters. The main question brought into the title of the novel *How Far Can You Go?* (1980) is addressed to the Catholic Church (regarding its restrictions on sexual practices) and stays unanswered throughout the novel. It is also possible to say that the question is most probably ultimately addressed to God who also remains silent.

It becomes clear from the above that a number of David Lodge's novels utilise silence and its relation to spaces and places as a tool of representation and emphasis. However, in no other novel is silence used in a more interesting and polysemantic way than in *Deaf Sentence* (2008). While the novel has been thoroughly investigated from various points of view, including its treatment of deafness, death related symbolism and narrative features (Necula, 72; Bekhta, 59), the question of the importance of the interrelation of spaces and sounds in the narrative has not, to my knowledge, been raised before. Although the significance of such details may not be immediately obvious, it is possible to argue that they serve as a symbolic representation of the protagonist's state of mind and understanding of the problems touched upon in the course of story.

To recognise the variety of functions and meanings silence has in the novel and how they are connected with spaces, it is important to acknowledge that in many cases the understanding of sound and

silence can depend on the individual perception of those experiencing them and on the general understanding of the meaning of the concepts at hand in a given society or group.

In contrast with the objective silence of spaces, deafness can be seen as an example of subjective silence, since, even though, objectively, it is caused by the changes in the human body, this absence of sound, auditory emptiness, only exists for the person with the hearing impairment. Subjectivity in this case lies not only in the personal affectedness of an individual, but also in the general perception of the world and understanding of the processes around. Used as a motif in a literary text, the representation of the process of the loss of hearing — along with an important social role of the depiction of an often underrepresented medical problem — can become a valuable tool in moving the story forward and an intriguing way of character depiction.

David Lodge's novel *Deaf Sentence* deals with hearing loss on multiple levels — it explores the main character's personal struggles with socialising, with the use of a hearing aid and with his work and private life, while at the same time employing a set of literary techniques to connect and associate deafness with larger-scale, more abstract concepts, such as death, loneliness, powerlessness.

The text invokes the association with death, as the phrase “death sentence” is among the first ones to come to mind as one reads the title of the book. There is, indeed, a connection between silence and death, as, while life is often associated with noise and movement, death, being the opposite of life, calls for the bond with silence and stillness. The main character acknowledges this connection in his diaries: “Often only the context allows me to distinguish between ‘deaf’ and ‘death’ or ‘dead’, and sometimes the words seem interchangeable. Deafness is a kind of pre-death, a drawn-out introduction to the long silence into which we will all eventually lapse” (*Deaf Sentence* 14). The novel's protagonist Desmond Bates wonders if there is a Deaf Instinct comparable with Freud's Death Instinct, an “unconscious longing for torpor, silence and solitude underlying and contradicting the normal human desire for companionship and intercourse?” (*Deaf Sentence* 119) Desmond eventually finds the answer to his question while visiting Auschwitz and experiencing its silent “landscape of death”. The experience of vast, empty and completely silent space gives him a better understanding of his place in the world and the significance of his condition.

The novel explores the theme of death in a number of ways: the main character, Desmond Bates, has to both witness and accommodate

the deaths of his wife and his father, while also supervising a PhD dissertation that focuses on the stylistics of suicide notes. It is important to highlight that the absence of such notes is of particular interest for the student conducting the research (the silence of the person who commits suicide seems unsettling and provocative to her), which is contrasted with the fact that Desmond's relatives (and he himself) were vocal about the preferences for how they want to pass away.

Taken at its face value, the title of the book is no less engaging. While Lodge provides the reader with select definitions of the word "sentence", the second half of the book's title, he omits the first one, "deaf", which is of interest for the present analysis. *Cambridge Dictionary* defines "deaf" as "unable to hear, either completely or partly" or "unwilling to listen". Both of these definitions are applicable to the narrative and the character at hand. While trying to be tactful with the people around him, Desmond sometimes chooses not to listen to their requests or objections, showing metaphorical silence (which in the text can be expressed through a choice to talk rather than to listen) as opposed to the literal silence surrounding him most of the time. In this respect, unwillingness to listen turns into unwillingness to speak for Desmond, which, according to Butler, is an act of self-preservation (11).

The world changes for Desmond when he starts to lose his hearing. He has not only to adjust to the new way of perceiving and experiencing life, but also to the new modes of interacting with the world, people and places. Even though disability theoreticians argue that "deafness becomes disabling through social conditions and need not be inherently problematic or undesirable" (*Reading Victorian Deafness* 7), it is clear that for Desmond deafness is a threatening kind of silence. The spaces that surround him change when affected by his state and become threatening in their silence:

It was the middle of the afternoon, when most residents would be at work, but the near-silence seemed eerie in the middle of this city of over half a million people; indeed the city itself looked unfamiliar seen from this angle. [...] The unnatural quiet, I suddenly realised, was enhanced by the fact that I wasn't wearing my hearing aid. I prefer to drive without it when I'm on my own because it makes my four-year-old Ford Focus seem as noiseless as a Mercedes (*Deaf Sentence* 84-85)

While Desmond jokingly admits that there must be some advantages to his condition, it significantly influences his perception, turning his experience of space into a more negative one. Even though Desmond

maintains that in general “deafness is comic, as blindness is tragic” (*Deaf Sentence* 289), deafness is obviously both comic and tragic for him, with the emphasis on the latter. While deafness can be used to produce comedic effect (and the text utilises its comedic possibilities to a great extent), it is still a threat to Desmond’s well-being, to his ability to interact with the world, as well as to his public face. The contrast between the sounds and noises of the world around Desmond and his subjective growing silence of it create a conflict he is incapable of addressing or solving immediately, which significantly affects his quality of life.

The two strategies Desmond uses to avoid the threatening effects of silence, removing himself from the conversation and engaging in it excessively, serve the same purpose - to avoid the loss of public face in the social situations imposed on him by the places he occupies at any given moment.

Unfortunately for Desmond, his home does not always serve as a safe space for him either. His wife, Fred, is keen on organising parties and inviting friends to the house, exposing Desmond to the same discomfort as other social events do. Social situations even outside the university posit threat to Desmond’s public face, so he has to recur to the strategies similar to the ones he tended to use at the university.

It is important to note that home, conventionally regarded as a safe haven, a “safe space” of sorts, is a volatile space for him. Home changes characteristics depending on the social situation and, hence, on the proportion of noise and silence — sometimes Desmond needs to self-censor, as people’s presence becomes a threat to his public face. As he tries to ignore his condition by being excessively communicative, the seemingly subjective silence of his increasing deafness starts affecting everyone around him, and, as it comes full circle, returns to him in the form of further humiliation.

Even though, conventionally, domestic spaces are expected to satisfy one’s need for quiet and comfort by being stable and predictable (Dovey 37), Desmond is faced with the reality of Fred’s social events that invade his privacy and call for his participation, all of which, again, increases his longing for silence and solitude, and, along with the predictable need for avoidance of public places, the construction of privacy within his own home becomes a priority and a sometimes unreachable luxury for him.

The loss of hearing for him also means the loss of (or a threat to) his authority at his workplace. A university is by definition a space that requires interaction between people — it is the space where knowledge is shared, mainly verbally, and where it is important to maintain

contact with both students and colleagues. Desmond, however, “found himself struggling to pick up the gist of an argument, falling silent, afraid to intervene in case he had got the wrong end of the stick, eventually giving up altogether and falling into a bored reverie” (*Deaf Sentence* 26) during the meetings of his Department. This act of self-censorship which is usually performed “out of respect for the feelings of others, but most often from the fear of punishment or loss of face” (Stroinska 97) lead him into a position of an outsider — not being able to either speak or listen, he lost his power as a member of the collective. The university becomes the space of constant stress and inability to follow certain conventions and rules of conduct, the space that eventually silences Desmond into early retirement:

He was finding teaching increasingly difficult because of his deafness — not just in seminars, but when giving lectures too, because he believed in interactive lecturing. [...] He encouraged students to raise their hands in the middle of his lectures if they didn’t understand something, and he would ask them questions himself occasionally to keep them on their toes, but the method depended on his being able to hear them, so he used it less and less as time went on (*Deaf Sentence* 26)

If in the meetings with his colleagues Desmond eventually chooses self-censorship, silencing himself, as the only possible behaviour, when it comes to his classes he adopts an altogether different approach, “he was talking far too much himself because it was easier than straining to hear what the students were saying” (*Deaf Sentence* 26). The second definition of deafness, “unwillingness to listen”, manifests itself here being a defence mechanism that Desmond uses to avoid the need to change his teaching methods, potential misunderstanding, and, ultimately, humiliation.

The statement below not only describes Desmond’s behaviour in public spaces and social situations, but also reflects the overall way the narrative is presented to the reader:

When you can’t hear what people are saying you have two options: you can either keep quiet and nod and murmur and smile, pretending that you are hearing what your interlocutor is saying, throwing in the odd word of agreement, but always in danger of getting the wrong end of the stick, with potentially embarrassing consequences; or alternatively, you can seize the initiative, ignore the normal rules of conversational turn-taking, and talk non-stop on a subject of your own choosing without letting the other person get a word in edge-ways, so that the problem of hearing and understanding what they are saying doesn’t arise (*Deaf Sentence* 186)

Both of these strategies essentially describe the respective definitions of deafness — the incapacity and the unwillingness to listen. The narrative itself is a collection of Desmond’s diary entries, a monologue about the inability to listen, a monologue that does not require an active listener, and that, when presented as a book, leaves the reader incapable of giving a response.

Simultaneously, it gives a possibility to equate sound and silence rather than present them as a binary: although it can be argued that silence and noise (or, in this instance, speech) are opposites, it seems possible to say that “in particular circumstances silence and certain forms of speech are functional equivalents” (Szuचेvicz, 247). While the original research on such a merging of functions claims that silence becomes an act of “speech” when it is loaded with meaning, it seems feasible that a reverse situation can occur, when speech can be so void of meaning that it becomes equivalent to silence.

The range of places where Desmond can experience comfort and security narrows down day to day, and his condition eventually limits him to the communication almost exclusively with those people who are aware of his problem and can act accordingly. The following excerpt illustrates how the inability to communicate on a sufficient level brings Desmond to solitude and the one place in his house that usually does not require communication with others:

Fred: Why did you say ‘All right’ if you didn’t hear what I said?

Me: Let me get my hearing aid.

Fred: No, don’t bother. It’s not important.

We drove the rest of the way home in silence. I went to my study to put a new battery in my right earpiece, or ‘hearing instrument’ as the User’s Guide rather grandiloquently calls it (*Deaf Sentence 8*)

Following this early indication of the comfort of his study is a number of instances when it is mentioned as a refuge, a place he resorts to in need of security. Eventually Desmond realises that his study is the only safe and quiet space in his house, which is also a place of “recharge”, both literally — he keeps batteries for his hearing aid in his desk’s drawer — and metaphorically. Desmond’s comfort zone narrows down, as the juxtaposition of silence perceived by him and the objective noise of the surrounding spaces create a threatening contrast which can only be resolved by avoidance of any sound. The silence and the lack of need to communicate seem more and more inviting to him and such that can provide a certain level of introspection (after all, this is where he writes his diary entries that the novel consists of) and production of meaning.

His attitude to this place changes throughout the novel as he realises not only the situational importance but also the necessity of solitude and silence, regardless of his condition:

I was desperate for some peace and quiet, longing to prise the hearing aids, which I had been wearing all day, out of my hot, sweaty earholes, and to enjoy a spell of silence. So after about a quarter of an hour I pretended that I was going to go to bed [...] and slunk back downstairs to my study (*Deaf Sentence* 174)

Desmond's relationship with other spaces within the house is linked to his relationship with his wife, and very often it means that these spaces cannot provide comfort or security for him, he needs to interact with guests in the living room, he "can only listen to the kitchen radio when [he is] alone in the house because [he has] to have the volume turned up so high" (*Deaf Sentence* 24). Desmond and his wife drift further apart, especially as he notices that she starts using his conversational strategies of speaking rather than listening "all so that she doesn't have to engage in a proper conversation with me" (*Deaf Sentence* 232). As a result of this, the study comes to be perceived as the only "home" within the house (that itself belongs to his wife too).

Desmond by now chooses the silence of his study over any other setting, in much contrast with the beginning of the novel when he feared it and found his growing deafness highly inconvenient and threatening to his social well-being. He rejects social interaction and chooses the objective silence of his study, confines himself in the limited space of solitude and introspection. Such a shift from subjective silence of his condition to the objective silence of the absence of noise can be an indication of two opposing processes: on the one hand, it can be an indication of Desmond's deeper (or different) understanding of the nature of silence and better appreciation of it, but on the other hand, in a slightly negative tone, it can be an escape from the sound and noise altogether because of the increasing levels of discomfort and the fear of it.

The final step in Desmond's coming to terms with silence is his visit to what he calls "the landscape of death" (*Deaf Sentence* 256), the Auschwitz concentration camp. The silence of this place is different to any other that Desmond has experienced so far, and the space around him changes his perception of silence and, subsequently, his understanding of his condition — Desmond's resistance to silence turns into appreciation of it:

Normally in such a situation I would have removed my hearing aid to give

my ears some relief; but I kept the earpieces in, because I wanted to hear the silence, a silence broken only by the crunch of my shoes on the frozen snow, the occasional sound of a dog barking in the distance, and the mournful whistle of a train (*Deaf Sentence* 255)

Even though “most visitors coming to Auschwitz for the first time note that the effect of seeing the material legacy of the camp’s past is the most powerful and devastating part of their trip” (Tumarkin 136), the silence of the place is no less significant. Auschwitz in the context of the novel is best described as a traumascap, a “place [...] transformed physically and psychically by suffering” (Tumarkin 13), a kind of space that draws visitors to itself by the power of the collective traumatic event that happened there. Such places usually have a set of common characteristics one of which is an ability to serve as a therapeutic setting for those suffering from trauma (Tumarkin 153). It is a space that urges self-reflection and crystallisation of one’s feelings and thoughts (Tumarkin 36), and in this light, Desmond’s readiness to embrace the silence around him serves as his answer to the challenges he is faced with on two levels.

It is, on the one hand, the moment Desmond comes to terms with his condition, as now, in opposition to his previous urge to take off his hearing aid as soon as possible, he welcomes the sound and, more importantly, the silence of the world around him. The importance of silence and its meaningfulness are now especially explicit. On the other hand, the place marked by the permanent presence of loss (Tumarkin 79) is the one that also gives resolution to Desmond’s worries about the death of his first wife and the inevitable death of his father. The silence of Auschwitz is a reverence reserved for the dead, and for Desmond the absence of sound is tantamount to the absence of the people he lost (or, as he understands, will lose). The silence of death is, however, not frightful for him, as the “cathartic experience [of the traumascap provides not only a] release from the burden of the traumatic past, but also of the anxious and uncertain present” (Tumarkin 53), and that allows Desmond to re-evaluate his experiences and re-establish his position in and understanding of the world.

Thus, the visit to Auschwitz and the experience of its silence becomes a formative event for Desmond, an event that completes his venture into the understanding of his condition, his attitude to life and death and, possibly, gives him a better comprehension of his future. The novel concludes with Desmond’s return to the lip-reading classes he was dismissive of at the beginning of the story, signifying his readiness to face his health problem and solve it, at least in a way, while not being afraid of silence any more.

While *Deaf Sentence* explores the themes of silence and deafness to the greatest extent among the works of David Lodge, it is possible to say that the experience of silence, be it objective or subjective, is an important part of multiple novels by Lodge. His characters are exposed to it or use it to their advantage, try to avoid it or face it to overcome misunderstanding or their fears. Silence is an essential part of the binary logic with sound being its opposite, since one cannot exist without the other: “silence is a fundamental part of the dialectic between talking and not talking, between activity and passivity, that forms the basis for the speech economy: without silence there is no rhythm” (Olsson 107). David Lodge creates and curates this rhythm in his novels by both describing silences as parts of his characters’ speech patterns and by including silences into the descriptions of spaces his characters experience.

The balance of sound and silence in the spaces of Lodge’s characters creates additional meanings, allows the reader to explore the characters’ motivations and gives insight into the internal structure of the fictional worlds they live in — the way their social lives are constructed, the relationship they have with spaces they occupy and their understanding of the spiritual realm. While such insights can be found in *The Picturegoers*, *The British Museum Is Falling Down*, *Therapy* and other novels written by David Lodge, *Deaf Sentence* explores the relations between people, spaces and silences to the greatest extent.

The silences perceived by Desmond Bates are polysemantic and multifunctional. They represent Desmond’s personal challenges on both literal and symbolic levels, providing an insight into the character’s understanding of the world and his development throughout the novel. While silence of deafness is, clearly, a challenge for Desmond, it also provides him with better understanding of and a possibility to re-evaluate his attitude to social life, privacy and death. And since silences around Desmond are linked to the spaces he lives in and visits, the interdependence of the two is of utmost importance for the understanding of the character’s background and motivations. The inability to participate in social events stemming from Desmond’s condition draws him away from public spaces, and even the privacy of his home becomes uncomfortable because of the need to share the space with his wife and occasional guests. Desmond’s active avoidance of spaces and situations that require interaction with people leads to his voluntary exclusion from social life in the majority of its forms: workplace communication, visits, family events, and the like. Both personal and public spaces (that Desmond experiences differently

depending on the sound-silence ratio throughout the novel) alter their importance and the role played in his life to give space to the silence of solitude. Desmond's experience of a traumascap of Auschwitz, however, helps him reassess his relationship with silence and find a way to cope with his own traumatic experiences, thus revoking the need to self-censor and self-isolate.

The spaces and their silences play an important role in the way the characters are built and developed in *Deaf Sentence* and other novels by Lodge. The silence of the library in *The British Museum Is Falling Down* aids in imposing the rules on those inside, the quiet of streets in *The Picturegoers* gives better understanding of the atmosphere of the urban soundscape and creates suspense, and broken silence changes the power relations of a military institution in *Ginger, You're Barmy*. All these instances provide an understanding of the multiplicity of meanings of silence and the variety of ways David Lodge employs it to characterise people and spaces people live, work and communicate in.

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The Silence of Mihai Eminescu's Poems

Anca Tomoioagă¹

Abstract: *Silence could be presence, plenitude, repose but also absence, wordlessness. The present study explores these two (semantic) dimensions of silence as they are configured in Mihai Eminescu's poetry. The harmonious nature and the feminine presence create the predilect atmosphere for the reverberations of silence as repose and plenitude. When the poet encounters difficulties in finding the right verbum, silence reflects the Orphic crisis of the poetic word. The poet is tempted to test the possibilities of the poetic verbum and tries the impossible i.e. forces the limits of the word in order to make it incorporate the reality itself, not just to denominate it.*

Key words: *silence, absence, plenitude, limits of language, Orphic temptations*

A short look at the series of the synonyms for the word *silence* (quietude, tranquillity, noiselessness, soundlessness, peace) sets up several directions of study for the present research on Mihai Eminescu's poetry. The sememes *silence* encompasses might be separated into different semantic areas: one referring to an absence (of sounds, of words) and it includes synonyms such as noiselessness, soundlessness, other referring to a plain presence (of serenity, harmony, recumbency) and it includes synonyms such as peace, tranquillity. Some other semantic areas of *silence* are narrower. For instance, the synonym *quietude* mostly expresses wordlessness, interfering with the semantic area of *soundlessness* with which shares the sememe *absence*.

Nevertheless, silence as *quietude* detains the sememe of *presence* too.

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

The dispute is as old as our world is, literally speaking. At the beginning of the world there was silence counterpointed by the ontogenetic Word, the *Logos*. Max Picard (1) defines silence as presence, plenitude, “Pure Being” which “contains everything within itself”, representing “the firstborn of the basic phenomena”. In relation to *Logos*, Picard (6-8) explains silence as an inform magma of potentialities where “everything is possible to begin”, including Speech whose origin silence is. As Picard puts it, Speech is not the enemy of silence, but “the reverse of silence” (11), therefore any word contains a pinch of the gestational, maternal silence it came from: “There is something silent in every word as an abiding token of the origin of speech.” (Picard, 8-9: 1964)

The Romantics drew on this hereditament of the poetic words, willing to recuperate the universal language of the origins, the divine *verbum* through their own poetic force. Only the poet is meant to imitate it, to reconstitute the initial unity between symbol and reality, between signifier and signified as the mission of the poetry is to recreate the first language, to totally restore the revelational contemplation and primary presence of things (Beguin, 93).

In this respect, poetry as the single vehicle for the initial silence, as repertoire for *Logos*, was often compared to mystical experiences as experiences of sacred unity. Though both the mystic and the poet aspire to osmosis with the divine, between the poet and the divine there is the phenomenal world (Bădescu, 20) from which the poet cannot separate himself if he wants to stay a poet (Raymond, 37: 1998). Therefore, through a mystic experience, the ego and the divine become one, beyond the conceptual, in the metaphysics of silence. The poet hoped for such a silence beyond the word and the image (Beguin, 165), beyond the intellectual and imagination. Henri Bremond (16: 1926) called such a poetry *pure poetry*. This purpose of reiterating the mythical function of poetic speech and, also, its impossibility to simultaneously exist as signifier and signified, to denominate and to exist (in real (f)act) generated, in modern times, a crisis in language that resorted to silence. This time, silence is reflecting absence, crisis, and the limits of language modern poets tested through deconstruction, voluntary ambiguation and objectification.

Silence as both presence and absence reopens the discussion regarding Eminescu’s poetry. What is silence for such sonorous poetry, deeply laved into prodigious auditive imagery as Eminescu’s? What is silence for such a being as the poet *per se* whose ontological estate presumes speaking, not being silent at all?

The following section of the present essay will try to give an answer to the first question and it draws on silence as presence,

fulfilment, and whole serenity, peace within and through poetry as catalyser of primordial silence (as Picard understands it).

Eminescu's poems agglomerate hums, murmurs, rustlings, echoes, *doina*, whispers. This is why one could hardly consider silence as the finality of such sonorous poems. Nevertheless, this abundant auditive imagery not only that induces peacefulness (silence) but also creates peacefulness. No one could perceive this subtle music, the whisper or the murmur but in silence. Reading Eminescu's poems in search for silence, one could surprisingly find oneself in an estate of silence, not necessarily because of the conceptualization of silence, but as a direct effect of this rich auditive imagery that parades *en sourdine*. In music, the *sourdine*, also called "mute", is a device that alters the sound in the sense that it softens it or reduces it to silence. No discordant, strident sounds in Eminescu's poems, but a soothing sounding through which primary silence reverberates.

Most of the poems that express such silence as plenitude always suggest that nature is a reiterated paradise. In *Blue Flower (Floare Albastră)*, the lover is invoked into an Eden where the forest, the springs which "in the valley weep" and the lake, "the placid reed" (tr. by D. Cuclin, 21: 2000), the moon and the stars recreate the plenitude of silence through their low voice sounding.

In fact, not only through sounds (auditive imagery), but also through the presence of nature in his poems, the primary silence is restored. As Picard (130: 1964) asserts: "The things of nature are images of the silence, exhibiting not themselves so much as the silence, like signs pointing to the place where silence is." For Picard, the lake is "like a seal stamped by silence on the face of the earth" and the forest is a "great reservoir of silence" (131-132). For Eminescu, the lake is the mirror that reflects the endless serenity of the sky and the forest ("those woodlands are our bliss", *Blue Flower*) always soothes the lover's soul, the poet's inner tremble. In *O remain, dear one* (tr. by C. M. Popescu, 40) the forest, like a mother, calms the poet and teaches him the lessons of nature:

"Stay with me in my fair land,
For your dreams and your longings
Only I can understand." (...)
"I will make you hear in secret
How the furtive chamois pass."

This secret sound of the furtive chamois is, in fact, the paradisiacal silence, the primary harmony. In *Călin (fragments from a tale)* (tr. by Leon Levitchi, 87), two verses, reminding us of Baudelaire's forest of symbols, express the plenitude of primordial silence:

“One would think the trunks eternal hide some souls beneath their bark
And they moan among the branches, and the branches, spell-bound,
hark.”

Actually, the poet wants to hear the inaudible, to guess the mysterious core of the sound/ word which is, as a token (in Picard's expressions), silence. It is not surprising that Egdar Papu named Eminescu “the evocative poet of the great *Non-hearing* that bathes the secrets of the universe” (50). In order to create an extraordinary imagery, the poet changed his poetic sight and hearing in such a way as to be able to perceive the unperceivable that we identify as silence. Such a process of transfiguration of senses can be seen later on, in Nichita Stănescu's poetry.

In an essay dedicated to Eminescu's writings and their imagery, Dan C. Mihăilescu analyses the power of the hearing, of visage and of the tactile. The critic (34-39: 2006) writes about the purification and the protection of the senses as an important condition for the act of thinking in Eminescu's poems. The mind recovers its *hesychia*, its tranquillity, its silence through the transfiguration of the senses. Particularly, this is how the critic explains the low sound that goes through the poetic universe in Eminescu's poems. Recalling Novalis's famous saying, Mihăilescu refers to closing the outside hearing in order to open the inside hearing which permits the purity of the meditation. In front of nature as a source of peace, meditation turns into reverie, a deepening into the mysterious silence of nature. Nature, as always for romantics, is one of the best refuges where to regain the initial estate of harmony through long sessions of reverie.

Furthermore, referring to Jung's concepts *animus* and *anima*, Bachelard identified the silence in the peacefulness of the reverie as a manifestation of the *anima*. In his study on the poetics of reverie, the French philosopher explains the daydreaming as the repose of the feminine/ within the feminine:

«Disons donc que pour nous, en gros, le rêve relève de l'*animus* et la rêverie de l'*anima*. La rêverie sans drame, sans événement, sans histoire nous donne le véritable repos, le repos du féminin. Nous y gagnons la douceur de vivre. Douceur, lenteur, paix, telle est la devise de la rêverie en *anima*. C'est dans la rêverie qu'on peut trouver les éléments fondamentaux pour une philosophie du repos. » (28)

The estate of the reverie represents the peace and serenity of the poet

who plunges into an atmosphere of silence that he overspreads throughout his poetry as the essence of his communicative flux: «Sa rêverie est sa vie silencieuse. C'est cette paix silencieuse que veut nous communiquer le poète.» (Bachelard, 52) Nevertheless, the effect of the poem is bidirectional. Not only has the reader got into an estate of silence, but the poet also finds out recumbency in his poetic words: «Se reposer au cœur des mots, voir clair dans la cellule d'un mot, sentir que le mot est un germe de vie, une aube croissante» (Bachelard, 55)

Is there such a respite in Eminescu's poems? We may identify it in the serenity of the reveries, always correlated with nature or with the feminine presence. Regarding nature, we already identified its *silent* echoes. The feminine, however, generates another type of silence, still in the semantic area of *presence*, but essentially different from the one that crosses the natural.

In this point, it is important to repeat Bachelard's ideas regarding the connections he sees between the reverie and the feminine/ anima as a part of the Psyche. Reverie means repose within the feminine/ within the spiritual dimension of *anima* which operates with images/ imagination. Frequently, in Mihai Eminescu's poems, the angelic mistress's presence tempers the torment and enlightens with a benefic aura the whole atmosphere. Literally, the feminine energy brings peacefulness and serenity, restoring the harmonious paradisiacal unity of the couple. In *Angel and Demon* (tr. by Corneliu M. Popescu 72), *anima* means balm and silence, tranquillity and repose:

“But into that narrow tawdry room, breaking the mist that veiled his eye,
A silver shadow softly creeps; behold, an angel shape comes near,
Sits lightly on the wretched bed, kisses away each blinding tear
From those dimmed eyes; and now the mist is torn away in ecstasy.”
Aye, it is She. And with what joy, joy fathomless, before unknown,
He gazes in his angel's face and reads love's tender pity there.
With long glance he is repaid all his life's anguish and despair.
He whispers with his dying breath "My love I know thee for my own.”

Love is a positive energy that installs peacefulness and banishes the poetic restlessness. But the poet's immersion into silence is preceded by the long glance that: “repaid all his life's anguish and despair.” This secret flux of silence develops through sight and hearing. In Eminescu's poems sight has been always analyzed by literary critics as being a predilect means for expressing love through silent communication. There is too much and too intense to express in order to use words.

Seeing the other is far more inclusive than verbal speaking because silence completely fills the gap between the lovers and is able to deliver superabundant messages. In other texts, because of this superabundance, the lover covers his eyes in the presence of the mistress and cannot utter a word:

“Before your soft reproach my words dried on my tongue.
I strove to make an answer, but could no answer find.
Would earth have swallowed me, and left no trace behind,
My hands before my face I put my shame to blind,
And tears came to the eyes where tears had never sprung.”
(*Ghosts* tr. by Leon Levitchi, 137)

This *silentio stampa* reveals an overwhelming feeling where the ego feels totally absorbed. In an estate of contemplation, the poet remains mute. The word cannot be created, the poet and his poetry freeze in silence. Thus silence does not mean an heavy absence (of words) but the plenitude given by the ecstasy and deepening into reverie. *Călin (fragments from a tale)* (tr. by Leon Levițchi, 75-81; 2000) is even more suggestive for our direction of interpretation.

“And her beauty’s charms, so naked that his senses
Scarcely find a place to linger in the chambers of his thought”

The beauty unwrapping itself in front of the lover’s eyes cannot be conceptualised “in the chambers of his thought” as long as imagery/ imagination prioritarily appeals to the spiritual dimension of *anima*. Only giving himself over to reverie the poet could relate to beauty. Not even words could comprise the absolute beauty:

“I feel happy beyond measure, for I like one tongue-tied,
Fail to tell how dear I hold thee, how I want thee for a bride
They would speak instead of whisp’ring, but know not where to
begin,
For a mouth closes the other when the other one drinks in;”

Love and beauty exists to the full, *in the object*, and it does not need any concepts or denominations, therefore no word could express such a blessed inner estate. Nevertheless, imagery can translate these feelings into silence. The only communicator is, again, the sight which does not need any word, but the daydream. “And their eyes alone are talking, for their tongues have been struck dumb.” The squelch of poetic language in front of Beauty itself anticipates the mallarméan silence. Hugo Friederich (79) explained that the French poet “pushed his creation till

the moment when it suspends itself, till its end.” The different Orpheus’s hypostases in Eminescu’s poetry could lead us, at some point, to similar conclusions. Oftenly, the poet feels as a defeated Orpheus who can no longer play the chords; he is absorbed in contemplation (like in *Odin and the Poet*) or he is confronted with the limits of language. In this last matter, silence is not a presence anymore, but an absence, a crisis of the poetic *verbum*.

The next section of the present essay will try to formulate a response to the second question and it draws on silence as absence. Firstly, we turn to Gaston Bachelard who considers concepts and images as two irreconcilable poles. Concepts and intellectual effort towards knowledge belong to *animus*, to the masculine; imagery belongs to *anima*, to the feminine. Concepts and images develop on two divergent spiritual directions and they cannot function through interfering as they exclude each other:

«Ainsi, images et concepts se forment à ces deux pôles opposés de l'activité psychique que sont l'imagination et la raison. Joue entre elles une polarité d'exclusion. Rien de commun avec les pôles -du magnétisme. Ici les pôles opposés ne s'attirent pas ; ils se repoussent. Il faut aimer les puissances psychiques de deux amours différentes si l'on aime les concepts et les images, les pôles masculin et féminin de la Psyché.» (Bachelard, 62:)

In Bachelard’s terms, the imagery, as the predilect material of poetry, has a different source in the double-dimensional Psyche *i.e. anima* as repose and peacefulness. In other words, imagery, reverie, femininity, *anima* are synonyms for silence, repose, peacefulness. Eminescu’s poetic ego finds his serenity in Poesis. However, *Poesis* certainly also implies conceptualisation, thought and wordy forms. This tension between image and concept, between abundant content and form as a Dionysian – Apollonian dominant, puts under question the poem itself as in *With daydreams and with images*:

“Lacking both learnings and maxims
Fantasy without form, just whims,
In wandered lost, oh!then it came:
Thoughts are obscure and verse lame.”
(tr. by Kurt W. Treptow, 115)

Eminescu seldom wonders about the right poetic form to capture the essence and truth, the very core of things: “How should man find true expression/To describe his teeming soul?” (*To the Critics*, tr. by

Corneliu M. Popescu, 187) but the doubt regarding the potentialities of poetic language will soon generate a crisis of the poetic ego. The image of the defeated Orpheus is recurrent in Eminescu's poems. The harp is silent, the poet does not create anymore, deepening himself into silence. One of the most suggestive poems, in this respect, is *Satire IV (Scrisoarea IV)*, as C.M. Popescu translates it (155-156):

“Where, here and there, amidst the dark, a gleam of milk-white
 moonlight strays
 From out a Carmen seculare as I did dream in former days...
 But for this sad sigh and wailing, whistling, discordant sound,
 Scattered cries and tangled noises in my weeping lyre are found.

 What the outcome of existence? Where the message that I had?
 All the lyre's chords are broken, and the minstrel man is mad.”

Within this context, the silence (of the harp) has become, semantically speaking, the expression of an absence. This time, silence means soundlessness, wordlessness. No plenitude or ecstasy, no tranquillity in the silence of a surrendered, doubtful Orpheus. On the contrary, when the poet is silent, the world gets more and more noisy. The *sourdine* of nature cannot be heard anymore. The disarmed poet cannot hear the silence beyond things, no reverie is possible. The contrast between noise and silence generates a crisis in the nature of poetic language and in the Orphic conscience. As Picard (141) asserts that: “the poetic word has a natural relation with the silence from which it comes and may produce a purely natural silence”, therefore it might be suppressed by the words, orphans of silence, which fill the air with noise because they do not rise from silence but from other noisy words and go back to noisy words (Picard, 168). The distance between people is filled with noise. The *hesychia* of the sight vanished. The verses from *I see the City – An Anthill* (tr. by Dan Solomon, 35) are very relevant through their auditory images, contrastive to the auditory imagery Eminescu got his lecturers used to:

“Excited people move on talking,
 All in a hurry, never stopping.”
 “The church bell ring”
 “And chanting prayers bearded popes.”
 “Tah-rah, boom, boom, behind the crowd
 Arrive proud soldiers with steps loud” led by “a drum major tall”
 “The city's clocks now strike the hour,
 But no one listens to these clocks
 The crowd is too large and it talks.”

No sourdine in the urban atmosphere the poet describes in such a modern poem. The ringing bells, the priest's chant, the menacing "tah-rah, boom, boom" and the people's chit-chat create noise, the rumour of the city that swallows the primordial silence. But Eminescu does not anticipate the modern poetry of the 20th Century only through this urban images that some of the poems deliver. Critics have also identified the modern struggle regarding the limits of the poetic language, the fear of nothingness, expressionist influences, the crisis and the estrangement of the poetic ego (*Melancholy*).

One of the critics that extensively analysed Eminescu's poetry from this perspective is Ioana Bot in her study *Eminescu explicat fratelui meu (Eminescu Explained to My Brother)*. The critic observes that Eminescu had always been interested in exploring the potentialities of the poetic language, more than the romantic poets used to. In fact, he was opened to linguistic experiments; these aspects are more evident in the posthumous poetry, in the laboratory, as it has been called. As Ioana Bot (45-46) explains, in the case of Eminescu's poems, the experiment of the poetic imagery is always accompanied by the experiment of the poetic language so that the latter seems more important than the first. The poetic imagery is built in such a way as to challenge the limits and the powers of the language hoping for a total experience that includes both action and speech, looking for the word that happens and institutes reality/ essence of the reality.

Similarly, in his book *Orfeu și tentația realului (Orpheus and the Temptation of the Real)*, Șt. Aug. Doinaș describes this crisis of the creation through commenting the Orphic myth. Doinaș's essay emphasizes new meaning in Eminescu's poetry where the Orphic hypostasis is almost always confronted with a crisis of creating. On its way out to recuperate Eurydice/ Poesis from the tenebrous Hades through his poetic chords, Orpheus endlessly struggles.

The poem *Povestea magului călător în stele (The Story of the Magus, the Stars Traveller –my. tr.)* contours the portrait of the Orpheus haunted by dreams and thoughts ("prigonit sta de visuri și de gânduri"), oscillating between dream and thought, without taking a decision („Ce vrea nici el nu știe, se chinuie în zadar”). He is a blind, revolted madman („Orb, nebun, ce blastămă firea” 152). This time, the poetic genius, in its blindness, is totally targeted towards the inner world i.e. the darkness where he invokes Eurydice/ Poesis. In fact, thorough the power of his music, Orpheus asks Eurydice to come out from his inner *Hades*. Similarly, the poet invokes Poesis through the poetic word, but the chords are silent, benumbed („strune amortite”):

“All the lyre's chords are broken, and the minstrel man is mad.”(*Satire IV*). Actually, the poet looks after the perfect verbal form. The word should not just denominate, but also make the reality it denominates, to recuperate the native force of Logos. Nevertheless, the lyre, the poetic language remains silent.

Șt. Aug. Doinaș studies the Orphic myth from the perspective of this crisis of language. When Orpheus lost Eurydice, he actually lost the concrete object of his passion, the reality he would fervently search afterwards. As long as he is aware of the effect his lyre has upon nature and reality itself, he is willing to try the impossible. After convincing the Gods, he descends *ad inferos* but he fails in respecting the sole condition imposed. So, he turns back to verify whether Eurydice follows him and his lyre, verifying whether the Real can be whipped out from the abstract darkness. This temptation of the real explains the crisis of poetic language and of the poetic truth. Looking back towards the real, towards Eurydice, expresses the tentative of the poetic language to verify itself in relation to the reality it denominates. Eurydice cannot come from Hades as a reality, but as a shadow because the poetic creation cannot be but a copy of the reality itself, as the poetic word cannot institute the real. As for modern poets, for Eminescu too, this expectation gave birth to numerous trials to test the limits of language:

“In short, it tries to transform the sign back into meaning: its ideal, ultimately, would be to reach not the meaning of words, but the meaning of things themselves. This is why it clouds the language, increases as much as it can the abstractness of the concept and the arbitrariness of the sign and stretches to the limit the link between signifier and signified.” (Roland Barthes, 133-134)

Orpheus looks back to verify whether Eurydice (the meaning of words) who is following him, because of his song, is the same with the real Eurydice (the meaning of things themselves). Nevertheless, Orpheus will never be followed from Hades by more than Eurydice's shadow. *Sonnet IV* (tr. by C. M. Popescu, 54) reflects the poet's doubts regarding the potentialities of the poem:

“When even the inner voice of thought is still,
And does some sacred chant my soul endear,
'Tis then I call to thee; but will you hear?
Will from the floating mists your form distil?”

The stanza clearly reiterates the Orphic myth. The poetic ego invokes

the ineffable (mistress) to come from the mists, but only when the voice of thought is silent. As Ioana Bot (46-47) asserts, the poet intends to recover the visionary power through the imagination of the ego, but also the reclaim of the ontogenetic word. Not reason, not conceptualisation but the imaginative power of poetic language is being endlessly tested. One of these experiments, Ioana Bot referred to as a proof for Eminescu's modern interest for poetics, is *First Epistle* (tr. by Leon Levițchi 151):

When there was but utter absence of both life impulse and will
When unopen there was nothing, although everything was
hidden,
When, by His own self pervaded, resting lay the Allforbidden.
Was it an abyss? A chasm? Wat'ry plains without an end?"

"Of the unmade things the shadows had not yet begun to gleam
And, with its own self-contented, peace eternal reigned supreme.
Suddenly, a dot starts moving- the primeval, lonely Other...
It becomes the Father potent, of the void it makes the mother."

The above description of the cosmogony presents the silence from the beginning of the world, silence as "peace eternal reigned supreme" and makes use of a series of contradictions. The first stanza shows up as a linguistical experiment that tests the possibilities of the poetic language to express the inexpressible. In Ioana Bot's inspired words (232, my tr.): "Eminescu's poetics is built on the scaffold of a huge struggle with the language, hoping to destroy it, to reduce it to silence, to turn it inside out, against its logic of functioning." By doing this, Eminescu repeats the child's gesture of decomposing the toy in order to see how it works. It is an avant-garde gesture that anticipates our modern poets such as Tudor Arghezi or even Nichita Stănescu.

The second stanza focuses more on the fundamental relationship between silence and the word/ Logos. As long as the first stanza expresses the silence as "utter absence of both life impulse and will" (thus the poetic language is challenged to express such silence), the second stanza points out the silence as presence, "own self-contented, peace eternal reigned supreme" from which the poetic language inherits its sacral gifts. The word as concept, the active principle seems to englobe the *animus*, the masculine, "the Father potent", while silence as fecund silence seems to englobe the *anima*, the feminine, the mother.

The world began simultaneously with this cosmic union of the feminine principle and of the masculine principle. Similarly,

microcosmically, the poetic universe starts where the Word, as active principle, separates and distinguishes itself from silence, as static principle of fecundity. The Word activates the rich, latent silence. The Word is masculine, belongs to *animus*, to conceptualization and reason, while silence is feminine, it is anima expressed by the force of imagery. These two dimensions of the poetic universe (of Psyche, of human spirit) co-exist as if they would be into a two wheel gear. Due to this tension between them, a creative energy crosses all the poems. In Eminescu's poetry, this tensioned duality is of outmost fertility and it has been of outmost interest in numerous studies on the double or the narcissism.

In the light of this duality and the tensioning game (Word-Silence) we have depicted in Mihai Eminescu's poems, we may draw several conclusions.

Firstly, silence is presence and plenitude, repose within the feminine through the force of imagery. Frequently, imagery refers to beneficent presences such as nature or the feminine (in love). Imagery poetically restores the paradisiacal silence, but for a keen perception, the senses should be transfigured. This is how the mind (the generator of the concepts, of the word) recovers its *hesychia*. Here is one of the multiple cogs that go together in the poetic gear. Senses should be purified so that they could reach the silence from inside the imagery (the feminine) that is to be comprised into the poetic words. Sometimes, this silence is superabundant, the message is so dense that only sight may carry it, not words, not mind, not reason. This happens always in the contemplation of the feminine, the Beauty embodied by the angelic mistress or *Poesis* herself. Another point of tension is revealed here.

Secondly, silence installs itself as a crisis of the poetic language, as absence – a negative category. In other words, the poet cannot create because between him and primordial silence appears a sort of Orphic doubt regarding his own capacity of comprising the essential silence in the poetic Word. This doubt tensions once more the gear and produces the linguistic experiments meant to explore the possibilities of language to enhance the Silence. How could the poet capture the ineffable, the Silence itself? His wish is to grasp the real Eurydice beyond the force of imagery. His hubris is to see his poetic word being incarnated, the reality itself, not its representation. However, as silence is endlessly evading, the poet is continually trying. These poet's numerous attempts are just as many approaches of *Poesis*.

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Silence
Cultural-isms

Le silence
Études culturelles

Silenced Life Stories

Magda Danciu¹ and Claudia Judea Pusta²

Abstract. *The present paper highlights the way in which, in order to answer the need for a different kind of rendering the characters life-stories, namely by reconstructing them from bits and pieces left after they had been silenced by fatal circumstances, contemporary detective fiction authors often opt for disclosing the secrets of the human bodies after their demise due to the use of cutting-edge technology and highly specialized professionals as it appears in forensic crime thrillers which combine fiction with facts and scientific elements. This kind of hybrid writing, currently embodying the contradictions of modern life and the preference for intercultural texts, generates a narrative that breaks down the traditional life-story telling into apparently unrelated pieces of a mystery puzzle that eventually develop the entire picture of a late existence. The reliable knowledge is provided to the reader by fictional forensic scientists who become carriers of non-fictional information that can help to bring a subject to life in a virtual way, beyond the sheer data, thus demonstrating how human remains reveal both secrets and truths in a fascinating, make-believe way as foregrounded in the present selection of texts authored by highly acclaimed writers.*

Key words: *forensic, silenced lives, science, investigation*

The Science that is Speaking for the Gone

During the late 20th century, forensics has become a part of main areas of research, such as anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, linguistics,

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

² University of Oradea, Romania

even genetics, gradually turning into their special sub-field of study, meant to provide homicide investigation with reliable elements for carrying out their work and discover the bio-components of both victims and perpetrators so that justice may be served. “Like all our other senses, our sense of justice has ancient evolutionary roots”, Yuval Noah Harari explains when referring to the citizens’ range of values in the twenty-first-century globalized world when we have to “comprehend relations between millions of people across entire continents” and when “our moral sense is overwhelmed” (Harari 224). Justice demands a set of abstract values, but also “an understanding of concrete cause-and-effect relations” (224) which is a fundamental request of any factual fiction, especially a crime story, most often enslaved to the topical and the visual, produced and fostered by the multiple media and social media channels, endemic in our times.

Scientific breakthrough has enabled novelists to find a way of creating texts determined by and connected to society's laws, culture, and technology, displaying both some special qualities of their authors and audience, and the former's constant attempt to conflate news, novels, ideology, history, fact, and fiction, as it commonly happens in forensic crime fiction. This sub-genre, similar to the police procedural, gets substantialized by the agency of an investigator, a medical examiner or a pathologist, most often doubled by a forensic scientist – an anthropologist or a psychologist or a linguist -, highly specialized in the science of death, whom the readers follow in their journey to discover the unknown lives and fatal experiences of the human remains exposed to be studied for their secrets. Forensic examiners provide the scientific analysis of the physical evidence of a crime scene as well as the story of the body or the remains of a body by using specific rules and regulations, knowledge and technology in order to discover the truth, the facts, the causes that led to the tragic ending. The autopsy of a corpse is followed by a completion of a necroptic forensic report that includes data related to the identity of the deceased person or identification elements (for corpses with unknown identity); the type of death; the medical cause of death; the existence of traumatic injuries and their mechanism, the nature of the injurious agent and the causal link between the traumatic injuries and death; the results of laboratory investigations carried out on biological samples taken from the corpse and the suspicious substances discovered; biological traces found on the body of the deceased; the probable date of death and any other elements that may contribute to clarifying the circumstances of the occurrence of the death (Dermengiu 21-22). It is the procedure followed by American author Kathy Reichs, a forensic anthropologist

herself, in her Temperance Brennan series highlighting the routine in performing body analyses:

The remains had arrived at the morgue in large black plastic bags, each containing a collection of Ziploc bags. Each bag was numbered and held an assortment of body parts, dirt, fabric, metal, and unidentifiable debris. The autopsy photos moved from the unopened bags, to shots of the small plastic sacks grouped on autopsy tables, to views of the contents sorted by categories. (...) After examining the prints and X rays I'd [dr.Temperance Brennan] come to agree on the anatomical origin of some tissues. (Reichs 21)

As a vital component of a police procedural, forensic examination in Simon Beckett's book (2010) involves both crime scene and lab analyses and techniques, carried out by pathologists as Dr. Pirie, who identifies the visual indicators of the silenced life:

First impression only. Rigor and livor mortis suggest he's been dead for between eight to twelve hours, as does the body temperature. That puts the time of death between one and five o'clock this morning (...) his neck has been broken, which at this stage seems the most probable cause of death. (Beckett 189)

The investigation on the deceased person is carefully completed in the forensic anthropology department, a utilitarian office, by laboratory examinations such among which the most common are histopathological, toxicological, bacteriological, hematological, serological, biocriminalistic tests in order to provide further evidence for the police investigation. After having been through the mortuary process of "carefully cutting away the decaying soft tissue from a cadaver, or degreasing human bones in detergent" (102), of having the corpse stripped of its flesh to a partial skeleton, Dr David Hunter, forensic anthropologist, proceeds to establishing life facts such as age, -"a man in his thirties"-, estimated from "the condition of the vertebrae and the amount of wear evident on the pubic symphysis – the part of the girdle where the two pubic bones meet"(102); the gender, that could be determined because of the "shape of the pelvis and large size of the bones."; the probable cause of death – " he'd been murdered (...) the arms, legs and head had been severed. The man's torso had been found by a builder, dumped inside the well of a derelict farmhouse (...), the other parts of the body were missing (102).

Voiceless Testimonies

Evolved from empiricism to science, forensic autopsy of a corpse can lead to the discovery of the nature of certain death, be it violent, suspicious or unknown, undeclared, as usually are favoured by crime fiction writers who have a large range of choices, according to current data, namely, death that can occur during performing a mission/job/service, or that can be “a death in custody, in detention, in psychiatric hospitals or penitentiary hospitals, in prison or police custody; or death associated with police or military activities” (Dermengiu 16-18); it can befall in public or isolated places; it can be a case of multiple deaths, simultaneous or serial ones. Forensic examiners study the human remains for their secrets juxtaposing material evidence with hypotheses, speculations, concluding with deductions regarding the cause of death, the circumstances of its occurrence, the criminal’s profile, so that they eventually should be able to picture the end of the victim’s life, in the manner Dr. Hunter carries out this analysis:

I hoped to at least establish how he’d been dismembered. There was none of the trauma that would indicate an axe or cleaver had been used, which pointed to it being a knife or a saw. Any blade would leave distinctive marks on the bone, and from its cleanness (...) this was likely to be some sort of power tool. My money was on a circular saw. But I’d need to examine each surface under a microscope to be sure. It was dull, methodical work, but identifying what cutting tool had been used might be the first step on the long road to catching the killer. (Beckett 103)

The scientific details grant the authenticity of the literary texts and their reliability regarding the characters involved in the process of decoding the governing rules, principles and reactions of the human body seen as a true repository of the individual’s life experiences and a map ready to be read and explored by forensic scientists such as Ronald Gilbert, expert in blood-spatter analysis:

Drops of blood are shaped as like spheres, not like teardrops (...) And shape is one of the things we consider in spatter-pattern analysis.(...) The goal of bloodstain-pattern interpretation is to work backward from a crime scene and reconstruct the events that took place. What happened? In what sequence? Who was where? What weapon was used? What objects have been moved?

To answer these questions we look at what has altered the drops of blood present. (Reichs 205).

Forensic anthropologists, such as Temperance Brennan, use knowledge and skills that can legitimize the bond existing between science and truth, the former being the key used in discovering the hidden, missing facts that the silenced body had gone through:

Using the X rays, I'd pulled the fragments containing bone, and dissected the tissue to search for landmarks (...). Two left pubic tubercles, or mastoid processes, or femoral condyles meant two different individuals. I'd also spotted evidence of childhood growth problem in some of the long bone fragments. When health is compromised, a child stops growing and skeletal development goes on hold (27).

Crime fiction views any forensic pathologist as being “engaged in an effort to restore human dignity”, just like an “objective historical anatomist”, in the intricate process of “reconstructing the victim’s suffering and identity”, by bringing “the abject back within the symbolic order” as it is bound to answer the requests of both characters and readers in terms of moving “towards closure” (Horsley, 2006). The fictional forensic examiners juxtapose their expertise, imagination and technology in order to reach a well-founded conclusion and to do justice for the victims, both through their autoptic procedures and crime scene reading as does Leonard Wainwright, one of the highest-profile forensic experts :

Peat is a unique substance. Formed from partially decayed plant, animal and insect remains, it’s an environment that’s inimical to most of the bacteria and insects that usually populate the earth beneath our feet. Low in oxygen and almost as acidic as vinegar, it can effectively pickle organic matter, tanning it like specimen in a lab jar. (...) The entire body – hair, skin and clothes – was caked in viscous black peat.(...) The outlines of broken ribs were clearly visible beneath the muddy fabric, and jagged bones poked through the flesh of the arms and lower legs. Beneath the clinging mat of hair, the skull was crushed and misshapen, the cheeks and nose caved in.(Reichs 29).

As any science thrillers, forensic crime fiction is much indebted to scientific territory and a strong technical background when using rules,

principles, knowledge of the real world, in order to speak for the dead and to reveal truth, yet in an exciting way; it is a narrative that reconstitutes a life story, a series of events and their effects through the work of its protagonists, the forensic experts, “by reassembling the fragmented body parts – recontaining the horror, reconstructing the abject body, negotiating amongst different possible scriptings of the victim’s fate, reincorporating the body within a narrative structure” (Horsley, 2006), that will rescue it from oblivion.

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If There Is Such a Thing as Dignity: Scenes of Silence in de Vigny's 'The Death of the Wolf'

György Fogarasi¹

Abstract: *The concept of human dignity has recently become a contested idea in at least two ways: either because of the growing difficulty to limit dignity to the human, or because the very notion of dignity has come to appear too unstable to serve as a conceptual tool for the purposes of defining humanity. This paper investigates the ways in which the figure of silence might be linked to these critical considerations. It starts out with a reflection on the concept of dignity from the perspective of human-animal relations by reference to the universal declarations of human and animal rights, as well as to the Derridean treatment of the question of the animal. Then it pays close attention to three scenes of silence in Alfred de Vigny's romantic poem 'The Death of the Wolf', and attempts to trace how silence is associated both with sublime morality, or dignity, and a primordial state of permanent threat and violence – the upshot being that this figural ambivalence of silence does not leave intact our modern notion of dignity and in fact indicates an intrinsic instability at the heart of the concept.*

Key words: *dignity, human, animal, silence, sublime*

According to the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Paris, 1948), humans have rights only inasmuch as they have dignity, an inherent attribute that indirectly also serves as the basis for freedom and justice, and ultimately as the foundation of world peace: 'Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...' Later on, in the first Article of the Declaration, the same notion of human dignity accompanies the concept of the human as a subject of law and a possessor of rights, but

¹ Department of Comparative Literature, University of Szeged, Hungary.

this time it is derived from the notion of freedom and presupposes the human as a rational and conscientious being. The desire for peace is here formulated in terms of a commitment to the spirit of brotherhood: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.' As a distinctive feature of the human species ('the human family'), dignity is thus the basis of human rights, and consequently, it is also one of the fundamental values of international law (Capps 106-07).

In contrast to the above UN document on human rights, the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights (Paris, 1978) does not mention dignity in its opening sentences. To be a subject of law according to this document is something wholly different from being endowed with dignity, whose role is here taken over by life as animal life. The preamble starts with the formulation that 'Whereas all animals have rights...', and the first Article reads as follows: 'All animals are born with an equal claim on life and the same rights to existence.' The only place dignity is mentioned is Article 10: '1. No animal shall be exploited for the amusement of man. 2. Exhibitions and spectacles involving animals are incompatible with their dignity.' According to this article, animals are threatened in their dignity as soon as they become targets of a spectating audience. Put on stage and degraded to serve as mere spectacles to be consumed for amusement purposes, animals are refused the power of the gaze, and are assumed to have no ability to watch and thereby to influence or transform another living being, for instance, by eliciting a feeling of shame in it.² According to the definition of dignity implied here, animals suffer a breach of their rights through a disrespect for their dignity, once they are refused the possibility to be the subjects, rather than the objects, of a gaze.

The question arises: where shall we place dignity? Is animal dignity possible? What is the status of dignity at all? How firmly is it

² In a talk on human dignity, Moshe Halbertal claims that the breach against dignity often takes the form of shameless behavior, as when, for example, a boss does intimate things in front of a subordinate colleague, not because they have an intimate relationship, but just out of sheer neglect for the other (as if the other person were just another piece of furniture), in other words, because the boss does not attribute to the subordinate the slightest ability to watch. The other person lacks authority by lacking a commanding gaze. He is not given *respect*, for he is not *spectating*. He does not have a glance that could be respectfully returned. In other words, his eyes do not constitute a mirror through which the self-controlling mechanisms of shame could begin to operate (Halbertal 15:50-16:43). Jacques Derrida's personal example (his shame at being naked before a kitten) extends this same logic to the human-animal relationship, and by this primal scene of shame before an animal, points toward the possibility of 'animal dignity' (Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am' 3-11).

established as a philosophical, moral or ethical, or even legal or political category? Today questions like these seem to be flooding the discourse on 'dignity' and are mercilessly shaking the very concept, especially in the form in which it has been stabilized in public discourse in the past five hundred years, as 'human dignity'.³ These questions seem to point in two different directions. One of them keeps asking: are humans the only beings on earth who possess dignity, or can dignity be extended to other entities, nonhuman living beings, so-called 'animals' (that is, 'mere', non-political, non-rational, non-conscientious etc. sentient beings), or beyond these, to so-called 'plants', a group of organisms about which there is much less (though an increasing amount of) critical talk today, or even perhaps to the perforated margins of life (mushrooms, microbes, viruses etc.), and further, beyond the borders of *bios*, to inanimate entities, however absurd such a suggestion might seem, and however radically this may threaten us with the inflation of the very concept of dignity? The other direction puts the question this way: on what basis or according to what right do we assume in the first place that humans have dignity and that there even exists such a thing as dignity (*dignitas*) understood as a distinct quality, an inherent attribute, the distinctive feature of a particular species, a specificity, about which one could, or at least should, be able to decide to what kinds of beings it belongs, but concerning which it is assumed from the very start that if it can at all be found anywhere, its prime location is most surely 'the human family'? Never before has the question of whether dignity can be limited to humans, or whether humans are indeed endowed with dignity – if there is such a thing at all – been raised so urgently.

Jacques Derrida has provided a memorable example for the mutual importance of both these directions of inquiry. In an investigation of the responsiveness or responsibility of animals, he warned against taking for granted, all too early, human responsiveness or responsibility, which could then be extended, with a critical gesture, to the animal. It may very well be the case that what one generously or all too quickly considers as a human response is just a reaction: a sophisticated, improved, but fundamentally still motoric, programmed or mechanical effect governed by necessity; and that therefore our critique should be applied to 'human dignity' before this concept is itself extended to animals (or other sensitive or non-sensitive, living or non-living beings). 'It is *not just* a matter of asking whether one has the

³ The classic that put this phrase into modern circulation is Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio de hominis dignitate* from 1486: 'On the Dignity of Man' (Pico della Mirandola 1-34).

right to refuse the animal such and such a power [...] It *also* means asking whether what calls itself human has the right rigorously to attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal...' (Derrida, 'And Say the Animal Responded?' 135).

'The Death of the Wolf' (*La Mort du loup*, 1843), a poem by the French army officer and romantic poet Alfred de Vigny, tells the story of a wolf hunt. Its famous closing scene is not only a scene of silence but also one of shame, felt by a human before the mute but speaking gaze of an animal.⁴ Unlike the he-wolf that remains dignified even in the midst of his final agony, and thus becomes the prime example for 'sublime animals' (*sublimes animaux*), man appears as a being unworthy of his 'great name' (*grand nom*), undeserving unless he follows the example of his nonhuman other and is able to hear from the animal's mute gaze the admonishment which the wolf leaves behind for the hunter, and which the poem offers as a final lesson for the reader.

Alas, I thought, despite the pride and name
Of Man we are but feeble, fit for shame.
The way to quit this life and all its ill
You know the secret, sublime animal!
See what of earthly life you can retain,
Silence alone is noble – weakness remains.
O traveller I understand you well,
Your final gaze went to my very soul.
Saying: 'With all your being you must strive
With strength and purpose and with all your thought
To gain that high degree of stoic pride
To which, although a beast I have aspired.
Weeping or praying - all this is in vain.
Shoulder your long and energetic task,
The way that Destiny sees fit to ask,
Then suffer and so die without complaint.'

[*Hélas! ai-je pensé, malgré ce grand nom d'Hommes,
Que j'ai honte de nous, débiles que nous sommes!
Comment on doit quitter la vie et tous ses maux,
C'est vous qui le savez, sublimes animaux!
A voir ce que l'on fut sur terre et ce qu'on laisse,
Seul, le silence est grand; tout le reste est faiblesse.*

⁴ For an English version, see Stan Solomons' translation quoted below (de Vigny 2020). A more literal translation has been offered by Joachim Zemmour (de Vigny 2011). For a classical 19th-century rendering, see Toru Dutt's translation (de Vigny 1880).

— Ah! je t'ai bien compris, sauvage voyageur,
 Et ton dernier regard m'est allé jusqu'au cœur!
 Il disait: 'Si tu peux, fais que ton âme arrive,
 A force de rester studieuse et pensive,
 Jusqu'à ce haut degré de stoïque fierté
 Où, naissant dans les bois, j'ai tout d'abord monté.
 Gémir, pleurer, prier, est également lâche.
 Fais énergiquement ta longue et lourde tâche
 Dans la voie où le Sort a voulu t'appeler,
 Puis, après, comme moi, souffre et meurs sans parler.']

Being also a character in the story he narrates, the speaker of the poem finally blushes with shame. Turning to the wolf, he first addresses the beast, and then even lends him speech, giving him the floor for the rest of the poem. This closing scene of shame is one of human baseness and animal grandeur, according to which the only way man can live worthy of his name (that is, in human dignity) is by hearing the admonishment that comes from the mute gaze of this dying animal. Man must feel ashamed before the wolf, follow his imperative and example, and ultimately choose freedom, which can only be achieved through self-sacrifice and suffering.

Even though de Vigny did not read German, the above passage might still remind us of the peculiar schematism of German classicist aesthetics, of Winckelmann's 'quiet grandeur' (*stille Größe*) as much as Schiller's meditations on dignity and the sublime in his essay 'On Grace and Dignity' (*Über Anmut und Würde*, 1793).⁵ It might also be reminiscent of the starting point of the Schillerian essay 'On the Sublime' (*Über das Erhabene*, 1795-96), the freedom-based anthropological notion that man is man only as long as he remains free, the implication being that freedom can only be sustained if one accepts the inevitable, even by a choice of death, through which man is able to morally surpass his physical limitations: "The morally educated man, and only this one, is entirely free. Either he is superior to nature as power, or he is in harmony with the same. Nothing which it exerts upon him is violence, for before it comes up to him, it has already become *his own act*..." (Schiller, 'On the Sublime' 257, emphasis in the original).

Even more relevant is the British poetic and aesthetic tradition. The poem may invoke Byron's *Childe Harold* (so highly esteemed by de

⁵ 'Just as grace is the expression of a beautiful soul, dignity is the expression of a sublime [*erhabenen*] disposition of mind' (Schiller, 'On Grace and Dignity' 2:370, translation slightly modified).

Vigny as a reader), which, as de Vigny notes,⁶ expressly states that ‘the wolf dies in silence’ (canto 4, stanza 21). It may also remind us of the hideous habitat of wolves and eagles described in Shelley’s *Mont Blanc*, where snow storms and lightning contend in perfect silence. But it may just as well bring to mind the Burkean opposition between the ‘sublime’ wolf (revered with fear) and the ‘beautiful’ dog (despised with love), a divide that seems to prefigure de Vigny’s own contrast between ‘sublime’ and ‘servant’ animals (*sublimes animaux* and *animaux serviles*).⁷

In the form of a more direct allusion, however, de Vigny’s poem refers us to the ancient tradition of Stoic philosophy (‘Stoic pride’, *stoïque fierté*), the principle of ‘living well’ and ‘dying well’, the commitment to the moral disdain for death, of which the Schillerian conception of human freedom appears to be a remote offspring. To confine myself here to just a single branch of this rich tradition, let me go back briefly to Seneca the Younger, especially his *Letters on Ethics* dedicated to Lucilius (*Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, c. 65 AD). First and foremost, one could cite Letter 70 on voluntary death: ‘Our good does not consist merely in living but in living well’, therefore, ‘Whether one dies sooner or later is not the issue, the issue is whether one dies well or badly’ (Seneca 209-10). And in order to live well, which according to this tradition means to stay free, one might need to ‘take violent measures against one’s own life’ (ibid. 211). In defense of a good life, a brave man chooses a good death. One ‘becomes one’s own murderer’ (ibid.), since ‘death, even the most disgusting, is preferable to slavery, even the cleanest slavery’ (ibid. 213). Seneca’s examples in Letter 24, of famous historical persons like Socrates, Mucius Scaevola, Cato, or Scipio Africanus (ibid. 85-87), are hard to forget. Yet, even more memorable are his anecdotes of nameless heroes: of the gladiator who, on his way to the morning spectacle, sticks his head between the spokes of the wagon’s wheel; or the other one who grabs a stick with a sponge used at the latrine to clean the ‘unmentionables’ and stuffs it down his throat, suffocating himself (ibid. 212-13); or the captured Spartan boy (from Letter 77) who decides not to let himself be enslaved, so when he is told to fetch the chamber pot, he dashes his head against the wall with such force that his skull is burst (ibid. 249). As these

⁶ *Le loup sait mourir en silence, écrivait Byron*, quoted by Maurice Tournier in his introduction to the poem (de Vigny, *Les Destinées* 101).

⁷ One might also mention two instances in Hungarian romantic poetry which appear as classical examples within this tradition of representation: János Arany’s narrative poem *Toldi* from 1846 (with its famous scene of a heroic wolf-kill in Canto 5), and Sándor Petőfi’s pair of poems, *The Song of the Dogs* (*A kutyák dala*) and *The Song of the Wolves* (*A farkasok dala*), both from 1847.

examples indicate, coercion in the Stoic tradition can only be overcome if one takes destiny into one's hands. Despite grabbing physical power, however, what is meant here is that we transform what is inevitable into our own will. 'That which you will be compelled to do if you are resistant is not compulsory if you do it willingly', says Letter 61 (ibid. 178). In such moments of determination, one attains an inner moral distance which is like the spatial distance one has from the sufferings of others. The hero 'looks on his own end with such a calm expression that if he looked so on another's, you would think him uncaring' (Letter 30, ibid. 102). This is how he becomes able to obey the imperative of silence – 'bid the groans be silent, and the cries, the shrill vociferations extorted by the lash' (Letter 24, ibid. 88) – and how his calm dignity ultimately embodies the 'Stoic pride' mentioned by the speaker of de Vigny's text.

The wolf in the poem does in fact engage in a fight with the hunting dogs. He does not lend himself over to death with the moral acquiescence described above. And yet, at the end of the fight, he bears the anguish of dying (the lethal wounds caused by the hounds, knives, and bullets) with noble quietness. His final silence, a passing away 'without complaint', or rather, 'without a word' or 'without speech' (*sans parler*), of course does not imply that he refrains from actual speech, for wolves do not speak anyway. Rather, what is missing are the unshaped vocal effects, the formless, inarticulate (if you will, 'analogue') sounds of suffering: the groans, sighs, and painful cries. At an earlier point in the text, at the end of the first section, which tells the story of the hunt, the poem still says that the animal dies without uttering a single sound (howl or cry): *sans jeter un cri*. In this basic typology of silence, we can behold a distinction that might be of some significance, between a silence without words (articulate sounds) and one without inarticulate vocalizations. And although the poem seems to blur this distinction later on, when it juxtaposes them as elements of a single list of sound effects ('Groan, complaint, prayer [*Gémir, pleurer, prier*]'), one mustn't neglect that the wolf – or to be more precise, his gaze, his 'last gaze [*dernier regard*]'), a gaze about to be extinguished as the last in a series of gazes mentioned before: *il nous regard, il nous regard encore*) – attains the ability to speak only through an imaginative gesture of personification. And since, within the realm of the story, the wolf is unable to speak, it is also unable to stay silent, at least as far as silence is identified as speechlessness. Thus, it can hardly serve for humans as an example for how to suffer and die literally 'without a word'. The most it can do is to serve as an example in the figural sense, provided we take the wolf as an emblem inherited from a

baroque tradition, an allegorical figure furnished with human attributes to represent the ideal abstraction of man rather than just another wild beast. The Stoic sublimity of the he-wolf, his dignity of mute suffering, his moral superiority in the moments of physical collapse, are closely related to his anthropomorphic character, his idealized humanity. The two parents and the two pups are staged as a human family. The she-wolf's decision to flee with the pups appears as the sober decision of a 'widow' (*veuve*), a quick resolution founded on a commitment to parental duty and an apprehension of the future burden of bringing up the new generation. Her wise determination seems to echo and affirm the he-wolf's equally sober decision, made earlier, as he plunged into the fight against the overpowering enemy with a full 'awareness' or clear 'judgment' of having no chance to win (*Il s'est jugé perdu*), and thus with a gesture of self-sacrifice that appears as a proof of his deep humanity.

All this seems important to consider, since the humanist narrative that informs this logic of anthropomorphism is precisely the one on the basis of which the distinction between mere killing and sacrifice (or self-sacrifice) is usually drawn. Just like other predators, wolves have their own prey, which they kill. But animals never kill themselves. They always kill another. According to the implicit humanist argument, only man is able not to kill another for his own survival, but to sacrifice himself for another, or, which is the same, to sacrifice another for yet another other, for example, by ascetically – that is, self-sacrificially – depriving himself of the other he captured and giving it to another with a gesture of sacrificial offering (as in an act of immolation).⁸ The humanist notion which humanizes the wolf (for the sake of setting the animal as an example before the human who has become unworthy of his name) never in fact asks the question of where mere killing ends and where sacrifice as a symbolic act of killing begins, nor does it ask whether the two can at all be separated, whether there is any transition from the one to the other, or whether we can conceive of the one as a pure starting point, namely, of killing as a mere act of violence, devoid of all symbolization, gesticulation, theatricality, or demonstrative function. Likewise, the humanist mindset must also evade the question of where the struggle for the other diverges from the struggle for one's own life, that is, where self-sacrifice parts with self-preservation.

In the first section of the poem, within the description of an earlier scene of silence (a silence with wholly different motivations), we

⁸ For the figure of the wolf as a predator able to kill but unable to sacrifice other animals, see Aesop's fable 'The Lamb and The Wolf' (Aesop 2000).

are informed that the wolf family (two adults and two pups) spend their days together in perfect quietness, suspicious of the threatful proximity of humans (a never quite sleeping race). This silence is one of mute and noiseless hiding, a silence of camouflage rather than a silence of dignity 'without words'. What the wolves withhold are inarticulate sounds, whether produced by the mouth (like howling or growling) or by other parts of the body (like making noises by movement):

Dancing beneath the moon, amid the heather.
And they were like the hounds that show their joy,
Greeting their master with a wondrous noise.
And they were like; like also was the dance
Save that the cubs played all in silence,
Knowing full well that near and sleeping slow,
Secure inside his house was man their foe.

*[Qui dansaient sous la lune au milieu des bruyères,
Comme font chaque jour, à grand bruit sous nos yeux,
Quand le maître revient, les lévriers joyeux.
Leur forme était semblable et semblable la danse ;
Mais les enfants du Loup se jouaient en silence,
Sachant bien qu'à deux pas, ne dormant qu'à demi,
Se couche dans ses murs l'homme leur ennemi.]*

The logic of this silence crucially differs from that of the silence at the closure of the text. It is not associated with any kind of anthropomorphic sobriety or heroism. Rather, it is governed simply by the survival instinct of hiding. In this passage, the emphasis does not seem to fall on the adults, but on the instinctual muteness of the playing pups. This mute play, precisely because of its muteness, cannot be entirely self-forgetful, as it takes place in the proximity of a latent lethal threat, the spectral presence of an enemy never fully asleep.

With regard to the image of hiding or self-concealment, the above scene of mute silence appears in fact as the animal counterpart of the silence shown by the hunters themselves in the opening scene, which depicts their tactics of stalking:

Silent we walked amid the dewy grass,
Amid dense briars and the vaulting heather
Until beneath some moorland conifers
We saw great gashes, marks of gripping claws
Made by the wandering wolves we tracked.
We listened, holding back our breath,
Stopped in mid-stride.

[*Nous marchions, sans parler, dans l'humide gazon,
Dans la bruyère épaisse et dans les hautes brandes,
Lorsque, sous des sapins pareils à ceux des landes,
Nous avons aperçu les grands ongles marqués
Par les loups voyageurs que nous avons traqués.
Nous avons écouté, retenant notre haleine
Et le pas suspendu.*]

This silence is not simply a state of quietude, since the hunters do not just withhold their breath and their steps; they also refrain from speech. At the point where the English translation speaks of silence, the French original uses the expression *sans parler* ('without speech'), just as it will at the very end of the poem. But unlike that final occurrence, speechlessness here is not yet a synonym for deep humanity, invincible intellectual freedom, or moral dignity. Rather, it signals a primordial logic of predation, one based upon the tactical behavior of stalking and stealth. In this initial scene of silence, the hunters proceed carefully in quiet, not only suspending their talk but occasionally stopping and freezing their movements as well. In such moments, silence becomes stillness in both the audial and visual sense of the term. Stillness appears here as a frozen state of attention, a state of tension or suspense, with suspended words and steps alike. The hunters do not just suspend their speech for the sake of listening. They also halt their steps for the sake of minute detection, trying to 'track' the 'marks', as the rhyming French words *marqués/traqués* emphatically suggest. It seems as if listening is dependent upon total quietness (a prohibition to produce any auditory effect), just as watching or reading requires a state of perfect motionlessness (a prohibition on any visual signal). Here everything depends on who can discern the other first, whether it is the hunter catching sight of the prey, or vice versa. If man himself appears here as a wolf and even outdoes the wolf in some regards, this is not because he surpasses the wolf's noble grandeur by an even nobler greatness, but because he himself occupies the apex position of the wolf, turning the iconic predator of the wilderness into his own prey. The ending of the poem attempts to erase or overwrite this initial scene of speechlessness as stalking by an allegory of speechlessness as dignity, in which dignity is conceived as something fundamentally human. The only question raised in the final lines is whether animals could also be deemed free beings, capable of morality and self-sacrifice, and thus endowed with dignity. What is not asked, however, is whether man has ever left behind the primordial behavior of predatory stillness, a silence lacking any element of dignity, which binds him essentially to

the wilderness. The poem seems to point out this behavior at the start, even though it appears to forget about it later on.

This is what two centuries earlier in the 1651 English version of his treatise on the citizen, *De Cive* (originally published in Latin in 1642), Thomas Hobbes called 'War', with reference to the natural state preceding sovereignty, a natural realm of 'Deceit and Violence' (Hobbes, *De Cive* 24). Unlike the central element in Roman mythology, which de Vigny's text does not forget to mention, and which figured the founders of Rome as human ancestors who had been nourished by a she-wolf (thus representing the wolf as a vital source of human civilization), Hobbes repositioned the wolf as the icon for the permanent fight that preceded civilized life, figuring it more like Mars' beast and the symbol of war, in accordance with the ancient wisdom of *homo homini lupus est* (*Man to Man is an arrant Wolfe*, *ibid.*). Having left military service as a lieutenant in 1827, de Vigny was most certainly well acquainted with warfare tactics. Rather than picturing imminent danger in the figure of the wolf, however, he tends to feature it, in his poetry, as a human factor: a menacing woman ('her wise coldness [*sa froideur savante*]', in the person of Delilah, *The Wrath of Samson*), the man of modern technology (the railway as a means of modern transportation traversing time and space, with passengers using 'a silent and cold calculation [*un calcul silencieux et froid*]' in order to expel all 'hazard [*hasard*]' from the world, *The Shepherd's Hut*), or a mortal sage (who responds with 'cold silence [*froid silence*]' to the eternal quietness of God, *The Flute*).

In the above cited passage of his book on the citizen, Hobbes also claims that individuals living in the city live in peace, while the cities themselves are in a state of war with each other. In the *Leviathan* (published in 1651, like the English version of *De Cive*), Hobbes investigates the emergence of these divergent relations. He shows how the war-ridden 'naturall condition', which is dominated by the will to triumph by 'force, or wiles' and the constant imminence of danger, and which he therefore describes as a state of 'diffidence of one another' (Hobbes, *Leviathan* 87-88), is supplanted by a state that establishes a relative confidence between individuals by providing security at least within the walls of the city. For Hobbes, the initial state of 'continuall feare' is replaced by another kind of fear, a fear of the sovereign's punishment, and this is what brings peace within the city. The sovereign is a 'power able to over-awe them all', so 'during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man', is in fact a state of 'continuall feare, and danger of

violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short' (*Leviathan* 88-89).

In view of these considerations, the poetic image of the wolf turns out to be greatly ambivalent, for while on the one hand it appears as the wild counterpoint to civilized society (the emblem of man's early 'brutish' life under natural conditions), on the other hand it also figures as a feeder of Remus and Romulus and thus an ultimate source of nourishment for human civilization. In the closure of the poem – if only allegorically – the wolf does not simply represent the glimmering past of mankind, but also the future ideal. This duplicity reaches its peak in the peculiar contrast between wolves and dogs. For when the poem mentions how 'servant animals' have made a 'city pact' (*pacte des villes*) with man,⁹ gaining defense for their renunciation of freedom, the envisioned social paradigm that is supposed to grant peace and security is patterned precisely after the wolf pack, with the alpha male as sovereign and his subordinates as civil subjects.

To be sure, de Vigny's poem does not even mention dignity. It remains totally silent about it. And still, in a series of scenes that are precisely scenes of silence, the poem can be read as a mute staging of both dignity and its critique. Silence appears as a figure for human dignity (or even animal dignity), but it also appears as a figure for warfare tactics of camouflage (whether in the service of defense or attack), and to that extent, it appears as something base and brutish. This wavering of silence between human dignity and tactical camouflage contaminates both the image of the wolf (as a vital source and a menace to humanity) and the image of the human (as violent predator and moral agent). Thus, much of the import of reading de Vigny's poem depends on whether one reads it, in the customary way, from beginning to end, or rather attempts to read it against the grain, as we have just tried to do, from its ending scene to its opening lines. Not that one could ever decide where to start reading a poem; but perhaps this very hesitation is an echo of the wavering we have just witnessed.

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⁹ De Vigny's text is prosaically impassionate in describing the pact as one of voluntary servitude, without any hint of coercion (unless, of course, one takes human agency itself as a coercive instrument): 'the city pact / Which man made with the servant animals' (*le pacte de villes / Que l'homme a fait avec les animaux serviles*).

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world, to make it inaudible.

The industry of film, as presented in the novel Beautiful Ruins, tends to have more and more in common with voyeurism, responsiveness to curious gaze superseding the barrier of intimacy and the overall desire of the public to see something 'unseen'. The influence of a new lifestyle made in Hollywood, the paparazzi style that permeated more strata of society has got into our daily life. Silence belongs to other ages. Silence could show man the forgotten path to himself. Silence does not find any roots now. Silence cannot have any longer the function of reconnection. People tend to disconnect more easily from themselves and from their fellow beings; they are used to different stimuli. The noise of the world is also a stimulus. Without it, everything seems life-less. Inflation of visibility and noise are intrinsically related.

Key-words: American fiction, ruins, noise, silence, beauty, the visible and the invisible, Hollywood industry, the poetics of the desire, spectacle, commodity

Silence and 'l'attimo che dura per sempre'. The Ruins.

The novel *Beautiful Ruins* (2012) by Jess Walter combines the satirical vision on Hollywood industry, with haunting nostalgia of the years before the influence of a new lifestyle 'made in Hollywood' that permeated more strata of society and got into our daily life.

Beautiful Ruins contrasts two life styles and two epochs which are superbly intertwined by the mastery of the author: on one hand the sixties, starting with the movie megaproduction *Cleopatra*, on the other hand the aftermath of *Cleopatra*, stretching its effects over 50 years of film industry, as a co-habitation between the parasite culture of paparazzi and genuine film culture.

Dee Moray is a cameo appearance in the *Cleopatra* megaproduction. She has a love story with Richard Burton, a couple of months before Richard and Elizabeth Taylor fall in love with each other.

Guided by Pasquale Tursi, the owner of the pensione where she was sent as part of a plot to keep her far from Richard Burton, with whom she is infatuated, the tall blonde actress Dee Moray discovers, in a land of breath-taking beauty near Porto Vergogna, some cave paintings made by a German soldier during the war.

”For a thousand years, armies used these points to look out over the sea; there were so many ruins up here Pasquale hardly noticed them anymore. Sometimes the rubble of these old garrisons gave him a dull sadness. To think that this was all that was left of an empire; what

mark could a man like him ever leave? A beach? A cliff-side tennis court? (...) Dee turned, took a few steps, and looked out the gun turret, to the sea below. Then she turned back to the paintings. 'It's amazing, Pasquale. Thank you.' She covered her mouth, as if about to cry, and then she turned to him. 'Imagine being this artist, creating masterpieces up here . . . that no one will ever see. I think it's kind of sad.' She returned to the painted wall. Pasquale lit another match, handed it to her, and she made her way down the wall again . . ."²

Inside the cave, knowing that her life might have come to an end prematurely (as her fatal diagnosis, told by Liz Taylor's doctor, was part of the narrative to disguise her pregnancy, a plan concocted by Michael Deane, whose mission was to rescue the film budget using whatever means), Dee Moray has the revelation of unseen beauty. Somebody from the opposite army, a soldier, had used his art to prolong time ("l'attimo che dura per sempre"), to express his tenderness for his sweetheart at his home and to conquer his fear in front of death.

This is a moment of contemplating beauty in perfect silence, surrounded by the protective black veil of cave darkness. The landscape is full of ruins. The place between Porto Vergogna and Porto Venere was a strategic one, used as observation post. Ruins are present to recall past, to witness change but also to evoke beauty, a continuity in beauty with other generations. The ruins near Porto Vergogna (a hamlet whose last fisherman was to die about ten years after the 1962 events) are the silent speaker and witness of Roman epoch and succeeding historical strata. Their beauty means acknowledging the past. The past is to give the best lesson to the most present self, the past cannot be absorbed in a noise-producing way of living, a way in which man is disconnected from his/her own roots. The past can speak to our innermost being, if we are connected with it and not disconnected from it.

By contrast, Claire Silver, Deane's assistant, forced to live in a very contemporary atmosphere, with no escape, challenged by the signal of new messages, mails, alerts, would have liked to use art films as an outlet and as a bridge to the past. She even listens to the sounds of sprinkles in the morning, as a way to transcend ordinary noise and connect to a more natural sounding. She works in a Hollywood studio. *Breakfast at Tiffany* is a cherished memory for Claire, a film she happened to see together with her father, as a little girl, but at the same time the initiator of trauma. Her father unexpectedly divorced. His

² Jess Walter, *Beautiful Ruins: A Novel*, N. p. Kindle edition, chapter 6 *The Cave Paintings*

nostalgia was a symptom of something deeper, impossible to figure out. In a bitter-sweet joke she tells herself, it is Holly Golightly the one who stole her father away. Therefore, past can reveal even the secrets of the present, but past can be sampled only in silence.

Claire Silver does not work in film business, as she expected, but in *buzz business*, as her famous boss, Michael Deane, tells her.

It is silence that accompanies the moment when the first kiss between Dee and Pasquale could have happened. It is a kiss that had to wait for fifty years to happen. It is the opposite of Hollywood movies, glorifying love through the kiss of the protagonists. Dee is touched by a strange proximity and affinity with the anonymous painter. It does not matter now on whose side of war he must have been. His legacy is universal, his longing for love is stronger than the war's privations. It only needs a connection, a deep gaze into the eyes of the portraits and his message becomes stronger than the span of decades and than the natural erosion of the landscape.

Disclosure of sensational deeds had always been a big part of the media show. However, in 1962 within the shootings of the mega-production *Cleopatra*, V.I.P. hunting started to become a smaller industry within the bigger industry, powering new circuits and directing and diverting cash-flows by exploiting the public's need to know more, to peep into the 'real' life, behind the curtains, and to treat the stars like idols, although the public claimed they only wanted the proof that stars are as 'real' as everybody else. Publicity instead of talent started to become the main factor influencing celebrity quota. Sometimes even the talent, like in Richard Burton's case, is not enough to save a film from being a disaster. With a nudge from the agents of change, like Michael Deane, with outbursts of emotions and whims of the main actors, the parasite culture of paparazzi eroded the big movie culture while it helped it survive. The journalists who took risks in finding more about film stars even felt 'rewarded' by generating new centers of gravitation for public attention.

The onset of the novel is in Porto Vergogna, Italy, in April 1962.

"The dying actress arrived in his village the only way one could come directly—in a boat that motored into the cove, lurched past the rock jetty, and bumped against the end of the pier. She wavered a moment in the boat's stern, then extended a slender hand to grip the mahogany railing; with the other, she pressed a wide-brimmed hat against her head. All around her, shards of sunlight broke on the flickering waves. Twenty meters away, Pasquale Tursi watched the arrival of the woman as if in a dream. Or rather, he would think later, a dream's opposite: a burst of clarity after a lifetime of sleep. Pasquale

straightened and stopped what he was doing, what he was usually doing that spring, trying to construct a beach below his family's empty pensione."³

Gaze and noise. Inflated voyeurism of 'made in Hollywood' culture

"The trompe l'oeil removes a dimension from real space, and this accounts for its seduction. Pornography by contrast adds a dimension to the space of sex, it makes the latter more real than the real - and this accounts for its absence of seduction. (...)

Consequent to the anatomical zoom, the dimension of the real is abolished, the distance implied by the gaze gives way to an instantaneous, exacerbated representation, that of sex in its pure state, stripped not just of all seduction, but of its image's very potentiality. Sex so close that it merges with its own representation : the end of perspectival space, and therefore, that of the imaginary and of phantasy - end of the scene, end of an illusion ."⁴

The industry of film, as presented in the novel *Beautiful Ruins*, by Jess Walter, (half of the action happens in 2006, the other half in 1962, with flashbacks and connecting points in between, war is also covered in a *mise en abyme* novel written by Alvin Bender), tends to have more and more in common with voyeurism, responsiveness to curious gaze superseding the barrier of intimacy and the overall desire of the public to see something 'unseen'. But this unseen aspect has nothing in common with the mystery of discovering a new being. It is only an inflation of visibility. It means living to its last consequences the illusion of seeing more, seeing what is taboo, seeing what was not allowed to see in TV and in films in other ages, for example during the sixties.

As it is known also from the history of film, not only from *Beautiful Ruins*, in 1962 in Italy the mega-production *Cleopatra* was shot. The film was one of the most devouring in terms of budget in the history of Hollywood. The main character of the book, Dee Moray, alias Debra Moore has an episodic appearance in the film. She is the rival of Liz Taylor. Rival in the sense that she is going to be replaced by Elizabeth in Richard Burton`s heart. However, the mysterious Dee, a

³ Jess Walter, *Beautiful Ruins: A Novel*, N. p. Kindle edition, chapter 1 *The Dying Actress*

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, transl. Brian Singer, New World Perspectives, Montreal, 2001, p. 17.

theatre actress rather than a diva type of femininity, will carry Burton`s child, refusing to have an abortion. A whole trama develops around her. She is being sent to Porto Vergogna, a fishermen`s hamlet in the region Cinque Terre, a place so world-forgotten that nobody could find it even on a map. The owner of the pensione in this village, the young dreamer Pasquale Tursi, falls in love with the American starlet who was not told about her pregnancy, when consulted. She was told that she suffered from stomach cancer.

On the other hand, some years after 2006 the action is in a film studio where Michael Deane, alias the Dean of Hollywood, is open to presentations of new film ideas which he auditions and evaluates. Actually, his assistant, Claire Silver, realizes what a fail of a career she has chosen, animated by her desire to find some depths about films, in an epoch when nobody reads and nobody makes films, because films don't sell. Reality-shows have taken the place of the films, that are very rare. Who would invest in a film nowadays? Art films are out of question, but big productions, big ideas might yet be on the role. Friday is the day of the Pitch. Claire has even made a strange deal with the Fate, in her mind, either to encounter the idea of a real film among these pitches, all selling commercial ideas for films, or to quit her job. The unexpected shall happen that very Friday, through the visit of Pasquale Tursi like an old Don Quijote 50 years after he had met his Dulcineea, alias Dee Moray.

On the other hand, Michael Deane is a man who always wanted to stream along the flow and not against it. Even in 1962 he had the intuition that the *Cleopatra* film would make up for it budgetary losses by selling to paparazzi the love story between Burton and Taylor. Taylor`s husband at the time, Fischer, was also coming to Rome trying to save his marriage to Elizabeth Taylor. After all, Liz had been the one to separate him from his wife at the time, Debbie Reynolds.

Not knowing that Michael is a wolf in sheep`s coat, Burton and Taylor hire him even to get rid of the paparazzi and scandal press. The dimension of antidivorce movement in Italy at the time sets even a steamier story. As we know from the history of film, such movements even stirred mass reactions like boycotts for truly artistic films, like the ones directed by Roberto Rossellini, with Ingrid Bergman as the leading actress, who was divorcing her Swedish husband to follow her heart, in love with Rossellini. Let us not forget that Rossellini was the main mentor, through his innovations, of a new generation of French cinema directors. Bergman-Rossellini story was caught it drama as well, but it was intertwined with sacrifices for art`s sake and with writing a portion of art film history. *Cleopatra* was neither a commercial success nor an

art film.

Jess Walter knows how to balance well the past and the present, with their traces and tribulations. One does not see only the exoticism of Italy, but also its dark side. Individual freedom is sacred in U. S. A, while Italy is torn between the defense of the individual rights and extremist interpretations of religious dogmas, annulling the act the core of Christian credo, namely annulling the free will. There is even a darker side in the attachment of people to forgotten harming practices and superstitions. The same people cannot regard frontally the change brought by progress, they use all their means to prevent it from taking place. Bigger entrepreneurs use brutal force to impose mafia protection fees.

Pasquale`s mother dies by having purposefully eaten bread made with caustic soda. It is a suicide in disguise under the banality of eating the bread of all days, with tragic consequences; she is bored with life and depressed after losing her husband. It is strange how a religious woman comes to distort the sacred meaning of everyday bread, maybe as a rebellion against the fact that God had not helped her more, she lost her sons in the war. She takes Valeria as an accomplice, Valeria being also an old woman, Pasquale`s aunt, who preserves strange traditions and superstitions. Valeria will have to live up with the remorse of participating in this hidden suicide. She will utter a curse when crossing paths with Richard Burton, who came to rescue Dee, not knowing who he is and not caring.

”I will never forget the photo I pulled out of that envelope. It was a work of art. Two people in tight clench. And not any two people. Dick Burton and Liz Taylor. Not Antony and Cleopatra in a publicity shot. Liz and Dick lip-locked on a patio at the Grand Hotel in Rome. Tongues spelunking each other`s mouths. This was disaster. They were both married. The studio was still dealing with the shit publicity from Liz breaking up the marriage of Debbie and Eddie. Now Liz is getting beefed by the greatest stage actor of his generation? And a top-notch cocksman to boot? What about Eddie Fisher`s little kids? And Burton`s family? His poor Welsh rotters with their coal-stained eyes crying about their lost daddy? The pub would kill the movie. Kill the studio. (...)

An A-bomb couldn`t keep Dick and Liz apart. And no wonder. This was the greatest Hollywood romance in history. Not just some set-screw. Love. All those cute couples now with their con-joined names? Pale imitations. Mere children. Dick and Liz were gods. Pure talent and charisma and like gods they were terrible together. Awful. A gorgeous nightmare. Drunk and narcissistic and cruel to everyone around them. If only the movie had the drama of these two. They`d

film a scene as flat as paper and as soon as the cameras cut Burton would make some wry comment and she'd hiss something back and she'd storm off and he'd chase her back to the hotel and the hotel staff would report these ungodly sounds of breaking glass and yelling and balling and you couldn't tell the fighting from the fucking with those two. Empty booze decanters flying over hotel balconies. Every day a car wreck. A ten-car pileup. And that's when it came to me. I call it the moment of my birth. Saints call it epiphany. Billionaires call it brainstorm. Artists call it muse.

For me it was when I understood what separated me from other people. A thing I'd always been able to see but never entirely understood. Divination of true nature. Of motivation. Of desirous hearts. I saw the whole world in a flash and I recognized it at once: We want what we want. Dick wanted Liz. Liz wanted Dick. And we want car wrecks. We say we don't. But we love them. To look is to love. A thousand people drive past the statue of David. Two hundred look. A thousand people drive past a car wreck. A thousand look. I suppose it is cliché now⁵

The reign of visibility goes along, in contemporary film culture, with the increase of noise. Too much visibility appears as an alternative to stuff the noise of the world, to make it inaudible. Silence belongs to other ages. Silence could show the man the forgotten path to himself. Silence does not find any roots now. Silence cannot have any longer the function of *reconnection*. People tend to disconnect or easily from themselves and from their fellow beings, they are used to different stimuli. The noise of the world is also a stimulus. Without it, everything seems life-less. Noise has become a part of people's everyday life, they have adapted to noise. It is impossible to go back on track, to find what used to be there before the noise. The character who has an unusual path in this regard is Dee and Burton's son, Pat, a musician in his late thirties. Pat and Lydia are lovers, Lydia is the one who can restore unity to 'the heap of broken images', as T. S. Eliot would call it. Lydia is writing a play where she expresses her doubts and her metaphysical questions in front of the world and of nothingness, her way of coping with loss, with taking care of the elders, with not understanding the pattern of human relationship and her way of enveloping with creativity her most wounded self.

The generalized noise is what keeps people distracted from thinking or from introspection. They prefer the visual imagery. But this

⁵ Jess Walter, *Beautiful Ruins*. N. P. Kindle edition, chapter 15. (The rejected First Chapter of Michael Deane's Memoir)

visual imagery of the world presents itself as a continuous bargain between demand and offer. Between desire and the satisfaction of reaching the desire.

Everybody is caught in the circuit of presenting themselves for a pitch. The adrenaline rush while preparing your pitch or while being evaluated is what constitutes now the new social circle. But the film industry has other circuits revealed in the novel, unknown to the amateurs.

Sometimes it is easier to pay a price only to get rid of a brilliant film idea, as it is the case of the encounter between Deane and Shane Wheeler with his idea of a film about Donner expedition and finally get rid of a burdening contract, only to sell the film again to the rivals of your former film studio owners and to sell it for a bigger sum. There is no room for art in this whole circuit. As for reading, Claire is hired to write reading notes because she is talented at this. She can make her own boss, Deane, give the impression to others that not only did he read the whole lump of manuscripts and future scripts, but that he did it with passion, immersed in reading, although this is nothing but a bluff. But in Hollywood this kind of bluffing is the secret substance of the magic world of appearances.

Shane Wheeler and Claire could have surrendered to a love story, as they are caught up together by unexpected events. Shane becomes ad-hoc Pasquale's translator. As his name suggests, he is partially belonging to the world of noise and partially to the world of silence, he used to be a promising literary talent. It is up to him what choice he will take. While having a flirty sweet encounter with Claire in his hotel room, we can see his part prone to art. But at the end of the novel, the wheel turns again and Shane finds himself the Hollywood cash-producing circuit as a promising script writer. His drive for success means that his trading side is winning, not his artistic side. Claire's current boyfriend, Daryl, is a peep-show go-er.

In Baudrillard's terms, seduction is about the world of appearances and it is never about the truth. (Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 132) On the contrary, seduction must be devoid of truth. Truth and seduction are incompatible, these two concepts can never be on the same side. The game of seduction is the game of visibility. There is no beyond in it, there is nothing beyond the surface.

In this game, Dee Moray is the one who refuses to play on the side of seduction. That is why she will bear the consequences, she will not belong to the world of Richard Burton, her love, and will not have the chance to get his attention. She will develop a career in theatre, full of satisfaction for sharing this art with younger generations, but apart

from spotlights. Nostalgically, she will see a film with Burton, now and then, after many years, since at the beginning she could not do that, she was too emotionally triggered.

The most dramatic moment of her life, after the anger caused by Burton who let her wait in vain, ghosting her and then trying to reconnect with her, involving Pasquale and Dean in this affair, will be the death of her husband, Alvin, whom she had met in the pensione of the hamlet Porto Vergogna. Her husband died in car crash, after having drunk too many glasses of whiskey. Her son, Pat Bender, inherits his biological father`s talent for acting. He is involved in a love story with a young intelligent girl, Lydia, who will portray him as his own character, as his own role, in an inquisitive play written by her.

Femininity appears in the novel in a complex relationship with the glossy atmosphere and with the deep quests for identity.

On one hand, we have Dee. She is the one who draws men to her, she is the one who prefers a low-key existence but who exudes charm like no other. On the other hand, she is eclipsed by Liz Taylor since Dee has a smaller role in the mega-production, she is intelligent rather than whimsical and temperamental and she loses the man she had loved all her youth because she will no longer belong to that world of glamour.

But Dee Moray has the joys and the anxieties of motherhood and widowhood; she comes to a deeper understanding of life. Pasquale`s searching for her as for his lost love, reduplicating the position she had in front of Richard Burton (the powerless in the couple, completely infatuated) gives her a chance to live her last days like a queen, spoiled with the affection of man who crossed the ocean to be with her. The episode in Italy had made Pasquale man up, he stepped into his role of the father, assuming the relationship and the child he had with Amedea from Florence. Amedea died in her old age and now Pasquale, in his seventies, supported by his own son and by his grandsons, is free to search for his youth love.

Dee is a woman who does not try to regain the power in relationship, as Liz Taylor must have done. Liz was supported by the world of appearances as a growing industry. Dee has preferred to play her femininity out, keeping herself apart from the world of noise and of the kaleidoscope of glossy images. Dee retreats in a special landscape where she is connected with nature and she builds a new house there.

As Baudrillard said, the order of production is the realm of masculinity. Femininity is endowed with the play, with what is transgressive, femininity is not soluble in power. Femininity has a more powerful effect outside the game of clear-cut ownership of the power. Femininity wins without seizing the power.

”The feminine knows neither equivalence nor value: it is, therefore, not soluble in power. It is not even subversive, it is reversible. Power, on the other hand, is soluble in the reversibility of the feminine. If the "facts" cannot decide whether it was the masculine or feminine that was dominant throughout the ages(once again, the thesis of women's oppression is based on a caricatural phallocratic myth), by contrast, it remains clear that in matters of sexuality, the reversible form prevails over the linear form. The excluded form prevails, secretly, over the dominant form. The seductive form prevails over the productive form.”⁶

In his essay on light, Leonardo Amoroso analyses the expression *lucus a (non) lucendo* as employed by Heidegger. Total clarity of light, therefore of the act of seeing, seems to be something impossible. There is no warranty, there is nothing that can grant man the gift of full visibility. Man stands in a certain rapport with obscurity, and this means already his existence is a historical existence.”*Insa esenta omului astfel inteleasa este o locuire, o adapostire in Lichtung –ul fiintei.*”⁷ Silence and the light that cannot manifest without darkness are interrelated, as Dana Cipău suggests, interpreting also Amoroso`s essay from the point of view of the poetic of silence. (*Études*, p. 146).

This fact underlines that the domain of utmost visibility is in fact an illusion. The novel *Beautiful ruins* contrast a life of the past, in Italy 1962 (including also earlier war reference in a war-novel, unfinished, attempted by Alvin Bender while he stays at a pensione in Porto Vergogna, Italy, in a fabulous place named Cinque Terre), when the act of seeing was not deprived of its mystery, and a nowadays Hollywood world, when voyeurism is omnipresent even in film industry, appearance, irrespectively gaze are now part of an economical circuit, according to the principles of free market. No one dares to make new films, since not only art film is something forgotten, but even other projects cannot keep up with the tendencies of the public to watch reality shows, to cross the barrier of intimacy and to actually violate the order of things.

All this gaze extended to full discrepancy is actually nothing but the domain of the utmost illusion promising the utmost fulfilling and the utmost extinguishing of the desire.

What can happen in this world, what are the characters receptive

⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, transl. Brian Singer, New World Perspectives, Montreal, 2001, pp.28-29.

⁷ Leonardo Amoroso, p. 129.

to? How will they come to term with the past, live with their own past?

Actually, in the moment in which we can have a glimpse into the characters past, the novel receives a new dimension. The present is flat, is saturated with sensations and with sampling the moment. But all the people of the present have in them a nostalgia for a moment when things were different, they could do different things.

The protagonists of the novel *Beautiful Ruins* by Jess Walter have their lives more and more integrated into the society in which the image has become the commodity (Debord), it is part of a bigger narrative which hides the feeling of alienation that it purports. The image is introduced in the bona fide circulation of capital. (in Guy Debord`s terms). This is not necessarily something bad per se, neither is good. It is just a tendency of contemporary world.

Will nostalgia keep it in the place? Unlike the things that are part of the film industry, nostalgia is not a capital. Nostalgia is the resistance to the economic capital seizing the world of images.

The book reveals most unexpected connections between the excess of sight and its reverso, the silence. The excess of sight is close to a very close image, so close that it is impossible to tell what will come out of it.

The main promoter of this new type is the character of the novel, Michael Dean. While Shane Wheeler is the true *raisonneur* of the book, Deane is the one having in his hands all the strings of the puppets. He is not some shadow eminence. On the contrary, he is far from that . He discovers his purpose in life when he manages to read the desires of all others. The real desires. The desires behind the desires. The desires that some men do not have the courage to pronounce. Actually, we, people in general, have our desires camouflaged. Dream is one of the ways to camouflage the desires so well that the language in which they are expressed is not the language of everyday speech, but the language of symbols. The language of everyday speech can be missing but the symbols in a new interaction are not missing.

What is Mike`s talent cannot be called intuition, because it is a whole philosophy of desire, in the sense of fulfilling other people`s real desires. It is the philosophy to be ahead of time instead behind it, to focus on the future instead of to focus on the past. Desire- this philosophy makes him feel useful, as of helping people reach their own desire. The limit between what he is doing, what is manipulation, even staging and what is hazardously happening is blurred. Deane can adapt his script, his narrative so as to engulf hazard *coups* as well. Deane does not care about the moral consequences, not because he is an unscrupulous man but because this is the direction of the future, the

liberation from any type of constraints. Deane`s coup that brought him money and could have brought even more was a film with zombie and a reality show entitled *Hookbook*.

”L’attimo, yes?” He looks at Shane for help. “L’attimo che dura per sempre.” “The moment that lasts forever,” Shane says quietly. “Yes,” Pasquale says, and nods. “Forever.” Claire feels pinched by those words in such close proximity, moment and forever. Not exactly KFC and Hookbook. She suddenly feels angry—at her silly ambition and romanticism, at her taste in men, at the loopy Sci-entologists, at her father for watching that stupid movie and then leaving, at herself for coming back to the office—at herself because she keeps hoping for better. (...) And he says to the man, in slow Italian, “Questo è realmente accaduto? Non in un film?” Pasquale nods. “Sì. Sono qui per trovarla.” “Yeah, this really happened,” Shane tells Claire. He turns back to Pasquale. “Non l’ha più vista da allora?” Pasquale shakes his head no, and Shane turns back to Claire again. “He hasn’t seen this actress in almost fifty years. He came to find her.” (...)The Italian looks from Claire to Shane and back again. “Dee Moray,” he says. And Claire feels a tug in her chest, some deeper shift, a cracking of her hard-earned cynicism, of this anxious tension she’s been fighting. The actress’s name means nothing to her, but the old guy seems utterly changed by saying it aloud, as if he hasn’t said the name in years. Something about the name affects her, too—a crush of romantic recognition, those words, moment and forever—as if she can feel fifty years of longing in that one name, fifty years of an ache that lies dormant in her, too, maybe lies dormant in everyone until it’s cracked open like this—and so weighted is this moment she has to look to the ground or else feel the tears burn her own eyes, and at that moment Claire glances at Shane, and sees that he must feel it, too, the name hanging in the air for just a moment . . . among the three of them . . . and then floating to the floor like a falling leaf, the Italian watching it settle, Claire guessing, hoping, praying the old Italian will say the name once again, more quietly this time—to underline its importance, the way it’s so often done in scripts—but he doesn’t do this. He just stares at the floor, where the name has fallen, and it occurs to Claire Silver that she’s seen too goddamn many movies.”⁸

Dee, Pat, Lydia, Alvin are the characters who genuinely help the others see themselves in a real light. They achieve this by keeping intact the devotion to their art and by placing the act of giving, of sharing above

⁸ Jess Walter, *Beautiful Ruins*, N. P. Kindle edition, chapter 2 The Last Pitch.

the act of mindlessly consuming images with their saturation of visibility. Pasquale is also a man aligned with his mission of assuming fatherhood. The winners are those who did not accept to sell their nostalgia, or turn it into a commodity. Silence, not success, is their path to feel connected to themselves, to their fellow beings and to the past.

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The Silent Christ and the Gift of Freedom – in the Bible and Literature

Florin Toader Tomoioagă¹

Abstract

The present study starts from what seems to be a striking biblical contradiction: although Jesus Christ is recognised by the Christian theology as being the incarnate Logos of God, He is, also, the silent Christ. The Silence and the Word go together in literary and theological contexts. Starting from a series of biblical and cultural sequences that depict the silence of Christ, we tried to prove that this silence can be deceptive: it is not an absence, a negation of the dialogue. On the contrary, it has its own eloquence that upholds the enhancement and the protection of the human freedom. The purpose of this article is to explore this apparent contradiction between the divine Logos and silence, in other words, between the silent Christ and the Logos-Christ. Thus, the three sections of the study are dedicated to the review of the relationship among silence, metamorphosis and forgiveness from the perspective of human liberty.

Key words: *Christ's silence, human freedom, the Logos, Truth.*

Introduction

One of the most striking biblical paradoxes consists in the fact that, although Jesus of Nazareth is identified by Christian theology with the divine Logos incarnate, His earthly life is marked by moments of dense, highly symbolical silence. By definition, the *Logos* is the Word of the Father; He is the divine Verb „spoken” by the Father, as in the St. Augustine’s analogy between the Trinity and the human mind. Jesus Christ is the “Word which proceeded from silence” (Ignatius of Antioch,

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

118). Despite this, the very Logos remains sometimes silent, unuttered, unspoken. There is the almost complete silence of His childhood; there is the eloquent silence of Jesus in front of the accusers of a woman caught in adultery; the (apparently) unintentional silence in front of Pilate raising the question of truth; and, among other moments, the silent glance addressed to Peter when he denied Jesus. Therefore, is there a contradiction between the divine Logos and silence, between His very essence of being a revelation of the Father and the hiddenness presupposed by His silence?

The purpose of this article is to explore this apparent contradiction between the divine Logos and silence, in other words, between the silent Christ and the Logos-Christ. The frame of this interpretation is represented by those biblical accounts already mentioned above, when Christ remained silent, but, as well, by their cultural echoes, in novels like Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and Shusaku Endo's *Silence*. We will get over the issue of His silent childhood – which offered room for a lot of speculation over the time and we will focus on the other moments of Lord's silence. What is their cultural, theological and philosophical significance? What is their pedagogical role, if any? The thesis of this article is that Christ's silence, in different cultural or biblical contexts, is intentional and makes room for the development of human liberty. God remains silent so that human being could speak.

1. Silence and metamorphosis

One of the most outstanding plays between Christ's silence and speaking is narrated in the famous episode named the *pericope adulterae* (Jn 7: 53-8: 11). The silent Christ meets a broken woman, completely reduced to silence by her adversaries, put on a grave charge and pushed to the thresholds of death. The story is well known. A group of scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in adultery. They confronted Him with a dilemma: should they stone her as the Law of Moses disposes or should they let her go free, unpunished? Each of the answers would have been an offense: the first one to the Roman law, which forbids Jews to kill anybody, and the second one to the Jewish tradition, to His own people. Christ refused to fall into the trap and remained silent. He bent down and wrote (or drew) with His finger on the ground.

In His gesture, one may distinguish a double act of *kenosis*, of humiliation. When Jesus bent down, He descended under the level of woman's accusers. He is being looked down on, assuming a position of inferiority. The two of them stand in their midst, in the centre of the

scene, judged together, and through this, Jesus shares the condition of the woman, of being judged. He borrows something of her silence. While her silence accuses her, Christ's silence accuses them. But this silence is a form of humiliation for the divine Logos of the Father. The Teacher keeps a moment of intense silence, more suggestive than thousands of words. In front of the aggression, He responds with tranquillity and peacefulness. Then, in the new sequence, He starts writing (or, according to some commentators, drawing on the ground). This is the only time in the whole biblical literature when Jesus writes.

There are many contradictory interpretations about what He wrote. We may never tell. Among them, there is the idea that He is indicating towards Sheol, the Hades of the Jews, an underworld located in the centre of the Earth; that He is quoting the Book of Jeremiah which has the expression "written in the dust" (Jer 17: 13) or that Jesus is writing the sins of the accusers (Bădiliță, 264-265). But they are not pleased with His silence. So they ask again and this time they receive an answer, immediately followed by the same double act of *kenosis*: "The one without a sin may throw first a stone at her!" Christ's following silence is pedagogical. It obliges the accusers to confront their own conscience. It makes room for an honest examination of their consciousness. It stimulates human freedom to choose the path of sincerity and to give up the path of hypocrisy, of double standards, to put away the social masks.

Paradoxically, the Logos knows exactly when to speak and when to be quiet. In the absence of this alternative, there is no free option. If the Logos always speaks, the human being must always listen. In this case, there is no dialogue, no reciprocal enrichment. But any authentic dialogue includes moments of silence, which sometimes become more relevant than the moments of speech. Without this dialogue, the human being would be transformed into a passive instrument, unable to possess self-determination. He/she would be obliged to listen to an authoritative Logos, which overwhelms the human being.

On one side, this is the case of Islam where God requires absolute submission because He cannot descend at the level of His listeners. According to Jacques Ellul, in Islam, God does not incarnate. God can only be the almighty judge that submits to His will all things and phenomena (Ellul, 98). He is unable of dialogue, because dialogue presupposes ontological equality. In Islam, in the absence of *the Other* of the Father, of the divine Son or Logos, God's utterance becomes a text. It is a failed incarnation – actually an inability to really descend at the level of His followers and to offer them choice.

On the other side, the doctrine of the Trinity safeguards the issue

of the dialogue. There is an intra-Trinitarian dialogue between the Father, the Son (or Logos) and the Holy Ghost. This dialogue is extended to the human being, created after the image of the divine Logos. The human being, as such, is a *logosiac* (rational) being. When the Logos descends at human level, He can be recognised, but only by those who reconfigure their *logos* (mind, reason) according to the Logos. As incarnate, He is, according to His human nature, at their ontological level.

The *kenosis* – beautifully expressed by His gesture of bending down in the episode of the *pericope adulterae*, is accentuated by the very fact of maintaining His divinity in the Incarnation. Although God, the incarnate Logos, often finds Himself in a position of inferiority towards the others. For most of the people, He is only another man, maybe a miracle maker. The fallen *anthropos* longs to a relationship with the Logos, but without a real possibility to choose, a real inner quest, his/her spiritual reconfiguration or metamorphosis is impossible.

The Logos is the *Truth* and, therefore, it requires a quest. His silence is the distance which makes possible the quest of *Truth*. It is never self-evident or self-imposed. As in the case of Resurrection, *Truth* is not given to the human being unless he/she has receptivity for it. And always, this receptivity requires the transformation of the self. This process involves hearing one's voice from interior within the frame of Logos's silence. When this happens, the Logos loses His exteriority and becomes an inner principle; He is internalised. This is why, all the woman's accusers leave one by one, starting with the elders. Freed by the inner voice of the Logos, they let her go free. The Law of Moses – exterior as it was is replaced by the law of the conscience. In front of the ground pointed by Jesus to symbolize the destination of all human beings – the death, all the offenders are silenced and all the sins are relativized. All are guilty.

2. Silence and the gift of freedom

“What is truth?” This is one of the oldest questions that tormented the human thinking, from the Greek classical philosophy to nowadays. In this section of the article we will follow it starting from another biblical episode of Christ's silence, the well-known dialogue between Jesus and Pontius Pilate. In the frame of Jesus's process, the Roman governor initiates with Christ a conversation about His guilt. The discussion turns quickly into a dialogue about the nature of Christ's Kingdom. His royal mission is not to defend some political realm, but to testify to the truth. When Jesus claims that those on the side of the truth listen to

Him, the dialogue is abruptly ended by Pilate's famous, rhetorical question: "What is truth?" (Jn 18: 38).

Christ is apparently reduced to silence by Pilate's rush to finish this process. And his rush probably is determined by his scepticism regarding the possibility of finding the truth. But in a story written by Vasile Voiculescu, *Adevărul* [*The Truth*], this episode is reinterpreted. As in the Bible, the question is addressed in Greek – symbol of the long quest for truth in Plato and the Greek classical philosophy. Christ's silence is considered intentional and not circumstantial. The disciples are offended by it. Why He did not answer, once and for all, and put an end to all the ambiguity regarding Christ's identity? He should powerfully reveal *Truth*, for the sake of the whole humanity, for the sake of all the history. They would have expected Jesus to "lower the lightning of truth, with His answer on earth", in front of Pilate, instantly silencing him. Later on, the witness to this dialogue, John the Apostle, in Vasile Voiculescu's version, receives the answer to Christ's lack of response, to His silence:

"... How could he tell us and Pilate what is the truth, when He Himself, the Truth, descended ontologically, was there and stood there, proposing Himself totally to our sight, hearing and touching. And we looked for Him elsewhere, as in a mirror and riddles... And we asked, like fools, for a few words of speech when He spoke to us in all His wholeness" (Voiculescu, 539).

And the Apostle continues: "As long as He was with us, we stood like fools on the very top of the mountain and wondered where the mountain was" (Voiculescu, 539).

In this dramatised episode, Vasile Voiculescu masterfully projects a recurrent theme in Christian theology: the truth is not an abstraction, a correspondence to reality/facts, but a concrete Person. The *Truth* is the incarnate divine Logos. Jesus Christ affirms about Himself: "I am (...) the truth" (Jn 14: 6).

In the context of contemporary relativism, where every claim to objectivity is delegitimized, the *Truth* as Person may sound challenging. But this idea becomes more reliable if we ask another philosophical question: Who is more entitled to establish the reality than the Creator of reality, the Demiurge? According to Christian theology, the Demiurge creates the world through the divine words, *logoi*. Through the act of speaking, the Demiurge Logos brings into reality the things in the universe and on the earth: heavens, light, sky, land, seas, moon, stars, sun, animals, etc.

The truth of the Incarnation reveals that the Logos is not an

abstract principle, an impersonal Architect of the universe, but a Person longing for communion and dialogue. It is a Person in the quest of the human person, which, correspondingly, is gifted with reason, as icon of the divine Prototype. If this is the case, the authenticity of the human person as icon depends of his/her ability to reflect the Logos as Prototype. This process is neither mandatory, nor linear. It can be accomplished only in complete freedom and truth. Actually, one is the condition of the other; they correspond to each other, influence each other. This is the meaning of the following verse: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8: 32).

If *Truth* is the divine Logos incarnate, Pilate's question is absurd. It loses its philosophical heaviness and becomes an existential blindness. "Pilate seeks to deflect its force by averting his gaze from the truth placed before his eyes to an abstract question concerning the truth of truth" (Hart, 332). This description is similar to the reaction that, in his story, Vasile Voiculescu ascribes to the expectations of the Apostles regarding the question about the truth.

But if *Truth* is a Person, this means that it can never be objectified or reified. It is a living being and it can never be transformed in a text. From this point of view, it is very meaningful the fact that Jesus Christ did not write a text, to be left behind as a supreme legacy after His Ascension into Heaven. The Logos did not become a book at the Incarnation, but a human being, a Person both divine and human. The French philosopher Jacques Ellul expresses this idea in the following words: "God does not send a book of metaphysics or a sacred book of Gnostic revelations or a complete epistemological system or a perfected wisdom. He sends a man" (Ellul, 24).

The literal interpretation of the Bible assumes that the Logos incarnated in a book. On the contrary, "the Word had been made flesh, not paper and ink" (Goa, 61). Despite the fact that the Apostolic *kerygma* (preaching) finally took the shape of a collection of books (*New Testament*), Christ's primary intention was preserved: the living Word/Logos cannot be codified in a series of laws, as in the Islamic *Sharia*. This means that in the fields of Ethics or Dogmatics, for example, the Christian theology always requires a process of enculturation, of reinterpretation according to the context. There are some unchangeable principles, of course, as those exposed during the Sermon on the Mount, and the Beatitudes stand at the centre of the Christian Ethics. But there are not infinite regulations of the Christian life, as in the Old Testament or Islam. In every place and time, there is a permanent necessity for the hermeneutics of encounter, for finding the small truths of life through the meeting with the unique *Truth* of

existence. This is why Origen states: “It is no wonder that, although the truth is one, many truths flow from it” (Balthasar, 1984: 80).

The same is also true about the Christian doctrine. Its core represents the biblical statements interpreted by the Seven Ecumenical Councils. Once again, a hermeneutical process has been made in order to define the Christian *Truth*. But because this is a Person, the incarnate Logos of the Father, it is a living being. As such, its content can never be exhausted, cannot completely be rationally formulated. What Nicaea (325) “solved”, returned in the next centuries with even a more intense interrogation. The Logos was always captured in human formulations (the *dogmas*) and always “escaped”, like a living being. Actually, the *horoi*, the doctrinal – mainly Christological – formulations resort to negative language in order to define the Person of Jesus Christ. The four words of negation, starting in Greek with a privative *alpha* in the *horos* of Chalcedon (451) are famous (*ασυγχύτως, απρέπτως, αδιαιρέτως, αχωρίστως*). The union of the divine and the human nature in Christ took place “unconfusedly”, “unchangeably”, “indivisibly” and “inseparably” (Ware, 34). Many theologians observed that these negative terms rather protect the mystery of the Incarnation and of Christ than reveal their truth. They rather show the limits of the human understanding, than to point to *Truth* itself. In front of the challenge posed by this negative definitions, there were created new theological systems, formulated in positives terms, as, for example, *theologia Crucis* (the theology of the Cross) of Jürgen Moltmann or the *Sophiology* of Fr. Sergei Bulgakov.

But the Logos as *Truth* apriorically excludes the possibility of a theological system. This would imply that *Truth* can be totally exhausted through conceptualisation. Of course, a theological system doesn’t exclude a systematic reflection on Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God, but it would never include a closed philosophical or theological system.

In this respect, Christ’s silence indicates more towards a presence than towards a conceptualization of that presence. While the presence is the plenitude of *Truth*, the conceptualization is only an indicative of that presence. It only points to *Truth*, it is not *Truth* itself. This is why, in front of Pilate, Jesus is silent and refuses to define what is *Truth*.

Christ’s silence, in this context, is a guarantee of the fact that God respects the gift of freedom. In the absence of a given answer, human beings are free to create their own answers. They are free to dream and to explore all the dimensions of reality and to “name” them, to define them, to try to find the meaning of their life on their own.

There is no predestination here, only an invitation addressed to human beings to discover their full potential, to be present for the divine Presence or to refute it. Paradoxically, Christ is willing to protect human freedom not only against any secular system, but even against any theocratic system that denies the gift which makes human beings truly what they are.

This last topic is masterfully explored in the episode of the Grand Inquisitor of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is noteworthy that Christ is depicted in the whole scene as being silent, except the moment when He arises a girl from death with the words: "Talita kumi". These words are biblical, and therefore, He adds nothing to His original message. As a matter of fact, He has no right to do it, from the point of view of an inquisitorial institution. Only the Grand Inquisitor from Seville utters a long monologue in front of the silent Christ. The monologue is the symptom of a fallen Church which multiplied the few moral and doctrinal evangelical principles and transformed them in a scholastic system. Codifying all the fields of human society, from personal behaviour to thinking, from private to social life, the medieval theocracy changed Christianity into something opposed to its divine founder's intentions. There is no surprise thus that the Inquisitor makes the apology of the institutional coercion and condemns the burden of freedom offered by God to humanity. Christ has no place in the city (symbol of the world) dominated by those who, in His name, act against His principles.

According to the Grand Inquisitor, human beings don't know what to do with their freedom. Christ is judged again, as it has been in front of Pilate, for the fact that He refused to display His power, to perform miracles and thus to oblige people to follow Him. Christ wanted the others to believe in Him and to love Him in full freedom:

"You did not come down [from the Cross] because, again, you did not want to enslave man by a miracle and thirsted for faith that is free, not miraculous. You thirsted for love that is free, and not for the servile raptures of a slave before a power that has left him permanently terrified" (Dostoyevsky, 217).

Offering the illusion of acting in the name of Christ, the fallen Church reversed His paradigm. It offers material and earthly bread for all, in return of people's total submission. Longing for the heavenly bread is only for a few, the chosen ones. Implicitly, the apology of coercion turns into an apology of freedom, to which Christ consents through His silence. In the end, He leaves the city, offering room even for a misuse of liberty. The Grand Inquisitor may run the world untrammelled –

another consequence of God's silence.

Christ's refusal to interfere in human affairs, in the history, *i.e.* in the interlude between His Ascension and His Second Coming, becomes the main theme of Shusaku Endo's novel, *Silence*. But under a Japanese writer's pen, Christ's absence from the history and His silence take on a tragic character. Here, as in Dostoyevsky's novel, Christ is silent. The dominant atmosphere in both novels is one of terror and coercion. But in Shusaku Endo's novel, the victims – missionary Catholic priests – are longing for freedom and are not pleased with God's passivity. Why does He not help them in the most dramatic moments despite the fact that they preach Him in a pagan, aggressive background? Is He being indifferent to the fate and suffering of His followers? They challenge Christ to act and all they get back is an unbearable silence:

“Lord, why are you silent? Why are you always silent.....?” (Endo, 141).
“Why have you abandoned us so completely? he prayed in a weak voice. Even the village was constructed for you; and have you abandoned it in its ashes? Even when the people are cast out of their homes have you not given them courage? Have you just remained silent like the darkness that surrounds me? Why? At least tell me why” (Endo, 147).

Of course, Endo's novel brings to the fore the theological issue of theodicy and of deism, with an unusual intensity. The first one struggles to answer the question: Where is God when the innocent suffer? The second one pushes the interrogation to the extreme: Did God abandon the world after its creation? Although not a satisfactory solution, the only thing that can be stated in this context is that suffering is the result of the human misuse of freedom. Moreover, God doesn't interfere, as expected, to correct it, to restrain it. This would contradict Himself, His act of creating the human being as an image of the divine freedom. If this freedom takes a destructive direction and it is used by human beings against their neighbours, it cannot be magically transformed from outside.

But the purpose of the novel *Silence* is not to offer easy solutions to theological dilemmas. On the contrary, it intensifies them, because the mystery of freedom presupposes its ambivalence: it can be used in a positive or a negative manner. Through His silence, Christ is the advocate of total freedom. He refuses, as the silent character in this novel, to interfere, to perform miracles and to manifest His power, in order to permit human beings to exercise the gift of freedom to the ultimate limit. Jesus rejects the idea of transforming people into

obedient slaves, blinded by His godly unlimited powers. In other words, He refuses to rescue His followers. In His silence, there is an absolute *kenosis*, an absolute humiliation of the One who refuses to favour in any way those who put all their hope in Him. To their prayer, He answers with silence. To their presence, He replies with absence. The denial to descend from the Cross – a challenge from the part of Pharisees and Scribes – to make them believe in Him, undergoes a tragic turning: it is directed to those who *already* believe in Him and love Him. Thus, belief and love are not superficially encouraged – they must be exercised in total freedom, at all costs, even with the price of apostasy. Despite this, in the end, this silence is a revelation of His participation at the suffering of the innocent. “ ‘Lord, I resented your silence’. ‘I was not silent. I suffered besides you’ ” (Endo, 285).

Christ’s silence during the agony of His believers in Shusaku Endo’s novel is only a reflection of the silence He encounters on the Cross. To His cry: “My God, my God, why have thou forsaken me?” (Mk 15: 34; Ps 22: 1), He receives no answer. It is a silence that made many Western theologians to state (probably wrongly) Christ’s abandonment on the Cross by the Father. Thus one of them describes the reduction of Christ to silence (as a result of Father’s silent abandonment of Jesus): “In the ‘great cry’ in the ‘darkness’, he sinks into the realm of the dead, from out of which no word of his any longer makes itself heard” (Balthasar, 2005: 61). In this way, Christ’s silence (and God’s, by implication), is His final revelation:

“But the death, and the dying away into silence, of the Logos so become the centre of what he has to say of himself that we have to understand precisely his non-speaking as his final revelation, his utmost word: and this because, in the humility of his obedient self-lowering to the death of the Cross he is identical with the exalted Lord” (Balthasar, 2005: 67).

Only if Christ’s silence is the silence of the Heavenly Lord, silence is a guarantee of human freedom and it is able to transform the suffering into comfort, the tragedy into joy, the betrayal of God into confession of faith and failure into triumph. But this requires the Resurrection. In its light, everything is transformed. The victory of the earthly powers over Christ is nullified and the Word of God starts speaking with clarity:

“After the crucifixion, which is the final word –‘the final proof’-pronounced by the powers of the age in defense of their rule and the final argument whereby the totality claims for itself foundations as old as the world, the resurrection suddenly reveals the form of Christ to

possess an infinite power of expression, which the final word of the totality can do nothing to silence, or even to anticipate: the power of this world's 'final' word is exhausted even as God's Word is only just beginning to be pronounced with absolute clarity" (Hart, 334).

To pass from failure to triumph, one must walk the path of Resurrection, the path of forgiveness.

3. Silence and forgiveness

All the four Evangelists narrate the episode of Peter's denying Jesus in Caiaphas's courtyard. But only Luke mentions that, after the third denial of Peter, Christ addressed him a silent look (Lk 22: 61). Immediately after this mute exchange of regards, the rooster crowed and Peter remembered that his denial was predicted by Jesus at the Last Supper. He repeated thrice, in a way or another, "I don't know Him". After Jesus turned and looked at him, Peter "went outside and wept bitterly" (Lk 22: 62).

In Jesus's look, one may discern reproach and charge to Peter's moment of weaklings. He defended himself instinctively, disowning his Master in the most crucial time. Christ is left alone to encounter the tragedy of the Cross. But this regard has something of a promise. It is the promise of meeting again, after the tragedy of the Crucifixion is consumed. It is, actually, the promise of Resurrection and of its fruit: the forgiveness.

After His return from the realm of death, the Master frees His disciple of the fears of death that caused his denial. Peter is reendowed with the lost gift of freedom. In this condition, he may give free answers to Christ's triple question: "Do you love me?" (Jn 21: 15-17). Thus, "I don't know Him" is healed and replaced by: "Lord, you know that I love you". And this happens because love and faith cannot be exercised without total freedom. From a theological point of view, a free spiritual failure is preferable to a constrained virtue. Sin and virtue, betrayal and faithfulness, hate and love are real only if they are free. Christ is silent so human being may speak.

Conclusion

This excursion into the biblical and cultural projections of Christ's silence proved its philosophical and theological actuality. Christ's silence represents the assurance of the gift of freedom. For the fields of Ethics or Doctrine, the biblical silence as *hiatus* or ellipse, as non explicit and detailed development of Christ's evangelical teachings, is a great advantage and not a theological infirmity, as one may assume. It creates space for the positive valorisation of all human contributions to

the quest of *Truth*, to the quest regarding the meaning of life and of *modus vivendi*. Instead of prefabricate answers, the vocation of the human being is revealed to be that of a finder. But this invites theology to be more humble with respect to the other fields of knowledge. If traditionally, due to its anchorage in the divine Revelation, it has been regarded as the “the Queen of the sciences”, theology must learn from Christ how to be silent in order to afford literature, philosophy, physics, astronomy and so on to speak about the truth. Particularly the Orthodox theology must remember that Christ’s silence is closer to apophaticism – to what human beings cannot rationally know about God, even if they are experiencing Him. The silent Logos is not opposed to the divine Logos – it only makes the Word of God more explicit.

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Diversity-isms

On a Wilde Parrot Chase: Julian Barnes and the Quarrel with the Realist Tradition

Teodor Mateoc¹

Abstract: *The intention of the paper is to examine the way in which realist conventions are deconstructed by the narrative strategies used by the contemporary English writer in his novel. The narrative under scrutiny is informed by the post-structuralist theories regarding the relation between art and reality, more specifically the way in which history can be rewritten as fictional discourse.*

Key-words: *realism, rewriting, ambiguity, irony, metafiction, historiography*

In 1990, *Romania literara*² published a translation of Julian Barnes' story *One of Kind*, a piece that Malcolm Bradbury included in his 1987 anthology of *The Penguin Book of Modern British Short Stories*. This first person narrative is relevant for my purpose not only because it brings (communist) Romania into focus but also because it offers a clue for the writer's method and the approach he was to us later in his 1984 novel *Flaubert's Parrot*.

The two writers mentioned in the story had been close friends in their youth: the first, Marian Tiriac is now an exile in England. His choice was deliberate because "daca nu poti scrie exact ce doresti, mai bine sa nu scrii deloc. Tacere sau exil, asa s-ar chema asta. Ei bine, eu am ales exilul"³. The other, Nicolai Petrescu chose to stay. The narrator

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

² A Romanian literary weekly

³ If you cannot write exactly what you want, you'd better not write at all. It's either silence or exile. Well, I chose the latter. (in *Romania literara*, no.22,1990- my translation)

visits Romania and, on returning to England, meets Tiriac and tells him that he had seen one of Petrescu's books, *Tortul de nunta* (*The Wedding Cake*) on display in the window of a large and seemingly important bookstore in Bucharest. The title, Tiriac explains, refers to an architectural style of Stalinist influence that was very much in fashion in

most Eastern-european countries in the 1950's. (The arch example is the building of Lomonosov University in Moscow, while in Bucharest Scanteia Publishing House, the core of the communist press, is a smaller scale replica).

The book then apparently deals with a recognizable, immediate reality but its realism is undermined by the narrative technique and by a distancing irony that the narrator deliberately maintains all along: "Ceea ce vrut el sa faca", says Tiriac, "a fost sa-si puna o inima falsa si apoi sa scrie din adincul ei. Aceasta inima era intens patriotica, sentimentala si documentara"⁴

What Geoffrey Braithwaite, the narrator in *Flaubert's Novel*, wants to do is to speak in Flaubert's voice, from within his mind, i.e., to assume a 'false heart' like the writer in the aforementioned story. With him, too, documentation is not only important, it becomes an obsession, bent as he is on deciphering the secret of a destiny, the path to the ultimate truth.

The realistic conventions and its tenets are constantly undermined by the narrative strategies employed in the novel. *Flaubert's Parrot* as a postmodernist text reconsiders, from a post-structuralist stance, the relation between art and reality, more specifically the way in which history/the past can be (re)constructed as narrative. The last but one chapter of the novel, 'Examination Paper' and its first section, 'Literary Criticism' invites the reader "to consider the relationship between Art and Life as suggested by any of the following statements or situations"⁵. I will take the suggestion and quote just one such situation, a fragment from one of Flaubert's letters to the writer Louise Colet, his paramour at the time

The day before yesterday, in the woods near Touquet, at a charming spot near a spring, I came across some cigar butts and some bits of pate. There'd been a picnic there! I described exactly that in November eleven years ago. Then it was purely imagined, and the other day it

⁴ What he wanted to do was to assume a false heart and then write from within it. This heart was intensely patriotic, sentimental and documentary (my translation)

⁵ Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*, Picador, London, 1984, p.172, henceforth quoted as FP, followed by page number.

was experienced. Everything you invent is true: you can be sure of that. Poetry is a subject as precise as geometry....My poor Bovary is without a doubt suffering and weeping even now in twenty villages of France (FP, 172).

What we have here is a reversal of the realistic tenet which sees art/literature as a mirroring of reality and measures its value by the accuracy of the reflection. On the contrary, what is implied in the fragment above is the Wilde-an idea that reality imitates art (more than art imitates reality) which ultimately means that reality itself is fictionally constructed. As a result, the relation of opposition becomes one of identity.

Barnes' novel is a postmodern narrative that is illustrative of the specific British postmodernism in that in Britain, probably more than anywhere else, realism has somehow survived formal experiment or has been incorporated by it, as Malcolm Bradbury states:

British fiction holds on to a certain tradition of its own although that tradition crosses over with or is influenced by other powerful traditions. Writers like John Fowles or Salman Rushdie or Kazuo Ishiguro are self-consciously aware of their relation to other traditions and the result is, in their work, the sense of an international tradition which bears the stamp of a distinctive British imprint (Bradbury, 83)

Indeed, France has always exercised an influence on the British writers. John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, for example, is, in a way, a commentary on the position of the contemporary British writer, under French influence, in relation to a key, realist tradition of Victorian fiction.

Geoffrey Braithwaite, the narrative voice in the novel, is himself torn between opposing impulses as he is, concomitantly, an English doctor, a frustrated writer and an amateur Flaubert scholar. His adulterous wife, Ellen, had committed suicide and he hopes to understand the motivation of her act by discovering the truth about the creator of the adulterous Emma Bovary. As a character, he is obsessed by concerns one usually associates with the realist school: documentation, testimonies, truth, references etc. The mode of representation is also meant to be realistic; "he wanted his prose to be objective, scientific, devoid of personal presence, devoid of opinions' (FP, 150)

As a narrator, however, he constantly undermines his own intentions: he addresses the reader directly, writes a parallel biography of Flaubert, parodies his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, or gives Louise

Colet's imaginary version of his liaison with the writer. Permanently aware of the futility of his account, he eventually acknowledges it openly:

Ellen. My wife: someone I feel I understand less than a foreign writer dead for a hundred years. Is this an aberration, or is it normal? Books say: she did this because. Life says: she did this. Books are where things are explained to you; life is where things aren't. I'm not surprised some people prefer books. Books make sense of life. The only problem is that the lives they make sense of are other people's lives, never you own. (FP, 168)

Apparently, the novel is well documented: Geoffrey Braithwaite crosses the Channel several times, visits Rouen, Flaubert's birthplace, and his house at Croisset, carefully mentions the writer's journeys to Egypt and Greece, uses fragments from his works and introduces such friends of his as Maupassant, Baudelaire, Victor Hugo or Saint-Beuve. His initial ambition is to find the stuffed parrot that had inspired Flaubert to create Loulou, Felicite's parrot in the French writer's short story *Un coeur simple*. By identifying it, he hopes to discover the author's true voice. However, he is somewhat disappointed when, to his surprise, he comes across not one but two parrots, either of which equally plausible as the prototype that may have inspired the writer. In order to authenticate it, he writes to various academics, to the French Embassy, or to the editors of the Michelin guide-books. In his attempt to reconstruct the past in all its details, he becomes almost maniacal when, inspired by a comparison of the sun with a pot of redcurrant jam, he writes to the producing company to find out whether in 1853 a pot of Rouen jam would have been the same colour as a modern one. What ultimately motivates his search is the realist creed that art is a mean to truth because the writer has a privileged insight into what ultimately constitutes reality.

By presenting people, places, events or documents as historically verifiable, the novel creates an illusion of verisimilitude. It is only an illusion, though because facts do not lead to truth; the real places and the real people are inevitably fictionalized by their very presence in the narrative, by their being displaced from history into fiction.

The metafictional dimension of the novel contains its own criticism; while it challenges the realist conventions, it does so from within those very conventions. As R. Wellek pointed out, nowadays realism can no longer be seen as a means to truth or as a faithful reflection of reality. The theory of realism is 'bad aesthetics', he says,

because it disregards the fact that all art is “making” and “ a world in itself of illusion and symbolic forms” (Lee, 19)

Structural linguistics theories have further undermined the transparent relation between art and reality by demonstrating the purely arbitrary connection between the signifier and the signified. Meaning is constructed, therefore and our perception of reality is inevitably embedded into language. In his now classical essay, ‘The Death of the Author’, Roland Barthes also asserts that the voice we hear in a novel is not the author’s, it is language: “to write is [...] is to reach that point where only language acts, performs and not me” (Barthes, 143). Consequently, the authorial “I” or “me” in first person narratives is to be seen as a linguistic subject and not as a person that exists prior to the text. What precedes the text is only language itself and other texts. That is why the author’s voice subjectivity is an illusion since to impose a single point of view is to impose a single, fixed meaning.

Contrary to the above, postmodern texts stress multiplicity of meaning because of the polisemy inherent in language. There is no such thing as literary originality or the first literary text just like there is no such thing as the “real” parrot that, presumably, had inspired Flaubert. Even with a copy of *Un coeur simple* in hand, Braithwaite cannot be sure whether either parrot matches Flaubert’s description. Not even after his visit to a scholar is the mystery solved: faced with the three parrots that were left out of the original fifty- at the time when Flaubert had presumably borrowed one-, the narrator’s final comment and the concluding line of the novel is: ;Perhaps it was one of them”.

Factual documentation and objectivity with the aim of revealing the truth are thus rendered ineffectual as realist tools with which one may appropriate the past. As Hayden White had argued in his *The Fictions of Factual Representations* (1976), the way in which we know the past is through historiography which, in its turn, is subject to the same creative process as fiction; historical narratives are verbal fictions whose forms are more akin to literature than to history and fact. In much a similar way, postmodernist fiction use history both as reference to the ‘real’ past and as a text, i.e., constructed discourse. Such an approach differs fundamentally from the common understanding of history as used in the traditional historical novel where it [history] is thought of as extra-textual and consequently can be represented ‘truthfully’.

Flaubert’s Parrot presents itself both as documentary history/biography and as artifice, dealing simultaneously with the referential and the non-referential nature of literature. At the beginning, Baithwaite attempts to reconstruct, in a realistic manner,

Flaubert's world as the writer himself may have seen it. His search for a direct correspondence between fiction and reality is undermined, nevertheless, by the very structure of the narrative. To him, Flaubert's novels are a key to Flaubert and Flaubert ('Emma Bovary c'est moi') is the key to unlock the ambiguities of his relation to his wife and understand the motivation of her suicide. It is a frustrating enterprise as the truth will not reveal itself easily:

How do we seize the past? How do we seize the foreign past? We read, we learn, we ask, we remember, we are humble, and then a casual detail shifts everything. [...] We can study files for decades, but every so often we are tempted to throw up our hands and declare that history is merely another literary genre: the past is autobiographical fiction pretending to be parliamentary report (FP, 90).

In a way, he himself becomes Flaubert's parrot. In the chapter entitled *The Flaubert Bestiary*, which contains fragments from his letters, entries from his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* as well as the narrator's comments, the parrot is allotted a substantial part and is anthropomorphised ('perroquet' is the diminutive of 'Pierrot' which, in its turn, is etymologically linked to 'Pierre'). It is also the only bird that can imitate human voice, it can be lecherous and prone to epilepsy. The same chapter contains yet another reference to a parrot; a paper clip containing the story of a man who, in his youth, "had been the victim of an ill-starred passion" (FP, 57) and whose only love, in old age, was a magnificent parrot. When he dies, the owner imagines himself being a parrot and tries to become one: "As if in imitation of the dead bird, he would squawk out the name he loved to hear; he would try walking like a parrot, perching on things and extending his arms as if he had wings to bear." (FP, 58)

The strange tale is resumed and extended in Flaubert's own story, *Un Coeur simple*, where the man is replaced by a woman servant, Felicite, who, herself betrayed in love, loses everything in the world and develops an emotional fixation for a parrot that her mistress had given her before her death. When Loulou, the parrot, dies, she has him stuffed and in the evening says her prayers kneeling before him. Moreover, she gradually comes to see the stuffed bird as the symbol of the Holy Ghost, much more appropriate in this role than a dove because, unlike a dove, a parrot can speak. When Felicite dies, "she thought she saw, as the heavens opened for her, a gigantic parrot hovering above her head (FP, 17).

The story reappears in *Flaubert's Parrot* and Braithwaite examines the possible resemblances between the writer and the story:

Felicite+ Loulou= Flaubert? Not exactly; but you could claim that he is present in both of them. Felicite encloses his character, Loulou encloses his voice. You could say that the parrot, representing a clever vocalization without much brain power was Pure World. If you were a French academic, you might say that he was “un symbole du Logos”. Being English, I hasten back to the corporeal [...]. I imagined Loulou sitting on the other side of Flaubert’s desk and staring back at him like some taunting reflection from a fun fair mirror....Is the writer much more than a sophisticated parrot? (FP, 17)

The paradox is that while trying to find a possible real parrot, he is doing so by using the documentary/fictional evidence found in Flaubert’s letters. The parrot/reality/the past is fictionalized and it is only through fiction that we can perceive them.. The possibility of a truthful historical representation is but an illusion; the story of the parrot in the newspaper clip, Flaubert’s story *Un coeur simple*, the writer’s letters mentioning the parrot- are all linguistic constructs which exist themselves in a larger fictional frame which is the novel itself.

Such multiple ways that Braithwaite uses to reach back to Flaubert-novels, letters, reminiscences, diary entries, chronological data etc- only prove that there is no single truth anymore than there is a single parrot. Although Flaubert was a historical person, we only know him through the written word.⁶ But since language is itself plural, the parrot and the Flaubert that Braithwaite creates is inevitably indeterminate. We discover that ‘parrot’ is a polysemantic word in itself: besides being a bird, it is also a meal (‘la soupe a perroquet’/parrot’s soupe, i.e., bread dipped in red wine) or a house with one room on each floor (‘un baton de perroquet’/ a parrot’s perch). The writer’s name is equally indeterminate: if naming is a way of ascribing an identity, re-naming suggests the impossibility of fixing any single identity. Indeed, on various occasions, different people either mispronounce or misprint the writer’s name: Faubert, Faubet, Foubert, Folbert or Flambert.

The novel maintains all along the duality history/fiction reflected at the textual level by the duality character/ narrator. On the one hand, it claims that the parrot exists as a historical fact and encourages Braithwaite’s search; on the other, the rhetoric of conflicting information represents the parrot as text/discourse and this is how we come to know it.

⁶ It is oddly significant that the writer’s house at Croisset was demolished after the writer’s death and replaced by a paper factory.

Another issue that the novel posits is that regarding the role of documentation in the process of producing a fictional discourse. Attending a lecture given by the Cambridge professor Christopher Ricks, Braithwaite is impressed by his arguments. The title of the lecture is 'Mistakes in Literature and whether They Matter' and its theme could be summed up as follows:

If the factual side of literature becomes unreliable, then ploys such as irony and fantasy become harder to use. If you don't know what's true, or what's meant to be true, then the value of what isn't true, or isn't meant to be true, becomes diminished (FP, 77)

In these terms then, the literariness of the text can only be measured against the factual background seen here as extra-textual. The presence of documentary information is meant to validate fictional events and characters and give them an ontological status equal to that of 'real' characters. However, deconstructing the opposition, we may equally say that the real events or characters that exist in an extra-fictional dimension are themselves fictionalized by being foregrounded in the narrative discourse. They are and yet are not the entities designated by their names and thus their ontology is itself questioned.

By its playing with realist conventions, *Flaubert's Parrot*- like most postmodern narratives which Linda Hutcheon called 'historiographic metafiction'- is problematic for the reader:

On the one hand, he [the reader, n.n] is forced to acknowledge the artifice, the art of what he is reading; on the other, explicit demands are made upon him, as co-creator, for intellectual and affective responses comparable in scope and intensity to those of his life experience. In this light, metafiction is less a departure from the mimetic novelistic tradition than a reworking of it (Hutcheon, 5)

Julian Barnes' novel can be taken as a 'classical' postmodern text. It is both a writer's novel and a teachable narrative. In both instances it is exemplary for the way in which it deals with that long debated issue, i.e. the relation between fiction and whatever lies beyond it. If, conventionally, literature feeds on reality, it does so by distorting and rewriting it so as to offer a heightened vision of existence and a deeper understanding of the rapport between the two.

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L'ironie comme phénomène argumentatif dans le discours journalistique algérien

Tahir Mahammedi¹, Wafa Bedjaoui²

Résumé : *Cet article se veut une contribution à l'analyse de l'ironie dans le discours journalistique en montrant comment l'acte ironique peut impliquer une dimension argumentative visant à faire adhérer l'interlocuteur à l'événement commenté dans le discours. Tout en suivant la typologie des mécanismes argumentatifs de l'ironie proposée par Eggs (2009), notre étude a pour ambition de mettre en lumière la place de l'ironie dans l'entreprise argumentative du discours journalistique. Les résultats de l'analyse confirment que l'ironie sert non seulement à tourner en dérision une cible, mais elle contribue également à l'efficacité du processus argumentatif du discours que le locuteur cherche à étayer pour susciter l'adhésion de son interlocuteur.*

Mots-clés : *ironie, argumentation, contradiction argumentative, événement, discours journalistique*

Abstract: *This article aims to contribute to the analysis of irony in journalistic discourse by showing how the act of irony can involve an argumentative dimension aimed at making the interlocutor adhere to the event commented on in the speech. While following the typology of argumentative mechanisms of irony proposed by Eggs (2009), our study aims to highlight the place of irony in the argumentative enterprise of journalistic discourse. The results of the analysis confirm that irony not only serves to make fun of a target, but also contributes to the effectiveness of the argumentative process of the discourse that the speaker seeks to support in order to get the interlocutor's support.*

Keywords: *irony, argumentation, argumentative contradiction, event, journalistic discourse*

¹ Laboratoire LISODIL, Université d'Alger 2, Algérie.

² Université d'Alger 2, Algérie.

Introduction

À travers son discours, le journaliste locuteur dispose de plusieurs stratégies discursives qui lui permettent de mettre en scène médiatique les événements qui surgissent dans sa société. Soucieux de ce qui se passe dans l'actualité politique, économique ou sociale, le journaliste en faisant recours à ces différentes pratiques langagières, cherche à informer le lecteur et à susciter son adhésion.

En s'inscrivant en analyse du discours, ce présent travail a pour objet de mettre l'accent sur la place et le rôle de l'ironie, considérée comme stratégie de discours, dans la construction argumentative du discours journalistique pour dire l'événement. Notre ambition étant de voir de quelles manières le journaliste locuteur met en discours un événement tout en se référant à l'usage de l'ironie en tant que procédé argumentatif. Dans cette optique, notre contribution tourne autour de la problématique suivante : dans quelle mesure l'usage de l'ironie comme phénomène argumentatif contribue-t-il à la mise en scène discursive de l'événement commenté par le journaliste locuteur ? En d'autres termes, de quelles manières le journaliste locuteur se sert-il du fonctionnement argumentatif de l'ironie pour dire l'événement dans son discours ?

À travers ces questions, nous voudrions, d'une part, soumettre la conception de l'ironie en tant que procédé argumentatif à l'épreuve d'un genre journalistique particulier, à savoir *la chronique*, dans un corpus retenu de la presse écrite algérienne. D'autre part, dans un sens plus large, notre perspective consiste à voir dans quelle mesure l'ironie comme phénomène argumentatif pourrait prendre place dans la construction discursive de l'événement dans le discours journalistique.

Pour constituer notre corpus, nous avons choisi de travailler sur un seul genre journalistique *la chronique* qui fait partie de la catégorie des *événements commentés* selon la conception de Charaudeau (2011 : 177) dans la mesure où le journaliste locuteur tout en commentant l'événement fait appel à l'ironie pour illustrer son discours. De ce fait, la chronique *Pousse avec eux* du journaliste Hakim Laâlam du quotidien algérien d'expression française *Le Soir d'Algérie*, constitue le corps de notre analyse. Il est à souligner qu'une certaine homogénéité vient du fait que notre corpus porte sur un seul événement discursif, il s'agit en l'occurrence du mouvement populaire du 22 février 2019 en Algérie, où les manifestations populaires, qui se sont déroulées pendant des mois dans toutes les régions, ont mis fin à l'ancien régime qui a géré le pays depuis 20 ans.

Quant à la démarche méthodologique que nous allons adopter pour cette étude, il est à préciser que notre analyse s'appuie sur la conception théorisée par Eggs (2009) selon laquelle l'ironie, en tant que procédé argumentatif, est une forme de contraire (ou *contrarium*). En fait, Eggs considère que le *contrarium* est un trait définitionnel pour l'ironie (2009 : 10) dans la mesure où « l'acte ironique est une forme d'argumentation critique et "négative" sui generis constituée par l'organisation rhétorique spécifique d'une (dis) simulation transparente où différentes formes du contraire et partiellement du ridicule sont mises en scène. » (2009 : 16). Dans cette perspective, Eggs fait distinguer entre quatre formes de contraire : le contraire propositionnel, le contraire inférable, le contraire énonciatif et le contraire indiqué par les orientations argumentatives fixées dans la langue (2009 : 10).

Nous rappellerons que notre choix théorique est inspiré de cette théorie pour deux raisons. D'une part, étant donné que notre objectif premier vise à décrire le fonctionnement argumentatif de l'ironie dans le discours journalistique, il nous apparaît que cette théorie est pertinente en ce sens qu'elle met en évidence l'aspect argumentatif de l'énoncé ironique. D'autre part, cette conception propose toute une typologie de mécanismes argumentatifs relevant de l'usage ironique ce qui nous permet de catégoriser les procédés langagiers utilisés dans la construction argumentative du discours et par la suite rendre visible l'importance accordée à tel ou tel procédé ironique.

Dans ce présent travail, nous nous intéresserons uniquement aux trois premiers types de contraire, fréquemment utilisés dans notre corpus, à savoir le *contrarium* propositionnel, le *contrarium* inférable et le *contrarium* énonciatif.

1. L'ironie comme *contrarium* propositionnel

Eggs considère que l'ironie est fondée sur un *contrarium* propositionnel lorsque le locuteur veut faire entendre explicitement le contraire de ce qu'il dit dans son discours (2009 : 5). En ce sens, le destinataire auquel s'adresse le locuteur ironiste pourra appréhender la lecture ironique de l'énoncé de manière directe en s'appuyant sur le contexte du discours en question. Il en découle que la dimension ironique se manifeste dès que le contexte du discours apparaît compréhensible. Pour bien illustrer notre propos, considérons l'énoncé suivant :

(1) C'est lui, tout ça ! Et plein d'autres choses, encore moins ragoûtantes. Comme cette dernière sortie dans laquelle, au nom du RND qui l'a pourtant exclu, il se félicite et félicite chaudement la direction du pays, éclairée à la lampe verte d'avoir emprisonné le... SG

de son parti. Pourtant, quel doux prénom lui ont donné ses parents, à la naissance : Seddik ! Mon Dieu ! Seddik ! Le fidèle. Le compagnon ! Le confident.

(*Le Soir d'Algérie*, 16 juin 2019)

La cible de l'ironie dans cet énoncé est Seddik Chihab, l'ex-secrétaire général du RND³, l'un des partis politiques de l'alliance présidentielle en Algérie. En se référant au contexte du discours, il nous apparaît que le journaliste vise en toute clarté le contraire de ce qu'il veut exprimer, en l'occurrence par l'usage des termes « *Seddik ! Le fidèle. Le compagnon ! Le confident* » ayant une polarité positive, le journaliste voulait faire comprendre le contraire. En fait, par la complicité avec son lecteur censé capable de saisir « automatiquement », pour reprendre le terme utilisé par Eggs (2009 : 5), l'intention ironique du journaliste, l'utilisation de ces adjectifs, fortement mélioratifs, permet au locuteur d'accentuer son jugement défavorable et rendre l'image de sa cible plus discréditée.

Dans cette optique, il est à préciser que le mot « *Seddik* » emprunté à la langue arabe fait référence dans la tradition musulmane à un personnage précis *Abu Bakur Essedik*, considéré comme le premier compagnon du prophète et son fidèle le plus proche. De là, le lecteur auquel s'adresse le journaliste, en faisant recours à sa compétence culturelle sur le religieux, va saisir le ton ironique de l'énoncé et par conséquent va interpréter l'intention du journaliste qui vise à mettre en dérision l'homme politique en question.

Cela faisant, le locuteur fait allusion à un savoir culturel partagé avec son lecteur pour signaler la contradiction de l'énoncé avec son contexte, ce qui contribue à l'interprétation ironique du discours. Amossy affirme, à ce propos, que « le savoir partagé et les représentations sociales constituent [...] le fondement de toute argumentation » (2013 : 112).

2. L'ironie comme *contrarium inférable*

Ici, ce n'est pas le contexte qui nous permet de révéler la dimension ironique de l'énoncé, mais c'est l'énoncé lui-même par inférence entre ses segments qui fait, en toute évidence, produire la lecture ironique. En fait, l'ironie se fait saisir dans une partie explicite de l'énoncé sans avoir fait recours à la contextualisation du discours. Autrement dit, l'énoncé ironique se contredit intrinsèquement à travers ses fragments,

³ Le Rassemblement National Démocratique est un parti politique algérien créé en 1997.

comme le confirme Eggs (2009), la contradiction argumentative se trouve cette fois-ci inférable dans une deuxième affirmation explicite. Notons à cet effet que, dans ce type de *contrarium*, l'ironie joue un rôle réfutatif dans la construction du discours.

Prenons l'énoncé suivant qui nous explicite cette forme d'ironie fondée sur le *contrarium* inférable :

(2) Enfin une mesure d'apaisement (x)... Rivotril et Diazépam disponibles sur le marché ! (y)

(*Le Soir d'Algérie*, 22 octobre 2019)

En (2), le journaliste ironise sur l'absence de toute réaction politique à l'égard des manifestations populaires éclatées en Algérie, en ce sens il convient de rappeler que l'ancien gouvernement algérien, après plusieurs semaines de contestation populaire, n'avait pris aucune décision en vue de calmer la situation et apaiser la colère populaire.

Dans cet énoncé, l'expression assertive (x) : « *enfin une mesure d'apaisement* » est complétée par l'argument (y) : « *Rivotril et Diazépam disponibles sur le marché* ». En effet, comme l'explique Mercier-Leca (2003 : 34), la valeur argumentative de l'énoncé ironique réside essentiellement dans son appartenance à une classe d'arguments en faveur d'une certaine conclusion, l'argument (y) nous permet d'attribuer une lecture ironique à la conclusion (x) dans la mesure où la disponibilité de médicaments calmants sur le marché algérien ne fait pas apaiser la colère populaire contre l'ancien régime en Algérie. De ce fait, la valeur illocutoire de ce fragment est, en toute clarté, celle d'un jugement dépréciatif renforcé par l'adverbe « *enfin* » qui marque généralement la fin d'une attente ou d'une espérance.

De là, il semble évident que l'ironie de cet énoncé est fondée sur un *contrarium* inférable dans la mesure où l'effet ironique se fait saisir par inférence entre les deux segments discursifs. D'ailleurs, l'argument (y) qui fait référence aux tranquillisants nous fait comprendre le ton railleur de la conclusion (x) qui signale un faux apaisement.

En fait, il apparaît que la dimension ironique fondée sur l'inférence s'affiche au niveau de l'énoncé à travers la contradiction entre les arguments mis en œuvre par le locuteur, l'énoncé ironique dans ce cas implique le plus souvent deux arguments où l'un va à l'encontre de l'autre :

(3) Démenti formel de la direction d'El-Harrach après les rumeurs faisant état de mauvaises conditions de détention pour Ouyahia : faux ! (x) On lui permet même de poursuivre en cellule son activité préférée. Aligner des chiffres... sur les murs ! (y)

(*Le Soir d'Algérie*, 23 juin 2019)

Dans cet extrait, l'événement commenté concerne la détention

de l'ancien premier ministre Ahmed Ouyahia, en l'occurrence des rumeurs circulent disant qu'il aurait été en mauvais état de santé à cause des conditions de détention jugées défavorables par son entourage familial. De son côté, la direction d'El-Harrach, établissement administratif responsable de cette détention, a fait une déclaration officielle pour démentir ces rumeurs.

En (3), l'argument (y) est orienté contre la conclusion (x). Le fait que le détenu politique a pour activité préférée « *aligner dans sa cellule des chiffres sur le mur* », cela met en doute la question de bonnes conditions de détention affirmée par la direction. De là, l'argument (y) dément ce qui est exprimé dans la conclusion (x), ce qui résulte que nous avons affaire à une contradiction argumentative d'où la coexistence de deux segments contradictoires. De plus, les fragments ironiques « *son activité préférée* » et « *aligner des chiffres sur les murs* » utilisés dans l'argument (y) permettent de conclure, par inférence, que les conditions de détentions ne sont pas favorables, ce qui se contredit avec la déclaration de la direction en question. De ce fait, il apparaît clairement que l'ironie est fondée sur un *contrarium* inférable dans la mesure où c'est dans l'énoncé lui-même que l'effet ironique s'analyse par inférence entre les deux arguments utilisés.

3. L'ironie comme *contrarium* énonciatif

Dans sa typologie sur les formes argumentatives de l'ironie, Eggs (2009 : 7) parle de « ton de la prononciation » pour saisir le *contrarium* énonciatif. Parallèlement à cela, dans un discours écrit, cette intonation ironique sera comprise par le dispositif typographique. C'est dans cette optique que l'ironie est signalée cette fois-ci par la typographie de l'écrit c'est-à-dire par l'ensemble des indices typographiques utilisés dans le discours comme l'exclamation, les italiques, les points de suspension et les guillemets qui ont pour but principalement d'orienter l'interlocuteur sur l'interprétation du discours.

Considérons l'exemple suivant dans lequel le journaliste poursuit son ironie sur le mutisme de l'ancien régime algérien par rapport à la revendication populaire :

(4) Première mesure après la colère populaire dans la rue. Les autorités vont supprimer le... vendredi et passer directement du jeudi au samedi ! Bravo les mecs !

(*Le Soir d'Algérie*, 26 février 2019)

Dans cet énoncé, en se servant de l'acte ironique, le journaliste critique ce mutisme gouvernemental qui, selon lui, ne fait qu'aggraver

la situation du pays. En fait, l'exagération hyperbolique dans « *supprimer le vendredi et passer directement du jeudi au samedi* » souligne, en toute clarté, le ton moqueur du locuteur. D'ailleurs, la modalité exclamative sert à signaler l'emploi inapproprié de l'énoncé. Ainsi, le recours au registre familier « *les mecs* » dans un discours adressé à une instance solennelle à l'image des autorités présidentielles permet de marquer la lecture ironique de l'énoncé. De plus, l'usage de l'exclamation et les points de suspension contribue à accentuer le ton ironique du locuteur, Eggs (2008 : 291-320) précise, à ce propos, que toute exclamation ou affirmation positive peut exprimer une lecture ironique. Dans ce sens, l'éloge « *Bravo les mecs* » oriente vers son contraire et donne à entendre un jugement dépréciatif sur l'attitude désintéressée des autorités algériennes à l'égard de la mobilisation populaire.

Il est à remarquer que l'acte ironique est signalé dans cet extrait par un *contrarium* énonciatif dans la mesure où l'indication ironique du contraire est indiquée cette fois-ci par les indices typographiques que nous venons de citer à l'instar de l'exclamation et les points de suspension.

Par ailleurs, nous allons voir, dans un dernier exemple, comment le fonctionnement argumentatif de l'ironie fondée sur ce type de *contrarium* sert également à détruire non seulement l'image d'un tiers, mais aussi les dires de l'allocutaire :

(5) Lakhdar Brahimi a déclaré : « Le changement doit se faire dans un cadre organisé. » Ya walidi ! Comment te l'expliquer ? Dois-je te faire un dessin ? Quand comprendras-tu que nous ne voulons plus entendre parler de... CADRES ?!

(*Le Soir d'Algérie*, 20 mars 2019)

Dans cet extrait, le journaliste vise à disqualifier les dires de son allocutaire, à savoir Lakhdar Brahimi, ancien diplomate algérien à la retraite, qui a fait une déclaration, considérée comme aberrante, en appelant à un changement encadré par l'ancien régime algérien. Rappelons que la dite déclaration se contredit formellement avec la revendication populaire qui réclame le départ de tout l'ancien régime et refuse par la suite toute négociation pareille.

En (5), les indices de l'ironie sont d'ordre typographique à travers l'utilisation de l'exclamation, les points de suspension et les points d'interrogation. À cet égard, l'écriture en majuscule du mot « *CADRES* » après les points de suspension à la fin de l'énoncé fait attirer l'attention du lecteur.

En effet, le mot « *CADRES* » fait allusion à l'ex-président algérien Bouteflika, absent depuis des années sur la scène politique à

cause de sa maladie, cette absence a été remplacée dans plusieurs reprises, là où le président devrait être présent, par un cadre⁴ portant sa photo, ce qui a suscité l'indignation et la moquerie vis-à-vis de cette pratique gouvernementale. Par cette allusion ironique, le journaliste voulait rappeler son lecteur que les dires de Lakhdar Brahimi ne sont, en fait, qu'une image reflétant l'attitude de l'ancien gouvernement algérien auquel tout le peuple est opposé.

Notons à cet effet que l'énoncé en question peut être aussi interprété comme argument *ad hominem* en ce sens qu'« il vise à invalider une autre argumentation en discréditant la personne qui la soutient. » (Doury, 2016 : 51). Ici, le journaliste vise à disqualifier la déclaration de sa cible Lakhdar Brahimi en discréditant la personne elle-même en lui considérant comme quelqu'un qui manque d'intelligence à travers l'interrogation ironique « *comment te l'expliquer ? Dois-je te faire un dessin ?* ».

Pour clore cette analyse, il est à préciser que le locuteur, dans cet exemple, fait appel au *contrarium* énonciatif pour construire son discours ironique. En effet, l'ironie, qui manifeste sous cette forme de contraire, permet au locuteur non seulement de dévaloriser les dires de l'ironisé, mais aussi de discréditer la personne en elle-même.

Conclusion

À travers cette contribution, nous avons voulu mettre la lumière sur la place de l'ironie comme stratégie argumentative dans la mise en scène discursive de l'événement. Pour ce faire, tout en nous référant à la théorie proposée par Egg (2009), nous avons mis à l'épreuve un genre discursif particulier *la chronique journalistique* portant sur l'événement du mouvement populaire du 22 février en Algérie.

En effet, cette brève analyse de quelques extraits du discours journalistique algérien nous a montré que l'usage de l'ironie prend une place prépondérante dans la construction argumentative du discours journalistique. En l'occurrence, nous avons constaté que le locuteur use remarquablement du potentiel argumentatif de l'ironie pour construire son discours dans la mesure où toutes les formes du *contrarium* ont été exploitées dans notre corpus.

En parallèle, il a été révélé que l'exploitation argumentative de l'ironie n'est donc pas uniquement une ouverture vers la spécificité du discours journalistique telle que la chronique ironique, mais également

⁴ Dans son récent ouvrage sur le mouvement populaire du 22 février en Algérie, Aït Dahmane souligne que « le portrait du président a pris des tournures surréalistes, les partisans du 5^{ème} mandat méritent le prix d'humour, ils sont allés jusqu'à saluer et honorer le cadre lors des cérémonies officielles » (2019 : 18).

et surtout une piste de réflexion sur le rôle argumentatif de l'ironie en tant que procédé d'écriture dans la mise en discours de l'événement. Celui-ci, rappelons-le, surgit sans cesse dans notre société et auquel l'analyste du discours est amené à aborder dans les recherches aujourd'hui.

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Book Reviews

Comptes rendus de livres

Concept & Text in Trauma Fiction

Anne Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004)

Ioana Cistelean¹

According to Shoshana Felman (American literary critic and university professor), "The twentieth century can be defined as a century of trauma". 9/11 events have generated both fiction and conceptual studies on the matter: two of the trauma studies' most eminent figures, Cathy Caruth with *Trauma: Explorations in Memory and Unclaimed Experience* (1995) and Kali Tal with *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996), are inspiringly joined by Anne Whitehead, author of *Trauma Fiction* (2004) - all these works accurately identifying the trauma fiction paradigm and respectively applying its inner features on significant modern texts.

Anne Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* delimitates what she would identify as the emerging genre of trauma fiction and it progressively traces how trauma and fiction would eventually influence each other. The book is divided in two parts, *Theme* and respectively *Style*, each part displaying three chapters. The first section argues the fact that trauma fiction is both influenced and informed by recent developments in trauma theory concerning "the nature of traumatic experience itself, the role and function of testimony, and the relation of trauma and place". It is these three theoretical developments that the first three chapters deal with respectively. Although trauma theory includes different methodologies, approaches, and disciplines, Whitehead's focus is primarily literary and each of the first three chapters, though they begin by engaging with major questions and theories, is concerned with offering close readings of works of contemporary literature.

The first chapter calls on Cathy Caruth's notion of trauma as a crisis of experience and temporality in order to examine Pat Barker's novel *Another World*, an exploration of the trauma of World War I, as a site of cultural and historical haunting. Whitehead sagaciously tempers Caruth with historian Dominick LaCapra's work on the dynamics of trauma and history in order to caution against over-identifying in an uncritical way with victims and thus erasing historical context and specificity. Whitehead rightfully notes that Pat Barker, although she deals with three generations of characters who committed fratricide, skips the generation that actually experienced World

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

War II and the Holocaust and thus claims that the novel risks generalization and "subsumes other, later conflicts" in a generalized haunting. As Whitehead says, "it becomes difficult to determine exactly what the trauma is in the novel or where it resides".

At least one significant direction of trauma theory began with the large body of testimony given by the survivors of the Holocaust. In the second chapter, Whitehead demonstrates that in the mid-1990s a genre of testimony emerged, largely due to the work of influential theorists like Dori Laub (Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Yale University) and Shoshana Felman. Binjamin Wilkomirski's false memoir, *Fragments: Memories of a Childhood, 1939-1948*, perfectly fits the conventions of this particular genre despite the eventual revelation that it was not in fact an autobiographical document testifying to a truthful account of a young refugee, but something else altogether (critics have constantly debated what its status is or should be). Testimony, as many theorists observe, rather captures the reader into an ethical relationship with the survivor that Wilkomirski's text betrays. Nevertheless, Anne Whitehead chooses to reactivate this text, not as a simply true or false testimonial, but rather as a pointed critique of a Swiss collective memory that, imbricated in political structures and national myths, itself falsely denied any complicity with the Nazi regime.

Finally, the third chapter examines the relationship between trauma and landscape, reminding the reading audience that landscape always emphasizes matters of not merely how we see, but also from which perspective we see. This questioning of positionality is crucial in terms of trauma narratives, which both examine the difficulties of finding one's bearings in the aftermath of trauma as well as radically disrupts notions of time, history, and experience. In order to illustrate the importance of landscape to trauma, Whitehead looks to Anne Michael's *Fugitive Pieces*, where nature becomes the surface on which trauma has been imprinted and in which the evidence of the past has been concealed, including graves, crawl spaces, ovens, chests, etc. Instead of escaping these negative spaces when they leave Europe, the characters find that the Holocaust has also made itself felt in the new world and on the next generation.

The introduction to the second half of the book makes some valuable and original connections between trauma theory, on one hand and postcolonial and postmodernist theory, on the other hand. Although postmodernism has been largely and constantly accused of being ahistorical, Whitehead justly underlines that postmodern fiction, quite similar to trauma fiction, is largely concerned with the politics of memory and forgetting. Furthermore, she notes that trauma fiction shares with postmodern fiction a tendency to both fragmentation and unreliability.

According to Anne Whitehead, "the desire among various cultural groups to represent or make visible specific historical instances of trauma has given rise to numerous important works of contemporary fiction". In the trauma novel, the reconstruction of massive trauma becomes a process of restatement, during which the response to the work of fiction contains both,

a personal and trans-personal dimension. It is difficult to exactly predict the true purpose of the ongoing and future effects of this traumatic experience or foresee the end of this so-called “transgenerational haunting” (Whitehead). The collective memory, including both flashbulb memories and fiction, can in itself become a valuable object of history. Reader-response criticism remains of significant value in the interpretation of trauma fiction. The community of witnesses includes several possible types of readers, when a present-day reader becomes “a learning witness” (Whitehead).

The Caledonian Promise

Daniela Rogobete, *Scotland and Scottishness. From Tradition to Modernity*, (Editura UNIVERSITARIA, Craiova, 2020)

Magda Danciu¹

The present study seems to be a good way of understanding what a difference it makes when someone casually states “I’m Scottish” or “I’m British” within or outside the UK on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is a useful instrument for picturing the Scottish experience in terms of national history, cultural identity, creative imagination and representation, and for grasping the dynamics of the socio-political context of the country. It aims, as the author admits it, at “providing information, facts and statistics, literary texts analyses whenever possible and funny facts, cultural curiosities and anecdotes meant to spice up the ending of each section” (Rogobete, 2020: 9-10); it is also ready “to encourage and inspire further research into the Scottish culture” (10).

The Scottish national imagination, so strongly connected with a constant attempt to assert Scottishness when defining this particular cultural self-expression, emerges from the permanence of myths and beliefs against a traditional, prototypical zone as revealed in *Part 1. Reimagining Scotland*, that is, the general presentation of the country’s history whether recorded or simply passed from generation to generation through texts, folk tales, legends, supernatural figures, stereotypical associations and symbols (Tartanry, kilt, bagpipe, Kailyardism, the thistle Clydesideism), specific holidays (Candlemas Day, Guy Fawkes Night). They all are part of the constant tendency of asserting “Scottishness” which seems to remain one of the dominant criteria in sharply defining a cultural self-expression emerged from a tradition of despair of being deprived of the national identity preserved, as demonstrated, by traditions, settings and a variety of discourses which constitute “the space that is the imagining of Scotland and Scotland’s imagination” (Cairns Craig, 1999:33).

The validation of the Scottish experience comes from the Scottish writing that bears the vernacular energies provided by exposing problems of language, social class, political belief as well as much freedom of imagination using that particular voice of the margin that has woken up to challenge the

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

right(s) of the centre and claim its own right(s), after accumulated historical wrongs. The author foregrounds this message about Scottish reality in the parts dedicated to the literary heritage that easily testifies the way in which Scottishness and Scotticisms have succeeded to transcend the space of Scottish imagination when imagining Scotland and to generate a specific vision of the world: *Part 2: From ancient bards to modern writers*, respectively, *Part 5: Lyrical Scotland*, when mentioning that “Scottish literature has been and still is a battlefield of contestations and affirmations, of searching and discovery” (Rogobete, 2020: 43), mainly caused by the “diversity of languages spoken in ancient times” (133) and the different literary traditions they engendered.

The author opts for a diachronic approach to each aspect of the Caledonian legacy she refers to in this study, by carefully selecting data and details to reveal this nation’s multi-faceted reality using certain starting points to demonstrate the strong connections between past and present, between memory and identity, between the local and the international strains, synopsized in *Part 3: The Last of the Free*, respectively, in *Part 4: Factual truths and human nature*, dedicated to the presentation of spiritual, moral, philosophical traits of the Scottish nation.

The final part, *Escapes from reality*, epitomizes the Caledonian traditionalism and centredness, relevant in two key works, James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886); subsequent to these books, self-division becomes the image of a self-divided culture exploring “the limitation of notions of the self which have themselves reduced the self from its true complexity in order to produce a false unity in which the person is simply a spectator and a social function”(Craig, Cairns, 1999: 114). The theory of the second self, of the diffraction of the self, expounds the Scottish fantasy tradition and “the obsession with split personalities and the duality of human nature, with doubles and specters” (Rogobet, 2020: 160), related to “Gregory Smith’s famous concept of *Caledonian antiszygy*” (160), the dimension that describes the union of opposites and has become the image of an inevitable ambiguity and the allegorical configuration of Scotland’s political and cultural history, as well as a recurrent motif Scottish gothic fiction and most popular crime fiction, successfully illustrated by the eccentric, mysterious stories of Arthur Conan Doyle. Daniela Rogobete explains the reasons for which Scottish writers have a preference for the Gothic, for “fear inspiring places and occurrences, as well as fear stricken characters”(157), demonstrating how the dialectics of fear operates with the Scottish gothic texts whose authors “make use of an entire range of dimensions: starting from a mythic fear, which is placed beyond reasonable explanation and relies upon myths and legends; a religious fear (...) highly marked by the Calvinist legacy, fear of Otherness” (158).

Readers might find it interesting to discover the comprehensiveness of the present study in the way in which it conflates history, religion, philosophy, literature, anthropology, in a panoramic over/view on the

country, its human geography and its polyphonic traditional culture, reassessed from the perspective of the current knowledge in the fields and the competing attractions of the globalized world. The book is a useful, friendly vade-mecum for both a scholar and a simply curious student due to its well structured content, detailed references and mostly, for the chapter-closing “Did you know...?”- section, thus opening avenues for further inquiries into the secrets of Scotland and Scottishness.

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Jean –Marie Gustave Le Clézio : Chanson bretonne suivi de L'enfant et la guerre Deux contes

(Editions Gallimard : 2020)

Florica Mateoc¹

Connu surtout comme un grand romancier, lauréat du Prix Nobel en 2008, Le Clézio fait paraître au printemps 2020 un petit bijou littéraire qu'il appelle lui-même conte. C'est une écriture singulière parce qu'elle n'a rien à faire avec le conte populaire ou le conte de fées ; mais c'est un conte revisité, une manière de raconter héritée de sa grand-mère maternelle qui inventait des histoires à Nice, pendant la guerre. D'ailleurs, l'écrivain explique le choix de cette forme littéraire et de cet intitulé lors d'une intervention dans l'émission « 28 minutes » du 10 juin 2020 sur la chaîne Arte. Quoique la veine autobiographique soit évidente dans ce livre, ce ne sont pas de mémoires comme le précise Le Clézio, tout en ajoutant qu'il n'aime pas ce genre. Ce sont des expériences vécues ou des histoires écoutées qu'il transfère dans cette œuvre tout en y ajoutant ses idées d'écrivain adulte, ancré dans la réalité du présent.

Comme le montre le titre, le livre contient deux contes où il remonte dans le temps et raconte son enfance en Bretagne (le premier) et la toute petite enfance, pendant la Seconde Guerre dans l'arrière-pays niçois (le deuxième). Ils sont inégaux car des 154 pages, le premier contient une centaine et le deuxième le reste. La première de couverture renforce aussi cette structure par les caractéristiques typographiques : « Chanson bretonne » est écrite en majuscules plus grandes et renforcées, éveillant l'attention du lecteur sur son contenu. En effet, il peut découvrir des images et des histoires de la Bretagne, pays très cher à Le Clézio. Le nomade qui a voyagé presque partout dans le monde, qui est un écrivain des lieux, a choisi cette fois une région de la fin du monde (le Finistère = Finis terrae en est un département).

Pourquoi la Bretagne ? L'écrivain donne lui-même la réponse à cette question dans l'émission de télévision de TV 5, « La Grande Librairie » : « J'ai vécu un peu partout, je suis étranger à tout, mais si je dois choisir un pays, une racine, ou plutôt un rhizome, c'est la Bretagne, une terre infinie et sans limites, qui ouvre sur l'imaginaire » (La Grande Librairie, le 11 mars 2020). En effet, c'est le lieu préféré par des artistes, des peintres et des écrivains qui

¹ Université d'Oradea, Roumanie

ont été attirés surtout par l'air exotique de la région, espace naturel et historique, exemple étonnant du mélange des cultures. L'intitulé de l'une des dernières toiles de Gauguin « D'où venons-nous ? Que sommes-nous ? Où allons-nous ? » renvoie à cette problématique de l'identité qui a hanté longtemps les Bretons. L'écrivain rappelle le nom du peintre lorsqu'il peint lui-même par des paroles la singularité du paysage breton. L'aveu de Gauguin lorsqu'il peint un village breton sous la neige contient la même idée selon laquelle la Bretagne est une source d'inspiration inédite : « J'aime la Bretagne, j'y trouve le sauvage, le primitif. Quand mes sabots sonnent sur ce sol de granit, j'entends le son sourd, mat et puissant que je cherche en peinture »²

La Bretagne est vraiment un pays différent des autres, avec une géographie et une histoire à part. Ce n'est pas le lieu natal de l'écrivain, lui étant né à Nice mais c'est le lieu de ses ancêtres qui ont vécu là-bas avant leur départ pour l'Ile Maurice, après la Révolution de 1789. Son nom est aussi d'origine bretonne comme il le montre à la page 39 où il décrit « les chemins creux à travers champs et bosquets, enfoncés entre deux hauts talus (*ar kleuziou*, notre nom de famille) ». Mais l'histoire de vie de sa mère montre que la Bretagne a abrité une partie de sa jeunesse ; elle y a connu l'amour, son père lui a demandé la main, elle y venait souvent de Paris pour se ressourcer, pour rêver à une famille ou pour se sauver pendant la guerre, comme le raconte l'écrivain dans l'émission de télévision rappelée ci-dessus. Cette attraction de l'écrivain pour le lieu pourrait s'expliquer aussi par un héritage maternel.

Le début du livre contient quelques phrases, en guise de préambule, où Le Clézio explique son lien fort avec la Bretagne, résidant d'abord dans l'histoire de la famille dont tous les membres sont des Bretons, « reliés par ce fil invisible et solide à ce pays » (p. 14). En plus, il se confie que les vacances d'été en Bretagne, entre les années 48 et 54, venant après son voyage en Afrique, lui ont apporté le plus d'émotions et de souvenirs. En même temps l'écrivain précise qu'il ne fera pas un récit chronologique car ce sera l'enfant Le Clézio qui racontera ses souvenirs et les enfants ne connaissent pas la chronologie.

Chanson bretonne, le premier conte, est structuré en dix-sept petits chapitres, de vrais tableaux de différents genres picturaux représentant la Bretagne et les Bretons : paysages, marines, natures mortes, portraits, compositions, scènes historiques. Le premier tableau, le plus grand d'ailleurs, décrit le village de Sainte-Marine, le village de son enfance. Aux yeux de l'écrivain adulte, il a beaucoup changé, étant soumis à l'uniformisation apportée par la modernisation. Malgré cela, son cœur d'enfant a gardé plein de choses qu'il se prête à présenter dans les moindres détails. La chapelle, le bac (remplacé aujourd'hui par le fameux pont de Cornouaille) pour passer de l'autre côté de la rivière Odet, la grande rue qui traversait le village sont quelques éléments définitoires pour son identité. L'atmosphère de jadis est rendue par la description des maisons bretonnes, pauvres et grises, avec des

² Noël Broëlec, *Beauté de la Bretagne*, Genève-Paris, Ed. Minerva, 1990, p. 76.

murs en granite et des toits de chaume. L'absence des commerces valorisait l'unique boutique de la ferme Biger qui vendait du tout. Le décor est enrichi avec l'image de la pompe communale, l'unique source d'eau potable où se rencontraient tous les gosses du village pour chercher l'eau. L'écrivain en a dû être fasciné parce qu'il décrit non seulement son aspect, la forme et la couleur, mais aussi l'action de puiser l'eau à l'aide d'un broc et de la transporter à la maison.

L'écrivain peuple ce village de gosses bretons et de quelques filles distinguées, différentes des autres enfants qui vivaient dans une grande villa et qui ont éveillé la curiosité et l'imagination de l'enfant. Ces gosses parlaient breton tandis que l'enfant Le Clézio avec son frère en étaient vus comme des étrangers « ar Parizianer » (p. 25). Il se rappelle leurs noms bretons qu'il se plaît à énumérer – Yanik, Mikel, Pierrick, Ifik, Paol, Erwan, Fanch, Soizik (p. 25)- et il regrette le fait que, devenus des spécialistes dans différents domaines, ils aient renoncé au breton pour devenir Français. C'est une bonne occasion pour l'écrivain d'expliquer les causes historiques de ce changement (le français est la langue de la République) mais aussi le complexe d'infériorité des Bretons envers les Français des autres régions.

Quelques portraits de Bretons attirent l'attention du lecteur : Raymond Javry, pêcheur, peintre, marin et Mme le Dour, la fermière avec ses deux filles Jeannette et Marise, devenues amies d'enfance de l'écrivain. Ce sont des gens simples, laborieux, indépendants et courageux. La description de la ferme est faite en détails donnant l'impression de voir un musée d'ethnographie. La pauvreté domine dans l'aspect de la maison, le sol de terre battue, la toiture de chaume, le manque d'électricité ou les vêtements de la femme. Et l'écrivain d'ajouter : « c'était le sentiment d'un lieu hors du temps, oublié du monde moderne. Oui, comme d'entrer dans un dessin. » (p. 34). Il se plaît à glisser des mots bretons dans le texte, un signe d'appréciation de cette langue, attitude pareille pour d'autres langues minoritaires : « glav, glao, glaobil, glao stank, glao sil...Glav a ra abaoe derc'hentdec'h » (p. 33), des mots et des phrases qui décrivent le climat particulier de la Bretagne, dominé par cette pluie drue et menue, appelée crachin.

Des scènes de vie bretonne apparaissent dans les chapitres intitulés *Le Cosquer* et *Moisson*. Au château de Cosquer vivait en solitude une marquise, comme dans les contes de fées, mais à la mi-août elle organisait une fête à laquelle participait des villageois et des touristes. Il y avait de la musique, des jeux spécifiques, une messe, un buffet breton (des crêpes de toute sorte) et un bal. Dans *Moisson* est décrite une autre fête, celle du travail destiné au blé qui était une sorte de rituel, « un événement, une épreuve et une bataille » (p. 49). La description de la batteuse, de son fonctionnement, de l'organisation du battage pendant un seul jour, de la fièvre des fermiers sont pour l'écrivain une leçon singulière qui le relie au passé lointain de sa famille mais aussi au passé de l'humanité.

L'écrivain dédie un petit chapitre, *Doryphores*, aux petits insectes qui avaient envahi les champs de pommes de terre en Bretagne, cet insecte destructif venu de Colorado avec l'import de ce légume en Europe. Son

imagination d'enfant déborde lorsqu'il se propose d'appivoiser ces insectes et de créer un cirque pour les mettre au premier plan. La même attitude est évidente devant un poulpe qu'il découvre à la marée basse et qu'il décrit dans le chapitre éponyme.

La mer est toujours présente dans ce premier conte mais l'on découvre une vraie marine dans le chapitre *A la mer*. C'est une mer déchaînée par le vent de la marée qui les surprend, lui et son frère sur un îlot de sable, le forçant de nager pour se sauver. Et puis, ce sentiment inoubliable d'avoir réussi et de dire que la mer lui a montré le chemin.

Rien de ce qui forme l'identité d'une région et de ses habitants n'est laissé de côté. En dehors des souvenirs d'enfance qui sont racontés de main de maître, l'écrivain intervient pour exprimer ses opinions sur la situation actuelle ou pour faire des comparaisons avec des faits similaires connus à Nice, en Afrique ou ailleurs. Sa remarque est que l'Eglise bretonne était plus sobre et discrète que celle catholique romaine, très riche en décorations et gesticulations. En plus, les curés portaient la loi et la culture bretonne avec les cantiques et les fêtes du Pardon. On apprend aussi par la voix de l'écrivain que là-bas comme partout en France, les églises sont désertes, les chapelles sont fermées et le manque des prêtres mènent les femmes à dire la messe.

Il ne faut pas oublier la belle description de la lande qu'on retrouve dans le chapitre *Avant l'histoire*. Végétation particulière de la Bretagne, elle porte un nom provenu du breton « lann » que l'auteur explique : « cela veut dire les étendues d'ajoncs, cette fourrure gris-vert qui recouvre la terre, qui s'empare de tous les lieux inhabités. » (p. 77). Mais la lande reçoit plus de singularité par la présence des menhirs et des dolmens qui ont reçu les Bretons dans leur monde. Dans le chapitre *Le mystère*, on apprend non seulement des détails sur la vie de son aïeul Alexis François, un républicain convaincu qui a quitté la Bretagne pour l'Ile Maurice mais aussi la rencontre de ses deux petits cousins du village Cleouziou qui l'ont impressionné pour toujours par leur mutisme, par leur air pauvre et craintif.

Le chapitre portant un titre en breton *Breizh atao ! (Bretagne toujours, en français)* donne la parole à l'écrivain qui parle du présent de la région, du tourisme, de ses beautés rares comme l'image d'un champ de blé devant la ligne des dunes ou le long de la falaise. Revenu en Bretagne à l'âge de la vieillesse, il est impressionné par la propreté des fermes, par l'agriculture biologique, par le retour des jeunes déterminés d'y vivre et de parler le breton. L'écrivain parle même d'une autonomie, non pas administrative mais économique, fiscale et plutôt culturelle.

Chanson bretonne finit par l'évocation de son héros breton, nommé Hervé qui apporte la magie ancienne par ses histoires d'enfance passée dans une ferme du bord de mer dans la commune de Poullan. Il parle de la dureté du climat, du travail au champ, des difficultés, du manque d'argent mais aussi des fêtes, des mariages, de la musique et de la bonne chère. C'est à lui et à son épouse Marie-Ange, que Le Clézio a dédié ce premier conte, non pas comme un album de souvenirs mais comme une chanson bretonne.

L'enfant et la guerre, le deuxième conte, comprend ses souvenirs

pendant la Seconde Guerre, à Nice et dans le petit village de Roquebillière, dans l'arrière-pays, dans la vallée de la Vésubie. Comme le précise l'écrivain dans les quelques phrases d'introduction, il a vécu les premières cinq années de sa vie dans une guerre. Il voit la guerre non pas comme un phénomène historique mais comme une somme de sentiments et de sensations. Il décrit la crainte qu'il ressent au moment de l'explosion d'une bombe dans la cour de l'immeuble où il habitait avec sa mère, son frère et ses grands-parents. Les souvenirs sont reliés à sa grand-mère qu'il décrit comme une belle femme, habillée à la mode des années 1900, une Parisienne venue pour s'installer à Nice avec son mari après la crise financière de 1931, lorsqu'ils ont tout perdu. C'était aussi une femme forte, très courageuse qui avait traversé aussi la Grande Guerre mais restée sensible par sa façon de raconter des histoires, de chanter des comptines, par sa joie de vivre. Le refuge dans le village c'était vivre en sûreté à côté des villageois qui se sont montrés très solidaires. Pour le petit enfant, c'était aussi le confort intérieur, la douceur offerte par les tricots de sa grand-mère et par le sein maternel. Par le présent de narration, l'écrivain se demande sur le sort des enfants des pays en guerre et s'indigne du fait que plus tard ils peuvent devenir eux-mêmes des assassins. Toute la misère de la guerre semble être imprimée dans l'image de la plaie à la jambe de sa grand-mère, pleine de mouches que l'enfant observe et décrit.

La scène de la moisson à l'ancienne, dans le village, sans machines agricoles reste mémorable, comme dernières traces de la civilisation agricole. La faim les a poussés à glaner comme l'a fait aussi l'écrivain chinois Mo Yan au temps de la famine qui s'est confessé à l'écrivain. Cette faim a quelque chose de particulier, parce que c'était un manque continu. Après la guerre, ses souvenirs d'avoir bu de l'huile de foie de morue et d'avoir léché des cristaux de sel sont le signe d'avoir enduré une grande faim. Il est évoqué ensuite l'enfant Mario, une sorte de Gavroche qui est mort déchiqueté par la bombe qu'il transportait. Cette histoire trouble l'écrivain et le fait condamner tous ceux qui impliquent les enfants dans la guerre, tuant leur enfance. Il évoque aussi la déportation des Juifs en train de passer vers l'Italie de même que l'histoire d'un groupe de fugitifs qui ont été massacrés par les Allemands.

L'écrivain raconte aussi l'après-guerre, le retour dans l'appartement de Nice, la queue pour obtenir les aliments, les matériaux pour le chauffage, les vêtements. Le vide provoqué par la guerre est intensifié dans son cas par l'absence du père, séparé de la famille par son métier de médecin de brousse en Afrique. Son rêve de revenir auprès des siens a été anéanti par la situation de la France qui a accepté l'invasion allemande par le gouvernement de Vichy.

La guerre veut dire aussi la décrépitude, la disparition des êtres proches comme ceux évoqués par l'écrivain dans la personne de la belle tante mauricienne, devenue aveugle et vivant dans la promiscuité. Ou bien l'histoire des deux sœurs Gaby et Maud, amies de sa mère, affamés et misérables.

La dernière partie du conte finit par la description de son départ pour l'Afrique pour retrouver son père. L'écrivain se reconnaît dans les images des enfants migrants d'aujourd'hui fuyant les pays en guerre. Il apporte une critique très dure à l'Europe qui a utilisé son progrès technique pour fabriquer

des armes de mort. Au contraire, l'Afrique, le continent primitif et sauvage dans les yeux des Européens l'a civilisé, lui offrant la liberté et l'abondance de la nature.

Hymne à la Bretagne et détestation de la guerre, des conflits et de la violence, les deux contes de Le Clézio montrent une fois de plus sa sensibilité et son rêve d'un monde meilleur.

Mircea Mihăieș, *O noapte cu Molly Bloom. Romanul unei femei (A Night with Molly Bloom. The Novel of a Woman)*
(Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 2020)

Marius Miheț¹

A Woman as Vast as the World

Who could have ever imagined that the pages of Joyce would be surpassed by the critical tomes dedicated to him? After *Ulysses*, 732. *Romanul romanului (Ulysses, 732. The Novel of the Novel)* (1,000 pages), Mircea Mihăieș continues an almost unbelievable critical adventure dedicated to James Joyce. The Timișoara academic returns to the Irish writer's masterpiece, but not to the novel of the novel this time. But to the meanings generated by Molly Bloom, a character who, it seems, can be assimilated with an entire book. Of course, we may ask ourselves: who would read a book of literary critique dedicated to a character? Mihăieș relates her to the great heroines of the European literary canon, from Russian to French literature. However, Irish Molly carries a wholly enigmatic baggage in terms of identity. As it is in her that the blood of certain ethnicities which, in the Anglophone world, create a profile of femininity wholly remarkable intertwines. The 12 faces of Molly that the critic analyzes in the book are just as many faces of the biography of a fictional character. Which seems to burst out of fiction and become more real than the impression with which the reader begins the book – namely, that they are reading a monograph of the protagonist of a work of fiction. Naturally, from the get-go, Mihăieș takes chances in several instances. First of all because he claims, in black and white, that this book attempts to understand the way in which the mind of a woman works. Except that the heroine of *Ulysses*, Joyce's exotic feminist, represents, for the Romanian author, one of the most powerful expressions of femininity in the Western literature of the past two centuries. The biographical reconstitution of the character of Molly Bloom, assuming a perspective as if it belonged to the character. However, she is the sum of the points of view; which is why Anglo-American critics have defined her as the new Penelope in thousands of dedicated articles and studies. Mihăieș sees beyond ideological critique; he perceives feminism and his theory as the exotic mirrors of her identity. Such that it is in no way accidental that she has the freedom that no one else has, not even during the era. On top of that, at the level of the discourse, her soliloquy stands out from all the other voices in the novel.

At the same time, the female character attracts an immense quantity of

¹ University „Comenius” Bratislava, Slovakia/ University of Oradea, Romania

information. Mihăieş has assumed this idea of Joyce's (from the Irishman's correspondence), in which he stated that he focused on so many details in his book about Dublin that, had the city been destroyed entirely, a careful reader could have restored it based on the information in his book. This is how Mircea Mihăieş wishes to treat Molly, yet she exceeds expectations by a wide margin. Especially when the author prefers to even give her a voice at the end of the novel, one that rings louder than all the rest. And, transcribed this way, this voice, Mihăieş believes, captures the most paradoxical thoughts coming from the mind of a woman ever shown in literature. Moreover, the unprecedented vitality of the heroine in the final part of the novel is achieved through a formula of radical experimentalism, which has also been a significant cause, the researcher believes, of the novel's celebrity.

The structure of Mihăieş's book resembles a fan fully opened. Gradually revealing the faces of Joyce's Penelope. The Irishman's queen is domestic, submissive and faithful. Only at surface level, because Molly is devising plans to cheat on her neglectful husband. Erotic freedom also provides her with moral disinhibition, believes Mihăieş. The chapters are, otherwise, titled very symbolically (Molly – the fan, the imperial, the immodest, the carousel, naturalis, triplex, from Troy, of stone, post-meridian, nocturnal, the earth, the assemblage, the mille-feuille, the grande-bouffe). Mihăieş, in a detective's manner, analyzes all perspectives, while sticking to the text. And nothing escapes him. This is also the first quality of the study: the reader's conviction that the literary historian has left nothing aside, that he has used all of his material, even the material we might consider inconclusive. Of course, on the one hand, Mihăieş critically re-tells the novel. He even strives to offer comments as close to an attractive narration as possible. And he manages it. With humor, unexpected connections and *livresque* references. Mihăieş is also spontaneous, but his reasoning can stretch on entire pages – whenever necessary. In any case, there is a bit of everything. It is not surprising that, at a certain point, Mihăieş states that, before being offered to the reader, Molly Bloom is subjected to a process similar to the one encountered with cubists; namely that she was "melted" into shapes and reconfigured into a sort of geometry that portray her depths more intensely. One might even say that she is offered a state of hyper-reality. Without a doubt, Mircea Mihăieş is fascinated by the character, but is far more so by the worlds that the author Joyce packs inside her. As if, for decades, the researcher from Timișoara has dedicated himself to a single author as much as to a whole library. He probably found the library in a single author and was won over. What is certain that he has won us over as well.

Erudite, encyclopedic, with a good understanding of what is Aesopian and how to geometrize even imagination, Mihăieş is a critic that any literature could admire, regardless of its expression.

A fundamental book that establishes unignorable reference points.

Time in Ali Smith's "Autumn"

SMITH, A. 2016. *Autumn*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

Dorel-Aurel Mureşan¹

"Autumn" is Ali Smith's first novel in the author's 'seasonal quartet', being labeled as the 'first post-Brexit' novel. Very well received by critics, Ali Smith's novel was both shortlisted for The Man Booker Prize for Fiction as well as considered one of the 10 Best Books of 2017. Although quite short, "Autumn" is a condensed mixture of themes, touching on complex issues like death, friendship, change, family relationships, art and literature. Such an accomplishment is possible through a juxtaposition of memories and dreams, of the past and the present, of the old and the new, in a three part novel, like the three months of autumn, that closely depicts the reality that nothing can escape the effects of the passing of time.

The novel starts with Daniel Gluck, a 101 years old man who is sleeping in a nursing home, and who is dreaming, as he get closer and closer to his death. Daniel's surrealist dream, in which time does not flow as it does in reality, overlaps with the reality of his constantly approaching death, emphasizing from the first pages of the novel that time cannot be stopped, despite our dreams and wishes. The 32 years old Elisabeth Demand, Daniel's friend and former neighbor, comes regularly to the nursing home to read to the comatose man. The novel develops around Daniel's dreams, intermingled with Elisabeth's reading as well as her childhood memories, her present life and her complicated relationship with her mother, having the description of the split post-Brexit English society as a background.

The first thing that the reader needs to understand is that time flies, and Smith vividly depicts this idea in one scene where Daniel throws his watch into the air, while teaching young Elisabeth a lesson. Moreover, Daniel's life can be summed up in three sentences, just like the three months of autumn or the three main stages of life: "Boy on a train. Blink of an eye. Old man in a bed" (101). However, the passing of time also offers people the opportunity to blossom in their relationships. Thus, Daniel and Elizabeth develop a lasting friendship, mature Elizabeth finally connects with her mother, and her old mother meets her long awaited true love.

Secondly, for Ali Smith, time seems to have a certain circularity. Thus, "Autumn" emphasizes that not only life stories are affected by the passing of

¹ Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania

time, but history as well. However, unlike life stories, history tends to repeat itself, as people tend to forget and repeat their mistakes. Nevertheless, Daniel stresses the importance of forgetting, since without forgetting there is no possibility of a new beginning. Therefore, past issues such as the Holocaust and the Profumo scandal are intertwined with present depictions of fragmented Britain because of the Brexit vote and the prejudiced mindsets embodied by the post office employees and Elizabeth's tutor. The hope for change is placed in the hands of the individual, so Daniel's influence on Elizabeth manifests itself in the woman's development and eventually both Elisabeth and her mother stand against the current, one through her dissertation and the other through her public act of disobedience.

But the passing of time leaves its mark on art and literature as well, since people's perception and opinions concerning both subjects constantly change. Thus, some books are old and some are new, some are boring and some are interesting, but Smith's suggestion is that it always depends on the reader. Moreover, because of the circular nature of time, with each new generation reading preferences might change, but old books might be rediscovered and brought to a focus. In addition, throughout her novel Smith skillfully employs the tool of intertextuality to associate styles, genres and literary currents that are mostly in opposition, implying that eclecticism is possible. As far as art is concerned, Smith focuses on the figure of Pauline Boty, the first female in the British pop art movement, who was not very well represented:

All the same. I bet she was ignored.
She was after she died, Elisabeth says.
I bet it goes like this, Zoe says. Ignored. Lost. Rediscovered years later. Then ignored. Lost. Rediscovered again years later. Then ignored. Lost. Rediscovered ad infinitum. Am I right?

Zoe's description encompasses the reality of constant change, but also suggests that there is always hope in rediscovery, and this is the project that Ali Smith embarks on. Smith's focalization on the figure of Pauline Boty goes beyond the mere mentioning; the author imitates Boty's art by constructing her novel like a textual collage:

Collage is an institute of education where all the rules can be thrown into the air, and size and space and time and foreground and background all become relative, and because of these skills everything you think you know gets made into something new and strange (71–72).

Thus, Ali Smith's "Autumn" with its experimental style incorporates past and present, old and new, ugly and beautiful, touching on a multitude of themes and points of view, blending everything together into "something new and strange". Smith's novel invites us to hope and freedom, to open-mindedness and optimism, in a beautiful novel about stories and histories, life and death, family and friends, art and literature, all of it taking place under the watchful eyes of Cronos.

The Quirks of Scots in Alexander McCall's Smith 'The Sunday Philosophy Club'

(Great Britain, Abacus:Little,Brown)

Giulia Suci¹

Are you a declared fan of Edinburgh? Would you like to take a virtual stroll through Princess Street or Calton Hill and learn about the quirks of the Scots? Then let me introduce you to Alexander McCall Smith - one of the most prolific and best-loved Scottish writers – and his protagonist Isabel Dalhousie from *The Sunday Philosophy Club* series, comprising 13 titles written between 2004 and 2020.

The series is set in Edinburgh, depicting the everyday life of its inhabitants, their daily conundrums and features Isabel Dalhousie, a Scottish-American philosopher in her early forties and the editor of the Review of Applied Ethics. Isabel, an independent woman of means, is living in a large aging house in Merchiston. (McCall himself bought and renovated a large Victorian mansion in the Merchiston area of the city, close to other famous authors like J.K Rowling or Jan Rankin.) When she is not editing the review, Isabel sorts out people's problems; when people in her circle of friends face problems, they turn to her for help. '*I am a recipient of unusual confidences*', she once said. Thus, this somewhat-nosy philosopher ends up exploring the rights and wrongs of everyday life, resolving moral dilemmas on a day-to-day basis.

With each novel we embark on a detective quest, be it to help an adopted fellow philosopher from Australia to track down her Scottish roots, to look into a poison-pen letter that makes insinuations about applicants for the position of principal for a renowned school, to unravel the truth behind a doctor whose career has been ruined, or solve the mystery of the fallen man from the balcony at the Usher Hall. A true philosopher, Isabel considers it her moral duty to help people in distress, and thus ends up meddling in people's lives – as some of her friends would put it – because for her, ethics are not theoretical at all: they are a matter of life and death.

But Isabel is so much more than a reluctant sleuth tackling crimes and mysteries among the cobblestones of Edinburgh. She is first and foremost a philosopher and while investigating murders, she is ready to pursue the

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

answers to all of life's questions, pondering fascinating angles to everyday topics, from the relatively mundane ones (the way in which chance determines much of what happens to us; skateboarders, with their lack of interest in anything much except their repetitive twirls and gymnastic tricks; the doings and little ways of those about us that gives texture to our lives; the way in which we define ourselves socially as much as individually through our duties to others etc.) to the deeply philosophical ones.

‘...the Trolley Problem, one of the most famous thought experiments of the twentieth-century philosophy – and twenty-first-century philosophy too, since the problem continued to rumble along, as everyone knew. Everyone professionally involved in philosophy, that is, and that included Isabel...

A trolley car is careering out of control down a slope. Ahead of it on the line are five people who have been tied there by a mad philosopher. You, however, realise that by flicking a switch you can divert the trolley on to a spur line. There is one person standing on the line. If you flick the switch, one person will be killed; if you do nothing, five will die. Will you flick the switch?’

(Alexander McCall Smith- ‘The Comfort of Saturdays’)

And all these philosophical tribulations take place against the background of wonderful Edinburgh atmosphere, giving away McCall Smith's love of the city and everything Scottish. In such crazy times (yes, I'm talking about the year 2020), a virtual tour of one of the world's most beautiful cities might be exactly what we need. And having Alexander McCall Smith as your tour guide is the bonus.

The Sunday Philosophy Club is a detective story in a rather quirky and incidental way, because the main focus is not on the crimes and wrongdoings, but on the characters. The real charm of the series lies in Isabel's thoughtful observations of the wrongs and rights of life, in a way that makes it so easy for us to relate to her in our everyday scenarios. Having a sly sense of humour and a clear understanding of what is right and wrong, Isabel has an intuitive understanding of human behaviour and advocates simple, basic concepts such as tolerance, kindness, simplicity and good manners. An insatiably curious philosopher and amateur detective, Isabel has been described as a combination of the nosey interfering of Austen's Emma with the relentless self-analysis of Carrie Bradshaw.

The series also makes frequent reference to works of literature, history, art and music from Scotland and elsewhere making the reading even more worthwhile; the frequently-mentioned Auden (Mc Call Smith's favourite poet), John Donne, Shakespeare, Orwell, Kant, Hume, Andrew McInnes, Max Richeter, even Ceauşescu, to give just a few examples.

Though Scotland's weather may be misty and cool, McCall's style warms every page of the series. Take everything with a pinch of the author's limitless understanding of human nature and you've got yourself quite a treat.

Anna Burns's *Mostly Hero*: an Experimental Tale

Anna Burns: *Mostly Hero*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 2019

Éva Székely¹

Self-published as an eBook in 2014, and published by Faber & Faber as a paperback in 2019, Anna Burns's novella: *Mostly Hero*, is the liminal tale per-se. Inspired by the plotline and the characters of classic-era film noir, action comics, and non-rogue like role-playing video-games, this topsy-turvy tale plunges the reader into the middle of an interminable quest for world-domination, revenge, and true love. The story, in spite of its episodic nature, is easily summarized. The protagonists: Superhero, Femme Fatale and Great Aunt live in an urban setting made up of skyscrapers, courthouses, restaurants and hospitals. The city is a dangerous place, where a number of gangs and individuals (the villains from downtown eastside, Great Aunt and her henchmen, Superhero, Monique Frostique) fight for supremacy. Tired by the repetitiveness of this war, where they can be only winners or losers, the protagonists have lost focus and stamina, and, therefore, are less pro-active than expected. Hesitation becomes the order of the day, and the plot of the story gets stale until the arrival of episodic character Freddie Ditchlingtonne^{ly} who murders in order to please the love of his life: Monique Frostique, one of the episodic villainesses of the tale. By the end of the story, some characters die, but death is not the ultimate end in this world. The story ends as it began: in medias res.

Among the hesitant protagonists, Superhero occupies most of the pages of the novella. Hence the title of the tale: *Mostly Hero*. Having been suspicious of everyone but himself, and keeping a dossier even on Femme Fatale, the love of his life, before the beginning of the story Superhero finds out that he is not the grandson of Mr. Squeaky Clean Great Guy Top Ace Superhero, as his father has always told him, but of Mr. Grand Villain Extreme Omni-Imperious Arch-Grand-Arch Emperor Supreme Baddie of the World and of arch-villainess Great Aunt. Often, in the course of the tale, the reader finds him questioning his true motifs for taking part in world-saving projects, and also of the truthfulness of the villain-hero dichotomy.

Hero, owing to a sense of anomie, of dragging anchor, indeed of a new sensation called depression, only imperfectly took in what was happening.

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

He was struggling with the incomprehensible idea of things systematically being taken away from him, as well as himself no longer being himself. Also, of not yet having turned into another person. Also, of himself not being good guy, or perhaps never having wanted to be good guy, because under the not wanting to be bad guy seemed to have lurked a discrepant seed demanding he be bad guy but with him thinking he wasn't allowed to be because of fealty to dead heroes who, it now transpired, had been villains all along. (Burns, 81)

Self-reflection results in inaction and also in lack of alertness to imminent danger. Therefore, the increasingly absent-minded Superhero saves none, not even himself. By the end of the story, he gets drugged and starts to hallucinate.

His lover, Femme Fatale, is under the influence of a less than perfect evil-spell meant to turn her into the murderer of Superhero. At the beginning of the tale, she has already made no less than forty unsuccessful attempts to murder Hero. In the spans when she is not under the spell she has no memory of any of her evil doings and behaves as a woman in love. By the end of the tale, when she manages to cast off the evil spell, she finds that her ambivalent attitude towards Hero hasn't changed at all, for love renders one vulnerable, and when hurt and angry, one has murderous thoughts, anyway.

Great Aunt, who has already dominated the world four times before, and murdered almost all her enemies, has spent the last twenty years of her life in the penthouse of a skyscraper giving orders to her henchmen, and watching and getting emotional about her favorite film noir: *The Third Man*. She receives regular visits from her niece: Femme Fatale, the only character in the novella who has no knowledge of Great Aunt's criminal activities, and the only person that Great Aunt truly cares about. It is because of her regard for her niece's feelings for Superhero that Great Aunt hesitates to murder him, thus forfeiting her last chance to dominate the world once again: "The child was besotted. Clearly now, she couldn't just obliterate hero – not with little chocolate here being so in love with him. Of course, there can't be any future in it, but when had that ever stopped anybody before?" (Burns, 18-19)

The sentences of the narrative, reflecting the undecidedness of the protagonists, abound in stative verbs, gerunds, progressive tenses, subjunctives, and an astonishing quantity of modifiers. And yet, although many of these sentences are half-page long, the story is surprisingly easy to read. And although it is filled with the clichéd characters of action comics and film noirs, by investing the protagonists with the capacity of self-reflection, and by giving up the customary well-knit plot, it is also surprisingly postmodern and innovative.

Women Who Write, Men Who Read

Lia Faur and Șerban Axinte (eds.) *Cum citesc bărbații cărțile femeilor*, Polirom, Iași, 2017

Anca Tomoioagă¹

The researchers and writers Lia Faur and Șerban Axinte brought into the spotlight a collection of 31 essays flanked by an epistolary poem written by Șerban Foarță and a phone interview (instead of the preface) with the poet Angela Marinescu. The short and very short essays are gathered under an outstanding book cover illustrated by the talented Carmen Parii and belong to several well-known writers, historians, academics and literary critics. Nevertheless, as the essays are not necessarily meant to fill in the panoply of academic writings, they are very accessible, easy to read for the common reader but also of interest for the researcher. We could place it on the same shelf with Mihaela Ursa's *Divanul scriitoarei* or Alina Purcaru's *Povești cu scriitoare și copii*, for instance. In my thinking, such collective volumes of essays respond to a certain need of writers to be represented in the public space and to reconnect with their readers. The topics that most of such volumes deal with are rather cultural and are meant to reveal the writers' personal views and experiences.

As the title suggests the book deals with the reception of women's writings by male professional readers. The title, though approached by some of the contributors as a question, in fact is a secondary sentence that starts with the adverb *how*, bringing precisely the manner of approaching women's fiction into both the reader's and writer's focus. The actual question which Lia Faur and Șerban Axinte pose in their introductory essay is whether, after considering the supremacy of the aesthetic, a reading which also takes into account the writer's biographical ego (women/men) is possible nowadays (5). The hypothesis that they use refers to the fact that fiction written by women is being read differently. Also, the two editors confess that they are aware of the fact that this issue has been considered a classified file within Romanian culture but they also argue that certitudes limit the thinking and the knowledge and, thus, they plead for a Socratic approach.

Consecutively, they invited writers and researchers, both men and women, to express their opinions. Though they were grouped in three

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

sections, the essays are coherently arranged in the volume –which is, I might say, the strength of the book. First section comprises essays that approach historically and theoretically the issue. Famous attitudes towards the problematic such as G. Călinescu's or E. Lovinescu's are evoked, explained or incriminated. Second section reunites works written by women writers which bluntly relate personal experiences wherein they were discriminated among writers or literary critics. These essays are vivid, ironical and direct and I have to mention here Maria Pilchin's and Angela Furtună's excellent contributions. More temperate, somehow sarcastic here and there, the essays from the third section belong to men professional readers who write about women writers.

Despite the diversity of opinions expressed in these essays, there is a common agreement that the aesthetic criterion should be the supreme evaluation grid, no matter the author's biographical ego. Nevertheless, Bogdan Crețu (33) suggests that we could speak about *feminine literature* only when, aesthetically valuable, it represents a form of cultural memory, a discourse with social, ideological, moral and identity values. In this respect, Dan C. Mihăilescu (22) recognises as particularly feminine the memorialist literature written by the imprisoned women writers.

But is feminine literature a legitimate expression? The distinction between feminine literature and literature written by women made possible some explanations regarding the classification of the literary works. For instance, Iulian Boldea (89) asserts that there is a literature of femininity and a literature of masculinity *i.e.* a writing of the intimacy, of the magic, of the sensuality and, respectively, a solar, lucid and rigorous writing. This does not mean that women write exclusively feminine literature or that men have exclusively a masculine *écriture*. Melinda Crăciun (160) adds that the feminine novel does not depend on the author's sexual profile, but on an intimate motivation that stays at the very basis of the literary creation. After all, Boldea considers that such terms like feminine or masculine literature are quite limiting and we all should avoid them. Christina Hermeziu (whose essay is written with extraordinary poetical talent) repudiates such terms like feminine or masculine literature because both the female and the male writer have a common body, literature which is neither feminine, nor masculine (145).

Though she agrees with I. Boldea's perspective, Dana Pârvan sees also the importance of difference, insisting on the feminine originality and masculine originality which should be considered valuable in their uniqueness. In fact, she suggests that a woman might write in a feminine way and it is nothing wrong about this. Doris Mironescu writes that some exclusively feminine experiences have the right to fiction (49). It is just the difference that makes the man, by means of reading, to experience the otherness, the feminine, as Nina Corcinski puts it (82).

Unfortunately, most of the prejudices (myths as Dan-Liviu Boeriu calls them) regarding women's *écriture* come from this *difference* that readers see, but do not understand. On one hand, women's literary writings are expected to be sentimental, to express fragility, to be somehow incoherent,

to focus on details *i.e.* to be feminine literature; but then this kind of literature is considered out of fashion, minor, easy, lacking in cerebralism, logic or humour. On the other hand, when women literary writings do not respond to these precepts (sentimentalism, sensuality etc. – also retrievable in some of the masculine writings), they are accused of masculinity. Such sexist experiences are being related by Ioana Bot in her blunt confession. Though Doina Ruști feels that things have changed lately in Romanian culture, several women writers recognise the segregation of women writers (Doris Mironescu) and that the male literary critic establishes the literary canon (Medeea Iancu, 167), that women feel that their cultural presence is not legitimate (Bianca Cernat, 40), that women writers are not enough represented in the literary histories and, finally, that Romania is misogynous (Ruxandra Cesereanu, 102). Unfortunately, not only men are guilty, but also women, „the pillars of the patriarchy” as Bianca Cernat calls them. For instance, Dan C Mihăilescu recalls a moment when he was accused of sexism because he used the syntagma „feminine poetry”. It is worth mentioning here Maria Pilchin’s characterisation of the feminine writing (130). She states that there are three types of feminine writings: a feminine writing that dissimulates masculine writing, one that dissimulates femininity pleasant to men and one that authentically expresses the women writer as she is. The first two called “literary make-up” aesthetically disadvantage the women’s *écriture*, while the third is safeguarding. Some of the voices in the book consider this authenticity a solution.

However, the authentic self expression in a book does not necessarily connect to the sexual categories, at least for some readers. For instance, Adrian Cioroianu is not interested in the age, sex or other biographical aspects of the writer and while reading he does not distinguish between the feminine and the masculine writing. On the contrary, Al. Cistelean is sure that it is impossible for him not to recognise a book written by a woman. Adrian G. Romilă agrees with Cistelean and adds that this particularity brings authenticity and value to the writing. Robert Șerban confesses that for him it matters when a book is written by a woman; he is more attentive and feels more of a man (210). Dumitru Crudu writes that he is reading women literature because of curiosity, fair enough.

Conclusively, the editors’ hypothesis whether literature written by women is being read differently today has been confirmed, but a single explanation is not enough. We’d better read the thirty three reunited in Lia Faur’s and Șerban Axinte’s book.

Authors/ Auteurs

Bedjaoui Wafa: bedjaoui79@gmail.com

Betouche Aini: betouche16@yahoo.fr

Boukhelou Fatima: mboukhelou@gmail.com

Cistelecan Ioana: ioana_cistelecan@yahoo.com

Curr Jillian: 20313998@student.uwa.edu.au

Danciu Magdalena: magda_danciu@yahoo.com

Drobot Irina-Ana: anadrobot@yahoo.com

Fogarasi György: fogarasi@hung.u-szeged.hu

Gada Lydia: lydia.gada.07@gmail.com

Maloum Célia: celiam1993@live

Mateoc Florica: mateoc_florica@yahoo.fr

Mateoc Teodor: doru.mateoc@gmail.com

Mihet Marius: mariusmihet@gmail.com

Mureşan Dorel-Aurel: muresanaurel@yahoo.com

Pusta Claudia Judea: claupustaml@yahoo.com

Radu Delia-Maria: dradu@uoradea.ro

Sala Adriana: adriana.sl10@yahoo.com

Sala Dana: danafsala@gmail.com

Suciu Giulia: giuliasuciu@ymail.com

Székely Éva: eszekely@uoradea.ro

Terentieva Yulia: yulia.terentieva@gmail.com

Tomoioagă Anca: astoian2003@yahoo.com

Tomoioagă Florin Toader: tomoioagaf@yahoo.com

Truță Liliana: truta.liliana@yahoo.com

Next Issue's Topic:

**Solitude
in Literature**

*Thématique du prochain
numéro:*

**La solitude
en littérature**

Confluente, Annals of the University of Oradea, Modern Literature Fascicule is an academic, double blind peer-reviewed journal that appears once a year.

The executive editors and the advisory board shall decide on any change about the frequency of the journal.

TCR specializes in bridging the world of academic literary criticism and theories with the aliveness of everyday literary phenomenon as reflected in the cultural media and book-production.

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British and Commonwealth Literature
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French Literature
Emmigrants' Literature
Cultural and Gender Studies
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Foundation:

As a research journal, the beginnings can be traced back to the academic year 1966- 1967, when, under the name *Lucrari stiintifice*, the section of academic research emerged at the University of Oradea. In 1991 the research journal changed its name and template, focusing on topics of immediate relevance and on thorough going studies, on cultural studies, research articles on Romanian literature, comparative literature. In 2006 emerged *Confluente*, a Modern Literature Fascicule including academic literary studies in English, French, German and Italian. In 2012 the Ministry of Education and Research (Romania) ranked our journal category C.

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The administration of the peer-review process is the attribution of the journal's editors that are selected from the members of the advisory board. The sender of the manuscript does not know the names of the reviewers of his/her particular case, only the complete list of reviewers.

Confluences, les Annales de l'Université d'Oradea, Fascicule Littérature moderne, est une revue académique évaluée qui paraît une fois par an. Les directeurs exécutifs et le comité scientifique vont décider tout changement concernant la fréquence de la revue.

TCR a le but de réunir le monde de la critique littéraire académique et des théories avec le phénomène vivant de la littérature d'aujourd'hui tel qu'il est reflété dans les médias culturels et dans la production du livre.

Les sujets contenus par notre revue dans ses deux sections généreuses – **Littérarismes** et **Culturalismes** sont les suivants:

Les dynamiques de la littérature, tendances
L'interconnexion de la littérature et de la culture
Identité, altérité, anthropologie et littérature, études culturelles
L'identité et son expression en littérature
Temps et théorie littéraire
Myths et auteurs postmodernes
Littérature comparée et études comparées

Fondation:

Comme revue de recherche, son commencement remonte loin, dans l'année académique 1966/1967, lorsque sous le nom de *Travaux scientifiques*, la section de la recherche académique a démarré à l'Université d'Oradea. En 1991, la revue a changé son nom et sa forme se fixant sur des sujets d'intérêt immédiat et sur des études approfondies, sur la culture, sur la littérature roumaine, sur la littérature comparée. En 2006 a paru *Confluences*, un Fascicule de littérature moderne incluant des recherches académiques littéraires en anglais, en français, en allemand et en italien. L'année 2012 la revue a été classifiée niveau C per le Ministère de l'Education et de la Recherche de Roumanie

Soumission

Les détails pour la soumission des articles, les instructions pour les contributeurs et pour la préparation du manuscrit sont publiés en ligne:

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Evaluation

Notre revue soutient un système d'évaluation ouverte, considérant que les noms des auteurs des articles ne doivent pas être envoyés comme anonymes aux évaluateurs, parce que cela pourrait avoir un petit impact sur la qualité de l'article soumis. La qualité de l'article de recherche est le seul argument dont on tient compte lorsqu'on fait la sélection des articles.

L'administration du processus d'évaluation est la tâche des éditeurs évaluateurs. L'expéditeur du manuscrit ne connaît pas les noms des évaluateurs de son cas particulier mais seulement la liste complète des évaluateurs.