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COMITETUL DE REDACȚIE
400165 Cluj-Napoca, Str. Emil Racoviță, nr. 21
Tel./ fax: +40 264 432440
e-mail: institutul.puscariu@gmail.com
web: <http://www.dacoromanialitteraria.inst-puscariu.ro>

ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ
Filiala Cluj-Napoca
400015 Cluj-Napoca, Str. Republicii, nr. 9
Tel./ fax: +40 264 592363
e-mail: filiala@acad-cluj.ro

ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ
Filiala Cluj-Napoca
Institutul de Lingvistică și Istorie Literară „Sextil Pușcariu”

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ANDRADA FĂTU-TUTOVEANU
LAURA CERNAT¹
BAVJOLA SHATRO

CULTURAL MEMORY IN EASTERN EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LIFE WRITING: AGENCY, PERSISTENCE, LEGACIES

Commenting on a visit to Ukraine from 2014, acclaimed Croatian author Slavenka Drakulić notes how shame and “repression in the form of silence”² affected the transmission of important knowledge about the harms of the old propaganda regime, especially among women, even within the family. This meant, according to Drakulić, that the young generation, who were the main promoters of social change through pro-European protests, “had to start learning about the past from scratch, because the battles they were fighting were against the remnants of the old totalitarian regime”³. Now, when the battle fought against cultural and memory erasure has turned into a war taking the toll of so many lives in Ukraine, the importance of preserving the memory of trauma and resistance in Eastern Europe cannot be overstated. This special issue of *Dacoromania litteraria* is intended as a contribution to this effort of preservation and reconstruction of cultural memory.

We propose to look at women’s works of Life Writing as enclaves of experiential testimony from an eventful, scarring, and unstable century (covered in thirteen articles with a focus spanning from the early 1900s to the twenty-first century) in a conflict-ridden territory (Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe). In interpreting these works, we gauge the social progress that the twentieth century as a “century of women”⁴ has achieved against all odds (women’s *agency*), the depth of the traumatic experience that women have overcome or are still working through (women’s *persistence*), and the recovery (both in the sense of personal psychic healing and of salvaging cultural memory) that is going on or is still left to do (women’s *legacies*). As we explain further, we see in Life Writing an essential component of cultural memory, with a unique ability to create an archive of counter-voices to official memory cultures. We use

¹ Laura Cernat would like to thank the FWO (Flemish Research Foundation) for its generous support of her project (1240823N), which made this work possible.

² Slavenka Drakulić, “A Sulky Girl in Ukraine: What People See or Don’t See”, in *Café Europa Revisited*, New York, Penguin Books, 2021, p. 36.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

⁴ Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States*, London, Viking, 1997.

the term “Life Writing” very inclusively to refer to works ranging from autofictions and autobiographical novels to works of auto/biography, memoir, artistic documentary, diaries or correspondence, written/recorded by both established writers and aspiring authors or amateurs, and intended both as private documents and as addressed to a wide reading public. Though the broad archive of Life Writing is gradually gaining visibility world-wide, parts of it being in many cases integrated in the canon⁵ of academic curricula and cultural events or debates, the work of theorizing it in a way that bridges the gap between Western and Eastern European models, without assuming that they are reducible to one another, is still underway.

As we undertake to participate in this work, we are aware that many studies on Eastern Europe confirm Drakulić's observation about the impediments to a coherent recollection of the past, suggesting that memory in the post-totalitarian context is often difficult to transmit to those who did not experience history's deprivations and strictures firsthand, either because an understanding of the context is perceived as inaccessible to the younger generations or to Western Europeans⁶ or because the propaganda machine of the former totalitarian regimes has been effective in its repression of memory, causing many people to censor themselves even in private writings, a phenomenon described by Matthias Schwartz, Nina Weller, and Heike Winkel as “missing memory”⁷. In addition to these factors, collective shame and the difficulty of drawing a clearcut line between victims and perpetrators⁸ have contributed to consolidating the obstacles in the way of remembering. Finally, what one of the contributors to this issue, Manca G. Renko, describes as a perpetual socio-political transition, “with no prospect of future ‘stability’”, has accentuated the memory crisis by creating a

⁵ See Aleida Assmann's famous distinction between “archive” and “canon” from “Canon and Archive”, in Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2010, pp. 97-108.

⁶ See Simona Mitroiu, “Life Writing and the Politics of Memory in Eastern Europe: Introduction”, in Simona Mitroiu (ed.), *Life Writing and the Politics of Memory in Eastern Europe*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 3.

⁷ See Matthias Schwartz, Nina Weller, Heike Winkel, “After Memory: Introduction”, in Matthias Schwartz, Nina Weller, Heike Winkel (eds.), *After Memory: World War Two in Contemporary Eastern European Literatures*, Berlin – Boston, De Gruyter, 2021, pp. 2-6. See also the notion of “active forgetting”, borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche in a recent study by Simona Mitroiu (*Women's Life Writing in Post-Communist Romania: Reclaiming Privacy and Agency*, Berlin – Boston, De Gruyter, 2023, p. 5).

⁸ This feeling of guilt for participation in everyday communist life, which imbued the social fiber after the regime's fall, is theorized by Simona Mitroiu (*Women's Life Writing in Post-Communist Romania*, p. 8.) with a phrase borrowed from Paul Connerton, “forgetting as humiliated silence”. See also Ana Blandiana's observation that the protesters in early 1990 felt “guilty not for what they had done, but for what they had not done” (Ana Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul [More-Than-Past]*, București, Humanitas, 2023, p. 13).

sensation of urgency regarding a focus on the present rather than the past. For all of these reasons the work of cultural memory is both urgent and important.

If it is true that we are living, as trauma theorists have been considering for decades, in what Shoshana Felman called an “age of testimony”⁹, where Life Writing with a traumatic core has become one of the main literary forms, this is happening because of a perceived “crisis of truth”¹⁰ that started even before the digital era. The paradox that shores the fragments of memory work against the ruins of a monolithic notion of historical truth, making trauma memorialization necessary and, by the same token, difficult, does not seem to have an expiry date. The discarding of Fukuyama’s “end of history” paradigm by Eastern European studies, highlighted, among others, by Agnieszka Mroziak and Anja Tippner in connection to the rise of late-socialism-themed autofiction¹¹, also means that the cultural work performed by Life Writing cannot be framed only through the grid of a retrospective relevance. On the contrary, analyzing women’s auto/biographical, autofictional, and diaristic writings from the early twentieth-century to the early twenty-first, and from various areas of transcultural confluence (from the former Habsburg Empire to the former Yugoslavia, as well as Lower Silesia, Transylvania, and other multiethnic areas), as this special issue does, contributes not just to the understanding of the past, but also to that of the present.

In this sense, Life Writing partakes in the open-ended work of cultural memory, a work that acknowledges how, in Gillian Swanson’s words,

a modern notion of the subjective has inflected the way we understand memory: not the fixed historical achievement of epic memory, but a fragmented field of perspectival knowledge, based on the intimate tracings of corporeal inhabitation, the alliance of gesture and encounter, and the expansiveness of reverie into that realm of intimate immensity, the possibility of becoming¹².

This insight about the multifocal and present-oriented nature of memory construction, reformulated by Maria Todorova, who considers “the politics of memory” to be a “work in progress”¹³, and by Hywel Dix, who presents cultural

⁹ Shoshana Felman, “Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching”, in Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York and London, Routledge, 1992, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹¹ See Agnieszka Mroziak, Anja Tippner, “Remembering Late Socialism in Autobiographical Novels and Autofictions from Central and Eastern Europe: Introduction”, *The European Journal of Life-Writing*, 2021, 10, pp. 4-5.

¹² Gillian Swanson, “Memory, Subjectivity, and Intimacy: The Historical Formation of the Modern Self and the Writing of Female Autobiography”, in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology*, London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2000, p. 127.

¹³ Maria Todorova, “Introduction: Similar Trajectories, Different Memories”, in Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou, Stefan Troebst (eds.), *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections*

memory, especially in connection to autofiction, as “incomplete and inherently selective”¹⁴, is at the heart of contemporary memory studies, of which literature and Life Writing have become a prominent part. To approach the complexity of a field still in play, we have paid special attention to this fragmented and yet coherent nature of collective memory, not just in assembling articles that implement a diversity of methodologies and cover a diversity of contexts, but also by including, in many of the analyses, fragmentary works like diaries written in the heat of the post-WWI transition (see Renko’s article) or artistic travelogues that use flashback techniques to piece together the story of a found identity (see Leena Käosaar’s contribution).

Aside from both the difficulties raised by the ruptures and erasures of memory imposed by the decades-long totalitarian past and the methodological challenge entailed by the structural shiftiness, adaptability, and open-endedness of memory work, another important aspect that this special issue has taken into account when theorizing Life Writing consisted in the silences we encounter not only in the archives, but in the very texture of written or filmed documents, those silences that are perhaps not simply the effect of censorship, but are deliberately woven in as part of memory artefacts like documentaries, diaries, prison or deportation memoirs, domestic violence testimonies, etc. In light of this realization, we dedicated a section to these silences, omissions, and oblivions, to highlight that the need for evidence against perpetrators and for the memorialization of trauma has to be balanced against an equally important awareness of the irreducibility of traumatic experiences and respect for the privacy of those who underwent them.

Prominent scholars of trauma and cultural memory like Marianne Hirsch have warned in recent years against forms of “appropriative empathy”, promoting instead a “solidarity that is suspicious of easy empathy”¹⁵. This respectful form of empathy entails, among other aspects, an ability to listen not just to words, but also to silences, clues, and hints, to interpret not just narratives but also their contexts; this is also Drakulić’s call in the essay mentioned above, which starts from the readings and misreadings of the image of a Ukrainian schoolgirl from the 1960s in Soviet-style tights. In its specificity, the concrete example both invites and resists the work of cultural memory, creating what one of our contributors (Lola Sinoimeri) calls “common memory around the silences”.

How can one foster a type of contextually informed, non-invasive empathy in the process of testifying to the private effects of war, political imprisonment, deportation or displacement, domestic violence, constant political shifts, gender-

of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe, Budapest – New York, Central European University Press, 2014, p. 7.

¹⁴ Hywel Dix, *Autofiction and Cultural Memory*, London, Routledge, 2023, p. 1.

¹⁵ Marianne Hirsch, “Vulnerable Times”, in Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, Leticia Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 84.

based discrimination, to name just some of the themes addressed by the texts analyzed in this special issue? In other words, how can a writer communicate the shattering personal impact of history while still carving out a space for privacy? One answer is provided by the very possibility of decoding these texts, in spite of the diversity of their generic, media, and disciplinary labels, as works of Life Writing. Addressing the complexity of framing traumatic experiences through self-narration, Simona Mitroiu recently challenged Philippe Lejeune's model of the identity between author, character, and narrator in autobiography, proposing instead that, when trauma is involved, "subtle narrative negotiations" between the three narratological entities occur, with the intent of "re-empower[ing] the narrator to regain control over the self-narration"¹⁶. By "acting as testimony about the past", Life Writing, Mitroiu claims, becomes an "essentially performative process that unveils the work of memory in a mediated and multifaceted way"¹⁷, transforming the authors into "performative subjects" or "autobiographical speakers"¹⁸ and thus creating a distance which at once protects privacy and charges personal example with collective significance.

This emphasis on "the role played by narrative voices in overcoming trauma through mechanisms of personal agency and resilience"¹⁹ explains how Life Writing can participate simultaneously in a discourse of witnessing and in one of empowerment, in a discourse of truth and one of expressivity. The ability to conjure and work through memories of atrocity while preserving and respecting silences is part of this screening effect that the act of written narration generates.

The need for re-empowerment, highlighted by the discourse of Life Writing, also presupposes a complex equation between agency, gender, and vulnerability. If there is a shared silence imbricated in the texture of the life narratives of female survivors of trauma, this could easily be misread as a sign of powerlessness and a limitation of agency or even of the ability to heal. However, the traditional framework that used to link women, perceived as a vulnerable category, with silence, perceived as a sign of that vulnerability, is crumbling down and making room for more sophisticated interpretations. In the introduction to their edited volume on *Vulnerability in Resistance*, Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay vehemently oppose the "dominant conceptions of vulnerability and of action", which "presuppose (and support) the idea that paternalism is the site of agency, and vulnerability, understood only as victimization and passivity, invariably the site of inaction"²⁰. Instead, Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay propose to

¹⁶ Simona Mitroiu, *Women's Life Writing in Post-Communist Romania*, p. 43.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

¹⁸ Sidonie Smith, qtd. in Simona Mitroiu, *Women's Life Writing in Post-Communist Romania*, p. 42.

¹⁹ Simona Mitroiu, *Women's Life Writing in Post-Communist Romania*, p. 43.

²⁰ Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, Leticia Sabsay, "Introduction", in Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, Leticia Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*, p. 1.

imagine “vulnerability [...] as one of the conditions of the very possibility of resistance”²¹. Distinguishing the defeatist discourse of victimhood from the positive assertion of vulnerability, these authors favor those approaches that “do not dismiss the induced vulnerability to which many women are exposed and try to offer alternative resources for self-empowerment, collective agency, and protection”²². If we understand vulnerability, along these lines, as “relational and social”²³ rather than as an essentialist feature of certain groups, we can start to grasp how speaking about trauma and recovery through Life Writing leaves room for the shared unsaid.

The same framework allows us to bring into focus the references to physicality and bodily trauma (from domestic and carceral violence to the devastating effects of socially-induced anorexia) which abound in this special issue, without fostering a reductive view of female embodiment. Speaking of women’s bodies as exposed to potential threats, and of their writing on these aspects as the difficult negotiation of an age-old taboo, can often acquire the resonances of a facile lament about the feminine condition. What elevates the texts under scrutiny here above that elementary level is, on the one hand, precisely this awareness and acceptance of the need to start from one’s vulnerabilities not as limitations, but as the grounding of a discourse on rights, on empowerment, and on legitimate social claims, and, on the other hand, the way in which female embodiment is the source of specific political struggles, as revealed by the examples in this corpus about domestic violence (discussed in Fanni Svégel’s essay), carceral abuse (touched upon by Snizhana Zhygun and Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu), the humiliations of carceral hygiene deprivation (see Ioana Moroşan’s piece and, again, Fătu-Tutoveanu’s) or the self-subjection to starvation practices as a result of social standards (analyzed by Olga Słowik). Even when we speak, like Zhygun, about works in our corpus as “narrative[s] of unresolved trauma, reflecting a woman’s inability to talk about what she experienced”, the effect of recognition and the possibility of shared memory remain, and so does the value of these confessions of vulnerability as acts of resistance.

Once we think, with Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay, of vulnerability as relational, and once we also remind ourselves of the link made by Paul John Eakin, in his by now canonical *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999), between the relationality of identity in general and the need to think Life-Writing along the same relational lines²⁴, we can approach women’s memoirs, fictions,

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 2.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

²⁴ Paul John Eakin, “Relational Selves, Relational Lives: Autobiography and the Myth of Autonomy”, in *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 43-44: “all identity is relational, and [...] the definition of autobiography, and its history as

autobiographies, autofiction, and diaristic writing with a new vision of the ability to reclaim embodiment without being reduced to it, as well as a capacity to acknowledge past traumas and present threats without shame or guilt.

This relational aspect of identity construction through Life Writing is particularly prominent in Leena Käosaar's text, which uses Adriana Cavarero's theory to unpack the complex dynamics between self and others in life narratives. Käosaar describes the "desire to be narrated" as the source of an "existential unity" in otherwise fragmented narratives. However, relationality is not always a transparent category, as Sinoimeri emphasizes in her argument about resisting Western war-voyeurism. The agency residing in being able to select the ways in which one speaks and the aspects that, though passed under silence, remain embedded in Life Writing documents and thereby relatable for people with similar experiences, is complemented by the agency that comes from accepting one's situational and relational vulnerabilities as part of a shifting network of power relations rather than thinking of them as belonging to the core of one's condition in a way that distinguishes and isolates it from other gendered or political positions. As Butler explains, "vulnerability indicates a broader condition of dependency and interdependency that challenges the dominant ontological understanding of the embodied subject"²⁵, alerting us to a shared human feature of needing support and needing protection rather than making this feature more prominent in some cases than in others.

Understanding vulnerability in this agential framework leads to replacing the notion of "resilience", still frequent in trauma studies and in Eastern European self-presentation, with the more flexible and capacious idea of "persistence". Resilience, as Sarah Bracke put it, "revolves around shock absorption"²⁶, and has become tainted by its increasingly common use by political and economic authorities in connection to confronting a constant crisis, for which the responsibility is delegated to the "resilient", which is to say those expected to cope with disaster and praised for their inner "strength". In a similar vein, Butler diagnosed the discourse of "resilience", in an MLA presidential address held during the Covid-19 pandemic, as "bound up with older versions of individual or collective heroism"²⁷. In this view, "the term 'resilience' often implies that people

well, must be stretched to reflect the kinds of self-writing in which relational identity is characteristically displayed".

²⁵ Judith Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance", in Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, Leticia Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*, p. 21.

²⁶ Sarah Bracke, "Bouncing Back: Vulnerability and Resistance in Times of Resilience", in Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, Leticia Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*, p. 54.

²⁷ Judith Butler, "Stumbling, Errancy, Persistence: The Struggle for the Humanities", MLA 2021 Presidential Address, <https://www.mla.org/Events/Convention-History/MLA-Presidential-Addresses/2021-24-Presidential-Addresses/2021-Presidential-Address>, 11'50"-12'00" (our transcription). Accessed November 21, 2023.

just bounce back from violence, trauma, injury, and loss, that it's all a matter of good cheer, stiff upper lips, entrepreneurial innovation, or pivoting. Resilient people and institutions are apparently those tough enough to emerge from hard times with renewed powers"²⁸. By naming "the ability [...] not to be damaged in an irreversible way"²⁹, resilience "focuses on the exemplary forms of surviving loss, deflecting attention from preventable loss and the structures responsible for that"³⁰. Butler proposed "persistence" instead, as a concept which "names a power beyond singular selfhood, a collaborative and collective power to lay claim to life, to equality, to a future horizon; it [persistence] asserts the value of a life precisely when the conditions for self-preservation, the social conditions in which lives are differentially valued, are frail, or absent"³¹.

It is in this sense that we want to contribute to refocusing the discourse of trauma in Eastern European women's Life Writing on something that goes beyond resilience or the old "suffering and resistance narrative" (Kõresaar and Jõesalu, cited in Käosaar's article), tracing an experience where life and self-expression are asserted precisely against conditions that put them under a radical threat – asserted in such a way as to create not a naïve trust in a capacity to suffer and recover, but a conscious choice to preclude the conditions of future suffering.

Literature's role in this narrative of persistence is partly to stand as a sign for what has been lost and to encompass that loss, metonymically, in the naming of losses and silences, in the testimony it brings from those places where voices seem lost without trace. For instance, Romanian political prisoner Lena Constante's mental exercise of composing rhymed children's stories and poems as a form of meaningful escapism during her seven years of solitary confinement (analyzed by Ioana Moroşan in her contribution about Constante's memoir), or Aglaja Veteranyi's eponymous counter-fairy tale turned leitmotif about a child boiling in polenta, which similarly upholds storytelling as a deliberate distraction from the constant threats of a nomadic and exilic childhood (discussed in Larisa Prodan's article on Veteranyi's autofictions), represent vivid illustrations of how persistence is embedded in the practice of carceral or exilic Life-Writing. Persistence is understood then as the very basic but at the same time essential work of living through the hours which Constante at some point lists by sheer number, the work of continuing to tell an absurd tale because one's life has been reduced by abusive power regimes to a state of utter precariousness, the work of existing when one is expected to disappear or when no conditions are created to support that existence.

Literature's other role, aside from naming and integrating the loss and silence, and aside from evoking this safe space of fantasy, is to renegotiate women's place

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 12'00''–12'20''.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 12'20''–12'24''.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 12'49''–12'59''.

³¹ *Ibidem*, 6'44''–7'05''.

not only in a temporary economy of prestige, but also, more importantly, in a retrospective network of values. Natalija Stepanović's "Perpetually Peripheral", an essay on neglected Croatian 1960s feminists Sunčana Škrinjarić and Divna Zečević, Manca G. Renko's work on post-WWI female authors from the former Habsburg territories, and Ioana Moroșan's work on Lena Constante all reveal (and deplore) an enduring privileging of male role models in the respective literary fields they analyze, or, with a phrase that Stepanović borrows from Sidonie Smith, the imposition of "men's life scripts"³².

There is no full consensus among our contributors on the ways in which women's autobiographical writings become marginalized: some, like Renko, consider, with Linda Anderson, that autobiography itself is dominated by Western middle-class men, and thus derive the marginality of female Life Writing from a cultural gender bias, while others, like Moroșan, consider the association between autobiography and a problematic notion of femininity, identified by Jennifer Milligan as specific to interwar France, as still dominating the public perception in post-1989 Eastern Europe, and therefore account for the marginalization of both genre and gender through their mutual connection. However, they all agree on the structural need to increase the visibility of women's auto/biographical writings as staples of cultural memory in Eastern Europe. Echoing Domna C. Stanton's lament, from three and a half decades ago, that female voices had been systematically erased from the Life Writing canon³³ (which in turn built on Virginia Woolf's similar observations more than half a century earlier), some of our contributors foreground the work of unearthing existing works of Life Writing and of revealing their contemporary relevance.

Admittedly, the landscape of Life Writing practice and scholarship has changed significantly since studies like Stanton's *The Female Autograph* or Smith's *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* came out, and today women's auto/bio/fictional work from Early Modern times to the present is much more acknowledged, studied, taught, and re-mediated. A lot has also been done to make Eastern European Women's life stories known in an international setting, but mostly in the framework of post-communist studies. By adding some perspectives which frame the memory of earlier historical periods like the beginning of the twentieth century in Romania (see Anca-Simina Martin and Stefan Baghiu's article), the experience of WWI (see Renko and Alina Bako's contributions), or the persecution and deportation of Ukrainians in the 1920s and 1930s (see Zhygun's essay), we hope to participate in a broadening of the cultural memory frameworks applied to this field. Combining historical case studies with recent

³² Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 7.

³³ Domna C. Stanton, "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?", in Domna C. Stanton (ed.), *The Female Autograph*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 6.

ones also serves the recalibration of power negotiations in the literary and cultural field, going beyond women's right to be heard and earn cultural capital and moving towards the acknowledgement of their already existing autobiographical and autofictional presence. Martin and Baghiu contribute to this feminist unearthing by reevaluating the literary work of early Romanian feminists Sofia Nădejde and Elena Bacaloglu, whom even contemporary specialists in the field had relegated to the margins of the female canon. Alina Bako also suggests such a reconsideration of female contributions when she calls for reading Romanian modernist Hortensia Papadat Bengescu's novel of war testimony next to other works of the European literary canon such as Virginia Woolf's novels and essays, in spite of Papadat Bengescu's ambivalent assessment by the critics of her time. This undoing of past erasures is at least as important as the work of carving out a space, a voice, and a right to speak in the present.

Alongside agency and persistence, the theme of legacies, linking past and present to future potentialities, animates the interventions in this special issue. Our last section in particular privileges the themes of legacy and post-traumatic (social or personal) recovery through a therapeutic process of communicating the experiences, although in some cases this communication is fragmented or interrupted. Either by engaging with memory transmission skeptically, like Brigitte Rigaux-Pirastru does in her intervention on the postmemory of displacement in German-Polish autobiographical cinema, where she calls attention to the fractures in a deliberately rosy and harmonious picture of transgenerational and transnational dialogue, or by emphasizing the message of healing that some narratives of trauma ultimately evoke, like Olga Słowik does in her account of anorexia memoirs, the papers collected here help us reflect on the affordances of Life Writing for thinking the future. Feminist legacies are addressed not only in these explicit ways, but also implicitly, by challenging received ideas about Eastern European specificity and belonging. A perfect example is Viivi Luik, the Estonian author analyzed by Leena Käosaar, who uses the pretext of a long stay in Italy to retell her life story as a fated journey to Rome, thus revisiting the question of Europe as a dream and an aspiration for the members of the former Eastern Bloc.

If these three intertwined notions – agency, persistence, and legacy – circumscribe the issue's thematic cohesion, methodologically its main strength lies in the ability to subvert and challenge the epistemic homogeneity in the field of Life Writing and memory studies by not just bringing local examples into dialogue with Western scholarship, but also building on theory coming out of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, which in many cases has not been translated yet, and which is used alongside the Western paradigms of understanding and interpreting cultural work. In favoring this close interaction between Western-imported models and the theoretical models of cultural critics with firsthand experience of the inner dynamics of particular Eastern European fields, we respond to a call for epistemic

diversification launched a few years ago by scholars such as Chen-Bar Itzhak, who drew attention to the imbalance between the relative democratization of World Literature and the enduring Western hegemony in literary theory, and called for a “World Republic of Theory”³⁴ corresponding to the World Republic of Letters, one where, for instance, “Lithuanian critique”³⁵ would be on an equal footing with the symbolic capital of French critique. Relying on a combination of Western and Eastern European secondary sources, our contributors are able to situate their objects of study in more nuanced ways, avoiding both “methodological nationalism”³⁶ and submission to a Western theoretical hegemony. Moving swiftly across languages and paradigms, their analyses connect the particularities of the local (too often hastily reduced in Eastern Europeans’ aspiration to become simply “standard Europeans”³⁷) with broader frameworks of understanding, both local and international, contributing to a much needed epistemic decentralization.

Another advantage of working across paradigms is a stronger critical spirit. Works that pertain to cultural memory, especially foreign ones, are sometimes easily applauded without taking into account their potential weaknesses. In the meantime, some of our contributors do not hesitate to challenge the construction of a cultural memory artefact that brushes over real historical tensions (as is the case with Karin Kaper’s documentary in Rigaux-Pirastru’s view) or to highlight the contrast between works that cater to an “international gaze”³⁸ and its traumatic voyeurism and works that respect the silences imbricated in any trauma victim’s confession (as Sinoimeri brilliantly does). These constructive delimitations and criticisms contribute to a nuanced view of memorialization processes.

In addition to the epistemological pluralism and the critical spirit, a methodological priority in selecting the papers has been the diversity of the corpus, not just in terms of geographical coverage (we tried to include representative case studies from several subregions of Eastern Europe broadly defined, from the former Yugoslavia to Ukraine, the Baltic states, and Poland) and of historical span (we moved from early twentieth-century examples to the early twenty-first century), but also in terms of really bringing into focus the transcultural dimension

³⁴ Chen Bar-Itzhak, “Intellectual Captivity: Literary Theory, World Literature, and the Ethics of Interpretation”, in *Journal of World Literature*, 5, 2020, 1, p. 82.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 86.

³⁶ For a critique of methodological nationalism in memory studies, see, among others, Chiara de Cesari, Ann Rigney, “Introduction”, in Chiara de Cesari, Ann Rigney (eds.), *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, Berlin–Boston, De Gruyter, 2014, pp. 1-25.

³⁷ For a critique of this attitude, see Sorin Antohi, “Narratives Unbound: A Brief Introduction to Post-Communist Historical Studies”, in Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsényi, Péter Apor, *Narratives Unbound: Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, Budapest and New York, Central European University Press, p. ix.

³⁸ Dragana Gavrilović Obradović, *Writing the Yugoslav Wars: Literature, Postmodernism, and the Ethics of Representation*, Toronto, Canada, University of Toronto Press, 2016, p. 139.

of memory (with works like Renko's, Rigaux-Pirastru's, Sinoimeri's, or Prodan's) and its transgenerational dynamics (especially, but not only, in Pirastru and Renko's texts), as well as the diversity of media (not only written works but also, in Rigaux-Pirastru's case, film) and of disciplines (with Svégel's study of peasant women's memoirs, elements of anthropology and sociology complemented the strictly defined cultural memory/Life-Writing perspective).

This four-fold diversity ("transcultural, transgenerational, transmedial, and transdisciplinary"³⁹) responds to and reiterates, on a smaller scale, the model proposed by Lucy Bond, Stef Craps, and Pieter Vermeulen in their edited volume *Memory Unbound*. Our explorations outside the confines of discipline, form or medium, geographical and generational boundaries, are complemented by our interest in understanding gender in its intersectional relation to class (hence Martin and Baghiu's focus on portrayals of the servant class in novels of the early twentieth century, as well as Svégel's study of autobiographical works by peasant women). Intersectional and dynamic criteria are applied at many levels of the special issue.

To navigate the complexity of the diverse approaches, we have organized the contributions around a triad of trauma-related responses related to our understanding of agency, persistence, and legacy: witnessing, enduring, and recovering. Under "Witnessing" we have grouped those articles that prioritize women's positions as agents of memory, keeping records of tumultuous times that affect them mainly through their connection or comparison with others: Manca G. Renko's work on the impact of political transitions after WWI upon women's lives, Anca-Simina Martin and Stefan Baghiu's study of early Romanian feminism's engagement with the figure of the female servant, Alina Bako's reading of Papadat-Bengescu's WWI novel (inspired by the modernist author's own wartime experiences as a nurse), Natalija Stepanović's reconsideration of two neglected Croatian feminists who recounted their lives from the position of a middle ground between "vehement Party members" and "dissidents" with impressive dignity and perseverance, and Larisa Prodan's reading of Aglaja Veteranyi's nomadic autofiction, where the author casts her younger self in the role of a witness to a world she does not yet understand. Under "Enduring", a word in which we insist on hearing both connotations (of suffering and of lasting through time), we have grouped articles that analyze extreme traumatic experiences recounted in women's memoirs, focusing on situations in which the persistence of life, not to mention of Life Writing, is only possible through negotiating a different pact with memory and temporality, which reframes the

³⁹ Lucy Bond, Stef Craps, Pieter Vermeulen, "Introduction: Memory on the Move", in Lucy Bond, Stef Craps, Pieter Vermeulen (eds.), *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*, New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2017, p. 2.

duration of trauma and the endurance of the written word as sides of the same coin. These life narratives (of deportation in Zhygun's essay, domestic abuse in Svégel's, political prison in Fătu-Tutoveanu and Moroșan's articles, and war trauma in Sinoimeri's contribution) are the site of a constant tension between the need to tell and the need to forget, which accounts for the fragmentariness of some of them. Finally, under "Recovering" (understood as recapturing of information or memory, but also as healing), we have organized those articles where postmemory or questions of memory transmission are at stake (Rigaux-Pirastru's text), where healing per se becomes a trope for resisting social pressures (Słowik's essay), or where the broader reflections on identity recovery are at stake, putting into perspective Eastern Europe's integration into the widened European horizon (Leena Käosaar's article).

MANCA G. RENKO¹

“UNINVITED, HISTORY ENTERED OUR LIVES” THE POST-WORLD WAR I TRANSITIONS IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Allow me to start my account of Women’s Life-Writing in the former Austro-Hungarian territories with a personal anecdote of former Yugoslavian territories. Born in the late 1980s, I was a child when Yugoslavia disintegrated. In the early 2000s, my friends and I, while willingly embracing the global pop-culture of MTV, began to refer to ourselves as “otroci tranzicije” which could be directly translated as “children of transition”. We may have been the first generation to enjoy a popular culture identical to that of our Western peers, despite the fact that the backgrounds of our early childhoods looked different. We knew that growing up in Yugoslavia, and later in one of its successor states, was a different experience to growing up in the USA, UK or Western Germany, but we somehow believed that our futures would be similar. However, years passed and we were no longer “children”. As our childhoods drew to a close it became evident that the *transition* was going to be a never-ending process, extending beyond the fall of the Berlin Wall and encompassing the political, social, cultural, national and economic changes that this brought: newly formed nation states, practicing democracy with some more or less authoritarian outbursts, economic liberalism as a dominant ideology, financial crisis, austerity measures, a collapsing job market, the real-estate bubble, covid, the war in Ukraine and Palestine, inflation, global warming. The *transition* that started in the 1990s is an ongoing process with no prospect of future “stability”. We, in Central and South-Eastern Europe, may have been one of the first generations to identify ourselves with the term *transition*, but this does not imply that we were the pioneers in experiencing the everlasting economic, social and existential instability that followed the profound geo-political shifts.

In 1918 German revolutionary and journalist Maria Saran wrote in her memoir: “There was no ‘last battle’ on the horizon, but a long succession of battles, campaigns, activities, efforts and sacrifices”². For a certain generation (but also class, nationality and race) there was no “last battle” of WW I, but the fight continued by other means: the fight for women’s suffrage, the fight for women’s economic independence, revolutionary upheavals, the class struggle, the

¹ The article was written within the EIRENE project, which is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 742683: Post-War Transitions in Gendered Perspective: The Case of the North-Eastern Adriatic region).

² Mary Saran, *Never Give Up*, London, Oswald Wolf, 1976, p. 113.

construction(s) and de-construction(s) of the concept of Yugoslavia, the national struggles of Woodrow Wilson’s Europe, the rise of fascism and the battle of economic survival to name just a few. The idea of the old world was shattered and the new world had yet to be invented.

The aim of this article is to observe the social, political and existential changes after WWI as seen by women intellectuals of different nationalities of the disintegrated Austria-Hungary. Based on autobiographies, memoirs, diaries and autobiographical fiction, the article will focus on shared and individual experiences of postwar years of women, who were predominantly writing in German, Slovene and Croatian and whose nationalities were often conflicted in postwar Europe.

Following the versatile experiences of women, as well as being aware of my own post-1989 experience of social change, the article will not aim to unify different life trajectories and narratives of post-war years into a single historical outline, but will seek to find different layers of dealing with uncertainty. The timeframe of the research extends from the last years of WWI into the transitional period that sometimes only impacts a few years, but in other cases covers the whole interwar period. The central research questions focus on the role of autobiographical writing, the different aspects of post-war transitions, the relationship between the political and the personal, autobiographical writing as a historical source and experiences of gender amidst the political, economic and cultural turmoil.

Autobiographical writings as a type of primary source are an integral part of historical research. As any other sources, they don’t speak for themselves but can only be used as a genre or a methodology that opens historiography for new social, cultural and political aspects of the past³. Although throughout history women regularly wrote in their diaries and nurtured correspondences in which public and private spheres collided, the female autobiography as a public genre (i.e. a published book), began to gain in popularity only in the second half of the 20th century. Before that, the world of memoirs and autobiographies in Central and South-Eastern Europe belonged strictly to men of power (with a few notable exceptions). The majority of autobiographical writings that thematize the post-WWI years were first published in the second half of 20th century.

In none of these works the concept of sociopolitical transition itself is a central focus or directly discussed, but a comparative analysis of different writings offers

³ Marta Verginella, “Zgodovinska raba avtobiografskih virov in značilnosti ženskega avtobiografskega pisanja” [“Historiographical Usage of Autobiographical Sources and Properties of Women’s Autobiographical Writing”], in Alenka Koron et al. (eds.), *Avtobiografski diskurz: Teorija in praksa avtobiografije v literarni vedi* [*Autobiographical Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Autobiography in Literary Studies*], Ljubljana, Založba ZRC SAZU, 2011, pp. 95-108.

a set of topics that dominated the post war autobiographical narratives of women intellectuals.

For this research, the autobiographical writings of more than 20 women were taken into account, but the article will focus on half of them: Zofka Kveder (1878–1926)⁴, Rosa Mayreder (1858–1938)⁵, Marija Jurić Zagorka (1873[76, 79?]-1957)⁶, Angela Vode (1892–1985)⁷, Anica Lokar (1897–1976)⁸, Gusti

⁴ Zofka Kveder was the first Slovene professional woman writer and belonged to the first generation of Slovene feminists. She lived in Ljubljana, Trieste, Prague and Zagreb. The majority of her writings from the time after 1915 were written in Croatian. The writings, analyzed in this article, were published in Croatian: *Hanka* (a novel, published in 1917), *Unuk kraljevića Marka* [*Grandson of the Prince Marko*] (a play, 1922), *Arditi na otoku Krku* [*Ardites on the Island of Krk*] (a play, 1923), *Po putevima života* [*Along the Paths of Life*] (novellas, 1926). These are all works of fiction with clear autobiographical segments. Her Slovene writings are collected in 5 books, edited and contextualized by Katja Mihurko Poniž (Založba Litera, ZRC SAZU, 2005–2018). Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English (from Croatian, Slovenian, German) by the author of this paper.

⁵ Rosa Mayreder was an Austrian author, painter, musician and feminist, who was a critic of the patriarchal structures of bourgeois society. Her most influential work was *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit* (published in German 1905 with the English translation *A Survey of the Woman Problem* in 1912). In 1923 she published her second book of essays with the title *Geschlecht und Kultur* [*Gender and Culture*], where her views are strongly influenced by the experience of WWI. She wrote several autobiographies which were published after her death: *Das Haus in der Landskrongasse. Jugenderinnerungen* [*The House on Landskrongasse. Youth Memoirs*] (published by Käthe Braun-Prager, Vienna, Mensa, 1948, re-published by Eva Geber, Vienna, Mandelbaum/AUF-Edition, 1998), *Mein Pantheon. Lebenserinnerungen* [*My Pantheon. Memoirs*] (published by Susanne Kerkovius, Dornach, 1988). She was also a committed diary writer. Parts of her diaries were published as *Tagebücher 1873–1937* [*Diaries 1873–1937*] by Harriet Anderson (Frankfurt am Main, Insel, 1988).

⁶ Marija Jurić Zagorka was the first Croatian professional woman journalist, writer and women's rights activist. Her mostly historical novels were widely popular with readers, yet for a long time she was not taken seriously by the intellectual establishment. She is an author of more than 30 books, including an autobiographical novel *Kamen na cesti* [*A Stone on the Road*] (1934). She also wrote a few shorter non-fictional autobiographical texts, including *Što je moja krivnja* [*What's My Guilt*] (1947) and *Kako je bilo* [*How It Was*] (1953).

⁷ Angela Vode was a Slovene author, feminist, political worker, dissident and human rights activist. Her most important non-fiction books are *Žena v današnji družbi* [*Woman in Contemporary Society*] (1934) and *Spol in usoda* [*Gender and Destiny*] (1938). In the 1970s she wrote her autobiography with the title *Skriti spomin* [*The Hidden Memory*] that she planned to have posthumously published. The book was published for the first time in the early 2000s, almost two decades after her death. Her autobiography is printed in two editions, one as *Skriti spomin* (ed. by Alenka Puhar, published by Nova revija) and the second one as book 3 of her collected works with the title *Spomin in pozaba* [*Memory and Oblivion*] (ed. by Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik et al., published by Krtina).

⁸ Anica Lokar was a Slovene political worker and communist activist, active in Ajdovščina, Trieste, Moscow and Ljubljana. During her lifetime, she was politically and socially well-connected due to her underground political activities in the interwar period, but never publicly known. Her memoirs were published posthumously, first as a newspaper series (1993) and later as a book with the title *Od Anice do Ane Antonovne* [*From Anica to Ana Antonovna*] (2002, ed. by Alenka Puhar, published by Mladinska knjiga).

Stridsberg (1892–1978)⁹, Alma Mahler Werfel (1879–1964)¹⁰, Hilde Spiel (1911–1990)¹¹, Salka Viertel (1889–1978)¹², Marija Vinski (1899–1941)¹³. They belonged to at least two different generations, Kveder, Zagorka and Mayreder being the pioneer feminist activists within their national communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while the other women were born in the late 19th century and began their crucial political, intellectual or artistic activity after WWI. The generational exception is Hilde Spiel, who experienced the war as a child and her memoirs offer a version of transition as seen from a child’s perspective. These women were not only part of different national, social and political milieus, but also held different positions within their respective societies. While some of them had already been well known (and also publicly ridiculed) as intellectuals in the pre- and/or interwar period (Kveder, Zagorka, Mayreder, Vode) or socialites (Mahler Werfel), others were unknown and their primary political and/or intellectual activism first became public after the publication of their memoirs (Lokar, Stridsberg) or even posthumously (Vinski).

The core of this research are the autobiographical writings of Cisleithanian¹⁴ women that were published and are publicly available. Even if their works were published posthumously, it can be assumed from their articulation that they were also in some way addressing the (future) public. As Lynn Z. Bloom asserts in her analysis of private dairies in the public domain, “for a professional writer there are

⁹ Gusti Jirku Stridsberg (Augustine Stridsberg) was a German-speaking author, translator, political activist and intelligence officer, born in Chernivtsi (in what is now Ukraine), who spent the first decade after WWI at a Hartenstein Castle in the Kingdom of SHS (what is now Slovenia). Later she moved via Vienna to Moscow, where she was a reporter from the Soviet Union for the Viennese newspaper *Der Wiener Tag*. In the second part of her life she lived and worked in Sweden, where she also published her autobiography *Mina fem liv* [*My Five Lives*] (1962). The translation of Gusti Stridsberg’s autobiography, *Mojih pet življenj*, was published in Slovene by Obzorja Maribor publishing house in 1971.

¹⁰ Alma Mahler Werfel was an Austrian composer, editor, socialite and integral part of Austrian and German cultural milieu. Her autobiography *And the Bridge Is Love* (1958) was first published in the USA, where she lived from 1940, and later modified and edited for the German translation. The latter with the title *Mein Leben* [*My Life*] was published in 1963.

¹¹ Hilde Spiel was an Austrian writer and journalist from an integrated Jewish family. Her autobiography *Die hellen und die finsternen Zeiten* [*The Light and the Dark Times*] was published in Munich in 1989.

¹² Salka Viertel was an Austrian Jewish actress and Hollywood screenwriter. In 1969, her autobiography, *The Kindness of Strangers*, was published in the USA.

¹³ Marija Vinski was a German-writing Jewish medical doctor and intellectual, who lived in Zagreb, Kingdom of SHS (later Kingdom of Yugoslavia) from 1924. Her diary from the years 1917–1934 was discovered in the archive of her last partner, Croatian writer and political worker August Cesarec. The diaries with the title *Velik je misterij života* [*Vast Is the Secret of Life*] were edited by Lucija Bakšič and Magdalena Blažič and published by Disput in 2021.

¹⁴ Cisleithanian refers to the western part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including present day Austria, Slovenia and Croatia that are referred to in this article.

no private writings”¹⁵, or, if we return to Roland Barthes, the act of writing “makes the private scene public”¹⁶. Of the discussed works, two autobiographies (Lokar, Vode) and two diaries (Mayreder, Vinski) were published posthumously. For some of these women, the publication of their writings meant placing them in a broader context of contemporary historiography.

However, the existence and availability of women’s testimonies does not necessarily mean that they are included in the prevailing historiographical narrative. As Linda Anderson points out, autobiography as a genre is inextricably linked to gender and is most often focused on middle-class men, preferably from the “West”¹⁷. Autobiographies of the underprivileged, the oppressed, and the overlooked have the potential to create a discourse beyond individual narratives that transcends the fate of the individual. Women or persons of non-normative sexuality and/or gender, members of non-dominant ethnic groups or the working class, can, by asserting an individual voice that has a potential to reach beyond the personal, establish their own cultural sphere. In this case, autobiography is also an emancipatory genre that helps one to fit into the culturally dominant world, to achieve social recognition, and in this way to empower oneself and one’s own social group¹⁸. To have control over one’s own narrative can also be understood as part of an emancipatory struggle, since, according to Pierre Bourdieu, deprived social classes do not speak, but are spoken for¹⁹. Autobiographical discourse itself can be perceived as an act of resistance: one in which a woman constructs her identity, either as a revocation of oblivion (in our case – Vode) or as “confrontation of her demonic image” (in our case – Zagorka)²⁰. As Domna C. Stanton put it, the “graphing” of the “auto” could be an act of self-assertion that denied and reversed a woman’s status²¹. In this article, the analysis of selected autobiographies will serve the historiographical research of women in the transitions after WWI.

Due to the focus on historiography, many aspects of autobiography as a genre and method, largely known from the fields of comparative literature, psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, will be omitted. The discussed

¹⁵ Lynn Z. Bloom, “I Write for Myself and Strangers: Private Diaries as Public Documents”, in Suzanne L. Bunkers, Cynthia Huff (eds.), *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1996, p. 24.

¹⁶ J. Gerald Kennedy, “Roland Barthes, Autobiography, and the End of Writing”, *The Georgia Review*, 35, 1981, 2, p. 397.

¹⁷ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, London, New York, Routledge, 2001, p. 3.

¹⁸ Julia Swindells, *The Uses of Autobiography*, London, Taylor & Francis, 1995, p. 7.

¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Une classe objet”, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 1977, 17/18, p. 2.

²⁰ Isabel González Díaz, “Autobiography as a Discourse of Identity and Resistance: Emma Goldman’s Living My Life”, *Revista di Filologia*, 2009, 27, pp. 89-100.

²¹ Domna C. Stanton, “Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?”, in Domna C. Stanton (ed.), *The Female Autograph*, Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 14.

autobiographical texts differ from each other; they follow various narrative styles, have different literary value and diverse historiographical reliability. Each of the autobiographies deserves special treatment within its context as a historiographical, literary, artistic, factual or fictional genre, but in a given case of a particular historical period it is no less important to think about what their comparison tells us about the time in question. In addition, autobiography is not only a genre or a mode, but a way of reading or understanding²². It is just as much a way of reading as it is a way of writing²³. The self that is established in autobiographical writing is not only a passive representation of one's own past, but an act that produces itself linguistically and performatively. Autobiography is therefore not only a historical document or a literary work, but a trope for the fictional and performative constitution of identity²⁴. As Domna C. Stanton points out, an autobiography is “a heterogenous mixture of *discours* and *histoire*”, that includes diverse aspects: personal, historico-cultural, elegiac, picaresque, illustrative and reflective²⁵.

Most of the women discussed in this article have already received at least some research attention from historiography and/or other humanistic branches within their own national contexts. However, this article is the first attempt to try to understand them through the perspective of post-war experiences in a transnational context. After all, this was also the context to which they, as (former) citizens of Austro-Hungary, belonged. Since the period of *transition* is more of a feeling than a defined period of time, autobiographical accounts are the best way to explore its various nuances.

Modes of Autobiographical Narration

“When I reach for the journal pages again, I do so because I want to find myself once more”, wrote Marija Vinski in her diary in 1926. Her confession reflects how through the dedicated act of writing in her diary she first establishes her own voice, which then, in the moments of self-doubt, contributes to the development of her character. But at the same time, establishing yourself through the act of writing can also mean replacing your memories with your writings. Such is the case of Rosa Mayreder's diary entry in 1923: “Yesterday I walked over the

²² Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-facement”, *MLN*, 94, 1979, 5, pp. 919-930.

²³ Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1989, p. 30.

²⁴ Marko Juvan, “Avtobiografija in kočljivost zvrstnih opredelitev. *Moje življenje* med tekstem in žanrom” [“Autobiography and the Difficulties in Genre Classification: *Moje življenje* between a Text and a Genre”], in Alenka Koron et al. (eds.), *Avtobiografski diskurz: Teorija in praksa avtobiografiji v literarni vedi* [Autobiographical Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Autobiography in Literary Studies], Ljubljana, Založba ZRC SAZU, 2011, p. 54.

²⁵ Domna C. Stanton, “Autogynography”, p. 8.

Hetzendorfer Heide, which I haven't set foot on since I was a child. [...] Since I wrote down the memories of my youth, I can no longer really distinguish between representation and memory"²⁶.

We can use autobiographies to describe the elements that mark a location in the text where self-invention, self-discovery and self-representation emerge within the diary-writing²⁷. Diary is more a practice than a product (unless published) and it represents many things: private documents, historical accounts, traces of a life and of a writing practice, records of self-making and a form of life writing that is closer to the letter in practice than to the published forms²⁸. Both Vinski and Mayreder spent years documenting their lives through diaries through which the reader can observe both the internal struggles of the two women as well as the struggles of the world around them. Although both diaries were published posthumously, we can assume from the way they were written that they were also public documents. It is important so understand them as such, because reading women's diaries (and other autobiographical writings) solely as private documents implies an underlying assumption about who is (or who should be) removed from public life²⁹. Rosa Mayreder (1858–1948) was one of the most well-known Viennese public intellectuals of her generation and spent the vast majority of her life writing. Her diaries consist of more than 4000 pages. For her, writing a diary meant to be “a historian of her own history” and diaries were like “herbarium for the pressed flowers” that would keep the past “accessible without the distortions of remembering”³⁰. The editor of Mayreder's *Diaries*, Harriet Anderson, points out that her diaries served other purposes as well: her writing may not only have served to dissect the “I”, but at the same time to create the “I” in daily self-reflection – as she herself later suggested, without knowing it, by reading part of the manuscript of her youthful memories titled *The Birth of Personality*³¹. At the same time, her diaries also served as a field for her literary ambitions, and had therapeutic purposes. Mayreder's diary shows a development from a training ground for her youthful sense of individuality and her literary ambitions to a place of emotional self-assurance through the means of storytelling and finally to a repository for experiences and thoughts in which they should be kept for eternity³².

²⁶ Rosa Mayreder, *Tagebücher 1873–1937* [*Diaries 1873–1937*]. Edited by Harriet Anderson, Frankfurt am Main, Insel Verlag, 1988, p. 225.

²⁷ Suzanne L. Bunkers, Cynthia Huff (eds.), *Inscribing the Daily*, p. 3.

²⁸ Julie Rak, “The Diary Among Other Forms of Life Writing”, in Batsheva Ben-Amos, Dan Ben-Amos (eds.), *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2020, p. 104.

²⁹ Kathryn Carter, “Feminist Interpretations of the Diary”, in Batsheva Ben-Amos, Dan Ben-Amos (eds.), *The Diary*, p. 96.

³⁰ Rosa Mayreder, *Tagebücher 1873–1937*, p. 27.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 28-35.

Maria Vinski's (1899–1941) diary was discovered more than seven decades after her death in the archive of her last partner, the Croatian writer and political activist Avgust Cesarec. Although her fame cannot be compared to that of Rosa Mayreder, and even if she did not make a living (exclusively) by writing, as she was a doctor by profession, we can recognize the legitimacy of the public document in her private diary. This is also emphasized in the foreword to her diaries, where the editors Lucija Bakšić and Magdalena Blažić point out that the goal of their publication is to free Vinski from her anonymity and create the conditions for the theoretical separation of the diary entry from its empirical author³³. There are also several points in the diary itself that allude to its potential public function: transcripts from the newspapers, her lectures, summaries of the books she read and detailed descriptions of political events. In 1924, after she gave birth to her son, she finished her entry with the following statement: “This notebook is coming to an end. I'll start a new one for you – maybe I can give it to you 20 years from now. Greetings to everyone I love!”³⁴. From these uplifting words, we can assume two things: that she intended to hand over her diary to her son and for future generations to read, and that her diary already had readers, whom she directly greeted with this entry. Last but not least, the discovery of her diary in her partner's archive testifies to the fact that she wanted her writing to be preserved and shared with others. If she wanted to destroy her diary, she would have had several reasons to do so in the last years of her life, as its discovery could also mean danger for her: both in the Soviet Union, where she traveled with Cesarec, and later in the Nazi puppet state of the NDH (Independent State of Croatia), where she was eventually killed as a sympathizer of communism and a Jew in 1941.

Among the discussed autobiographies, there are two that were published posthumously and could therefore be considered as more private than public documents. These are *Skriti spomin [The Hidden Memory]* (written in 1971, first published 2000) by Angela Vode (1892–1985) and *Od Anice do Ane Antonovne [From Anica to Ana Antonovna]* (written in the 1970s, first published in 2002) by Anica Lokar (1897–1976). But the content of both autobiographies makes it clear that they were written with publication in mind. Vode's writing can be perceived as an act of resistance and an attempt to tell her own story and history as she has witnessed it:

When the “heroes” achieved everything they fought for and sat firmly in their profitable positions, they began to write their memoirs [...] I am reading those, whose authors I knew personally and I am especially interested in events that I have also

³³ Marija Vinski, *Velik je misterij života. Dnevnik 1917–1934 [Vast Is the Secret of Life. Diary 1917–1934]*. Edited by Lucija Bakšić and Magdalena Blažić, Zagreb, Disput, 2021, pp. 7-24.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 219.

witnessed myself. I am often amazed by these descriptions, as they are often completely unknown to me, even when I participated in them, and I also don't recognize the persons described, although I once knew them personally"³⁵.

In order to tell the "truth", Angela Vode wrote her political autobiography, focusing on her political activities as one of the first Socialists and, soon after 1919, also Communists in the interwar Yugoslavia. The detailed descriptions of the transition period mainly serve to show the early Yugoslav Socialist and Communist movement, to which she herself belonged until she was expelled from the party due to her opposition to the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939. As she emphasized, she did not write her autobiography out of revenge, but out of a desire to tell the truth: "Let me just mention that these pages were not dictated to me by hatred, but by knowledge. The realization that what we have been waiting for is far from socialism, and most importantly: that our Socialism lacks a human face"³⁶.

Similar is the closing sentence of Anica Lokar, also an early interwar Socialist, Communist and activist, whose expectations of a Socialist utopia were not met in the Stalinist Soviet Union where she spent several years, nor in Socialist Yugoslavia: "Maybe I belong to the Communist movement of the future, but I no longer belong to the one I experienced after 1920"³⁷.

"When is a person the most open-hearted, where does one reveal the most, where does one best bare his soul without fear? – Maybe in letters, maybe in diaries"³⁸, wrote Slovene-Croatian author Zofka Kveder (1878–1926) in her letter to the women's newspaper *Ženski svet* in 1924. She was an avid letter writer and she also used the form of letters for her partly epistolary novel *Hanka* (1917) which deals directly with the question of WWI and its impact on women. *Hanka* consists of several autobiographical parts (the experience of divorce, falling in love, the death of her mother, the relationship with her daughter, antisemitism, attitude towards God, etc.) and, as Kveder's biographer Katja Mihurko Poniž points out, the novel contains almost no narrative distance³⁹. *Hanka* was the last great female figure in Kveder's oeuvre and declares the writer's life credo through her⁴⁰. At least some autobiographical fragments are visible in almost all of Kveder's texts and she is therefore not only one of the first professional writers of the late Austro-Hungarian empire and later interwar Yugoslavia, but also an

³⁵ Angela Vode, *Skriti spomin* [*The Hidden Memory*], Ljubljana, Nova revija, 2005, p. 346.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 362.

³⁷ Anica Lokar, *Od Anice do Ane Antonovne* [*From Anica to Ana Antonovna*], Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga, 2002, p. 169.

³⁸ Zofka Kveder, *Zbrano delo*, peta knjiga: *Dramatika, članki, feljtoni* [*Collected Works, the fifth book: Drama, Articles, Feuilletons*]. Edited by Katja Mihurko Poniž, Ljubljana, ZRC SAZU, 2018, p. 542.

³⁹ Katja Mihurko Poniž, *Drzno drugačna: Zofka Kveder in podobe ženskosti* [*Daringly Different: Zofka Kveder and Representations of Womanhood*], Ljubljana, Delta, 2003, p. 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

acclaimed contributor to women’s autobiographical discourse⁴¹. In her literary works we can recognize a whole spectrum of autobiographical data, from political beliefs to private transformations. Her post-war literary works are largely programmatic-political dramas *Arditi na otoku Krku* [*Ardites on the Island of Krk*] and *Unuk kraljeviča Marka* [*Grandson of the Prince Marko*] (1922), that serve to spread the centralist Yugoslav ideology which was her strongest political conviction until the end of her life. In 1926 her last book, *Po putevima života* [*Along the Paths of Life*], was published and it deals exclusively with abandoned women. This too can be seen as autobiographical, since she herself was heartbroken and devastated due to her husband’s infidelity and abandonment that led to a divorce from which she never recovered. In her latest collection, each story features a different female character who is abandoned by her husband. All women love their husbands unconditionally and never recover from their abandonment. The backdrop for these intimate narratives is the Yugoslav ideology. The stories take place from Triglav to Vardar, and women are victims of loveless men regardless of their nationality, religion, education or class⁴². From the novel *Hanka* onwards, Zofka Kveder increasingly turned to history for the narrative frame of her stories. Her best-known fin-de-siècle works told distinctly contemporary stories about women of her time, but after WWI the historical backdrop began to represent a key ideological component. As she wrote in *Hanka*:

History is a tool for me. When you browse through old books and old manuscripts pay special attention to what can be used to say something to people even today. [...] Indeed, history is an extraordinary means of saying something that is actually forbidden to say⁴³.

The historical framework of literary works was a fundamental feature of Marija Jurić Zagorka’s (1873–1957) novels. She, too, used history as a means by which to say what would be too dangerous in the present and thus experienced great popularity among Croatian readers. In 1934 she published her autobiographical novel *Kamen na cesti* [*A Stone on the Road*], which, through the story of the protagonist Mirjana Grgić, narrates a literary version of her own life with recognizable biographical features⁴⁴. In addition to this literary autobiography, Zagorka wrote several other autobiographical texts, the most

⁴¹ Katja Mihurko Poniž, *Zapisano z njenim peresom. Prelomi zgodnjih slovenskih književnic s paradigmo nacionalne literature* [*Written with Her Pen: Early Slovenian Women Authors’ Break with the Paradigm of National Literature*], Nova Gorica, Založba Univerze v Novi Gorici, 2014, p. 136.

⁴² Zofka Kveder Demetrović, *Po putevima života* [*Along the Paths of Life*], Zagreb, Tisak štamparije S. Boranovića, 1926.

⁴³ Zofka Kveder, *Hanka*, Ljubljana, Ženska založba belo-modra knjižnica, IX knjiga, 1938, p. 41.

⁴⁴ Marija Jurić Zagorka, *Kamen na cesti* [*A Stone on the Road*], https://popara.mk/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Kamen-na-cesti_Marija-Juri%C4%87-Zagorka.pdf. Accessed on September 2, 2022.

important of which is *Što je moja krivnja* [*What's My Guilt*], which was written in 1947 and published in 1948⁴⁵. Both texts touch on the same life events with different literary approaches. Her autobiography is a reckoning with life and life's injustices and a testament to her achievements, which she believed had gone unrecognized. The autobiography of Marija Jurić Zagorka acts as a means of righting wrongs.

The remaining four autobiographies were published by their authors as works of literature and were written for their audience. Gusti Jirku Stridsberg (1902–1978) wrote her own life story through the key events of her life: life as a landowner in the Kingdom of SHS, political engagement, the journey through Vienna to the Soviet Union, the Spanish Civil War, the WWII and life in Sweden. It is clear from the text that it was not only important for the author to share her own life story and place herself in the history of the turbulent 20th century, but that she aspired to a literary product of a high quality. In her case, telling the “truth” or establishing herself was not more important than the craftsmanship of writing⁴⁶. This is similar to the autobiography of actress and screenwriter Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers*, first published in 1969. As a politically left-leaning Jew, she had fewer and fewer opportunities in the German-speaking theater of the interwar period. A new career opportunity appeared for her in Hollywood, where she became a screenwriter and became the main breadwinner for her family. The traces of screenwriting style can be recognized in the way her autobiography is written: it is a fluent and fast read that was carefully conducted with the readership in mind. Even for her, the book as a final product is more important than placing her own person in the great historical currents of the 20th century⁴⁷. At the same time, it is not negligible that precisely with this work she shed light on her own working-conditions and work, which until then was often in the shadow of her former husband Berthold Viertel⁴⁸.

Die hellen und die finsternen Zeiten [*The Light and the Dark Times*] is only one of more than thirty books that Austrian writer Hilde Spiel (1911–1990) wrote. She was a skilled and renowned writer who also proved herself critically with various literary works. Her autobiography primarily has a writerly and literary function⁴⁹.

The autobiography *Mein Leben* [*My Life*] of socialite, composer and wife Alma Mahler Werfel (1879–1964) is literarily the weakest of the four listed. The

⁴⁵ Marija Jurić Zagorka, “Što je moja krivnja” [*What's My Guilt*], in Vinko Brešić, *Autografije hrvatskih pisaca* [*Autobiographies of Croatian Writers*], Zagreb, AGM, 1997, pp. 451-499.

⁴⁶ Gusti Jirku Stridsberg, *Mojih pet življenj* [*My Five Lives*], Maribor, Založba Obzorja, p. 1971.

⁴⁷ Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers*, New York, NYRB, 2019.

⁴⁸ Katharina Prager, Vanessa Hanneschläger, “Gendered Lives in Anticipation of a Biographer? Two Intellectual Relationships in Twentieth-Century Austria”, *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies*, 19, 2016, 3, pp. 337-353.

⁴⁹ Hilde Spiel, *Die hellen und die finsternen Zeiten. Erinnerungen 1911–1946* [*The Light and the Dark Times. Memoirs 1911–1946*], Hamburg, Rowohlt Verlag, 1991.

autobiography is based on her diaries, but serves above all as her own testament and a reminder of her own importance within the society of Viennese modernists⁵⁰.

All four autobiographies written by Gusti Jirku Stridsberg, Salka Viertel, Hilde Spiel and Alma Mahler Werfel are clearly aimed at the public. They were written with the intention of becoming a public document and will be treated as such. The autobiographical texts of the other six authors (Mayreder, Vinski, Vode, Lokar, Kveder, Zagorka) will also be treated as public documents, since it is clear from the intent and circumstances of their writing that their works were intended for an audience.

Transition: The Turbulent Present

Thanks to Stefan Zweig and his *The World of Yesterday* (1941), autobiography is the first art form that comes to mind when Habsburg nostalgia is mentioned. In the search for a sense of transition, “nostalgia (from *nostos* – return home, and *algia* – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed”⁵¹. In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time and progress⁵². But surprisingly there is only a trace of nostalgia in the autobiographical writings of the women in question, despite the fact that several of them knew and admired Zweig (Mahler Werfel, Viertel, Stridsberg) and Angela Vode even translated *The World of Yesterday* into Slovene (1958). Idealization and nostalgia (as “history without guilt”⁵³) also remind us of the privilege experienced by the women in question. The privilege demonstrated the most through the writings of Alma Mahler Werfel, who described the pre-war times as “beautiful without a cloud”⁵⁴.

The disruption of “peace” took several women by surprise – Salka Viertel for instance was completely “unaware that Austria was preparing for war”, because she “never read the political articles in the papers; they seemed so unimportant, compared to the theatrical news”⁵⁵. The war came as a surprise, or as she wrote: “On June 28, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were killed in Sarajevo and everything, which appeared built for eternity, began to falter. Uninvited, history entered our lives, and our roots were plowed under by tanks and guns”⁵⁶. But everything, even an illusion of eternity, has an expiration date. For the

⁵⁰ Alma Mahler Werfel, *Mein Leben. Biografie [My Life. A Biography]*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Verlag, 1982.

⁵¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2002, p. XIII.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. XV.

⁵³ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, New York, Vintage, 1991, p. 688.

⁵⁴ Alma Mahler Werfel, *Mein Leben*, p. 116.

⁵⁵ Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers*, p. 186.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

majority of women of non-German nationality, the crumbling monarchy represented an opportunity and the future seemed to be filled with expectations. Not long before the end of war Marija Jurić Zagorka demanded equal pay. Her male colleagues were in significantly better financial positions and, as her request was brutally denied, she quit her job, “firmly believing that democracy and equality were on the threshold”⁵⁷. The same goes for Angela Vode, who lost her job at the beginning of 1917, but that didn’t particularly affect her. She didn’t “take things too tragically”, because she was “young and gullible, and especially full of confidence in the future. Austria was already shaking a lot”, she wrote, and she “firmly believed in its disintegration” after which justice will reign”⁵⁸. In particular, Yugoslav women had no time to mourn the Empire, since they were busy with the idea of the unification of south Slavs in one common state. “Soon after the creation of the first Yugoslavia in 1918, the eyes of young fanatics, who dreamed of the state of South Slavs with such idealism, began to open”⁵⁹, wrote Vode, realizing that the post-Habsburg utopia will take a different, more authoritarian shape than expected. She was not the only one expecting the impossible. As Zofka Kveder put it in the preface to *Hanka* in December 1917: “Better days will come! Salvation! After trials, freedom – for all of us!”⁶⁰.

In 1918 Marija Jurić Zagorka printed the novel *Crveni ocean* [*The Red Ocean*] inspired by the Russian Revolution. The novel ends with the description of how “the people will be happy in the red ocean of equality”, but, as she put in her autobiography, at that time she couldn’t imagine “why someone would have to drown me in it”⁶¹.

There was optimism not only in post-WWI Yugoslavia, but also in Austria. As Hilde Spiel wrote:

It is now customary to regard the First Republic as an unfortunate entity, doomed from the start [...]. At the time we felt differently for a while. We didn’t mourn the monarchy because adults didn’t. The fact that we had lost an empire did not bother us, because in the 1920s we thought we had exchanged it for Europe, even for the whole world⁶².

But as was the case in Yugoslavia, there was a crack in the Austrian optimism as well:

⁵⁷ Marija Jurić Zagorka, “Što je moja krivnja”, p. 482.

⁵⁸ Angela Vode, *Spomin in pozaba. Zbrana dela Angele Vode*, III. knjiga [*Memory and Oblivion. Collected Works of Angela Vode*, third book]. Edited by Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik et al., Ljubljana, Krtina, 2000, p. 81.

⁵⁹ Angela Vode, *Skriti spomin*, pp. 355-356.

⁶⁰ Zofka Kveder, *Hanka*, p. 7.

⁶¹ Marija Jurić Zagorka, “Što je moja krivnja”, p. 497.

⁶² Hilde Spiel, *Die hellen und die finsternen Zeiten*, p. 53.

Even our fathers, who not too long ago had gone to war loyal to the Emperor, had meanwhile accepted it [the new Republic] regarded the persisting poverty, the recent inflation, the unchanged unemployment as birth pangs, hoped for the solidarity of other democratic countries [...]⁶³.

When we compare descriptions of the post-war period in autobiographies, such as that written by Hilde Spiel, with accounts of the post-war years in diaries, we notice at least one important difference. Autobiographies see the post-war period as a summary of problems, while diaries, due to their nature of daily inventory, which often does not distinguish between more and less important events, systematically list problems. Inflation and unemployment may seem manageable when viewed in autobiographical retrospect, while daily records of bread prices, cold, hunger, strikes and disease paint a much bleaker picture of the post-war reality. Diaries also don't privilege extraordinary over ordinary (historical) events in terms of scope, space or selection⁶⁴. The reality, described in the diaries therefore often seems messier than the one summed up in autobiographies.

“The present is so turbulent. The war is not over at all”⁶⁵, wrote Marija Vinski in her diary in December 1918. Her diary entries give us the most detailed insight into the transition period, whether it is about her internal hardships, when she was prevented from traveling and therefore visiting her family in Bukovina, or about political positions, such as disagreement with Wilson's fourteen points. In October 1918 Vinski reported how it is impossible for her to imagine the truce, because everything she knows is “that there was a bright time, without unrest, mistrust, disease, hatred and misery”⁶⁶, but she can hardly remember it. For the whole months of October and November, while she was also sick with the Spanish flu, she wrote of a “general boiling”: German nationalism at the University, hatred directed towards Slavic pupils and antisemitic pogroms in Krakow and Lviv⁶⁷. “There is no way out, no light at the end of the tunnel”⁶⁸, she wrote just a few weeks before the end of the war. In November she reported how she can no longer follow the political events, because so much is happening at the same time:

Revolution. Hungary separated from Austria. Austria no longer exists at all, only a new German-Austrian state. Retreat of the Habsburgs. [...] The Americans have arrived in Trieste and are keeping it under occupation, the Italians have walked into

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

⁶⁴ Suzanne L. Bunkers, Cynthia A. Huff, “Issues in Studying Women's Diaries: A Theoretical and Critical Introduction”, in Suzanne L. Bunkers, Cynthia A. Huff (eds.), *Inscribing the Daily*, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Marija Vinski, *Velik je misterij života*, p. 58.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 54-55.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

Ljubljana. And in the meantime, the new government is discussing the state structure, which should be republican. The time of unrest got into everyone's blood⁶⁹.

Her diary entries in the first weeks, months and even years (up until 1923) are the most regular within 17 years of her diary writing. It seems like every day is a new battle of transition: the Romanian occupation of Bukovina (which also meant that in 1919 she enrolled in her studies in Vienna as a Romanian citizen), emperors renouncing the thrones, monarchies becoming republics, aggressive soldiers living in the courtyard of her parents' home long after the war "ended", socialist upheavals, demonstrations, suspended tram service, closed shops, women's suffrage and antisemitism in politics, but also on the streets of Vienna and in her own university classes. "This is not how I imagined peace"⁷⁰, she wrote, and it is true – nothing in her diaries for the first two years after the war seems peaceful.

Rosa Mayreder, who experienced the war in the same city, was less vocal in the time of vast political changes. On the day that Austria became a republic (18 October 1918), she only wrote one sentence: "Transformation of Austria into a federal state through an imperial manifesto"⁷¹. But she shared the view of Vinski, claiming that in the time of peace negotiations in Paris "the world does not look like peace: for a week violent street fighting took place in Berlin between the Spartacus group and the government socialists; hostilities continue between Italy and South Slavs, Hungarians and Czechs, Poles and Czechs. But most pacifists have become very quiet everywhere"⁷². Almost a year later she wrote that the first year of peace "was worse than all the years of war"⁷³. She described the rise of prices, food shortages, nervousness and general instability that prevent her every attempt to do intellectual work, because she found it so stressful to live in a time, when "no one knows what the next few months will bring"⁷⁴. Rosa Mayreder regularly wrote a diary through the turbulent post-war times, but with a different temperament than Marija Vinski.

This is of course not surprising, if we take into account that there is a more than 40-year age difference between them. Vinski stood on the threshold of her adult life, while Mayreder was approaching old age, with more than three decades of public intellectual work behind her. "The events that are so big are not able to awaken any real resonance in me"⁷⁵, she wrote in the middle of November 1918. The war made her tired and she also lost "40 pounds in two years", because she lived on "black pasta, potatoes, homemade dumpling-shaped wine, all prepared

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹ Rosa Mayreder, *Tagebücher 1873–1937*, p. 183.

⁷² *Ibidem*, pp. 187–188.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 197.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 185.

with a minimum amount of fat”⁷⁶. However, she herself wasn’t sure whether her apathy had physical or spiritual causes: the war broke her internally and she never recovered from her disappointment in humanity, which is also reflected in her post-war writings, especially in *Geschlecht und Kultur* [*Gender and Culture*] from 1923.

Many women reported that their weight loss was partly connected to the lack of food and partly to the psychological struggles of the after-war life. “My appearance adapted to my mood. I became very thin, had a narrow and boyish face and short-cropped hair”⁷⁷, described her after-war appearance Gusti Jirku Stridsberg. Her new look did not only reflect a change of fashion, but it reflected the new, unstable world. As she herself described her collision of personal and political in her autobiography:

My world was confused. The moral notions of my educators were no longer valid. Social foundations were devalued, even grotesque. God was far away and seemed to demand incomprehensible things from me. I felt alone and had to play a role that my drive resisted. Man or woman, landowner in anachronistic feudal relations; wife without marriage, mother without faith in the future⁷⁸.

Also, here we can witness the generation gap. What for Stridsberg was a consequence of the post-war instability, for Mayreder was something she could not comprehend: “Modern women with bubikopf, a cigarette and red lipstick” were for her “beings from a foreign world”⁷⁹. She was against the “culture of cozy enjoyment”⁸⁰ and shared her worldview with Zofka Kveder, who wrote in one of her public letters to the newspaper *Jutro* in 1926: “It’s not true, is it, that people today only need cinemas, radio, operettas and jokes. After all, there are still some old-timers among us, and not all the youth are interested in sports”⁸¹.

But the generational differences did not only manifest when it came to fashion or lifestyle decisions, but also in deeper, more important transitional definitions, such as politics.

Politics: The Pressure for Political Identification

In the intellectual and autobiographical work of the first generation of women’s rights activists, we can begin to notice a turn to traditionalism immediately after the war. Zofka Kveder, one of the first Slovenian feminists, who in her oeuvre was prominently concerned with the empowerment of women,

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ Gusti Jirku Stridsberg, *Mojih pet življenj*, p. 106.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ Rosa Mayreder, *Tagebücher 1873–1937*, p. 265.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 247.

⁸¹ Zofka Kveder, *Zbrano delo*, p. 578.

begins writing ideological dramas with weak female characters who exclusively serve the motherland, motherhood and men⁸². In this period, she believed that literature has to exceed fiction, or as she wrote in the afterword to one of her works: “Let this book be a document of our day – not just a theatre play”⁸³. After the novel *Crveni ocean* (1918), that was directly influenced by the ideas of the Russian Revolution and the Marxist ideas about women’s emancipation, Marija Jurić Zagorka, the first Croatian professional journalist, started writing *Kći Lotrščaka* [*The Daughter of the Lotrščak*], a novel with her weakest female protagonist⁸⁴. Austrian feminist Rosa Mayreder, who wrote a seminal feminist work *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit* [*A Survey of the Woman Problem*] (1913) and campaigned for women’s economic and intellectual independence, was skeptical about women’s suffrage in the new republic of Austria⁸⁵. However, she was not concerned by the abolition of democracy through the Austrofascist regime of Engelbert Dollfuss⁸⁶, just as Alma Mahler Werfel, the free-spirited, artistically gifted and intellectually sharp woman “believed in the salvation of the world through Italian fascism”⁸⁷.

But at the same time as women of the older generation flirted with conservatism or even autocratic and totalitarian ideas, younger women were radicalized in another direction. Ideas of the Russian Revolution were romanticized through literature, songs and urban legends without any real understanding of what was happening in the Soviet Union. “Although I was not ‘primo loco’ a political person”, wrote Hilde Spiel in her autobiography, “I was soon seized by the spirit of the time [...]. We understood nothing of the murder of the kulaks. [...] Emotional reasons [...] have pushed us to the left”⁸⁸.

Angela Vode also reported about her emotional involvement, writing that she did not “join socialism for the sake of scientific study and foresight of social development in the future [...], but was driven to join the ranks of the workers simply by the emotional realization that injustices must be eliminated and therefore it is necessary to fight to change the world”⁸⁹. But what began as an

⁸² Natka Badurina, *Nezakonite kćeri Ilirije. Hrvatska književnost i ideologija u 19. in 20. Stoljeću* [*Illegal Daughters of Illyria. Croatian Literature and Ideology in the 19th and 20th Centuries*], Zagreb, Centar za ženske studije, 2009, pp. 173-195.

⁸³ Dimitrije Gvozdanić, *Unuk Kraljevića Marka* [*Grandson of the Prince Marko*], Zagreb, Komisarna naklada hrvatskog štamparskog zavoda, 1922, p. 319.

⁸⁴ Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, *Opasne iluzije. Rodni stereotipi u međuratnoj Jugoslaviji* [*Dangerous Illusions. Gender Stereotypes in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia*], Zagreb, Sredna Europa, 2014, p. 113.

⁸⁵ Rosa Mayreder, *Tagebücher 1873–1937*, p. 185.

⁸⁶ Hilde Schmölzer, *Rosa Mayreder. Ein Leben zwischen Utopie und Wirklichkeit* [*Rosa Mayreder. A Life between Utopia and Reality*], Vienna, Promedia, 2002, p. 262.

⁸⁷ Alma Mahler Werfel, *Mein Leben*, p. 539.

⁸⁸ Hilde Spiel, *Die hellen und die finsternen Zeiten*, p. 81.

⁸⁹ Angela Vode, *Spomin in pozaba*, p. 49.

emotional attachment continued as a dangerous political path for many women. Angela Vode became a political worker for the Communist Party. Anica Lokar, Gusti Jirku Stridsberg and Marija Vinski all left for the Soviet Union to accompany their partners and to help build the new world they believed in. Lokar and Stridsberg vividly reported their disappointments as soon as they arrived in Moscow. To be a Communist in interwar Yugoslavia meant risking your life. Angela Vode, Anica Lokar and Gusti Jirku Stridsberg all report in their autobiographies that Yugoslavia was a dull autocratic police state where being a communist (or even just being a suspected communist) meant great danger for the whole family. Everyone could very quickly be suspected of communism. As Stridsberg wrote:

Whoever wants unions is a communist. Anyone who has socialist books is a communist. Anyone who corresponds regularly with foreign countries [...] is a communist. And if two or three people of this type drink wine or even brandy together, then they are an organization of state traitors⁹⁰.

Even the women who did not devote their lives to communist agitation have retained their affinity for the socialist idea. When Salka Viertel, like many other Hollywood workers during the McCarthy era, was interrogated for having alleged communist sympathies, the FBI agent, after receiving no incriminating evidence, blurted out reproachfully: “Oh, you people [...] You are anti-fascist but I have never heard one of you say: I am anti-communist”⁹¹.

As Anica Lokar remembered, the first post-war years “laid the foundation for the future outlook on the world”⁹². The same goes for many other women of her generation. As Stridsberg recalls, the post-war climate became completely politicized and younger people expected clear political definitions. “Pressure for political identification”⁹³, was a new societal expectation. It is interesting that in the case of the women discussed herein, we can see that the female suffrage gained after the war had no effect on radicalization. Yugoslavian women without the right to vote were no less radical than their Austrian contemporaries. As Angela Vode recalled: “[...] everything was seething with revolutionary excitement. [...] The atmosphere was filled with revolutionary ideas like dynamite”⁹⁴.

For some women this atmosphere was not only exciting but also frightening. Alma Mahler Werfel wrote that she “pulled out my pistols”⁹⁵ when she saw the worker’s demonstration for the first time in November 1918. She wished “for the

⁹⁰ Gusti Jirku Stridsberg, *Mojih pet življenj*, p. 115.

⁹¹ Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers*, p. 667.

⁹² Anica Lokar, *Od Anice do Ane Antonovne*, p. 58.

⁹³ Gusti Jirku Stridsberg, *Mojih pet življenj*, p. 107.

⁹⁴ Angela Vode, *Spomin in pozaba*, p. 103.

⁹⁵ Alma Mahler Werfel, *Mein Leben*, p. 228.

emperor back” and even if he were “the most idiotic of all” she would still prefer it to the “screaming of masses” that she saw as “music from hell that a pure ear can never endure”⁹⁶.

Even women with left-leaning ideological orientations did not traverse the streets of Vienna without a sense of fear. Salka Viertel described how she was curious what was going on outside and she went for a walk. She saw “thousands of people marching, among them soldiers and sailors, obviously just back from the front”⁹⁷. They were singing the *Internationale*, while detachments of police appeared and the shooting began. She ran back home⁹⁸. Later she didn’t feel any safer in Germany, where Karl Libknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and Kurt Eisner were murdered. She feared being cut from her husband by political events, and since she was expecting a child, she asked the theater director to release her from her commitment. She wrote: “In defeated Germany the bells did not ring and though relieved, people did not rejoice”⁹⁹.

For Marija Vinski, the path to political identification was a long one, but she started writing about capitalism right after the war. She regretted that “capital” had become the only goal for people and nations and pointed out that capitalism had replaced God¹⁰⁰. She was also in favor of the agricultural reform that happened in Romania after the war, advocating for better lives for peasants. She believed people were too poor and taxes were too high¹⁰¹. In the interwar years, she was becoming more and more familiar with Marxist literature and her faith in God became increasingly loose. In the 1930s, her political profile was already quite clear, although she herself was not sure whether she was a revolutionary only in theory, or she could also be one in practice. In 1934 she wrote:

Workers’ revolution. I didn’t go out those days. Just because I was tired and sick? Not! I wasn’t so sick that I couldn’t go out – it was more the fear [...]. These days, the thought came to me for the first time, that I am actually a coward and that I am not made for the job of a revolutionary fighter [...] ¹⁰².

She believed that a true revolutionary needs a meaningful anger about unjust conditions and must be romantic enough to believe in success¹⁰³. She wasn’t sure she had any of this.

However, the critique of capitalism was popular not only among left-leaning women, but also among conservatives. Rosa Mayreder was critical of Wilson’s

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 246.

⁹⁷ Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers*, p. 241.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 242.

¹⁰⁰ Marija Vinski, *Velik je misterij života*, p. 64.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 334.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 336.

division of Europe, since she saw him as an “advocate of capitalist and imperialist interests”¹⁰⁴. Indeed, criticism of Wilson and his plan for post-war Europe is the only political event mentioned in the autobiographical writings by all the women discussed in this chapter.

In conclusion: Gender in the Post-war Period

The post-war period does not only bear witness to the consequences of war, but is also a response to the new, complex reality that took place in newly formed post-Habsburg countries. Everyday life was intricately intertwined with social and political changes that none of the intellectuals could ignore. The autobiographical testimonies do not provide us with a unifying experience of this period that could be attributed to all women. However, what is evident is that the generational proximity is more unifying than the national one. The women discussed belonged to different generations, nationalities, races and classes, all of which marked the multiplicity of their experiences. However, one feature is common to all of them – gender. In conclusion, I will try to summarize the experiences of the post-war transition, which are linked exclusively to the gender of the women in question.

The first, obvious, experience that women share is the female body. With the exception of Angela Vode, Rosa Mayreder and Marija Jurić Zagorka, all women gave birth to children, at least three of them experienced a miscarriage (Kveder, Mahler Werfel, Lokar), and two of them experienced the death of their children after WWI (Kveder, Mahler Werfel). Motherhood itself is also a transition from one state into another. It is not only a personal, possibly life-defining, experience, but also a social identity that has a major impact on women’s lives. Salka Viertel remembered how her first birth affected her well-being and at the same time it fit into the broader geopolitical circumstances:

It is commonly assumed that to give birth is the happiest moment in a woman’s life. Why then was I possessed by such abysmal sadness, such black depression? I was exhausted and had the feeling that something in me had died and that I would never be my old self again. [...] When I finally recovered [...] Sambor was now Polish. The dual monarchy had fallen apart and with it my father’s entire fortune¹⁰⁵.

It is also needless to point out that the care of the children was left entirely to the mothers, while the fathers occupied themselves with external things, be it studies, art or revolution. Moreover, many women not only performed care work, but also took care of the family’s financial well-being. Immediately after WWI, Gusti Jirku Stridsberg took care of both the estate and the daughter, while her

¹⁰⁴ Hilde Schmölzer, *Rosa Mayreder*, p. 216.

¹⁰⁵ Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers*, pp. 256-257.

husband studied medicine in Vienna. They divorced not long after. Zofka Kveder was married for a second time and took care of her three daughters from her previous marriage. Even in her new marriage, she wanted to have a child, but she was unable to do so. To her great sadness, her husband, for whom she also did political, intellectual and activist work, left her when he impregnated a younger woman. Anica Lokar was the wife of a professional revolutionary who in the twenties spent more time in prison than at home. She took care of the family's financial well-being, and of both the household and her husband's revolutionary and intellectual activities in the interwar years. During WWII, they divorced in Moscow. For Marija Vinski, marriage meant that she moved from Vienna to Zagreb, which resulted in the discontinuation of her medical studies. She finished her studies a little less than a decade later, after she became a widow at the age of thirty-two and her child was old enough for her to devote herself to her studies. For her, motherhood meant "sentimental compulsion"¹⁰⁶, and she frequently discussed the challenges of having a body that undergoes changes with the menstrual cycle. She often wrote down the days of her cycle, as menstruation made it almost impossible for her to work. Or rather, as she wrote herself in 1920: "Menstruation is a major factor in a woman's life because it inhibits her mental development"¹⁰⁷.

With the exception of Alma Mahler Werfel, all the women discussed had a profession. For certain careers, for example acting, it was considered that if a woman wanted to keep her job, she had to return as soon as possible after giving birth. Salka Viertel, for instance, returned to the stage only six weeks after giving birth¹⁰⁸. At the same time, for her being married also meant that she was convinced to follow her husband to the United States, where he had a promising career as a director. In the end, she was the one who mostly financially supported the family with writing screenplays. She and her husband divorced and after WWII he was the first to return to Europe, where a place in the Burgtheater awaited in his native Vienna.

Care-giving work did not fall to women as mothers, but also as wives. Rosa Mayreder had been caring for her mentally ill husband since the end of WWI. This was physically, mentally and intellectually exhausting for her. Several pages of the diary are devoted to documenting her paralysis due to her husband's outbursts, and she described her hurt that her work has never been truly appreciated, neither by her husband nor by the extended family¹⁰⁹.

Being married and/or having a child(ren) was an all-encompassing decision for the women of the post-war period, which affected not only their intimate but also

¹⁰⁶ Marija Vinski, *Velik je misterij života*, p. 314.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁸ Salka Viertel, *The Kindness of Strangers*, p. 262.

¹⁰⁹ Rosa Mayreder, *Tagebücher 1873–1937*, p. 214, 237.

their public lives. Biographical information about births, illnesses, family dynamics and biological features of the body are mostly omitted from biographical records. But it is through autobiographical testimonies that we can see that these circumstances play a key role in understanding the living conditions of women.

With the exception of Rosa Mayreder, who stayed in her (open) marriage until death, all the other women lived in non-normative relationships for those times. All of them were divorced at least once (with the exception of Marija Vinski, who was a young widow and Angela Vode, who was never married). This, too, can be seen as a consequence of post-war times.

Of course, gender was not only conditioned by biology, but also by society. This is especially evident in the reception of public intellectual work, where all three female intellectuals of the older generation, Kveder, Zagorka and Mayreder, were ridiculed, ignored or both. With their careers in decline after WWI, Zofka Kveder's words could have been attributed to either of them: “It is given to no one to spend the entire life at the highest peak of yourself. At the peak, you either die – or you have to go down to the valley again, to a normal life”¹¹⁰. But the “normal” after 1918 didn't happen for any of them.

Only one of the women made it clear in her autobiographical writing that she would like to be treated beyond gender. This is Angela Vode, a lifelong feminist and interwar gender theorist. She wrote:

I also thought of my book *Gender and Destiny*, which brought me so much trouble. If I were to write a book about human destiny again, I would call it *Character and Destiny*. The causal relationship between gender and destiny is of sociological and biological origin. [...] I was not shaped by my gender, but rather by my character¹¹¹.

Her autobiography is written in the most impersonal manner of all, and she seems to have tried more to describe the political and social conditions of her time than to describe herself. Even in this attempt of “a gender-neutral autobiography”¹¹², we can recognize the self-denial that can most often be attributed to women.

In conclusion, the post-WWI period marked a tumultuous and complex phase in the lives of women discussed in this study. While their experiences were diverse due to factors such as generations, nationalities and social classes, the common threads can also be detected. These include motherhood and care work, professional roles, marriage and non-normative relationships, gendered receptions of intellectual work and increased political activism that combined the private and public spheres. The autobiographical writings serve as a testament of the multifaceted experiences, highlighting the complexity of women's lives and also

¹¹⁰ Dimitrije Gvozdanović, *Unuk Kraljevića Marka*, p.317.

¹¹¹ Angela Vode, *Spomin in pozaba*, p. 49.

¹¹² Angela Vode, *Skriti spomin*, p. 377.

the rapidly changing world of the interwar period. The paper also demonstrates that instabilities frequently amplify, making it challenging to distinguish between inner turmoil and the sweeping transformations in the external world.

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“UNINVITED, HISTORY ENTERED OUR LIVES”
THE POST-WAR TRANSITIONS IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE
(Abstract)

The article deals with the role of autobiographical writings of women intellectuals and their depiction of the post-war transitions. In foreground are the autobiographical texts of ten women (Rosa Mayreder, Zofka Kveder, Marija Jurić Zagorka, Marija Vinski, Anica Lokar, Hilde Spiel, Alma Mahler Werfel, Angela Vode, Salka Viertel, Gusti Jirku Stridsberg) of different nationalities, social groups, generations, professions and classes who through their writing, created a legacy that thematizes the topics of nostalgia, politics, family, war and gender. The article focuses on transnational and gender perspectives of autobiographical writings as a historical source for the early post-Habsburg era.

Keywords: transitions, gender, interwar period, transnational perspective, autobiography.

„NEINVITATĂ, ISTORIA A INTRAT ÎN VIEȚILE NOASTRE”.
TRANZIȚII POST-PRIMUL RĂZBOI MONDIAL DIN PERSPECTIVĂ
AUTOBIOGRAFICĂ
(Rezumat)

Articolul abordează rolul textelor autobiografice scrise de intelectuale în reprezentarea tranziției de după Primul Război Mondial. Analiza se concentrează pe autobiografiile a zece autoare (Rosa Mayreder, Zofka Kveder, Marija Jurić Zagorka, Marija Vinski, Anica Lokar, Hilde Spiel, Alma Mahler Werfel, Angela Vode, Salka Viertel, Gusti Jirku Stridsberg), de naționalități diferite și aparținând unor clase sociale, generații și profesii diverse, care au creat o tradiție a tematizării unor subiecte precum nostalgia, sistemul politic, familia, războiul și identitatea de gen. Articolul dezvoltă perspective transnaționale și de gen asupra scrierilor autobiografice în calitatea lor de resurse istorice pentru înțelegerea epocii post-habsburgice.

Cuvinte-cheie: tranziție, identitate de gen, perioada interbelică, perspectivă transnațională, autobiografie.

NATALIJA STEPANOVIĆ

**PERPETUALLY PERIPHERAL:
LIFE NARRATIVES OF/BY SUNČANA ŠKRINJARIĆ
AND DIVNA ZEČEVIĆ**

Marginal Intellectual Trajectories

This article supplements the history of Yugoslav women's literature with the works of two overlooked Croatian writers: Sunčana Škrinjarić and Divna Zečević. Working at the same time as better-known literary figures associated with the second-wave feminism, notably Slavenka Drakulić, Dubravka Ugrešić, and Irena Vrkljan¹, Škrinjarić and Zečević depict their attempts to claim the identities of a creative and an intellectual. I argue that Škrinjarić and Zečević articulate a feminist point of view by comparing male and female life trajectories as well as by researching their literary predecessors, the writers Dragojla Jarnević and Zofka Kveder. The two authors, who are remembered primarily as fairy tale writer (Škrinjarić) and folklorist (Zečević), left behind extensive oeuvres that should be (re)interpreted in the context of recent feminist inquiry into Yugoslav cultural history.

Solitary figures living on the outskirts of the Croatian capital Zagreb, Škrinjarić and Zečević never joined feminist circles. Their contributions to this movement are limited. Škrinjarić's debut novel *Ulica predaka* [*The Street of Ancestors*] (1980) briefly aroused the interest of her contemporaries², and Zečević published a scholarly essay and a prose fragment in the 1983 issue of the literary journal *Republika*, which brought the subject of women's literature to the attention of the Croatian public³. "Perpetually Peripheral" argues that Škrinjarić's and

¹ During socialism, Slavenka Drakulić was known mainly as a columnist. Her 1987 novel *Hologrami straha* [*Holograms of Fear*] is a frank account of illness and a female support system around her. In her early period, Dubravka Ugrešić developed a tendency toward postmodern pastiche. Her best-known work from the socialist period is *Štefica Cvek u raljama života* [*Steffie Speck in the Jaws of Life*], a 1981 novel about an office worker in search of love, in which Ugrešić parodies popular romances and fairy tales. Drakulić and Ugrešić faced fierce backlash in the 1990s for publicly criticizing the rapes committed by soldiers of all ethnicities during the Yugoslav civil war (this was perceived as traitorous to Croatia). Irena Vrkljan is best known for her three novels, in which she interweaves her own life story with that of the Croatian actress Dora Novak and the Russian émigré poet Marina Tsvetaeva: *Svila, škare* [*The Silk, the Shears*] (1984), *Marina ili o biografiji* [*Marina or about Biography*] (1986), and *Dora, ove jeseni* [*Dora, this Fall*] (1991).

² Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi* [*Horses, Women, Wars*], Zagreb, Ženska infoteka, 1996, p. 250.

³ Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 101.

Zečević's stories about unruly women and their (failed) creative pursuits belong to the corpus of Yugoslav feminist literature.

Born in Zagreb in 1931, Škrinjarić gained recognition as a writer for children in the 1960s⁴. During the 1960s and 1970s, she published a dozen short stories in literary magazines and daily newspapers, finally compiling them in the collection *Noć s vodenjakom* [*A Night with an Aquarius*] in 1978. Together with her stories from the 1980s, she republished them in 1991 in the book *Jogging u nebo* [*Jogging to Heaven*]. As she noted in conversation with Lidija Dujić and Ludwig Bauer, a scholar and a writer who co-edited the book *Knjiga o Sunčani i Severu* [*The Book about Sunčana and Sever*] about her relationship with the poet Josip Sever, Škrinjarić considered *The Street of Ancestors*, the first part of her *Bildungsroman* trilogy, to be her best work⁵. Subsequent parts, *Ispit zrelosti* [*The Matriculation Exam*] (2001), and *Bijele strijele* [*The White Arrows*] (2004), were partially published as short stories in the first person, and, as her novelistic debut, rewritten in the third person.

The 2004 edition of Škrinjarić's selected works, on which she collaborated, as her letter to the editor Ante Matijašević at the very end shows, describes the trilogy as autobiographical. Along with this categorization, Škrinjarić's professed proclivity toward using personal experiences as inspiration makes me inclined to think of her coming-of-age novels as confessional⁶. Although it is the story of Tajana, an aspiring writer from an abusive bourgeois family struggling to adapt to the new, socialist regime, the described events (employment at the Statistical Office and Radio Zagreb, encounters with notable cultural personae, untimely death of her younger brother) largely coincide with Škrinjarić's life. The only major divergence, the fact that Škrinjarić gave birth to her daughter in 1954 while Tajana remained unmarried and childless, challenges the normative formational experiences of women's (auto)biographies.

The trilogy is an example of "personal storytelling"⁷ characterised by longevity and generic fluidity – therefore, it is comparable to Divna Zečević's diary. However, since it was published (and presumably completed) in 2004, in the post-socialist period, Škrinjarić's trilogy apparently does not belong in this article on Yugoslav literary history. I chose to include it for several reasons. It helps to parallel Zečević's life story, describing similar experiences while illuminating the gendered power dynamics of the Yugoslav cultural space and, consequently,

⁴ Irena Lukšić, "Sunčana Škrinjarić: Autobiography from Various Narrative Points of View", *Croatian Studies Review*, 2, 2002, 1, p. 119.

⁵ Lidija Dujić, Ludwig Bauer, *Knjiga o Sunčani i Severu* [*The Book about Sunčana and Sever*], Sisak, Aura, 2010, p. 8.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁷ Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography. A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 14.

Škrinjarić's commitment to feminist causes, which analyses of her work either fail to acknowledge or deny⁸. Partly because of the temporal distance from the events it depicts, the author's autobiographical trilogy has a degree of candour not present in her earlier prose. In contrast to Škrinjarić's short stories, which focus on intimate encounters and domestic plots, Tajana's narrative deals with the cultural politics of the 1950s and 1960s. Škrinjarić's novels are not only engaging female formation narratives – they also describe the questioning of gender norms in a period that is often underrepresented in feminist historiography: Cold War era.

After her death in 2004, Škrinjarić is regarded in Croatian literary studies as a beloved writer for children. As the proceedings of a conference organized in Osijek in 2008, the only publication to analyze her works in detail, show, her writing addressed to adults is rarely engaged with. Since she is not mentioned in overviews of Yugoslav women's art, with the exception of Celia Hawkesworth's 2001 essay "Croatian Women Writers 1945–95," which lists all the authors who published during socialism, Škrinjarić's "fluent, evocative style"⁹ has yet to find its place in feminist literary history.

Divna Zečević was born in Osijek in 1937. She moved to Zagreb to pursue studies in English and Yugoslav languages and literatures, eventually earning her doctorate under the mentorship of Professor Ivo Frangeš. After a short period of tutoring and working in the administration of the Museum of Serbs in Croatia, Zečević began to study oral literature at the Institute of Folk Art. Zečević, who was initially interested primarily in modernist poetry and reluctant to enter this field (especially when research required visiting remote villages and carrying heavy equipment) eventually became a prominent folklorist.

From 1961 until her death, Zečević kept a diary. In it she often interpolated her daily routines and reflections with lives of others, especially the confessional writing of Croatian nineteenth century literate Dragojla Jarnjević whom she relentlessly studied. In addition to personal experiences, critical essays, and project ideas, Divna, as she noted while searching for a publisher for her collected poems, also used her diary to write verse and prose passages¹⁰. Some of them were published in *Netremice [Intently]* (1976), *Pjesme i fragmenti [Poems and Fragments]* (1990), and *Autoportret s dušom [Self-Portrait with the Soul]* (1997). Detailing urban living and emotional turmoil, *Intently* and *Poems and Fragments* complement Zečević's life narrative as presented in her diary. Zečević's obituary

⁸ Ante Matijašević, "Foreword", in Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi [House of Words]*, Zagreb, Mozaik knjiga, 2004, p. 13; Irena Lukšić, "Sunčana Škrinjarić: Autobiography", p. 124.

⁹ Celia Hawkesworth, "Croatian Women Writers, 1945–95", in Celia Hawkesworth (ed.), *A History of Central European Women's Writing*, New York, Palgrave, 2001, p. 264.

¹⁰ Smilja Kursar Pupovac, "Foreword", in Divna Zečević, *Autoportret s dušom [Self-Portrait with the Soul]*, Zagreb, Duriex, 2008, p. 7.

describes her as having “lived for her scholarly and literary work”¹¹. Since she married in 1967 and gave birth to her daughter Marijeta a year later, Zečević tried, often unsuccessfully, to divide her time between the public and domestic spheres.

Literary critic Marija Ott Franolić, whose book *Dnevnik ustreljen nedostižnom* [*Diary of the Unattainable*] compares Zečević’s diary with autobiographical narratives of intellectual or artistically inclined women struggling with social limitations¹², transcribed, compiled, and edited the manuscript which was published in 2017 under the title *Život kao voda hlapi* [*Life Evaporates Like Water*]. As with Škrinjarić, the time gap (and, in this case, a different editor: the segments submitted for publication by Zečević were far less revealing than the expanded, posthumously published version) allowed for a lesser degree of (self-)censorship.

Existing Scholarship

While this article focuses primarily on the two overlooked authors, it also aims to bring Škrinjarić and Zečević into dialogue with scholarship on Yugoslav feminism: early efforts to examine the writing of regional women, essays by literary scholars Jasmina Lukić and Andrea Zlatar, and contributions by the subsequent generation, especially Zsófia Lóránd (who builds on Lukić) and Marija Ott Franolić (who draws on Zlatar). Feminist historians Zsófia Lóránd and Chiara Bonfiglioli significantly upended the field in the 2010s. Lóránd’s 2018 book *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia* traces the emergence of second-wave feminism in Yugoslavia in its artistic and activist aspects. Bonfiglioli’s understanding of local feminism as a continuous critical current¹³ is important for inserting Škrinjarić and Zečević into the timeline of the Yugoslav women’s movement, specifically for interpreting the authors’ works that preceded its resurgence in the 1970s and 1980s.

The new generation of educated and outspoken city-dwellers, as the second-wave Yugoslav feminists are described by Lóránd, challenged “the socialist state [...] based on one of its biggest promises, the equality of women”¹⁴. The historian emphasizes that these women collaborated with the state and relied on public

¹¹ Ljiljana Marks, Ivan Lozica, “Divna Zečević Zdunić (1937–2006)”, *Narodna umjetnost: hrvatski časopis za etnologiju i folkloristiku*, 43, 2006, 2, p. 221.

¹² Marija Ott Franolić, *Dnevnik ustreljen nedostižnom: svakodnevnica u ženskim zapisima* [*Diary of the Unattainable: Everyday Life in Women’s Records*], Zagreb, Disput, 2015, p. 15.

¹³ Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Women’s Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era: The Case of Yugoslavia”, *Aspasia*, 2014, 8, p. 2; Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Communisms, Generations, and Waves: The Cases of Italy, Yugoslavia, and Cuba”, in Anna Artwińska, Agnieszka Mroziak (eds.), *Gender, Generations, and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond*, New York and London, Routledge, 2021, p. 73.

¹⁴ Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge*, p. 2.

funds when promoting feminist ideas¹⁵. Born after WWII to parents who had experienced the war firsthand¹⁶, the feminists began to articulate their dissent in the early 1970s¹⁷. Yet to become established scholars, women who tentatively critiqued state socialism were mocked and ostracized¹⁸. According to Lóránd, feminists entered the mainstream through art and the mass media¹⁹. She argues that *Drug-ca žena: Novi pristup* [*Comrade-ess Woman: A New Approach*], the 1978 conference in Belgrade attended by a number of internationally known leftist activists and theorists²⁰, contributed to the visibility of Yugoslav feminism. The gradually emerging network of research groups *Žena i društvo* [*Woman and Society*], the first of which was founded in Zagreb²¹, also signaled the strengthening of feminist consciousness.

As avid readers and translators of foreign fiction, Yugoslav feminists eventually created literature of their own. In the 1983 issue of *Republika*, Ingrid Šafranek published an essay “‘Ženska književnost’ i ‘žensko pismo’” [“‘Women’s Literature’ and ‘Women’s Writing’”], in which she discussed Héléne Cixous’s elaboration of *écriture féminine*. The proliferation of regional women’s writing soon followed. Yugoslav women’s literature, characterized by a frank engagement with corporeality and sexuality²² and a tendency toward confessional genres²³, was, as Zlatar argues in her 2004 monograph *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* [*Text, Body, Trauma*], a poetics capable of subverting entrenched textual patterns²⁴. Used in retrospect to group the most prominent authors of the period, “women’s writing” usually refers to the works of Ugrešić, Vrljan, and Drakulić, as well as Daša Drndić and Rada Iveković²⁵.

In her pioneering article “Women-centred Narratives in Contemporary Serbian and Croatian Literatures”, Lukić provides a comprehensive overview and astute

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 31-33.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 46-47.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 32-35.

²² Ingrid Šafranek, “‘Ženska književnost’ i ‘žensko pismo’” [“‘Women’s Literature’ and ‘Women’s Writing’”], *Republika: mjesečnik za književnost, umjetnost i društvo*, 1983, 39, p. 19.

²³ Jasmina Lukić, “Women-centered Narratives in Contemporary Serbian and Croatian Literatures”, in Sibelan Forrester, Pamela Chester (eds.), *Engendering Slavic Literatures*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 227.

²⁴ Andrea Zlatar, *Tekst, tijelo, trauma: ogledi o suvremenoj ženskoj književnosti* [*Text, Body, Trauma: Essays on Contemporary Women’s Literature*], Zagreb, Naklada Ljevak, 2004, p. 79.

²⁵ Jasmina Lukić, “Women-centered Narratives”, pp. 229-238; Andrea Zlatar, *Tekst, tijelo, trauma*, p. 83; Zsófia Lóránd, “Sisterhood and Second Wave Feminist Stakes in Women’s Art and Women’s Literature in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s”, in Annette Bühler-Dietrich (ed.), *Feminist Circulations between East and West*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2019, pp. 110-111.

interpretations of regional women's writing without ignoring formal differences among authors. She argues that first-person narratives were gradually replaced by explorations of female experiences "as part of a larger framework"²⁶. Distinguishing narrative instances, as Lukić aptly does in her article, is important for reading Škrinjarić and Zečević, who have been blurring the normative modes of narrating one's life since the 1960s. To follow Lukić's example, I rely on two concepts: "life narrative" and "life writing". As literary scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain in *Reading Autobiography*, a book that summarizes a decade of their collaboration as well as findings from the authors' monographs, "life writing" refers to all confessional, fictional, and historiographical texts that are "about life", while "life narratives" are generically diverse self-referential texts²⁷.

Male Role Models, Female Disappointments

For Škrinjarić and Zečević, a narrative one can inhabit is structured by gender. The situation of the female artists and intellectuals we encounter in their works differs from that of their male counterparts. Often without supportive peers, lacking in time or space to work, and never quite sure if they are suited for the role, their (auto-)biographical trajectories illuminate the inhospitality of archetypal formative narratives. Stalled, unproductive, and maladjusted periods and lives, descriptions of failure rather than success, are foregrounded by Zečević and Škrinjarić. This section argues that they illuminate disparities within nominally egalitarian Yugoslav society.

Škrinjarić and Zečević are authors fascinated by various genres of life writing (memoirs, biographies, and confessional poetry) as well as by shifting modes of telling stories about their own lives and the lives of others. They have produced a variety of (auto-)biographical writings, including two overarching narratives: a *Bildungsroman* (published in part as a series of short stories in the first person) and an extensive diary. Born in the 1930s, awkwardly positioned between anti-fascist militants and second-wave feminists, and coming of age in the 1950s, influenced by male-dominated intellectual circles and selectively loosening sexual mores, Škrinjarić and Zečević had limited opportunities to negotiate their marginality, especially given the general hostility towards the confessional genres to which they tended. Therefore, their autobiographical narratives can be described as stories of failure.

Failure is certainly not in the foreground if we systematise the events presented: published books, intellectual exchange with peers, and influence on subsequent generations of feminists. Nevertheless, it is given a prominent role

²⁶ Jasmina Lukić, "Women-centered Narratives", p. 238.

²⁷ Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 3.

within the narrative, which, as Smith and Watson argue, should not be interpreted as a mere reflection of historical circumstances²⁸. Because “they offer a subjective ‘truth’ rather than a ‘fact’”²⁹, the narratives authors wrote about themselves diverge from what we have come to see in retrospect as stories about overcoming great difficulties and leaving influential works that redefined literature both academically and artistically.

Much like life narratives, which, as English poet and social critic Stephen Spender points out in his essay “Confessions and Autobiography”, combine “externalised and internal points of view”³⁰ (ventures of a “social or historical personality”³¹ witnessed by others and reshaped through introspection) failure for Škrinjarić and Zečević has an external and an internal dimension. Occasionally related with misperforming in the public sphere, stuttering or stumbling before an audience, failure is depicted as an internal experience of improper gender embodiment. For women, more than the public persona is under scrutiny. While Smith and Watson stress the importance of this dual perspective, Spender also notes that “self-revelation of the inner life is perhaps a dirty business”³². His remark is to be understood as a warning to read skeptically, because narrators who claim to be the most truthful tend to fib and evade in order to present themselves as they want to be seen. However, the “dirtiness” of the female confessional writing has different implications. Unruly bodies, oversharing about unconventional sexuality, and socially unacceptable reproductive choices, themes present in Škrinjarić’s and Zečević’s lives trajectories and foregrounded in the exploration of their predecessors, can disqualify women from becoming artists/intellectuals.

The authors deal with the specter of undisciplined bodies and reject monogamous heterosexual coupling. From the depiction of the warts on Tajana’s hands to her lack of athleticism, Škrinjarić frequently reflects on aberrant embodiment. By introducing the character of Šile, a former partisan who attends high school as an adult and excels in military training courses, Škrinjarić juxtaposes two models of femininity that were discarded in the late 1940s: overtly androgynous fighter (character written out of the war fiction published immediately afterward)³³, and a sickly middle-class girl who could not participate in important components of socialist life such as sports. However, Tajana is

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

³¹ Stephen Spender, “Confessions and Autobiography”, in James Olney (ed.) *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 116.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 118.

³³ Maša Kolanović, *Udarnik! Buntovnik? Potrošač... Popularna kultura i hrvatski roman od socijalizma do tranzicije [Striker! Rebel? Consumer... The Croatian Novel from Socialism to Transition]*, Zagreb, Naklada Ljevak, 2011, pp. 203-207.

usually not a frail waif – she throws tantrums, bites a classmate with her “horrendous, vampire-like teeth”³⁴, and has early outbursts of sadism and later tendency toward masochism. Zečević, who also had no interest in vigorous exercise, often wrote about the shame she felt about all physical matters during her upbringing and her ailing and aging body. Moreover, she complains about feeling sluggish during menstruation, and wishes to separate the hormonal body from the mind and the imperative to “overcome feelings with the will, to work like a man”³⁵. According to Smith, this duality structured history of the Western autobiography by dividing universal, male subject from the female, embodied one³⁶. The latter can negotiate its secondary status through life writing while also undermining its protocols³⁷.

Reflecting on the rapidly changing sexual politics of the second half of the 20th century, the authors also expose two ideals of partnership as asymmetrical: romance modelled after popular literature (upheld by Škrinjarić’s characters and ironized by the narrator) and intellectual camaraderie (in Zečević’s diary). They document the evolution from postwar puritanism to gradual liberalization – the presence of sex in mass culture and the relaxation of abortion laws that culminated in the 1974 Constitution allowing abortion on demand³⁸. Škrinjarić and Zečević challenge normative socialist womanhood, both in its reproductive function (as wife and mother, which should override other forms of becoming) and during sexual intercourse itself.

In her 1971 short story *Jedno ljeto* [*One Summer*], Škrinjarić depicts a young woman (also a narrator) having an affair in semi-private corners of a coastal town. The heroine is as apathetic toward her lover as she is toward the possibility of starting a family, seeing both as an “eternal and inevitable nightmare of repetition”³⁹. This story is retold in *The White Arrows* with a different affective undertone: the sentimental Tajana really does fall in love with her summer lover, the handsome law student Marko. The affair takes on a somber coda in Slavko’s (Tajana’s friend and occasional lover) warning that she may end up needing a visit to a clinic. Tajana’s unconventional sexual preferences are already hinted at in *The Street of Ancestors*:

³⁴ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, p. 30.

³⁵ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi: izbor iz dnevnika 1961–2006* [*Life Evaporates Like Water: Selected Diaries 1961–2006*]. Edited by Marija Ott Franolić, Zagreb, Disput, 2017, p. 70.

³⁶ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 23.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

³⁸ Ivana Dobrivojević, “Planiranje porodice u Jugoslaviji 1945–1974” [“Family Planning in Yugoslavia 1945–1974”], *Istorija 20. veka*, 2016, 2, pp. 85–95.

³⁹ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Noć s vodenjakom* [*A Night with an Aquarius*], Čakovec, Tiskarsko-izdavački zavod “Zrinski”, 1978, p. 31.

When her mother lashed her once, she was left with feelings of humiliation and hatred, later, when she grew up a bit, she wanted to be beaten by men, and she also sought the velvety, immovable tenderness of the teddy bear [Tajana's childhood toy], these things cannot be found in one person, so there always had to be several⁴⁰.

Despite its longevity, Zečević's marriage was passionless. She frequently mentions her "frigidity" and disregards sex in favor of seeking intellectual companionship with her peculiar, platonic romantic interests – Professor Frangeš, Priest Soldo, and a much younger colleague. Zečević downplays the significance of events nominally recognized as turning points – the description of her wedding is only a few sentences long. She also constantly criticizes the male entitlement to the female bodies. After meeting a friend from university who was looking for an affair rather than, as she hoped, a discussion, Divna remarks that "only when the boys offer their beds is there a lot of work and opportunity for a woman"⁴¹. When she became pregnant with her daughter Marijeta (and reluctantly decided to keep her), Zečević mentioned her 1960 abortion. Zečević recalls how, after being rejected by several doctors (at that time women were still forced to justify their decision to commissions)⁴², she managed to get an abortion just in time, witnessing in the ward "horrible screams and a physicality that was anything but dignified"⁴³.

As Smith and Watson show using the Western autobiographical canon, identities that can be asserted, denied, and remodeled are shaped by context: "there are models of identity culturally available to life narrators at any particular historical moment that influence what is included and what is excluded"⁴⁴. In Škrinjarić's autobiographical trilogy and Zečević's diary, there are two main conflicting patterns of becoming: "the (socialist) intellectual" and "the (married) woman". The tension is to be sought in the antagonism between the masculine coding of the intellectual and the feminine coding of normative femininity. The main models of identity in Škrinjarić's and Zečević's narratives are compound: I have chosen to bracket the adjectives because of the ambivalent role of socialism and marriage, and the frequent renegotiation of their relations to intellectual labor and womanhood.

Sidonie Smith's discussion of representativeness and rebellion, concepts developed in two major works on autobiography, Georg Misch's *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* and Karl Joachim Weintraub's *The Value of the Individual*, helps illuminate the models of subjectivity in Škrinjarić and Zečević. For Misch, autobiographies, although expressions of one's personality, are always representative to some degree, since their authors engage in the public sphere and

⁴⁰ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, p. 41.

⁴¹ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 375.

⁴² Ivana Dobrivojević, "Planiranje porodice", p. 87.

⁴³ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 125.

⁴⁴ Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 34.

depend on circulating discourses on selfhood⁴⁵. Misch's disciple Weintraub sees the value of the confessionals differently: a truly interesting autobiographer rebels against social mores and makes himself an outcast instead of being a proper representative of his time⁴⁶. Before interpreting the life narratives of Anglo-Saxon women writers, Smith notes that both ways of belonging to one's context are "men's life scripts" – women's access to political and cultural life is restricted and attempts to enter the public arena "transgresses patriarchal definitions of female nature by enacting the scenario of male selfhood"⁴⁷. Similarly, the position of an outcast is made possible by his possibility of belonging to the social order, for "only in the fullness of this membership can the fullness of his rebellion unfold"⁴⁸. While the division between private and public was shifted by the socialist imperative of full employment, the possible plots and identities for female protagonists were still limited. The meandering life trajectories of the authors show the prevailing inaccessibility of cultural life in socialist Yugoslavia. Neither vehement Party members nor dissidents, Škrinjarić and Zečević recount their quests for recognition and, by doing so, challenge the socialist framework.

The circumstances of production and publication differ between Škrinjarić and Zečević. Although both published part of their autobiographical writings (the complete first book as well as episodes from the subsequent parts of the autobiographical trilogy, or prose excerpts and poems) in the socialist period, the genre dictates the relationship between the time of the events described and the time in which they are narrated. The full texts were published after the collapse of Yugoslavia, in 2004 and 2017. However, the events described, either recounted retrospectively in Škrinjarić's *Bildungsroman* or reflected upon as they are happening in Zečević's diary, describe the gender-based asymmetries that governed Yugoslav cultural sphere.

Škrinjarić narrates her coming-of-age trilogy in the third person. Unlike in *A Night with an Aquarius*, she opts for an external narrative instance. This allows her to take an ironic stance toward the period depicted, Tajana's formative years (spanning from the early 1930s to the late 1950s). Because the narrative breaks off before her creative maturity, Tajana's potential to become a self-actualized artist is present only if the protagonist is conflated with the author who gained prominence in the 1970s. A precocious child, Tajana began journaling at an early age. However, her first public attempts at writing (penning confessional poetry), which she undertook in the literary section of the school immediately after the war, were met with rejection and the accusation of being "backward, sentimental, and, worst

⁴⁵ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

of all, reactionary”⁴⁹. After her book of poems submitted to the literary magazine *Izvor* (an actual publication in print from 1948 to 1951) was disparagingly described as “a kind of typical female scribbling”⁵⁰, Tajana became increasingly aware of the marginalization experienced by female creatives.

In contrast to the first two parts, which focus on her upbringing, the third part of the autobiographical trilogy traces Tajana’s entry into the workforce and her involvement in artistic circles. It features a number of historical references, the most important of which is the triptych of writers: Miroslav Krleža, who does not appear as a character but is mentioned as the pinnacle of Yugoslav literature, Marija Jurić Zagorka, revered for her romances but obscure and impoverished in her later years, and Vesna Parun, a struggling poet who takes Tajana on as a protégé. Parun, like Zagorka, is praised by contemporary scholars as a feminist foremother⁵¹. These vignettes allude to the relationship between gender and success, which Škrinjarić develops further in Tajana’s life narrative. Tajana’s colleagues are pushed into children’s radio programmes and excluded from notable projects such as the adaptation of Krleža’s plays, and even a respected poet like Parun is unhoused and widely considered unhinged. Tajana is warned by an older colleague that her male peers are mainly interested in romancing her, because “prestigious positions are, of course, only for men naturally for those who belong to their circles. Women are only companions, secretaries... editors of unpopular programmes”⁵². Exposed to sexual violence from an early age, Tajana’s attempts to establish herself in official and bohemian artistic circles are repeatedly sabotaged.

Zečević began writing her diary after graduating from university in 1961. In her mid-20s, she already had the feeling of “being a failed existence”⁵³. Occasionally recalling the cruel early socialization into proper feminine behavior that Tajana also experiences, Zečević further departs from conventional diary entries (i.e., recording autobiographical events)⁵⁴ by interspersing events from her life with poems written by her or others, as well as essayistic paragraphs on literature and social issues. In addition, her diary departs from classic self-referential writing through literary devices such as second-person address:

Where are you going, Divna? Stay in your place. Where is your place? You live in all places – except your sick place. What is happening to you and where is it leading? I have to ask you this, like everyone else. [...] Homeless, you know you are homeless with a miserable Museum [of the Serbs in Croatia] job that is as insecure as your

⁴⁹ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, pp. 184-185.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 347.

⁵¹ Zsófia Lóránd, “Sisterhood and Second Wave Feminist”, p. 110.

⁵² Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, p. 333.

⁵³ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 26.

⁵⁴ Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 193.

rented room. [...] You always weep – when you reach your limits and it is pointless then – now, every attempt to look you in the eye. I am seeking understanding for your embittered soul – for your affection, your desire for love, and my caution meets your desperate confusion. I am holding my hand on your hair and waiting for you to calm down⁵⁵.

Precarious working and living conditions as well as frequent emotional upheavals characterise Zečević's diary of "failed ambition and creative impotence"⁵⁶. She struggled to publish her confessional prose, which was rejected by *Republika* in 1962. In his 1975 article "Žena u suvremenoj književnosti" ["Women in Contemporary Literature"], literary critic Jure Ujević described Zečević's poetry as insufficiently avant-garde⁵⁷. Half-heartedly, Zečević worked in cultural institutions, but never managed to enter academia as she had desired – as a lecturer at the Department of Croatian Language and Literature. Divna portrays herself as "a stupid, persistent and diligent woman, good for conversation but not for assistantship, there are enough clever men for that"⁵⁸ and constantly compares her limited opportunities with those of men.

In these two life narratives, the limits are revealed through contrasts – the limitations of the "script of a woman's life"⁵⁹ become clear in the interaction with the men's life trajectories. As a brief overview of the life narratives by Škrinjarić and Zečević shows, institutions are more open to men. Moreover, the cultural canon favors masculine plots and protagonists – in Škrinjarić's novels, everyone competes to work on Krleža's plays, while female literary figures such as Zagorka and Parun are pushed to the outskirts of cultural life. Although interested in feminist classics such as Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Dragojla Jarnević since the early 1960s, Zečević worked primarily on the writings of great men. Before turning entirely to folklore, she researched the avant-garde poet Antun Branko Šimić and the Croatian national movement of the 19th century. Škrinjarić and Zečević engage with what Smith describes as "paying tribute to the lives of men"⁶⁰, both living (peers who gained recognition and entered prestigious professions) and dead (canonical writers): their texts are suspended "between paternal and maternal narratives, those fictions of male and female selfhood that permeate [their] historical moment"⁶¹. The oscillations between paternal and maternal lineages, which also play out domestically in the form of strained mother-daughter relationships and identification with paternal figures, allow authors to

⁵⁵ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 117.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 258.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

⁵⁹ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, p. 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

engage with both literary history and their contemporaries: artists and intellectuals they encountered in Zagreb. Striving to join their circles, Škrinjarić and Zečević simultaneously work to appropriate male plots and embody a culturally acceptable femininity whose script of dressing up, childbearing and childrearing, housework, and emotional labor leaves little time for reading and writing.

Because of their great interest in literary production, the authors meet a variety of notable men and write about them, sometimes with admiration, sometimes with irony. While describing numerous interactions with various cultural workers and non-conformists, they compare themselves with two parallel plots: that of regime writer Slavko, modeled on the representative of existentialism Antun Šoljan,⁶² and that of Professor Ivo Frangeš. Intellectual role models doubling as romantic interests, they are success stories against which the protagonists measure their arduous attempts to participate in cultural production on an equal footing with their male counterparts. Slavko, an overconfident man of letters who plagiarizes Tajana's writings and carries his manuscripts around in a briefcase lest someone do the same to him, is mocked by the narrator. Frangeš is held in high esteem by Divna and is among "the only four people with whom I felt spiritually connected: my father [Nikola Zečević, an amateur poet], Thomas Mann, Professor Frangeš, and Ivo Andrić [Yugoslav modernist writer and Nobel laureate]"⁶³. Their efforts awarded and their prominence widely acknowledged, Slavko and Professor Frangeš show what the authors could have done had it not been for gender-based discrimination.

When it comes to dissidents rather than representatives, they are given a more prominent role in Škrinjarić's writing. While Zečević longs for a life outside of monogamous marriage and a bureaucratic job, noting that "if [she] were a man, [she] would have visited all the taverns in the world"⁶⁴, she concedes that she is a provincial woman who values a decent, orderly life. Škrinjarić's inclination toward less upstanding citizens was present even before the publication of her autobiographical trilogy. Originally published in 1969 in the daily *Večernji list* and included a decade later in *A Night with an Aquarian, Obitelj [The Family]* is a first-person short story about the companionship between the narrator, her brother, and a man named Grof [Count], a polyglot and occasional stage designer. The narrator is urged to part with childlike, rootless Count, seek steady employment and "start living seriously"⁶⁵. She is also encouraged to "marry like every honest woman, and Count is not a good match, he only yaks and fibs"⁶⁶. These imperatives suggest that, in socialism, the normative women's script includes both

⁶² Lidija Dujić, Ludwig Bauer, *Knjiga o Sunčani i Severu*, p. 7.

⁶³ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Noć s vodenjakom*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

paid work and heterosexual marriage. These outcomes are avoided both in the short story and in *The White Arrows* in which the story about Count is told in the third person, as Tajana's adventure.

Perpetually on the verge of divorce from her husband Petar Zdunić, Zečević is similarly critical of marriage and an exemplary woman's life. Neither fully integrated as intellectuals nor able to become properly feminine, Škrinjarić and Zečević authored stories that resonate with the persistent double bind of female autobiography that Smith describes as follows "vulnerable to erasure from history because it is, on the one hand, an 'unfeminine' story and, on the other, merely the 'inferior' word of woman"⁶⁷. Smith's understanding of the dangers of speaking one's truth publicly, and consequently speaking from a position of authority, aptly explains the obstacles that Škrinjarić and Zečević faced when they attempted to publish their confessional writings in the 1950s and 1960s. Also, it resonates with Rebecca Solnit's depiction of femininity as a "disappearing act".

Reminiscing about her own artistic development and perils of urban living as a young woman in 1980s San Francisco, American essayist Rebecca Solnit compares bodily autonomy to claiming ownership of one's writing, even though one has been conditioned not to do⁶⁸. She sees the erasure of matrilineal genealogies in the politics of naming (i.e., adopting the husband's surname at marriage, a practice that was widely spread in Yugoslavia, although socialist Family Law allowed otherwise)⁶⁹:

Femininity at its most brutally conventional is a perpetual disappearing act, an erasure and silencing to make more room for men, one in which your existence is considered an aggression and your nonexistence a form of gracious compliance. Your mother's maiden name is often requested as the answer to a security question by banks and credit card companies, because it is assumed her original name is secret, erased, lost as she took on the name of a husband. It's no longer universal for women to give up their names but still rare to pass them on if they're married, one of the ways in which women vanish or never appear⁷⁰.

Despite major differences in context, Solnit's assertion applies to Škrinjarić, whose connection to her grandmother, the interwar feminist Zofka Kveder, as well as to her daughter, the popular children's book author Sanja Pilić⁷¹, is obscured by naming customs. It also resonates with Zečević's refusal to publish under her legal, hyphenated last name (Zečević Zdunić). Another connection between these three autobiographical narratives is the question of legacy (or lack thereof). While the listless Tajana remains impassive when she realizes that Slavko has stolen some

⁶⁷ Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, p. 54.

⁶⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of my Nonexistence*, Penguin Random House LLC, 2020, pp. 66-70.

⁶⁹ Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, p. 90.

⁷⁰ Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of my Nonexistence*, p. 71.

⁷¹ Celia Hawkesworth, "Croatian Women Writers, 1945-95", p. 263.

passages from their ongoing correspondence and even tells him that he may use “her insignificant life ... in one of [his] stories”⁷², Divna fights fiercely against a colleague who plagiarized her research, even going so far as to sue him for copyright infringement in 1990. Due to the texts covering different periods of life, the question of preserving one’s works is handled antithetically. Both protagonists are skeptical about their literary talent. However, Tajana is careless with her collection of poems, while Divna takes great pains to preserve her scholarly and confessional writing. Zečević, ethnically Serbian and staunch anti-nationalist, carried her manuscripts everywhere and hid the diary during the violent disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia (1991–1995). The very last sentence of her diary, both in the edited edition and, as seen in the photograph of the last page, in the manuscript, underscores the negative affect and personal history as one of defeat rather than triumph. With a hand trembling from early-onset Parkinson’s disease, Zečević notes:

I can barely write. Never
I have never been well⁷³.

Despite the grim ending, the diary (more as an object and publishing project spanning more than 60 years and linking distant feminist generations than as a text) is an example of amazing resilience and, ultimately, of faith in one’s ability to leave something for (feminist) generations to come.

Feminist Foremothers

Škrinjarić and Zečević not only transformed their experiences into life narratives, but also used (auto-)biographical trajectories to establish continuity with the pre-war generation, the literary women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For both authors, these divergent biographies, involving both the performance and the refusal of the female roles of wife and mother, became an example of resilience and a way to engage with political issues of their time. The tendency to interpolate different female experiences is reflected in terms used retrospectively to describe Yugoslav women’s writing as “sym-gyno-graphic” (Zlatar and Ott Franolić) or “writing the sisterhood” (Lóránd).

Andrea Zlatar coined the term “sym-gyno-graphy” to describe mirroring life trajectories in Vrkljan’s novel *Marina or about Biography*⁷⁴. As Ott Franolić explains when using the concept to analyze similarities between Jarnević, Zečević and herself, “sym-gyno-graphy” is an amalgam of two neologisms: Domna

⁷² Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, p. 394.

⁷³ Divna Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, p. 616.

⁷⁴ Andrea Zlatar, *Tekst, tijelo, trauma*, p. 90.

Stanton's "autogynography" and Consuelo Riviera-Fuentes's "sim/bio/graphy"⁷⁵. According to Ott Franolić, Stanton, whose study of female confessionals dates back to the early 1980s, coined the term "autogynography" to denote the difference evident in women's life writing⁷⁶. Her intervention, while affirming some widely recognised features of female autobiographies at the time she republished her essay in 1988, such as the privileging of a "discontinuous, digressive, [and] fragmented"⁷⁷ narration and a private sphere, should not be limited to including women in the autobiographical canon. She also challenged the understanding of the genre as honestly depicted life, as well as the agenda of a feminist critic whose "own identity depended on the referential reality of the woman in the text"⁷⁸. As Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield summarize in the overview of feminist research that precedes the essays in their 2000 co-edited volume *Feminism and Autobiography*, "excising the 'bio', that is 'real life', from 'autobiography'"⁷⁹ allows women to write about themselves without obliging them to pen a truthful testimony. The shift from realistic representation to textual constitution of female subjectivity⁸⁰ is important for understanding the peculiarities of Sunčana Škrinjarić's and Divna Zečević's account of their lives: Škrinjarić wrote about herself as if she were someone else, and Zečević used historical personae to examine her own intellectual curiosity and unconventional sexuality. Through these narrative strategies, the authors challenged the boundaries of the confessional genres.

As for the collective aspect of this feminist project, Ott Franolić explains that she refers to Riviera-Fuentes⁸¹, a scholar who refused to interpret texts as a disinterested reader and affirmed interdependence and the mapping of one's identity through (textual) encounters⁸². By introducing the biological term "symbiosis" to life writing, Riviera-Fuentes emphasizes relationality. However, this intertwining is not based on ascribed roles within the family, but on the shared experience of a queer sexuality that blurs linear temporality by occupying "not only a textual/sexual space, but also a time *warp*"⁸³. Collectivity, as it occurs in

⁷⁵ Marija Ott Franolić, *Dnevnik ustreljen nedostižnom*, pp. 239-240.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

⁷⁷ Domna C. Stanton, "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?" in Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson (eds.), *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader*, Madison and London, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988, p. 137.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

⁷⁹ Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield, "Introduction", in Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography. Texts, Theories, Methods*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000. p. 7.

⁸⁰ Domna C. Stanton, "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?", p. 139

⁸¹ Marija Ott Franolić, *Dnevnik ustreljen nedostižnom*, p. 239.

⁸² Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes, "Doing Sym/Bio/Graphy with Yasna", in Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography*, p. 248.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

Škrinjarić's and Zečević's works, has ambivalent rather than strictly positive implications. Cherished by the socialist regime, communitarian spirit is seemingly disregarded by Škrinjarić and Zečević as they portray solitary heroines, oppose the culture geared toward the masses (Škrinjarić) or disdain the working people who populate the socialist blocks (Zečević). Instead of seeking camaraderie with their contemporaries, the authors discovered relationality through their foremothers. Škrinjarić's and Zečević's (auto-)biographical texts also resonate with depictions of Yugoslav women's writing as "writing the sisterhood". Coined by Lóránd, the phrase "writing the sisterhood" acknowledges feminine difference while affirming interrelatedness, that is, the two traits also communicated by neologism "sym-gyno-graphy". According to Lóránd, "writing the sisterhood" conveys acute awareness of womanhood as shared experience: "'writing the sisterhood' is a genre and a technique of sympathetically reflecting on the lives and fates of other women through one's own story"⁸⁴.

While she contributed to the commemoration of her grandmother in 1978 (the centenary of her birth), Škrinjarić, who experienced a curious overlap between familial and literary foremothers, did not publish her essay on Zofka Kveder, "Zapisi o baki koja sja" ["Notes on My Grandmother Who Shines"], until 2004. It was her very last text. Kveder is described by historian Andrea Feldman as an ardent advocate of women's suffrage and social rights who sided with socialists rather than bourgeois feminists in the interwar period⁸⁵. Incorporating family memories and facts about her grandmother's literary and journalistic career, Škrinjarić portrays Kveder as a person caught between proactive political and creative efforts and listless melancholy. She describes Zofka as one of her doomed heroines:

[she] lived fast and shamelessly, recklessly and without prudence, gave birth to three girls, divorced her first husband and was abandoned by the second, edited literary journals and women's magazines, corresponded with numerous prominent and anonymous persons [...] with all her literary talent she also had a kind of urge to self-destruct⁸⁶.

Although she never met Kveder, who committed suicide in 1926, Škrinjarić read her works as a child and imagined Slovenian as a melodic, cryptic language of fiction. Škrinjarić's essay establishes the matrilineal transference with Kveder through early reading experiences that provided a lesson in the value of form and linguistic play, qualities foregrounded in Škrinjarić's polyphonic prose.

⁸⁴ Zsófia Lóránd, "Sisterhood and Second Wave Feminist", p. 118.

⁸⁵ Andrea Feldman, "Proričući gladnu godinu – žene i ideologija jugoslavenstva (1918–1939)" ["Prophesying a Hungry Year – Women and the Ideology of Yugoslavia (1918–1939)"], in Andrea Feldman (ed.), *Žene u Hrvatskoj: ženska i kulturna povijest* [Women in Croatia: The Cultural History], Zagreb, Institut Ženska infoteka, 2004, p. 239.

⁸⁶ Sunčana Škrinjarić, *Kuća od riječi*, pp. 588-589.

Zečević, while criticising Dragojla Jarnević's conservative attitude toward women's participation in politics, strongly identified with the writer, especially her doomed romances, heavy workload, and status as an eternal outsider. Unlike Kveder, whose feminist activism was widely recognised, Jarnević, one of the few female participants in the nineteenth century national movement known as much for her spinsterhood as for her writing, was not yet a feminist role model when Zečević began work on her diary in the early 1960s. Unable to complete a formal education due to the early death of her father and subsequent financial difficulties, Jarnević supported herself through sewing and tutoring⁸⁷. A devotee to the national cause, she published sentimental poetry and prose that, as historian Sandra Prlenda notes, was wrongly dismissed as inartistic, even though it conformed to the prevailing literary fashions of the time⁸⁸. According to Zečević, Dragojla was the first Croatian professional female writer⁸⁹. Her most voluminous work, the diary she kept for 41 years, was characterized as pathological and perverse throughout much of the twentieth century⁹⁰. Until the critical edition with commentary by Lukšić (the scholar who also wrote the only comprehensive interpretation of Škrinjarić's prose) was published in 2000, the diary was available only in excerpts.

When Zečević was asked to contribute to the 1983 issue of *Republika*, she submitted Jarnević's description of an affair with a peasant boy whom she supported financially. Arguing that the passage departs from nineteenth-century morality, Zečević notes that it remained controversial for her contemporaries, male critics who regarded Jarnević as

a "poor" woman without "a welcoming home" and "a master". Dragojla, suffered in the moments of crisis, from the circumstances that excluded her; it seems that the critics suffered much more, that is, replicated the general opinion about a woman's "proper place" in society much more often [than the diarist]⁹¹.

In addition to sarcastically summing up prejudices within literary studies, Zečević argues that Jarnević subverted the stereotypical link between sexuality and the femme fatale archetype and introduced "the career woman" as a new identity in regional literature. According to Ott Franolić, working on Jarnević's manuscript was for Zečević "almost as if she looked in the mirror and recognized herself in

⁸⁷ Sandra Prlenda, "Dragojla Jarnević", in Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, Anna Loutfi (eds.), *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms. Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*, Budapest and New York, CEU Press, p. 187.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

⁸⁹ Divna Zečević, *Dragojla Jarnević*, Zagreb, Zavod za znanost o književnosti Filozofskog Fakulteta, 1985, p. 63.

⁹⁰ Sandra Prlenda, "Dragojla Jarnević", p. 187.

⁹¹ Divna Zečević, "O Dnevniku Dragojle Jarnević" ["On Dragojla Jarnević's Diary"], *Republika: mjesečnik za književnost, umjetnost i društvo*, 1983, 39, p. 169.

another [woman]”⁹². Zečević’s interpretation of Jarnević’s diary immediately received acclaim from feminists and solidified her affiliation with Yugoslav feminist circles.

Looking Back, Moving Forward

In this article, I argue that Škrinjarić and Zečević, two writers who have not been considered in recent research on Yugoslav feminism because they entered the literary scene between the established feminist generations, have authored comprehensive feminist oeuvres. Škrinjarić and Zečević were not directly involved in the activities that proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s – their works were referenced by their more prominent contemporaries, only to be forgotten by the following generation of scholars.

In their narratives of female formative experiences, Škrinjarić and Zečević prioritise creative pursuits over entrenched plots of romance, marriage, and motherhood. These two authors show that normative formational narratives, like Yugoslav artistic and academic circles, are fundamentally inhospitable to female protagonists. Returning again and again to questions of authorship, acclaim, and legacy, they asked what it meant to be a woman writer in socialist Yugoslavia. Finally, Škrinjarić and Zečević went beyond seeking to enter literary history as solitary, gifted individuals. By examining the lives of women’s rights advocates Dragojla Jarnević and Zofka Kveder, they crafted matrilineal narratives of intellectual becoming and artistic maturation.

This article not only adds them to the history of the Yugoslav women’s movement, but also pays tribute to Sunčana Škrinjarić and Divna Zečević as literary figures whose life writing, to quote Solnit’s memoir,

changed the collective story from the old overarching story built on endless silencing [...] storytellers [...] who have broken that silence with their voices and made room thereby for other voices to be heard, perhaps before they too become survivors with terrible stories to tell⁹³.

I came to relate with the persistent efforts of Škrinjarić and Zečević to commemorate their lives in an environment hostile to unconventional women and their stories. I hope the others can do the same.

⁹² Marija Ott Franolić, *Dnevnik ustremljen nedostižnom*, p. 260.

⁹³ Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of my Nonexistence*, p. 195.

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PERPETUALLY PERIPHERAL:

LIFE NARRATIVES OF/BY SUNČANA ŠKRINJARIĆ AND DIVNA ZEČEVIĆ (Abstract)

This article looks into the life writing of two overlooked Croatian writers: Sunčana Škrinjarić and Divna Zečević. Life writing, texts that, according to the literary scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, depict (auto-)biographical trajectories, are the predominant mode of Yugoslav women's literature. Škrinjarić's and Zečević's confessional fragments, however, were published both too early and too late: while their works appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, their most important autobiographical texts, a coming-of-age trilogy (Škrinjarić) and an extensive diary (Zečević), were published only after the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia. Moreover, these two writers never fully participated in Yugoslav second-wave feminism, a dissident political current that affirmed the aesthetic of female writing and thus helped more notable literary figures gain recognition. My analysis acknowledges these historical circumstances while arguing that Škrinjarić's and Zečević's texts depicting their lives, as well as the lives of other women, should be interpreted as part of Yugoslav feminist literature. The article is divided into two parts. The first part argues that Škrinjarić and Zečević wrote their autobiographical and biographical texts by comparing female and male life trajectories, and that their feminist stance is evident in women's inability to follow normative paths to success. The second part analyses their attempts to find feminist foremothers. Škrinjarić and Zečević, did so by researching biographies of two early women's rights activists, the interwar socialist Zofka Kveder and the nineteenth-century writer Dragojla Jarnević.

Keywords: women's literature, life writing, *Bildungsroman*, diary, failure.

PERPETUU PERIFERICE: NARAȚIUNI ALE VIEȚII
TRĂITE/SCRISE DE SUNČANA ŠKRINJARIĆ ȘI DE DIVNA ZEČEVIĆ
(Rezumat)

Acest articol analizează scrierile autobiografice ale două autoare croate mai puțin cunoscute: Sunčana Škrinjarić și Divna Zečević. „Bioficțiunile”, texte care, potrivit cercetătoarelor Sidonie Smith și Julia Watson, configurează traiectorii (auto)biografice, reprezintă formula predominantă de reprezentare din literatura feminină iugoslavă. Cu toate acestea, fragmentele confesive ale lui Škrinjarić și Zečević au fost publicate atât prea devreme, cât și prea târziu: în timp ce majoritatea scrierilor lor au apărut în anii 1960 și 1970, cele mai importante texte autobiografice pe care le-au semnat, o trilogie despre maturizare (Škrinjarić) și un jurnal amplu (Zečević), au fost publicate abia după prăbușirea Iugoslaviei socialiste. În plus, aceste două scriitoare nu au aderat niciodată pe deplin la feminismul iugoslav din al doilea val, un curent politic disident care a promovat estetica scriiturii feminine și a ajutat, astfel, unele figuri literare mai notabile ale mișcării să obțină recunoaștere. Analiza mea ia în considerare aceste circumstanțe istorice, susținând în același timp că textele lui Škrinjarić și Zečević, care descriu propriile vieți, precum și viețile altor femei, ar trebui interpretate ca parte a literaturii feministe iugoslave. Articolul este organizat în două părți. Cea dintâi argumentează că Škrinjarić și Zečević și-au scris textele autobiografice comparând parcursurile de viață feminine și masculine, așa încât poziția lor feministă este evidentă prin tematizarea incapacității femeilor de a urma căile canonice spre succes. A doua parte analizează tentativele lor de a-și descoperi predecesoare feministe. Škrinjarić și Zečević au întreprins acest demers prin intermediul cercetării biografiilor a două activiste timpurii pentru drepturile femeilor, anume socialista interbelică Zofka Kveder și scriitoarea de secol XIX Dragojla Jarnević.

Cuvinte-cheie: literatură feminină, bioficțiune, *Bildungsroman*, jurnal, ratare.

COGNITIVE WAR CARTOGRAPHIES IN HORTENSIA PAPADAT-BENGESCU'S NOVEL

Hypothesis

War polarizes the two points of view on conflict, the masculine one, generated by active involvement on the battlefield and the feminine one, peripherally expressed, on a secondary level. War novels, 20th century confessions, were overwhelmingly written by authors who were involved in battles or for whom battle served as a pretext for developing certain obsessions. These texts were subjective confessions of the internalization of conflicts. If we were to refer only to WWI prose, we would observe that “canonical” novelists wrote at least one novel dedicated to this topic, an essential conclusion for the manner in which reality breeds fiction or, as Ernst von Glasersfeld put it, for observing the capacity of knowledge, and implicitly of literature, “to empower us to act effectively in the world of our experience”¹. We are thus dealing with a form of internalizing fictional information on the part of the reader, in order to relate it to one’s own manner of being in the world. This amounts to an attempt to cognitively map out an actual phenomenon, experienced with terror and anxiety during any era.

The essential hypothesis we start out from is connected to the manner in which cognitive cartographies are constructed in the novel *Balaurul [The Dragon]* (1923) by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, a novel that brings up various key elements for our study: the war theme and short-term memory, the feminine internalization of war trauma, cognitive schemes arising out of dangerous experiences. The knowledge gained by the reader is constructed as a cognitive cartography made up of key spaces placed on a map imagined by the writer. The “traumatic memory” of war is constructed by means of an exclusively female vision, comparable to the one employed by Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) or *Three Guineas* (1938)². In their *Uncomfortable Connections: Gender, Memory, War*, Ayşe Gül Altınay and Andrea Pető expressed an idea that could also apply to the work of Papadat-Bengescu:

History is too much about wars; biography too much about great men, she exclaimed, and in her diverse body of writing, Woolf practiced new methods for simultaneously challenging the ways in which women had been written out of human

¹ Ernst Von Glasersfeld, “Farewell to Objectivity”, *Systems Research*, 13, 1996, 3, p. 238.

² The question from which Woolf starts (How to prevent war?) can be found in the meditations of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu’s character, who wonders how women can prevent a war or what their role is in this historical event, excessively masculinized.

history, and for constructing alternative narratives to encourage, inspire and empower women³.

This complements “modern memory” as theorized by Paul Fussell in “The Great War and Modern Memory”⁴. Another difference pointed out by Fussell is the one regarding

this obsession with the images and myths of the Great War among novelists and poets too young to have experienced it directly. They have worked it up by purely literary means, means which necessarily transform the war into a “subject” and simplify its motifs into myths and figures expressive of the modern existential predicament. These writers provide for the “post-modern” sensibility a telling example of the way the present influences the past. In eschewing the Second War as a source of myth and instead jumping back to its predecessor, these writers have derived their myth the way Frye notes most critics derive their principles, not from their predecessors but from their predecessors’ predecessors⁵.

To address the insufficient knowledge regarding war literature written by women, anthologies or volumes were created⁶, such as *Women Writers of the First World War. An Annotated Bibliography* by Sharon Ouditt⁷, which led to an enriched perspective on the manner in which the global conflagration shaped literature.

Certainly, novels such as *Balaurul* by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu deserve to be included into a larger global context. Apart from the reference to Virginia Woolf, to whom the Romanian writer has been compared before, another term of comparison could be texts such as Sylvia Thompson’s *Chariot Wheels* (1929), Mary Borden’s *The Forbidden Zone*⁸ (1929), expressing feelings related to being around the wounded, just like the character of Laura from Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu’s work, or Radclyffe Hall’s novel, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), which stirred well-known controversy during its time⁹. In *Women’s Autobiography. War*

³ Ayşe Gül Altınay, Andrea Pető (eds.) *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories. Feminist Conversations on War, Genocide and Political Violence*, London, Routledge, 2016, p. 1.

⁴ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 886.

⁶ See literature like Daniela Gioseffi (ed.), *Women on War*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1988, or Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War*, New York, Basic Books, 1987.

⁷ For more details about the women experience in the war, testified in books, articles, memoirs, diaries and letters, see Sharon Ouditt, *Women Writers of the First World War: An Annotated Bibliography*, New York, Routledge, 2000.

⁸ See Mary Borden, *The Forbidden Zone*, London, Heinemann, 1929, p. 117: “There are no men, only body parts; as far as she is concerned ‘Everything is arranged. It is arranged that men should be broken and that they should be mended’. Combines a haunted sense of the absurdity and pathos of nursing the wounded in Belgium, but occasionally spills over into melodramatic phraseology”.

⁹ See Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1928. It is the story of the “invert” Stephen Gordon, who responds (just over half-way through the novel) to the call of war: “England was calling her men into battle, her women to the bedsides of the wounded and dying, and

and Trauma, Victoria Stewart concludes that such trauma cannot be assimilated by traditional means, and the narrative endeavour sometimes appears fragmentary:

The attempts by these writers to assimilate source material – whether in the form of their own earlier writings, news reports, or historical texts – often emphasize the impossibility of narrative completion, but this lack of unequivocal closure is not a signal of the failure of the autobiographical project, rather of a refusal to allow traditional narrative trajectories to smooth over the exigencies of individual experience¹⁰.

Balaurul was published in 1923, when the memories of war still lingered, seemingly continuing a state of anxiety which was fully experienced by the European countries. This novel has always been considered by critics an interstitial type of writing¹¹, included either in a class of first-stage prose about to lose its lyrical character, or in a class of prose texts evincing an obvious tendency towards objectivity. *Balaurul*, however, does not advance a unique relation in the universal literary landscape, but a complementary one, while adding knowledge from the South-East European space¹². Looked upon as a marking point of the transition from the “Viața Românească” literary circle, and the complete affirmation of the adherence to the “Sburătorul” literary salon to which the *Homage* of the first edition is dedicated, the novel stirred interest, but also condescending attitudes. Many of its chapters were published in the *Sburătorul* magazine under different names before they were finally gathered in one volume. The published fragments are not identical to the novel’s final form. The latter features various changes, omissions or reinterpretations. For instance, the chapter entitled *Omul căruia i se vedea inima* [*The Man Wearing His Heart on His Sleeve*] was published in the May 8 issue of the *Sburătorul* magazine, and from the text published in the magazine certain formulations are eliminated such as “a pronounced Swedish type”, “removed from the prestige of idolatry”, or the war “which periodically stirs the temporary tranquility of mankind, as well as the peaceful lives of ordinary

between these two chivalrous, surging forces, she, Stephen, might well be crushed out of existence” (p. 271). She joins an ambulance column, however, and “finds herself” in a role that demands authority, courage, strength, is awarded the *croix de guerre* and receives three mentions in despatches. The period of self-fulfilment, though, is brief: “Great wars will be followed by great discontents – the pruning knife has been laid to the tree, and the urge to grow throbs through its mutilated branches” (p. 298).

¹⁰ Victoria Stewart, *Women’s Autobiography. War and Trauma*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 196.

¹¹ See E. Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* [*History of Romanian Contemporary Literature*], vol. IV, Bucuresti, Ancora S. Benvenisti, 1928, p. 335.

¹² See also the analysis concerning the space in Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu fiction’s in Alina Bako, “The Romanian Inter-War Novel – A Geocritical Perspective”, in Alina Bako (ed.), *Spatial Readings and Linguistic Landscapes*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022, pp. 18-50.

people”; similarly, “she covered her face” replaces “she hid her face”, elements of nuance with the role of stylistically perfecting phrases.

Referred to as “hospital papers” or “war journal”¹³, *Balaurul* reflects an experienced reality, vivid impressions by means of daily notes the author took during the time she voluntarily cared for the wounded on the front, between 1918–1919. The main protagonist, Laura – Laurenția, offers to voluntarily care for the wounded in an ad-hoc field hospital in a train station in the South-Eastern part of Romania, identified by means of the author’s biographical data as Focșani. The feminine vision transposes the traumatic experience of war by means of recording the encounters with the “dragon”, the train carrying the wounded from the front lines. Unlike Camil Petrescu’s novel *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* [*The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War*] no details regarding geographic spaces or places or frontline positions are included. Instead, they are exposed by means of a process of internalization obvious in the employment of a witness perspective and in the scars that war imprints on the mind and body.

The publication of the novel did not stir much critical attention. The critics either questioned the novelty of the composition or spoke about a new stage in the author’s prose writing. Thus, T. Teodorescu-Braniște speaks about the “‘flaw’ of ‘confused’ novelty, of the composition’s not being characterized by classical rigor, of the disorderly style saturated with French lexical items and barbarisms”¹⁴, associating it with the anecdote of the old maiden reconciling two rival families by means of “the parents’ joy of finally ridding themselves of the ‘burden in their household’” or accusing the novel of “putting on too pompous a dress, a dress not suitable with its stature! But the worst thing is that the author does not seem to have read Maiorescu’s criticism, especially the chapter entitled ‘The Drunkenness of words. A study of literary pathology’”¹⁵.

Thus, a point of view is expressed which does not overstep the traditional analytical line. Moreover, it resorts to analogies regarding the status of women writers, thus proving the critic’s reluctance towards the text’s novelty. Apart from such criticism, other perspectives, such as the one belonging to Silvian Iosifescu, hold that the novel’s great merit is that of having “overcome ‘biologism’” (“the idealization of war, rooted in the same biologism which we will encounter in the later novels, is gradually dissipated by terror”)¹⁶ – a quite imprecise perspective, as we will prove by means of arguments from the novel, especially since here we can

¹³ See Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Opere* [Works], vol. I: *Romane* [Novels]. Edited by Gabriela Omăt and Eugenia Tudor Anton, București, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2012, p. 1195. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

¹⁴ T. Teodorescu-Braniște, *Oameni și cărți* [People and Books], vol. I, București, Socec, 1922, p. 80.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Silvian Iosifescu, “Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu”, *Viața Românească*, 10, 1957, 1, pp. 169-170.

encounter the narrative nuclei developed in the novels published later on. Another critical hypothesis attempts an inclusion into the large European family: Valeriu Ciobanu writes that it is “rather a war novel seen through the analytical, meditative and humanitarian eyes of Laura, than Laura’s novel in the circumstances of war”¹⁷, and associates it with *Vie des martyres* by Georges Duhamel. Mircea Zăciu considers the novel “an inner fever pushed to the boundaries of hallucination and paroxysm, occasionally not estranged from expressionism [...], the confessions of a Remarque, Dorgeles, Barbusse, [...] Liviu Rebreanu [...], Camil Petrescu [...], war as a collective drama and experience – as the final destination of egotism”¹⁸. Mention should also be made of Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu’s perspective, who highlights the feminine point of view, developing his analysis of the text’s novelty only halfway:

the intimate journal of a woman, Laura, a voluntary nurse during the war. The typically female realm of preoccupations is not absent from this novel either. [...] She experiences personal suffering when faced with human misery, a suffering similar to romantic disillusionment [...]. *The Dragon* pushes Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu’s prose towards a more objective type of character, in the sense that social reality with its inherent drama erupts in the author’s pages¹⁹.

Attempting to trace the same direction for the volume, Constantin Ciopraga notices the element of novelty in European literature, the fact that

it is an ample journal, the confessions of a consciousness, maybe the first one in the European landscape reflecting the tragedy of war by means of the female vision. One year after the publication of *The Dragon*, other indirect confessions surfaced, this time authored by male writers: *Les Gardiennes* by E. Perochon and *La guerre des femmes* by Antoine Redier²⁰.

We wish to conclude our overview of the criticism the novel received by resorting to a series of ideas belonging to Gheorghe Crăciun, who in 1986 noticed a couple of original aspects, starting from the analysis of Papadat-Bengescu’s novel: the therapeutic value of writing (“a cathartic scriptural gesture. The literary product thus obtained is therefore the result of a therapeutic procedure”), textual polymorphism and experimental writing achieved through “becoming aware of the evolving process of transformation and recurrence of literary forms”²¹. He refers to

¹⁷ Valeriu Ciobanu, *Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu*, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1965, p. 84.

¹⁸ Mircea Zăciu, “Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu”, in *Masca geniului [The Mask of the Genius]*, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1967, p. 209.

¹⁹ Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, *Literatura română între cele două războaie mondiale [Romanian Literature Between the Two World Wars]*, vol. I, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1967, p. 436.

²⁰ Constantin Ciopraga, *Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu*, București, Cartea Românească, 1973, p. 113.

²¹ Gheorghe Crăciun, “Recitind *Balaurul* sau despre un exercițiu de căutare și descoperire” [“Rereading *The Dragon* or on an Exercise in Search and Discovery”], in Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Balaurul [The Dragon]*, 3rd edition, București, Editura Militară, 1986, p. 9.

the novel as “a novel about the direct experience of life, about an auctorial psycho-sensualism which is always alert and of a remarkable moral astuteness”, as well as to the innovations arising from “observations pertaining to the sphere of the body, which are of psycho-somatic nature”²². We can thus notice a diversity of approaches that nevertheless outline two fundamental ideas which are of particular interest for the present study: the novelty of the feminine vision in Eastern European literature and the idea of an experiment the author undertakes by means of her incursion into wounded corporality.

For the female protagonist – Laura (also referred to in the novel as Laurenția) the first contact with war is connected to an obsessive temporality, a nervousness arising from the persistence of the conflictual situation. Memory thus focuses on the impossible prediction regarding the restoration of balance, which brings about anxiety: “How long it was! By means of repetition, it imparted a state of anger, an endless prolonging of the misfortune it brought about, an amplification of the cruel law that it enacted. Always, always ... War!... War!... War!...”²³. Consequently, “repetition” is employed as a unique element, as it is bereft of any perspective, standing for an action that “annoys”, that is internalized to the point of obsession. We can notice the perspective of “modern memory”²⁴, according to which a distinction should be made between the manner in which war was previously perceived from Homer to the 19th century, a vision dominated by heroism, arising from the desire for freedom, and the 20th century perception, when humanity’s major trauma unfolds. Papadat-Bengescu explains it also by means of a dichotomy which connects the text to the dominant European ideas of its time. The two diametrically opposed symbols, the bugle versus the *bucium* (alphorn), the ideal versus the obligation, give voice to this transformation as war is depersonalized, bereft of the ideal of unity or independence:

Were there really only bugle players, or was there some noncom walking beside them, saying something in a clear, harsh, monotonous voice? Like a herald, but one who did not bear resemblance to heralds of yore, the same way the bugle did not resemble the *bucium*. Of course, he was not saying: “Rise up, people! The long-awaited hour of battle and joy is finally here!”... He also did not say: “Rise up, people! Danger and carnage are upon us!”. What he said was: “All people eligible for military service from these contingencies ... have to enroll ... Today, August 14... war has been declared!...”²⁵

What is continuous in this narrative intervention is the fundamental change of perspective on war, which proves the writer’s obvious modernity. Perceived in all

²² *Ibidem*, p. 1220.

²³ Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Balaurul* [*The Dragon*], in *Opere*, p. 180.

²⁴ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 888.

²⁵ Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Balaurul*, p. 180.

its ugliness, bereft of the aura of glory that it enjoyed during the 19th century, war appears absurd, its only observable aspects being the trauma caused to the human being, too fragile when faced with this immense and merciless machinery.

The incursions into the character's psychology are connected to the conscious experience of tragedy, of an impossible resolution to conflict and the lack of any horizon of hope:

...It was unbearable! Again and again! After surprise, emotion, fear, came irritation, a darkening of the mind, an all-encompassing sense of worry, a conflict of energies, a feeling of estrangement, which demanded the silencing of that voice which kept biting into the all too clear consciousness of a harsh reality and crushed under the weight of sounds any semblance of illusion regarding those thoughts²⁶.

Through the protagonist, as well as through the other aspects of femininity faced with a world thrown profoundly off balance, the reader constructs their own image of war, whose novelty derives from the variety of perspectives it relies on. The unforeseen, the lack of vision, the chaos perceived by the human mind caught up in an unstable situation, translate into synaestheses: "the long, harsh and sinister siren" and "the more they advanced towards the heart of the cave, the more it stank. Laura could feel it in her hair and ears [...] Her eyes were burning, not from the smoke, but from that morbid emanation filling up the wagons"²⁷. Throughout the novel, ways of relating to the past are brought up which are however not meant to soothe the soul, as the "new" war is different, it is fought on another battlefield, with completely different weapons:

This was to be the War, unlike any battles the *bucium* called to, unlike any other battle before. A dull, blind, endless peril, dragged along time and crossroads, always threatened, always threatening, cruel, terrible! Longer than one could conceive of or bear. Producing a metallic, sinister sound. Advancing with heavy, determined steps²⁸.

Perceived as society's major evil, the global conflagration produces, before battles start, the anxiety caused by the concrete threat of fatal action: "Nothing resembled the endless talk, ideas, illusions, calculations that had been previously made"²⁹. To this, political speeches are added "choir-like and from the top of the Capitol" and "predictions", as well as the inhumane practice of dividing the world into spheres of influence ("people, intrigues and the division and fight over the prey")³⁰.

What appears original to us is the female vision dividing the world of politics according to intrigues, to "fights", thus creating a domestic vision of the military

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 180-181.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 252.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 182.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

phenomenon. The exclusivity of the female point of view is proven also by the bringing up of a “girl”, one of the “young ones”, suggesting a solidarity of gender subordinated to excessive sensitivity: “War! One of the young girls seemed to ponder inside Laurenția’s thoughts, insider her very soul, on the meaning of the word”³¹. The relationship between what it means to be a witness of such events and transposing those events into writing, the internalization of a cruel reality, were studied by Shoshana Felman, who concludes that

the appointment to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment to transgress the confines of the isolated stance, to speak for others and to others. [...] By virtue of the fact that the testimony is addressed to others, the witness, from within the solitude of his own stance, is the vehicle of an occurrence, a reality, a stance or a dimension beyond himself³².

Laura is a witness-character and a character who acts, as well as observes what is happening behind the frontlines and transposes in a literary manner the prolonged experience of war.

The novel actually confronts two fundamental experiences: a personal one, the one of romantic disillusionment, a sentimental cliché of the 19th century novel, and a collective one, seen through the female gaze:

To such conflicts war offered a solution. A huge one, proportional to her revolt. It seemed like her inner turmoil, which was searching for a resolution and failed to find one, had created, precisely for her pain and need, this colossal tempest, in the power of which all other powers would dissolve³³.

The solution to personal turmoil is plunging into a collective one where all references to individuality are erased, because

Laura indeed thought that the war had come/precisely for her, at the time and hour when she had been waiting for something to set things straight. A force of things had arrived which was clearing up her questions and was connecting her, alongside everybody else, with unknown destinies. This thought was maybe not altogether absurd³⁴.

The feminine point of view refers to this connection to the entire humanity by means of trauma, and relating to it is achieved in different ways, according to the inner states that shape the character’s feelings:

Had she been happy yesterday, the war would have appeared to her as it had done before, during her days of vitality and joy. In the name of all that’s good and of Human

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 198.

³² Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York and London, Routledge, 1992, p. 3.

³³ Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Balaurul*, p. 223.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 198.

Beauty, she would have considered it a monstrosity robbing humanity of its superb heritage. The scourge would have replied with its merciless reality. Now she perceived the red Plague differently. She saw it as an elementary force unleashed in order to bring about destruction and creation³⁵.

Chaos corresponds to the first stage of creation, and war is seen as a civilizing force, as ushering in a new era. It seems to be “the loud overture of a heroic symphony”³⁶ as the cityscape is perceived from the center to the periphery: “liveliness reached its peak in the center, but it extended to the edge of the city”³⁷. Elements of urban imagery are inserted here (automobiles “as small provincial events”)³⁸, and the war brings a gregarious mood to the capital, with both the population and the army multiplying. The prefecture and the “telephone vibration”³⁹, the gathering of the Red Cross members, are events meant to shape the narrative framework.

Cognitive Cartographies

War is experienced by the protagonist under the form of a journey, a dense one, the map of which is metaphorically traced according to the knowledge incorporated into the details provided. Thus, psychological elements are inserted into the text which adhere to the global image of the war landscape. The creation of such a map is achieved by analysing the tiniest details meant to create a panorama of the world fallen prey to war, where only the state of emergency matters:

Like waters, like storms, the only thing you could do was circumnavigate them with the help of a compass; to identify small fords in the great current and, once incorporated into it, go along with it to the *Other Side*. This was what War would be like. People and their determination, everything she thought would rule over her and guide her, were to be scourged by its elementary force, and that determination was just a small ford inside a big one - a desperate steering guided by the deviation axis of the compass. Caught up in the primordial carnage, normal sufferings were laid out for Laura. Like the times, her energies were tinier than this new tyrant. She was no longer battling the impossible. The impossible was now the tyrant⁴⁰.

The woman perceives the war as the center of power, positioned in a hostile environment the primary trait of which is violence and oppression in all domains of life. G.T. Moore and R.G. Golledge speak about *environmental cognition*

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 189.

related to the possibility of subjectively analyzing the external environment, in this case, war. In their 1976 book, they state that apart from direct, real observations, witness of war “have impressions about their character, function, dynamics, and structural interrelatedness, and that they imbue them with meanings, significance, and mythical-symbolic properties”⁴¹. This dual characteristic, simultaneously cognitive and affective, also shapes the manner of relating to war in the Romanian novel. The origin of the phrase *cognitive map*, theorized as early as 1948 by Edward C. Tolman by means of the *rat in the maze* analogy with human beings, meant to describe an itinerary, is well known⁴². Similarly, the manner of describing war corresponds to a relative representation of reality, exemplifying Golledge’s theory, who defined a cognitive map as an “incomplete, distorted, mixed-metric representation of real-world environments, but they can also be maps of the imaginary environments represented in literature folk tales, legends, song, paintings, or film”⁴³. The female character imagines the new reality with the help of data pertaining to the old one, and the starting point of her experience is introduced simply: “she applied for the position of nurse at the train station, where a first aid point had been set up”⁴⁴.

In spite of being as old as humanity itself, war is experienced differently according to the ages:

Just like war was a topic taken up again and again while its proclamation was in fact a new reality, so preparations for it appeared unexpected. The monotonous and traditional mechanism of all authorities suddenly turned to new endeavours. Faced with them, it trembled, shaken to its core. Phones were ringing wildly, seeking to create order in the midst of a feverish disorder. It was an all-encompassing chaos⁴⁵.

Like any other phenomenon, it is judged from the perspective of historical knowledge, to which an arid experience is added, divorced from the direct one. To the external chaos corresponds a subjective observation of the world, as the map created by the character is made up of the subjective details perceived by Laura, a nurse in the Focșani train station. The novel has also been praised for its documentary aspect, as Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu cared for the wounded in 1918, an experience she spoke about in her letters to Garabet Ibrăileanu:

When, with my luggage at the station and a hired carriage, I remained here after suffering what I suffered, I believe I also saw everything that could be seen of what

⁴¹ G.T. Moore, R.G. Golledge (eds.), *Environmental Knowing: Theories, Research and Methods*, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, Dowden, 1976, p. 34.

⁴² Edward C. Tolman, “Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men”, *Psychological Review*, 55, 1948, 4, pp. 189-208.

⁴³ Reginald G. Golledge, Robert J. Stimson, *Spatial Behavior: A Geographic Perspective*, New York, The Guilford Press, 1997, p. 234.

⁴⁴ Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Balaurul*, p. 191.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 199.

was happening, I must say that it maybe was a twist of fate to be placed at the most interesting observation point, because it has always been my destiny to observe interesting things by paying for it with my very soul. I did not shy away from it. I offered myself as an object of experimentation for the most painful things, because I believed in a deeper meaning. I observed as well as I could and I suffered greatly⁴⁶.

Consequently, war trauma is directly experienced, and the piecing together of events is done through the character of Laura. One essential idea arises out of both the direct and the fictional experience: the idea of war as erasing individuality and as an act of connecting with collective tragedy. The memory of experienced events is employed for the fictional merging of the hideous imagery of war. What is also unique is the manner in which the woman relates to what war stands for. Experiencing her own personal drama, Laura internalizes the external situation, turning it into a pretext for her own process of metamorphosis:

It was for her that the war had broken out, to change the meaning of things, and along with this meaning into which her malicious misfortune was carved, to remove that misfortune from its evil roots. In order to change the meaning of her pain, the overall meaning of things had changed! Nothing short of a plague had been required to cure the moral suffering of mankind, nothing short of a hurricane to shatter the layer of mold on the flaws of humanity. This is what Laura believed! The war had been created for her and she was its humble serf. Could she possibly not take part in it?... This evening?... From her position?...⁴⁷.

A sort of Stockholm syndrome takes over the woman who perceives war as an all-powerful master, as a form of curing a disease. This moral cleansing, the therapy people submit to, a harsh and categorical one, is a new vision on the WWI. We are dealing with the dissolution of evil through evil, Laura believes, while also thinking that the “hurricane” is meant to bring order into the world.

The male characters are shown in different guises: the unsatisfied prisoner, the soldier shown from different vantage points, coming or leaving from the front. The nurse’s eyes capture such situations, turning them into moments meant to help to sketch out portraits: “very tall”, “the count... in the service of the imperial Austro-Hungarian army, a prisoner in the northern Carpathians!”⁴⁸ or to express discontent: “You treat your prisoners poorly! The Hungarian replied again arrogantly. We do not even have some hay to sit on, even though there should have been benches!”⁴⁹, to which there is a “rebellious” reply: “We are not rich enough to offer prisoners luxuries. But we do not mistreat anyone”⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Scrisori către G. Ibrăileanu [Letters to G. Ibrăileanu]*, vol. I. Edited by Mihai Bordeianu, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1966, p. 63.

⁴⁷ Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Balaurul*, p. 209.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 230.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 282.

The narrative description of such situations is reminiscent of the social attitudes towards the Austro-Hungarian army and the manner in which writers had related to it previously, such as for example Liviu Rebreanu, who in 1922 had published *Pădurea spânzuraților* [*Forest of the Hanged*]. We might add other war novels, such as the one written by Mihail Sadoveanu, *Strada Lăpușneanu. Cronică din 1917* [*Lăpușneanu Street. A Chronicle from 1917*] (1921), Camil Petrescu and his well-known novel *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* [*The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War*] (1930), *Roșu, galben și albastru* [*Red, Yellow and Blue*] (1924) by Ion Minulescu, *Întunecare* [*Darkening*] (1927) by Cezar Petrescu or *Fata moartă* [*The Dead Girl*] (1937) by Ioan Missir. War literature is created, in most cases, through direct experience, as most of those who write it have taken an active part in battles.

The novelty of Papadat-Bengescu's approach thus lies not in the central theme tackled, but in the feminine point of view that she applies to unknown situations. Until that point, war had been an exclusively masculine trauma, with women being perceived as victims only through the lens of their suffering at home⁵¹, in the absence of the men who had left for the front. In Papadat-Bengescu writing's, masculinity is perceived as bearing two essential traits identified as follows: "with men gone, life had lost its two meanings: the quest for money and the quest for love", the only thing remaining being the survival instinct, "the need to exist"⁵². On another occasion, the scout called M., a sub-lieutenant of the infantry who had voluntarily helped her to care for the wounded and had died on the front, is a brief presence. The same can be said about Gore the teacher and the crisis that fills Laura with fear, about Vintilă who protects her and persuades her that "children, just like puppies, just like women, are small domestic animals, led by voices and smells"⁵³; about Dobre whom she perceives as a "solemn pilgrim"⁵⁴; about the Russian captains Wasia and Iwan and their everlasting friendship; about Cojocariu, "an intellectualized peasant"⁵⁵ and Dumitru who cares for him; about Ion Cizmaru "the merry goatherder"⁵⁶; about the old silversmith. The uselessness of belonging to a nation when faced with war and death is expressed as follows: "buried Romanians and Russians, Germans and French"⁵⁷. It is a tragic conclusion to what a global conflagration stands for that destroys comrades and enemies alike.

⁵¹ See the study about geofeminism in Alina Bako, "Geo-feminism in Romanian Fiction. An Introduction", *Transilvania*, 2020, 11–12, pp. 113-119.

⁵² Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Balaurul*, p. 230.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 230.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 330.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 339.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 383.

The other attitude Laura acquires is the result of multiple experiences, shifting from a toned-down perspective on war to a more radical one. Her outrage is sincere and springs out of a powerful experience of war-time trauma. Contaminating humanity like a pandemic, war leaves behind victims and horrors:

Beast! Hideous beast! Who will ever sever its monstrous heads at the root, when they grow back again and again from the spot they have been severed? War! Everyone was now a soldier and all places were camps. The enemy was lurking somewhere in the shadows, thoughts and movements were aligned with the meanings of battle and the general paradigm was that of carnage⁵⁸.

The female characters are perceived as an all-seeing and unforgiving eye, acid and devoid of any subjectivity. We are introduced to the “mundane nurses” of the Red Cross, such as Milly, “tall and busty”, who takes up an important place in “surgical medicine, or in other words in wartime butchery”⁵⁹ Dudu, about whom the reader finds out that she was “handy, devoted and virile, a precious frontrunner of the bandage room”⁶⁰, the director and other nurses present at the front.

The time she spends in the infirmary prompts Laura to undertake several analyses developed by Papadat-Bengescu in her later novels: “For the same law there were, however, two different realities. In the back-prison of cities, the unlawful births, the ones outside of marriage, were full of misery and sadness. Frail and pale like midwife’s Dorina or like Ancuța’s poor child”⁶¹, these births announce the future fate of the “disheveled maidens”, female figures that populate the author’s coming-of-age novels, characters who are far from the feminine ideal and harboring sins of youth.

The discontinued narrative contains fragments of gossip which form a sublayer of the text. There are claims that “The trenches between Bucharest and F. were full of bodies [...] for a longtime weird gossip was going around, irritating people”⁶², and the presence of Russian troops grants her the opportunity to state that “she had never before seen anything as foreign-looking as them”⁶³.

Events that trigger emotional reactions, such as the one involving the girl whose body had been thrown off the train so as not to infect others, are brought up in order to showcase a different facet of war outside the frontlines:

Mielușica was one of those soldiers fallen on the battlefield that no one has time to pick up, because the duty of moving forward commands harshly. A soldier among

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 240.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 212.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 232.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 245.

those left in the trenches to the dogs and crows, a place on the white apron to hang a new toy, a cross with a green bow⁶⁴.

The idea of experimentation is also obvious from the mixture of magic realism and historical documentation:

Dobre had finally arrived. Stumbling forward and destitute, of course, on the road, like the poor that gypsy he was, he had reached the good Lord with his beard so big and white that in its whiteness all his religious amazement resided. He had reached the place of those supreme convergences of universal harmony, with echoes of vibrations connected to human existence⁶⁵.

Another character surrounded by the same magical aura is the old silversmith. In the midst of the trauma of war, he continues his mission, and his portrait is sketched with the help of contrasting details. Laura notices him working on a “necklace”, thereby introducing his craft. His prudence corresponds to the woman’s lack of patience – he works quietly, without haste, enjoying the process of creation. Details regarding his large family, his nine children of which four take part in the war (“One is a sailor... one is an aviator... two are artillerymen”) are provided, as well as the fact that he works for the Germans because “one has to make a living”⁶⁶. His origins are mixed: “My father was a gypsy... my mother... a Moldavian...”⁶⁷. His portrait is reminiscent of Mephistopheles’, the old silversmith appearing to be in possession of the secrets of alchemy, as magic is inserted, we might state accidentally, into the cruel reality of war. The character evinces a dual nature, presented with the help of the image he projects, camouflaged in the image of a “Florentine jeweler” is added, one descended from magic realism, mumbling curses and owning cryptic volumes, reminiscent of the characters created by Mircea Eliade, or, earlier on, of Ruben – Riven from Mihai Eminescu’s prose:

He was always smirking, a diabolical smile, with eyes restless like flames lit inside old lamps. A weird old man! A few moments ago, weighing that modern plaything of a necklace with love and contempt, he had seemed a Florentine jeweler, and now he appeared to be a gypsy blacksmith, who, putting horseshoes on his enemy’s horses, was mumbling curses that would cause the wagon to flip.

– Come over some day if you like! I will show you some books that nobody except the old silversmith has... I live over there in that old house at the back of the street... Poor people! Who is working with silver anymore? ... Everything can be bought in shops⁶⁸.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 396.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 241.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 245.

Such passages are rare in the prose of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, but they attest to the need to escape the traumatic reality of war. The character's portrait, naturally integrated into the Romanian context, remains however insufficiently explored, with only a brief description in the narrative context. In spite of this, we notice the same opposition, sometimes more strongly perceived, at other times rather discretely, between the modernity generated by that which is new and tradition with its endless, magical mechanisms. Although her work is indebted to new creative processes and the objectifying process of prose, by means of such passages the writer points to a prolonged tradition in character construction, to some extent advancing a reinterpretation of the manner in which the creation process itself is perceived.

The Dragon

The dragon imagery is employed to personify a terrifying view, namely the train carrying the wounded coming from the front. The station is presented both before the onset of the war, with the "endless maneuvers of convoys towards multiple destinations"⁶⁹, with "wagons showcasing the fashion of the day consisting in heroic inscriptions"⁷⁰, and after the war had started, when trains were bringing the wounded from the front.

The dragon's first sighting is depicted as follows: "after 20-30 hours of travel, stuck in the darkness, in the asphyxiating steam inside the Dragon, pumped full of morphine in their misery, they were now slowly awakening"⁷¹. The wounded are taken care of, some pass away, some get well, and the observations are sprinkled with psychological inserts, with the dragon's appearance acquiring beastly proportions:

with a dull hoot, the long-awaited train, feared, terrible, now decrepit, with its stomach emptied of its hot entrails, started moving again, and slowly, powerlessly, emptied of the blood and flesh it had thrown out there, it retreated into the dark chaos of the warehouse. A monster that had now turned into a prisoner⁷².

Each of the "dragon's" arrivals brings about a trauma that adds to the other individual physical and psychological traumas.

Each new experience is mediated by the hideous projection of the dragon. "The Dragon's huge and hideous head was still far away. Far away was also the hell of its full and overflowing entrails. Only its severed tail, carrying people as in

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 192.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 222.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 229.

fairy tales, was cheerfully moving”⁷³. The Dragon appeared to them like its correspondent in the Bible; like the one in the primitive drawings of the Testament: “a beast with a greyish head and scales, with red-painted nostrils and black whiskers...They were the white archangels, frail, clean and tranquil alongside the subdued beast”⁷⁴. The representations of the train-dragon vary from folklore-like descriptions to biblical allusions such as the one to the Apocalypse of Saint John the Theologian (ch. 12), who presents the image of the woman and the large red dragon, war being associated in eschatological studies with the end of a world order. What is also interesting is the allusion to creation and destruction through evil. The symbolic transposition of the dragon into the train carrying the wounded and the association with “the white archangels” are allusions to the biblical battle between Archangel Michael and his fellow angels and the dragon embodying absolute evil.

The apparition of the “dragon” is associated with an intermediary space, where light and darkness, good and evil, suffering and sacrifice meet, the station being a point of arrival and departure:

The station was, of course, a privileged space. Trains were passing there daily. The entire war was on display there, loaded unto the crowded and noisy freight wagons. The long convoys of refugees were passing with their picturesque and humiliating pain; mysterious official trains with blinds closed on the sad equivocal circumstances; long, never-ending military trains heading towards who knows what and who knows where, but certainly towards something exulting and causing sadness at the same time, which excited the soldiers who were unaware of the pain awaiting them as if they were gazing above it, above themselves, above life’s suffering and sacrifice, towards the joys to come⁷⁵.

Meditations on human nature provide the novel with existential undertones, this point of view being taken over from biologism as it was explained, perceived and applied at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1921, Oscar Hertwig advanced a theory contradicting the Darwinian idea of evolution, offering the example of war seen as an “unalterable necessity of nature”⁷⁶ that could be avoided through adaptation by human beings who, through evolution, might find peaceful resolutions to conflict. The perspective taken up by Papadat-Bengescu offers a biological source, the capacity of killing being tied to the very condition of being human. Thomas Hobbes identifies it as an essential condition of being human, thus

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 255.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 292.

⁷⁶ See Reinhard Mocek, “Two Faces of Biologism: Some Reflections on a Difficult Period in the History of Biology in Germany”, in William R. Woodward, Robert S. Cohen (eds.), *World Views and Scientific Discipline Formation: Science Studies in the German Democratic Republic Papers from a German-American Summer Institute, 1988*, Amsterdam, Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1991, pp. 279-291.

able to kill⁷⁷, while Robert Sidney Bigelow speaks about the human being “defined not as the toolmaker, but rather as the war maker”⁷⁸. The idea is not new. War has been perceived as part of human nature since Aristotelian times, while antiquity was indebted to this heroic vision on war. Emmanuel Levinas also takes up the idea of a human being’s innate power to kill⁷⁹. The Romanian novelist identifies this primary characteristic, while trying to find a justification for war:

Man, humankind, are born assassins. The power of destruction is just as present within them as the power of creation. Being born, man gives birth; being mortal, he is able to kill. Out of these two elementary forces, one is denied to him by moral laws as long as he does not rebel against it. He does not kill. But his powerful threats are wasted on verbal manifestations: “I shall kill him!” And sometimes that is what he does!... Now people everywhere had stood up in rage and heat, ready to kill each other. It was war. To kill... in order to improve things... This idea of “improvement” that grew like poisonous mushrooms in the minds of people on the shores of all waters, from the dough of all shores⁸⁰.

The power to kill is seen as a basic instinct that people are born with and that is repressed throughout one’s existence, remaining dormant inside us until at some point, when reason clouds over, a positioning is created in reality where there are no more moral laws. The vision advanced in the novel *Balaurul*, synchronized with the evolution of society fallen prey to the major phenomenon of war, is a valid one, all the more so as the two fundamental principles of existence are presented as binary opposites here: creation and destruction, birth and death. Like the biblical text that advances the image of the woman giving birth to destructive threats, this prose text presents us with a coherent vision of a world on the brink of chaos. Loss of reason is seen as the reason for the outbreak of war by means of the allusion to submerging oneself in the irrational bereft of any control, once the “heat” takes over the human mind. This position connects the pathological with war seen as a deviation from normal behaviour. The human being is under the spell of a malady, the loss of reason, as madness multiplies and takes over the whole of humanity. Beyond the primary interests of nation-states, war brings about the loss of all moral and social milestones, causing the destruction of human relationships but also the impossibility of relating to one’s own self. The perspective offered by the novel’s female character is interesting also because she finds herself in a position which disrupts her initial status: from creation, she starts observing destruction, fighting for her life alongside the others. The position of the

⁷⁷ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: Parts One and Two*. With an introduction by Herbert W. Schneider, New York, The Liberal Arts Press, 1958.

⁷⁸ Robert Sidney Bigelow, *The Dawn Warriors: Man’s Evolution toward Peace*, Boston, Little, 1969, p. 43.

⁷⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991.

⁸⁰ Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Balaurul*, p. 223.

protagonist as witness also implies a tracing of limits and feelings when faced with death, and especially with the suffering of the body. More than death, Papadat-Bengescu's novel speaks about the body that suffers, that is wounded, that goes through the destructive process of physical suffering. The wounded observed and cared for by Laura are, in fact, versions of the suffering body, with war becoming a pretext for discussing human nature. The novel's text contains references to the chaos brought upon human beings, a profound one, an abandoning of the self that, even though sought by the female character at the beginning, is later on understood to be a form of loss of individuality. The unique vision advanced by the Romanian writer is grounded in the fact that war is perceived as a malady, progressively infecting the collective body of a nation, with the pathological aspect being essential to the observation of the entropic process. Vanities are seen, biblically, as the supreme sin leading to war, to loss of balance, to lack of reconciliation:

Destroying balance and suspended above themselves, they were making their way through death towards something better – crushing all that was standing in their way towards rebirth and ennoblement. For the icons inside churches – for the light reflected on the foreheads of idols – for the wounds, out of which puss is streaming to decongest the brains of nations – for ambition and passion – for the triumph of egotism⁸¹.

The triumph of “egotism” alludes to sacrificing the collective interest, the interest of common people caught up in the Great War machinery where each one is just a speck of individuality, part of a whole moved by the frontline.

Each time such reflections on the nature of war appear, the chance is seized to recall all fundamental moments in human existence, because alongside love and death, war too had shaped new world orders. The two fundamental attitudes the writer places at the root of human existence are connected to “the heroic sentiment” and “the humanitarian sentiment”, seen as two forces succeeding each other “without replacing each other”. From time to time, the narrator remarks that “humanity had followed the wild call of the blood and as soon as it had completed it, the feeling resurfaced proclaiming its generous supremacy”⁸², a sort of necessary crisis for the re-establishment of order. The dividing line between peace and war seems awfully frail, with each reiteration of conflict proving the fragility of human nature. The observation according to which both the state of war and the state of peace are connected to blood, “the same wonderful fluid”, is yet another allusion to the discussion of corporality and biologism. If evolution entailed renouncing war and moving towards a new era, then the Darwinian hypothesis, with its emphasis on instincts proving that violence is still very much present inside the human being, would have no ground. Papadat-Bengescu identifies as

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 300.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 301.

alternative moments the crises brought about by “blood”, by the biological element of human nature that rejoices both in war and in the tranquility of peace:

Laura thought that the spiritual law was the serene climate of the blood and the red instinct the crisis of the same marvelous fluid. Feelings, freed from the conflicts of the day, were slowly taking up again their delicate joys, first turning towards nature, towards the delights of light, the caress of air, the various marvels of the surroundings where the soul could find refreshment in order to start anew the miracle of its games of lights and shadows⁸³.

We can thus note that the novel *Balaurul* advances a new and unique vision in the European literary landscape by presenting a feminine point of view on war, in accordance with the literary directions of the times. The trauma experienced by Laura, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu’s protagonist, is first and foremost a personal one, experienced when there still was “a serene climate of the blood”, however, the second one that marks her existence is lived out inside a crossroads space penetrated by war, as the modern train brings in the wounded. Participation in war is achieved from behind the front lines, by means of observing the effects of battle, with corporality becoming a mirror of the immense trauma brought about by war. The wounded body is a metaphor of humanity turned into a victim of its own pettiness and loss of reason and even of its survival instinct. The novel’s starting point, overcoming a personal tragedy by immersing oneself in a collective one, morphs into a pretext for sanctioning war, seen as a major trauma of humanity, a malady born from temporary loss of reason. The feminine diary arising from this becomes the confession of a traumatic event from a novel perspective, different from the ones the reader had been accustomed to before, a modern vision of a world where diversity of points of view was a rare thing. We can safely state that Papadat-Bengescu’s novel is part of European literature and represents an important contribution to understanding the manner in which the feminine point of view matters to the description of events considered as pertaining exclusively to the sphere of masculinity.

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⁸³ Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Opere*, p. 303.

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COGNITIVE WAR CARTOGRAPHIES
IN HORTENSIA PAPADAT-BENGESCU'S NOVEL
(Abstract)

This research endeavour is part of the study of feminine points of view on war and the manner in which they are internalized. Concepts such as “*modern memory*” (Paul Fussell), *testimony and witness* (Shoshana Felman), *new methods for writing about war* (Ayşe Gül Altınay and Andrea Pető) or *the impossibility of narrative completion* (Victoria Stewart) are employed, all of them connected to the rendition of the war experience through the female voice. The Romanian novel fulfils the generative function of creating “cognitive cartographies”. Thus, mental activity generates both the literary work and its interpretation under the form of a map represented individually by each character. The manner in which cognitive cartographies are constructed is studied in the novel *Balaurul* [*The Dragon*] (1923) by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, a novel that displays various key elements for our study: the war theme and short-term memory, the female internalization of war trauma, and cognitive schemes which are the result of dangerous experiences. The knowledge the reader gains is constructed under the form of a cognitive cartography made up of internal key spaces placed on a map imagined by the writer.

Keywords: trauma, Romanian fiction, WWI writings, war, gender studies.

CARTOGRAFIERI COGNITIVE ALE RĂZBOIULUI
ÎN ROMANELE HORTENSIEI PAPADAT-BENGESCU
(Rezumat)

Articolul se înscrie în seria studiilor care analizează perspectivele feminine asupra războiului, precum și modul în care aceste puncte de vedere sunt internalizate. În cadrul cercetării sunt utilizate concepte precum „*memoria modernă*” (Paul Fussell), *raportul mărturie-martor* (Shoshana Felman), *noi metode de a scrie despre război* (Ayşe Gül Altınay și Andrea Pető) sau *imposibilitatea completitudinii narative* (Victoria Stewart), toate acestea fundamentând înțelegerea modurilor în care este redată experiența războiului prin vocea feminină. Romanul românesc îndeplinește funcția generativă de a crea „cartografii cognitive”. Astfel, activitatea mentală generează atât opera literară, cât și interpretarea acesteia sub forma unei hărți reprezentate individual de fiecare personaj. Modul în care se construiesc cartografiile cognitive este studiat în romanul *Balaurul* (1923) de Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, un roman care prezintă diverse elemente-cheie pentru mizele acestui articol: tema războiului și problematica memoriei recente, interiorizarea feminină a traumei războiului, respectiv schemele cognitive generate de experiențele traumatiche. Cunoștințele pe care le dobândește cititorul sunt construite sub forma unei cartografii cognitive, alcătuite din spații interne cheie, plasate pe o hartă imaginată de scriitoare.

Cuvinte-cheie: traumă, roman românesc, scrieri despre Primul Război Mondial, război, studii de gen.

LARISA PRODAN

AGLAJA VETERANYI – THE AUTOFICTION OF A NOMADIC EXISTENCE

The literary transpositions of the self – included, as a defining “umbrella term”, in the category of *life-writing*, namely those texts with an (auto)biographical and memoir character –, through which the authorial self subjectively transposes their inner thoughts and experiences, have gained along the years an increasingly significance within literary studies. Over the last decades, a literary category that can be considered separate within the narratives of the self, bordering autobiography and fiction, is *autofiction*. The term was initially proposed by Serge Doubrovsky in the novel *Fils*¹ (1977), and it launched, with its first attempts of definition, a series of polemics regarding its nature and its conceptual delimitation.

The present research does not propose an exhaustive presentation of the attempts to define what is (or is not) autofiction, although I will appeal to some of the most rigorous conceptual delimitations, but a presentation of how autofiction imposes itself as a solution (and manner of escaping of the self) for different traumatic experiences. Beyond the *trauma narratives*, which expose, in a fictional universe, various traumas and traumatic experiences, autofiction allows the (auto)fictional transposition of the self through subjective, authentic and truthful recollections and expositions, so that the effect of the narrative act works in a double sense most of the time: both from the self towards the reader, and from the literature itself to the affected self. Representative in this sense are Aglaja Veteranyi’s novels – or better said, *autofictions* – *Why Is the Child Boiling in the Polenta*² and *The Shelf of the Last Breaths*³. These literary works represent the core of the present paper. The two texts offer a subjective transposition of the child and, at the same time, of the teenager Aglaja, strongly affected by her family’s migration and the accumulation of traumatic experiences lived throughout their nomadic existence. Coming from a family with a significant matriarchal basis, the subjective feminine narrative voice accumulates and at the same time recounts the narrative through an uninterrupted stream of consciousness. She recalls the traumas that the former communist regime in the country caused to the

¹ Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils* [*The Son*], Galilée, Paris, 1977. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

² Aglaja Veteranyi, *De ce fierbe copilul în mămăligă* [*Why Is the Child Boiling in the Polenta*]. Translated by Nora Iuga, Iași, Polirom, 2013.

³ Aglaja Veteranyi, *Raftul cu ultimele suflări* [*The Shelf with the Last Breaths*]. Translated by Nora Iuga, 2nd edition, Iași, Polirom, 2019.

family, and records the consequent necessity of constant migration. In the case of Aglaja Veteranyi, migration from one country to another transfers the character into an autofictional universe, literarily transposed as a form of prose with strong autobiographical and subjective underpinnings.

Thus, as a “fiction of the self”, autofiction represents a mode of narrative creation around which a multitude of perspectives and definitions still gravitate. Serge Doubrovsky himself has repeatedly reconsidered the initial definition provided on the back cover of the novel *Fils*. For Doubrovsky, autofiction represents the “fiction” of events and happenings with a realistic character at the center, in which “the language of the adventure has been entrusted to the adventure of language in its total freedom”⁴. The innovation that Doubrovsky brings to literary prose does not consist in redefining the narrative limits of the novel, but in the clear demarcation and, implicitly, in the “distance” between autobiography and (auto)fiction. When he talks about the nature of *self-narration*, Arnaud Schmitt discusses this precise distinction imposed by Doubrovsky, namely the differentiation between the categories of (auto)biography and fiction: “It was conceived as a sort of memoir with a hint of fiction, in other terms as a novelistic autobiography, not as an autobiographical novel”⁵. Schmitt himself perceives the cognitive side of self-referential texts as defining for this distinction: “a creative form of self-referential texts, memoirs nourished by the most innovative narrative energy”⁶. In the case of autofiction, in its mix with biographical elements the share of fiction counterbalances biography, a perspective also supported by Vincent Colonna: “‘Autofiction’ is fiction, and only the name of the author is real”⁷.

Addressing the degree of authorial involvement in the narrative act, Marjorie Worthington also mentions the transposition of the image of the author into the text. Most of the time, this – the autofictional transposition of the author – can be found in the guise of the main eponymous character, who also takes on the role of the subjective narrative voice but who cannot be identified with the author himself:

The primary defining trait of autofiction as I define it is the inclusion of a characterized version of the author, usually as the protagonist. I say characterized version of the author because as autofictional narratives unfold, it becomes patently clear that, although they share a name, the protagonists and the authors are not identical to one another⁸.

Even if autofiction allows the creation of a character with the same name and similar existential traits as those taken from the author’s biography, there is no

⁴ Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils [The Son]*, Paris, Galilée, 1977.

⁵ Arnaud Schmitt, “Self-Narration”, in Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (ed.), *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, Boston – Berlin, De Gruyter, 2018, p. 659.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Vincent Colonna, *Autofiction et autres Mythomanies Littéraires*, Paris, Tristram, 2004, p. 75.

⁸ Marjorie Worthington, *The Story of “Me”: Contemporary American Autofiction*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2018, p. 18.

relation of equivalence between the two narrative instances, as in the case of diaristic writings or memoirs, for example. Precisely from this point of view, therefore, autofiction is not (only) autobiography, its innovation and creative originality consisting in the fictional transposition of realistic elements taken from the author's biographical journey. The narrative "truth" is imposed, thus, as distinct from "the historical or biographical factuality"⁹.

Moreover, the delimitation from autobiography is also noted by Hywel Dix, in the introduction to the collective volume *Autofiction in English*¹⁰. Autofiction, in Dix's view, presupposes a greater "degree" of "experiencing" the "limits of the self" – an assumption of creative freedom therefore – which is implicitly much more permissive, the author claims, than the simple exact reproduction of already (arch)known biographical facts: "It is, moreover, a form of autobiographical writing that allows a degree of experimentation with the definition and limits of the self, rather than the slavish recapitulation of known biographical facts"¹¹. Likewise, the status of autobiographical literature is substantiated by Philippe Lejeune in *The Autobiographical Pact*¹². The autobiographical account requires, in Lejeune's view, a "pact" between the confessional voice and the reader, by means of which the identification of the authorial instance with the narrative instance can be recognized thanks to the common name¹³.

However, autofiction claims itself as a distinct literary species. If Lejeune speaks of an *autobiographical pact*, Jacques Lecarme theorizes instead the *autofictional pact*¹⁴. Fictional elements and strategies, once applied to realistic and subjective renderings of the authorial self, distort the accurate unbiased rendering of facts. Autobiographical fiction thus moves away from the realistic horizon of the related facts but still maintains a correlation between itself and the fictional creative process. The connection between fiction and reality comes, most of the time, from the liberating effect produced at the moment of the self's transposition into a fictional universe. As Hywel Dix notes in the introduction of his edited volume, autofiction becomes a process of (self)exploration and (self)experimentation of the evolution of the authorial self, founded on the traumatic experiences that drive the self towards confession in order to overcome the trauma more easily:

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 22: "In autofiction, as in all fiction then, narrative 'Truth' is distinct from historical or biographical factuality".

¹⁰ Hywel Dix (ed.), *Autofiction in English*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹² Philippe Lejeune, *Pactul autobiografic [The Autobiographical Pact]*. Translated into Romanian by Irina Margareta Nistor, București, Univers, 2000.

¹³ Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Contract", in Tzvetan Todorov (ed.), *French Literary Theory Today*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 193.

¹⁴ Jacques Lecarme, "L'autofiction, un mauvais genre?", in Philippe Lejeune (ed.), *Autofictions & cie*, Paris, RITM, 1993, pp. 227-249.

In this sense, autofiction is a project of self-exploration and self-experimentation on the part of the author. This in turn is partly because many works of autofiction have been written in the aftermath of some kind of traumatic experience – real or imagined – so that the process of writing in response to trauma can be seen as a means of situating the self in a new context when other relational constructs have been removed or jeopardized¹⁵.

Such effects of the transposition of a traumatically affected self can be found in the autofictional works of Aglaja Veteranyi. The narrative voice recounts events that fall within the sphere of trauma, and some of them are represented by the constraints to which the author's family is subjected by the former socialist regime. Agnieszka Mroziak and Anja Tippner also talk about the traumatic effects of socialism – captured in autobiographical novels and autofiction – in a study published in the *European Journal of Life Writing*¹⁶. Under different forms of literary exposition included under the category of life-writing, such as autobiographies, autofictions, memoirs or diaries, the authors choose to confess their own experiences of the years dominated by socialism¹⁷. Literature – and, implicitly, autofiction – becomes, in this way, not only a form of creation that supports its own fictional universe, but also a close connection and a manner of communication between generations and distinct social categories. The evocation and transmission of personal memories mark the intergenerational differences especially as the authors as adults reproduce events experienced in childhood or adolescence:

The protagonist/narrator of most analysed texts is a child/adolescent whose biography, or at least some of its elements, can be easily linked to the biography of the author [...]. This makes the works in question a kind of record of a generational experience of the authors [...] for whom the memory of late socialism is also the memory of their own childhood and adolescence¹⁸.

This is also the case of Aglaja Veteranyi, who exposes her childhood and adolescence as traumatic stages that marked her entire evolutionary path, from the migratory journey and the conflicts in the dysfunctional family she grew up in, to the communist political restrictions in her native country.

¹⁵ Hywel Dix (ed.), *Autofiction in English*, p. 4.

¹⁶ Agnieszka Mroziak, Anja Tippner, "Remembering Late Socialism in Autobiographical Novels and Autofictions from Central and Eastern Europe: Introduction", *European Journal of Life Writing*, 2021, 10, pp. 1-14.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 5: "An important source employed by contemporary scholars of late socialism are various types of personal documents and life-writing: autobiographies, memoirs, letters, diaries, photographs. These materials, which are indispensable for analysis of the specificity of the epoch, are also a tool of communication within and between various social and age groups. Particularly valuable in this regard are not only autobiographical texts, but also autofictional ones, which feed on stories of life under socialism and process them in various ways".

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

Thus, Aglaja Veteranyi's prose could be qualified as trauma narrative, stories that represent, most of the time, an attempt to translate painful experiences into language ("trauma narratives represent the written accounts of survivors' struggles to put their experience into comprehensible language"¹⁹). The attempts to fictionalize trauma can also be found in autofictions (*trauma autofiction*), a literary category that subscribes to the multitude of forms of trauma narratives but to which a higher degree of experimentation is attributed, since the characterological delimitations are not yet completely established in literary criticism²⁰.

However, unlike the purely fictional narrative, what autofictions of trauma allow is an objective "distancing" of the authorial self from the traumatic event, so that its rendering is accomplished with the fullness of the lived event and not just as succinct naming of subjective fractions retrieved from memory. In this way, the issue of the distinction between author and narrating character reasserts itself, as the "extratextual author" of autofiction becomes an "avatar" of the fictional entity. In spite of this, the similarity of the names of the two narrative entities provides "credibility"²¹, so that the trauma is attributed to the author because it has a high degree of veracity. Simona Mitroiu also talks about the difficulty of confessing trauma. When the author recalls his/her past, he/she becomes a witness of the evoked events²². The "distancing" from the related facts, previously mentioned, can be reinterpreted by this double act of testimony and, at the same time, of confessing one's own past, through which the authorial self exposes itself publicly, in the full intimacy of one's thoughts and experiences.

Aglaja Veteranyi is, therefore, an author who transposes her migratory experience on the border between the biographical and the fictional. The Romanian origin writer settled in Switzerland at the end of a long journey with her

¹⁹ Marjorie Worthington, *The Story of "Me"*, p. 99.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 99-100: "Through the inherently split subjectivity of its author-character, autofictional strategies allow for the depiction of a critical distance from a heretofore unrepresentable traumatic event. The author-character becomes both an avatar for the extratextual author and a fictional character whose depiction need not adhere to the strict tenets of truth-telling. In other words, the 'fiction' part of autofiction allows for a departure from a strict adherence to referentiality in order to shape the story that is difficult to tell. At the same time, and somewhat ironically, the onomastic connection between author and author-character (the 'auto' part of autofiction) lends a kind of credibility – whether deserved or not – to the trauma fiction".

²² Simona Mitroiu (ed.), *Women's Narratives and the Postmemory of Displacement in Central and Eastern Europe*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 6-7: "In speaking about the personal past, one becomes a witness to past events, as personal memories and experiences are brought into the public arena. This act is no easy task, and the process of witnessing and testifying (and the relationship between direct witnesses and indirect ones, and the connection of memory and postmemory) is one of the most complex and multi-layered relations that can be analysed in the realm of memory studies".

family. They left Romania in 1967 with the circus where they were working because of the rigors of the communist security services and the oppression to which different members of the family were subjected. Their itineraries included not only European countries, but also regions of South America or Africa, with the circus where the author's mother, as well as her husband and sister, worked. The biographies of the Romanian origin writer record a traumatic childhood lived with parents working as circus performers, her childhood experiences also representing the background of her pseudo-autobiographical accounts in the two published novels, *Why Is the Child Boiling in the Polenta* and *The Shelf of the Last Breaths*.

In an article dedicated to Veteranyi's novels, Ștefan Fircă notes that her work is "specific to the aesthetics of autofiction" ("The ambiguous status of the voice [...] is specific for the aesthetics of autofiction"²³), an aspect that can also be inferred, in my view, from Aglaja Veteranyi's own statements regarding the veracity of her writings. In an interview given to Rodica Binder, when asked about the "line between reality and fiction" in her works, Aglaja Veteranyi states that this aspect is not "important" to her: "I don't want to write the truth, I'm not writing a history book, I just want to 'erzählen' ['to tell']"²⁴. Her purpose as an authorial instance is, beyond the memoir transposition of the facts, a fictional one. Considering her novels as part of the category of autofiction is thus valid, as fragments from the traumatic biographical experience of the author of Romanian origin are narratively integrated in the fictional transposition of realistic experiences.

Thus, Aglaja Veteranyi's first novel, *Why Is the Child Boiling in the Polenta*, represents a fictional attempt to transpose the traumatic subjective experiences of a narrative voice who still finds herself regressing to an infantile stage which, however, subliminally hides an early traumatic maturity. In an article from *Steaua* literary magazine dedicated to the comparative analysis of Veteranyi's and Herta Müller's works, Dana Bizuleanu notices that the novel imposes itself as a "Gordian knot" of childhood trauma: "Veteranyi's novel severs precisely the Gordian knot of childhood trauma, its narrative building a universe of silence through the eyes of a child in the process of becoming"²⁵. The narrative is circumscribed to a "universe of fear and childhood marked by the limits of subsistence"²⁶. Forced to leave the country because of the communist restrictions

²³ Ștefan Fircă, "Adapting In-Betweenness: Transpositions of Aglaja Veteranyi's Literature in Theatre, Music and Film", in Hajnal Király, Zsolt Györi (eds.), *Postsocialist Mobilities: Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021, pp. 232-262.

²⁴ Rodica Binder, "Aglaja Veteranyi – Salt mortal de la circ la literatură" ["Aglaja Veteranyi – Deadly Leap from Circus to Literature"], *România literară*, 33, 2000, 31, p. 21.

²⁵ Dana Bizuleanu, "Limbaje ale traumei: Aglaja Veteranyi și Herta Müller" ["Languages of Trauma: Aglaja Veteranyi and Herta Müller"], *Steaua*, 64, 2014, 3-4, p. 75.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

and prohibitions, the family subsists due to the mother's circus act of hanging herself from the wire of a trapeze by the length of her own hair. The danger of her acrobatics is deeply felt and internalized by the child who anticipates, witnessing helplessly at the same time, the fatal moment of her mother's deadly fall, out of a paralyzing fear of losing her.

In fact, the interiorization of fear gives birth to the fictional story of "the child who boils in the polenta", a leitmotif at the level of the narrative that is also present in the title. The story is initially concocted by the narrator's sister to distract her during her mother's performances, but it is amplified by the subjective narrative voice as the sense of abandonment becomes more acute. The more intense the danger of losing her mother (and remaining alone, in a perpetual state of abandonment), the more the atrocities and sufferings of the narratively projected "child" intensify. Boiling in the polenta becomes, from my perspective, a mask of projecting her inner suffering and fear:

When I imagine how the child boils in the polenta and how bad it hurts, I stop thinking incessantly that my mother could fall from up there, from above, she says. But it doesn't help at all. I always have to think about my mother's death so that it doesn't take me by surprise²⁷.

The child boils (in polenta), as a double fictional transposition of trauma. Therefore, the novel projects a narrative within another narrative, through which the trauma of the child is rendered by the elements of physical suffering. The association with the culinary sphere is representative for the entire prose of Aglaja Veteranyi. For that matter, it is not at all intriguing why "polenta" is chosen as the boiling medium, and not basic water or any other liquid substance – including tar, maybe. "Mamaliga", perceived as a traditional Romanian dish, offers the literary image of a symbol of national identity. The fictional character of the "child" "boils in the polenta" because the narrative self, strongly linked to the Romanian national space through the gastronomic sphere – and the analysis of the novel will strengthen this vision – also "boils" in its own suffering. Internal grinding and deglutition are achieved through constant decomposition processes.

Of particular interest in the fiction of the traumatic migratory experience is the way in which the sense of belonging is diluted and, at the same time, condensed in the various forms and spaces with which the narrative subjectivity comes into contact. These forms are most of the time spatial metaphors that can be associated with what Dana Bizuleanu calls "transfer-images"²⁸. For example, the trailer that

²⁷ Aglaja Veteranyi, *De ce fierbe copilul în mămăligă*, p. 26.

²⁸ Dana Bizuleanu, "Limbaje ale traumei", p. 75: "They are the narrative vehicles that metaphorize the characters' physical and mental displacement, conveying their traumatic dimension and configuring it spatially and temporally. In turn, the transfer images can textually signal other traumas, being mechanisms that coagulate the imaginary marked by limit experiences".

represents the family's home at the time when the child's parents are acrobats at the circus is perceived by the narrator at an identity level: "The circus is always abroad. But the wagon in which we live is always at home. I open the door of the car as little as possible so that home does not evaporate"²⁹. The fragility and securing familiarity of that space is so accentuated due to the eternal temporary character it carries, that the narrative instance tries, with obvious concern, to save the stability of the home that the "wagon" offers for as long as possible. The national space is no longer perceived as an identity due to the prohibition to return to the country, imposed by the socialist regime ("THE DICTATOR SURROUNDED ROMANIA WITH BARBED WIRE"³⁰). The traumatic dimension of the space-wagon can also be noticed in the novel. The female narrative voice, in a presentation of the divinity she trusts to protect her mother, describes one of the culinary-spiritual rituals attributed to the supreme deity seen in the guise of an all-protecting God:

In every new town I dig a hole in the ground in front of the wagon we live in, I stick my hand in, then my head, and hear how God breathes underground and chews. [...] / GOD IS ALWAYS VERY HUNGRY. / He also drinks my lemonade with pleasure, I stick a straw in the ground and offer him a drink to protect my mother. / And I also lay for him there in the hole a bit of the tasty food that my mother cooks³¹.

The narrative voice of the main character constantly feeds, in a ritualistic gesture, the sacred monster in the hole dug in the ground, lest it "consume" her mother because it might feel uncontrollably hungry. The child Aglaja also offers him "the tasty food that her mother cooks" to complete this Pantagruelic feast and, at the same time, to point out her mother in his divine protection through the quality of her gastronomic preparations. It is worth mentioning the connection that the girl maintains with the divinity, the connection allowed precisely by the "foreign" space, as in her native country any form of faith was forbidden by the communist rigors: "THE DICTATOR HAS FORBIDDEN GOD. / But abroad we are allowed to be believers, although there is almost no Orthodox church. Every night I say the prayer I learned from my mother. At home, children are not allowed to pray or to draw God"³².

Even if the narrative voice can be difficult (or even impossible) to identify as belonging to a (certain) space because "the circus is always abroad", never "at home", what she as a feminine voice reveals as affective identity is designated by the culinary sphere. Traditional Romanian dishes, specific tastes or smells, all ensure, along with the ever-moving caravan, a much-coveted feeling of stability,

²⁹ Aglaja Veteranyi, *De ce fierbe copilul în mămăligă*, p. 9.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 32.

safety and belonging: “Mother’s ripe eggplants smell like home everywhere, no matter what country we are in”; “I know my country by smell. It smells like mom’s food”³³.

Thus, the migratory space, geographically indeterminate and generically called “abroad”, is nevertheless perceived as a space of abundance. The allusion is, of course, to the restrictions imposed in the country under communism, when families often faced significant shortages of basic food. The idea is reinforced by the description of certain actions that demonstrate the incredibly difficult life that the family had to face in order to survive: “here we live like rich people; after the meal we can throw the bones out of the soup without feeling remorse, while at home we had to keep them for the next soup”³⁴. Because of the lack of permanent sources of food, the family is forced to reuse certain products to ensure an additional meal that does not require many other ingredients. The affectivity manifested at the olfactory level is therefore representative in the case of Aglaja Veteranyi’s writings.

In this way we could say that an identity by extension of the native country, of the native territory is achieved through the culinary and olfactory elements that define it. At the same time, the connection with the maternal entity (“my mother’s food”!) and, implicitly, with the space of her origin is an intrinsic one. The narrator’s psychological comfort is ensured not by the simple preparation of some specifically Romanian dishes, but by the action and identity imprint of the mother in perfecting the dishes. In the aforementioned interview given to Rodica Binder, the author declares that food has constantly represented an identity and psychological boundary to which the family referred at significant moments:

My mother always prepared food for me, Romanian food, and I thought that this is Romania, this is home, this is love; my mother shows me her love through food; *sarmale*, polenta... it’s something beautiful, isn’t it? But something that has a certain power over me. When she can’t speak, when she cries, my mother goes to the kitchen and cooks. My mother’s sister died half a year ago. My mother took her food to the hospital; Aunt Reta was dying and we were all... eating. And for me, all things are one: food, crying, joy, that’s how it’s been in my family, that’s how I’ve always felt³⁵.

Thus, the figure of the mother plays an overwhelming role throughout the entire traumatic existence of the daughter. Often characterized by her actions as a twisted mother, the decisions made by the maternal figure and often her neglect, including the girls’ abandonment in an orphanage, deeply affect the narrative self. The entire narrative imaginary is circumscribed to her affectively potentiated corporeality. The phantasmagorical projections of the fatal end of the mother’s fall

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

³⁵ Rodica Binder, “Aglaja Veteranyi – Salt mortal”, p. 21.

are also depicted through elements of an affected corporeality: “I see her setting fire to her hair with burning torches, the way she falls to the ground laughing. And when I lean towards her, her face decomposes and turns into ashes”³⁶. These elements imaginarily depict the subjective voice of the girl. The female character feels the possible loss of her mother deeply and traumatically because there is an umbilical connection between the two: “Before I was born, I was an acrobat on a wire for eight months – I was standing on my head. I was in my mother’s belly, she was doing splits on the high wire and I was looking down or standing on that wire. Once she could no longer get up from the rope and I was ready to fall out”³⁷. The period of gestation is felt as an identity boundary between the narrative self and the maternal one, and the fear of falling off the wire – enhanced by the role of an already established destiny – is present even at the fetus stage.

There are aspects of the circus life that render spatiality unfamiliar. In verse prose, the narrative voice records: “But also the foreigners mean us harm. / I am not allowed to leave the living car alone. / I’m not allowed to play with the other children. / Mother doesn’t trust anyone. / I have to learn this too”³⁸. Thus, the “foreign space” that the circus designates is also marked by solitude, a state that comes mainly from mistrust towards the other – the foreigner who could at any time become a potential danger by denouncing the family to the communist security services (“If they found out who we are, we will be kidnapped and sent back, my parents and aunt will be killed, my sister and I will starve and everyone will laugh at us. When they fled Romania, my parents were sentenced to death”³⁹).

In addition to leaving the country, which the girl’s mother and her husband do to escape the prohibitions of the communist regime, their life at the circus involves a constant migration, a perpetual exchange of space and, implicitly, a deterritorialization imposed at regular intervals. For the narrator self, the lack of stability imposed by this nomadic life creates strong emotional effects: “The closing of the tent is everywhere the same, like a great funeral, always at night, after the last performance in a city. After the circus fence has been removed, strangers sometimes come to our living quarters and stick their faces to the window. I feel like a fish at the market”⁴⁰. Leaving a space is equivalent, in the narrator’s view, to leaving vitality itself behind. Migration is thus associated with a death ritual dominated by a perpetual sadness.

Also worth noting is the symbolic element used in delimiting the space circumscribed by the circus performance from the rest of the territory, namely the “fence”. Its setting up creates a small identity space, while its removal analogously

³⁶ Aglaja Veteranyi, *De ce fierbe copilul în mămăligă*, p. 26.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

restores the nomadic character of the protagonists. The raising of the fence also symbolizes, at the level of the collective subconscious, a removal of the limits of the personal space attributed to the artists. The “strangers”, led by a curiosity bordering impertinence, “stick their faces” to the window of the wagon both out of a desire to know the intimate space of those admired on stage, and as a sign of the non-recognition or even the annulment of their personal identity.

The nomadic experience of life at the circus ends, however, with the act of a father with failed directorial ambitions. He “steals the money from the circus cashier”, something that triggers, once again, the family’s imperative need to emigrate to another country. The decline of the family begins with this last escape. Not having a stable home anymore, abandoned by the paternal figure together with his biological daughter, Aglaja and her mother prolong their nomadic life by living in hotel rooms where they try to keep fragments of the Romanian national-identity imagery. For instance, the mother kills and skins chickens in the bathrooms of hotel rooms as a basic means of subsistence (“WHEN THEY ARE CUT, CHICKENS SHOUT IN AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE! WE CAN UNDERSTAND THEM EVERYWHERE”⁴¹). With these events dominated by instability, the image of the symbolic family is reconstructed from a matriarchal perspective. Unable to continue her acrobatics because of repeated accidents, the mother becomes the promoter of the girl’s variety show career. The narrator’s inner trauma is deepened with the failure of her career at the cabaret as she finally turns to her aunt, often identified as a second maternal entity: “When she came back, I called my mother AUNTIE, and my aunt MOM”⁴².

The events, rendered in a manner that often defies logical and chronological exposition by recollection and description of moments that occur in the subjective involuntary memory, are presented retrospectively in the form of different narrative flashbacks. Aglaja Veteranyi does not write the epic text by chaining and alternation, but with the help of short, contrapuntal sentences, each sentence starting at the beginning of the line, leaving the impression of the organization of the text into verses and stanzas. To these are added the multiple sentences rendered in capital letters. Short sentences, again succinct, but which capture in the concreteness of just a few words ideas of a marked tenseness.

Since her second novel, *The Shelf of Last Breaths*, is built like the first one, the works of Aglaja Veteranyi both illustrate the concept of picto-novels, creations in which, beyond the direct textual message, the impact is the indirect one, at the subliminal level of the organization and writing of the text. Literary critics

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 131.

associate these creative strategies with literary surrealist techniques, many of them seen as reinterpretations of pointillism⁴³.

In this respect, the author's second novel, *The Shelf of Last Breaths*, appears as a continuation of the first one – not only from the point of view of the continuation of the traumatic migratory process of the teenage girl Aglaja, but also from the point of view of the selected narrative form and method. Thus, the autofictional transposition of the author's destiny is offered not only a narrative extension, but also certain details that bring depth to the existence of the female alter ego character. In this second novel, a significant role is played by the theme of death, especially observed in the stages of carnal disintegration and the aunt's death. However, the theme is already announced in the motto ("We are longer dead than alive, therefore in death we need much more luck"⁴⁴), a line belonging to the aunt's character. Their entire destiny is thus placed on the verge of chance.

Moreover, the death of her aunt becomes a strong intertext found even at the level of the title. The noun "shelf" is, of course, a symbolic term with a bookish connotation. Generally meant as a material element to support and store books, the shelf designates an entire space of written worlds that wish to be discovered. Such a written universe, with ambitions of (self) revelation to the reading public, is also the inner world of the author. However, attached to the "shelf" is a specific attributive construction – "of the last breaths". Are these the aunt's "last breaths" constantly attended to by the suffering relatives around her deathbed? Or the "last breaths" of the author herself who, after writing the novel, commits suicide, the novel remaining a legacy work? The interpretations can, of course, be multiple.

However, on associating the title of the novel with the fictional universe it creates, the last breaths may be all the fictional instances whose existence loses its consistency with the passing of aunt Reta into non-existence – "the last gasps", we might say, of vital energy of the still-living entities. In addition, the action begins with an instructive description of how to prepare the funeral cake, a symbolic dish by means of which a direct reference to the national identity specific to the Romanian space can be perceived, namely the traditional custom of commemoration by preparing and offering "*coliva*" in memory of the deceased: "The wheat boils in the tenth water, he said. / Nine heavens? / Yes, for every sky, a cleansing [...] Vanilla. / Rum. / Almond extract. / Sugar. / Salt. / Grated lemon peel. / Raisins"⁴⁵.

With the young girl's affective oscillation between the two female entities both acquiring maternal values – the mother and the aunt – considerations regarding the identity crisis of the character are expounded on in the novel, an

⁴³See Ștefan Fircă, "Adapting In-Betweenness".

⁴⁴ Aglaja Veteranyi, *Raftul cu ultimele suflări*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

aspect also noticed by Werner Löcher-Lawrence and Jens Nielsen in their foreword to the book (“Identity crisis is doubly marked: by the mother’s lack of love and by exile”⁴⁶). Suffering her own emotional crises marked by several significant episodes of alcoholism, the mother amplifies the traumatic experiences of her daughter who, subconsciously, emotionally distances herself from her, favoring instead the aunt’s protective persona: “If I love my aunt more than my mother, my mother’s beautiful eyes will quench me. If I love my aunt more than my mother, my mother will leave my aunt in Paris. If I love my aunt more than my mother, I feel sorry for my mother”⁴⁷. The narrative voice does not decide on a definitive break with the mother figure, not because of the depth of their mother-daughter love, but out of regret for the possible consequences of the mother’s emotional abandonment. Possible explanations could be found through psychoanalytical interpretations, but *The Shelf of the Last Breaths*, like the author’s first novel, mainly captures traumatic episodes of migration and constant nomadism amplified by the lack of devotion and love displayed by the mother, the only remaining parental figure.

The migrant status perceived by the female narrator is presented in the form of daily reflections, notations and observations of cruel and eccentric lucidity, specific to the author’s literary style. For example, the phenomenon of migration manifests itself as an identity at the level of verbal language. The assimilation of the languages specific to the countries where the family travels is not perceived at a cognitive level, but at a bodily, biological level (“I am growing into foreign languages, first the swear words, then the declarations of love”⁴⁸). In this metalinguistic evolution, the first assimilated elements are, of course, the notions specific to the vulgar colloquial language, after which affection manifests itself at vocabulary level. Besides that, the narrative subjectivity records, on several occasions, the difficulty and cultural shock represented by the differences between the two national languages and, at the same time, the need to assimilate them for the best possible social integration: “The other children are not afraid, they speak the same language. We also speak their language, but they don’t speak ours. [...] My sister and I speak to each other in our language”⁴⁹.

The familiarity between the two sisters is manifested at the level of their national identity by their speaking the same language. The narrator’s consternation arises from the fact that the effort to learn new foreign languages is necessary only in their case, while the process is not reciprocal: those of other nationalities do not have to learn the girls’ mother tongue. “IN EACH LANGUAGE THE SAME

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem* p. 62.

⁴⁹ Aglaja Veteranyi, *De ce fierbe copilul în mămăligă*, p. 86.

THING IS CALLED DIFFERENTLY”⁵⁰, states the subjective narrative voice, venting her frustration with the need to learn different foreign languages.

Moreover, the culture clash also comes from the apparently general perception of the Western society, according to which in the case of a migrant it was necessary to find out if their emotions are manifested transnationally, so that they could comfortably identify psychologically with the adoption space. Thus, the leitmotiv question, repeatedly addressed to the narrative voice (“Do you like it here?”) gives rise to real confrontations with her inner self:

Do you like it here? In all countries everyone wants to know the same thing. Only in Romania no one asks you about it, says my aunt. [...] Do you like it here? We always had to answer YES to this question there. Yes, it was very bad in Romania. Yes, it’s very nice here. [...] Being an emigrant and returning – even if only temporarily – to the country you left is an absolute, internal and unshakable contradiction. The one must exclude the other⁵¹.

In the collective view, the emotional attachment to the country you migrate to must be manifested singularly. As far as the abandoned native country is concerned, on the contrary, the attitude imposed is one of rejection. “The one must exclude the other”, the narrative voice records, projecting the regime of affective exclusivity that Western societies adopt regarding the feelings nurtured by migrant subjects.

Likewise, the identity of the migrant narrator self acquires multinational valences that are psychosomatically integrated. Throughout the entire process of self-formation, the homodiegetic narrative voice experiences not only alienation from the native territory, but also disintegration and, along with it, a deconstruction at the bodily level that marks the itineraries of their artistic journeys and expeditions:

I was conceived in Krakow, says my mother. Conceived in Krakow and born in Bucharest. I’m a Wallachian. What is a Wallachian? My nanny’s hands came from Germany. My appendix remained in Czechoslovakia, in a military hospital. [...] My tonsils remained in Madrid⁵².

The transnational character that the destiny of the narrative voice acquires after leaving the country, and her uprooting, are apparently anticipated and even imposed from birth. Conceived in Krakow, the narrator is taken care of by a German nanny while her corporeal transnationality is marked at a visceral level, as the removal of her appendix is performed in Czechoslovakia and the operation to extract her tonsils is performed in Spain. Deterritorialization, along with bodily decomposition, are anticipated biologically also by the maternal corporeality,

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

⁵¹ Aglaja Veteranyi, *Raftul cu ultimele suflări*, pp. 62-65.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 67.

albeit to a lesser extent. Only her mother's "bile", as a visceral symbol, remains in Africa: "My mother's bile remained in Africa, in a hospital run by nuns"⁵³. Every location of these medical acts becomes potentiated symbolically. Through "adoption organs", spatiality acquires a metaphorical character while at the same time becoming a link between territorialization and corporeal geography. Migration is, therefore, a complex process of (re)forming a corporal geography identity framed by the spatial indeterminacy of the territory of adoption.

In the case of the aunt, the narrating character does not recall such disembodiment. On the contrary, as far as she is concerned, she recalls a kind of affective augmentation manifested at a physical level: "Living for a long time gave my aunt a long heart. She grew up in the direction of her parents' grave"⁵⁴. The identity link with the native land is perceived in the case of the aunt not only by the "growing of the heart", but by its specific direction towards the commemoration of the deceased parents. The symbol of the aunt's parents' tomb remains an identity marker. Among the three female instances, the aunt is the one who eventually manages to visit the country. "Eight years younger than in reality, she traveled back to Moldova, to her relatives"⁵⁵, records the narrative voice. Following the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the family consider returning to the country. During the visit to her relatives, "a farewell after twenty-five years", the aunt takes care of the administrative aspects of the family, but the visit also represents a good opportunity to get to know the new members whom she did not have the opportunity to meet before that moment: "She bought cemetery plots, baptized children, bought an apartment, a second one for her uncle and a third one for her refrigerators. She kept frozen lamb and pork. All the newborns were named after her. Or after me. Even chickens or rabbits bore my name"⁵⁶.

With a special literary style, Aglaja Veteranyi builds, under the "umbrella" of autofiction, the literary journey of a character for whom the phenomenon of migration is constant and unequivocal. The author memorializes traumatic events from her own autobiography in a fictional manner marked by originality and narrative creativity. The perpetual migratory transmutations generate deep suffering and trauma for the little girl who lacks identification with herself and with the geographical spatiality in which she is forced to integrate following the family's exile. The two literary works of the Romanian-origin author are ascribable, thereby, to the category of *trauma autofiction*. The lack of stability, not only geographical, but also affective, occurs at the identity level in the case of the female narrative voice, in the form of a void in (re)knowing one's self. For the child traumatized by the constant fear of losing her mother, the feelings of

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

protection and emotional safety come from an entire matriarchal universe, which in turn falls apart with the passing of the aunt. To conclude, Aglaja Veteranyi's autofiction is built by means of a particular form of narrative acuity which captures, subliminally, the trauma of an existence marked by forced exile. The impossibility of a definitive return to the country of birth, especially due to communist prohibitions, accentuates the state of "non-identity" of the fictional figures, so that we deal with multiple ontological voids projected into the autofiction of identity trauma.

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AGLAJA VETERANYI – THE AUTOFICTION OF A NOMADIC LIVING (Abstract)

In the field of life-writing, autofiction represents a literary category placed at the border between fiction and autobiography. Often perceived as similar to fictional (auto)biography, autofiction represents a fictional writing based on the experience of the self. Such creative strategies have been adopted by the Swiss female writer of Romanian origin, Aglaja Veteranyi. Within her two novels, *Why the Child is Cooking in the Polenta* and *The Shelf with the Last Breaths*, the author creates a surreal narrative fiction based on her traumatic childhood experiences. The multiple traumas that the child faces are mainly caused by the migratory experience that the family has to deal with. Because of the oppressive communist regime in the country at that time, Aglaja's mother decides to leave the country with her daughter and her sister working at an international circus. Through the lens of affects and feelings coming not only from customs, food, but also family traditions constantly associated with those from the native country, the main character subjectively exposes her migratory living. Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyse Aglaja Veteranyi's autofictional work, in order to observe the way in which migration together with the never-ending pressure of the communist regime that does not allow the family to turn back into the country become a severe traumatic experience for the subjective female narrative voice. Originating from a Balkan territory, Aglaja Veteranyi becomes a transnational writer that presents through different fictional strategies the traumatic autobiographical experience of migration.

Keywords: autofiction, migration, trauma, affect, transnational writer.

AGLAJA VETERANYI – AUTOFICTIUNEA UNEI EXISTENȚE NOMADE (Rezumat)

În cadrul scrierilor memorialistice (cunoscute sub denumirea de life-writing), autoficțiunea reprezintă o categorie literară plasată la granița dintre ficțiune și autobiografie. Percepută deseori drept ficțiune autobiografică, autoficțiunea reprezintă o scriere ficțională bazată pe experiența sinelui. O asemenea strategie narativă este preluată și de către scriitoarea elvețiană de origine română, Aglaja Veteranyi. În cadrul celor două romane ale sale, *De ce fierbe copilul în mămăligă* și *Raftul cu ultimele suflări*, autoarea creează o ficțiune narativă suprarealistă bazată pe evenimentele propriei copilării traumatice. Multiplele traume ale vocii narative sunt în general provocate de experiența migratoare pe care o trăiește familia sa. Din cauza opresiunii comuniste din acei ani, mama Aglajei hotărăște să părăsească țara alături de aceasta și de sora ei, fiind acrobată în cadrul unui circ internațional. Prin intermediul afectelor și al sentimentelor provocate nu doar de obiceiuri, mâncare, ci și de tradițiile propriei familii, constant asociate celor din timpul șederii în țara nativă, personajul narator își expune subiectiv experiența migratoare. Astfel, cercetarea își propune o analiză a operei autoficționale a Aglajei Veteranyi, cu scopul de a investiga modul în care migrația și presiunea constantă din partea regimului comunist, care nu permitea familiei întoarcerea în țară, devin o traumă profundă pentru vocea narativă feminină. Originară dintr-un teritoriu balcanic, Aglaja Veteranyi devine astfel un scriitor transnațional care își prezintă, prin diverse strategii ficționale, trauma experienței autobiografice din timpul migrației.

Cuvinte-cheie: autoficțiune, migrație, traumă, affect, scriitoare transnațională.

WRITING THE LIFE OF SERVANTS IN EARLY ROMANIAN FEMINIST NOVELS

Carolyn Gold Heilbrun argues in her 1979 *Reinventing Womanhood* that “women’s ‘search for identity has been even less successful within the world of fiction than outside it’”³. Here, she refers, of course, to the fact that many literary characters portraying women are defined by their relation to men. Women’s emancipation had been a long and arduous process, with the agency of self-representation most frequently at the heart of the struggle. This leads us to the most significant issue in modern fiction, especially in semiperipheral cultures, where women had no voice of their own until the late nineteenth century. Due to patriarchal policies in education and literacy, whereby women were either denied the right to formal education or trained in *beaux-arts* only to ensure they become suitable companions for men⁴, women’s autobiographical writings are



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² Acest articol a fost publicat cu sprijinul Ministerului Cercetării, Inovării și Digitalizării din România, prin proiectul CNCS-UEFSCDI, numărul PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-2690, finanțat în competiția PNCDI-III.

³ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood*, New York, Norton, 1979, p. 72.

⁴ And most often they are represented as such in novels as well. See how, for example, novelists describe women playing the piano during the period: “The piano illustrates that being a nobleman or a bourgeois is not that easy. In his 1880 *Brazi și purtegiu* [*Fir Trees and Putrefaction*], N.D. Xenopol likewise illustrates the difficulty of playing the piano: ‘apparently you didn’t have enough of reading and playing the piano...’; ‘she was either very sickly or she would not stand up from the piano or the writing table for hours’. In *Domnișoara Ursuza* [*The Morose Young Lady*] (1881) by Iulia Hasdeu, there is even a chapter titled ‘Urâsc pianul!’ [‘I hate the piano!’] where young Elisa’s piano teacher tells her mother that the girl does not seem to like playing the piano and that it would perhaps be better for her to quit, to which the mother replies that ‘a young lady, not playing the piano?! That is preposterous, it is absurd ...’. The girl who hates the piano is, in the narrator’s own words, ‘a naughty, moody, and mischievous child’. Apart from being the hallmark of dedicated work, the piano is, by the same token, a sign of intelligence. In *Strada Carmen Silva* [*The Carmen Silva Street*], Alexi Teochar’s 1893 novel, when asked ‘so are you saying she’s a tad boncheaded’, Traian’s friend replies with ‘Oh, God, no, quite the contrary! She speaks French, German, Greek, she can play the piano, she sings with her voice’” – see Ștefan Baghiu, Cosmin Borza, “The Sickie and the Piano. A Distant Reading of Work in the Nineteenth Century Romanian Novel”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 6, 2020, 2, pp. 107-128.

conspicuously absent. Not only are autobiographical works missing from modern literary cultures, but Daiana Gârdan has also shown through quantitative methods that novels written by women writers are few and far between, even during the first half of the twentieth century⁵.

However, a similar phenomenon affected more experienced or larger cultures as well. In the Kingdom of Poland, Narcyza Żmichowska's 1864 *Poganka*, one of the earliest examples of Polish women's fiction written in the first person, features a male protagonist. As noted by Grażyna Borkowska in her 2001 *Alienated Women: A Study on Polish Women's Fiction*, Żmichowska wrote "in an environment in which women's identity was hidden even from themselves, in which women were forced to adapt themselves to traditional female roles"⁶. Yet the same Żmichowska wrote *Biała róża* [*White Rose*], published three years earlier in 1861, with a clear understanding of the importance of a subjective women's voice. Although a sentimental and sensationalist novel heavily influenced by romantic practices – thus pushing the subject of women's emancipation into the realm of aristocratic practices –, *Biała róża* set a precedent for several first-person narratives by Polish women writers, such as Eliza Orzeszkowa's 1884 *Pamiętnik Wacławy* [*The Diary of Wacławy*].

What is interesting, however, is that, in Polish and Romanian cultures alike, the scarcity of women's first-person works encouraged the release of several epistolary novels during the second half of the nineteenth century, with the amendment that Romanian literature experienced a notable delay in the emergence of women writers due to its limited literary practice.

The defining case for modern Romanian literature in this respect is Alba Monte's 1880 *O soartă stranie* [*A Strange Fate*], originally published in French, but the novels of Constanța Dunca-Schiau can also be viewed as a significant precursor for women's writing in point of narratorial agency. Although described by Bianca Burța-Cernat as "(rightfully) ignored as a poet, prose writer, or playwright"⁷, there is nothing "right" in Dunca-Schiau's critical reception. Women's writing in nineteenth-century Romania is not only scarce but also overlooked⁸, not just by foreign scholars, which is structurally understandable in a

⁵ See Daiana Gârdan, "The Great Female Unread: Romanian Women Novelists in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: A Quantitative Approach", *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 2018, 1, pp. 109-1924.

⁶ Grażyna Borkowska, *Alienated Women: A Study on Polish Women's Fiction*, Budapest, CEU Press, 2001, p. 25.

⁷ Bianca Burța-Cernat, *Fotografie de grup cu scriitoare uitate* [*Group Photograph with Forgotten Women Writers*], București, Cartea Românească, 2011, p. 16. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the authors of this paper.

⁸ The reasons for this remain the same as two decades ago, as described by Andrea Peto in "Writing Women's History in Eastern Europe: Toward a 'Terra Cognita'?", *Journal of Women's History*, 16, 2004, 4, pp. 173-181.

cynical way, since places such as Romania tend to receive less recognition in any global literary framework or transnational methodology, but also by local research. Even when not ignored, women's writing of the early modern period – in Romania, it is considered to have begun close to the second half of the nineteenth century – is often mistreated or dismissed, even by scholars in women's writing studies, and in this article, we will explore some interesting cases.

As is evident from Burța-Cernat's aesthetic judgment, the disdain for Dunca-Schiau's work was influenced by the notion that Dunca-Schiau's literature was not "worthy" of attention due to its perceived naive narratives. However, it is important to recognize that there is nothing "rightful" about "ignoring" women's writing, and Dunca-Schiau holds a fundamental place in this respect, if only for offering the first novel written in the first person with a female protagonist in Romanian culture. Her 1863–1864 work, *Elena Mănescu. Romans național* [*Elena Mănescu: National Novel*], is an epistolary novel in which both the singer Elena Mănescu and the peasant character Floarea Carpaților take center stage. Similarly, in her 1868 *Sub vălul Bucureștilor: Fiica adoptată* [*Under the Veil of Bucharest: The Adopted Daughter*], Dunca-Schiau introduces the diary of a young Eliza, a girl who falls in love with young Alexandru after being adopted. While these narratives may not be rooted in the author's autobiography, they represent occasions in which Romanian women writers choose to "let women speak".

For this reason alone, it is disconcerting how contemporary Romanian women scholars dismiss key moments in the formation of women's writing in the local landscape using derogatory terms:

The author employs the artifice of the epistolary novel (as in *Elena Mănescu*) or that of journal fragments introduced into the narrative (as in *Sub vălul Bucureștilor*). Of course, these novels have a documentary value alone; what draws attention to the author – aside from her prolificacy and the ease of stringing together, at a certain pace of alertness, clichés from popular literature – is the attempt to densify a schematic and predictable narrative by creating milieus, with the model likely being that of Bolintineanu in his (also naive) novels *Manoil* (1855) and *Elena* (1862)⁹.

Burța-Cernat goes on to label the literature of feminist militant writer Maria Flechtenmacher as "sub-mediocre" and asserts that the literary endeavors of Alba Monte, Emilia Carlen, Maria Eschenazi, Eugenia Ianculescu de Reus, and even Sofia Nădejde are unworthy of critical attention.

Therefore, it is fair to say that the most oft-cited study of women's writing in contemporary Romanian literary studies actively overlooks and dismisses *all*

⁹ Bianca Burța-Cernat, *Fotografie de grup cu scriitoare uitate*, p. 17.

nineteenth and early twentieth-century women's writing¹⁰. Yet commendable efforts have been made to explore their works. For instance, Ioana Moroșan has recently studied the conditions influencing women's writing in modern Romania, and her research provides not only a framework for interpreting their unbalanced treatment but also an explanation for the typical representation of women writers in Romania:

[T]he occupation of writing remains tributary to the acceptance of the father's heritage and his literary capital. In this way, they [women] reproduce the cultural and social capital gained by the writer/intellectual – fathers or male relatives – without homologating their dominant position due to restrictions imposed by their gender identity. So, during the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, many important women from the Romanian literary field accede to the literary (liberal) professions through the status of their fathers', relatives', or husbands' intellectual affiliation, mobilising either paternal inherited capital or their relational capital. Thus, all those female authors and literary women such as Ermonia Asachi, Martha Bibesco, Anna de Noailles, Adela Xenopol, Iulia Hasdeu, Elena Văcărescu [...], or Sofia Nădejde, Matilda Poni, Natalia Negru, Sanda Movilă, Agatha Grigorescu or Bebs Delavrancea who contributed to the Romanian literary patrimonial heritage, were mostly introduced in the literary field due to the inherited educational and cultural capital, as well as [their] access had become realistic and favourable because of their bourgeois and upper-middle class origin. Writing is either an act of acceptance of the father's heritage, or it is regulated by the male relatives, mainly partners, and, as such, the access to writing and women's writing tradition remains mainly a bourgeois and urban calling¹¹.

There are two primary reasons why we consider our approach significant. Firstly, it provides an analysis of two novels that are virtually unknown in literary scholarship outside Romania. Secondly, it delves into the representation of women servants in novels authored by women through the lenses of life writing and intersectionality, where gender intersects with class in various *ideologemes*.

In this context, we understand this concept as defined by Fredric Jameson, namely “the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes”¹². We selected two examples that are both

¹⁰ See the weak institutionalization of gender studies in Romania in Ionela Vlase and Andrei Terian, “The Production of Gender-specific Scholarly Literature in Romania: The Weak Institutionalisation of Gender Studies in Higher Education”, *Studies in Higher Education*, 48, 2023, 12, pp. 1-16.

¹¹ Ioana Moroșan, “Romanian Women Writers and the Literary Profession during the First Half of the 20th Century: Exclusion, Feminisation and Professionalisation of Writing”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 8, 2022, 1, p. 108. See also Imre József Balázs, “Women Writers and the Possibility of a Women's Literary Tradition in Transylvanian Hungarian Literature”, *Hungarian Studies*, 36, 2023, 1–2, pp. 66-73.

¹² Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 115. See a more detailed explanation in William Marling, “The Formal Ideologeme”, *Semiotica*, 98, 1994, 3–4, pp. 277-300. More recently, Costi Rogozanu has written a doctoral dissertation using this concept as

ideologically intriguing and thematically fascinating due to their potential for exploration in life writing: Sofia Nădejde's 1903 sentimental novel *Patimi* [*Passions*], often described as "the first feminist Romanian novel", and Elena Bacaloglu's 1906 *În luptă* [*In combat*] and its 1908 sequel, *Două forțe* [*Two Forces*], a romance novel with autobiographical undertones which evokes Bacaloglu's marriage to the Romanian author and literary critic Ovid Densușianu¹³. Both Nădejde and Bacaloglu are representatives of early modern Romanian fiction, even though they were writing as late as the beginning of the twentieth century.

Nădejde, a socialist militant in the 1880s and 1890s and a collaborator of socialist and populist magazines such as *Contemporanul* and *Era nouă*, turned liberal after 1899. In 1903, she took the side of small rural boyars in their struggle with urban mores¹⁴. She translated numerous novels, including works by women writers such as Matilde Serao¹⁵, and wrote several essays and novels that are primarily important as *social documents* on the situation of women in the late nineteenth century, covering topics such as abortion, medicine, rural areas, family formation and divorce, civil and economic rights of women, etc. Conversely, Bacaloglu, a prominent intellectual of the *belle époque*, had collaborated with

a main tool for the analysis of Romanian fiction. Some of his works in this respect can be consulted in English. See Costi Rogozanu, "The Socialist Realist Structure of Marin Preda's *Moromeții*", *Transilvania*, 2022, 5, pp. 76-80; Costi Rogozanu, "Reverse Socialist Realism: Three Recipes for Dissidence in Communist Regimes – Petru Dumitriu, Solzhenitsyn, Czesław Miłosz", in Ștefan Baghiu, Ovio Olaru, Andrei Terian (eds.), *Beyond the Iron Curtain: Revisiting the Literary System of Communist Romania*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2021, pp. 251-273.

¹³ See the most recent work in genre theory by Andrei Terian et al., "Genurile romanului românesc (1900–1932). O analiză cantitativă" ["The Genres of the Romanian Novel (1900–1932): A Quantitative Analysis"], *Transilvania*, 2020, 10, pp. 53-64; Cosmin Borza, Alex Goldiș, Adrian Tudurachi, "Subgenurile romanului Românesc. Laboratorul unei tipologii" ["The Subgenres of the Romanian Novel: The Laboratory of a Typology"], *Dacoromania literaria*, 2020, 7, pp. 205-220.

¹⁴ As Ștefan Baghiu describes the situation in his preface to the 2021 second edition of the novel, "[t]he 'social' story written by the socialist author from Iași revolves around the drama of the landowner Mustea, deceived, robbed, and abandoned by his wife, and the failed relationship of the cunning clerk Iliescu and Matilda. It is quite challenging to understand why one of the central figures of socialism at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century would choose to 'take the side', through a novel, of the old boyar classes and portray the Flaubertian 'good husband' and 'adulterous and cunning wife'. Because, from beginning to end, the only moral of the story seems to be that the persistence of the old order is more moral than the pursuit of gain by the new bureaucratic and petty-bourgeois classes. [...] Although often described as the 'first feminist novel', *Patimi* seems more like the 'last novel' about rural aristocracy" – see Ștefan Baghiu, "Patimile și banii" ["Passions and Money"], in Sofia Nădejde, *Patimi* [*Passions*], 2nd ed., București, Publisol, 2021, p. 21.

¹⁵ See Ștefan Baghiu, "Romanierele: traducerile de romane scrise de femei în cultura română (1841–1918)" ["Women Novelists: The Translations of Novels Written by Women in the Romanian Culture (1841–1918)"], *Transilvania*, 2021, 6, pp. 11-21.

Universul before turning to fascism in Italy during Mussolini's ascent to power and returning to Romania to create the first fascist organizations.

Intriguingly, both novels can be interpreted as bearing (auto)biographical motifs¹⁶. Sofia Nădejde had been accused by Romanian authors like Duiliu Zamfirescu of being a hypocrite leftist – while espousing a progressive discourse on class struggle, she and her husband allegedly mistreated their servants. Thus, her novel *Patimi* can be seen as a response to this attack and an attempt on Nădejde's part to give voice to servants in both rural and urban areas and counter their stereotypical representations up to that date. Similarly, Bacaloglu's marriages with both Radu D. Rosetti and Ovid Densusianu became subjects of gossip in the Romanian literary circles of the early twentieth century, and according to Const. Mille in his 1906 review of her *În luptă*, Bacaloglu's work seeks to *clarify* the story through a novel on romantic triangles. Consequently, both works must be read in connection with the authors' biographies to be understood as social documents.

Described by male authors as embodying a significant degree of modernity, women, especially in semiperipheral and peripheral cultures, lacked the means of self-representation. For this reason, studies in life writing and autobiography have seldom been afforded the opportunity to explore modern works by Romanian women writers. However, international scholarship has revealed a shift in the intersectional representation of gender and class, coinciding with the rise of modernism. For instance, Mary Wilson's 2013 *The Labors of Modernism: Domesticity, Servants, and Authorship in Modernist Fiction* correlates the emergence of the modern novel, using Virginia Woolf's argument in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown", to the development of a distinct approach to representing servants. In Wilson's words,

the modern novel, she [Virginia Woolf] indicates, now has to take into account a new domestic reality, in which servants are no longer willing to remain simply background creatures. While recent critics have carefully studied the gender, racial, ethnic, and imperial coordinates of modernism, fewer have discussed class, and almost none has considered the close link between narrative structure and servants in modernist fiction¹⁷.

In the Romanian novels released before 1918, female servants typically emerge as quiet figures. Although fundamental in works such as Nicolae Filimon's 1863 *Ciocoi vechi și noi* [*Upstarts Old and New*], where they operate as plotters

¹⁶ The novels have been put forward for open access reading by *The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: 1900–1932*, Sibiu, Complexul Național Muzeal ASTRA, 2020, <https://revistatran-silvania.ro/mdrr1900-1932>. Accessed November 22, 2023.

¹⁷ Mary Wilson, *The Labors of Modernism Domesticity, Servants, and Authorship in Modernist Fiction*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013, p. 1.

and spies, they are rarely given any narratorial attention in most other prose works of the period. Their duties, such as receiving guests and handling correspondence, along with their socio-economic predicament – marked by vulnerability to manipulation, especially due to their dependence on their employers, usually upper-class women – carry considerable narrative weight, which the authors leverage to introduce new characters into the storyline and propel the plot into intriguing twists. A devout companion such as in N. Petrașcu's 1905 *Marin Gelea* – “the servant [...] believed her mistress to be the most perfect being in the world, the most beautiful, [and] the kindest”¹⁸ –, a threat to their mistresses' face or, to the contrary, an accessory to their questionable actions – the spying servants of Dorina's mother-in-law in N. Rădulescu-Niger's 1908 *Magistrații noștri* [*Our Magistrates*] and Viorica's maid in V. Pop's 1910 *Cuza Vodă* [*Prince Cuza*] –, such characters, as women and members of the lower class, have a double subordinate role, which makes them more susceptible to abuse and less likely to achieve emancipation.

There are, however, instances where female servants have a speaking part, and in some cases, they even stand up against their mistresses' abuse. A tell-tale example in this regard is Ivanca, a fifty-year-old servant to four unmarried sisters in a similar age range, who takes a liking to Casandra, the protagonist of V. Demetrius' 1913 *Tinerețea Casandrei* [*Casandra's Youth*], a novel in which the author explores the struggles of a working woman, systematically betrayed by the men in her life and left to fend for herself. Depicted as entertaining “the crazed conviction that she would marry”¹⁹ before her mistresses, despite her status and “hundreds of wrinkles”²⁰, Ivanca becomes an object of fascination for Casandra, no less for her open defiance toward her mistresses, who ridiculed her appearance and, at times, even physically abused her for her unsatisfactory services – services for which she was not paid. Ivanca's narrative appears intentionally crafted to create a connection between Casandra and the schoolteacher Margareta, the divorced sister of Ivanca's employers, who, like the protagonist, is a single mother who suffers at the hand of her new partner, despite her more privileged background and formal education. However, the stories of the two women say something about the condition of the female servant, too; in a universe populated by women, Ivanca embodies what Casandra and Margareta, the two virtuous and eligible women, lack: the ability to express themselves openly.

So, our question was: how do the first feminist Romanian novels written by women represent domestic workers, and especially women servants?

¹⁸ N. Petrașcu, *Marin Gelea*, București, Imprimeria Albert Baer, 1905, p. 153.

¹⁹ V. Demetrius, *Tinerețea Casandrei* [*Casandra's Youth*], București, Leon Alcalay, 1913, p. 66.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

Sofia Nădejde's Conservative Feminist Fiction: The Drunk Casandra and the Flirty Rosa

When writing her novels in the early twentieth century, self-proclaimed socialist advocate Sofia Nădejde had already distanced herself from her socialist origins. In the 1870s, she achieved the remarkable feat of becoming the first woman to obtain a high school diploma and marry without a priest, sparking a significant scandal in Iași. Nădejde played a pivotal role in establishing the first feminist circles, leading discussions at workers' clubs, and contributing extensively to women's emancipation discourse in various magazines, predominantly socialist ones. In 1879, Sofia Nădejde notably responded to the controversial thesis proposed by the most prominent Romanian literary critic of the century, Titu Maiorescu, who argued that women could not engage in specific intellectual activities due to the size of their brains. Her response article, titled "Chestiunea femeilor" ["The Question of Women"], asserted that despite the emancipation of many minorities, half of humanity still lived in slavery, emphasizing that women remained enslaved. She questioned the shame of civilized humanity perpetuating this condition, stating, "Is it not a shame for our century that half of so-called civilized humanity is in slavery? The slaves were emancipated, gentlemen, but our predicament persists"²¹. Nădejde's arguments were also rooted in economic observations, pointing out that "[w]e [women] are looked down upon because we are uneducated, but do we have schools? For a woman to graduate high school, she must also have thousands of gold coins"²². Moreover, she expressed dismay that "a woman cannot bring a lawsuit without the man's consent"²³. Her radical activism was complemented by an ongoing struggle to establish socialist circles around the *Contemporanul* magazine, collaborating with Marxist thinker Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea and her husband, Ioan Nădejde, and her short stories from the 1880s abound in depictions of desperate situations involving poverty, illness, and a lack of societal support. It is crucial to note that, despite being strongly socialist, the intellectual circles of that period did not always align with contemporary progressive ideals, as Maria Cernat has recently shown that:

Sofia Nădejde harbors a genuine aversion for bourgeois women, often condemning them for the superficiality with which they handle their education, the way they unhesitatingly entrust their children to neglectful servants, the fact that... they dance! In today's hedonistic society, where everything Sofia Nădejde despised – such as the destruction of family ties for material interests, the sacrifice of friendships and

²¹ Sofia Nădejde, "Chestiunea femeilor" ["The Question of Women"], *Femeia română*, 2, 1879, 111, p. 177.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*. See also Baghiu, "Patimile și banii", p. 11.

partner relationships for personal pleasure – is often packaged and sold as progress, we might be tempted to relegate her to the corner of the outdated. But perhaps her thoughts were more nuanced than our interpretative framework would allow us to see, undoubtedly influenced by stereotypes and superficial judgments²⁴.

Her stance on the organization of society can today be described as conservative. Although nineteenth-century socialism had diverse perspectives on the concept of family, with one renowned viewpoint presented in Friedrich Engels' 1884 *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the prevailing position of the European left asserted that complete emancipation could only be achieved by abolishing capitalist production relations. Ioan Nădejde, Sofia's husband, translated Engels' *The Origin of the Family* – as acknowledged by Engels himself in the preface to the fourth edition²⁵ – yet in the same context in which Engels defines the “single family as the economic unit of [civilized] society”, the German scholar also criticizes the drawbacks of this model, suggesting that “[t]he form of the family corresponding to civilization and coming to definite supremacy with it is monogamy, the domination of the man over the woman”. Engels evokes here Charles Fourier's insightful observations on civilization, which he describes as an instance of “brilliant criticism”²⁶. As Ștefan Baghiu has already explained in his preface to the second edition of Sofia Nădejde's 1907 *Părinți și copii* [*Parents and Children*],

[a]lthough Charles Fourier's critique of the “traditional family” became a cornerstone of continental critical theory, there was never a socialist or leftist consensus on this institution in the nineteenth century. A good example here is that voices such as the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin emphasized the importance of the “natural family” in society, while Marx and Engels dialectically examined the origin of the family to unveil the superstructures that decide on social institutions and micro-communities. As discussed by Richard Weikart in a 1994 article on “Marx, Engels, and the Abolition of the Family”, Marx and Engels “were not the instigators of the anti-family trend among socialists” – and Marx's biography is telling in this respect –, although Engels' writings “contributed mightily to it”. What is certain is that beyond

²⁴ Maria Cernat, “*Patimi* – un roman despre patimi sociale!” [“*Patimi* – A Novel on Social Passions!”], *Baricada România*, 2021, <https://ro.baricada.org/patimi/>. Accessed June 30, 2023; See also Sofia Nădejde, *Despre creierul femeii și alți demoni* [*On Women's Brain and Other Demons*]. Edited by Maria Cernat and Adina Mocanu, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2019.

²⁵ See Friedrich Engels, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State”, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3. Translated by Alick West, 1942, online version: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/index.htm>. Accessed June 30, 2023.

²⁶ *Ibidem*: “I originally intended to place the brilliant criticism of civilization which is found scattered through the work of Charles Fourier beside that of Morgan and my own. Unfortunately, I have not the time. I will only observe that Fourier already regards monogamy and private property in land as the chief characteristics of civilization, and that he calls civilization a war of the rich against the poor. We also find already in his work the profound recognition that in all societies which are imperfect and split into antagonisms single families (*les familles incohérentes*) are the economic units”.

the militant attitudes against the traditional family within the socialist and anarchist circles of the nineteenth century, materialist theory was primarily interested in the *production of families* in bourgeois and industrial societies²⁷.

While Marx and Engels were intensely preoccupied with the adverse impacts of alienation and the dispossession of the means of production – highlighting as early as *The German Ideology*, originally written in the 1840s, the destruction of the family by the industrial complex as one of those repercussions – the Nădejde family adopted a different stance in the early twentieth century. When discussing the responsibility of building a family, Sofia Nădejde vehemently opposed single individuals, consistently presenting the family as a moral prerequisite for societal existence:

The state [now] needs, more than ever, a clear, or at least vague, awareness of the obligations and rules that must be fulfilled or removed. However, celibacy, in addition to the threat of sterility, poses another significant danger in the contagion of selfishness, luxury, and depravity that it spreads²⁸.

Especially after 1899, the ideological positions of Sofia Nădejde and her husband, the politician and activist Ioan Nădejde, underwent even more significant changes. Faced with a political downturn, social democrats joined the Liberal Party and faced severe criticism for it, particularly from the founding figure of Romanian socialism and modern literary criticism, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea. This shift rendered their initial critique of bourgeois society obsolete in light of their *nouveau* bourgeois praxis, thus becoming the target of harsh critique from other figures, including the conservative writer Duiliu Zamfirescu, who depicted them in *Lume nouă și lume veche* [*New World and Old World*] as demagogues espousing a socialist discourse while mistreating servants in real life²⁹.

This is the context in which “the first feminist novel in Romanian literature”, *Patimi* (1903), was released, bearing witness to the culturally and morally conservative tones of this shift. Bianca Burța-Cernat notes that Sofia Nădejde’s literature *consistently* featured these moral undertones as early as the 1880s. Despite her passion for scientific discoveries and her courage to deconstruct misogynistic theses, Burța-Cernat explains, Nădejde’s works do not mirror her critical perspectives: they are “traditionalist in form, lacking in imagination, and didactic. In this author’s prose, late echoes of romanticism emerge, and the

²⁷ Ștefan Baghiu, “Parenting”, in Sofia Nădejde, *Părinți și copii* [*Parents and Children*], 2nd ed., București, Publisol, 2022, p. 8.

²⁸ Sofia Nădejde, “Celibatul” [“Celibacy”], *Universul*, 17, 1899, 144, p. 1.

²⁹ See *DCRR – Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc de la origini până la 1989* [*The Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel from Its Origins Until 1989*], București, Editura Academiei Române, 2003, pp. 1337-1338.

influences of naturalism are evident. A moralizing attitude openly condemns vices and injustices”³⁰.

Sofia Nădejde’s *Patimi* is, in certain aspects, a *retro* novel for its time. According to most literary studies experts, the sentimental novel represented the vogue of the eighteenth century which sparked the proliferation of the novel itself, and *Patimi* is no exception to the rule. On the centenary of the novel, Elena Zaharia-Filipaș noted in her article “Primul nostru roman feminin” [“Our First Feminine Novel”] that it “revives, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the naïve-moralizing narrative framework of the pioneers of the Romanian novel. Like Filimon, who attributed to Dinu Păturică [the main character of *Ciocoi vechi și noi*] all sorts of vices – venality, villainy, treason –, stigmatizing him through an explicit authorial discourse, Sofia Nădejde does the same thing to Matilda”³¹. In what was labeled as “the first feminist Romanian novel”, Sofia Nădejde’s story revolves around a good husband being cheated on and robbed by his wife. Matilda, the heroine, is a pioneering feminist character, rivaling Ioan Slavici’s *Mara* – serialized in 1894, released in a book-length format in 1906 –, a widow trying to keep her family on the right track while also becoming the first “businesswoman” in Romanian literature³². However, Matilda is an anti-hero because she gains independence from her husband through theft and adultery; in so portraying her protagonist, Nădejde seems to suggest that the only way in which a woman can become independent at the beginning of the twentieth century is by running away with another man. This cynical perspective reflects the general situation of women.

When analyzing the class situation in the novel, a different interpretation emerges. Nădejde provides a detailed portrayal of women’s lives during this era, which surpasses any other Romanian writer’s. The lives she depicts are documented and characterized by heavy materialism, in which finances play a vital role, and reality is understood through realist and naturalist means. The novel portrays the marriage of Mustea, a small rural landowner, with Matilda, a city woman compromising her urban life for a quasi-aristocratic one in the countryside. In struggling to keep his land profitable, Mustea brings a city paralegal to the house for paperwork, and Matilda falls in love with him. This new character, Iliescu, is a villain who uses Matilda to steal a significant amount of money from her husband, and then runs away with her. However, she soon discovers Iliescu’s true character when he begins to mistreat her, eventually leaving for Italy and Switzerland, where Matilda foolishly follows him, leading to her downfall and eventually to her death. The moral of the story is clear: passions – meaning vice –

³⁰ Bianca Burța-Cernat, *Fotografie de grup cu scriitoare uitate*, p. 18.

³¹ Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, “Primul nostru roman feminin” [“Our First Feminine Novel”], *România literară*, 35, 2002, 48, p. 19.

³² See Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe. Eseu despre romanul românesc* [Noah’s Ark. Essay on the Romanian Novel], București, Grammar+, 1998.

and bourgeois life are the death of family. Beyond the moralizing tones, women's situations in the period are extensively detailed in *Patimi*. One of the most impactful scenes in the novel is when Matilda undergoes an abortion procedure, an event that exposes various perspectives on abortion from female characters of different age groups. Despite Nădejde's rather stereotypical representation of women, Maria Cernat sheds light, in a recent article on the novel's second edition, on the special social role of servants in the novel, suggesting that their portrayal as autonomous working women is quite revolutionary:

Let us not forget that the first part of the novel dedicates entire pages to discussions among servants. Far from being "a form of communication between intellectual elites and economic elites about the common man", Sofia Nădejde's novel brings us the perspective of the servants on the elites through the discussions in Casandra's kitchen. Casandra, a very interesting character which unfortunately was systematically overlooked, is portrayed by Sofia Nădejde in a way that commands respect. Despite being an alcoholic, the cook Casandra has her own profession and never ceases to boast about it. She knows that she can find work for herself and earn a living independently. Maria is envious of her and the peasants on Mustea's estate"³³.

When Casandra, the house servant in *Patimi*, is introduced in the story, the episode occurs during one of the first interactions between Matilda and Iliescu. Casandra is described here as a "master" of cooking and cleaning. However, the second time the servant makes an entrance in the novel is when Matilda's daughter, Puica, announces that Casandra is drunk and has left the food on the stove:

"Mom, you know what? Casandra got drunk! The food is left alone on the stove, and she's sleeping in the barn. The rats are going to nibble on her nose, seriously, Mom", said the little girl laughing hysterically.

"Sit down, why are you laughing like a fool?"

"How can I not laugh? Besides being ugly, how will she be when she doesn't have a nose?"³⁴

The subsequent discussion between Matilda and Iliescu is ironically premonitory of what will happen between them. Matilda claims that in the city the advantage of having servants is that they are more professional and can also be changed more often. In the countryside, Matilda complains, she is stuck with a "drunk cooking woman", having to deal with more and more chores as time passes. "Any day now he will put me in the kitchen", she says to her new lover, who cynically does exactly this at the end of the novel. Casandra's depiction here is indicative of Nădejde's perspective on the dynamics within the household:

³³ Maria Cernat, "*Patimi* – un roman despre patimi sociale!".

³⁴ Sofia Nădejde, *Patimi*, p. 92.

Around five o'clock, Casandra woke up, yawned a few times, looked at the sun, pondered for a moment to remember whether she had put the food on the stove or not, then slowly made her way to the kitchen. She was a woman around fifty years old. The fire and kitchen work had left their mark on her, wrinkling her face more than it should have. Wearing worn-out clothes, a red apron, and simple slippers, she was determined enough to show something: that she wasn't a peasant who walked barefoot. Yawning continuously, she appeared at the kitchen door. Maria was instructing Raveica on how to make chicken for roasting. Nearby, the soup was simmering.

"There you go! Good! Let the ladies also cook! Casandra, poor thing, grows tired too, because, you see, she's human. But who believes her? Everyone, every fellow, has vacation time; she doesn't! When a public holiday comes, there are guests and plenty of work to do – dishes, roasts, strudels [by the dozen] – until I can't feel my bones in the evening!"³⁵

What stands out the most is the autonomous manner in which Casandra justifies her behavior. Indeed, this moment is probably one of the most interesting cases of self-determination and breaking the deal with the class gap. Her drunkenness is actually described by herself as a way to cope with the fact that her mistress, Matilda, seems to be involved in an affair with Iliescu:

"Listen, Raveică, I got drunk out of distress, really. He comes, well, scrawny as he is, with his dead game and tries to teach me how to cook for him! I've cooked steaks for other important people, not for a scoundrel like him, whose family hasn't seen a cook. The audacity of this city man, who hunts like he's on his father's estate when he doesn't even have to hunt! They shouldn't mess with me; I'll let them eat spoiled eggs until their souls turn sour. Let them fry the lad's dead game. Grey heron steak! I haven't heard of such a thing since my mother gave birth to me!"

"What the hell is he doing in the yard all day?" asked Raveica, looking the cook in the eyes.

"What do you mean? Good food, walks, hunting, and, Lord forgive me, who knows what else. The devil doesn't build monasteries"³⁶.

When Matilda finally leaves the house and steals the money, just as Casandra predicted, the servant is the one who helps Mustea recover. She finds him with red eyes, in the aftermath of a heart attack, which occurred after he had learned of the missing money and Matilda's unplanned trip to the city. She cries and runs from the kitchen yelling, "The poor boyar! She finished him!"³⁷ and claims that Matilda has cast spells on him. Matilda's character and infidelity are portrayed by the narrator in contrast to the servants, upon whom he directs her anger in the absence of her husband. Frustrated by her life in the countryside, she fails to comprehend why she cannot freely use her husband's money, and despite being the wife of a

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 94-95.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 286.

rural landowner, she perceives her status as inferior to that of a servant, asserting that her servants have more independence than her, primarily due to their wages:

In the kitchen of landowner Todiriță [Mustea], the quarrels between Iordache and Casandra persisted. And the same complaints about the masters. No matter how well Casandra cooked, skilled as she was in the kitchen, the lady of the house still didn't like it. In the morning, around nine or ten, she regularly came to the kitchen and gave each of them their share of scolding. Upstairs, the young man was targeted first. No matter how the coffee was, it was never good, that is, the lady never liked it. Either it was too cold, or it was not strong enough. Mistress Matilda needed to vent her frustrations, and since her husband, to his fortune, wasn't at home, she vented them on the servants. She claimed she was taking care of the household:

"With such animals, I'm shortening my life! And they call this living! Mustea is the biggest fool because he's never hired others."

That's what she thought and often said out loud.

"I'm poisoning my life for his wealth! What do I get in return? Less than a maid who gets paid regularly"³⁸.

The thesis takes a radical shift in the latter part of the novel, following Matilda's escape with Iliescu. After stealing a substantial sum from Todiriță and departing with her lover, she comes to the realization that he was merely interested in taking her money. Paradoxically, she expresses a diminished sense of freedom compared to her life with her husband: "Todiriță never kept track of the money he gave her; Iliescu always accounted for every last penny, treating her like a servant"³⁹. Furthermore, when Iliescu expresses dissatisfaction with the new maid's culinary skills, he vents her frustration toward the two women in the house – Matilda and the new maid, Rosa. Matilda feels humiliated by being mentioned in the same breath as the maid, insisting that their statuses should not be compared:

"These are dishes for drunkards. The two of you can't even make a proper soup!"

"Please, Iliescu, don't put me in the category of servants", said Matilda.

"Fine, dear, but why don't you go to the kitchen, too? After all, I'm spending money, and I believe I have the right to ask for a decent meal! What's the point of having a house?"

"Where have you seen a house without any mistakes? That doesn't mean you should treat me like a cook. I already suffer enough in the kitchen, hoping to please you! But it's hard to cater to the whims of someone like you"⁴⁰.

However, this new servant, Rosa, is unlike Casandra; she is young, attractive, well-dressed, and takes on numerous tasks around the house. This is how Nădejde's narrator characterizes her:

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 415.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 443.

She wasn't like the country maids, poorly dressed and dirty. When she brought something, it was a pleasure to look at her. Well-groomed, with clean clothes, and a white apron with lace, she made a good impression on anyone who saw her, and upon lying eyes on [Rosa], people believed that Iliescu kept a mistress, a cook, and a housekeeper. In the kitchen, Rosa wore two aprons: over the white one, she had one made of baize, but still clean. As soon as the bell rang and she was called upstairs, Rosa appeared as a coquettish lady, with a white apron, nicely groomed, ribbons in her hair, cheerful and smiling. With such a servant, Matilda had peace of mind⁴¹.

However, here lies the issue: Iliescu indulges in flirtation with Rosa and she enjoys it. Being much younger than Matilda at only eighteen, Rosa responds to Iliescu's advances and they initiate an affair. When Matilda catches them, she grabs the servant by the hair and forcibly throws her out of the house. Once again, the status of the servant is a crucial aspect: Matilda's humiliation has less to do with adultery, and more with the fact that Iliescu engaged in such behavior with a servant. Her feeling of betrayal is class-defined – “What about me? What will people say?” – since it bears witness to her intolerable downgrade to an inferior status.

Elena Bacaloglu's "Misunderstood Souls": The Emancipation of Tina

Conversely, in fascist advocate⁴² Elena Bacaloglu's novel, the female protagonist's struggle primarily unfolds through internal monologues, as noted in a 1906 review of *În luptă* [*In Combat*], the first volume of what should have been a three-part “psychological” novel:

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 440.

⁴² Her controversial political activity has been duly noted – after World War I, she “[aspired] to create a movement focused on the idea of achieving an ‘Italian-Romanian empire’, a movement whose presidency [was] offered to [Italian poet and politician] Gabriele D’Annunzio and later to Benito Mussolini” –, yet in the context of the present article, we wish to emphasize her views regarding “[women’s] innate ‘force’, which spurs ‘the loftiest of ideas and initiatives,’ [and] lie at the heart of [Bacaloglu’s] feminist advocacy. As for the ideal rapport between the sexes, [she] finds inspiration in the [allegedly platonic] relationship between [Italian patriot and artist] Bianca Milesi and [Moldavian-Romanian polymath] Gheorghe Asachi” – See Victor Durnea, “Elena Bacaloglu”, in Eugen Simion (ed.), *Dicționarul general al literaturii române A/B* [*The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature A/B*], București, Editura Muzeului General al Literaturii Române, 2016, pp. 481-4822. In her paper on Asachi, “the most daring and victorious of the soldiers”, who fought for his torn country’s cultural advancement, and Bianca Milesi, Bacaloglu suggests that the latter “had to love him beyond themselves, like a slave to an ideal that she wanted to serve at any cost”. It was she, the “intransigent revolutionary”, and “exemplary” mother and wife, who, like Dora Virgil, “would protect [Asachi] from the mistakes of youth, inspiring in him the purest and noblest actions” – see Elena Bacaloglu, *Bianca Milesi e Giorgio Asaky* [*Bianca Milesi and Gheorghe Asachi*], Roma, Tip. Armani & Stein, 1912, p. 16, 18, 21, 12.

[women] have no choice but [...] to appear content, tender, [and] affectionate, while in [their] soul there simmers a silent rebellion against the social laws that force [them] to stifle [their] abilities, vocation, [and] inclinations. [...] The *strength* of *În luptă* lies in the ambition of a noble woman's soul to convert a man's character – *hesitant* due to his pestilential milieu [and] *lost* because he inhaled the poison of malice and skepticism, which thrive abundantly like weeds in the fertile soil of social life – to the religion of virtue⁴³. (original emphasis)

This seems to suggest – at first glance, at least – that the struggle anticipated by the title of the first volume and the “two forces” which give the title of *Două forțe* (1908), the novel's second part, are Virgil Andrea – “a misunderstood soul, [...] isolated from all other souls, a true intellectual who is dissatisfied with others, but also with himself, and whose hypersensitivity makes him wander from place to place without finding rest [...] and strike harshly in [his partner's] love” – and Dora, his loving wife, “an intelligent, cultured woman, an artist of the piano”, who nonetheless “humbles herself in front of him”⁴⁴. Presumably the alter egos of “the author and an intellectual with some reputation, [...] whose mismatched and unhappy marriage caused a stir a few years ago”, according to another reviewer⁴⁵, Dora and Virgil live in an imperfect symbiosis, as the former

would open her soul and share it with [him] [with every small gesture] – just as you open a vein to give some of your life, your blood, to a dear patient. She became one with Virgil, breaking him away from his past, unfolding a new life for him as if [discovering] in him a being [...] from the distant age of an ancient race – a divine being, a shard of light torn from the abyss of the ages gone by [and] concluded in agony. This new life, amidst the many lives in our beings, legacies of nations, might very well be the spark of another individual, another soul, which, by setting fire to the past, gives light to the times yet to come⁴⁶.

Yet this new era, built by men like Virgil, who, through their intellectual pursuits, turned into “super-humans” who fail to reconcile their “dead [sciences]” with a “trained soul”⁴⁷ would require “a home where good examples strengthen and elevate, where fulfilling one's duties is the foremost obligation, where love is cautious and gentle” – in other words, to provide women, capable of “[opening] new and bright perspectives, not only for [themselves] but also for [their husband's] aspirations”⁴⁸, the necessary environment to help them strike “a

⁴³ Neli Cornea, “Sufletul femeii: Un cuvânt despre romanul d-nei Elena Bacaloglu” [“The Woman's Soul: A Word About Mrs. Elena Bacaloglu's Novel”], *Dimineața*, 3, 1906, 822, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Victor Anestin, “Cărți și reviste” [“Books and Magazines”], *Adevărul*, 20, 1907, 6590, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Const. Mille, “Letopisiți” [“Chronicles”], *Adevărul*, 19, 1906, 6019, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Elena Bacaloglu, *În luptă: Roman psihologic [In Combat: Psychological Novel]*, vol. 1, București, Librăria Socec & Comp., 1906, pp. 183-184.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 113-114.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

balance between mind and soul, feelings and thoughts”. This “ideal merging of all the dormant homogeneities living in them” is – according to Dora – the way in which men “can shape a weapon of battle from their judgment and will” for what the narrator envisions as another struggle, “the battle of life”, thus “[becoming] truly superior” and creating a new world after “they had forged themselves *in* and *from* the past” (original emphasis)⁴⁹. Until then, however, wives are destined “[t]o suffer *with perfection*. That’s what elevated Dora’s feelings... They had [a] sense of *eternity* [in them], the tired, terrified soul of a woman!” (original emphasis)⁵⁰.

Unbeknownst to Dora, however, her suffering was also triggered by a third struggle, of which she becomes aware only toward the end of the second volume: that with her husband’s former lover, Anca Petrov. Older than Virgil and married with a child to a man whose finances she exploited to his ruin, Anca, “[realizing] well that [...] [Virgil was] an extraordinary man”, “had strengthened her will for a [...] certain victory”⁵¹ by flaunting her wealth, asking little of his time, and carefully planning their getaways while vilifying her husband and dotting on him in her love letters. In short order, Virgil found himself “drawn to her by [a] sincere, powerful force, [...] [s]he [dominating] him through something undefined, [...] [replying to] a call from deep within himself with an air of authority and a hint of affection, through the allure of the material well-being she always showcased”⁵². A few years later, Dora came into his life and after a whirlwind romance, which culminated with a shotgun engagement, he had no choice but to break the news to Anca; “estranged [at first] from everything related to his past”⁵³ by his feelings for Dora, Virgil initially withstood Anca’s emotional outpourings only for a “drop of venom [to creep] into the soul of this man, who did not yet know himself”⁵⁴ when Anca, possessed by “the perverse thought of not allowing herself to fail”⁵⁵, expressed her and his friends’ distrust of Virgil’s chances at ever finding happiness with the modest Dora, who was previously engaged.

“[Hating] Anca, in [that] moment, [feeling] as if he could have crushed her then and there”⁵⁶, Virgil would soon start to fantasize about her, the Anca “with a rough-edged, masculine face, devoid of any tenderness”⁵⁷ being replaced in his thoughts by the Anca from his dreams, “an elegant, voluptuous woman, with full hips and a smile on her face”⁵⁸. “From here to an obsession, there was only one

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 116-117.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 18.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

step: [...] [a] new pleasure crept into [his] soul, like a perverse, deceitful suffering”⁵⁹, for which Dora “knew she was neither responsible nor capable of finding an explanation”⁶⁰. And, as mentioned previously, she would remain oblivious to it – unlike all others inside and outside their inner circle – until the end of the second volume, when she found the love letters Anca had sent her husband before their engagement. Faced with the answer to all her questions, Dora finds support, involuntarily at first, in the wives of her husband’s friends when she visits one of them to ask for a loan – “Maria approached Dora and gently stroked her hair. Indifference or malice would have hardened Dora, this caress made it worse. It slid over her frozen soul, shaking it, [h]er eyes [filling] with tears”⁶¹ – yet she deliberately seeks comfort from Didia, “a kindred soul, [...] whose [warm] embrace was sweeter, in the face of great sorrows, than any other”⁶².

Notwithstanding the different trajectories of their lives – which bear testimony to their creators’ ideologies – Matilda’s and Dora’s stories share a common ground in their disregard of working-class women’s plight; both Matilda and Dora have female servants, but neither of them supports their employees in breaking the glass ceiling, nor do they acknowledge their equal right to self-representation and actualization. A tell-tale episode in this regard appears in Bacaloglu’s *Două forțe*, when Virgil and his wife, among others, debate whether “the country would perish”, and Dora supports her friend Mărioara’s opinion that “it will if women do not work harder”, adding that “one can no longer tell [their friends’ domestic worker], Ioana, [...] from a lady. A peasant from the depths of Buzău, who once donned a traditional wool skirt, now wears a corset, a feathered hat, and styles her hair in a bun”⁶³. The divide between Dora and Ioana becomes even clearer when, upon hearing the servant’s heartbreaking life story – abducted and forced to marry against her and her father’s wish to a man she didn’t love, who would later abuse her and her child, who wasted away and died, leaving her in a near-constant state of distress before he went to prison for theft –, Dora’s reaction is to complain of how difficult it is to find a domestic worker, failing to object to her husband’s decision to not hire a woman who, according to Virgil, belongs in “a hospital or an asylum”⁶⁴.

The paradox, however, is that the only woman who appears to have succeeded in emancipating herself in Bacaloglu’s novel is Tina, the German servant, who had worked for eleven years in the United States. When Dora was inquiring for a

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁶¹ Elena Bacaloglu, *În luptă: Două forțe [In Combat: Two Forces]*, vol. 2, București, Noua Tipografie Profesională Dim C. Ionescu, 1908, p. 201.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 207.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

helper at the domestic worker placement agency, Tina, “without being summoned, stood out from all others with an air of pride”, “striking a conversation” with Dora, “fixating” and “tagging along” with her even after being reprimanded by the agent for doing so⁶⁵. The servant – “tall, rather slim”, “with small, turquoise-colored eyes, lively and restless like a squirrel, [...] and false teeth” – “had something Semitic” in her “long face, [...] large somewhat bent nose”, and in “her pronunciation, which was not ordinary but rather original”⁶⁶. “Engageons-la, [...] elle est originale”, reiterated Virgil upon learning that “she came from abroad and was well-travelled”⁶⁷ and it was not long before Dora’s husband developed a relationship of “silent complicity”⁶⁸ with the servant – when the doctor visited his wife after finding Anca’s love letters, Tina, who “called the physician at Virgil’s request”, “was leaning against a door, while [he] was looking at her from [his spouse’s] bedside”⁶⁹.

In short order, Dora would lose her authority over the servant, with the latter eventually “[taking] on an air of protection or pity that affected [Dora] more than everything she had ever endured from [the servant]”⁷⁰. On the brink of her imminent divorce from Virgil, a situation Dora was still hesitant to embrace, confronted with “an adverse fate that seemed to be crushing her entire *vocation as a woman*” (original emphasis)⁷¹, “[Tina] managed virtually everything in the household, without consulting her, without listening to her anymore. [...] It appeared as though [the servant] had become the mistress of the house”⁷².

Conclusions

However, similar to Rosa in *Patimi*, Tina conspicuously vanishes from the novel after the demise of Dora and Virgil’s marriage, with neither Nădejde nor Bacaloglu providing any closure to their stories, despite the fact that they made their servant characters complicit in the downfall of their mistresses. It is, however, clear that Iliescu and Virgil do not pursue a relationship with the two servants, which, in turn, raises the question as to whether the domestic workers remained in service – Tina’s final appearance depicts her as lighting a candle while Dora meditates on the separation from Virgil – or, with their credentials

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 65-66.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 243.

compromised, they were forced to explore other means of making a living – the case of Rosa.

What does this say about the perspective of the first feminist Romanian novels written by women on domestic servants? That their fate mirrors that of their upper-class mistresses, with the amendment that the women servants' livelihood depends not only on their female employers but also on the latter's husbands, who pay, after all, for the servants' labor and who ultimately exploit them to regain their independence or to reassert their dominance over their wives. However, Tina's and Rosa's stories, although potentially more resourceful than their mistresses', merely scaffold the plight of upper-class women, being discarded to the fringes of their narrative universes after they fulfilled their purpose. In the early twentieth century, it was not yet the time to have their voices heard.

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WRITING THE LIFE OF SERVANTS IN EARLY ROMANIAN FEMINIST NOVELS

(*Abstract*)

Despite their potential to read as social documents on women's condition at the turn of the century, novels written by women writers in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century are, if not systematically overlooked, then severely understudied, at least in semiperipheral cultures, which by default have a young literary history. In this article, we explore two non-canon works, *Patimi* [*Passions*] (1903) and *În luptă* [*In Combat*] (1906–8), by Sofia Nădejde and Elena Bacaloglu respectively with a view to understanding whether they constitute glimpses into their authors' lives and the extent to which the ideological convictions of the writers influenced how they portray the plight of female servants, who, as women and domestic workers, have a double subordinate role. In the case of both novels, there is (circumstantial) evidence to suspect that shards of the authors' autobiographies and convictions made their way into their works, and by looking further into how Nădejde and Bacaloglu tackle the condition of women servants in *Patimi* and *În luptă*, a similar phenomenon can be observed: notwithstanding their political ethos – Nădejde espoused socialist views until her literary career started, when her views shifted toward a more conservative stance, whereas Bacaloglu contributed to the emergence of the first fascist organizations in Romania –, the two most prominent women writers of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century instrumentalized the female servant characters to give voice to the plight of their upper-class mistresses. This, in turn, bears testimony to the fact that their works operate as artefacts of women's condition at the turn of the century, and when corroborated with the authors' autobiographies, they show that the first attempts at feminist literature in Romania did not put forward a progressive perspective on the social mobility of workingwomen.

Keywords: Elena Bacaloglu, feminist literature, Romanian novel, servants, Sofia Nădejde.

SCRIEREA VIETII SERVITOARELOR ÎN ROMANUL FEMINIST
ROMÂNESC DE LA ÎNCEPUTUL SECOLULUI AL XX-LEA
(Rezumat)

În ciuda potențialului lor de a fi citite ca documente sociale despre condiția femeii, romanele scrise de scriitoare la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea și la începutul secolului al XX-lea sunt, dacă nu sistematic trecute cu vederea, foarte puțin studiate, cel puțin în culturile semiperiferice care, implicit, au o istorie literară tânără. În acest articol, analizăm două texte literare necanonice, *Patimi* (1903) de Sofia Nădejde și *În luptă* (1906–1908) de Elena Bacaloglu, cu scopul de a înțelege dacă romanele valorifică sau nu anumite aspecte din viața autoarelor, respectiv în ce măsură convingerile ideologice ale scriitoarelor au influențat modurile în care este reprezentată condiția dificilă a servitoarelor, care, în calitate de femei și de lucrătoare casnice, se află în situația unei duble subordonări. În cazul ambelor romane, există dovezi (circumstanțiale) care ne fac să bănuim că frânturi din autobiografiile și convingerile autoarelor au pătruns în operele lor, iar, dacă analizăm mai atent modul în care Nădejde și Bacaloglu abordează condiția femeilor servitoare în *Patimi* și *În luptă*, se poate observa un fenomen similar: în pofida etosului lor politic – Nădejde a îmbrățișat viziuni socialiste până la începutul carierei sale literare, când opiniile sale au evoluat spre o poziție mai conservatoare, în timp ce Bacaloglu a contribuit la apariția primelor organizații fasciste din România –, cele două scriitoare de seamă de la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea și începutul secolului al XX-lea au instrumentat imaginea servitoarei pentru a da glas situației dificile a femeilor din clasa superioară. Acest aspect atestă că ambele romane propun artefacte ale condiției femeii de la începutul secolului. Coroborate cu autobiografiile autoarelor, cele două romane arată că primele încercări de literatură feministă din România nu au prezentat o perspectivă progresistă asupra mobilității sociale a femeilor muncitoare.

Cuvinte-cheie: Elena Bacaloglu, literatură feministă, roman românesc, servitoare, Sofia Nădejde.

SNIZHANA ZHYGUN

**TO TELL IN ORDER TO FORGET:
NADIYA SUROVTSOVA'S MEMOIRS OF THE
REPRESSIONS OF 1927–1953**

Introduction

State-building processes in Ukraine in the early 1990s were accompanied by the publication of testimonies about the traumatic experience that Ukrainians had undergone during the Soviet Union's rule. Nineteen volumes of the National Book of Memory of the Holodomor Victims of 1932–1933 (containing information on more than 805,000 names out of at least 3 million dead); the multi-volume edition of *Rehabilitated by History*, which contains information about the victims of the Bolshevik terror in each of the 25 administrative units of Ukraine; numerous publications about the writers of the "Executed Renaissance" (1920s–1930s) and memoirs of Gulag survivors came out during the years of independence. These testimonies about the crimes of the Soviet Union against humanity formed a sharp condemnation of Stalinism and its adherents in Ukrainian society. Awareness of the scale of human losses pushed Ukrainians to resist any attempts to impose an aggressive regime and encroachment on rights and freedoms. At the same time, this great narrative of national tragedy during the dictatorship, which helped Ukraine adhere to democratic values, absorbed the individual narratives of the victims. As Nadia Kaneva defines the problem of large narratives, criticizing the work of Tzvetan Todorov, "[a]lthough it may help readers to imagine the dehumanizing aspect of the camps, it harms the survivors' attempts to reclaim their subjectivity through the act of telling their personal stories"¹.

The case of Nadiya Surovtsova demonstrates the dominance of the great narrative over the individual one. In journalistic and accompanying texts she is presented as "an example of the struggle for the freedom of the Motherland" or as a symbolic example of moral victory, "[w]e get to know a brave and courageous soul that the cruel ugly system failed to overcome. There is irrefutable proof: nothing can break a human soul that has faith and purpose. The purpose was great: it was about honour and dignity"². However, the impression from reading the memoirs is depressing rather than glorifying.

¹ Nadia Kaneva, "Remembering Communist Violence. The Bulgarian Gulag and the Conscience of the West", *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 31, 2007, 1, p. 54.

² Olena Sergienko, "Ale zori i nebo – moi" ["But the Stars and the Sky Are Mine"], in Nadiya Surovtsova, *Lysty [Letters]*, Kyiv, Vydavnytstvo imeni Oleny Telihy, 2001, p. vi. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

The story of her stay in the Gulag is part of her autobiography, covering a period stretching from her childhood (early 1900) to her release from prison in 1950s. The text is compositionally divided into two parts. The first one, “The Chronicle of a Short Happiness”, covers the period before her arrest: her childhood, education, the national revolution, her emigration and return to Ukraine, and her life in Kharkiv. The second part is called “On the other side” and consists of three sections of different volumes: “Lubyanka 2”, “Yaroslavl” (subtitled “Memoirs from the Grave”), “On the road. Arkhangelsk-Golgotha” (within this largest subsection, the episodes “Vologda”, “Irkutsk”, “Vladivostok”, “Golgotha”, “Kolyma Adventure” are singled out).

As Emily Sun, Eyal Peretz, and Ulrich Baer argued, “it is commonplace to think of literature as something that gives expression to the voiceless or to that which could not make itself heard before”³. Surovtsova’s *Memoirs* is one of those texts whose authors insisted on their right to be heard. These memoirs belong to the “literature of testimony”. Ruxandra Petrinca describes it as follows:

They are not based on historical documents so much as they constitute them by recording, this is to say “documenting”, what their authors have witnessed [...] [they] can therefore be given the meaning of “eyewitness account”, whether or not the author intended to give evidence for or against specific people or institutions⁴.

But in Surovtsova’s case, her testimony could lead to her renewed arrest, which complicated her writing strategy. Gilmore stated that “conventions about truth-telling, salutary as they are, can be inimical to the ways in which some writers bring trauma stories into language”⁵. In my article, I propose to consider how trauma influences the narration of an autobiographical text written in the context of a still-present threat.

Surovtsova’s experience in the Gulag was extremely traumatic and writing as an act of verbalizing her experience of suffering could be a therapeutic act⁶ transforming traumatic memories into narrative memoirs. Jodie Wigren has mentioned that the task of therapy with victims of trauma is to help in the shaping of a completed narrative⁷, that contains and organizes their experience:

³ Emily Sun, Eyal Peretz, Ulrich Baer, *The Claims of Literature: A Shoshana Felman Reader*, Yale, Fordham University Press, 2007, p. 1.

⁴ Ruxandra Petrinca, “Halfway between Memory and History: Romanian Gulag Memoirs as a Genre”, *Slovo*, 29, 2017, 1, p. 8.

⁵ Leigh Gilmore, “Limit-Cases: Trauma, Self Representation, and the Jurisdictions of Identity”, *Biography*, 24, 2001, 1, p. 129.

⁶ Suzette A. Henke used the term “scriptotherapy” to name “the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactmen”. In her opinion, writing an autobiography can be a therapeutic tool – see Suzette A. Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life-Writing*, London, Macmillan, 1998, pp. xii–xiii.

⁷ Jodie Wirgren, “Narrative Completion in the Treatment of Trauma”, *Psychotherapy*, 31, 1994, 3, p. 422.

It requires, first, attention to an experienced sensation. Next, it involves a cognitive-perceptual selection process, in which various elements of the internal and external environment are screened for relevance to the felt sensation. Then causal chains are constructed, that locate events as causes and as consequences of other events... Events are also organized episodically, which divides the stream of consciousness, and links certain experiences while separating them from others. Finally, conclusions are drawn from these episodes that will guide future behavior, and contribute to the ongoing formation of a worldview and a personal identity⁸.

The formation of an individual narrative about trauma allows a person to distance herself or himself from the experience and push it into the past. But the circumstances of the constant threat of new repressions, in which Surovtsova wrote, prevented her from forming a logical and consecutive narrative that could be integrated into the biography. After all, the completeness of the narrative is not possible without giving events meaning. Usually, this process is easier for those experiencing collective trauma, as collective discourse forms a common sense, but Surovtsova could not rely on it in the situation of Soviet officials' resistance to the dissemination of information about the Gulag in the USSR. For these reasons, the presentation of her memoirs ceased to be consistent.

Holocaust researcher Lawrence Langer insisted that trauma should be discussed only in the most literal ways, otherwise there is a risk of denying it⁹. But Surovtsova's memoirs contain many silences and euphemisms. Her story about the Gulag reproduces the characteristics of trauma narratives, in particular, those identified by Laurie Vickroy: "fragmentation", "dissociation" of the characters' identities, the capacity to produce "metaphors", "static images" and "dialogical conceptions of witnessing"¹⁰. Surovtsova's tale of repression begins as the story of a wrongly convicted but faithful communist woman who promises to be steadfast in order to prove her allegiance. However, this narrative ends as the story of a woman whose life and opportunity of self-realisation as a wife and mother were stolen. The reader is unable to understand how this transformation occurs because of the lacunae, omissions, and deliberate distortions.

At the same time, it is important to note that the memoirs were written in a different order than they are presented in the text. It is known that Surovtsova began writing her memoirs in 1946 with the episode "Golgotha"¹¹, the most traumatic period of her life. In 1949 she postponed the camp history and wrote childhood memoirs. She ended the last episode of her story in the Gulag ("The Kolyma Adventure") in 1958. After coming back to Ukraine, she returned to the

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 415-416.

⁹ Lawrence Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994.

¹⁰ Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Virginia, University of Virginia Press, 2002, pp. 24-175.

¹¹ Nadiya Surovtsova, *Lysty*, p. 299.

beginning of her arrest and completed the fragment of “Lubyanka 2” in 1959. The second fragment, “Yaroslavl”, has remained undated. There are gaps of several years between the fragments of this part, unlike the memoirs of the first part, where the presentation is consistent and coherent. This fragmentation testifies to the impossibility of forming a coherent narrative by inscribing it in the history of her life.

Next, we will consider how the themes of 1) a falsely accused communist and 2) women’s experience in the second part of her memoirs (called “On the other side”) are developing and conflicting.

“Lubyanka, 2”, “Yaroslavl” – The Story of a Communist Woman

The first subsection tells of the first arrest on charges of espionage in 1927. Surovtsova was not a spy, but the fact that she returned from abroad where she had communicated with foreigners was sufficient reason for the Bolsheviks to arrest and imprison her. Surovtsova’s memoirs of the Yaroslavl detention centre record a period when the Soviet penitentiary system was not yet fully formed. This particular prison isolated, but did not exploit prisoners. The administration of this prison, in use since Tsarist times, allowed inmates to read newspapers and books, walk, correspond and even protest. This liberal “pre-revolutionary” regime evoked a literary parallel in Surovtsova’s memoirs, as she often referred to the memoirs of Tsarist revolutionary Vera Figner.

In her *Return from The Archipelago, Narratives of Gulag Survivors*, Leona Toker defines one of the four common features of the Gulag memoirs as follows: the presentation of the imprisonment story as a fasting time, as a test of their faith¹². Surovtsova also mentions this motive in the introductory text to the part of her memoir that deals with imprisonment:

And if there is one main idea here, it is to show how, after thirty difficult years, a person can remain deeply committed to their ideals, and remain a communist after enduring all the hardships that I am writing about. The most important thing to note is that I am not an exception: I have not seen a single communist who renounced their convictions despite dying in our Soviet prisons, surrounded by strangers, ideologically hostile people. Innocently, tragically-mysteriously condemned, they did not waver from their ideals...¹³.

It seems that declaring herself as a communist arises from the desire to circumvent censorship, to justify her story, to give it significance in an ideologically biased society. The story of persons in the Gulag was marginalized in

¹² Leona Toker, *Return from The Archipelago, Narratives of Gulag Survivors*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 94.

¹³ Nadiya Surovtsova, *Spohady [Memoirs]*, Kyiv, Vydavnytstvo imeni Oleny Telihy, 1996, p. 213.

Soviet society; most of the former prisoners were silent about their experience, fearing repression and neglect. The story of a communist woman could be told as a story of unwavering loyalty to ideals. This motif of loyalty to communism is the strongest in this fragment of her memoirs, written after the rest of the text. Despite the high pathos with which the author asserts her views, the narrative of the vainly accused communist woman contains both obvious and hidden contradictions.

A clear contradiction is revealed in the author's structuring of the world (individuals) into "one's own" and "another's". In those fragments that deal with ideological loyalty, "one's own" means communist, and "another's" means representatives of other political views: "There were mostly enemies around, political opponents, people with completely different political convictions"¹⁴. Surovtsova characterizes people primarily by political affiliation: socialists, Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, Doshnaks, Musavatists, anarchists: "I, the anarchist Dubensky, two Trotskyist soldiers and a Menshevik pharmacist"¹⁵. Naming the prisoners according to their political preferences created the impression that, on the whole, the punitive system acted correctly by isolating the numerous opponents who encroached on the Bolshevik power. Moreover, the presence of a Bolshevik in a detention centre could look like an unfortunate mistake. However, this chosen form of ready-made ideological narration does not suit her real experience: she did not experience people as opponents but as companions.

She risks her health by starving for other prisoners' sake, she risks being punished by violating regulations in order to help or please others. And therefore, the real "we" are not the communists, but the prisoners: "But to us, who knew what bondage is, it seems a crime to keep silent about someone left in one's merciless memory. After all, this is the only thing that can be given to those very often innocent people who have left irrevocably. Maybe this is the responsibility of the survivors?"¹⁶. It is noteworthy that Surovtsova feels her duty not only to the communists but also to those whom she calls "enemies". This position drives her story in which party principles do not apply. Thus, Lenin's imprisoned comrades-in-arms are barely mentioned, and the main stories are about "enemies" with whom she had warm relations.

The hidden contradiction is this: in the Yaroslavl detention centre, Surovtsova falls in love with the Socialist-Revolutionary Dmitriy Olitsky, because of whom she refuses to leave the detention centre even after her release, and whom she marries during her exile. The text conceals this event: the name of a loved one is not mentioned even casually among other prisoners. She only hints at it: "Thus

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 240.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 241.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 225.

began the acquaintance that determined my personal destiny”¹⁷, “And personal life only now smiled at me. I met a man whom it would be infinitely hard for me to lose”¹⁸. These are the only mentions of Olitsky in her memoirs. Whatever the reasons why Surovtsova keeps silent about her story of love in prison, they help her avoid the contradiction between her desire to assert her loyalty to the communist ideals and her “ideologically incorrect” love for a man whom the communists have recognised as an enemy.

Failure to reflect this contradiction between the real structuring of the world and the desired one in memoirs reveals an extreme degree of unfreedom in comprehending one’s experience. The division of the world into “I” and political opponents of Bolshevism reveals another feature of her experience: “They spoke openly, clearly and could evaluate the regime”¹⁹. Instead, her main reaction to the events was a ban. The author tried to convince herself and convince the reader in her memoirs that everything she has experienced (such as false accusations, incitement to denunciations, violations of legal procedures, and the jailers’ cruelty) does not affect her beliefs. Denying the obvious becomes her defensive reaction: “The worst thing for me would be to think that not everything is perfect – I would lose the remaining ground under my feet!”²⁰. The euphemism “not everything is perfect” contrasts with the situation where the innocently accused are dying and losing their sanity *en masse*.

Considering the category of the unsayable, Eneken Laanes points to its connection with language’s possibilities and the symbolic order of time: “The symbolic order offers modes and frames of representation that enable us to make sense of the world. If language lacks modes of representation for helping us make sense of certain events, these events acquire a traumatic nature”²¹. In Surovtsova’s memoirs, vocabulary embodying the Soviet symbolic order conflicts with her experience, making it difficult for her to verbalise the unsayable. Presenting herself as a communist, she needed to speak like them, but the use of ideologically correct frames forced her to silence what could not be squeezed into them in any way. That is the main reason for contradictions in this part of her memoirs.

The use of ideologically correct frames has one more result. The frames imposed by the Bolshevik’s ideology did not leave much room for womanly experiences, so the more effort Surovtsova makes to achieve an ideological narrative, the less she says about women’s experiences and vice versa.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 256.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 259.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 240.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ Eneken Laanes, “Unsayable or Merely Unsaid?”, in Gabriele Rippl et al. (eds.), *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in an Age of Trauma*, Toronto – Buffalo – London, University of Toronto Press, 2013, p. 124.

If love is silenced, then what kind of female experience gets to be told? The daughter's experience is the most tangible in this part. She considers her greatest fear at Lubyanka is that her mother might think she is to blame. And then she blames herself for the death of her mother, which makes Surovtsova feel "irretrievably" lonely. Moreover, she shows an understanding of the inexpediency of establishing herself as an unjustly punished but faithful communist in a world where no one cares about it: "I will never be able to tell how I succeeded in my ordeal because there is no one to tell it to"²².

The rest of Surovtseva's female experience in this part is very limited. Surovtsova is more willing to write about opposition to the system and about self-organization than about a woman's experience. She only recalls trying to equip her space (knitting tablecloth, making a dressing table from a box, buying cologne) and handicrafts (knitting warm clothes for herself and others). She avoids commenting on the humiliation of imprisoned women, just mentioning it in passing:

After a while, I asked him to take me to the toilet. And then a strange thing happened. I had not seen anything like it in all my prison travels: the young man left the door open and refused to even turn his back on me. We were both young. I don't know how he felt, but I had no choice²³.

The experience of other women is also limited in this part of the memoirs. Surovtsova is more willing to tell stories about men, although the following shows that she also knew stories about women:

[in the bathhouse] I met the women of our wing, and we invariably celebrated name days and birthdays together, offering each other a treat stored in advance... It was amazingly fun to drink coffee, tea – whatever we had there – on the shelf in the bathhouse, as naked as Eve²⁴.

The reader will not know who these women were, what they were imprisoned for, and what their story was. Perhaps as soon as women were usually imprisoned, not for their own faults but as members of families of political prisoners, from the point of view of Surovtsova they did not belong to the world of ideological struggle in which she asserted herself. However it may be, she only talks in detail about two women – a revolutionary of the Tsarist times and Catholic believer, and a domestic crime perpetrator.

The latter story belongs to the semantic field of the implicit motive of motherhood²⁵. This story of domestic violence tells about how the desire to

²² Nadiya Surovtsova, *Spohady*, p. 247.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 248.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

²⁵ Vickroy considers this motif to be one of the most important for women's trauma stories. See Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival*, pp. 36-80.

provide for her unborn child pushed a woman to murder. Motherhood is the only thing that distinguishes this woman from the many criminals of Butyrka. Surovtsova tells a few more stories that testify to the hidden longing for motherhood (about a bird that she fed in prison and how later on the bird flew in with its chicks; about a doll that she made for herself out of an egg, which forced the warden to call a doctor as he believed that Surovtsova was thinking about a child and going crazy, etc.). The inclusion of these stories in the narrative shows the importance of this topic to the author. In the next fragment, this motif will become more frequent.

“On the Road. Arkhangelsk-Golgotha” – Her Story of Losing Oneself

The second subsection recounts her most difficult period – serving a second term in Kolyma, and previously in the Vologda prison and the Vladivostok camp. Surovtsova was arrested in 1937 and she spent five and a half years in prison. Without permission to leave, Surovtsova had to remain in Kolyma until 1950, when she was again arrested and kept imprisoned for almost a year. She was released only in 1954.

The nature of the narrative in this part is significantly different. The theme of loyalty to the ideals of communism is decreasing, and the fate of women in the camp becomes the main one. John Stephan noted that “Kolyma is a river, a mountain range and a metaphor”²⁶. Surovtsova replaces it with an even stronger one – Golgotha. (The subtitle of this part is “Arkhangelsk-Golgotha”, and the names of the fragments are “Vologda”, “Irkutsk”, “Vladivostok” and “Golgotha”). Replacing the real name of Kolyma with the metaphorical one of Golgotha alongside other Russian geographical names becomes a means of characterizing the camp under circumstances in which it was impossible to tell the whole truth.

The metaphorical name of Kolyma refers not only to the personal experience of the author but also to most of the prisoners in this camp. Surovtsova’s story is the story of a “survivor”, meaning that her experience is easier than that of other prisoners. Two circumstances contributed to survival in the camps: luck and easier work. Surovtsova was lucky enough to get to the hospital (out of her 5.5 years, she spent, according to her own words, 1.5 years in the camp hospital), where conditions were better than in the camp. From time to time doctors also employed her in a hospital or in a kindergarten. This, in her own words, saved her life.

However, she also had to work in construction, fell trees according to male quotas, work in land reclamation by pounding the frozen ground with a pick, etc. Each of these tasks ended with Surovtsova’s spending months in the hospital. However, the death rate in “Golgotha” is not as striking as in “Vladivostok”,

²⁶ John Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 225.

where people died by the thousands. Yet exhaustion and death are only part of this suffering metaphor. This means that the dehumanization to which the prisoners were subjected was even more traumatic.

The history of the communist undergoes significant changes here. First of all, it becomes the story of many people. Surovtsova mentions numerous names of Soviet officials and foreign communists whose lives ended in the camp, thus convincing the world of their innocence:

I remember being taken to a dying Italian... And, holding my hand, exhausted, looking terrible but still young, he, as if in a fever, hastily looking for words, mixed them with Italian: "If ever... perhaps... tell your comrades that this is all a lie. I am a communist, I have never been a traitor". The agony began. Holding his hand, I gave him my word that I would relay it to his comrades. I do not remember either his name or his surname; time has erased them from my memory. But I am fulfilling that promise now, twenty years later²⁷. There was a Bulgarian in our hospital, Dimitrov's secretary. There were Czech comrades. Some who survived and some who died. But close to dying they would invariably persuade me of their innocence, as if this made it easier for them to leave this world²⁸.

At the same time, the text also contains a less pathetic, more ironic story, which was probably more in line with the author's mood at the time of writing the initial edition:

At first, I got to the women's ward of doctor Polina Lvivna Herzberg. She was a communist, a Jew from Poland and a political immigrant with a ten-year term. The arrest hit her hard but she remained orthodox and deeply believed that a mistake had been made. Years passed, and grey hairs appeared in her black hair, but Polina Lvivna clasped her hands in exaltation at our meeting and asked: "Tell me what the word is, will they sort this out soon?" True, they sorted it out after quite a long time. After 11 years, she was released when she had served more than her term, and taken by plane to Moscow²⁹.

The slight irony in this story suggests that proving allegiance to communist ideals is no longer a survival goal for the author. Surovtsova does not focus on these changes and is silent about how and when they occurred. Her Bolshevik ideals could have been revised during exile under the influence of Dmitriy Olitsky. Her faith in Soviet justice could have been shattered after her and her husband's second arrest. Yet what she saw in the camps during the Great Terror completely destroyed her previous illusions. The scale of the repression, including that against communists and their families, and the terrible conditions denied any hope for

²⁷ This sentence indicates that the "tragic history of the Communists" was either added or edited in 1957 and does not belong to a text written in the late 1940s.

²⁸ Nadiya Surovtsova, *Spohady*, p. 286.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 310.

justice in a person forced to experience unjustified imprisonment for the second time.

In the fragment “Vologda”, the author characterizes people by party affiliation, following the model of the section about the Yaroslavl detention centre, but in the subsequent parts, such characteristics cease to be significant. For example, the author first describes her friend Amy Stelzer as a German who did not know Russian, then talks about her character, then about her profession – a dressmaker, and only then – of the fact that she is a communist who escaped from the Nazis and came to the Soviet Union by invitation. Emmy committed suicide in the camp, so Surovtsova considers it necessary to speak about her. But the story of her other friend, the Latvian communist Olga Zvedryn (a Comintern cipher clerk), is not found in her memoirs. She does not single her out from the other prisoners, and she does not mention her name. We learn from the women’s correspondence, which lasted until Olga’s death in 1975, that they spent a lot of time together and were very close. The common history of these unjustly accused women would have increased the revealing effect of her memoirs, but Surovtsova avoids it. I suppose that she did it for ethical reasons.

Obviously, she was well aware of the construction of the narrative about herself and she respected the right of others to create their version of a “usable past”³⁰. The story about Amy Stelzer can no longer harm her, but her story about living friends can contradict their own version of events or remind them of something they would like to forget or hurt their relatives. Therefore, she avoids them, allowing her friends to speak about themselves.

What is new in the story of this communist woman is the motif of dehumanization and separation from ideology imposed on imprisoned party members. Surovtsova indignantly recalls that she was not allowed to read Lenin in the camp; that May Day had to be celebrated secretly, conspiratorially; that it was forbidden to address prisoners as “comrades”. Proving her loyalty to the communist ideals ceases to be indispensable in this part of the memoirs. In a story about her work as a nurse during a typhus epidemic, an extremely non-communist comment appears: “Only Heaven saved me”³¹.

The main theme of this part is the women’s experience in the camps, which Surovtsova portrays in many ways, but not without prudence. Moving through camps and various areas of work allows her to show a wide panorama of portraits of women and men imprisoned in the Gulag. In her book *Gulag. A History*, Anne Applebaum observes that women’s stories are defined by the narrator’s sex: men tell it as a story of fall and women tell it as a story of survival³². The point is that

³⁰ Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past”, *The Dial*, 1918, 64, pp. 337-341.

³¹ Nadiya Surovtsova, *Spohady*, p. 287.

³² Anne Applebaum, *Gulag. A History*, New York, Anchor books, 2003, pp. 307-308.

the life of women often depended on the favours of male authorities in the camp. In Surovtsova's presentation, this is rather a story about the deprivation of rights, a loss of subjectivity which she simultaneously exposes and conceals. On the one hand, she recalls how the powerful men in the camp used women as concubines. For example, during her work in the taiga, a group of women in transit stopped for the night in their temporary settlement: "They were tired, cold, and the soldiers brought them to us to rest... I was indignant in the morning when I learned that, with the knowledge of their commander, one of the women spent the night with the taskmaster, brightening his leisurely hours"³³. She writes directly: "Women were bought, they were raped and they were rarely loved"³⁴.

But at the same time, she unexpectedly endows women with an agency that they did not have:

[Kindergartens] were created due to the growing number of illegitimate children. The women were doomed to loneliness by being sent to camp. However, nature was taking its toll and, despite the heavy punishment, despite the hell, physical and moral, that awaited the mothers, there were more and more children and the state was forced to take care of these unexpected boys and girls³⁵.

She describes this "care" quite truthfully: having completed breastfeeding, mothers saw their children once a month, on condition of exemplary behaviour. The children did not enjoy enough attention and, because of epidemics, they died *en masse*. It is not surprising that many women tried to avoid giving birth: "they were carrying heavy things, jumped from heights, drank cinchona, getting it by any possible means, had abortions, died, and if nothing was successful or there was not enough courage in them, then they confessed"³⁶. The fact that dying was a better alternative to confessing says a lot, but the author avoids a direct assessment of the Soviet regime as inhuman and criminal. However, by generalizing the types of imprisoned mothers, Surovtsova again resorts to avoidance.

Noting the "heterogeneity" of the contingent, she singles out young girl prisoners who want to get an easy job in this way, older women who try to exercise their right to motherhood at any cost, and married women. But she forgets to mention the numerous – according to the rest of her memoirs – category of women who have to give birth after forced sex.

Surovtsova avoids writing about the "generally brutal atmosphere" in relationships where "rape and prostitution became, for some, part of a daily routine"³⁷. One would assume that she was lucky in the camp. But the recollections

³³ Nadiya Surovtsova, *Spohady*, pp. 315-316.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 317.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Ann Applebaum, *Gulag*, p. 314.

of her friend and relative Katerina Olitskaya, who was serving her sentence in the same camp, show that rudeness and violence were common there. However, her memoirs were written for Western readers, so the author did not censor them.

Surovtsova's story about rape in the camp is perhaps the only one in this part of her memoirs:

There was an elderly German woman, Olga D. Her love affair was somewhat unusual and a story worth hearing. She was under forty. A virtuous German woman, she began a relationship with a male prisoner she loved very much. [...]. And at night, several prisoners broke into the hut to kill him [...]. She begged, and pleaded, all in vain. This angered them even more. Even though they respected her and saw her as a maternal figure. She shielded him, he escaped ... he returned with help and took her to the hospital where she recovered. In the court case that followed the perpetrators received punishment. And here the actions of the camp husband are worth noting. He was not shocked by the reputation of the dishonoured Olga. He literally prayed for her³⁸.

In addition to the humane behaviour of Olga's husband, this story is also notable for the omission of a central event, which the reader can guess from the phrase "the reputation of the dishonoured". Since behind these words is the horror of gang rape, every expression like "a child from an unloved man" or "spent the night, brightening his leisure time" also hides a crime.

Metaphorically, this story provides an understanding of the general strategy of Surovtsova's writing: she is silent about the most difficult moments. This silence looks like an attempt to forget traumatic events, to wipe them out of her past by creating a less traumatic version. According to Nadiya Koloshuk, silence is a common strategy in women's texts about the Gulag:

Most of the published memoirs lack the most intimate and painful details. There are only faint allusions to the violence experienced. In general, there is much more silence in women's memoirs than in men's; these gaps are sometimes not easily noticed by the eyes of an outsider, but those involved in the camp experience saw them³⁹.

Surovtsova deals with her own story in the same way: while describing in detail her movement through the camps and the specifics of the work she did, she avoids talking about personal relationships. Although she mentions her husband by name in this part, she does not talk about her experiences. The reader does not know when and how Surovtsova learned of his death. Once the author says that she was picking berries for a "friend", and later she recalls that after her dismissal she

³⁸ Nadiya Surovtsova, *Spohady*, pp. 318-319.

³⁹ Nadiya Koloshuk, "Zhinocha 'emansypatsia' v GULAGu (za zbirkamy tabirnoi poesii ta spogadamy vjazniv): zворотnyj bik komunistychnoi utopii" ["Women's 'Emancipation' in the Gulag (According to Collections of Camp Poetry and Memoirs of Prisoners): The Reverse Side of the Communist Utopia"], *Filologichni nauky. Literaturoznavstvo*, 2016, 8, p. 71.

was at the theatre with her husband, but who were these persons (or person), and how they appeared in her life, the reader of the memoirs will not find out. The author also hides the experiences of her closest friends.

A comparison of the presentation of events in memoirs and Surovtsova's letters confirms the omission as a textual strategy. Her letters to the teacher Kira Danylova, who became her closest friend after her mother's death, were written during her stay in the camps and accurately reflect the author's emotional state. Because of the camp censorship, Surovtsova avoids writing about camp life but writes about her emotional experiences. Her letters to her camp friend Olga Zvedryn were written after the latter left for Latvia, but the status of a close friend provided them with emotional authenticity and frankness. One of the first of these letters even begins with the phrase: "Do not read the letter to anyone and burn it" (1953)⁴⁰.

Letters to Kira Danylova reveal Surovtsova's worries about the fate of her husband Dmitriy Olitsky⁴¹, which fill each letter:

And I hope to find out where Dima is⁴².

And where my Dima is I still do not know... is he alive, and is it not in vain that I live here?⁴³

Is he alive? To know only this! I'm so tired of living through this time that it's a shame not to know if there is any point in waiting for something⁴⁴.

It's hard for me to live now – without Dima, without news of him – after all, there is nothing to live for. For nothing. I live in the hope that he is alive, that, therefore, we will meet⁴⁵.

I'm afraid to remember the year with Dima – it hurts too much. It hurts inhumanly – how do I seem to have got used to suffering⁴⁶.

There is also a ray of joy – however sharp – we managed to get Katyushka, Dima's sister, transferred here, and now we are spending rare moments of rest together. And we carefully avoid painful places – her husband is also somewhere in the dark... There is no hope of finding out anything anymore, everything has been tested – only something accidental, perhaps. The personal somehow dissolves into the general, and so a strong ring of hopelessness surrounds us⁴⁷.

The last two quotations confirm that avoiding and silencing painful memories was Surovtsova's overall strategy. The meeting with Katerina Olitskaya, not described in the memoirs, intensifies the drama of the experience: "I recognize my

⁴⁰ Nadiya Surovtsova, *Lysty*, p. 299.

⁴¹ Dmitriy Olitsky was shot in 1937, 7 months after his arrest.

⁴² Nadiya Surovtsova, *Lysty*, p. 28.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

favourite features in Katya's face (they are similar). And it hurts so much, and I don't want to live. And then I 'forcibly' wait and hope again"⁴⁸. A letter dated 1942 captures the frustration of unsuccessful searches, breakdown, and despair. In 1944 she wrote:

In fact, if I had known at that time that he had died, I certainly would not have prolonged my life by another six years. I lived in hope. But to live, it turned out, had no reason. That's it. How he died, I do not know for sure, and probably will never know. Well, "approximately" – oh wow, I can only imagine⁴⁹.

Thus, in letters conveying direct experiences, another motive for survival in the camp appears: her desire to see her beloved husband replaces her desire to prove her loyalty to communist ideas.

These letters also reveal a second silenced plot: despite the irony with which Surovtsova commented on the camp husbands, she was also trying to start a family with the released Latvian Andriy Krumin, but within a few years this relationship fell apart. In a letter to Danylova, she characterizes these relationships as the ones without which she could not live, "and there was no point"⁵⁰. However, she avoids talking about her loneliness and the need for close relationships in her memoirs.

Avoidance of talking about her friends removes another dramatic conflict from the text of her memoirs, which is restored in the letters to Olga Zvedryn. The fact is that many prisoners were married before their arrest and new relationships arose from the hopelessness of reuniting with their family someday. Therefore, these relationships carried both support and self-reproach. This is Olga's story, too. Her husband escaped arrest and she nourished feelings for him for a long time, but she returned to Latvia with the man she met in the camp.

Comparison with reality in memoirs and letters makes it possible to assert that in the part "On the way. Arkhangelsk-Golgotha" the narration strategy is influenced most of all by the desire to forget the worst, cut off her past and form a self-affirming version by distancing herself from the events depicted.

The pinnacle of frankness in the analyzed part of the memoirs is the story of her illness. The conditions of imprisonment led to incessant menstrual bleeding⁵¹. She lost a lot of blood and needed surgery, which could not be performed because of the doctor's being arrested. Surovtsova miraculously recovered, but probably this was what made motherhood impossible for her. Its importance for the author is evidenced by her mentions of many "camp daughters" – young girls whom she supported and helped. Work in the kindergarten brought her both easier conditions

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Of course, Surovtsova avoids specifying the nature of her bleeding; the reader understands this from the details.

and severe psychological torment: “And it weighs so lonely on my consciousness that I do not have even such a camp child, one that’s been taken away. And the warm children’s sleepy arms that hugged my neck, the children that clung to me in confidence, they too did not belong to me”⁵². The hardest episode of this part is the fate of the children from the kindergarten – despite all efforts, only few survived.

Bitterness as a result of her non-realisation is the main emotional motif at this part’s end. The author complains about loneliness and longing,

without affection, without someone to whom I would still be dear or needed in the world. This loneliness saved me from much disappointment and bitterness and made my stay in the camp too bleak on the one hand, while on the other hand it gave me confidence that absolutely no one needs me and that I cannot be needed. I have lost the idea of myself, of my intellect and my appearance in the camp⁵³.

Surovtsova concludes this part with the words: “Cinderella has grown old. The prince did not show up. Everything was coming close to its end...”⁵⁴. Lack of reward for the trial and a ruined life – these ideas contrast sharply with the evaluation of trials in the first part, as a test of faith that should have been passed with dignity.

The fact that the author began to write memoirs from the Golgotha part (not from the first and not from the second arrest, but from Kolyma) testifies to her desire to “work through” the trauma, to comprehend this terrible period in her life. Kolyma becomes Golgotha not only because of the hard work and high mortality there but also because of her dehumanization and loss of identity, which are perceived as a metaphorical death. Vickroy has pointed out that the metaphorization of death is an important feature of the trauma narrative: “The key link between literature and trauma is explained by this confrontation with death as a universal/essential element of human experience that cannot be fully confronted but can be symbolized”⁵⁵. The camp system deprived Surovtsova of the right to political views, to maintaining her cultural level and to self-realization. In addition, it took away from women the right to dispose of their own bodies and the right to motherhood.

Leaving the camp did not change much. Most importantly, her release did not provide an opportunity to talk about her experience. The threat of being arrested again did not disappear for the rest of her life. Therefore, omissions, metaphors, and euphemisms were the main strategies of the narrator in this story.

⁵² Nadiya Surovtsova, *Spohady*, p. 319.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 324.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 331.

⁵⁵ Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival*, p. 224.

The “Kolyma Adventure” – The Story of an “Experienced Old Rat”

The subsection called “Kolyma Adventure” completes the second section, but differs from it so much that it requires a separate section in the study. The author began writing this subsection in Kolyma and completed it in Ukraine in 1958. The fragment is about the events of 1950 when Surovtsova was suddenly arrested again and imprisoned without charges for almost a year.

The peculiarity of this part is that Surovtsova does not use omissions and euphemisms. She does not avoid evaluating events and talking about herself at the center of them. The story of the communist completely disappears in this part, but a picture of the dehumanization of a person in the Gulag becomes concrete, and the author depicts it from the position of a witness. In this part, the important characteristics of the protagonist are the experience and old age (in fact, at that time she was only 54, but by camp standards and her own feelings, she was old). Surovtsova’s experience in the camps becomes her advantage in opposing the system and the criminals. She recounts how skilfully she uses her knowledge of laws and procedures to defend her rights, as well as how ingeniously she protects a young cellmate from attacks by criminals, and she eventually invents cancer for herself in order to move from prison to a camp hospital. Old age becomes her amulet against sexual violence, the constant presence of which she speaks without euphemisms: “Masha... is waiting for the unhappy fate of the ‘tram’ (collective rape – author’s note); it is so common here in Kolyma”⁵⁶. In the previous section, she did not talk about this. The author is somewhat more careful in her statements about prostitution in the camp because it was not the criminals who were responsible for it, but the jailers:

And the household criminals were usually taken to work in the village before their trial and sentence, and sometimes afterwards until they were sent to the camp. They went to the apartments of the military prison authorities to wash the floors. [...] But in the end, we all understood what was really happening...

Our income grew. I embroidered countless Richelieu pieces, and the girls earned their unhappy bread by going to the village. Adultery was highly regulated and it was somehow permitted. This surprised only me. However, the facts spoke for themselves. Even in prison, one cell was constantly “accidentally” left empty; at night, by agreement, the duty officer took one of my cellmates there and left in the morning⁵⁷.

In general, she becomes much bolder in her statements, testifying not only about prison crimes but also against Soviet laws (the story of a woman who got a seven year sentence under “the act of five ears of corn”). If in the previous text she avoided evaluating the sentences, often characterizing them as erroneous, then in

⁵⁶ Nadiya Surovtsova, *Spohady*, p. 342.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 346.

this part the motifs of absurdity, injustice and arbitrariness appear. The narrator abandons the strategy of avoiding and distancing herself from difficult topics and traumatic experiences. On the contrary, she positions herself as a reliable witness, a person who has the right to testify and accuse. However, she avoids writing about the conflict between her youthful communist sympathies and her own experience as a victim of Soviet crimes.

Developing the metaphor of the previous fragment, this part confirms that after Golgotha resurrection is possible, but not of the communist woman. Surovtseva considers her resurrection (without using this word) to be her rehabilitation, but the reader has the feeling that her resurrection has already happened – she regains herself and the ability to talk about authentic experiences. In this part, she contrasts her right to remember and testify with the pressure exercised by power.

But age and experience imply not only courage in actions and statements but also despair and hopelessness, which determine her life in prison (“Out of habit, I tried to survive, although now it was somehow very unclear why, in fact, I was doing this”⁵⁸) and after her release (“All dreams collapsed, the light of the weakest hope to live in order to return home sometime went out, we were finally seized by the tenacious paws of hopeless lawlessness in which we had to wallow to the end of our days”⁵⁹).

Surovtsova’s return from prison is very disappointing. The former pigsty where she had lived before and which she had arranged for housing as she could, was ruined, so she was forced to spend the night with unfamiliar neighbours. She was overwhelmed by loneliness and the realization that “no one was happy” about her return, that “not a crumb of personal life” remained. And the only thing that moved her that night was the return of the cat, which had lived without her for a year, “as a greeting from a life where, it seemed, there was nothing left”⁶⁰. However, the end of this story (and hence of her memoirs as a whole) is optimistic. Surovtsova describes the destruction of the prison to erect an ordinary store, and this local story is perceived as the destruction of the entire system of lawlessness.

Conclusion

Surovtsova’s memoirs of the Gulag represent a narrative of unresolved trauma, reflecting a woman’s inability to talk about what she experienced and to fit her traumatic experience into her life.

The fact that the author began to write her memoirs starting with “Golgotha” indicates that Surovtsova wanted to overcome her trauma and rediscover herself

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 344

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 363.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 365.

with the help of scriptotherapy. Writing memoirs was supposed to help forget the experience and create a less traumatic version of her past, for herself and for the ideological society that refused to discuss the crimes of the authorities. However, the desire to “tell in order to forget” creates a conflict between the object and the technique of narration. The narrative of Surovtsova’s memoirs of the Gulag is characterized by: fragmentation (a composition in which the parts are separated according to the place of imprisonment; the periods of exile are left outside the story, forming lacunae); internal contradiction (as a result of the clash of the declared identity with the injured one); omissions (of the emotional and physical experience and the criminal objectification of women in the camp); metaphors (“Memoirs from the grave”, “Golgotha”). The narrative is also characterized at the level of utterance by: omissions (not verbalizing part of the message) and euphemisms (“spent the night, brightening his leisure time”, “a child from an unloved man”, “organisational conclusions”).

This conflict between what is told and the ways of telling emphasized the unspoken and testified to Surovtsova and her trauma no less than her story. Even decades later, when she was forming the story of her first imprisonment as a socially valuable narrative of a faithful communist, she was unable to edit the entire text to remove gaps and conflicts, to create a coherent story of her life, partly because the threat of repression had not disappeared. The text of the memoirs demonstrates not only the way in which “trauma attacks language”⁶¹, but also how constant threat does it. Therefore, what this text does not openly say is also critically important.

The focus on the public circumstances of a woman’s self-realization is due to the influence of the literary tradition (memoirs of pre-revolutionary political prisoners) as well as to the patriarchal prejudices about what is worth telling from a woman’s life (about her opposition to the system and the benefits that she brings). The traumatic physical and emotional experience becomes a realm of the unspoken. But this empty space is filled by men telling women’s stories as stories of moral degradation, and approving that it was easier for women in the camps, which could suggest that, the responsibility of the authorities for crimes against women is removed. Thus, the desire to tell an “acceptable” story harms women, because silencing and omissions acquire important political significance. Women’s stories, shaped by pain, shame, and fear, must be read by a “resisting reader”⁶² capable of decoding the story from gaps and euphemisms.

⁶¹ Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 95.

⁶² Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, Bloomington and London, Indiana University Press, 1978.

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TO TELL IN ORDER TO FORGET: NADIYA SUROVTSOVA'S MEMOIRS OF
THE REPRESSIONS OF 1927–1953

(Abstract)

The article deals with the role of autobiographical writings of women intellectuals and their depiction of the post-war transitions, and focuses on the conflict between the object and the technique of narration in a narrative of unresolved trauma. The study is based on the memoirs of Ukrainian journalist and scholar Nadiya Surovtsova about her unjustified arrest and 27-year stay in prisons, camps and exile. The peculiarity of these memoirs is that they were written in the USSR, when the

author was under the supervision of repressive authorities. Writing memoirs was supposed to help Surovtsova forget the Gulag's experience and create a less traumatic version of her past, for herself and for the ideological society that refused to discuss the crimes of the authorities. The circumstances of the constant threat of new repressions prevented the creation of a logical and consecutive narrative. That is why the narration is characterized by fragmentation, internal contradictions, omissions, metaphors, and euphemisms. The article considers how the themes of 1) a falsely accused communist and 2) women's experience are developing and conflicting in the second part of her memoirs (titled "On the Other Side"). The general strategy of Surovtsova's writing is silencing the most annoying moments. Omitting crimes and brutality, Surovtsova was trying to forget them and write a better story of her past. In the last part of the memoirs, she rejects euphemisms and omissions, regains the ability to talk about authentic experiences and testifies not only about prison crimes but also about the theft of her life and opportunity of self-realisation. The case of Nadiya Surovtsova's *Memoirs* demonstrates how the ideological pressure and patriarchal prejudices about what is worth telling from a woman's life caused the traumatic physical and emotional experiences to be a realm of the unspoken and how it needs to be read, decoding the story from contradictions and omissions.

Keywords: memoirs, trauma narrative, contradictions, omissions, unspoken.

A POVESTI PENTRU A UITA: MEMORIILE NADIYEI SUROVTSOVA DESPRE REPRESIUNILE DINTRE 1927 ȘI 1953 (Rezumat)

Articolul abordează rolul scrierilor autobiografice ale intelectualelor în configurarea tranzițiilor postbelice și se concentrează pe tensiunea dintre subiect și tehnica narativă în constituirea unei narațiuni a traumei nerezolvate. Studiul analizează memoriile jurnalistei și cercetătoarei ucrainene Nadiya Surovtsova despre arestarea sa nejustificată și despre cei 27 de ani petrecuți în închisori, în lagăre și în exil. Particularitatea acestor memorii este că au fost scrise în URSS, când autoarea se afla sub supravegherea autorităților represive. Scrierea memoriilor ar fi trebuit să o ajute pe Surovtsova să uite experiența Gulagului și să creeze o versiune mai puțin traumatizantă a trecutului său, atât pentru ea însăși, cât și pentru membrii ideologizați ai societății, care refuzau să discute crimele autorităților. Amenințare constantă a unor noi represiuni a împiedicat crearea unei narațiuni logice și cursive. De aceea, narațiunea este caracterizată prin fragmentare, contradicții interne, omisiuni, metafore și eufemisme. Articolul analizează modul în care tematicile – 1) condiția comunistei acuzate pe nedrept și 2) condiția femeilor în societatea totalitară – se dezvoltă și intră în conflict în cea de-a doua parte a *Memoriilor* (intitulată „De partea cealaltă”). Strategia narativă centrală a scrierii lui Surovtsova constă în reducerea la tăcere a celor mai traumatice experiențe. Prin omisiunea crimelor și a brutalității, Surovtsova încerca să le uite și să scrie o variantă mai luminoasă a trecutului ei. În ultima parte a memoriilor, scriitoarea respinge eufemismele și omisiunile, își recapătă abilitatea de a vorbi despre experiențe autentice și depune mărturie nu numai despre crimele din închisoare, ci și despre furtul vieții sale și al oportunității de a se împlini identitar și social. Cazul memoriilor Nadiiei Surovtsova demonstrează cum presiunea ideologică și prejudecățile patriarhale despre ceea ce merită povestit din viața unei femei au făcut ca experiențele fizice și emoționale traumatizante să fie un tărâm al nerostitului, respectiv cum acest nerostit trebuie citit, descifrând povestea din contradicții și omisiuni.

Cuvinte-cheie: memorii, narațiune traumatică, contradicții, omisiuni, nerostitul.

FANNI SVÉGEL

BEYOND TABOO AND STIGMA DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN 20TH-CENTURY RURAL HUNGARY AND TRANSYLVANIA

It's been twenty-three years since the first Hungarian comparative folklore study on female life writing was published. The author, Imola Küllös suggested that the shared aspect of peasant women's lives was unfulfilled marriage and the presence of an alcoholic, aggressive father or husband¹. Patriarchal peasant society and women's socialization did not allow for narrating or preserving female stories². The transformations in gendered social norms and the change in researchers' interest were essential to disclose this side of spousal or parent-child relationships. In Hungarian speaking areas this process began in the 1970s, when ethnographers and social scientists opened up space for women's life narratives. Parallel with the second wave feminism in West Europe, researchers discovered the analytical value of individual life narrative and started to collect and publish women's testimonies.

This study aims to underscore the conversions in violence concepts (rape, wife beatings, child abuse) textualised in autobiographies. By addressing the main questions of violence against peasant women, the study provides a path toward the inclusion of the rural as a geographic and socio-cultural dimension in the studies of women's writing. How did these women retrospectively narrate their experiences? What type of contemporaneous interpretations existed in expert analysis and community assessment? The separation of these connotations potentially results in understanding the diversity of the problem. Re-reading autobiographies and rethinking the analytical prospects provides a chance for emphasising the historical continuity of domestic violence and exposing the circumstances that permitted the abuse of vulnerable groups, predominantly women and children.

The shared characteristic of violence against women is shame, which prevents the narration, therefore, in most cases, the violence and its consequences remain almost imperceptible, hidden inside the female body. A potential approach to these records is exploring how the act of narration and writing can be interpreted beyond trauma processing. Why have these stories been told, while others remained

¹ Imola Küllös, "A női önéletrajzok folklorisztikai vizsgálatának néhány tanulsága" ["Lessons Learned from the Folkloristic Study of Women's Autobiographies"], in Géza Balázs et al. (eds.), *Folklorisztika 2000-ben. Tanulmányok Voigt Vilmos 60. születésnapjára* [Folkloristics in 2000. Festschrift in Honor of Vilmos Voigt], Budapest, ELTE BTK, 2000, pp. 134-163.

² Olga Nagy, *A törvény szorításában. Paraszti értékrend és magatartásformák* [In the Grip of the Law. Peasant Values and Behaviours], Budapest, Gondolat, 1989.

silenced? I examine these accounts of violence as coping strategies that transform former victims into actors. Based on the concepts of resilience and agency, I attempt to disentangle the stories of women who have experienced domestic violence from indescribability and shame by suggesting a possible approach beyond taboo and stigma. Women who came out with their stories could subsequently become agents instead of victims.

I analyse eight women's life paths that shed light on abuse in the marriage or in the family. The sources cover a diverse time frame from the turn of the century to the late state socialist period. The narratives were exclusively recorded under socialism, between the mid-1950s and 1990. Six reports are from women living in Romania – Bukovina (1) and Transylvania, Cluj and Mureş counties (5) –, and two from Hungary (Heves and Somogy counties). In terms of methodological differences in collection, there are three oral history accounts and five life narratives based on manuscripts among the sources. The biography published under the pseudonym Mrs Sándor Varjú was collected by Ilona S. Dobos in Sztálinváros (Fejér county, Hungary) in 1956. The name covers the storyteller Julianna Horváth (Mrs József Tóth Szőke, b. 1901–?), a poor peasant woman from Somogy county (Hungary), whose account included regular, physical abuse by her first husband. After the death of her second husband, she moved to Sztálinváros with her children and became a worker³. The Transylvanian-Hungarian journalist and folklorist Olga Nagy (Ernei, 1921 – Sfântu Gheorghe, 2006) had collected Hungarian-speaking Transylvanian peasant women's oral life narratives from the 1950s when she encountered the gendered discrepancies of the genre. She was the first Hungarian ethnographer who legitimized the female life narrative as a proper subject within the field of folklore studies and examined it from a broader social perspective.⁴ Her collection *Asszonyok könyve* [*Book of Women*] was the first Hungarian language volume presenting women's life narratives. One of her key informants, Zsuzsanna György from Cojocna (Cluj county, Romania), mainly recalled childhood abuse⁵, while in the stories of Mrs Ferenc Bakó from Neaua (Mureş county, Romania) her husband's aggressiveness dominated⁶.

³ Mrs Sándor Varjú, "Egy parasztasszony élete. Elmondta Varjú Sándorné 55 éves somogyi asszony", ["The Life of a Peasant Woman in the Narration of Sándorné Varjú, a 55-year-old Woman from Somogy], in Ilona S. Dobos (ed.), *Szegényember vízzel főz. Életrajzi vallomások* [*Poor Man Cooks with Water. Biographical Testimonials*], Budapest, Magvető, 1958, pp. 93-136.

⁴ Olga Nagy, *Hagyományörző népi kultúra. Társadalomnéprajzi vizsgálat Széken* [*Traditional Folk Culture. Socio-ethnographic Studies on Sic*]. Edited by Vilmos Keszeg, Cluj, Exit Kiadó – Asociația Etnografică Kriza János, 2016. On emancipation and political thought in state socialist Romania see Adela Hincu, *Accounting for the "Social" in State Socialist Romania, 1960–1980s: Contexts and Genealogies* (PhD dissertation), Budapest, Central European University, 2019.

⁵ Zsuzsanna György, "Kapálóban" ["In the Field"], in Olga Nagy (ed.), *Asszonyok könyve. Népi elbeszélések* [*Book of Women. Folk Narratives*], Budapest, Magvető, 1988, pp. 279-283; Zsuzsanna György, "Kifogyott a víz a kancsóból" ["The Jug Run out of Water"], in Olga Nagy (ed.), *Asszonyok*

The Transylvanian folklorist, Anikó Salamon, edited the biographies of Amália Botos (1907–?), a young woman from Târgu Mureş and Borbála Csobot (Mrs Albert Dávid, 1880–1971) from Bukovina. At 50, Amália Botos started to write diary-like, non-chronological notes about her life, which she intended to burn because of their personal nature. Her life was marked by violence, both psychological and physical, which resulted in a suicide attempt in 1922, caused by her childhood suffering⁷. Borbála Csobot, a poor peasant woman, began writing her memoirs after the death of her husband and completed them in 1963 when she was bedridden. During their 58 years of marriage, she had 14 children and was forced to work and even abused by her aggressive husband while pregnant⁸.

The autobiographies of Klára Győri (1889–1975) from Sic (Cluj county, Romania), Erzsébet Zsigmond (1937–?) from Aluniş (Mureş county, Romania), and Rozália Berényi (1887–1973) from Tarnabod (Heves county, Hungary) were published in separate volumes. Klára Győri was a storyteller and, encouraged by Olga Nagy, composed her life story in three attempts, continuously redrafting her previous manuscript. Her work was kept in secret while her husband was alive⁹. Erzsébet Zsigmond's autobiography consists of two parts: her memoirs from 1977 and her diary-like entries written between 1988 and 1990, after the death of her child. She was controlled by her husband and was regularly abused physically and emotionally¹⁰. Rozália Berényi grew up in a family of day labourers in Jászság (Upper Great Plain, Hungary), and worked as a maid and a servant all her life. She published her writings from the 1950s onwards. In 1967, she was involved in the volunteer ethnographic collector movement and finished her autobiography as an in-patient¹¹.

Gendered Life Writing: Theoretical Frameworks

In feminist academic scholarship, gendered life writing is considered to be an inclusive term that obliterates generic boundaries to overcome the masculine

könyve, pp. 289-293; Zsuzsanna György, "A hazugság büntetése" ["Punishment for a Lie"], in Olga Nagy (ed.), *Asszonyok könyve*, pp. 293-299.

⁶ Mrs Bakó, Ferenc, "Ma már nem tűrnék én se" ["Now I Wouldn't Bear It Either"], in Olga Nagy (ed.), *Asszonyok könyve*, pp. 102-110.

⁷ Amália Botos, [Untitled autobiography], in Anikó Salamon (ed.), *Így teltek hónapok, évek [Months and Years Passed by like This]*, Cluj, Kriterion, 1979, pp. 78-191.

⁸ Mrs Albert Dávid (née. Borbála Csobot), [Untitled autobiography], in Anikó Salamon (ed.), *Így teltek hónapok, évek*, pp. 9-40.

⁹ Klára Győri, *Kiszáradt az én örömem zöld fája [The Verdant Tree of My Delight Has Drained]*, Cluj, Kriterion, 1975.

¹⁰ Erzsébet Zsigmond, *Sírató. Életem panaszos könyve [Lament. The Plaintive Book of My Life]*. Edited by Vilmos, Keszeg, Cluj, Asociația Etnografică Kriza János, 1995.

¹¹ Mrs. András Berényi, *Nagy Rozália a nevem [My name is Rozália Nagy]*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1975.

concepts of canonical autobiographies. The diverse forms of women's self-representation derive from the gendered differences of experiences, thus requiring a broader analytical framework¹². To overcome the hindrances of the term female life writing, Caren Kaplan suggests the "out-law genre" in cases of non-canonical pieces of life narratives. These testimonies can be assumed as a form of resistance, and have the potential to challenge the hierarchy of ethnographers and informants¹³. Another recommended term is "marginalized counter-histories" by Susannah Radstone, to express that these pieces of self-representations have been neglected by professionals and, therefore, might open up new space for analysis¹⁴. These life narratives are more likely to be fractured, as women – especially in rural areas – did not have the "room of their own" to develop a coherent autobiography, like their male peers might have done. One example of this phenomenon are the female stories of the Neaua (Havadi) narrative collection by the folklorist Olga Nagy. This volume consists of non-canonical pieces of folk narratives, fragmented "peripheral stories" that did not fit in with the interviews about folktales. The most important outcome of Nagy's examination of seemingly unimportant narratives is that while men's stories ended happily, women's stories lacked any form of happiness or any sense of success¹⁵.

Apart from gender specificities, the question of extensibility occurs: whether the peasant self-images in these autobiographies can be considered typical or rather exceptional¹⁶. The individual life paths textualised in the sources represent both a subjective (personal) and a universal (communal) experience. The contradiction between ordinary and exceptional stories and their representativeness can be resolved by scrutinizing communal experiences via individual stories. The anthropologist Péter Niedermüller suggests that autobiographies register the values and norms of a community, and also spotlight

¹² Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson (eds.), *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1998; Louise O. Vasvári, I-Chun Wang, "Introduction to Life Writing and the Trauma of War", *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 17, 2015, 3, <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2915&context=clcweb>. Accessed on November 20, 2023; Louise O. Vasvári, "Életírás, társadalmi nemek, és Trauma" ["Life Writing, Gender and Trauma"], *Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya Interdiszciplináris eFolyóirat*, 6, 2016, 2, pp. 150-197.

¹³ Caren Kaplan, "Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects", in Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 115-138.

¹⁴ Susannah Radstone, "Autobiographical Times", in Tess Coslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism & Autobiography. Texts, Theories, Methods*, London, Routledge, 2000.

¹⁵ Olga Nagy, *Világgá futó szavak – Havadi beszélgetések [Words Flowing into the World – Neaua Conversations]*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1990.

¹⁶ Tamás Mohay, "Egyének, életutak" ["Individuals, Life Paths"], in Sárkány Mihály, Miklós Szilágyi (eds.), *Társadalom. Magyar néprajz nyolc kötetben VIII [Society. Hungarian Ethnography in Eight Volumes VIII]*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2000, pp. 771-773.

the most significant events of individual life¹⁷. Therefore, the unique memoirs of these peasant women correspond to the local, female experience of the first half of the 20th century.

On interpretation, we must also anticipate that the authors may have been somewhat alienated from the peasant lifestyle and mentality at the time of the text formation. Accordingly, the representation and subsequent life-course (re)assessment already occurred after a mentality shift¹⁸. The analysed texts are marked by liminality, meaning that the characteristics of conservation and elimination of the archaic social system are present simultaneously. Social control and fear of neighbours' judgment can still be observed in the narrations, but there are already signs of transformation, such as social and physical mobility, a divorce, or widowhood. Moreover, the act of writing and the publication of memoirs is also a transformational marker.

Women's and gender studies have, from the outset, focused on researching violence against women and abuse, but seldom scrutinized the experiences of rural women, unlike people living in urban poverty. Ethnographic studies incorporated women's experiences in their analysis for it was essential to the understanding of everyday life and the inner structure of communities. However, these studies applied a normative approach without criticism: gender roles were present as subjects, but not as an analytical tool or a category for interpretation. Another substantial circumstance is that many authors of life accounts scrutinized in this paper belong to the Hungarian ethnic minority in Transylvania. Therefore, their testimonies are marginalized on multiple levels.

The first peasant autobiographies date from the 19th century, the third and final stage in the history of memoirs¹⁹. Nevertheless, life stories written by peasant women only appeared around the 1970s²⁰, following the narrative or linguistic turn and the academic institutionalization of women's history²¹. At that time, the research interest of folklorists turned towards the individual and emphasized the personal experiences of narrators. The *performer-centred approach* allowed for a more profound examination of the narrators' lives, personal habits, and emotions.²²

¹⁷ Péter Niedermüller, "Bevezetés" ["Introduction"], in Péter Niedermüller (ed.), *Életsorsok Zsombón* [*Life Courses in Zsombó*], Budapest, MTA Néprajzi Kutató Csoport, 1982, p. 5.

¹⁸ Tamás Mohay, "Egyének, életutak", p. 773.

¹⁹ Viktor Gyenis, "Emlékirat és parasztkrónika" ["Memoirs and Peasant Chronicles"], *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, 69, 1965, 2, pp. 152-171.

²⁰ Mihály Hoppál, Imola Küllös, "Parasztönéletrajzok – paraszti írásbeliség" ["Peasant Autobiographies – Peasant Literacy"], *Ethnographia*, LXXXIII, 1972, 2–3, pp. 284–292.

²¹ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988; Andrea Pető, Judith Szapor, "The State of Women's and Gender History in Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungary", *Journal of Women's History*, 19, 2007, 1, pp. 160-166.

²² Linda Dégh, *Narratives in Society: A Performer-centered Study of Narration*, Helsinki, Folklore Fellows Communications, 1995; Mihály Sárkány, "Hungarian Anthropology in the Socialist Era:

Over the same period, the topics of domestic violence and violence against women made their way into the social and political discourse of Western Europe as part of the feminist, human, and civil rights discourse. These social, political, and academic circumstances allowed the articulation and amplification of stories of violence that had been silenced for centuries.

The history of Hungarian peasant autobiographies has been reviewed several times²³, and the existence of gendered differences has also been underscored²⁴. In these analyses, the feminine attributes of female narratives were emphasized such as passivity and focus on the family. These features however are inseparable from socialisation and traditional gender roles, therefore stories of women who voiced both painful and intimate events carried feminine attributes. Yet, by writing and publicly acknowledging their sufferings, they disrupted the traditional image of passive peasant women. In this way, it is unsurprising that negative criticism suggested that their fate and experiences are marginal, not representative, and therefore cannot be considered “traditional peasant lives”²⁵.

According to Imola Küllös, the motivation for writing could be the transmission of personal knowledge, education, rebelling against social norms, artistic self-expression, or serving the community²⁶. Life narratives can be externally encouraged or spontaneously created texts, retrospectively generated autobiographies that intend to conceptualize and evaluate the stages of one’s life course, or diaries written in the course of everyday life. Each portrays their creator in a different way²⁷. Küllös suggested that writing as a method of passing on and transmitting knowledge and values was atypical, and this fact explains the negative criticism of peasant female life writing. On the other hand, as the cornerstone of peasant society was work, providing information to ethnographers or historians, collecting local artefacts, story-telling, or writing increased the social and communal esteem of elderly people, as these activities were realized as labour by the community²⁸.

theories, Methodologies and Undercurrents”, in Mihály Sárkány, Chris Hann, Peter Skalník (eds.), *Studying Peoples in the People’s Democracies: Socialist Era Anthropology in East-Central Europe*, Münster, LIT Verlag, 2005, pp. 87-108.

²³ For example, see Mihály Hoppál, Imola Küllös, “Parasztönéletrajzok”; Tamás Mohay, “Egyének, életutak”.

²⁴ Krisztina Frauhammer, Katalin Pajor (eds.), *Emlékek, szövegek, történetek. Női folklór szövegek [Memories, Texts, Narrations. Women’s Folklore Texts]*, Budapest, Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, 2019; Küllös, Imola, “A női önéletrajzok”; Olga Nagy, *Asszonyok könyve*.

²⁵ Olga Nagy, “Hagyományörző népi kultúra”, pp. 100-102.

²⁶ Imola Küllös, “A női önéletrajzok”, p. 425, 431-434.

²⁷ See, Gergely Kunt, “How Do Diaries Begin? The Narrative Rites of Adolescent Diaries in Hungary”, *European Journal of Life Writing*, 2015, 4, pp. 30-55.

²⁸ Imola Küllös, “A női önéletrajzok”, pp. 432-433.

Conceptualising Sexualised Violence in Times of Social Change

The concept of violence and its communal and individual apprehension vary historically, and it has been interpreted differently by each social layer and local community. In this section I aim to underline the core elements influencing the perception of violence against women: historical period, locality, war and alcoholism. To uncover how sexualized violence was understood in different periods and communities, it is essential to observe by what means authorities and people considered physical violence. Corporal punishment and physical violence have been socially accepted sentences for centuries and used by both clerical and secular authorities, but customs have also authorized the beating of children and women. Law enforcement bodies penalized certain forms of violence, yet in other cases, they used physical retaliation²⁹.

Since peasant society subordinates human connections to labour, in the patriarchal socio-economic system the father and then the husband decide upon the position of women in the work organization and everyday life. Young girls were socialized by their mothers and female relatives to tolerate the patriarchal norms, in this way a cycle developed from which women could not and did not necessarily want to get out. Except for brutal cases (violence against pregnant women and infants), domestic abuse was not considered to be “authentic” violence³⁰. Hierarchy was also an important aspect of relationships outside the family, such as the unequal position between landlords, male servants, and female maids. And the vulnerability of those in a subordinate position included the risk of physical and sexual violence. Excluding abuse with serious consequences (physical mutilation, extramarital pregnancy), these cases were not subject to any particular sanction, primarily because the perpetrators were considered socially superior to the victims.

Regional differences also characterized peasant society despite its homogenous image in historiography. Olga Nagy developed a model of local cultural patterns indicating that each Transylvanian village has different customs and attributes: Sic (Szék) has individualistic and archaic features, while Neaua (Havad) is austere and

²⁹ See Mónika Mátay, “The Adventures of Dispute. A Marriage Crisis”, *Hungarian Historical Review*, 2014, 3, pp. 159-189; Eleonóra Géra, “‘Mulier Imperiosa’: The Stepfamilies of Eva Elisabetha in Buda in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century”, *Hungarian Historical Review*, 8, 2019, 4, pp. 789-811; Gabriella Erdélyi, *Negotiating Violence: Papal Pardons and Everyday Life in East Central Europe*, Leiden, Brill, 2018.

³⁰ Lajos Balázs, *Amikor az ember nincs es ezen a világon. Paraszti nemi kultúra és nemi erkölcs Csíkszentdomokoson* [When a Person is No Longer in this World. Peasant Sexual Culture and Morality in Sândominic], Miercurea Ciuc, Pallas – Akadémiai Kiadó, 2009; Sándor Balázs Kovács, “Válás a sárközi paraszti társadalomban”, [“Divorce in Rural Sárköz”], in Attila Gaál (ed.), *A Wosinsky Mór Múzeum Évkönyve 27* [Yearbook of the Wosinsky Mór Museum], Szekszárd, Wosinsky Mór Múzeum, 2005, pp. 259-296; Olga Nagy, “A törvény szorításában”.

puritan in morality³¹. Speaking of domestic violence in rural society, differentiation is required between the perpetrator's and the victim's points of view; the reaction of the village or neighbourhood; the assessment of the researcher or collector; and the evaluation of posterity. Moreover, the analysis is hindered by women's apprehension who considered violence legitimate. Growing up in a hierarchical social system, subjugation, and female cultural patterns did not allow the legitimacy of physical punishment to be contested in most cases³².

The norm of physical punishment was only challenged in the 20th century, as a consequence of modern childrearing practices, the institutionalization of child protection³³, the recognition and extension of human rights, and the feminist and civil rights movements³⁴. These discourses have transformed the way we think of violence against women and also problematised the issue of domestic violence in the public discourse. Whilst transformations at the beginning of the century had a greater influence on the lives of urban citizens, we cannot disregard that the morals and customs of the peasant society were also affected by the First World War and its aftermath, and by the influences that commuters (seasonal workers and maids) mediated³⁵.

Among the consequences of WWI on family life, the beating of wives and the murder of women were reported in the press. The Feminists' Association (Feministák Egyesülete) published several reports on the invisible suffering of women and children in the hinterland, the murder of wives, and the intensification of domestic violence after the war³⁶. On the other hand, quantitative research on the thematic distribution of articles in Hungarian feminist journals (*A Nő és a Társadalom*, *A Nő*) outlined that violence against women and the "maid question" closely connected to prostitution enjoyed negligible publicity compared to the topics of suffrage or labour. Middle-class families, who provided the financial

³¹ Olga Nagy, "A törvény szorításában", pp. 19-30.

³² Kata Jávör, "A magyar paraszti erkölcs és magatartás ["The Hungarian Peasant Morality and Behaviour"]", in Sárkány Mihály, Miklós Szilágyi (eds.), *Társadalom. Magyar néprajz nyolc kötetben VIII*, pp. 601-692.

³³ Zita Deáky, „Jó kisfiúk és leánykák”. *A kisgyermekkor történeti néprajza Magyarországon* ["Good Little Boys and Girls". *Historical Ethnography of Early Childhood in Hungary*], Budapest, Századvég, 2011.

³⁴ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will. Men, Women and Rape*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1975.

³⁵ Gábor Gyáni, *Women as Domestic Servants: The Case of Budapest, 1890–1940*, New York, Institute on East Central Europe, 1989; Ágnes Fülemile, "Social Change, Dress and Identity: Observations on the Disintegration of Peasant Culture as Exemplified by Rural Women's Clothing in Hungary from the First World War to the End of the Kádár Era Socialism", *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, 65, 2020, 1, pp. 107-186.

³⁶ Judit Acsády, "Diverse Constructions. Feminist and Conservative Women's Movements and Their Contribution to the (Re-)construction of Gender Relations in Hungary after the First World War", in Ingrid Sharp, Matthew Stibbe (eds.), *Aftermaths of War. Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918–1923*, Boston – Leiden, Brill, 2011, pp. 309-332.

security of the Feminists' Association, regarded these matters inappropriate for their daughters, and the Association had to consider their moral values.³⁷ Although militarism and the trauma of war experienced by men may have contributed to the escalation of domestic violence, it does not in itself explain the existence of abuse, as marital violence has been present throughout history. WWI and its aftermath, the temporary disintegration of norms, may have contributed to the expansion of violence against women, but it is alleged that not all soldiers abused their wives and not all abusers were soldiers.

Another ground for intimate partner violence was men's alcohol consumption. Alcoholism as justification for violence also echoes in 20th century biographies and literary works. The correlation between men's alcohol consumption and domestic violence can also be observed in the increasing number of divorces³⁸. These justifications implicitly exonerate the perpetrator, as the influence of trauma or alcohol diminishes personal accountability to some degree. To this end, domestic violence cannot be treated exclusively as a "women's issue", for effective action against the problem is not possible without thematising the role of the perpetrators³⁹.

Life writings are immensely significant, since in retrospect, women transcribed experiences that were unspeakable heretofore. Accordingly, I interpret the representation of domestic violence in self-narratives as a transgressive act. Nevertheless, women whose stories corresponded to the textualization of 20th century female life courses contributed to the transformation of social norms through their narrative act. Subsequently, the emphasis is largely on the power and the limitations of abuse narratives.

Uncovering Violence Against Women: From Shame to Agency

Concerns about publishing abuse stories enclose the questions of shame, trauma, and agency. The sense of shame prevented the stories of domestic violence from being narrated and publicized, in this way violence and its consequences remained almost invisible, enclosed into the female body⁴⁰. Patriarchy and the subordination of women as a social group contribute to the elusiveness of shameful stories. In rural society, shame is a fundamental emotion in the

³⁷ Dóra Czeferner, *Polgári-liberális, feminista nőszervezetek és sajtójuk az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchiában (1907–1918). Egyesületek, periodikák, tartalomelemzés [Civil-liberal, Feminist Women's Organizations and their Press in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1907–1918). Associations, Periodicals, Content Analysis]* (PhD dissertation), Pécs, University of Pécs, 2020, p. 185, 193.

³⁸ Olga Tóth, *Erőszak a családban [Violence in the Family]*, Budapest, TÁRKI, 1999, p. 32.

³⁹ Krisztina Morvai, *Terror a családban. A feleségbántalmazás és a jog [Terror in the Family. Wife Beating and the Law]*, Budapest, Kossuth, 1998, pp. 237–254.

⁴⁰ Andrea Pető, "Shame Revisited in the Memory Politics of Illiberal States", in Ernst Van Alphen (ed.), *Shame! and Masculinity*, Amsterdam, Valiz Publishing, 2020, pp. 103–113.

socialisation of girls. In the grip of various taboos and prohibitions, the moral aspect of shame comes to the fore. The gendered sense of shame dominated women's views on sexuality and marriage. The political environment is again substantial as memory policy influences the way stories are told or tabooed. The narration of domestic violence is restrained by the state discourse based on ideological familism. Treating the family as an exclusive unit obscures its internal relations and dynamics, thus making male-female conflicts silent⁴¹.

I argue that women's stories of violence can be interpreted as coping strategies that transform former victims into actors. Building on the concepts of resilience and agency, I attempt to reframe violence narratives beyond the framework of indescribability and shame, thus proposing a possible approach beyond taboo and stigma. A significant but disputed notion in this process is "overcoming trauma". While analysing narratives of distressing events, Agatha Schwartz used the term "vocabulary of rupture" referring to overcoming the trauma of wartime sexual violence. Schwartz conceptualized rape as a traumatic event associated with a specific vocabulary and expressions⁴². Correspondingly, Suzette A. Henke mobilizes trauma theory in reframing women's autobiographies as a space for coping strategies. "Scriptotherapy" is perceived as a process for reconstructing the traumatized self: an activity through which a former victim can create her narrative of the violence she has experienced, thus transforming past events into present actions⁴³.

Surprisingly, the Communist takeover also contributed to uncovering past taboos. The Hungarian ethnographer Judit Morvay published the first women-centered village monograph in 1956⁴⁴. Her investigation of the patriarchal family structure and female life experiences was possible because it fitted in with the communist scientific policy. The suppression of women could be framed as a reflection of the failures of the old, bourgeois system, not the general subordination of women in society. Nonetheless, this "equivocal emancipation" allowed for women to reveal their experiences. Writing provides women a chance to find their voice and their own story. Repositioning events in a discursive space equips survivors with an agency and an opportunity for action to form a coherent self-image beyond trauma. However, in addition to finding a functional vocabulary, women also had to deal with the lack or rejection of potential

⁴¹ Csaba Dupcsik, Olga Tóth, "Feminizmus helyett familizmus" ["Familism Instead of Feminism"], *Demográfia*, 51, 2008, 4, pp. 307-328.

⁴² Agatha Schwartz, "Creating a 'Vocabulary of Rupture' Following WWII Sexual Violence in Hungarian Women Writers' Narratives", *Hungarian Cultural Studies*, 10, 2017, pp. 82-95.

⁴³ Suzette A. Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1998.

⁴⁴ Judit Morvay, *Asszonyok a nagycsaládban* [Women in the Joint Family], Budapest, Magvető, 1956.

audiences, so a letter, a diary, a memoir, or an autobiography could evolve as the scene for the re-creation of events.

Negotiating Intimacy: Cold Relationships and Marital Rape

In addition to dysfunctional marriages, the unhappiness of sexual life, and the fear of unwanted pregnancies, the problem of domestic violence appeared in Lajos Balázs's monograph on Sándominic (Csíkszentdomokos). Balázs traced the cognitive elements of local society on sexual morality⁴⁵. In the case of marital sex, women often obeyed the will of their husbands in the hope of shorter intercourse. Others, fearing physical punishment, did not dare to resist. Nor should we forget that women were economically dependent on their husbands, accordingly divorce was not a real possibility. Furthermore, the atmosphere of everyday life in the family was important to the wives. That is why subtle influences such as everyday verbal abuse challenge our notions of sexual violence. A recurring element in women's narratives is obligation. Female imprints of socialisation and internalised expectations have more than once resulted in a situation where it is the abused wives who protected their husbands from being persecuted. Elements of self-blame imply they have "provoked" the violence with their perceived or actual behaviour, and even the assumption of deserving to be beaten⁴⁶. After the wedding, peasant women moved to their father-in-law's house, where they were outsiders and integration into their new families brought unexplored conflicts to the marriage. Despite considerable humiliating and painful situations reported by women, these actions did not count as unambiguously violent behaviour by local standards⁴⁷.

The evaluation of violence and its approval is exemplified by an extreme case when the husband beat and then raped his wife during the postpartum period. Because of the man's brutality, the wife had to be taken to the hospital, for she was heavily bleeding. Despite being severely injured she did not dare to tell the doctor what had happened at home. The wife justified her action by protecting their children and the honour of the family. This kind of brutality was condemned by the neighbourhood and was evaluated unquestionably as domestic violence⁴⁸. We can again see that protecting the family has triumphed over the protection of women's physical safety. In this case, it was the abused wife who contributed to the silencing of domestic violence, which can be explained by social expectations.

The autobiography of Klára Győri (1899–1975), a peasant storyteller from Sic (Szék), is possibly the most prominent piece of its genre in the Hungarian-

⁴⁵ Lajos Balázs, "Amikor az ember nincs es ezen a világon".

⁴⁶ Krisztina Morvai, "Terror a családban", pp. 98-103.

⁴⁷ Lajos Balázs, "Amikor az ember nincs es ezen a világon", pp. 266-272.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 268-269.

language ethnographic literature⁴⁹. Klára Győri started to write her life story in 1960, and only after the death of her abusive husband could she finish a genuine manuscript. In the book *Kiszáradt az én örömem zöld fája* [*The Verdant Tree of My Delight Has Drained*] her experiences as a maid, her vulnerability, her unhappy marriage, and her toxic relationship with her husband were disclosed. After the First World War, her marriage to widower István Filep brought decades of suffering. The lonesome years spent with the rude, uneducated, and insensitive man left their mark on the wife. Győri's book was ground-breaking in many senses and it was the first female autobiography to disclose the "wedding night" of newlyweds. Even the manuscript's editor Olga Nagy was shocked since Győri never talked about forced sexual relations in her marriage during the many years of their acquaintance. Unhappy, cold marriage and forced sexual intercourse with her husband were not even considered de jure violence in that era. Regular sexual intercourse between husband and wife was acknowledged as part of the marriage, and this perception excluded the existence of sexual violence within a marriage:

My man was asleep, but suddenly woke up. In vain did I promise God thirty prayers. Now he begins to squeeze me, to embrace me, I feel something rising from the hangman's pants! Oh, what shall I do? This was the first difficulty. He said some mild words: Well, look, this is how it should be, others do it too. I said: God damn who came up with this. [...] Well, I didn't even get warm, I was shivering, I was so cold. Anyway, he was the stronger. When I was free from torture one evening (I never once desired it, nor had any desire for it), I wondered: if he had worn nice underpants the first time he undressed, would it have helped? Or is it not the underwear that counts?⁵⁰

From Győri's narration, it is unmistakable she was aware of the inappropriateness of this relationship, but no forum existed where she could express her doubts. Moving back to her parents' house was opposed by her father for marriage was considered a lifelong choice. This attitude was typical since the foundation of rural society was the family. Caring for divorced or single women would have placed an additional burden on the community. The coping strategy of women could only be patience and acceptance, which contributed to their vulnerability and solitude.

The concern of folk text publications – i.e., who is authorized to publish, what is to be printed, and when to uncover narratives – occurs in the case of Klára Győri's autobiography. This volume was unprecedented in its explicit description of the sexual vulnerability of peasant women and the intimate, private details of marriage. A significant circumstance for the publication was that the editor, Olga Nagy, sent "appropriate" chapters to the editorial office of *Valóság* and *Korunk* –

⁴⁹ Klára Győri, "Kiszáradt az én örömem zöld fája".

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 137-138.

two leading Hungarian-language journals – to advertise the forthcoming book⁵¹. Caution proved necessary, as the book provoked substantial debates among both Transylvanian and Hungarian experts. The intimacy of the narration and the textualization of domestic violence were perceived as a violation of social norms not only by the village community but by some professionals as well⁵².

Concerning Klára Győri's volume, peasant women argued for the inappropriateness of writing about such private incidents. The assessment was also determined by local morality and religion: people of the Calvinist Neaua (Havad), mentioning shamefulness, completely rejected the book, while the ones of the Catholic Sândominic (Csíkszentdomokos) identified with the narrator. According to the inhabitants of Sic (Szék), Győri spoke out against the will of the village, meaning she disclosed information about them for which she did not have the moral authority⁵³. The nonacceptance of experts could also be triggered by the fact that Győri's autobiography did not conform to the canonised image of the Transylvanian peasantry and also dismantled the idealised view of Sic (Szék)⁵⁴. The romanticized representation of Transylvania and the "untouched" rural life was part of the nationalist discourse in Hungary and among the Hungarians living in Romania. Investigations with different outcomes – which were closer to reality – were suppressed, as they could shatter the identity of Transylvanian people.

Another example of sexual violence against women is the case of Mrs András Berényi (1887–1973) from Tarnabod, Hungary, who also exposed the violent nature of the wedding night. She was raised in a poor peasant family and was an agricultural worker and a maid throughout her life. She had been writing and publishing regularly since the 1950s in communist journals, which were significant forums for women on the one hand, and legitimized the Stalinist emancipatory policies on the other hand. Berényi had also been involved in the voluntary ethnographic collection movement since 1967. In arranged marriages, there was a relatively short time to become acquainted with each other before the wedding, but an intimate relationship was expected to be established on the first night:

Oh dear, now I have to go to bed. I've made so many plans to get away from this, and now I'm in a room with this stranger who is so persistent, let's go to bed, I have to get up in the morning. He's so violent, I can't even get out of his arms, and he pulls my clothes off. I push him away in vain, I can undress, but he wants me to lie against the wall, no, I'd rather not lie down, and I beg him not to touch me, I have to pray! He spits on the lamp, I struggle with him for a while, but he is so strong, he knocks me down, and I feel so much pain. I scream loudly, and now I am no longer a virgin, that

⁵¹ Olga Nagy, "Hagyományőrző népi kultúra", pp. 83-84.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 106-108.

⁵⁴ Vilmos Keszeg, *Alfabetizáció, írásszokások, populáris írásbeliség [Alphabetization, Writing Habits, Popular Literacy]*, Cluj, Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, 2008, pp. 306-307.

which for years I have lived in perpetual anxiety and suffered many painful hours for has happened⁵⁵.

The description of a “wedding night” lacking any kind of intimacy and humanity permits a glimpse into the emotionally poor world of the vast majority of peasant marriages. Though mothers attempted to prepare their daughters, still the common assessment was that men’s violent behaviour was reasonable, or at least unchangeable, and young women had to tolerate it. These memoirs published in the mid-1970s, were among the first to discuss intimate relationships inside marriage and gave a brief description of the first sexual intercourse of newlyweds. In doing so, they paved the way for the exploration of peasant women’s life experiences and also served as a model for future narratives.

Coping with Physical Abuse in Everyday Life

In what follows I examine the textualization of wife beating in rural autobiographies. The fractured articulations of abuse in the texts may be explained by the fact that the author did not consider the events to be particularly remarkable⁵⁶. On the other hand, there may exist some ambiguity when it comes to shame, silence, and the desire to share their experiences. In the life narrative collection edited by Anikó Salamon, we can also find a sequence of mistreatment in two women’s autobiographies.

Borbála Csobot (1880–1971) from Bukovina was regularly abused by her husband. During their 58 years of marriage, she gave birth to 14 children, and her aggressive husband abused her while pregnant. In one case, on returning home late at night, the husband suddenly attacked his wife with a saw while she was making dinner. Csobot could only escape with the help of a neighbour:

He hit me so hard with the little saw that the wood in the middle broke. So he hit me on the head with the wooden ends until blood ran from my head down to my feet. [...] There was only one tough man next door. He broke through the gate, came in, grabbed him by the throat, and pulled me out of his hands⁵⁷.

Amália Botos (b. 1907) experienced various forms of physical and emotional terror in her dysfunctional family relationships from a very young age. At the age of fifty, Botos moved to an apartment in Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely), where she started to take diary-like non-chronological notes about her life. Later she wanted to destroy them because of their excessive honesty. Neither as a child nor as an adult did Botos have any human relationship without some kind of violence: she was abused by her father and stepfather, and beaten by both husbands. Dissatisfied

⁵⁵ Mrs András Berényi, “Nagy Rozália a nevem”, p. 173.

⁵⁶ See Sándor Balázs Kovács, “Válás a sárközi paraszti társadalomban”, pp. 273-275.

⁵⁷ Mrs Albert Dávid, [Untitled autobiography], p. 16.

with the unemployment and drunkenness of her first husband, she wanted to divorce. Infuriated by this news, the husband started beating her and only stopped upon the landlady's intervention:

And in response, he grabbed my hair, pushed me to the ground and kicked me wherever he could, saying, "Do you want a divorce? Right? A divorce?" And the wall being thin, my landlady, hearing what was happening, came in and saw us and said, "Mr Orbán, what are you doing?" And my dear husband let go and said, "Nothing"⁵⁸.

Physical violence was an everyday experience for Mrs József Tóth Szőke (pseudonym: Mrs Sándor Varjú) in her first marriage.⁵⁹ On one occasion she smiled at her former lover while smashing corn, and her sister-in-law informed her husband about it. The man brutally beat his wife, despite her being seven months pregnant:

Then my husband called me out. He beat me badly, even though I was already pregnant. My mother saw it too, she felt sorry for me; she told me not to go back to my husband. But I took my scarf and went home with my husband and sister-in-law. Jóska also noticed that my husband was beating me. Only later did he tell me that he followed us home and stood under the window for a long time wondering if they would hurt me⁶⁰.

The abovementioned examples underscore that the intervention of the neighbourhood or relatives may have put an end to domestic violence. Still, in the vast majority of incidents, eyewitnesses did not provide aid to the abused women and the interventions only occurred in explicitly brutal cases⁶¹. The autobiography of Erzsébet Zsigmond (b. 1937) from Mureş county also exemplifies the mechanisms of physical and verbal abuse and the recurring motifs of abused women's stories. Erzsébet Zsigmond's life writing consists of two parts: her recollections from 1977 and her diary-like entries between 1988 and 1990 after she had lost her child. Zsigmond was kept under constant control by her husband, who physically and emotionally abused her wife. In the academic reception, no details have appeared about the violent, drunken husband or her unhappy marriage. Scholars positioned the autobiography to the public as a story of a mother traumatised by having lost her child. Either by involuntary tabooing or conscious silencing, this fact obscures Zsigmond's long-standing and systematic physical and mental abuse⁶². Furthermore, restraining the experience of traumatized women hinders the understanding of the sequence of causes and consequences that ultimately shaped the authors' identity. It was not by accident that in each case

⁵⁸ Amália Botos, [Untitled autobiography], p. 105.

⁵⁹ Mrs Sándor Varjú, "Egy paraszttasszony élete".

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 116.

⁶¹ Amália Botos, [Untitled autobiography], p. 90; Mrs Albert Dávid, [Untitled autobiography], p. 16.

⁶² Vilmos Keszeg, "Élettörténetek", p. 166; Vilmos Keszeg, "Alfabetizáció", pp. 308-307.

analysed the life account was written only after the death of the husband or the permanent separation of the couple. Writing and publication can be perceived as a form of compensation for lifelong suffering and, likewise, an opportunity to liberate oneself from the husband's oppression⁶³.

Like many other women in cold marriages, Erzsébet Zsigmond suffered from the absence of attention and care, the husband's crudeness, and excessive alcohol consumption⁶⁴. Resignation and the acceptance of the fate imposed on her were coupled with a sense of permanent terror. While drunk, the husband behaved unpredictably and violently with those around him, especially with his wife. In one instance, he tried to murder his wife with a butcher's knife which he regularly used to threaten her with:

He locks the hallway door from the inside, he is still drunk, he turns off the light and takes the large butcher's knife, he always pulled out those, holy God, I often wonder why I didn't let him kill me, but then God knows why I was so afraid, trying to save my life, I could not think. I run out, but the door to the hallway is locked, I try the key but in my nervousness, the door won't open, I can feel the knife in my back, I'm so desperate that it's all over, the door opens at the last moment, on February 24, 1980, in the crackling cold, I run to my dear mother in a house dress. [...] I trembled so badly, when he was drunk, his eyes were like those of an enraged animal, I was even more afraid that he would hang himself and his relatives would eat me alive, saying that I was to blame. When I told my sister what he did, she always told me to let him do it⁶⁵.

Unmistakably, the threat with a knife was not an impulsive, single occasion. Moreover, the husband was emotionally blackmailing the distressed wife with his suicide, so Zsigmond had to fear possible revenge by the man's relatives. Accordingly, the wife had to bear not only her torments but also the weight of her husband's possible actions. Her mental and emotional condition is well reflected by the fact that she did not even understand why she was protecting her own life when her husband tried to kill her. Therefore, domestic violence cannot be considered a "private affair", as it also affects the relatives of the couple, let alone their children. Only in the 21st century had violence against women as a social problem been widely acknowledged in Eastern Europe. These narratives of systematic abuse were formerly labelled as bad marriages, estrangement, issues related to mentally ill or drunken husbands, or the unhappiness of women. Marginalizing the problem and pathologizing the perpetrators have all contributed to silencing the experiences of abused women.

The story of Mrs Ferenc Bakó from Neaua (Havad) not only reflects on and re-evaluates her former actions, but also sheds light on solidarity as a possible

⁶³ Vilmos Keszeg, "Alfabetizáció", p. 309.

⁶⁴ Erzsébet Zsigmond, "Sirató", p. 58.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

response to violence. During an escalating conflict over domestic labour, physical punishment was retaliation for the woman's harsh words:

When he gets up, he says: – Is there any food ready? I say: – Is there any wood under the stove? As you cut wood, so I cooked. When you're at work, that's different. You're making money. But on Sunday you are sleeping and I should cut wood? Did you take me as a lumberjack or a wife? Do you think, you are the only smart one here? Well, he beat me so badly that my back was blue. That was the kind of man I had. I tolerated him because of the children. I'd never have dared to fight back, if I had I would have gotten even more of that. A woman is a woman, and a man is a man, so God has ordained⁶⁶.

In her narrative, the concept of tolerating the beating for her children's sake and obeying the divine order is combined with exceptional self-esteem. Pride and desire for human dignity encouraged Mrs Bakó to communicate her complaints despite being conscious of the consequences. Following another incident, the woman called her adult son, who acted upon the protection of his mother and openly confronted the abusive father⁶⁷. Solidarity in the family could thus provide a kind of response to the problems of abused women, as moving out with an adult child, parent, or relative could be a solution for women, even in a social system where divorce came at a very high social price: they could not fit in the village community any longer.

Nonetheless, the abovementioned examples also illustrate that this type of solidarity was rather exceptional. Even close family members accepted the abusive treatment of women and did not intervene in marital conflicts. One informant of Lajos Balázs, who was beaten by her drunken, violent husband several times, asked the local priest for help, but her hopes were shattered. Eventually, the neighbours intervened to protect her young children. In this case, secular forces, and the local authorities appeared as potential aid providers, while the clergy remained silent⁶⁸. The husband's sober periods and vows resemble the batterer's behaviour and answer the question of why women stay in such relationships⁶⁹. Although the neighbours' action was a significant moment in the story, it is obvious that their primary motivation was to protect the children, not the wife.

Conclusion

Transformations in academic paradigms and social changes of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in materializing violence against women and domestic violence in

⁶⁶ Mrs Ferenc Bakó, "Ma már nem tűrnék", p. 102.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 103-104.

⁶⁸ Lajos Balázs, "Amikor az ember nincs es ezen a világon", pp. 269-270.

⁶⁹ Lenore Walker, *The Battered Woman*, New York, Harper & Row, 1979.

the social and political discourse. These transitions coincided with the transformation of the Hungarian and Romanian rural societies under state socialism and Western second-wave feminism. Peasant women were oppressed in the patriarchal culture of peasant society and scarcely benefited from political representation despite the emancipatory policies of state socialism.

Therefore, these social changes and the evolution in academic interest can be perceived as game-changers. The re-evaluation of the boundaries between the public and private spheres permitted rural women to share their experiences. These eight women's narratives scrutinized above moved beyond taboo and stigma, into a realm where peasant women's traumas would gain a voice. This phenomenon is exemplified either by the social and political changes that facilitated the visibility of the suffering connected to interwar, bourgeois society, or by the death of the husband and the escape from patriarchal repression.

Transformations in women's lifestyle, mentality, and gender roles also allowed for the narration and subsequent reassessment of (domestic) violence against women⁷⁰. Although the experiences of violence in peasant women's autobiographies have not yet been reinterpreted at the time of their textualization, they have already become articulated and narrated. Self-narrations were preceded by a transition in mentality during which women moved away from the traditional peasant lifestyle and attitude. By transforming the evaluation of their experiences, public narration became achievable. Yet, the implicit principle of non-intervention and family life as a private environment remained until the 1990s. The narratives of domestic violence were hindered by a state discourse based on ideological familism, which, by treating the family as an exclusive unit, obscures its internal relations and dynamics, thus silencing male-female conflicts⁷¹.

In this study, changes in the notion of violence and the peculiarities of female autobiographies as marginalized counter-histories were briefly presented via eight life narratives. In this corpus, two main types of abuse were scrutinised: sexual and physical violence against wives. These women publicly violated the regulations related to female socialisation patterns, therefore there was no space for community solidarity to be established. It is unsurprising that women only spoke out when they were older, after the death of their husbands. This may be explained by the loosening of norms in the case of elderly women, or a desire to share their life stories prior to the end of their lives. Recording violence and harassment may have served as a coping mechanism or a creative activity. Retrospective life narration could also be a tool for the restoration of their self-esteem, as it was

⁷⁰ Karen Offen, *European Feminisms. A Political History, 1700–1950*, Los Angeles, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 20.

⁷¹ Csaba Dupcsik, Olga Tóth, "Feminizmus helyett familizmus".

recognized as labour by the community. Thus, their writing can also be evaluated as a means of taking their destiny into their own hands.

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**BEYOND TABOO AND STIGMA: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN 20TH
CENTURY RURAL HUNGARY AND TRANSYLVANIA***(Abstract)*

The study underscores the conversions in violence concepts textualized in eight Hungarian-speaking peasant women's life narratives. By addressing the central questions of violence against peasant women, the examination provides a path toward including the rural as a geographic and socio-cultural dimension in the studies of women's writing. In this corpus of marginalized counter-histories, two main types of abuse were scrutinized: sexual and physical violence against wives. Breaking with the social and community norms, these rural women textualized and publicized their stories of abuse and moved beyond the stigmatizing efforts of patriarchal society. I examine these accounts of violence as coping strategies that transform former victims into actors. Based on the concepts of resilience and agency, I attempt to disentangle the stories of women who have experienced domestic violence from indescribability and shame by suggesting a possible approach beyond taboo and stigma.

Keywords: domestic violence, violence against women, rural society, female life narrative, Hungary.

**DINCOLO DE TABU ȘI DE STIGMĂ. VIOLENȚA DOMESTICĂ ÎN MEDIUL
RURAL DIN UNGARIA ȘI TRANSILVANIA SECOLULUI AL XIX-LEA***(Rezumat)*

Studiul evidențiază schimbările de concepere a violenței, reflectate în opt narațiuni despre propria viață, aparținând unor țărânci de limbă maghiară. Abordând problematici centrale despre violența împotriva femeilor din zona rurală, articolul pledează pentru recunoașterea ruralității ca o dimensiune geografică și socio-culturală relevantă pentru aria de studii dedicate scriiturii feminine. În cadrul acestui corpus de contra-istorii marginalizate am analizat două tipuri de abuzuri: violența sexuală și violența fizică la care au fost supuse femeile în ipostaza lor de soții. Încălcând normele sociale și comunitare, aceste femei din zona rurală au transpus în scris și au făcut publice abuzurile la care au fost supuse, așa încât au eludat procesul de stigmatizare tipic societății patriarhale. Valorific aceste dări de seamă despre violența domestică ca strategii de adaptare menite să transforme victimele în actori. Pornind de la concepte precum reziliența și capacitatea de a acționa, îmi propun să delimitiez poveștile victimelor violenței domestice de prejudecata indescriptibilului și a rușinii cu scopul de a configura o posibilă abordare dincolo de tabu și de stigmă.

Cuvinte-cheie: violență domestică, violență împotriva femeilor, societate rurală, narațiuni ale vieții femeilor, Ungaria.

ANDRADA FĂTU-TUTOVEANU

TATTOOED SOULS: THE VOCABULARY OF SEXUALITY AND TRAUMA IN WOMEN’S MEMOIRS ON ROMANIAN COMMUNIST PRISON EXPERIENCE

We would be nothing without our memory.
(Annie Bentoiu)

Writing is a journey into our memory and soul.
(Isabel Allende)

Life Writing on the Post-Communist Romanian Book Market

While Life Writing as an umbrella genre became incredibly popular on the Romanian book market in the 1990s, following the demise of the Communist regime, it took more than one decade for women’s personal narratives, including memoirs, diaries or correspondence, to get the same attention. However, since 2009–2010 female Life Writing accounts have become increasingly present or even dominating on the Life Writing niche market in Romania, as a natural and long-expected compensation of historically silenced voices. Authors like Ana Blandiana, a famous poet and civic activist, interested in building remembrance projects like the Sighet Memorial and in the legacies of anti-Communist resistance and prison memory, published with great success books that cover the different subgenres we associate with Life Writing¹. Similarly, if the authors could no longer publish them personally, their successors did so (see, for instance, Monica Pillat or Dorli Blaga publishing their parents’ correspondence or diaries), considering the cultural legacy they contributed to. Additionally, personal narratives published by Romanian authors but previously not available in Romanian (like Raluca Sterian-Nathan’s memoir, published in French, Ana-Maria Callimachi’s, published in English, or Olimpia Zamfirescu, whose memoir in English was in manuscript in the British archives for decades) were finally translated in the recent years.

Publishers have grouped these accounts into anthologies or collections related to the Life Writing genre such as those published by the Humanitas Publishing House and named “Memorii/ Jurnal” [“Memoirs/ Diaries”], the Corint Publishing House (“Istorie cu blazon” [History with a Coat of Arms]) and by Polirom

¹ The most recent, Ana Blandiana, *Mai-mult-ca-trecutul. Jurnal, 31 august 1988 – 12 decembrie 1989* [*More-Than-Past. Diary, August, 31, 1988 –December, 12, 1989*], București, Humanitas, 2023.

Publishing House, which creatively titled the collection “Ego-grafii” (a pun combining “ego” with the Romanian word for ultrasound scans – *ecografii*). Interestingly, this label points at the process of exploring the self and its intimate mechanisms, with a therapeutic purpose. The description of these collections is aimed explicitly at the variety of the Life Writing subgenres, containing diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, all uncensored and revealing untold stories. Critics and audiences, as well as the publishing system have all shown constant or even increasing interest in the genre. I believe this consistent, significant and, in terms of women’s Life Writing, growing interest of both publishers and readers shown during Post-Communism can be explained on the Romanian book market through a need for recovering a silenced past and making visible the previously censored or self-censored confessions (the so-called “literatură de sertar” [literally “drawer literature”])²:

Ideas of restitution and reparation, evoking both financial or political justice and more abstruse compensations such as recognition of wrongs done, or readiness to hear and acknowledge hidden stories, all draw on a sense that the present is obliged to accommodate the past in order to move on from it (itself, of course, a historically specific way of thinking about history)³.

The reasons behind the phenomenon of what I call a Life Writing boom on the Romanian market (female writing being a significant segment, most relevant in the last two decades) range from aiming at offering a cultural legacy to, more importantly, regaining a collective sense of identity, but all these under the umbrella of therapeutic testimonies⁴ of collective memory and remembrance:

Memory is not only individual but cultural: memory, though we may experience it as private and internal, draws on countless scraps and bits of knowledge and information from the surrounding culture, and is inserted into larger cultural narratives. This is a relationship that goes both ways, of course. If individual memories are constructed within culture, and are part of cultural systems of representation, so cultural memories are constituted by the cumulative weight of dispersed and fragmented individual memories, among other things⁵.

As a form of compensation for decades of censorship and self-censorship, of untold stories, of individual and collective traumas, these voices are finally heard. On the other hand, for the readers the living interest in discovering a truth that was

² Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, “The Post-Communist Romanian Book Market – Recovering Politically Censored Literature in the 1990s. Case Study: Petru Dumitriu’s Works”, *Donauraum*, 2010, 3–4, p. 368.

³ Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone, “Introduction: Contested Pasts”, in *Memory, History, Nation*, London, Routledge, 2017, p. 1.

⁴ Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, *Personal Narratives of Romanian Women during the Cold War (1945–1989): Varieties of the Autobiographical Genre*, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2015.

⁵ Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone, “Introduction”, p. 5.

“out there” but left untold is also the concern in recovering as many pieces as possible of a historical jigsaw and therefore to understand the events that had perhaps shaped their lives or those of their parents or family and of an entire nation. It is, eventually, a need for understanding, an essential human search for meaning, in this case by appealing to direct testimonies: “The person who remembers, in this model, is able to know and tell the truth of the event, because s/he was there at the time. Experience is the guarantee of certainty”⁶.

However, the very nature of life-writing is “uncertain”⁷, ambiguous, with intentional or unintentional blurring of the thin line between fiction and non-fiction:

The appeal to memory in determining the truth of the past, then, is widespread. But it is also problematic: both ‘memory’ and ‘truth’ here are unstable and destabilising terms. To privilege memory as a tool of truth, through which the statements of authority may be subverted or contradicted, we must assume a direct correspondence between the experience and how it is remembered⁸.

Thus, the Romanian book market (and, more recently the film industry, but only with attempts that can be seen as shy in comparison with the Communist historical movies, grand epics and biopics) has adapted to this request for the “autobiographical genre”⁹ and has extensively (and successfully) published “ego documents”¹⁰. Moreover, the therapeutic function of such recoveries is primordial, as they are what we call trauma documents on a collective traumatic past:

Trauma theory [...] has become an explanatory apparatus through which to apprehend and analyse the past. [...] It is worth noting that, while this conceptualisation of the relation between the traumatic event and its subsequent representation has been hugely influential in the two particular instances of childhood sexual abuse and the holocaust, it is striking how seldom the main concerns of trauma theory appear in other historical or national contexts. Other massacres and genocides,

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁷ Jochen Hellbeck, “The Diary between Literature and History: A Historian’s Critical Response”, *The Russian Review*, 63, 2004, 4, p. 621.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁹ Following the concept used by Liana Cozea, *Confesiuni ale eului feminin [Confessions of the Female Ego]*, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2005, p. 12.

¹⁰ The term was inspired by its use in previous instances such as in the Dutch Historian J. Presser’s “Memoires als geschiedbron” [“Memoires as a Historical Source”] (in *Winkler Prins Encyclopedie*, VIII, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1958, pp. 208-210), the German “Ego-Dokumente”, in Winfried Schulze, “Ego-dokumente. Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte?” [“Ego-Dokumente: An Approach to Human History?”], in B. Lundt, H. Reinmoller (eds.), *Von Aufbruch und Utopie. Perspektiven einer neuen Gesellschafts geschichte des Mittelalters [On Beginnings and Utopia. Perspectives on a New Social History of the Middle Ages]*, Köln – Weimar – Wien, Geburtstages, 1992, pp. 427-451. See also Winfried Schulze, “Ego-Dokumente” in Winfried Schulze (ed.), *Ego-Dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte [Ego-Dokumente: An Approach to the Human Being in History]*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1996, pp. 319-325.

other experiences of violence, loss, suffering, displacement, are either little studied, or studied in other contexts than that of traumatic memory¹¹.

However, in the case of female authors, this recovery is even more significant in terms of testimonies and legacies because we are dealing with a category that, both as political prisoners and as a “secondary people”¹² or “secondary nation” and gender, were silenced and it took longer than in the case of male authors (with a twenty years delay if we consider the female Life Writing publishing boom after 2010) to make themselves heard. These

personal narratives, seen as reflections of female experiences and interpretations of events, represent a key object of analysis for gender-focused studies.... I consider this connection between *gender* and *the genre*¹³ [of life-writing] extremely relevant mainly because these narratives are not and cannot be, critics consider, neutral from the gender perspective¹⁴.

Once accepted the ambiguity of the personal narrative genre in relation to the truth, which often remains untold or fragmented, the focus here will be on the manner in which Life Writing is constructed to balance testimony and silence in this type of narrative. These accounts refer to isolation in imprisonment but also to collective imprisonment, during which the sharing of one’s “narrative reserves” was essential in a regime of confinement that banned writing and reading. Memory served, therefore, a vital function in the exercise of survival. In this context, but also after the imprisonment experience, the story has strong therapeutic functions and creates a magic, protective circle around the narrator, thus re-establishing a traditional aspect of oral storytelling. In prisons, in the absence of access to the actual tools of writing, this process was actually experienced as a re-enactment of the ancestral oral storytelling practice. Later, the accounts on collective and/or personal crises have been associated with both the use of narratives as form of survival and resilience and as a consequence, in trying to tell/share the story of trauma and find coherence, put order into chaos. The personal narrative remains most prominent in these traumatic contexts, probably as it has to do with the internal survival and with the preservation of mental health. It can also be connected with the justification of a sort of internal resistance and schizoid thinking in relation to the external intrusion of the political.

¹¹ Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone, “Introduction”, pp. 6-7.

¹² See Călin Morar-Vulcu, *Republica își făurește oamenii. Construcția identităților politice în discursul oficial în România, 1948–1965* [*The Republic Builds its own Citizens: Constructing Political Identities in the Romanian Official Discourse, 1948–1965*], Cluj-Napoca, Eikon, 2007, p. 411.

¹³ See Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, “‘Gender and Genre’: Women’s Diaries and Memoirs”, in *Personal Narratives*, pp. 11-18.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

This need for order and coherence is intertwined – in personal narrative writing and reading – with a search for establishing the “truth”, Quixotic as it may seem due to the nature of both “memory” and “truth”¹⁵. History, in the form of official narratives (which, stable as they may seem, are also subject to changes, whether enriched over time with new, additional information or, on the contrary, politicised, mystified, distorted) coexists at the level of personal histories or herstories with the perspective of the individual (famous or anonymous), with his/her version of the blurred or fragmented – but nonetheless first-hand – experience.

Besides the search for the truth – which sometimes makes the author compare his/her story with the official sources (as the author Annie Bentoiu does as a rule), history books, newspapers archives, other memoirs – this search for meaning and coherence has to do with one’s own identity and evolution. Thus, diving into memory, as Victor-Ieronim Stoichiță¹⁶ or Micaela Ghițescu¹⁷ do, becomes equivalent with a recovery of one’s “Bildungsroman”, a hero/heroine’s journey in which the books they read are the “helpers” and “mentors” essentially necessary in the process of transgressing the challenges of a totalitarian regime.

Gender, Sexuality and Trauma. Women and Communist Repression – Inquiries and Interrogatories

Typically for totalitarian regimes, Romanian Communist dictatorship utilised repression as a form of control, political prison, torture and sexual violence being some of the extremes. The presence of women in prisons as political prisoners was relevant for a more precise characterization of the regime and the formulas it applied for the “liquidation” of some social categories: “the imprisonment of teenage girls, young students, mothers, pregnant women, but also grandparents with hair bleached by time and age, their humiliation and torture hang heavily in the judgment of history”¹⁸. This type of repression involved all of the aspects listed here, as well as more gender-focused, sexual violence or intimidation (the so-called verbal rape).

Quoting Daniel P. Mannix, Ruxandra Cesereanu discusses the sexualisation of torture (*algolagnia*), exercised directly or indirectly, as having ancient roots in the

¹⁵ See Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone, “Introduction”, p. 2.

¹⁶ Victor-Ieronim Stoichiță, *Despărțirea de București* [Leaving Bucharest]. Translated by Mona Antohi, București, Humanitas, 2015. In the French original the title is *Oublier Bucarest*.

¹⁷ Romanian translator, a political prisoner in her early 1920s.

¹⁸ Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Martore fără voie: fostele deținute politic și memoria comunismului în România* [Unwilling Witnesses: Women Former Political Detainees and the Memory of Communism in Romania], Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun, 2021, p. 212.

Colosseum massacres, either involving the gladiators or the Christian martyrdom¹⁹. Cesereanu observes that in the witch trials organised by the Inquisition the victims were also subject to sexual violence and creates a parallel to the 20th century political torture exercised on the female body²⁰ and characterised by or including sexual violence. In this context, Cesereanu notes that the rape, in the form of “dominating rape”, combined with “sadistic rape” and “punitive rape” is a double form of torture, as both aggression and supreme humiliation²¹. This form of physical violence is more politicised and organised than one might believe and therefore not a spontaneous form of abuse. In 20th century political torture, sexual violence was considered a duty for the person performing it and a political measure or “political objective”²². In this respect, a perfect case in point would be Oana Orlea quoting a guard, who also became a prisoner and who said: “It’s hard for you too, but it’s not easy for us either”²³. To this confession, Orlea adds the comment: “Hell in the mirror. With strict distortions”²⁴, thus suggesting that violence, sexual violence included, was not spontaneous or instinctive but politicised and organised.

What is extremely relevant here is the female authors’ reluctance to use explicit references to sexual violence or intimidation and their effort to organise the narrative in a manner that would avoid uncomfortable references to it. These women, who grew up in the interwar middle class, educated not to discuss vulgar or abject matters, but to cultivate their femininity, discretion and modesty and to take care of themselves²⁵, found it difficult or chose not to describe intimate aspects in the prison universe. These women,

socialized in a bourgeois environment and therefore shaped by its values, tried to manage not only the body itself, but also its representation in discourse. For a woman from the interwar middle class, talking about her own body was considered inelegant, being perceived as a humiliation and a social degradation²⁶.

Moreover, “[a]t home they talked academically and there was a kind of taboo for everything related to sex”²⁷. Therefore the dilemma of these personal accounts lies, for a whole generation of female authors, socialised in the 1930s and/ or

¹⁹ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Panopticon. Political Torture in the Twentieth Century*, București, Institutul Cultural Român, 2006, p. 199.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 204.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 205.

²³ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, interviu realizat de Mariana Marin [*Cantacuzino, Take Your Rags and Move!*, interview conducted by Mariana Marin], București, Compania, 2008, p. 77.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Martore fără voie*, pp. 236-237.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

²⁷ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, p. 17.

1940s in the middle class society mentioned above, between the importance of their testimonies as historical and cultural legacy and also as a form of justice to the voices of fellow prisoners silenced forever (see Micaela Ghițescu's account on a very young friend, Mariana, who died in prison due to tuberculosis²⁸) and the reluctance to speak the unspeakable, to express in words the humiliating and painful experiences, especially the intimate ones:

I find it difficult to speak, especially under the gaze of the generation that I represent. [...] However, here I am talking. I can think of two reasons for doing it. The first: an entire generation in Romania has no memory. [...] The second reason: it seems unfair and, in a certain way, dangerous to look at the dead. For many of them, our memory will be the only grave²⁹.

The result is a subtle form of balance between explicit details from prison and interrogatory experience and suggestions, oblivions, gaps when something is unspeakable and translated into the refusal to remember the traumatic experience (they prefer to remember the fellow prisoners' solidarity, stories and songs they shared etc.), sometimes avoiding mentions of the body altogether³⁰:

the body, beyond its reality, is a symbolic, social and cultural construction. ... However, I was surprised to find that the women interviewed by me rarely mentioned the experiences related to the body, intimacy and ignored biological needs in their narrative³¹.

An interesting detail, observed by researchers of Romanian female prisoners and their Life Writing narratives is that they did not talk to their former fellow prisoners (although they kept in touch) or to their family about what happened "out of fear but also out of modesty"³². Their "inhibition, trauma, humiliation, but also the belief that others had tougher experiences or that they told stories better led my informants to conceal its details"³³. There are exceptions of episodes of sexual violence, such as those mentioned by Raluca Sterian-Nathan³⁴, who experienced it during interrogatories, where she was regularly taken for intimidation (but not as a political prisoner).

²⁸ Micaela Ghițescu, *Între uitare și memorie [Between Oblivion and Memory]*, București, Humanitas, 2012.

²⁹ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, p. 4.

³⁰ Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Martore fără voie*, p. 234.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 234-235.

³² See the Ghițescu-Dobre interview, in Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Fostele deținute politic și Securitatea. Studiu de caz [The Former Political Women Prisoners and the Security Service]*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun, 2023, pp. 201-229.

³³ Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Martore fără voie*, p. 169.

³⁴ Raluca Sterian-Nathan, *Suflet tatuat [Tattooed Soul]*, București, Humanitas, 2010. In the French original, the title is *L'âme tatouée*.

Some researchers believe that, in the case of Romanian political prisons during Communism, sexual violence was not the dominant practice (Grațian Cormoș, for instance, argues that “unlike other concentration areas, Siberian Gulag, South American political prisons, here sexual abuse in the form of rape remained unrepresentative”³⁵) and, some testimonies acknowledge, even punished: “sexual assault was pretty firmly repressed, at least during my time [in prison]”³⁶.

Nonetheless, in all cases, sexual harassment, aggression and sex-related torture were current practices, especially as a gender-related form of intimidation but also extending to male prisoners in form of verbal sexual references and innuendos, expressing domination and appropriation of the last possession of the victim, the body. The uniform of the guardians (a symbol of power and authority) was opposed to the vulnerable nudity of the prisoner (“there was a tension in the air, with all the guardians who always saw us naked in the shower or the toilet”³⁷). The situation took the form of a symbolic pre-rape, based on domination and humiliation: “In the majority of detention testimonies, sexual aggression was limited to verbal harassment, voyeurism and, more rarely, took the form of physical touching”³⁸. In this approach, verbal violence or the “verbal rape” were ubiquitous as a form of constant threat and intimidation, in order to weaken resistance:

I stayed there for about two months. In addition to slaps, handcuffs and endlessly repeated questions, the investigations were accompanied by swearing. [...] It was the first time in my life that I heard such complicated swear words. The banter was current, the rudeness – deliberate, “I’m going to do it to you” and “I’m going to do the other thing to you...”. Not to mention “fuck you” and other swearing about God... They worked in the classic pair: the evil, brutal, thwarted investigator, and the good and humane one. “But you can’t... Look, she’s a child, you can’t do that to her”³⁹.

This practice of the alternating hard and soft methods was a classic, indeed, mentioned by all of the victims. Micaela Ghițescu, investigated for 13 months at Uranus⁴⁰, writes that she suffered no physical violence but she felt fear nonetheless:

My main investigator was relatively decent. [...] He didn’t beat me, nor did he touch me, although nearby I could hear screams of pain... The actual investigator was

³⁵ Grațian Cormoș, *Femei în infernul concentraționar din România (1945–1989)* [*Women in the Romanian Prison Inferno (1945–1989)*], Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006, p. 53.

³⁶ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, p. 17.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Grațian Cormoș, *Femei în infernul concentraționar din România*, p. 53.

³⁹ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Uranus was initially a military prison in Bucharest, later a centre for interrogatories and, finally, since 1961, a penitentiary used temporarily for prisoners before taking them to other prisons.

doubled by another. [...] The one I was really afraid of [...] he spoke threateningly, raised his voice. [...] I was really afraid of him⁴¹.

However, we do not know whether this verbal harassment was the actual limit of aggression or the testimonies refrain from describing more than the “verbal rape”, out of reluctance and solidarity, a sort of silent agreement between the fellow prisoners or a pact of silence. The violence of language that was the first and most ubiquitous form of intimation towards these women, most of them young and unaccustomed through education with this type of communication, can best be described through the concept of “linguistic vulnerability” coined by Judith Butler⁴², whose arguments can describe the power of this form of “verbal rape”:

When we claim to have been injured by language, what kind of claim do we make? We ascribe an agency to language, a power to injure, and position ourselves as the objects of its injurious trajectory. We claim that language acts, and acts against us, and the claim we make is a further instance of language, one which seeks to arrest the force of the prior instance. [...] The problem of injurious speech raises the question of which words wound, which representations offend, suggesting that we focus on those parts of language that are uttered, utterable, and explicit⁴³.

In the case of these women prisoners, the sexual references, also suggesting power and violence, were those meant to hurt and intimidate, prior or instead of physical brutality. In contrast to the violence of language suggested by the author, the modesty of these women socialized in the interwar space, in the bourgeois environment and with the modesty to talk about the body. Memories are marked by silence or (intentional?) memory gaps: “I forgot”⁴⁴.

A certainty is, nonetheless, the confiscation of the body by the authority and the control of all its aspects, from hygiene to food, as a symbol of an attempt to total control and, respectively, loss of identity. Testimonies reveal that this was not achieved eventually because the system could not hold captive the minds (despite attempts, such as in Lena Constante’s case, to weaken this also, through total isolation or other practices). The women prisoners, especially as they were educated to take care of their bodies and appearance, described this appropriation of body related practices (“confiscated” body) as humiliating. Ioana Berindei describes the need to preservation of femininity as a form of resistance and dignity⁴⁵, while Oana Orlea speaks of the humiliation of being denied the right to hygiene:

⁴¹ Micaela Ghițescu, *Între uitare și memorie*, p. 100

⁴² Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, 2nd edition, Abingdon, New York, Routledge, 2021, p. 1.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ Interview with Ioana Berindei, in Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Fostele deținute politic*, pp. 282-306.

Of course, they took our shoe laces, watches, rings, bras, but that was unimportant besides the lack of a comb, a toothbrush, a towel. I had nothing. Only the skirt, the torn blouse and, on the feet, the sandals. I didn't even have a handkerchief to wipe myself with. It is unimaginable how much I can suffer due to the lack of these trivial objects! And they know it. Everything is perfectly controlled. To go into the investigation dirty, without combing your hair [...] it is so humiliating, and resistance weakened⁴⁶.

However, if the body was no longer their own or exclusively their own, these women prisoners managed to find strength in their minds: in telling stories, in narrating to each other books, films or in reciting poems or singing songs, and in a sense of sisterhood, preserved after their return from prisons in personal networks relying in prison solidarity and friendship.

As partial conclusions of this research that is still in progress, we have to mention the significance of sexual violence and sexual language in practices related to political prisons throughout recent history, in close relation with political torture, especially when women prisoners were concerned. In this context, the female prisoner is made even more vulnerable by the (usually male) dominating investigator or guardian, who has unconditional access to the victim's body, sexual violence being in political interrogations or wars a form of exercising power, domination and control. Although sexual violence is not extremely visible in Romanian Life Writing authored by women, language violence (verbal rape), and intimidation is mentioned by all the authors. We also have reasons to believe that we are dealing with omissions, silences and intentional memory gaps ("I forgot") because of the victims' education in interwar middle class or aristocratic families, where the body and sexual issues were taboo. Also, these silences and omissions could be due to their own feeling of humiliation or because of some silent pact between the fellow victims to keep some intimate aspects of the trauma as private. Still, from what is spoken, we see that the body and the sexual aspects were very important in the case of political prisoners and even more so in the case of women. The body, the last stronghold of the prisoners, was humiliated and tortured even through continuous voyeurism and hygiene issues, hence the need to take refuge in a cultural dimension (readings, foreign languages, films, etc.), religion, as well as in friendship and solidarity. Therefore, the authors of these Life Writing accounts try to narrate their prison experience for the next generations but at the same time trying not to have their intimacy even further violated.

⁴⁶ Oana Orlea, *Cantacuzino, ia-ți boarfele și mișcă!*, p. 16.

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TATTOOED SOULS: THE VOCABULARY OF SEXUALITY AND TRAUMA
IN WOMEN'S MEMOIRS ON ROMANIAN COMMUNIST PRISON
EXPERIENCE

(Abstract)

Departing from extended previous research on Romanian women's Life Writing covering the Cold War and Romanian Communist dictatorship, the paper focuses on trauma and sexual intimidation within the context of political investigations and interrogatories described by female victims in their memoirs. The paper focuses on the manner in which trauma and more precisely sexual trauma is approached by these authors, with a special interest for their vocabulary options. The article discusses the perspective of Life Writing as documenting trauma for the generations to come but also as a discourse with a therapeutic function. Regarding sexual violence, language violence (verbal rape) and intimidation are mentioned by all the authors. In contrast to the violence of language suggested by the authors, these women authors, socialized in the interwar period, in the bourgeois environment, show a reluctance to talk about the body and sexual violence. Therefore, I am largely interested in the oblivions, gaps, omissions, silences but, at the same time, in the mechanisms through which the silenced and previously unheard voices of women, traditionally perceived as a "secondary people" or nation (Morar-Vulcu 2007), become more prominent in the last decade.

Keywords: trauma, Romanian literature, political prison, torture, sexual violence.

SUFLETE TATUATE: VOCABULARUL SEXUALITĂȚII ȘI AL TRAUMEI ÎN
MEMORIALISTICA FEMININĂ DESPRE EXPERIENȚA ÎNCHISORILOR
COMUNISTE DIN ROMÂNIA

(Rezumat)

Pe fondul cercetării derulate de autoare în ultimii ani în zona memorialisticii și a diaristicii feminine (sau, în termeni mai largi, *life-writing*) ce acoperă perioada comunistă, articolul studiază tema sensibilă a traumei și a intimidării de tip sexual în contextul anchetelor și interogatoriilor politice. Mai precis, lucrarea urmărește maniera în care trauma în raport cu sexualitatea este abordată de către autoarele volumelor de memorialistică, cu o focalizare specială pe aspectul opțiunilor de vocabular. Articolul pornește de la mai multe volume ce relatează istorii personale din perioada comunistă și, mai ales, din perioada „obsedantului deceniu”. Mă interesează abordarea *life-writing* din perspectiva povestirii „egografice”, ca document al traumei, dar unul cu funcție terapeutică (nevoia de coerență, de sens, de „adevăr”), precum și didactică, anume transmiterea a „ceea ce s-a întâmplat”. Deși violența sexuală reiese din memorii ca fiind nereprezentativă pentru cazul romanesc, violența de limbaj (violul verbal), ca formă a intimidării, este menționată de toate autoarele. În contrast cu violența de limbaj, aceste femei socializate în spațiul interbelic, în mediul burghez, manifestă pudoarea de a vorbi despre corp. Așadar, mă interesează mai ales aspectele indicibile, ceea ce este omis, tăcerile, dar, în același timp, și demutizarea, verbalizarea, vocile feminine, vocile neuzitate ale unui „popor secundar” (Morar-Vulcu 2007), care devin mai proeminente în ultimul deceniu.

Cuvinte-cheie: traumă, literatură română, închisoare politică, tortură, violență sexuală.

LOLA SINOIMERI

**FAIRE MÉMOIRE COMMUNE AUTOUR DES
SILENCES. FICTIONS ET MÉMOIRES DES GUERRES
DE YOUGOSLAVIE CHEZ
ANILDA IBRAHIMI ET MARICA BODROŽIĆ**

We engage in history not only as agents and actors but also as narrators and storytellers. In narrative, we may be able to redress forcibly forgotten experiences, allow the silences of history to come to word, and imagine alternative scripts of the past. [Nous nous engageons dans l'histoire non seulement en tant qu'agent-es et acteur-ices, mais aussi en tant que narrateur-ices et conteur-euses. Par l'intermédiaire du récit, nous pouvons être en mesure de rétablir des expériences éradiquées de la mémoire, permettre aux silences de l'histoire de s'exprimer et imaginer des scénarios alternatifs du passé.]

Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*

Azade Seyhan ouvre sa réflexion sur les littératures transnationales en attribuant à la littérature et en particulier aux récits de fiction le pouvoir de proposer des versions alternatives de l'histoire officielle en donnant voix aux expériences silencées. Selon elle, ce sont ces littératures « déterritorialisées » « opér[ant] en dehors du canon national »¹ et se situant « dans les interstices entre différents espaces »² qui constituent le lieu privilégié d'une mémoire alternative autour de laquelle il deviendrait possible de faire communauté autrement³. Face à la perte linguistique et communautaire propre à l'exil et aux expériences traumatisantes de l'histoire, les écrivain-es transnational-ales deviendraient en effet « les chroniqueur-euses des histoires des déplacé-es dont les récits ne seraient

¹ Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 4, 10.

² *Ibidem*, p. 4.

³ Azade Seyhan définit à plusieurs reprises son objet d'étude qui ne saurait cependant être catégorisé de manière définitive. Je me réfère pour ma part à cette définition : « Je conçois la littérature transnationale comme un genre d'écriture qui opère en dehors du canon national, aborde des questions auxquelles sont confrontées les cultures déterritorialisées et parlent pour celles et ceux qui forment ce que j'appelle des communautés ou alliances "paranationales" » – *Ibidem*. La traduction des citations m'appartient, sauf mention explicite d'un-e autre traducteur-ice.

pas enregistrés autrement. La littérature tend à enregistrer ce que l'histoire et la mémoire publique oublie souvent »⁴.

Dans cet article, je me propose de mettre à l'épreuve, à partir de l'étude comparée de deux romans de fiction, l'idée selon laquelle la littérature transnationale aurait le pouvoir de créer de nouvelles communautés mémorielles qui échappent voire se construisent contre la mémoire nationale. Les deux œuvres que j'étudierai s'inscrivent dans un même contexte : celui de la rupture que constituent dans les années 1990 l'effondrement des régimes socialistes, la montée des nationalismes et les guerres en Yougoslavie. On assiste alors à la consécration du modèle politique de l'État-nation et à la mise en place de nouvelles frontières qui vont de pair avec la fabrication de communautés nationales et donc de mémoires nationales. Ce changement de paradigme politique n'est pas sans conséquence dans le champ littéraire européen. On assiste en effet à l'émergence d'une littérature transnationale issue des migrations intra-européennes des Balkans vers l'Europe occidentale, qui met en récit ces bouleversements historiques en ex-Yougoslavie ainsi que l'expérience de l'exil⁵. Parmi ces écrivain-es de la diaspora balkanique, on compte un certain nombre d'autrices qui mettent en récit ces expériences du point de vue des femmes, que ce soit dans leurs œuvres autobiographiques, autofictionnelles ou fictionnelles⁶.

C'est le cas d'Anilda Ibrahim et de Marica Bodrožić, qui présentent des trajectoires biographiques et littéraires similaires : après leurs expériences des régimes socialistes dans leur pays d'origine et leur exil, elles commencent à être publiées toutes deux dans la langue de leur pays d'arrivée. En 1994, Anilda Ibrahim quitte l'Albanie pour l'Italie puis la Suisse et publie en 2009 son premier roman d'inspiration autobiographique⁷. Marica Bodrožić quant à elle est née en 1973 dans l'actuelle Croatie et immigré en Allemagne en 1983 avec sa famille. Elle se fait connaître en publiant de la poésie, des nouvelles et un premier roman

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

⁵ Pour les champs littéraires germanophones et italo-phones, voir notamment Milica Grujičić, *Autoren südosteuropäischer Herkunft im transkulturellen Kontext [Auteurs d'origine sud-est européenne dans un contexte transculturel]*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2019; et Emma Bond, Daniele Comberiati (eds.), *Il confine liquido: rapporti letterari e interculturali fra Italia e Albania [La Frontière liquide : les relations littéraires et interculturelles entre l'Italie et l'Albanie]*, Nardò, Besa, 2013.

⁶ Voir Jasmina Lukić, « Gender and Migration in Post-Yugoslav Literature as Transnational Literature », in Angela Richter, Tijana Matijević, Eva Kowollik (eds.), *Schwimmen gegen den Strom? Diskurse weiblicher Autorschaft im postjugoslawischen Kontext [Nager à contre-courant ? Discours de l'auctorat féminin dans le contexte post-yougoslave]*, Halle, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 2018, pp. 319-342.

⁷ Anilda Ibrahim, *Rosso come una sposa [Rouge comme une mariée]*, Torino, Einaudi, 2009. Publié en traduction française : Anilda Ibrahim, *La mariée était en rouge*. Traduit par Maïra Muchnik, Paris, Books éd., 2013.

autobiographique⁸. Après l'écriture autobiographique vient chez ces deux autrices l'écriture d'œuvres de fiction, qui traitent de l'histoire contemporaine et récente des Balkans, de l'expérience de l'immigration ou de la diaspora, ainsi que des questionnements identitaires qu'elle suscite. C'est le cas des romans *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle* [*Bois de cerisier et sentiments anciens*]⁹ et *L'amore e gli stracci del tempo* [*L'amour et les lambeaux du temps*]¹⁰ qui ont en commun de mettre en récit les expériences de l'exil et de la guerre du point de vue des femmes. Le premier raconte la vie d'Arjeta, la narratrice immigrée à Paris puis à Berlin après son expérience du siège de Sarajevo, sa ville d'origine. Le roman d'Ibrahimi quant à lui mêle deux récits de vie, ceux d'Ajkuna et de Zlatan, lié-es par un amour de jeunesse et séparé-es par la guerre. Ajkuna, jeune Albanaise du Kosovo, a subi les violences de la guerre de 1999 puis est transférée en Suisse après son passage dans un camp de réfugié-es en Albanie.

Il semblerait au premier abord que ces romans s'emploient non seulement à défaire la mémoire nationale et toute récente des guerres de Yougoslavie, mais aussi à élaborer par opposition des mémoires alternatives de la guerre et de l'exil, que j'appellerai « mémoire commune ». Dans un premier temps, j'analyserai les modalités d'élaboration de cette mémoire dans le cadre de la fiction : les deux romans proposent en effet des scènes de reconstruction communautaire qui passent par la mise en récit et surtout en dialogue de l'expérience des femmes exilées, et ce dans le respect des failles de la remémoration mais aussi et surtout, quand il s'agit d'expériences de violence extrême, de l'indicible¹¹. Je me demanderai dans quelle mesure ces récits fictionnels peuvent en réalité servir de modèles à l'expérience d'écriture et de lecture : ces mémoires communes ne s'élaborent-elles pas finalement dans les communautés d'écriture et de lecture créés par ces romans de fictions ? La notion d'horizon d'attente¹² me permettra dans un deuxième temps de remettre en question le pouvoir des littératures transnationales à faire mémoire commune autour des silences : en effet, comment assurer une écoute et un respect de ces récits de violence extrême dans un contexte d'horizon d'attente occidentalocentré ? Dans cette perspective, je prêterai attention aux enjeux éthiques de

⁸ Marica Bodrožić, *Sterne erben, Sterne färben : Meine Ankunft in Wörtern* [*Hériter des étoiles, colorer les étoiles : mon arrivée en mots*], München, btb, 2016.

⁹ Marica Bodrožić, *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle* [*Bois de cerisier et sentiments anciens*], München, Luchterhand, 2012.

¹⁰ Anilda Ibrahimi, *L'amore e gli stracci del tempo* [*L'amour et les lambeaux du temps*], Torino, Einaudi, 2011.

¹¹ Sur le concept d'indicible en littérature, voir Luba Jurgenson, *L'indicible : outil d'analyse ou objet esthétique*, 37, 2009, 2, pp. 9-19.

¹² Je reprends l'expression d'horizon d'attente à Hans Robert Jauss, *Pour une esthétique de la réception*, trad. Claude Maillard, Paris, Gallimard, 2005. Je comprends dans cette perspective l'horizon d'attente comme l'ensemble des normes littéraires et sociales qui forment les attentes du lectorat au moment de la parution de l'œuvre.

représentation des guerres et des femmes qui en sont victimes. Je replacerai pour cela la publication de ces romans dans leur contexte spécifique, celui des années qui suivent les guerres de Yougoslavie, et j'interrogerai le rôle de ce que Dragana Obradović appelle l'*international gaze*¹³ dans les représentations des victimes et les modes du récit.

1. De la mémoire nationale aux mémoires communes des guerres en diaspora

1.1. Défaire la mémoire nationale

Selon Assmann, la mémoire nationale se fabrique autour de grandes victoires et de grandes défaites nationales qui sont commémorées, ritualisées et monumentalisées dans le but de construire une identité nationale et de l'ancrer dans le temps¹⁴. Or la fabrication d'une telle mémoire va de pair avec un processus de sélection et d'exclusion, « séparant nettement les souvenirs utiles de ceux qui ne le sont pas, et les souvenirs pertinents de ceux qui ne le sont pas »¹⁵.

Chez Ibrahimî comme chez Bodrožić, les ressorts de la fabrication d'une telle mémoire et donc de son caractère factice sont exhibés par certains personnages. La mémoire nationale se trouve ainsi mise à distance voire décrédibilisée. En effet, elle ne peut fonctionner que par le biais d'une adhésion émotionnelle et d'une identification de toutes les personnes censées former la communauté nationale. Dès lors que cette adhésion est rompue, la fabrique de la mémoire se révèle et rompt l'illusion de la naturalité de la nation et de sa communauté¹⁶.

Au début du roman d'Anilda Ibrahimî, *L'Amore e gli stracci del tempo*, les personnages de Donika et de Slavica – respectivement les mères d'Ajkuna et de Zlatan – se disputent à propos de la légende de Rozafa. Chacune défend les intérêts de sa communauté : Donika, albanaise du Kosovo, affirme qu'il s'agit d'une légende albanaise qui se déroule dans la ville de Shkodër en Albanie tandis que Slavica rétorque qu'il s'agit d'un monument de la littérature serbe. Finalement, le différend est réglé par le mari de Slavica, Miloš, qui les interrompt : « Ça suffit ! [...] Nous avons toujours été voisins, cela ne vous semble pas normal que nos histoires se ressemblent ? »¹⁷. La légende nationale contribue de fait à la

¹³ Dragana Gavrilović Obradović, *Writing the Yugoslav wars: Literature, Postmodernism, and the Ethics of Representation*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2016, p. 139.

¹⁴ Aleida Assmann, « Memory, Individual and Collective », in Robert E. Goodin, Charles Tilly (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 210-224.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 216.

¹⁶ Voir Étienne Balibar, Immanuel Wallerstein, « La forme nation : histoire et idéologie », in *Race, nation, classe. Les identités ambiguës*, Paris, France, La Découverte, 2007, pp. 117-143.

¹⁷ Anilda Ibrahimî, *L'amore e gli stracci del tempo*, p. 31.

construction de la mémoire nationale, dans la mesure où cette dernière trouve son fondement dans un fait historique amplifié, déformé au point d'être assimilé à un mythe. Ici, la légende est en réalité révélée par Miloš comme un terrain de partage entre les Albanais-es et les Serbes. La subversion consiste donc ici à souligner le commun plutôt qu'à se disputer l'appartenance et à ériger des frontières entre les communautés nationales. Dès lors qu'est exhibé le commun dans les mémoires albanaise et serbe, le caractère excluant de la fabrique de l'ethnie et de la nation est mis en lumière.

Chez Marica Bodrožić, la fabrication de la mémoire nationale est décrite comme une entreprise de destruction de la mémoire passée. Le dernier chapitre du roman est dédié en grande partie à une réflexion autour d'un ami d'enfance, Mateo, avec qui Arjeta, la narratrice, passait ses vacances en Istrie – actuelle Croatie. C'est la mère d'Arjeta qui lui rend visite et qui lui raconte le tournant nationaliste de son ami, qui a rejoint une organisation dont le but est la purification de la langue et qui s'emploie lui-même à purifier sa propre histoire familiale de tout élément considéré comme étranger :

Ma mère affirmait qu'au début de sa vingtaine, Mateo n'avait jamais su quelle était sa religion. Mais à présent, disait-elle, à présent il connaît tout son arbre généalogique par cœur et le récite à l'auberge comme un poème de Virgile. Son arrière-grand-père avait pourtant été un Italien de l'arrière-pays de Trieste. Mais cela, Mateo l'occulte simplement sans y voir de contradiction. Il est devenu le grand défenseur de la pureté et il omet simplement ce qui dans son arbre généalogique ne correspond pas à sa nouvelle identité nationale¹⁸.

Or cette occultation mise en œuvre dans la généalogie familiale trouve son équivalent dans la fabrique de la mémoire nationale croate. La consécration du modèle de l'État-nation nécessite un effacement de la mémoire yougoslave et notamment de la mémoire antifasciste qui a été monumentalisée par la fédération yougoslave : cela passe pour les groupes nationalistes auxquels adhère Mateo par une destruction massive des monuments antifascistes mais aussi de manière plus générale par une forme d'amnésie collective. La mère d'Arjeta cite notamment le cas d'un camp de concentration pour enfants pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale transformé en discothèque après la guerre¹⁹. Ce sont des souvenirs non seulement « inutiles »²⁰, mais surtout considérés comme nuisibles, qui sont écartés de cette nouvelle mémoire nationale.

¹⁸ Marica Bodrožić, *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, p. 170.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 184 : « Des dizaines de milliers de personnes y avaient été autrefois emprisonnées. Quatre-mille personnes y étaient mortes. C'était une maison de quatre étages. Ça fait beaucoup de place, disait ma mère, beaucoup de place pour du pur plaisir. Ce cadeau à la jeunesse, disait-elle, était inestimable et beau pour une vie de petite ville ».

²⁰ Aleida Assmann, « Memory, Individual and Collective », p. 216.

1.2. Faire communauté autour des silences ?

Face à l'exhibition des ressorts de fabrication de la mémoire nationale, les deux romans mettent en récit une mémoire alternative des guerres de Yougoslavie et de l'exil, que je me propose d'appeler « mémoire commune ». Selon Assmann, la mémoire nationale est incompatible avec la mémoire non pas des vaincu-es de l'histoire mais de ses victimes, chargée de honte, de culpabilité et de traumatismes²¹. La mémoire commune peut être identifiée à la mémoire de ces victimes et se distingue de la mémoire nationale par son mode de production : elle n'est pas simplement une autre mémoire collective qui sélectionne et exclut à son tour, en réaction à la manière dont s'élabore la mémoire nationale. Cependant, elle ne consiste pas simplement à combler les silences, les amnésies organisées, les voix éradiquées de la mémoire nationale, mais bien plutôt à braver ces entreprises de silenciation en proposant une autre manière de faire récit et dialogue et par là-même de faire communauté entre celles et ceux dont l'expérience est silencée par la mémoire nationale – en particulier, les femmes –, que je caractériserai par le souci éthique du droit au silence.

Chez Bodrožić comme chez Ibrahim, la narration est perturbée par les silences qui entourent les expériences de la guerre et de l'exil. Ces silences peuvent faire l'objet d'interprétations variables : la honte et le tabou – dans le cas par exemple des violences sexuelles – et l'impossibilité de nommer tant la violence vécue est extrême – on a alors affaire à la question de l'indicible. Dans tous les cas, ce qui m'intéresse plus particulièrement est la manière dont le récit de soi et les dialogues représentés dans les romans négocient voire incorporent ces failles, et posent la question du respect du droit au silence des victimes.

1.2.1. La remémoration perturbée

Les deux romans présentent des dispositifs narratifs tout à fait différents : chez Bodrožić, Arjeta est la narratrice, et tout le roman consiste au déroulement de ses souvenirs de guerre et d'exil à partir de vieilles photographies de familles contemplées dans son nouvel appartement, à Berlin, dans le présent de l'écriture. Cette autobiographie fictionnelle qui suit le flux de pensée et de souvenirs de la narratrice la confronte à l'impossibilité de nommer certaines expériences de violence extrême. Ainsi, lorsqu'Arjeta évoque la mort de son père pendant le siège de Sarajevo, c'est pour décrire l'impossibilité de parler véritablement d'elle : « La mort de mon père. La mort imprononçable. Sa mort. Je ne peux pas parler d'elle. À chaque fois que j'essaie, je reste sans voix »²². La mort de ses frères jumeaux,

²¹ Voir Aleida Assmann, « Memory, Individual and Collective ».

²² Marica Bodrožić, *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, p. 104.

quant à elle, fait l'objet d'un récit dès le début du roman : la narratrice raconte la découverte de leurs corps après qu'ils ont accidentellement marché sur une mine²³. L'écriture est alors altérée par une forme de dé-réalisation de la narratrice qui évoque dans la description à la fois le sang et les « jolis orteils » de ses frères, détail qui revient sans cesse comme pour maintenir à distance la réalité matérielle et horrible des corps démembrés des jumeaux.

Dans le roman d'Ibrahimi, la narratrice chronique les parcours de deux familles, serbe et albanaise, au Kosovo, avant, pendant la guerre et en exil. Le déroulement des chapitres, qui se focalisent successivement sur les personnages d'Ajkuna et de Zlatan – à la troisième personne – respecte la chronologie et parcourt la période qui s'étend des années 1980 au Kosovo aux années 2000 en Italie, Suisse et France. Si l'écriture d'Ibrahimi n'est pas le lieu-même de la remémoration et de ses failles comme c'est le cas chez Bodrožić, le personnage d'Ajkuna se construit lui aussi autour de deux silences biographiques – la mort de son père et les viols pendant la guerre – qui sont exposés dans des dialogues. Ainsi, une fois arrivée en Suisse après son transfert depuis un camp de réfugié-es en Albanie, Ajkuna est amenée par Jacqueline, une bénévole qui vient en aide aux réfugié-es, chez une psychologue à qui elle fait le récit de sa vie. Passé un certain stade, les questions de la psychologue restent sans réponse :

- Et ensuite ? – lui demande-t-elle soudain. – Que s'est-il passé ensuite ?
Silence. Tous les récits d'Ajkuna s'arrêtent là.
- Ensuite rien – dit-elle, – me voilà.
- Où as-tu connu Jacqueline ?
Silence.
- Te souviens-tu de Kukës ? Comment y es-tu arrivée ?
Silence.
- Tes parents n'étaient pas avec toi, n'est-ce pas ?
Silence.
- Tu as voyagé seule ?
Silence.
- Silence.
- Silence²⁴.

Le silence est cependant rompu des années plus tard, dans ce qui semble être au premier abord des moments de solidarité entre femmes : ainsi Ajkuna réussit à parler de la mort de son père avec son amie suisse Odine, qui se confie également à elle pour lui parler des violences conjugales qu'elle subit. De la même manière, c'est à Jacqueline qu'Ajkuna parvient à parler pour la première fois des violences sexuelles vécues en temps de guerre au Kosovo. La réalité des violences est donc

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 20-21.

²⁴ Anilda Ibrahimi, *L'amore e gli stracci del tempo*, p. 153.

finalement révélée dans un acte de langage transparent : aux silences répétés succède dans toute son horreur le récit du meurtre de Besor, son père, et des viols d'Ajkuna par des soldats serbes. Il est d'ailleurs intéressant de remarquer que le récit des violences qui arrive à la fin du roman²⁵ est un long passage à la première personne qui n'est jamais interrompu par Jacqueline : on assiste à une bascule, c'est bien Ajkuna qui fait le choix de prendre la parole, sans l'injonction d'une psychologue. La prise de parole chez Ibrahim est le lieu d'une libération thérapeutique : une fois que les traumatismes sont mis en mots, les personnages d'Ajkuna et de Zlatan peuvent aller de l'avant, c'est-à-dire abandonner l'idée que leur amour durera toujours – idée qui permettait à Ajkuna de survivre après son exil – et fonder leur propre famille.

Chez Bodrožić au contraire, l'expérience de violence extrême que constitue la mort des jumeaux ne sera jamais surmontée dans un moment de prise de parole rédemptrice. Au contraire, c'est le silence autour de cet événement qui caractérise la relation entre la narratrice et sa mère²⁶, voire une opération de transmission de ce silence²⁷ : une fois que la narratrice est installée à Berlin, sa mère lui ramène les photographies de famille de leurs vacances d'été en Istrie, auxquelles elle ne veut plus se confronter²⁸. Ce geste ambivalent expose à la fois la réalité tangible de la disparition et l'effort pour oublier, la volonté de ne plus se confronter aux souvenirs qui rappellent cette disparition : comme le souligne Marianne Hirsch, le propre de la photographie familiale est de dire à la fois ce qui a été, en chair et en os, et ce qui n'est désormais plus²⁹. Elle confronte à la fois à la vie passée et à la mort, advenue ou à venir. Dans ce contexte, le refus de regarder ces photographies et la dégradation de leur statut – elles ne sont pas soigneusement rangées dans un album, mais jetées pêle-mêle dans un simple sachet en plastique – témoigne non seulement d'un tabou dans le langage mais aussi et surtout d'une faille dans le « réseau tacite de regards »³⁰ qui caractérise la relation entre la mémoire familiale et la photographie.

À cette transmission inversée, la narratrice répond jusqu'à son dernier déménagement – point de départ du roman dans le présent de l'écriture – par un

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 22 : « Je ne remarquai pas du tout que pendant des années, ma mère ne mentionna plus les prénoms de mes frères. Quand elle parlait d'eux, c'était comme ses deux enfants, mais cela arriva en tout et pour tout cinq fois ces dernières années. Elle préfère garder le silence ».

²⁷ En cela, cette transmission peut être rapprochée de la notion de « postmémoire » telle qu'elle a été théorisée par Marianne Hirsch, bien que la narratrice Arjeta ne puisse pas être considérée comme faisant partie de la génération de la postmémoire des guerres de Yougoslavie. Voir Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 22.

²⁸ Marica Bodrožić, *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, p. 22.

²⁹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family frames*, p. 5.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

geste similaire : « À l'époque, j'ai simplement accroché le premier sachet à une poignée de porte dans l'appartement de Nadeshda »³¹. On sait cependant qu'au début du roman, la narratrice se met à contempler ces photographies, à tenter de se confronter à cette disparition. L'entreprise ne s'achèvera pourtant jamais dans un acte de langage transparent. Le présent de l'écriture demeure affecté par cette incapacité première à dire la mort tout en confrontant la narratrice au souvenir de cette disparition. Ainsi, chez Bodrožić, « [le] salut ne passe pas par le langage »³², ce dernier est au contraire le lieu où se manifestent les failles sans qu'il soit nécessaire de les combler d'une quelconque manière.

Bien que les deux autrices mettent au centre de leur roman le motif du silence, il est évident que leur traitement de ce silence diffère. Chez Ibrahim, l'acte de briser le silence constitue un moment de résolution thérapeutique tandis que c'est au contraire l'impossibilité de mettre en mot qui anime l'écriture à la première personne de Bodrožić. Quoi qu'il en soit, il semblerait que c'est bien l'injonction au silence qui est bravée ou du moins interrogée dans les deux récits, les faisant entrer en résistance avec les entreprises de silenciation qui caractérisent les modes de production de la mémoire nationale.

1.2.2. Mémoires communes et reconstructions communautaires

Comment faire communauté autour des silences ? Les deux romans présentent des scènes de dialogue et de mise en commun des expériences de la guerre et de l'exil et interrogent par là-même les possibilités de re-faire communauté malgré voire avec les silences. Si la mémoire nationale se construit dans une forme d'adhésion à un récit qui n'admet aucune disparité et qui ne s'interroge jamais sur ses propres fondements, le propre de la mémoire commune serait au contraire une mise en commun réflexive et une attention aux enjeux éthiques de prise de parole et surtout de réception et d'écoute de cette parole³³. J'analyserai donc ces scènes de mise en commun dans les romans en prêtant une attention particulière à la représentation de l'écoute.

³¹ Marica Bodrožić, *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, p. 23.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 103.

³³ En ce sens, la notion de mémoire commune telle que je la définis est à inscrire dans une tendance générale dans les études mémorielles à proposer des modèles alternatifs à la mémoire nationale, dans une perspective transculturelle et transnationale. Ainsi, Lucy Bond, Stef Craps et Pieter Vermeulen décrivent une tendance collective à proposer « un modèle de mémoire comme un processus fluide, inclusif et ouvert, plutôt qu'un récit fixe et excluant, qui embrasse la possibilité que la rencontre de discours mémoriels disparates offre une opportunité pour forger des communautés de mémoire empathiques par de-là les frontières nationales, culturelles ou ethniques » – Lucy Bond, Stef Craps, Pieter Vermeulen, « Introduction : Memory on the Move », in Lucy Bond, Stef Craps, Pieter Vermeulen (eds.), *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2017, p. 6.

Dans les deux romans, certaines tentatives de dialogues et de partage mettent en lumière la difficulté pour Ajkuna et pour Arjeta à re-faire communauté en exil en raison de décalages trop importants entre celle qui raconte et celle ou celui qui écoute. Dans *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, les écarts et décalages se manifestent à la fois dans les communautés recrées en exil – par exemple entre Arjeta et sa colocataire Hiromi – et dans la tentative de maintien ou, après la guerre, de reconstruction des liens familiaux. Ce sont surtout ces liens familiaux, ou plutôt la difficulté de leur maintien, qui remettent en question la possibilité de faire communauté quand les écarts entre les expériences sont trop grands :

Ma mère et mon père sont restés dans la ville. Cave. Peurs. Grenades. Faim. Feu. Flammes. Des flammes, partout. Maisons défenestrées. Quant à moi, je peux me promener dans Paris, retirer de l'argent sur mon compte au Crédit Lyonnais. [...] Bref, j'ai survécu. Pendant que celles et ceux qui sont resté-es à la maison ont faim³⁴.

La culpabilité d'avoir survécu nourrit la distance qui se creuse entre la mère et la fille pendant le siège de Sarajevo. Ainsi, même les contacts téléphoniques entre elles sont insatisfaisants, brouillés et interrompus par les difficultés techniques mais aussi communicationnelles :

La ligne s'interrompt. Elle appelle à nouveau. Jamais plus elle ne sera capable de respirer sans peur. À cet instant, je comprends dans ma chair que je ne peux pas partager ma vie, que c'est terrible de l'avoir seulement pour moi. Et de devoir la garder pour moi. Et de continuer à vivre sans les autres³⁵.

À cette impossible communication succède donc l'intense solitude d'Arjeta exilée. La narratrice réalise que sa famille ne peut se projeter dans son expérience d'exilée, que son histoire a désormais bifurqué par rapport à la leur. Les silences qui entrecoupent les mots de sa mère la déconnectent définitivement de son champ d'expérience et vice versa. Une forme d'altération dans l'écoute survient ici des deux côtés et se poursuit après la guerre, dans la relation entre la mère et la fille :

Je sentais que ses mots dissimulaient un reproche indicible, et qu'elle voulait me dire que je n'avais pas mon mot à dire car je n'avais pas été là. Elle avait raison, je n'étais pas là, encore aujourd'hui je ne sais rien de l'entêtement du sang qui colle aux semelles³⁶.

Dans *L'Amore e gli stracci del tempo*, lorsqu'Ajkuna fait le récit de la mort de son père à son amie suisse Odine, elle se heurte elle aussi au risque de la mécompréhension voire de l'incompréhension de son interlocutrice : « Ajkuna regarde Odine. Elle ne sait pas si elle a compris les choses qu'elle lui a racontées, mais cela ne l'intéresse pas. Si elle n'a pas compris, c'est peut-être même pour le

³⁴ Marica Bodrožić, *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, pp. 46-47.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

mieux, car ce n'était pas à Odine qu'elle voulait en parler »³⁷. Ici, c'est l'écart entre les conditions d'Odine, femme suisse, et d'Ajkuna, exilée kosovare, qui met en question la possibilité d'une communauté d'expériences entre elles. Mais il ne suffit pas en réalité pour pallier ces écarts de se tourner vers sa communauté d'origine, en diaspora. C'est ce que montre notamment le récit qu'elle fait à Zlatan des violences qu'elle a subies pendant la guerre et qui se clôt sur une forme de décalage et même d'altération dans l'écoute puisque ce dernier l'interrompt avant qu'elle n'ait fini :

– Je ne veux rien entendre de plus, crie-t-il soudain, – je connais cette histoire, ce n'est pas seulement la tienne, c'est notre histoire.

Ajkuna rit. Il ne l'a jamais vue ainsi.

– Trop facile, – dit-elle. – Quand les choses seront finies, tout le monde dira cette phrase. Notre histoire ? Tu veux dire une histoire qui appartient à toute l'humanité ? Non, mon cher, cette histoire est seulement la mienne. Certes, il faut que l'humanité écrive l'histoire, mais où était-elle quand j'étais en enfer avec les autres filles ? C'est tout ce que nous avons, c'est tout ce qui nous reste³⁸.

Ajkuna peut faire ici le récit des violences sexuelles à Zlatan, mais elle ne peut pas créer sur ce point une communauté d'expériences avec lui – car il est un homme et qu'il a vécu la guerre en tant qu'homme, enrôlé dans l'armée serbe. Elle rejette également tout élargissement artificiel de son histoire à celle de l'humanité, défait l'illusion d'une universalité de la condition humaine, dénonce même une forme d'appropriation de son histoire par « l'humanité » qui en réalité renvoie à un point de vue dominant, masculin et occidental – comme le sous-entend sa question : « où était-elle [...] ? ». Ajkuna semble donc limiter la communauté qui peut se créer à travers le récit de son histoire. Cependant, il est question dans sa réponse à Zlatan des « autres filles », celles qui ont subi les mêmes violences qu'elle. On peut dès lors s'interroger sur la faculté des voix de ces « autres filles » à rencontrer celle d'Ajkuna et à donner à son récit une dimension commune.

De fait, si les deux romans mettent en lumière la difficulté à faire communauté en exil, il semblerait qu'ils proposent malgré tout des modèles de solidarité et de reconstruction communautaire en diaspora et entre femmes des Balkans. Dans le roman d'Ibrahimi, Ajkuna se lie d'amitié avec Mahira, sa voisine bosniaque, après qu'elles ont réalisé toutes les deux qu'elles partagent une langue, le serbo-croate. Au-delà de leurs différences – ethnique, confessionnelle –, leur rencontre et leur conversation éclairent ce qu'il y a de commun entre elles, entre leur condition d'exilées et entre leur pays d'origine, et ce par de-là les frontières ethniques et nationales :

³⁷ Anilda Ibrahimi, *L'amore e gli stracci del tempo*, p. 158.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 247-248.

Elles parlent longtemps. De choses sans importance, mais qui deviennent les choses les plus importantes du monde. Elles parlent des commerces turcs qui vendent des aliments similaires à ceux de leur pays. C'est ainsi que la Bosnie et le Kosovo sont devenus leur pays. Avec l'odeur des recettes communes et l'odeur du passé commun³⁹.

Le partage d'une langue et d'habitudes communes procure un réjouissement, une forme de soulagement dans l'isolement de l'exil et ouvre la voie à une communauté par le partage d'un « passé commun ». Cependant, il reste un silence entre Mahira et Ajkuna – la raison de leur exil :

Mahira vit ici depuis 1995. Elle ne précise pas si elle est arrivée après le massacre de Srebrenica ou avant. Peut-être durant le siège de Sarajevo. Ajkuna ne le lui demande pas. [...]

Ces deux femmes arrivées de loin, peut-être pour la même raison, parlent de tout sauf de ce qui les a poussées à partir. Ces deux femmes qui ont échappé presque au même ennemi parlent de tout sauf de cet ennemi⁴⁰.

Mahira, comme Ajkuna pendant une grande partie du roman, garde le silence sur son expérience de la guerre lorsqu'elle parle de son exil. Dans ses échanges avec Mahira, Ajkuna ne cherche cependant pas à combler à tout prix ce silence biographique. Elle respecte au contraire une forme de droit au silence. Le passage au pluriel dans le deuxième paragraphe fait signe finalement vers la possibilité d'une mémoire commune dans le partage tacite de ce qui ne peut être dit, dans le respect mutuel de l'indicible.

Dans *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, on assiste également à des dialogues et à des formes de solidarités entre femmes exilées originaires d'ex-Yougoslavie. Ainsi, dans l'interstice qui subsiste entre ces deux mondes que tout oppose – Sarajevo assiégée et Paris – s'esquisse la possibilité d'un partage d'expériences avec Nadeshda et Silva, toutes deux originaires d'ex-Yougoslavie et ayant émigré au moins temporairement en France. Avec Silva, rencontrée dans un café à Paris, la narratrice adopte une posture d'écoute attentive et empathique : « Elle disait qu'elle se souvenait de tout, cela sonnait comme un avertissement pour ne pas poser plus de questions. Je ne le fis donc pas, je l'écoutai simplement sans faire un sujet de discussion des lacunes qu'il y avait dans son histoire⁴¹. ». De la même manière que la narratrice livre son récit sans en combler les failles, elle n'exige pas de Silva que le récit de son expérience soit transparent et cohérent. De manière plus continue dans le roman, l'amitié entre Arjeta et Nadeshda⁴² peut également constituer le lieu de l'élaboration d'une mémoire commune de la guerre en exil.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 127-128.

⁴¹ Marica Bodrožić, *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, p. 78.

⁴² Il est intéressant de remarquer que Nadeshda est la narratrice d'un autre roman de Marica Bodrožić, *Das Gedächtnis der Libellen* [La mémoire des libellules] (2010).

Nadeshda a quitté la Dalmatie au début des années 1990 avant le déclenchement des guerres : son expérience entre en résonance avec le sentiment de culpabilité et d'isolement d'Arjeta. Mais ce n'est pas seulement cette expérience de la guerre à distance que les deux amies ont en commun : c'est aussi celle des violences conjugales et sexuelles à Paris, exercées par le même homme. En effet, un des fils rouges du roman est la relation d'emprise qui se noue entre Arik et Arjeta, les difficultés rencontrées par cette dernière pour se libérer d'une dépendance destructrice et pour formuler les violences subies – notamment le viol. Mais l'expérience commune n'aboutit pas immédiatement à une communauté d'expériences par et dans le langage, elle est encore et toujours caractérisée par un silence partagé : « À Paris, Nadeshda ne m'a pas tout raconté à propos d'Arik et elle. Ce n'est que lorsqu'elle partit à Berlin qu'elle me fit comprendre, par une étrange allusion, qu'elle l'avait rencontré avant la séance de pose avec les chemisiers bleus »⁴³. Ce n'est qu'au moment de l'enterrement d'Arik que la narratrice émet l'hypothèse, dans le présent de l'écriture, d'une douleur partagée entre elle et Nadeshda, une douleur qui n'est en réalité pas celle du deuil :

Nadeshda pleurait, elle aussi. Pleurions-nous Arik ou pleurions-nous car il faut pleurer les morts ? Ou pleurions-nous pour nous-même ? C'était peut-être cela, peut-être ne pleurions-nous pas du tout Arik, mais les années de notre vie que nous lui avons abandonnées en toute bonne foi. Des sacrifices, que nous avons pris pour de l'amour⁴⁴.

Cette constatation constitue le signe que par-delà les silences, ou peut-être même grâce à une compréhension mutuelle de leur nécessité et de la difficulté à les braver, des solidarités peuvent se nouer autour de récits communs, ici la guerre, l'exil, les violences conjugales et sexuelles. C'est le propre finalement d'une mémoire commune des victimes que de faire entendre les difficultés à faire récit et à faire communauté face à une mémoire dominante, nationale, qui occulte les vécus des plus marginaux-ales.

Les deux romans esquissent donc la possibilité de faire communauté en dehors des cadres patriarcaux de la nation. Les voix qui se rencontrent ne s'unissent pas tout à fait, elles se confrontent, prennent en compte les écarts et décalages et élaborent ensemble une mémoire commune contre la mémoire nationale. Mais au-delà des représentations, il semblerait que les scènes d'écoute, de solidarité et d'empathie disent quelque chose du rapport à l'écriture et à la lecture dans ces littératures diasporiques de fiction : comment des récits de fictions peuvent-ils en soi constituer des lieux d'élaboration de contre-mémoires ? L'écriture de fiction, l'acte de lecture, la circulation des œuvres entre Balkans et Occident sont-elles véritablement capables de créer des communautés alternatives ?

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 211.

2. *Des communautés représentées aux communautés littéraires : pouvoirs et failles de la fictionnalisation des guerres de Yougoslavie*

2.1. *Les autrices et leurs personnages de fiction : une communauté littéraire ?*

On l'a vu plus haut, il existe une continuité dans l'économie des œuvres des deux autrices entre les œuvres autobiographiques, qui correspondent généralement aux premiers ouvrages publiés, et les romans de fiction. Certes, dans les cas des deux œuvres analysés, le fondement même du pacte autobiographique⁴⁵ à savoir l'identification entre autrice, narratrice et personnage est absent. On peut cependant rapprocher les deux romans des trajectoires biographiques des autrices et poser l'hypothèse d'une communauté d'expérience, cette fois-ci entre les autrices et les personnages représentés – Arjeta et Ajkuna. L'expérience commune, c'est bien l'exil depuis les Balkans et par conséquent un point de vue situé sur les guerres de Yougoslavie. Mais des écarts subsistent évidemment entre les autrices et les voix qu'elles font résonner dans leurs œuvres de fiction. Pour *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle* l'identification entre narratrice et personnage fait signe vers l'écriture autobiographique mais c'est bien un personnage fictionnel qui fait acte de remémoration. De plus, l'autrice est originaire de l'actuelle Croatie et a émigré en Allemagne bien avant les guerres de Yougoslavie. L'écart est encore plus important pour le roman d'Anilda Ibrahim, introduit par une petite note éclairante : « Les événements et les personnages décrits dans ce roman sont le fruit de la libre imagination de l'autrice »⁴⁶. De fait, le roman écrit à la troisième personne éloigne franchement la possibilité d'une écriture d'inspiration autobiographique ou d'un roman autofictionnel. Enfin, si Anilda Ibrahim est elle-même exilée, c'est d'Albanie et non du Kosovo : bien que les Albanais-es d'Albanie et les Albanais-es du Kosovo soient lié-es par une langue et une culture commune, l'histoire du Kosovo au XX^e siècle appartient à celle plus globale de la Yougoslavie, de sa constitution à son éclatement pendant les guerres. L'Albanie a cependant été impactée par ces guerres voisines et a accueilli de nombreux-ses réfugié-es kosovar-es comme le montre d'ailleurs le roman d'Ibrahim – on pense par exemple au camp de réfugié-es de Kukës, ville albanaise proche de la frontière kosovare.

Dès lors, ces écarts et rapprochements possibles entre les autrices et les personnages représentés font entrevoir une possibilité : celle de faire de la fiction le lieu-même de l'élaboration d'une communauté qui mette les points de vue de femmes immigrées des Balkans au centre. Comme le propose Anna Federici, on assiste dans les trajectoires littéraires des autrices au passage d'un « je » à un

⁴⁵ Voir Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique*, Paris, France, Éditions du Seuil, 1996.

⁴⁶ Anilda Ibrahim, *L'amore e gli stracci del tempo*, p. 4.

« nous ». Si elle l'envisage comme un véritable engagement politique de la part des autrices⁴⁷, qui font entendre des voix différentes mais proches des leurs, j'interprète davantage ce passage du singulier au pluriel comme le signe de l'élaboration d'une communauté propre à la littérature transnationale et en particulier ici à la littérature diasporique des Balkans. De la même manière que dans le roman, des mémoires communes se créent autour de celles qui parlent et de celles qui écoutent, les autrices esquissent sans doute la possibilité d'une communauté littéraire qui les lie aux victimes des guerres qu'elles n'ont pas directement vécues.

Poser cette hypothèse implique cependant d'en percevoir les limites. De même que les scènes de reconstruction communautaire dans les romans mettent en lumière les difficultés rencontrées par les personnages à partager leurs expériences et à faire entendre leur parole ainsi que ses failles, les écarts entre les situations des autrices et les personnages représentés peuvent mettre en question la capacité des littératures transnationales à re-faire communauté autour des mémoires des femmes exilées.

2.2. *L'international gaze dans les littératures transnationales*

Dans son ouvrage *Writing the Yugoslav Wars*, Dragana Obradović montre comment le contexte historique a bouleversé le paysage littéraire et artistique des pays d'ex-Yougoslavie et a posé un défi éthique aux auteurs-ices concerné-es⁴⁸. Selon elle, le rapport entre les événements réels et les narrations et témoignages de guerre sont obscurcis par les médias de masse et les discours humanitaire occidentaux sur les Balkans. L'articulation entre la réalité locale et sa réception internationale est dès lors obstruée par un processus d'altérisation, par des représentations balkanistes⁴⁹ et par ce que l'autrice appelle un « colonialisme de la représentation » (« colonialism of representation⁵⁰»). C'est bien un rapport centre-périphérie qui caractérise la circulation des récits de guerre par l'intermédiaire des médias de masse, des Balkans vers les pays d'Europe occidentale. Si le discours humanitaire joue également un rôle, c'est parce qu'il construit avec eux une représentation de la victime de guerre, caractérisé par sa féminité et son silence :

La figure de la victime, souvent dépeinte comme passive, féminine ou vulnérable est l'objet non seulement des représentations médiatiques mais aussi des discours

⁴⁷ Anna Federici, *Écrivaines italiennes de la migration balkanique*, thèse de doctorat en Études italiennes sous la direction de Margherita Orsino et Flavia Cristaldi, Toulouse 2-Le Mirail, 2016, f. 198.

⁴⁸ Voir Dragana Obradović, *Writing the Yugoslav wars*.

⁴⁹ Voir Mariâ Nikolaeva Todorova, *Imaginaire des Balkans*. Traduit par Rachel Bouyssou, Paris, Éd. de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, DL 2011, 2011.

⁵⁰ Dragana Obradović, *Writing the Yugoslav wars*, p. 8.

d'aide humanitaire. Ils construisent une victime silencieuse en utilisant des images de corps en souffrance comme indices du « réel » et de ses marques de douleur et de blessure. [...] le média instrumentalise les populations locales sans même leur donner la parole, ce qui a pour effet de réduire ou d'occulter leur capacité d'agir politique ou sociale⁵¹.

Selon Obradović, cette représentation de la victime, produite par ce qu'elle appelle un *international gaze*⁵², a des conséquences dans les œuvres artistiques et littéraires. Si les auteur-ices qu'elle étudie échappent ou mettent à distance ce *gaze*, ce n'est pas le cas de productions artistiques occidentales qui privent les victimes de leur parole et de leur capacité d'agir⁵³. Dans ce cadre de réflexion, il est intéressant d'interroger la place de cet *international gaze* dans la littérature transnationale, et en particulier dans les romans d'Ibrahimi et de Bodrožić. De fait, pour les littératures transnationales qui circulent entre périphéries et centres, cet *international gaze* constitue non pas un point de vue de départ mais une attente de représentations – en d'autres termes un horizon d'attente – qui affecte nécessairement la réception des œuvres dans les pays de publication. Face à ce constat, ce sont les autrices qui font le choix de satisfaire ces attentes ou de les déjouer. Or il me semble que l'*international gaze* transpose dans l'acte d'écriture de fiction transnationale la question de l'écoute et du traitement du silence. Faire circuler des représentations occidentalocentrées des victimes c'est à la fois rétablir une forme de silenciation – on impose un regard sans donner la parole – et exposer les violences sans interroger l'importance du droit au silence de ces mêmes victimes. Au contraire, la mise à distance de cet horizon d'attente balkaniste promet un autre modèle et ouvre la possibilité d'une communauté littéraire alternative entre les autrices, le lectorat et les victimes de guerre autour des expériences silencieuses des guerres de Yougoslavie.

2.2.1. Mise à distance ou satisfaction des attentes du centre ?

Dans *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, la question des représentations occidentales sur les victimes de guerre se pose dans la trajectoire de la narratrice, notamment lorsque celle-ci se confronte aux demandes de bourses à l'université à Paris :

À l'université, on m'avait accordé une bourse. Quand je me présentai devant la commission qui les attribuait, je sentis que les professeurs voulaient véritablement m'aider. Cependant, une sorte de déception indignée glissa sur leur visage lorsque je

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 138.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 144. C'est le cas par exemple de la mise en scène de *En attendant Godot* par Susan Sontag, qui entend aider les habitant-es de Sarajevo pendant le siège à accéder à une identité et culture européenne salvatrices, et ce dans des conditions de travail inacceptables.

leur dis que j'avais déjà prévu, avant la guerre, de venir étudier la philosophie ici à Paris et que je m'étais déjà inscrite en présence de mon père. Une agitation nerveuse s'empara du secrétariat car quelqu'un dit qu'il ne fallait pas formuler la demande de cette manière dans le procès-verbal. [...] L'agitation était uniquement due au fait que j'avais déclaré avec honnêteté que j'aurais étudié à Paris dans d'autres circonstances. Il fallait rayer cela du procès-verbal et ajouter le mot guerre. Cela me paraissait-il juste ? me demanda-t-on, je répondis oui et j'oubliai à cet instant précis de dire merci en bonne et due forme pour la bourse⁵⁴.

Même les procédures administratives françaises sont atteintes par cette imagerie de la bonne victime de guerre en Yougoslavie à laquelle Arjeta ne correspond pas. Cette représentation est mise à distance ici par une narratrice ironique, qui met en balance la prétendue écoute des professeurs d'université et les conditions très précises à remplir pour être l'objet de leur empathie. Si la question des attendus occidentaux constitue un véritable sujet dans le roman de Bodrožić, c'est parce qu'Arjeta ne fait pas partie de ce que cet *international gaze* considère comme une « vraie » victime de guerre et donc comme une « bonne » réfugiée. Elle perd une grande partie de sa famille pendant le siège de Sarajevo mais elle parvient à quitter la Bosnie durant le conflit. Elle n'est pas victime de violences sexuelles pendant la guerre comme c'est le cas d'Ajkuna dans le roman d'Ibrahimi mais subit des violences sexuelles et conjugales dans sa relation avec Arik, alors qu'elle est en exil à Paris. Chez Bodrožić, quitter les Balkans ne signifie pas s'émanciper d'un cadre patriarcal « arriéré » comme le conçoit un script occidental-centré et balkaniste mais au contraire, subir des violences spécifiques à son statut de femme exilée.

À l'inverse, dans le roman d'Ibrahimi, le personnage d'Ajkuna semble correspondre aux attendus de l'imagerie occidentale sur les victimes de guerre dans les Balkans : elle subit des viols pendant la guerre, elle est transférée depuis un camp de réfugié-es albanais en Suisse à la demande d'une bénévole qui la prend en sympathie et elle passe une grande partie du roman dans l'attente d'un homme – Zlatan. Tout semble, dans une certaine mesure, écrit autour d'elle pour susciter l'empathie à la lecture. Mais cette empathie pose question : elle ne souligne pas tant une possible communauté avec le lectorat et l'autrice que des écarts entre le vécu sur place et les attentes des centres – l'Italie, pays de publication du roman, où les vagues migratoires depuis les Balkans sont importantes pendant les guerres de Yougoslavie. Comment cela se met-il concrètement en place dans la narration ?

Le choix de la troisième personne et de la narration omnisciente est éclairant pour réfléchir à ces enjeux : à de nombreuses reprises, le personnage d'Ajkuna est observé et entendu de l'extérieur, avec un point de vue occidental et humanitaire, notamment par le personnage de la bénévole Jacqueline. Ainsi, lorsqu'elle vient la

⁵⁴ Marica Bodrožić, *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, pp. 38-39.

chercher dans le centre d'accueil pour réfugié-es à Bâle, on assiste à une description d'Ajkuna qui correspond tout à fait à l'imagerie de la victime féminine et vulnérable, dont le corps est exposé, attestant des souffrances psychologiques et physiques vécues :

Jacqueline avait levé les yeux et l'avait vue. En réalité, la première chose qu'elle avait vue était une couverture brune qui dessinait un corps humain. Le corps minuscule et recroquevillé d'Ajkuna. La tête dans l'oreiller et les coudes sur les genoux. [...] Douce Ajkuna, avec son visage d'enfant et ses cheveux bruns à présent plein de nœuds. Depuis combien de jours personne n'avait peigné ses cheveux ? Mais elle la sortirait de là. Et elle peignerait ses cheveux tous les matins, tous les soirs, tant qu'elle ne serait pas remise sur pieds⁵⁵.

Le statut de victime d'Ajkuna est ici associé à une féminité stéréotypée, « douce », et infantine, ce qui contribue à souligner sa vulnérabilité et par là même son incapacité à agir pour elle-même – c'est bien Jacqueline qui la remettra sur pieds. Tout ceci est renforcé par le fait qu'on accède à cette description uniquement par le biais du regard de Jacqueline, dont l'empathie qui crée au premier abord du lien accentue en réalité l'écart qui existe entre les deux femmes, l'aidante occidentale et l'aidée étrangère. Contrairement au roman de Bodrožić, cette empathie ambiguë n'est pas mise à distance par la narratrice qui embrasse le point de vue de Jacqueline. En réalité, même lorsque l'on adopte le point de vue d'Ajkuna par le biais de l'omniscience de la narration, tout contribue à faire d'elle une « bonne » victime, tel que le conçoivent les discours et représentations occidentales. Sa très rapide ascension sociale fait de la Suisse – de manière générale des pays occidentaux – le lieu de l'émancipation des femmes par le travail⁵⁶, contrairement aux pays des Balkans qu'Ajkuna elle-même finit par considérer comme « arriérés » et où les femmes resteraient sous l'emprise de leurs maris violents⁵⁷. De fait, la violence masculine est du côté de la « barbarie » de la guerre en Yougoslavie, qui est donnée à voir sans filtre dans le récit qu'Ajkuna livre à Jacqueline à la fin du roman. Si le récit passe alors à la première personne, il reste centré sur les paroles et la cruauté des soldats serbe qui traitent les femmes albanaises comme des objets qui serviront aux intérêts de la « Grande Serbie »⁵⁸. Mon hypothèse est que l'usage de la première personne ici vise à créer de l'empathie à la lecture mais que le *gaze* reste malgré tout international : même

⁵⁵ Anilda Ibrahim, *L'amore e gli stracci del tempo*, p. 110.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 175. On apprend au début du chapitre 38 qu'Ajkuna est désormais cadre dans une société financière, avec deux secrétaires à son service.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 238 : « Après tout, ses amies d'enfance sont sans doute déjà mariées à l'heure qu'il est avec des hommes choisis par leurs parents, ont donné naissance à cinq ou six enfants et à trente ans ressemblent déjà à de vieilles femmes. Quant à elle, elle est encore belle, elle n'a pas de mari qui peut la traiter comme une vache à lait ».

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

dans le récit qui est fait des violences, Ajkuna ne se ressaisit pas d'une quelconque capacité d'agir en livrant les sensations qui lui sont propres ou même en respectant son propre droit au silence.

2.2.2. *Les récits du silence : quand la narration est affectée par l'international gaze*

Au-delà de la question des représentations des victimes, il semblerait que l'incorporation ou non de l'*international gaze* affecte les modes du récit. En effet, si les mémoires nationales silencient les voix des victimes comme celles d'Ajkuna, la satisfaction d'un horizon d'attente balkaniste dans les récits transnationaux implique nécessairement la transgression du droit au silence voire à l'indicible – qui est pourtant le propre de ce que j'ai défini comme la mémoire commune. Ainsi, lorsqu'Ajkuna livre le récit des violences subies à Jacqueline, *a priori* de son point de vue, non seulement celui-ci me semble rester tributaire d'une forme d'*international gaze*, mais il fait en plus lumière soudaine sur une expérience de violence extrême dont la mise en mot pose une question éthique voire politique. Les refus et les silences initiaux d'Ajkuna créent une forme d'attente chez les lecteur-ices qui est finalement satisfaite dans une révélation finale sur les violences subies. De fait, ce que j'ai d'abord analysé comme une libération par la prise de parole, un usage thérapeutique de la langue, peut dans cette perspective être interprété comme un ressort narratif qui vise à satisfaire un public occidental dans une résolution finale de l'intrigue. L'expérience de lecture n'est alors pas une expérience de respect de l'indicible, elle ne peut constituer le lieu d'une mémoire commune autour de laquelle faire communauté, car l'empathie qui est suscitée à la lecture est conditionnée à la nécessité d'exposer les violences vécues. En d'autres termes : le récit du silence chez Ibrahimović est le récit d'un silence aboli par les attentes du lectorat et par les nécessités de l'intrigue.

Au contraire, chez Bodrožić, le récit reste affecté voire motivé par la difficulté à mettre les mots sur les violences vécues pendant la guerre et en exil. Si la langue n'est pas le lieu du « salut »⁵⁹ pour la narratrice Arjeta, c'est aussi parce que l'acte de lecture en retour ne vient pas « sauver » celle qui prend la parole dans la fiction. L'autrice se refuse à la tentation de faire de son roman le lieu d'un récit attendu, d'une empathie conditionnée et conditionnelle. Cela signifie que l'acte de lecture n'est pas motivé par la promesse d'une révélation des violences tues mais aussi qu'il ne vient pas rejouer le scénario de la victime sauvée par la prise de parole adressée à un-e aidant-e occidental-e. C'est une écriture et par là-même une lecture dans le respect de ce qui se refuse aux mots, dans la conscience des failles et de l'indicible, qui rend possible une communauté littéraire et transnationale autour des mémoires des victimes de guerre.

⁵⁹ Marica Bodrožić, *Kirschholz und alte Gefühle*, p. 103.

Conclusion

Dans un premier temps, l'analyse des reconstructions communautaires représentées dans les romans m'a amenée à réfléchir à la place des silences et de l'indicible et à en faire un élément de définition important de la mémoire commune. Face à la mémoire nationale qui homogénéise, sélectionne et surtout silencie, la mémoire commune est le produit de dialogues et d'une écoute dans le respect mutuel d'un droit au silence. Si les deux romans posent des défis aux entreprises de silenciation propres à la mémoire nationale, ils se distinguent cependant par leurs rapports au silence et par là-même, à la langue. Chez Ibrahim le silence est brisé par Ajkuna dans les récits qu'elle finit par livrer des violences subies pendant la guerre. Chez Bodrožić, au contraire, le récit reste affecté par les failles et par l'indicible. Dans un deuxième temps, j'ai tâché d'interroger la capacité des littératures transnationales à faire mémoire commune autour des silences dans les actes même d'écriture et de lecture. Cette capacité se trouve conditionnée selon moi à la satisfaction ou non des attendus de l'*international gaze*, en d'autres mots d'un horizon d'attente balkaniste. Lorsque l'*international gaze* est satisfait comme c'est le cas chez Anilda Ibrahim – que ce soit dans les représentations et ou dans un mode narratif qui instrumentalise les silences – la lecture et l'écriture sont motivées par les attentes de certaines représentations occidental-centrées et par une injonction à exposer la violence. Au contraire chez Bodrožić, cet *international gaze* est interrogé et explicitement mis à distance par la narratrice Arjeta, qui échappe aux attentes d'une réception médiatique occidentale tout en désorientant son lectorat dans une écriture qui ne cherche jamais à combler les failles. Cet *international gaze* pointe finalement les limites du pouvoir de la fiction à devenir les chroniques « des histoires des déplacé-es » pour reprendre l'expression d'Azade Seyhan. Force est de constater finalement que l'écriture de fiction, la lecture, la circulation des œuvres sont pétries par des rapports de force et que leur analyse ne peut faire l'impasse sur ce qu'elles ont d'éminemment politique.

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MAKING COMMON MEMORY AROUND SILENCES. FICTIONS AND
MEMORIES OF THE WARS IN YUGOSLAVIA BY ANILDA IBRAHIMI AND
MARICA BODROŽIĆ

(Abstract)

In this paper, I propose to examine Azade Seyhan's theory according to which transnational literatures have the power to make heard the voices that have been silenced by national history and memory, and thus to create a different kind of community. With this in mind, I analyse the narratives of the Yugoslav wars in two fictional novels written by Anilda Ibrahim and Marica Bodrožić in the light of the concept of "common memory". It seems that these novels, written by women with Balkan migrant backgrounds, seek not only to undo the national and very recent memory of the wars in Yugoslavia, but also to elaborate, by opposition, alternative memories of war and exile, around which it becomes possible to build community. I begin by analyzing the ways in which this common memory is elaborated in fiction: the two novels offer scenes of community reconstruction through the

recounting and, above all, dialogue of the experiences of the exiled women, while respecting the flaws in their recollection. I then explore the extent to which these fictional narratives can function as models for the experience of writing and reading. Finally, the notion of horizon of expectation leads me to question the power of transnational literatures to create a common memory around silences: indeed, how can we ensure that these narratives of extreme violence are listened to and respected in a context of Western-centric horizon of expectation? With this in mind, I look at the ethical issues involved in representing war and the women who are its victims. To this end, I situate the publication of these novels in their specific context, that of the years following the wars in former Yugoslavia, and I examine the role of what Dragana Obradović calls the international gaze in the representations of the victims – their words and their silences – as well as the modes of narrative.

Keywords: exile, common memory, Yugoslavia, silence, transnational literature.

CREAREA UNEI MEMORII COMUNE ÎN JURUL TĂCERILOR.
FICȚIUNI ȘI MEMORII ALE SCRITOARELOR ANILDA IBRAHIMI ȘI
MARICA BODROŽIĆ DESPRE RĂZBOIAELE DIN IUGOSLAVIA
(*Rezumat*)

În acest articol problematizez teoria lui Azade Seyhan, conform căreia literaturile transnaționale au puterea de a da glas vocilor care au fost reduse la tăcere de istoria și memoria națională, creând astfel o comunitate aparte. În acest sens, utilizez conceptul de „memorie comună” pentru a analiza reprezentarea războaielor din Iugoslavia în două romane scrise de Anilda Ibrahim și Marica Bodrožić. Aceste ficțiuni, aparținând unor autoare migrante, cu origini balcanice, își propun nu doar să demanteleze memoria națională și foarte recentă a războaielor din Iugoslavia, ci și să elaboreze, prin opoziție, memorii alternative ale războiului și ale exilului, în jurul cărora devine posibilă crearea unei comunități. Deschid articolul cu analiza modurilor în care această memorie comună este configurată ficțional: ambele romane includ secvențe de reconstrucție comunitară prin intermediul narativizării și, mai ales, al reprezentării dialogale a experiențelor femeilor exilate, oferind totodată o atenție specială și inconsistențelor din rememorările acestora. Ulterior, evaluez în ce măsură narațiunile menționate pot funcționa ca modele pentru experiența scrisului și a lecturii. În cele din urmă, noțiunea de orizont de așteptare mă determină să problematizez capacitatea literaturilor transnaționale de a crea o memorie comună în jurul tăcerilor: într-adevăr, cum putem garanta că aceste narațiuni de o violență extremă sunt ascultate și respectate într-un context dominat de orizontul de așteptare occidentalocentric? În consecință, articolul se focalizează și pe problemele etice implicate de reprezentarea ficțională atât a războiului, cât și a femeilor care îi sunt victime. Tocmai de aceea, situez acestor romane în contextul lor specific, cel al anilor care au urmat războaielor din fosta Iugoslavie, și analizez presiunea exercitată de ceea ce Dragana Obradović numește prejudecata occidentală asupra reprezentării narative a victimelor – în special, a cuvintelor și a tăcerilor acestora.

Cuvinte-cheie: exil, memorie comună, Iugoslavia, tăcere, literatură transnațională.

IOANA MOROȘAN

**THE GENRE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND WOMEN'S
WRITING. THE BOUNDARIES OF GENDER,
GENRE AND POLITICS:
THE CASE OF LENA CONSTANTE**

The autobiographical genre became an important literary form within the Romanian literary system after 1989 from two standpoints: as a main way of depicting former political prisoners' horrifying experiences in the Communist prisons, as well as exploring the conditions of many intellectuals under political oppression. On the other hand, these topics have nourished and contributed to legitimizing the agenda of post-December 1989 Romanian anti-Communist movements. Nevertheless, the prominent position of the testimonies did not involve a significant symbolic recognition of the genre within the economy of the post-Communist literary production, although many writers such as Mihail Sebastian (1907–1945) or Nicolae Steinhardt (1912–1989) earned their long-term recognition and are mostly present in the contemporary literary scene due to their published diaries. Autobiographical practices, mainly those works that are focused on revealing either carceral experiences or the oppressed condition of intellectuals under Ceaușescu's regime have been contextually well-received, as they represent a form of free speech about the terrifying Communist past after more than four decades, a period during which the literary evolution had been on a declining trend as an effect of censorship.

Considering this, I will analyze how the practice of testimonies contributed to increasing writers' visibility within the post-Communist cultural context, with a special focus on the most important female figures who were consecrated for memoir writing and who published acclaimed books on this topic during the 1990s. The present article proposes a survey of the role of testimonies among former female prisoners who established themselves in the field of carceral literature while practicing this genre, paying special attention to Lena Constante's works. This paper mobilizes a sociological approach and aims to advance some explanations for the contextual visibility of the autobiographies while highlighting the dimension of gender and the level of the evolution of gender identity during the last decades of Romanian Communism (the 1970s and the 1980s).

In the same vein, the article involves a thematic exploration of these terrifying confessions as they not only provide testimonies of traumatic experiences but also present the potentiality of being a real form of recovery of women's identity in the local literary field. One of the most important perspectives is related to the

peripheral position of women within the local literary system. At stake is the marginal position of the autobiographies and autobiographical genres against the backdrop of their feminization; the symbolic gain as well as the literary prestige; and the political contextual connotations of this genre. Finally, I will investigate possible reasons for these writers' minor status, as they currently constitute a forgotten fraction. The article mainly focuses on autobiographical patterns inspired by the terrifying experiences of female political dissidents in prisons during the Communist regime. The solidarity of women under these harmful conditions leads us to an approach that analyzes the influences of coercive environments and especially carceral spaces on female autobiographical writing. This solidarity turns into an ethos of womanhood emblematic for Lena Constante's writing and consequently, into a token of the singularity of women's representation in carceral writing.

The Position of the Autobiographical Genre within the Romanian Literary System

According to the studies dedicated to the phenomenon of women's writing, the biographical genre has become established as a gendered literary practice. In this respect, Jennifer Milligan, while researching French women writers' condition during the inter-war period, concludes that autobiographies, along with romance, are implicitly related to the problematic concept of femininity¹ and it has served as a way of exploiting women's intimacy:

The literature written by women during the inter-war period was an object displayed for the pleasure of the voyeuristic male gaze [...] The critical reception is governed by 3 principles: women are feminine, the genres that they use are linked to femininity, and these genres are the second-rate importance in literary hierarchies [...]. Literary historians would have one believe that their governing criteria are related more to genre than to gender [...] An overview of entries on Inter-war female writers in literary histories reveals that the notion of femininity, whether it be attributed ironically, disapprovingly [...] is consistently twinned with one of two literary genres: the autobiography or the romance².

Thus, this genre has worked as an established form of writing among women, being also mostly encouraged in women's literary writing. In spite of that, the confessional and biographical genres, implicitly related to a rhetoric of intimacy, have paradoxically served as the main principle of exclusion of female writers from the circuit of legitimation and from the list of consecrated works due to the habit of practicing a marginalized literary formula. In other words, the fact that

¹ Jennifer Milligan, *The Forgotten Generation. French Women Writers During the Inter-war Period*, New York, Berg, 1996, p. 70.

² *Ibidem*, p. 65, 73.

prominent female figures aspiring to a literary career were mainly practicing a confessional formula (perhaps also inscribed into a romance plot) reveals a strategy of male dominance through which men defend and preserve their positions in the literary field.

In the French literary system during the inter-war period, confessional genres were mainly related to the female writers' community, due to the lack of real writing competencies, and to stereotypes about femininity. These mentioned aspects constituted the main reasons for excluding women from the established literary scene, and, conversely, for excluding the autobiographical genre from the corpus of consecrated and aesthetically relevant texts. As symbolic gain and wide recognition among female writers had constituted an important goal even for aspiring female authors, this fact involved a clear demarcation of this category from the general women's writing. For instance, Marguerite Yourcenar or Rachilde (Marguerite Vallette-Eymery) distinguish themselves from their peers by placing their writing in a different category in comparison to the feminine paradigm that defined French women writers' narratives during the inter-war period³. As an effect, they will link their writing to the dominant discourses, because "linking women's names to the names of male writers carries with it the implication that these women have achieved a degree of recognition because of the link rather than because of the quality of their works, which is discussed only in second place"⁴. In this respect, both authors will emphasize the differences between their autobiographical work and testimonies of personal emotions as well as the lack of intellectual weight of women's writing in general⁵.

As in the case of the French literary field, in the Romanian literary system, the autobiographical genre and testimonies were subjected to a similar destiny. The marginalization of intimate diaries and autobiographical literary practices is an endemic fact of literary critics' resistance to the embedding of confessional writing in the literary and aesthetically relevant system of writing. Thus, in the local context, E. Lovinescu and G. Călinescu, the most prominent excluders of women from the literary field, were at the same time the most prominent enemies of diaristic writing. For instance, in the French literary space, Roland Barthes' early position regarding the genre is articulated unequivocally, as he considers diaristic writing false and unable to accede in a different way to the status of writing⁶. Also, in the local literary field, it is worth noting that the confessional genre is not deemed as part of an eligible literary material for consecration, especially during the inter-war period.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 71-73.

⁶ See Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*. Translated by Annette Lawers and Colin Smith. Preface by Susan Sontag, New York, Hill and Wang, 1977.

Thus, this genre carries a feminized dimension as the same close relationship between the fraction of female writers and autobiographical genres is reiterated as well in the case of local literary history. The closeness between female writing established during the inter-war period (confessional, weak, sentimental, naïve writing)⁷ and genres such as sentimental novels or even autobiographical writing occurs in the Romanian literary field, too. In this way, confessional genres, which were rather frequented by women writers during the inter-war period⁸, in the post-Communist context reshaped the status of autobiographical work within the economy of the literary production against the backdrop of the importance of depicting and highlighting the injustice of the local past and the terrifying conditions endured during the Communist regime.

Many women writers have mostly contributed to the local life-writing canon, without obviously reaching a symbolic consecration over the practicing of autobiographical writing. Thus, we should advance here some prominent examples such as Jeni Acterian's biographical work, *Jurnalul unei fete cumiști* [*The Diary of a Teenage Girl*], the work of Alice Botez, *Cartea realităților fantastice. Jurnal* [*The Book of Fantastic Realities. A Diary*], or even Nina Cassian's testimony, *Memoria ca zestere* [*Memory as Dowry*], or Lucia Demetriu's work as well as Gabriela Melinescu's, along with those female authors' works who had provided an account of the lived experience of imprisonment and oppression during Communism, such as Lena Constante.

This aspect will constitute one of the most important reasons for their legitimation and for the increased visibility of their titles among their female peers during the 1990s. In comparison to the autobiographical literary practices from the inter-war period, during Communism, especially in the Socialist-realist era, this genre was banned against the backdrop of abolishing all those genres that could not adhere to the formula of Socialist-realist orthodoxy. The analytical⁹ formula and any type of self-inspired literary materials or autobiographical allusions were deemed completely outlawed from the ideological perspective. For instance, any descent into an intimate or confessional style was sanctioned and authors were harshly criticized for their inappropriate gesture of writing an intimate poem

⁷ See Elena Zaharia-Filipaș, *Studii de literatură feminină* [*Studies in Women's Literature*], București, Paideia, 2004.

⁸ Nonetheless, many important figures of the field (such as E. Lovinescu), who did turn against the autobiographical writing, were practicing this genre in their turn.

⁹ In France the analytical novel was related by the critics to the women writers – see E. Abry, P. Crouzet, C. Audic, *Histoire illustrée de la littérature française*, Paris, H. Didier Éditeur, 1942, p. 805; a similar situation occurs in Romania through the subjecting of women's writing to the narrow interpretation grid of personal and self-centered literature.

instead of praising the benefactions of the party, especially in the Socialist-realist literary contexts¹⁰.

The stakes of testimony during post-Communism are radically changed, insofar as it is practiced by those authors who are not necessarily accounted for in the production of fictional materials, and their testimony is mostly inspired by carceral experiences. This is the case with Lena Constante's diaries, but we can mention here Paul Goma's books, as neither body of works is related to a consistent literary career. Moreover, the carceral experience narrated by Lena Constante (*L'évasion silencieuse* and *L'évasion impossible*), as well as Madeleine Cancicov (*Le cachot des marionnettes*), had been published in French. Only Doina Cornea publishes her confession about the prisoner experience in Romanian (*Jurnal. Ultimele caiete [Diary. The Last Notebooks]*). Worth mentioning is that both authors (Constante and Cancicov) contributed to the "internationalization" of the local Communist past as they mainly published abroad and in foreign languages (especially French). Nonetheless, both writers had become public figures during the 1990s and their autobiographical works were constantly discussed within the intellectual and cultural debates, even though Paul Goma had capitalized on the image of the Communist victim until his gradual dismissal from the field because of his irritating attitude¹¹ towards the local intellectuals.

Looking back, as it could be noticed, none of these authors were revisited after the 1990s, although the topic of the Communist past still feeds into the local literary production. From this standpoint, the reason for forgetting these authors becomes quite clear. Indeed, it becomes apparent that it is not the topic itself that is at fault, but rather it is the genre that does not favor a long-term adherence to the field, in addition to gender identity as a criterion of exclusion. Many male authors belonging to those fractions of writers whose diaries are mainly inspired by the memories under the Communist regime, such as N. Steinhardt or I.D. Sîrbu, are still frequented, and their works are re-edited. While these authors are still present in the current cultural and literary awareness, most female authors are not. From this vantage point, we can ask a question: are these women writers victims of their gender identity, of the practiced literary genre, or their works were merely involved in a political act of establishing the new post-Communist ethos?

A third possible explanation for their forgetting can be related to the political dimension of their postures, as all these authors depict the terror of Communism and Ceaușescu's dictatorship, without having a political/institutional/public

¹⁰ In 1952, Maria Bănăș, as well as the literary magazines where her intimate poems were published, for instance *Viața Românească*, were blamed for publishing a deviant text that contradicted the literary standards of the regime – see Marin Radu Mocanu, *Cazarma scriitorilor [Writers' Barrack]*, București, Libra, 1998, p. 285.

¹¹ See Mihai Iovănel, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane (1990–2020) [History of Contemporary Romanian Literature (1990–2020)]*, Iași, Polirom, 2021, pp. 671–673.

position. They are minor names in comparison to the paramount visibility of Gabriela Adameşteanu or Monica Lovinescu, for instance, who are the most important figures of the institutionalization of the anti-Communist ethos exercised through their position within important cultural (and political) institutions (The Group for Social Dialogue – Gabriela Adameşteanu and Radio Free Europe – Monica Lovinescu). Former women dissidents and prisoners in the Romanian Communist prisons were “literally locked in a cage being out of law and out of time”¹², despite the fact that the confessions of these women, including Lena Constante, Madeleine Cancicov or Doina Cornea, Monica Lovinescu’s diaries, have remained points of reference as they embedded the intellectual dissidents’ struggles against the political system under the oppressive regime.

As they did not occupy a consistent political or institutional position, their anonymity can be attributed to their lack of public engagement regarding the building and reinforcing of the political ethos and contributing to the dominant political constructs during the 1990s. Moreover, regarding Lena Constante, it is well-known that she was part of the local Communist movement during its illegal phase, along with Elena Pătrăşcanu. At the same time, she was in a very close relationship with Elena Pătrăşcanu as well as with her husband, Lucreţiu Pătrăşcanu, one of the most important figures in the early phase of Communism. All these names, including Constante’s, had become quite questionable in the political context of the 1990s due to their Communist ideological affinities before the establishment and institutionalization of the Romanian Communist dictatorship.

Attempts at Carving a Space for the Specificity of Women’s Autobiographies

In a 2008 issue of CoNTEXTES dedicated to the biographical and autobiographical genre, Vanessa Gemis approaches the relationship between gender and genre, especially between women writers and biographical projects. According to Gemis, the main function of auto/biographical works is to recover the great female figure and, in this way, to counteract the patriarchal literary tradition in France. In this respect, she points out how every feminist movement is accompanied by the gesture of reshaping the importance of women through instrumentalizing the biographical tool which mainly works as a strategy of edification of these marginalized identities, and finally constitutes a subversive act:

¹² Ilinca Barthouil-Ionesco, “Femei în închisorile comuniste româneşti” [“Women in Romanian Communist Prisons”], *Cronica*, 1991, 23, p. 4. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

These biographies of women thus join one of the traditional functions: the edifying function. The feminist project that underpins them, however, involves an implicit critique of classic female biographies. Whilst in the latter, women only appear because of their relationship with great men (daughter of so and so, sister of so and so, even mother of so and again or muse of so and so), feminists favor “their action, their independent professional or artistic activity”, thus modifying, as Eleni Varikas points out, “the criteria for selecting biographical subjects”, and proposing “a different selection and organization of the biographical materials themselves”. The edifying intention is thus manifested less by the choice of subject than by the highlighting of certain aspects of women’s lives: “Whether explicitly formulated or not, the function of these biographies is to prove that women are as capable as men of making history, of disputing with men the claim of being the sole creators of civilization. [...] These portraits reproduce the epic definition of history by contrasting the exploits of men with the exploits of women. [They constitute] an attempt at re-reading or subterranean subversion of the received models which suggests the search for another historical vision”¹³.

From this standpoint, (auto)biographical works have a paradoxical dimension. On one hand, as a confession, autobiographical practice is considered a minor genre assigned either to weak writing or to women and mostly to the notion of feminine. And, on the other, as a strategy of edification, it had been deemed the most viable means for recovering forgotten figures. The dual dimension of autobiographical writing emerges in Romanian women’s testimonies about their experiences in the Communist regime’s carceral spaces. The minor status of confessional writing about the painful experiences under the Communist regime is *volens nolens* confirmed as those testimonies are no longer revisited or republished.

The contribution of these texts cannot be seen as an act of recovering women writers’ forgotten figures or women’s literary tradition. The literary engagement of these testimonies is quite narrow in comparison to the social and political engagement, which had been mostly appreciated in these books. From this point of view, as the testimonies depict the painful condition of women and, in this way, they highlight the singularity of women’s bodies which are subjected to just as much pain as male bodies experience under political captivity, the gender perspective that arises from these texts is worth more attention. In this vein, these texts compete with fictional writing considering their engagement in differential rhetoric of women’s identity and their capacity to mobilize what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “dialectic of distinction”¹⁴. The terrifying confessions about the prisoner’s

¹³ Vanessa Gemis, “La biographie genrée: le *genre* au service du genre”, *CoNTEXTES*, 2008, 3, <https://journals.openedition.org/contextes/2573>. Accessed November 20, 2023.

¹⁴ According to Pierre Bourdieu, a minor fraction, that is involved in a competition with the dominants’ doxa, increases its capacity to acquire aesthetic attitudes over the distances from this dominants’ doxa. In other words, the capacity to adopt a favourable/aesthetic disposition is measured

experiences as a female political dissident involve a real engagement in terms of the rhetoric of differentiation of what is singular regarding the women's experience marked by a terrible condition of bereaved motherhood, acts of violence, and sexual abuse, all these terrible experiences being rendered into a very direct language¹⁵.

As the evolution of women's writing is subjected in the post-war period to political constraints, following the fights between autonomists' doxa and heteronomists', between the defense of aesthetic autonomy and maintaining the status of the writer over publication, the fact that writing as a profession becomes gradually more inaccessible, especially during the 1980s, as well as the erosion of the generous social conditions that were assured via the Writers' Union – a women-centered phenomenon within the literary discourse does not occur in this period. Against this backdrop, many female writers (including the most visible women writers from the last decades of the post-war period) missed the chance to invest their resources in establishing a parallel channel for female writing's affirmation in the literary field and its imposition in the domain of the literary profession. In this respect, their writing mostly revolves around the main topic of the literary recovery and ongoing economic and ideological constraints. As such, an articulation of a space for the recovery and imposition of women's identity over a differential rhetoric, as had occurred in the case of French women writers after the events of May 1968, does not occur in Romania.

Women Prisoners: Narratives about the Confiscation of Freedom and the Body

For analyzing the degree of engagement of carceral testimonies written by former women political dissidents in depicting socially and bodily what being a woman under the traumatic and miserable conditions of the Communist prisons involved, Lena Constante's confessions are among the most prominent. Lena Constante had been imprisoned for about 12 years for her involvement in the famous case of Lucrețiu and Elena Pătrășcanu, who, using their institutional power, guided the artistic activity in a systemically undesirable way, for which they were murdered and their accomplices, Lena Constante among them, sentenced to prison. Thus, Constante spends her first seven years in solitude, and her first book, *Evadarea tăcută* [*The Silent Escape*] is mainly inspired by this period, whilst *Evadarea imposibilă* [*The Impossible Escape*] is based on her last five

through what Bourdieu calls „the dialect of distance”, so that the distance becomes a manner of acquisition – see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated into English by Richard Nice, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 27, 61.

¹⁵ See Luce Irigaray, “This Sex Which Is Not One”. Translated by Claudia Reeder, in Elaine Marks, Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms. An Anthology*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 99.

years' experience along with other imprisoned women, contributing to a shift in her autobiographical vision and writing. Among many women's testimonies who shared the same experiences such as Elisabeta Rizea, Oana Orlea, Anița Nandriș-Cudla along with Doina Cornea and Madeleine Cancicov, Lena Constante's diaries mainly stand out through the rough descriptions of the pain and emotional, psychological, or even physical suffering, and over those beliefs that are rooted in her artistically accomplished interior world serving as a platform for her survival – the faith in literature, in music, in the power of arts and the human: “I had not been a poet, nor a composer, but I was still composing poetry and songs; I had finally found the key to my escape”¹⁶.

Her belief in the power of words has brought her experience and her writer and dissident posture, at the same time, closer to some of the most famous cases like Maiakovski or Anna Akhmatova, who succeeded in surviving imprisonment due to the power of poetry, as Lena Constante herself acknowledges:

One day I had the joy of getting a booklet by Mayakovski, this small prosodical treatise made me happy. Brilliant, intelligent, spiritual, efficacious, it was very helpful. It taught me the first notions of my profession [...]. I have survived. I owe Mayakovski an enormous debt of gratitude¹⁷.

As can be noticed, the confiscation of freedom is compensated for by the power of words in the case of Constante's traumatic experience in the Communist camp, as she is even able to diminish the intensity of her pain reducing the experiences of her suffering to *nothing* and *nobody*; Lena Constante sees her prisoner's pain as “a piece of nothingness”¹⁸.

The most important part of her confession consists of the full engagement with the female gaze. In comparison to many women who were imprisoned, and found a “key of escape” through the patriotic, nationalist ideology (representative being here Anița Nandriș Cudla), or Christian faith (as is the case of authors such as Oana Orlea and Elisabeta Rizea), Constante focuses her experience on literature and the tenebrous female experience that assures a sort of cohesion which can be defined as women's power. Thus, many female fiction writers from the autonomist guild whose topic is mainly politically engaged but in an aesthetic way, or those female authors who are merely interested in immediate gains, dedicate their writing to either reinforcing the autonomist discourses or to serving political or pecuniary interests, especially in the last decades of the Communist regime. Unlike

¹⁶ Lena Constante, *Evadarea tăcută. 3000 de zile singură în închisorile din România [The Silent Escape. Three Thousand Days Alone in Romanian Prisons]*, București, Humanitas, 1992, p. 56.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Gulagul în conștiința românească: memorialistica și literatura închisorilor și lagărele comuniste. Eșeu de mentalitate [The Gulag in Romanian Consciousness: Memoirs and Literature of Communist Camps and Prisons. An Essay on Mentality]*, Iași, Polirom, 2005, p. 122.

the situation of fiction, the stakes of the autobiographical writings inspired by carceral experiences are different. As a disinterested form of writing, autobiographical works are mainly inspired by traumatic episodes which nevertheless lead to a real return to femaleness, to the woman's body. So, to the detriment of the literary aspect, Lena Constante's confessional books, *Evadarea tăcută*, first published in French in 1990 at the Parisian Publishing, La Découverte, and *Evadarea imposibilă* are both deeply engaged in exploring the women's body as oppressed by the cruelty of carceral life. From this standpoint, her texts maintain a wide distance from the whole tradition of women's writing in Romania.

The most prominent feeling that nourishes Constante's writing is the mercy for her peers whom she is sharing the same pain with. The vulnerability of the female body is not only highlighted, but also constitutes an important part of Constante's writing formula, remaining quite specific and relatable to her politically – and socially – engaged style:

the writer describes the larval condition of women dressed up in rags, with shoes made of twisted hairs, with long nails, with disheveled hair like involuntary witches. Lena Constante narrates all the elements of physiological misery neither because of a lack of modesty, nor for the sake of overemphasizing the grotesque already densely present within carceral spaces, but because of her honesty¹⁹.

The sincerity and honesty that are often evoked in the case of Lena Constante's confession mark her specific way of approaching roughly the condition of women under all aspects involved by the gender identity constrained to exist under a regime of terror. Against the backdrop of vulnerable bodies subjected to painful and cruel conditions, this phenomenon leads to the articulation of a sort of solidarity between women. The fact reveals a micro-social structure mainly mobilized by a principle of womanhood: "My neighbor S was trembling for me. After vain efforts she had tried to make me give up, bringing arguments like the sick lungs, anemia, etc. She has decided to help me avoid dangers, and thwart the surveillance of guards"²⁰. Therefore, she narrates the daily routines from detention without any heroic nuances, in comparison with her more acclaimed peers such as Paul Goma or even Nicolae Steinhardt²¹. Constante explores the women's psychologies, feelings, and bodies in their deepest details.

After having been imprisoned for almost 8 years in complete solitude, Constante was relocated to another prison with fourteen other women, a fact that will highlight a new dimension of her writing, as womanhood, assuring the cohesion of the group, becomes an important part of the confessions from

¹⁹ Ruxandra Cesereanu, "Doamna Gulagului românesc" ["The Lady of the Romanian Gulag"], *Steaua*, 1994, 6, p. 18.

²⁰ Lena Constante, *Evadarea tăcută*, p. 237.

²¹ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Gulagul în conștiința românească*, p. 124.

Evadarea imposibilă. The narratives about the existence of these women were more important than a personal confession: “I have filled tens of pages with memories from the sixth jail. Re-reading them, I figured out that I have talked a lot about the jail in general, especially about every woman, about our different activities, and I have forgotten myself”²². The general attitude of the women is submission; they are mainly abulic due to their inertia which is, in her words, especially characteristic of women who have always been subjected to authorities, to the authority of the father, the husband, the priest, and not least, of public opinion²³, and they are mostly imprisoned because of their male relatives’ (sons or husbands) political activism.

Thus, Constante reiterates the violent language and terrifying treatment used against the imprisoned women; as such, her writing becomes one of the first texts that expose roughly what it means to be a woman, especially under these extreme conditions. The topics mostly explored regarding the women’s identity are the body and feelings. In this vein, motherhood obviously occupies a central position in female prisoners’ narratives. Mother detainees are subjected to the most excruciating conditions²⁴, as the most frightening threats coming from those in power are directed, in the mothers’ case, to their children. In this respect, Doina Ciurea’s and Madeleine Cancicov’s confessions will remain especially representative. Nevertheless, Lena Constante inserts a narrative about how she and her imprisoned peers were organizing the Christmas celebration in 1958, improvising within reach the scene of the birth of the Son of God:

Soaked and kneaded by water, the soap turns out into four centimeters of baby Jesus. We were touching our mattresses to take some pieces of straws out and so we built a miniaturized manger [...]. In the center, the manger and the baby are quite pale, the little poor creature. He was just born in a prison [...]. The celebration was cut short by an unwanted appearance [...] when the door had suddenly opened, and a guard came into the cell²⁵.

The close relationship that is established between the women and the theatrical representation of the Christian celebration can be related to their status as homemakers, a status especially emphasized by the association with Christmas. The act of birth is reclaimed by their condition as mothers, which results in a need of dramatical representation of the prototypal act of birth, the Nativity, albeit on a small scale²⁶.

²² Lena Constante, *Evadarea imposibilă. Penitenciarul politic de femei Miercurea-Ciuc, 1957–1961* [*The Impossible Escape. The Political Prison for Women in Miercurea-Ciuc, 1957–1961*], București, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1993, p. 86.

²³ Lena Constante, *Evadarea tăcută*, p. 33.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

²⁵ Lena Constante, *Evadarea imposibilă*, p.146.

²⁶ Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Gulagul în conștiința românească*, p. 238.

In comparison with the imprisoned man, the confiscation of women does not cease with the confiscation of freedom. On the contrary, in their case the surveillance is going much further, being extended to rigorous control of their bodies as well as their freedom. For instance, Constante narrates how one of the guards attempts to rape her. In this context, women's bodies become the most vulnerable as they are mainly seen as sexual objects. The only aspect that prevents the guard from acting is the fear of denouncement:

It was in the middle of the night [...] I feel how he slithers along on my skin, how he meanders on my thigh. The fright wakes me up. A man stands above me. He is getting up. The Guard! He sees my opened eyes, enlarged by fear. I am threatening I will scream. He is getting afraid. He creeps out. I am afraid to fall asleep again²⁷.

The misogynistic local cultural tradition reverberates through many forms of humiliating and degrading women, and one of them is the association of women with the representations of animals, which occurs at all levels of social hierarchies and cultural expression. For instance, within the literary field, women participants in the literary production were mostly associated by the literary authorities (such as E. Lovinescu) with a dove, as their literature is considered naïve, weak, and fragile like a dove, or, sometimes, female writers and their literary products are associated to a cat²⁸. In Liviu Rebreanu's most famous novel, *Ion*, the animalization of women mostly occurs through the violence of language. The plot of the novel is situated in Transylvania, at the beginning of the 20th century, in a rural area. The main female character of the novel is subjected to what amounts to statutory rape by the main male character, Ion, a poor peasant who attempts to become a landowner through ownership of Ana's body. Finally, "Ana's delivery is described from Ion's point of view as an inopportune act of 'dropping a litter' (*să fete*)"²⁹. As an instilled pattern, the animalization of women occurs even in autobiographical narratives. In this context, the lack of power and vulnerability accompanying the pain and trauma caused by the carceral experience, the weakness of women who are harassed and who are permanently feeling threatened by others contribute and accelerate the process of belittling the prisoners' identity and turning it into an animalistic level of self-perception:

²⁷ Lena Constante, *Evadarea tăcută*, p. 84.

²⁸ This type of appropriation between women and animals practiced by the most important literary critics during the inter-war period is analysed by Elena Zaharia-Filipaș in *Studii de literatură feminină*.

²⁹ Anca Parvulescu, Manuela Boată, "The Inter-Imperial Dowry Plot. Modernist Naturalism in the Periphery of European Empires", *Interventions*, 23, 2021, 4, pp. 570-595.

This jail is not a jail. They locked me into a cage. Into an animal cage. The animal is me. I am an animal in a cage. [...] Close your eyes. Think of the mouse. I am thinking of the mouse. You are the mouse. I am the mouse³⁰.

Moreover, Lena Constante does not hesitate to highlight in no cosmeticized terms what it means to be a woman in a political prison. The female and the male experiences are different, so her distinctive claim to womanhood starts by evoking the essential part a of woman's existence:

in prisons, and especially in those prisons with locked cells, women are hit by a much more difficult and vital situation, while men are shielded from that. Most women are young, they have not reached the menopausal age. Daily, many women were bleeding at the same time. We did not have padding or hygienic bandages [...]. As they were younger, they were more ashamed by their involuntary impudence³¹.

Aside from the vulnerability of women's bodies under cruel conditions, the body itself is also subjected to the surveillance of the political and institutional power of the carceral system. As an effect, women are even subjected to a "gynecological strip search", in the author's words, which did not have a medical aim at all. It had been integrated as an organic part of the female prisoners' strip search³², because, as women, they had a different status in comparison to the male prisoners. They are not only persons, but [different] bodies too, and their bodies could be tools of committing undesired acts against the regime³³.

Lena Constante's confessions explore this distinctive part of being a woman in the Communist political prison system as the violence committed against her body constitutes an important part of their narrative. From this standpoint, she succeeds in mobilizing what Pierre Bourdieu calls a *dialectic of distinction*. Nonetheless, what has been accomplished here is quite far from the sociological roots of the concept, mostly discussed in connection to cultural competition for legitimation. In Bourdieu's terms, the dialectic of distinction means differentiating oneself from the aesthetics and positions adopted by the dominated as a path of competing with the dominant. In the present case, the distinction arises through the differential manner of configuring the women's identity and body, but Constante's writing on being an imprisoned woman was not reflected in the established literary paradigms of women's representation, partially because Constante is not interested in literary prestige and recognition. In other words, her writing is withdrawn from the cultural competition for legitimation and assertion. As I have already mentioned, Constante is primarily a painter, and part of Dimitrie Gusti's sociological circle, so she was not an emergent writer and never aimed at literary fame. That can be one of the

³⁰ Lena Constante, *Evadarea tăcută*, p. 79.

³¹ Lena Constante, *Evadarea imposibilă*, p. 122.

³² See Ilinca Barthouil-Ionesco, "Femei în închisorile comuniste românești", p. 5.

³³ See Lena Constante, *Evadarea imposibilă*, p. 140.

reasons why her contribution to the process of differentiating women's identity in literature, situated far from the doxa's perception, has remained forgotten and unrecorded.

Lena Constante's Eclipse and Autobiographical Works by Women

In the cultural frame of the 1990s, the debates about the canon of post-war literature are mostly marked by political and moral considerations rather than literary ones. "East-ethical revisionism"³⁴ guides the phenomenon of literary recovery as well as the literary production in a symbolic order during the post-Communist decades. The anti-Communist ethos established the names of the majority of legitimized intellectuals such as Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca, and all intellectuals gathered around the Grupul pentru Dialog Social [Group for Social Dialogue] or Grupul de la Păltiniș [the Păltiniș Group]. Many others endeavored to establish an autonomist ethos centered around the literary act (Eugen Simion), a moralizing attitude regarding the former sympathizers of the Communist regime or current "neo-Communist" figures (Monica Lovinescu), and finally, an anti-Communist conception that guides the fate of literature and culture (Grupul de la Păltiniș). Against this backdrop, the autobiographical works of the former political prisoners are mobilized for the legitimation of the post-Communist cultural agenda and the new literary ethos established during the 1990s.

It must be admitted that many former prisoners, such as N. Steinhardt, will reach long-term literary recognition, as his works are still widely read and present in the contemporary local editorial market through constant reeditions. Unlike the case of N. Steinhardt, while Lena Constante's confessions were involved in the local political and cultural debates in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, receiving slight recognition, her works had enjoyed only a temporary recognition, as her texts are too rarely revisited today. From this vantage point, several possible explanations for Constante's current anonymity could be advanced, considering three aspects: politics, gender, and genre, which together have contributed to the gradual exclusion of Lena Constante from the local literary scene.

Firstly, the dimension of genre marks the temporal prestige of Constante due to the framing of her works in so-called carceral literature. This is an aspect mostly related to the practiced genre and not as much to the topic, as the plot that revolves around the bleak local history during the Communist regime has been embedded in the fiction works (especially by the great novels about Communism written by very prestigious local authors such as Dan Lungu or Lucian Dan Teodorescu). The need for the absorption of this type of writing is highlighted by Monica Lovinescu,

³⁴ See Cosmin Borza, "Beyond the Myth. The Romanian Post-Communist Revisionism", *Diversité et identité culturelle en Europe*, 2015, 2, pp. 95-106.

who deplores the slight production of Romanian carceral literature in comparison to the production and circulation of this type of narrative in the Western literary network³⁵. Nevertheless, the contextual character of these repression system testimonies must be added to the minor status of the genre itself. As I mentioned above, in the economy of the local literary production, the status of autobiographies had often been connected to women's writing. Generally, memoir writing has occupied a minor status, as Monica Lovinescu also suggests, deploring the lack of confessions about the cruel past. These works' aesthetical and historical value is locally underestimated, as their value is hard to understand for "someone from Romania who is too fond of theoretical laziness to allow anything other than fiction to be called literature"³⁶.

Secondly, another criterion for the marginalization of Lena Constante can be related to her political position, as her socialist beliefs have proven unwelcome during the 1990s. As Vanessa Gemis pointed out in her study, the memoir, as well as biographical works dedicated to the ample experience of many women, contribute to the rehabilitation of women's identity within a patriarchal system of values. In the case of Lena Constante, her carceral testimonies did not succeed in assuring her long-term literary success. However, Constante established a tradition of women's representation in writing by mobilizing a differentiative ethos regarding the condition of women and what it truly means to be socially, politically and even bodily a woman in a terrifying context.

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³⁵ Monica Lovinescu, "Alice în țara sîrmei ghimpate" ["Alice in the Land of Barbed Wire"], 22, 1992, 21, p. 16.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

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THE GENRE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND WOMEN'S WRITING. THE
BOUNDARIES OF GENDER, GENRE AND POLITICS: THE CASE OF LENA
CONSTANTE
(Abstract)

Over the last century, and especially during the first half of the 20th century, autobiographical writing has acquired an unfavorable position in the economy of literary production, and it has been often related to a form of “feminine”, confessional writing. The cultural context during the Communist regime in Romania has reshaped the connotation of autobiographical writing, which was banned outright during the Socialist-realist era, and then became a pivotal way of surveillance for dissidents who were imprisoned mainly for political reasons during the rule of the Communist regime. Thus, the present paper aims to follow how the biographical works of former women prisoners, with a focus on Lena Constante's autobiographical work, have contributed to a sort of differentiation of women's writing, mobilizing in Pierre Bourdieu's terms a “dialectic of differentiation”.

Keywords: communism, imprisoned women, autobiographical writing, autobiographies, dialectic of differentiation.

GENUL AUTOBIOGRAFIEI ȘI SCRITURA FEMININĂ. LIMITELE
IDENTITĂȚII DE GEN, ALE GENULUI LITERAR ȘI ALE POLITICII:
CAZUL LENEI CONSTANTE

(Rezumat)

Scrisul autobiografic a dobândit în ultimul secol, mai ales în prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea, un statut minor în economia producției literare, fiind adesea asociat cu o formă de scriitură „feminină”, confesivă. Contextul cultural din timpul regimului comunist din România a remodelat conotațiile scrierilor autobiografice, acestea fiind de-a dreptul interzise în perioada socialist-realistă, iar apoi devenind o modalitate privilegiată de supraveghere a disidenților care au fost încarcerați mai ales din motive politice în timpul regimului comunist. Astfel, lucrarea de față își propune să analizeze modul în care operele biografice ale fostelor deținute, cu accent pe opera autobiografică a Lenei Constante, au contribuit la un fel de diferențiere a scriiturii feminine, care activează, în termenii lui Pierre Bourdieu, o „dialectică a diferențierii”.

Cuvinte-cheie: comunism, deținute politic, scriitură autobiografică, autobiografii, dialectica diferențierii.

BRIGITTE RIGAUX-PIRASTRU

**PASSÉ DOULOUREUX ET PRÉSENT APAISÉ ?
DES RÉCITS DES VIE DE FEMMES ALLEMANDES ET
POLONAISES EN SILÉSIE DANS LE DOCUMENTAIRE
ABER DAS LEBEN GEHT WEITER [MAIS LA VIE
CONTINUE]**

Introduction

Deux femmes allemandes âgées retournent avec leur fille et nièce dans leur ancienne maison familiale en Basse-Silésie (Pologne) pour y retrouver l'actuelle propriétaire polonaise ainsi que sa descendance. La cinéaste allemande Karin Kaper documente ainsi sa propre histoire familiale ainsi que celle de la famille polonaise installée dans leur ferme après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, dans son film *Aber das Leben geht weiter* [*Mais la vie continue*]¹, sorti en 2010. Dans cet article, je me propose d'analyser la représentation de cette rencontre intergénérationnelle et internationale, presque exclusivement féminine. Surtout alimenté par les narrations des personnes âgées, mais aussi par des photographies et des vidéos tirées des archives familiales respectives, et, bien sûr, par de nombreuses prises de vues des participantes elles-mêmes ainsi que de la maison et du village où se déroulent ces retrouvailles, ce documentaire affiche comme principal objectif la préservation et le partage des souvenirs de la génération la plus ancienne. Ceux-ci soulèvent des pans très douloureux de l'histoire du 20^e siècle en Europe de l'Est : la Seconde Guerre mondiale et, en particulier, des déplacements forcés liés au conflit, ceux des Polonais de l'est du pays occupé par les Soviétiques ainsi que la fuite et l'expulsion des Allemands des provinces allemandes annexées par la Pologne. Je détaillerai tout d'abord ce contexte historique dans lequel s'inscrivent les témoignages, puis je résumerai le film avant de procéder à son analyse. La méthode d'analyse choisie est en particulier celle de la *Visual History*. Celle-ci repose sur l'hypothèse

que l'histoire [du 20^e siècle et du début du 21^e siècle] a été largement façonnée par les médias visuels et leur utilisation, et se transmet en même temps par des sources visuelles. Les mass-médias visuels assurent une fonction non seulement lors de la construction du présent mais aussi lors de la mise en forme de l'histoire. De plus, des projets d'avenir, des espoirs et des peurs [...] s'y reflètent toujours. En outre, [...] des productions d'images ne sont pas uniquement considérées comme alimentant par

¹ Karin Kaper, Dirk Szuszcies (réalisateurs), *Aber das Leben geht weiter* [*Mais la vie continue*], RFA, 2010.

exemple l'histoire politique, des mentalités ou du genre, mais comme des médias qui généraient et génèrent leur propre histoire visuelle et virtuelle, faisant ainsi partie intégrante du processus historique lui-même².

De ce fait, c'est bien le film qui exerce depuis des décennies l'impact le plus important sur la construction des histoires nationales, comme le souligne aussi l'historien Stefan Berger³.

Le contexte historique évoqué dans le film

Le pacte de non-agression germano-soviétique, conclu quelques jours avant l'invasion de la Pologne par la *Wehrmacht* le 1^{er} septembre 1939, incluait un protocole secret définissant notamment le partage de la Pologne entre les deux dictatures. C'est pourquoi ce pays⁴ « [fu]t le premier terrain d'expérimentation de la politique nazie de restructuration raciale de l'espace »⁵, avec l'exécution des élites, des expropriations suivies d'expulsions, des internements, du travail forcé. Un sort particulier fut réservé d'emblée aux Juifs, « cibles privilégiées des unités SS »⁶. Quant à la partie orientale du pays, l'occupant soviétique y organisa en 1940 et 1941 des déportations de masse en Sibérie, au Kazakhstan et en Extrême-Orient,

son objectif était avant tout l'élimination de soi-disant ennemis de classe et de ceux qui étaient soupçonnés d'être antisoviétiques. En fait, bien que le critère de la nationalité ne jouât officiellement aucun rôle, ces actions touchèrent surtout la population polonaise [N.d.T. : dans un environnement multi-ethnique]. [...] Les déportations soviétiques représentèrent une forme extra-judiciaire de la répression, qui fut appliquée selon le principe de la faute collective, et concerna donc des familles entières⁷.

² Gerhard Paul (ed.), *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder, Band II : 1949 bis heute [Le siècle des images, volume II : de 1949 à nos jours]*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, p. 9.

³ Stefan Berger, « Narrating the Nation : Historiography and other Genres », in Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas, Andrew Mycock (eds.), *Narrating the Nation : Representations in History, Media and the Art*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2008, p. 8.

⁴ En l'occurrence sa partie occidentale, avant que l'Allemagne n'entre en guerre contre l'Union Soviétique en juin 1941.

⁵ Christian Baechler, *Guerre et exterminations à l'Est. Hitler et la conquête de l'espace vital 1933–1945*, Paris, Tallandier, 2012, p. 97.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

⁷ Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, « Polen (*Rzeczpospolita Polska*) », in Detlef Brandes, Holm Sundhaussen, Stefan Troebst (eds.), *Lexikon der Vertreibungen. Deportation, Zwangsaussiedlung und ethnische Säuberung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts [Dictionnaire des expulsions. Déportation, exil forcé et épuration ethnique dans l'Europe du XX^e siècle]*, Wien, Köln, Weimar, Böhlau Verlag, 2010, p. 508. La traduction des citations m'appartient, sauf mention explicite du traducteur.

Les Soviétiques déportèrent ainsi 320 000 Polonais⁸. Bien qu'amnistiés en 1941, après l'invasion de l'URSS par la *Wehrmacht*, ces derniers ne furent jamais autorisés à rentrer chez eux. Contraints de séjourner en URSS au moins jusqu'à la fin de la guerre⁹, ils furent déplacés dans l'immédiat après-guerre à l'ouest de la Pologne, dans les provinces précédemment allemandes, nouvellement placées sous administration polonaise (*de facto* annexées) dont l'expulsion des habitants allemands était en cours. Les Polonais de l'est du pays restés chez eux durant la guerre subirent le même sort, Staline ayant négocié avec les Américains et les Britanniques l'annexion définitive de cette partie de la Pologne. Les tractations entre ces Trois Grands concernèrent aussi l'expulsion définitive des Allemands du Reich et ethniques, dont le principe fut acté dès 1943. Il s'agissait d'affaiblir durablement l'Allemagne en limitant son influence en Europe de l'Est ; par ailleurs, la Pologne, amputée à l'est, devait être dédommée par de nouveaux territoires à l'ouest, en l'occurrence par des provinces allemandes. Au total, 12,6 millions d'Allemands¹⁰ furent touchés par cette décision. Le syntagme « fuite et expulsion » désigne l'ensemble de leurs déplacements, caractérisés par l'arbitraire, une grande violence et un chaos inouï. La fuite et l'expulsion englobent une grande diversité de mouvements de population, des évacuations et des fuites devant l'avancée de l'Armée rouge, des tentatives de retour, des expatriations et des expulsions, qui se déroulèrent dans l'ensemble de l'Europe de l'Est et du Sud-Est, de janvier 1945 jusqu'au début des années 1950, en l'occurrence surtout en temps de paix, dans ce que l'historien Keith Lowe appelle une « Europe barbare »¹¹, dans laquelle les violences exercées durant la guerre trouvèrent une prolongation :

La politique d'occupation pratiquée par les pouvoirs allemand et soviétique considérait les déplacements forcés comme une procédure normale vis-à-vis des populations livrées entre leurs mains. Par leur brutalité, leur caractère massifié, le triomphe d'un chauvinisme national et du racisme, les transferts de population en temps de guerre devinrent un exemple et firent école. Leur expérience déboucha sur le traitement impitoyable des civils allemands [...]¹².

Ces derniers, expropriés, dépouillés de tous leurs biens, furent expulsés vers l'Allemagne, dans ses nouvelles frontières de 1945. Des régions entières, vidées d'une bonne partie de leur population, durent être repeuplées¹³. Le pouvoir communiste y implanta donc les exilés de l'est de la Pologne, mais leur nombre

⁸ Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, « Polen », p. 508.

⁹ Une partie d'entre eux dut séjourner en URSS jusque dans les années 1950.

¹⁰ Ray M. Douglas, *Les expulsés*. Traduit par Laurent Bury, Paris, Flammarion, 2012, p. 9.

¹¹ Keith Lowe, *L'Europe barbare 1945-1950*. Traduit par Johan-Frédéric Hel-Guedj, Paris, Perrin, 2013.

¹² Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, « Polen », p. 510s.

¹³ Ce fut également le cas dans l'ouest de la Tchécoslovaquie.

étant largement insuffisant¹⁴, il fit surtout appel à « des ‘déplacés volontaires’ [...] originaires de la Pologne centrale à qui [il] avait attribué le statut de ‘pionniers’ de la repolonisation des ‘territoires recouverts’ »¹⁵. Sous le communisme, le métarécit national resta circonscrit à cette « reconquête » justifiant une polonisation radicale, qui devait gommer toute trace d’une présence allemande séculaire. L’exil forcé des Polonais de l’Est, dont l’évocation aurait constitué une critique à l’égard de l’URSS, fut passé sous silence, l’évocation de sa mémoire émergeant dans la sphère publique seulement à partir des années 1990. Pour des raisons identiques, il en fut de même en Allemagne de l’Est pour les nombreux réfugiés et expulsés allemands qui constituaient environ 25% de la population. Désignés dans l’immédiat après-guerre comme des « personnes déplacées », puis comme de « nouveaux citoyens » soi-disant parfaitement intégrés, ils ne purent exprimer publiquement ni revendication ni souvenir de leurs épreuves. À l’inverse, en République Fédérale, ils se constituèrent en associations qui revendiquaient le droit au retour, le recouvrement des biens perdus ainsi que la non-reconnaissance de la ligne Oder-Neisse comme frontière germano-polonaise¹⁶. Fortes au départ de millions d’adhérents, elles bénéficièrent jusqu’au milieu des années 1960 du soutien de l’ensemble de la classe politique, avant de tomber en disgrâce à partir de 1970, lors de la mise en œuvre de la « politique d’ouverture vers l’Est » (*Ostpolitik*) par Willy Brandt et son gouvernement et poursuivie par les chanceliers suivants. Marquées depuis du sceau du « revanchisme » – un concept sur lequel je reviendrai encore – de plus en plus isolées sur le plan politique, souffrant d’une mauvaise image auprès de l’opinion publique, les associations et leur fédération nationale menèrent un combat juridico-politique désespéré jusqu’en 1990. À partir de cette date, la profonde césure provoquée par la fin du Rideau de fer, la réunification des deux Allemagnes, la reconnaissance définitive de la ligne Oder-Neisse comme frontière germano-polonaise et la chute de l’Union Soviétique en 1991 transforma la culture mémorielle de la fuite et l’expulsion, non seulement en Allemagne, mais aussi dans les pays dits « expulseurs » au nombre desquels se trouve la Pologne. La perte définitive des territoires autrefois allemands, associée à une volonté partagée de réconciliation facilitée par la disparition des régimes communistes, permit l’amorce d’une autre approche du douloureux passé commun.

¹⁴ Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene. Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945–1956* [Les expulsés allemands et polonais. Société et politique des expulsés en RDA/RFA et en Pologne 1945–1956], Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998, p. 44 : « 8 millions d’Allemands [sur les 12,6 millions de réfugiés et d’expulsés] durent quitter les territoires de l’Est, tandis que 2,1 millions de Polonais furent chassés de l’est de la Pologne ».

¹⁵ Agnieszka Niewiedzial, « Une réconciliation germano-polonaise fragilisée par le débat sur les expulsions ? », *Revue d’études comparatives Est-Ouest*, 41, 2010, 1, p. 124.

¹⁶ La République Démocratique allemande (RDA), sous la pression de Moscou, avait reconnu dès 1950 cette frontière. L’Allemagne réunifiée, quant à elle, la reconnut en 1990, en accord avec les Alliés.

Le documentaire Mais la vie continue

La production de films allemands consacrés au thème de la fuite et l'expulsion¹⁷ reflète ces mutations : elle décolla timidement après la réunification, puis explosa à partir des années 2000, atteignant un pic entre 2004 et 2010. Hormis le contexte politique décrit ci-dessus, les 60 ans de la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale et du début de la fuite et l'expulsion, commémorés en 2005, contribuèrent à une médiatisation accrue, appelée de surcroît de leurs vœux par les réfugiés et les expulsés originaires de RDA ainsi que par leurs descendants. Ils aspiraient en effet à une reconnaissance publique qui leur avait été refusée sous la dictature. Enfin, la génération des témoins disparaissant peu à peu, l'accent fut mis en particulier sur les témoignages de ces derniers, dans des docufictions et des documentaires, surtout télévisés, qui représentent le gros de la production, articulés autour de deux grands axes, les événements historiques et des voyages souvent très nostalgiques dans l'ancienne *Heimat*¹⁸. La mise en récit du passé par des témoins, transformés « en porteurs d'histoire »¹⁹, y joue donc un rôle central. Leurs propos, dont la dimension émotionnelle leur permet de passer avec le spectateur « un pacte compassionnel »²⁰, comportent toujours une valeur incontestée et donnent souvent l'impression d'une grande spontanéité. Pourtant, un documentaire, tout comme un film de fiction, se prépare avec un scénario, un synopsis, voire un script. Le choix des lieux, des personnes interviewées, etc., rien n'est laissé au hasard. « C'est là que le documentaire est soumis à un défi majeur : convaincre de l'authentique quand les qualités de conviction du simulacre l'emportent »²¹, ce qui signifie qu'il constitue toujours un intermédiaire entre les témoins convoqués par le cinéaste et les spectateurs (qui en ont rarement conscience).

Le documentaire *Mais la vie continue*²² a été réalisé par deux documentaristes, Karin Kaper et Dirk Szuszies. La première se présente dès le début du film, dans

¹⁷ Je me base sur un corpus de plus de 200 films germanophones évoquant la fuite et l'expulsion, tournés entre 1946 et 2018.

¹⁸ Le substantif *Heimat*, qui contient une forte charge affective, peut être imparfaitement traduit par « la petite patrie », à laquelle on est étroitement attaché.

¹⁹ Annette Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*, Paris, Plon, 1998, p. 118.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 178.

²¹ Guy Gauthier, *Le documentaire, un autre Cinéma*, Paris, Nathan, 1995, p. 6.

²² Ce documentaire (auto)biographique constitue une démarche tout à fait originale, tant par la participation conjointe de témoins allemands et polonais, sur plusieurs générations et dans un lieu unique, que par le genre – la démarche étant presque exclusivement féminine. À ma connaissance, les œuvres allemandes s'en rapprochant le plus sont celles des documentaristes Ute Badura et Volker Koepp. La première, dans *Schlesiens Wilder Westen [L'Ouest sauvage de Silésie]* (2002), effectue un reportage dans le village natal de son père en Silésie, en interviewant les Polonais qui s'y sont installés ainsi que les Allemands qui y retournent dans le cadre de visites nostalgiques ; le second,

une démarche autobiographique. Née en 1959 à Brême, dans le nord de l'Allemagne, elle vit à Berlin. En 1975, pour la première fois, elle avait accompagné sa mère Ilse Kaper²³ en Pologne, dans son village natal à Niederlinde (Platerówka), en Basse-Silésie. Cette dernière voulait à tout prix revoir sa *Heimat* dont elle avait été expulsée en 1946, presque 30 ans auparavant. Son mari craignant de passer derrière le Rideau de fer, elle avait demandé à sa fille adolescente de voyager avec elle. Elles furent accueillies par la famille polonaise à laquelle la ferme avait été attribuée après-guerre. D'autres visites suivirent. La sœur de Ilse, Hertha Christ, s'y rendit plus tardivement, en 1990, avec ses deux fils et sa petite-fille. Gabriela Matniszewska, la petite-fille de l'actuelle propriétaire de la ferme, Edwarda Zukowska, leur avait ensuite rendu visite en Allemagne. Cette fois-ci, Karin repart à Platerówka avec sa mère Ilse et sa tante Hertha, soulignant que ce voyage constitue une démarche particulière :

C'est Gabriela la première qui m'a raconté la vie de sa grand-mère. Ma famille en savait très peu, malgré quelques visites dans la *Heimat*. Nous étions d'accord, Gabriela et moi, que Edwarda, ma mère Ilse et sa sœur Hertha devaient encore une fois se rencontrer dans le lieu où leurs chemins s'étaient croisés de manière si dramatique, dans la ferme où Edwarda vit seule aujourd'hui²⁴.

Plusieurs séquences montrent ces six femmes réunies autour d'un repas ou d'un goûter, dans une atmosphère paraissant plutôt détendue. Du côté polonais, Edwarda, sa fille Maria Wojewoda et Gabriela représentent trois générations, voire quatre, si l'on compte les deux fillettes de Gabriela qui apparaissent quelques fois à l'écran, tandis que les Allemandes incarnent deux. C'est donc une rencontre quasi exclusivement féminine qui a été orchestrée et mise en scène. Les hommes, presque toujours invisibles ou du moins silencieux, n'y jouent qu'un rôle mineur. Dirk Szuszies, le coréalisateur, reste derrière la caméra, Hertha est veuve et le mari d'Ilse, visiblement très diminué par la maladie, ne prononce que quelques mots, filmé au domicile conjugal en Allemagne. Des photos, disponibles sur le DVD en complément du film, ainsi qu'une photo de groupe sur sa couverture, révèlent cependant qu'il accompagne les femmes à Platerówka. Quant aux hommes polonais, ils demeurent également dans l'ombre. Gabriela présente brièvement son père ; son frère, installé depuis près de trente ans aux États-Unis, n'est évoqué que par le biais de photographies. Rien ne perle sur le mari de la jeune femme. Certes, il y a une surreprésentation des femmes, mais les hommes ont été écartés ou peut-

natif de Stettin / Szczecin, revient dans *Berlin-Stettin* (2009) sur ses origines et sur la fuite de sa mère face à l'avancée de l'Armée rouge début 1945, en parcourant le trajet séparant les deux villes.

²³ Les personnes, après une première présentation de leur nom et prénom, seront ensuite uniquement désignées par leur prénom.

²⁴ Karin Kaper, Dirk Szuszies, *Aber das Leben*.

être l'ont-ils eux-mêmes souhaité. Quoi qu'il en soit, la mémoire et sa transmission sont présentées dans *Mais la vie continue* comme une affaire de femmes.

Il s'agit donc de mieux se connaître, de partager son histoire avec l'autre famille, avant que les témoins déjà âgés ne disparaissent et surtout, par le biais de la médiatisation audiovisuelle, de rendre publiques ces mémoires privées. Cette mise en récit répond à des enjeux identitaires contemporains définis plus ou moins explicitement par celles que je considère comme les deux instances morales du film, en l'occurrence Karin et Gabriela. Au début du film, la première s'exprime ainsi :

Toute la famille de ma mère avait dû quitter son village natal de Basse-Silésie en 1946. Quand j'étais jeune dans les années 1970, des thèmes comme la fuite et l'expulsion était quasiment des tabous pour moi, parce que trop d'Allemands ne se considéraient que comme des victimes de l'histoire. À cause de ça, j'avais honte d'être allemande, car durant des voyages et à l'étranger, j'étais confrontée aux crimes de guerre allemands²⁵.

Karin exprime ainsi un sentiment de honte identique à celui évoqué par Gabrielle Schwab²⁶ ; comme cette dernière²⁷, elle s'appuie sur la thèse de Alexandre et Margarete Mitscherlich²⁸, sans la nommer toutefois, laissant entendre que le proche passé nazi et ses crimes auraient été refoulés par les Allemands. Or cette thèse a été réfutée par plusieurs auteurs, notamment l'historien Friso Wielenga :

[I]l ne pouvait pas être question de deuil, [...], mais tout au plus de honte et de culpabilité. Longtemps, il n'y eut même pas de place pour cela chez la plupart des Allemands, car ils étaient notamment confrontés eux-mêmes à la perte de proches, à l'incertitude quant au destin de disparus et de prisonniers, ou parce qu'ils étaient victimes de la fuite et l'expulsion. Tilmann Moser [N.d.T. : élève des Mitscherlich], fort de sa propre expérience de psychiatre, affirme que pour les *expulsés*, le combat pour la survie avait été tellement fondamental, qu'au départ il n'y eut même pas de place pour le deuil de proches qui avaient perdu leur vie²⁹.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ Gabrielle Schwab, *Haunting Legacies, Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 5.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

²⁸ Alexander Mitscherlich, Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern [Le Deuil impossible]* (1967), München, Piper Verlag, 1988.

²⁹ Friso Wielenga, *Schatten deutscher Geschichte : Der Umgang mit dem Nationalsozialismus und der DDR-Vergangenheit in der Bundesrepublik [Ombres de l'histoire allemande : le traitement du national-socialisme et du passé de la RDA en République fédérale d'Allemagne]*, Greifswald, SH-Verlag, 1995, p. 27s.

Réfutant donc cette théorie du refoulement, il souligne qu'au contraire, le passé nazi « a petit à petit marqué au fer rouge l'identité ouest-allemande »³⁰. D'autres auteurs, comme le psychologue Gerhard Bliersbach et l'historienne Svenja Goltermann, partagent son point de vue. Le premier fait valoir que les Mitscherlich n'avaient aucunement tenu compte de la réalité socio-culturelle ouest-allemande³¹, tandis que la seconde relève d'une part que le silence n'est pas une preuve de refoulement³² et, d'autre part, que la société ouest-allemande avait dès les années 1960 commencé à prendre vraiment conscience de la Shoah, les médias contribuant largement à cette évolution³³, ceci générant très tôt une distinction entre les souffrances des victimes du nazisme et celles des Allemands. C'est d'ailleurs bien là le postulat qui sous-tend tout le film et affiché d'emblée par Karin. Quelques scènes plus loin, des propos de Gabriela y font écho :

Depuis des siècles, l'histoire germano-polonaise a toujours été très compliquée, ça ne veut pas dire qu'il faut tout le temps garder les yeux rivés sur le passé, mais je ne peux en aucun cas tolérer l'ignorance. Oui, on doit être d'accord avec ce que les Polonais ont mal fait et ce que les Allemands ont fait, mais relativiser, ça, c'est un très grand danger pour nos histoires réciproques³⁴.

Le risque de relativisation évoqué ici concerne les Allemands, qui pourraient être tentés de mettre en avant les souffrances endurées lors de la fuite et l'expulsion, au détriment de la mémoire de celles infligées à leurs victimes. Implicitement, les propos des deux jeunes femmes révèlent dès le début du documentaire que le paradigme victimaire sera bien davantage appliqué aux épreuves des Polonais. Au demeurant, en guise de conclusion, Karin insiste encore sur la responsabilité allemande :

Après le voyage avec ma mère en 1975, je suis retournée plus tard à plusieurs reprises en Pologne. J'étais régulièrement bluffée de rencontrer presque partout des gens qui ne manifestaient pas de ressentiments. C'est incroyable, en fait. C'est quand même l'agression de la Pologne par les Allemands en 1939 qui a mené à la catastrophe de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Et l'occupant allemand a assassiné plusieurs millions de Polonais³⁵.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 107.

³¹ Gerhard Bliersbach, *So grün war die Heide... Die gar nicht so heile Welt im Nachkriegsfilm [La lande était si verte... Le monde pas si rose que ça dans les films d'après-guerre]* (1985), Weinheim und Basel, Beltz, 1989, p. 20, 135.

³² Svenja Goltermann, *Die Gesellschaft der Überlebenden [La société des survivants]*, München, Pantheon Verlag, 2011, p. 161.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 415s.

³⁴ Karin Kaper, Dirk Szuszies, *Aber das Leben*. Gabriela s'exprimant dans un allemand approximatif, je corrige *de facto* ses fautes dans la traduction française.

³⁵ Karin Kaper, Dirk Szuszies, *Aber das Leben*.

Elle prononce ce texte avec solennité, tandis que la caméra effectue de très gros plans sur son visage. Ce rappel semble indiquer que la fuite et l'expulsion constitueraient une conséquence « naturelle » de l'agression allemande qui en serait l'unique cause. Si celle-ci représente, certes, le fait générateur majeur, d'autres facteurs jouèrent également un rôle (notamment les doctrines nationalistes du 20^e siècle, partagées par la majorité des acteurs politiques, considérant qu'il fallait des nations ethniquement homogènes et justifiant des mouvements de populations forcés depuis la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale, auxquelles il convient d'ajouter l'hégémonie soviétique avec ses pratiques répressives)³⁶. En outre, dès le début du film, Karin prend soin de souligner que sa mère, membre d'une association d'expulsés, n'a cependant « jamais rien revendiqué »³⁷. Il s'agit de la blanchir de tout soupçon de « revanchisme ». Les idéologues est-allemands avaient conçu ce terme pour accuser les associations d'expulsés et leur fédération de visées belliqueuses afin de récupérer les territoires annexés – ce risque d'agression fantasmé justifiant en particulier l'érection du mur de Berlin, censé protéger la population. Repris sans discernement dès les années 1960 en Allemagne fédérale, l'adjectif « revanchiste » affubla dorénavant les revendications des réfugiés et des expulsés. Actuellement, bien que tous les recours en justice pour recouvrer des biens à l'Est aient été épuisés et que la frontière germano-polonaise soit définitive, ces termes continuent à être employés, condamnant tout propos critiques et corsetant ainsi la parole des derniers témoins et de leurs descendants. D'ailleurs, Gabriela ne manque pas d'évoquer clairement le « revanchisme » :

La problématique du revanchisme, pour ainsi dire, je crois. Toutes les visites que la famille Queißer [nom de la famille de Ilse et Hertha] a faites ici, ils n'ont jamais manifesté une telle pensée auprès de ma famille. Ça veut dire qu'ils n'ont certainement jamais rien dit, ni rien fait en rapport avec une telle pensée³⁸.

Les témoignages d'Ilse et de Hertha doivent donc répondre à ces injonctions, sous le poids de la faute allemande qui entraîne forcément une (auto)censure de leurs propos. Il est donc nécessaire de scruter les discours, « les oublis, les silences ou les mensonges du témoin intéress[a]nt autant le chercheur que les vérités. On

³⁶ Une majorité de chercheurs défend ces causes multifactorielles. Eva et Hans-Henning Hahn, qui estiment en revanche que la guerre d'agression menée par les Allemands serait l'unique fait à l'origine de la fuite et l'expulsion, constituent une exception notoire – voir Mathias Beer, « Rezension zu Hans Henning Hahn, Eva Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern. Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte* » [« Compte-rendu sur Hans Henning Hahn, Eva Hahn, *L'expulsion dans la mémoire allemande. Légendes, mythes, histoire*], *H-Soz-Kult*, 2011, <https://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/reb-14969>. Consulté le 7 mai 2020.

³⁷ Karin Kaper, Dirk Szuszies, *Aber das Leben*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

pourrait ajouter que la vérité du témoin tient aussi dans ce jeu, conscient ou pas, avec la vérité historique »³⁹.

Le témoignage des Allemandes

Les témoignages des trois femmes âgées ont été agencés de manière croisée, avec des parallèles, par exemple, des scènes ont été filmées dans les jardins respectifs d'Edwarda et de Hertha, dans le cimetière polonais de Platerówka et dans celui du nord de l'Allemagne où repose une partie de la famille de Karin. Toutefois, la plupart des séquences se déroule dans la belle ferme ventrue en Basse-Silésie, dans le jardin et les dépendances ainsi qu'aux alentours, dans le village et les champs. Le séjour s'effectue en été, la nature est verdoyante, le temps beau et les températures visiblement clémentes, ce qui confère de la douceur aux scènes. Les propos des unes et des autres sont parfois étayés par des photos et aussi par quelques rares scènes de fiction. Ilse et Hertha se retrouvent dans une situation ambivalente, dans le lieu même qui fut des générations durant la propriété de leur famille et où elles passèrent toute leur jeunesse (Ilse est née en 1926). Elles abordent donc le thème de la perte et évoquent leurs souvenirs dans le lieu même qu'elles ont perdu – mais non pas perdu de vue. On les voit arpenter le jardin, déambuler dans la maison, parcourir des chemins de campagne adjacents. Ces filles d'agriculteurs issues d'une famille de 8 enfants racontent leur jeunesse, le labeur des champs, la guerre qui perturbe profondément leur vie. Elles assurent que leur père était opposé au régime, que l'un de leurs frères, enrôlé volontaire à 18 ans, ne l'avait fait que par goût de l'aventure.

Au début de l'année 1945, la famille prend la fuite face à l'avancée de l'Armée rouge, puis revient, croyant que sa progression a été arrêtée par la *Wehrmacht*. Lorsque les soldats russes arrivent finalement dans le village, elles se cachent dans un grenier pour leur échapper – une séquence les présente devant et dans le bâtiment qui leur servit de refuge. Elles affirment ne pas avoir été violées mais avoir entendu des femmes crier⁴⁰. Puis les Russes chassent la population du village, jusqu'à la nouvelle frontière germano-polonaise. Ne pouvant accepter ni comprendre cette expulsion – Ilse et Hertha soulignent l'absence d'informations – leur famille revient avec une partie des habitants à Niederlinde, espérant encore un retour à une vie normale.

Cependant, la milice polonaise, qui a remplacé les Soviétiques, oblige les Allemands à s'identifier avec un brassard blanc et leur impose un couvre-feu. La ferme des Queißer est attribuée à Edwarda qui y installe son père. Ce dernier y fait

³⁹ Denis Peschanski, « Repenser les memory studies », in Francis Eustache (ed.), *Mémoire et oubli*, Paris, Editions Le Pommier, 2014, p. 73.

⁴⁰ Les femmes allemandes furent massivement violées par les soldats soviétiques.

travailler les Queißer. En juillet 1946, ils sont brusquement expulsés avec les autres Allemands vivant encore au village et se retrouvent dans le nord de l'Allemagne, ayant tout perdu. Les vieux parents doivent travailler pour survivre. Ilse, la plus jeune de la fratrie, dont la scolarité a déjà été bouleversée par la guerre, l'interrompt définitivement et entame une vie professionnelle. Le documentaire s'attarde sur sa vie conjugale et familiale, soulignant qu'elle fut heureuse et épanouie dans sa nouvelle *Heimat* – ce qui relativise la perte subie. Pourtant, bien que les relations paraissent bonnes et plutôt détendues entre les femmes, un malaise sous-jacent reste perceptible.

Au demeurant, on observe tout au long du documentaire un contraste (intentionnel et / ou inconscient) entre ce qui est dit et ce qui est montré. Par exemple, en l'absence des Polonaises, l'une des deux vieilles sœurs allemandes pleure dans la petite gare d'où elles furent expulsées des décennies auparavant. En revanche, aucune émotion ne perle lorsqu'elles évoquent la maison de leurs voisins, disparue, dont il ne subsiste aucune trace. Il en va de même quant au cimetière allemand, évanoui, sur la surface duquel le curé a fait construire sa maison, selon leurs explications. Elles évoquent les tombes disparues des grands-parents et d'une sœur décédée enfant. Les promenades dans le village révèlent des bâtiments en mauvais état, parfois abandonnés ainsi que des terrains vagues sur lesquels devaient se trouver des bâtiments. Ces « vides » non commentés et ces disparitions témoignent d'eux-mêmes des violences ayant accompagné les expulsions ainsi que les conséquences de ces dernières. Nombre de cimetières furent profanés ou détruits, afin d'effacer irrémédiablement la mémoire des Allemands. Les ruptures dans la structure du village témoignent quant à elles des

dommages infligés par les pays expulseurs à leurs propres tissus démographiques et économiques [...] Pendant des décennies, ces zones frontalières [d'où fut expulsée la population allemande] resteraient les moins densément peuplées et les moins développées de leurs pays respectifs⁴¹.

Quant à la description de l'expérience même de la fuite et l'expulsion, elle paraît édulcorée. La famille Queißer n'aurait ainsi été maltraitée ni par les Soviétiques ni par les Polonais, hormis le vieux père, incarcéré une courte période dans le village et battu par des miliciens. Assurément, Ilse et Hertha n'ont été ni déportées dans un camp de travail en Union Soviétique, ce qui constitua le sort de centaines de milliers d'Allemandes des anciennes provinces de l'Est, ni internées, en attendant leur expulsion, dans un ancien camp de concentration géré par les Polonais. Le père d'Edwarda n'aurait pas maltraité les anciens propriétaires de la ferme et le dernier voyage en train vers l'Allemagne se serait plutôt bien déroulé (alors que souvent les conditions sanitaires et climatiques furent désastreuses). Les vieux parents Queißer ne retournèrent jamais en Basse-Silésie. Quels profonds

⁴¹ Ray M. Douglas, *Les expulsés*, p. 255.

traumatismes provoqua cet arrachement définitif ? Karin et Ilse, qui s'étreignent devant la tombe de ces derniers, dans le nord de l'Allemagne, commentent leur vie en exil :

Karin : Je n'ai jamais eu l'impression qu'ils étaient amers, ils étaient en fait très très paisibles Ilse : Mmmh. À la maison, ils en parlaient un peu, mais d'une certaine manière, ils étaient renfermés sur eux-mêmes, et au début, ils avaient toujours l'espoir de rentrer quand même un jour chez eux, mais après 20 ans environ, il n'y a plus eu d'espoir [...] ils n'ont pas eu le courage de visiter la *Heimat*. Mais ils étaient déjà trop vieux, alors, en fait... ils en ont conservé le souvenir. Karin murmure : Oui, c'est peut-être mieux comme ça. Ilse, très tristement : Oui (elle déglutit péniblement)⁴².

L'attitude de la mère et la fille, très émues, dévoile une situation bien plus douloureuse que ce qu'elles veulent bien décrire. Le silence des grands-parents, typiques en cela du comportement des victimes, dénote probablement une grande souffrance. Ilse, ayant elle-même vécu la fuite et l'expulsion, a dû, de surcroît, assister au déracinement de ses parents. Cependant, la narration des Allemandes doit répondre à des injonctions plus ou moins implicites qui leur dictent d'accepter leur sort et de relativiser les épreuves vécues. Dans cette optique, à la fin du film, Hertha met l'accent explicitement sur les souffrances d'Edwarda :

Edwarda, elle a vécu des choses terribles autrefois, et la peur est chevillée au corps chez elle, ça, c'est dans l'inconscient, elle n'aime pas dire ce qui la touche vraiment, c'est logique, on ne peut pas oublier, n'est-ce pas, parfois ça marche, parfois, le souvenir, il revient, même si on ne veut plus y penser [...] elle a dû aller directement dans un autre pays, c'était quelque chose de différent, ce n'était plus polonais chez nous à la maison, on a aussi dû tout laisser, mais on est restées dans notre pays⁴³.

La rupture aurait donc été plus importante dans la vie d'Edwarda, par comparaison avec le vécu de la famille Queißer. Ilse, qui participe aux échanges, réfute immédiatement les propos de sa sœur en soulignant le rejet dont ils furent les objets : les autochtones « pensaient qu'on venait de Pologne, n'est-ce pas, qu'on était des Polacks »⁴⁴, mais elle minimise ensuite cette expérience négative en prétextant que ce fut pire dans le sud du pays. Ce déni partiel de l'accueil glacial subi en réalité par une grande majorité de réfugiés d'expulsés, quelle que fût la région, ainsi que l'oubli de la polonisation radicale et immédiate des régions allemandes occupées par les Polonais signalent à nouveau qu'elles accordent à Edwarda un statut de victime plus important que le leur.

⁴² Karin Kaper, Dirk Szuszies, *Aber das Leben*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

Le témoignage des Polonaises

La polonisation du village de Niederlinde / Platerówka passa aussi par le changement de son nom. Ainsi, Gabriela, avant que sa grand-mère ne commence à raconter son histoire, explique, sans autre commentaire, que le nom d'une héroïne nationale polonaise ayant vécu au 18^e siècle, Emilia Plater, « une personne très importante dans notre histoire »⁴⁵, lui fut attribué. Cette modification très symbolique participa de la politique et du discours officiel de la Pologne communiste, qui prétendait donc avoir reconquis des territoires autrefois polonais. Par ailleurs, un nationalisme polonais, parfois essentialiste, transparait dans les propos des trois générations ; ainsi, Maria (née en 1950) affirme-t-elle que « la foi éternelle [en la Pologne] constitue la force de notre nation »⁴⁶. Edwarda (née en 1924) souligne l'identité polonaise de sa famille qui porte un nom allemand (Straub), tout en évoquant l'environnement encore multiculturel et multilingue de sa jeunesse. Sa famille avait vécu dans la partie polonaise annexée par l'Empire austro-hongrois au 18^e siècle, qui redevient une partie de la Pologne lorsque celle-ci renaît de ses cendres en 1919. Son père s'installe ensuite comme colon en Volhynie, dans l'est du pays.

Quand les Soviétiques l'annexent en septembre 1939, il doit choisir officiellement son identité ethnique et se définit comme un Polonais et non comme un Allemand, Edwarda précisant que, dans ce dernier cas, sa famille aurait été déplacée à l'ouest, dans l'une des régions occupées par le régime nazi. En février 1940, les Straub ainsi que le reste du village, perdant tous leurs biens, sont déportés en Sibérie, dans des conditions terribles. Le voyage dans des wagons dure trois semaines, par un froid glacial. Beaucoup meurent, surtout des enfants. Dans la taïga, ils survivent tant bien que mal, habitant des baraques, surveillés par un commandant du NKVD. Amnistiés en 1941, ils sont envoyés au Kirghizstan, près de la frontière iranienne, et manquent d'y mourir de faim. Enrôlée en 1943 dans l'unité polonaise de l'Armée rouge, Edwarda assiste sur l'autre rive de la Vistule à l'écrasement du soulèvement de Varsovie par la *Wehrmacht*, Staline ayant ordonné de ne pas intervenir.

À la fin de la guerre, on l'envoie en Basse-Silésie, à Niederlinde : « Quand on était encore en Russie, Staline nous avait promis une terre à l'ouest. Pour la *Heimat* perdue dans l'est de la Pologne »⁴⁷. Ses parents l'y rejoignent, elle n'évoque pas le sort du reste de la famille. La vieille dame ne manifeste pas d'émotion quand elle égrène ses souvenirs. Personne n'est retourné en Volhynie, ni dans la région d'origine de la famille. Sa fille Maria, qui a exercé durant trente

⁴⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁷ *Ibidem.*

ans le métier d'enseignante dans le village, commente le contexte, le pacte Ribbentrop-Molotov, à l'origine du partage de la Pologne entre l'Allemagne nazie et l'Union Soviétique, en soulignant la volonté des deux dictatures d'anéantir définitivement leur pays. Elle rappelle également que le régime communiste polonais interdisait toute évocation de la déportation de ses propres citoyens par les Soviétiques et conclut ainsi :

Où est la vérité ? Notre nation a été trahie ! Des millions sont morts et ne sont jamais revenus dans leur propre pays. On aimerait tellement se rendre dans les anciens territoires polonais de l'Est. On ne peut pas. On a peur⁴⁸.

Maria reprend « le vieux récit de la Pologne victime des nations, 'Christ des nations', un récit victimaire toujours réactivé »⁴⁹. Selon ce métarécit très nationaliste, « la Pologne pendant la guerre et après a été trahie par les Occidentaux, s'est battue seule. Il y a un 'nous' très ethnique, le 'nous martyr et trahi par tous' »⁵⁰, y compris bien sûr par l'Union Soviétique dans le cas de cette famille dont des membres ont été déportés. L'évocation d'un voyage de retour désiré, mais *a priori* impossible participe aussi de ce statut de victime, car elle fait allusion aux massacres de Polonais par des Ukrainiens nationalistes à la fin de la guerre. Cette peur collective peut aussi révéler une postmémoire chez Maria qui, bien que n'ayant pas vécu les événements, a « hérité » des émotions ressenties par sa mère.

L'héritage

Les témoignages et les commentaires des unes et des autres constituent un entrelac dense de souvenirs et de leur transmission, voire donc de la postmémoire à l'œuvre chez les générations suivantes. Cet héritage, conditionné évidemment aussi par les mémoires collectives respectives des deux pays, se traduit par une « narration de la réconciliation »⁵¹, dans le cadre de laquelle les rôles sont parfaitement déterminés. Typique des documentaires allemands produits sur le thème des voyages dans l'ancienne *Heimat*, généralement en Pologne, elle se caractérise par un impératif d'harmonie, structuré par des règles implicites, auxquelles *Mais la vie continue* ne déroge pas. Ainsi, la responsabilité des Allemands est explicitement affirmée, tandis que le comportement des Polonais, des victimes devenues parfois bourreaux – notamment des Allemands avant leur

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ Delphine Bechtel, « Autour de la 'loi sur la Shoah' en Pologne. Table ronde organisée et menée par Delphine Bechtel, Université Paris Sorbonne », *Mémoires en jeu*, 2019, 9, p. 110.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

⁵¹ Maren Röger, *Flucht, Vertreibung und Umsiedlung. Mediale Erinnerungen und Debatten in Deutschland und Polen seit 1989 [Fuite, expulsion et réinstallation. Mémoires et débats médiatiques en Allemagne et en Pologne depuis 1989]*, Marburg, Verlag Herder-Institut, 2011, p. 243.

expulsion – est passé sous silence. En outre, la mise en parallèle du destin d'Allemands expulsés et de Polonais déplacés, très fréquente dans les documentaires allemands, donne l'impression trompeuse que les premiers auraient été systématiquement remplacés par les seconds, alors qu'ils le furent surtout par des Polonais venus volontairement du centre du pays, comme déjà mentionné. L'attribution du bien perdu à des victimes également expulsées et paupérisées limite le propre statut de victime des Allemands.

En outre, la parole exclusivement accordée aux femmes dans *Mais la vie continue* contribue selon moi à renforcer ce statut, tant pour les Polonaises que les Allemandes. Ces dernières furent exposées plus que les hommes, encore au front ou déjà en captivité, aux événements dramatiques de la fuite et l'expulsion. Elles incarnent donc une forme d'innocence, contrairement aux hommes, décrédibilisés par leur rôle de soldats de la *Wehrmacht*, et considérés comme majoritairement impliqués dans le nazisme. *Mais la vie continue* présente ainsi des témoignages exemplaires, exprimés par des femmes qui maîtrisent leurs émotions. Jamais elles ne manifestent de la colère, de l'amertume ou ne serait-ce qu'une forte nostalgie. Cette exemplarité démontre non seulement que les récits autobiographiques relatés par des personnes ayant vécu des épreuves sont donc corsetés par de nombreuses règles sociales⁵² et peuvent de surcroît intégrer, souvent à leur insu, « des récits rapportés, des éléments de mythologie 'culturelle' en lien avec l'événement ou l'histoire »⁵³, mais que leur autocensure, consciente ou non, découle aussi de leurs probables troubles traumatiques⁵⁴. Leur mutisme complet à ce propos, l'insistance sur leur vie de famille présentée comme heureuse, révèlent « une scission entre le *je* racontant et le *je* raconté »⁵⁵. Leurs narrations taisent en effet les angoisses, les potentiels problèmes de santé et traumatismes liés aux épreuves⁵⁶. Par ailleurs, une rencontre entre anciens et nouveaux propriétaires représente probablement une démarche parfois plus embarrassante et douloureuse que ce que veut faire croire le reportage, quelle que soit la bonne volonté des hôtes et des visiteurs – qui dans ce cas entretiennent tout de même des relations depuis déjà plusieurs décennies au moment du tournage, car

⁵² Magda Stroińska, Vikki Cecchetto, « Is Autobiographical Writing a Historical Document ? : The Impact of Self-Censorship on Life Narratives », *Life Writing*, 12, 2015, 2 p. 180.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ Valérie Baisnée-Keay et al. (eds.), *Text and Image in Women's Life Writing. Picturing the Female Self*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, p.11.

⁵⁶ Notons que ce silence est conforme à celui observé jusqu'à aujourd'hui dans les nombreux documentaires allemands traitant de la fuite et l'expulsion. Ils occultent les traumatismes subis par les réfugiés et les expulsés (et parfois encore par les générations suivantes) au profit du mythe, toujours très vivace, d'une intégration rapide et réussie.

la recherche d'un passé soutenable ne représente ni une construction culturelle ni un ensemble de débats intellectuels ni des décisions politiques, mais un processus de travail ardu sur la mémoire vivante dont le poids douloureux peut être allégé mais jamais entièrement ôté⁵⁷.

Les silences d'Edwarda, des remarques de Gabriela et quelques commentaires de Ilse et Hertha laissent en effet deviner une situation plus complexe. Gabriela, qui vit depuis de longues années à Wrocław, met l'accent avec émotion sur son attachement à la vieille ferme où elle passa son enfance. Sa condamnation, sur un ton presque agressif, du « revanchisme » peut refléter l'inquiétude éprouvée des années durant par ses grands-parents, installés dans un bien confisqué à des gens susceptibles de le reprendre peut-être un jour. Quant à Ilse et Hertha, leur attitude parfois gauche et certains de leurs propos démontrent que cette visite sur le lieu de la perte leur coûte, par exemple : « Je pense souvent à la *Heimat*, à tout ce qu'on a dû laisser [...] on y retourne avec des sentiments mitigés »⁵⁸. Quand Karin leur rappelle avant le départ comment dire bonjour en polonais, sa mère soupire et dit qu'elle avait refoulé ce mot. Si ces propos et ces postures sont bien présents dans le documentaire, cela résulte toutefois d'un choix, sinon d'une concession lors du montage. Les réalisateurs ont laissé sourdre des émotions, pour éviter des témoignages trop lisses, tout en préservant une « narration de la réconciliation » qui bénéficie déjà aux protagonistes elles-mêmes, car connaître l'autre permet de mieux accepter la situation et, le cas échéant, de lui pardonner :

Aider les personnes âgées à dresser un bilan constructif de leur existence, par le biais d'une approche narrative, se présente à cet égard comme une manière de développer leur *résilience*. [...] Vaillant (2004) assure que les personnes aspirant à bien vieillir gagneraient davantage à se préoccuper de leur capacité à pardonner qu'à surveiller leur taux de cholestérol ! Le pardon peut en effet être envisagé comme un judicieux procédé salutaire pour faire face à l'adversité. Il s'agit plus précisément [...] d'un processus interindividuel et relativement complexe, par lequel un individu agressé par un tiers (qui s'est conduit de manière injuste envers lui) choisit d'abandonner le ressentiment éprouvé à l'égard de ce dernier, plutôt que de se venger⁵⁹.

Les cadrages accompagnent cette démarche collective, avec beaucoup de plans moyens, voire larges sur des groupes, constitués par les femmes, les familles, les duos (sœurs, mère / fille, petite-fille / grand-mère, etc.). Cette « mise en récit

⁵⁷ Kristin Kopp and Joanna Niżyńska, « Introduction : Between Entitlement and Reconciliation. Germany and Poland's Postmemory after 1989 » in Kristin Kopp and Joanna Niżyńska (eds.), *Germany, Poland and Postmemory Relations. In Search of a Livable Past*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 12.

⁵⁸ Karin Kaper, Dirk Szusies, *Aber das Leben*.

⁵⁹ Colette Aguerre, « La résilience assistée du bien vieillir », in Serban Ionescu (ed.), *Traité de résilience assistée*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2011, p. 408s.

mémoriel »⁶⁰, dont la dimension performative accompagne la construction commune d'une mémoire plurielle et consensuelle, plaide aussi en faveur d'une transmission intergénérationnelle permettant une meilleure compréhension du vécu des générations précédentes, allemandes et polonaises. N'est-ce pas aussi un hommage empathique de Karin à sa famille silésienne et à sa mère en particulier ? La réalisatrice reconnaît au début du film qu'elle ne commença à comprendre cette dernière que lors de leur premier voyage à Platerówka en 1975.

Conclusion

Ce documentaire poursuit donc plusieurs objectifs, étroitement imbriqués : contribuer à la réconciliation germano-polonaise, cultiver la mémoire officielle de la fuite et l'expulsion, rendre un hommage à la famille, présentée comme exemplaire, de la réalisatrice, tout en accordant de la considération à la famille polonaise ayant pris sa place. Cette notion très concrète de lieu joue aussi un rôle important dans le film, car toutes les femmes manifestent un attachement à la vieille ferme silésienne. Leur nostalgie intergénérationnelle représente « une force positive »⁶¹ car « l'amour partagé d'un lieu, en l'absence de revendications matérielles, peut revêtir une fonction thérapeutique »⁶². C'est pourquoi cette œuvre, réalisée 20 ans après la reconnaissance définitive de la frontière germano-polonaise et 12 ans après le rejet, par la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme à Strasbourg, des ultimes revendications de dédommagement, alimente un métarécit national, d'ailleurs tant pour l'Allemagne que pour la Pologne, les subventions accordées par la Fondation pour la collaboration germano-polonaise ainsi que par le délégué du gouvernement fédéral allemand pour la culture et les médias démontrant qu'il participe du discours officiel des deux pays⁶³. L'analyse de *Mais la vie continue* corrobore le fait que « [l]'histoire est connaissance, le documentaire est mémoire »⁶⁴. Le corollaire de la mémoire, l'oubli, s'inscrit nécessairement et visiblement dans cette démarche. Il s'agit ici de « l'oubli constructif »⁶⁵, mis en œuvre probablement dès les premiers contacts entre les deux familles allemande et polonaise et cultivé par les réalisateurs. Basé sur « la réconciliation, l'intégration sociale et le fait de surmonter une histoire violente commune »⁶⁶, il nécessite pardon et volonté de s'en sortir. Cette démarche est mise

⁶⁰ Denis Peschanski, « Repenser les memory studies », p. 74.

⁶¹ Kristin Kopp, Joanna Niżyńska, « Introduction : Between Entitlement and Reconciliation », p. 16.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ Site de Karin Kaper, <http://www.karinkaper.com/>. Consulté le 27 juin 2022.

⁶⁴ Guy Gauthier, *Le documentaire*, p. 215.

⁶⁵ Aleida Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens [Les Formes de l'oubli]* (2016), Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2017, p. 57s.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

en exergue par les récits et témoignages presque exclusivement féminins, dont la dimension genrée souligne l'apolitisme et l'innocence de celles ayant vécu les épreuves et confère une douceur accrue à cette rencontre intergénérationnelle et internationale.

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A PAINFUL PAST AND A PEACEFUL PRESENT?

LIFE STORIES OF GERMAN AND POLISH WOMEN FROM SILESIA IN THE DOCUMENTARY *ABER DAS LEBEN GEHT WEITER* [BUT LIFE GOES ON]

(Abstract)

Two elderly German women return with their daughter and niece to their former family home in Silesia (Poland), only to find the current Polish home owner along with her descendants. This is how the German film director Karin Kasper documents her own family history together with that of the Polish family installed in their farmhouse after the Second World War, in her movie *Aber das Leben geht weiter* [But Life Goes On], produced in 2010. I aim to analyze the representation of this exclusively feminine intergenerational and international encounter. Fueled mainly by the narratives of elderly people, but also by photographs and videos taken from the respective family archives, and, of course, by several recordings of the participants themselves as well as the house and the village where these reunions take place, this documentary's objective is to preserve and share the memories of the older generation. Such memories stir up very painful facets of the history of the 20th century in Eastern Europe: Second World War, persecutions and forced displacements of Polish ethnics by Germans and Soviets, flight and expulsion of the Germans, etc. Which light do these exclusively feminine micro-histories shed on the historical facts? How are the traumatic experiences expressed even decades afterwards? Could it really be a question of resilience? What emotions arise from what is said, but also from silences and postures? What heritage of memory and post-memory has been transmitted to the next generations? More broadly, can this "film testimony" contribute to the German-Polish reconciliation? Such are the main questions to which I wish to respond.

Keywords: forced displacement, feminine micro-histories, post-memory, Karin Kasper, German-Polish reconciliation.

UN TRECUT DUREROS ȘI UN PREZENT LINIȘTIT?
POVEȘTILE DESPRE PROPRIA VIAȚĂ ALE FEMEILOR GERMANE ȘI
POLONEZE DIN SILEZIA ÎN DOCUMENTARUL *ABER DAS LEBEN GEHT
WEITER* [*DAR VIAȚA CONTINUĂ*]
(Rezumat)

Două femei germane în vârstă se întorc, împreună cu fiica și nepoata, în fosta lor casă din Silezia (Polonia), însă acolo o găsesc pe actuala proprietară poloneză împreună cu descendenții ei. Acesta este modul în care regizoarea germană Karin Kasper documentează în filmul *Aber das Leben geht weiter* [*Dar viața continuă*], produs în 2010, istoria propriei familii, dar și pe cea a familiei poloneze instalate în casa lor de la țară, după cel de-Al Doilea Război Mondial. Îmi propun să analizez reprezentarea acestei întâlniri intergeneraționale și internaționale exclusiv feminine. Informat în principal prin relatările persoanelor în vârstă, dar și prin fotografii și prin videoclipuri preluate din arhivele familiilor respective și, bineînțeles, prin mai multe înregistrări cu participantele însele, precum și cu casa și cu satul în care au loc respectivele reuniuni, documentarul este menit să recupereze și să împărtășească amintirile generației mai în vârstă. Aceste amintiri ilustrează fațete foarte dureroase ale istoriei secolului al XX-lea în Europa de Est: cel de-Al Doilea Război Mondial, persecuțiile și strămutările forțate ale etnicilor polonezi de către germani și sovietici, fuga și expulzarea germanilor etc. Ce lumină aruncă aceste microistorii exclusiv feminine asupra faptelor istorice? Cum sunt exprimate experiențele traumatice chiar și după decenii? Ar putea fi vorba, într-adevăr, de o chestiune de reziliență? Ce emoții se nasc din ceea ce se spune, dar și din tăceri și din posturi? Ce tipuri de memorie și de post-memorie au fost transmise generațiilor următoare? În sens mai larg, poate contribui această „mărturie cinematografică” la reconcilierea germano-poloneză? Acestea sunt principalele întrebări la care îmi propun să răspund în acest articol.

Cuvinte-cheie: strămutare forțată, micro-istorii feminine, post-memorie, Karin Kasper, reconciliere germano-poloneză.

**BEING A WOMAN AS A WOUND.
CZECH WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING
ON ANOREXIA NERVOSA¹**

Twenty years ago, Leigh Gilmore noticed that the boom of memoirs and autobiographies coincided with “the age of trauma”². I argue that in post-communist countries an indispensable part of that boom are autobiographical testimonials about eating disorders (ED), especially *anorexia nervosa*³, almost exclusively written by women. The experience of anorexia itself can be strongly connected to trauma understood as a psychic wound that alters and sometimes shatters the self, and is therefore related to the question of one’s identity. Eating disorders are sometimes caused by a traumatic experience but they can also become one. A person that experienced them usually struggles to retell her story, rebuilding her *self*.

This article analyzes autobiographical prose narratives by Czech women authors with experiences of *anorexia nervosa*: Petra Dvořáková’s *Já jsem hlad* [*I Am Hunger*] (2009), Vlastina Svátková Kounická’s *Modrý slon* [*Blue Elephant*] (2010), Martina Jendruchová’s *Už je to za mnou* [*It’s All Behind Me Now*] (2013), Tereza Nagy Štolbová’s *Dcera padajícího listí* [*Daughter of Falling Leaves*] (2014), and Eva Steppanová’s *Anorexie: Hlad po jiném světě* [*Anorexia: Hunger for Another World*] (2017). ED are interpreted through a feminist lens that allows perceiving them as psychic wounds that are not merely a personal but also a political issue.

Feminist researchers of eating disorders propose a rich variety of approaches and interpretations. However, they agree on several aspects: firstly, they emphasize that it is primarily girls and women who suffer from anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating; secondly, they place these phenomena in a broader sociopolitical and cultural context; and thirdly, they place eating disorders on a continuum of “normal” eating – dieting – eating disorders⁴. The obsession with thinness is not

¹ The article is a reworked version of one chapter of my dissertation defended at Charles University in Prague in 2022.

² Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2001, p. 16.

³ For stylistic reasons I use in the article the notions “anorexia”, “anorexia nervosa” and “eating disorders” interchangeably.

⁴ See Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993; Helen Malson, *The Thin Woman: Feminism, Post-Structuralism and the Social Psychology of Anorexia Nervosa*, New York, Routledge, 1997; Susie Orbach, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, New York, Galahad Books, 1997.

considered abnormal in Western society – it becomes abnormal only after a certain point is crossed. Anorexics thus radically embody the norms by which we all live. They embody an ascetic lifestyle as well as the desire for control, self-mastery, power, and freedom – all of which are symbolically linked to a firm, fat-free “masculine” body. Therefore, anorexia, bulimia or binge eating cannot be perceived as merely pathological behaviors of the individual.

Susie Orbach interprets anorexia as a teenager’s rebellion against the female body, noting an important paradox – this rebellion leads (at least for a time) to the embodiment of the ideal of female thinness:

Anorexia reflects an ambivalence about femininity, a rebellion against feminization that in its particular form expresses both a rejection and an exaggeration of the image. The refusal of food which makes her extremely thin straightens out the girl’s curves in a denial of her essential femaleness. At the same time, this thinness parodies feminine petiteness. It is as though the anorectic has a foot in both camps – the pre-adolescent boy-girl and the young attractive woman⁵.

Orbach sees upbringing as an important factor in explaining why women in particular experience “body trouble”. Girls, she argues, are raised in a more puritanical way, and are led to perceive sexuality as something impure, undesirable, wrong or dangerous, which contributes to the disorientation associated with their own corporeality. Moreover, girls are socialized to care for others, taught that they should meet the needs of others (children, men) but not their own⁶.

The author also pays attention to the role of capitalism and consumer society, in which the female body becomes an object of alienation, fascination and desire – both for women and men⁷. Orbach places the increased incidence of eating disorders in a broader socio-cultural context. She argues that several decades ago, similar internal conflicts might have manifested themselves in other ways, but nowadays Western society is characterized by a surplus of food, and therefore certain problems may manifest themselves in food refusal or other specific behaviors connected to food preparation or consumption. Crucial is also the fact that in most households it is still women who prepare food, while at the same time we are reminded every day by advertisements, television, and magazines that food is something dangerous for us⁸.

The implication is that food is good for others, while women themselves should treat it with caution or avoid it altogether. From here there is a short way to serious internal conflicts that in Czech and other post-communist societies have

⁵ Susie Orbach, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, pp. 125-126.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 165.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 15. Of course, in the Czech context the role of (late) capitalism and consumer society is beginning to play a vital role only after 1989.

⁸ Susie Orbach, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, p. 41.

manifested themselves in their full intensity only at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries. Before that, we cannot speak of surplus of food or greater number of advertisements telling us that food is a danger that we should avoid.

The vast majority of feminist scholars who have addressed eating disorders emphasize the role of the mind-body dualism, so central to the Western culture. A long philosophical tradition contributes to the perception of the body as something that stands in the way of knowing the truth, the self, or the soul; something that deceives, hinders, or turns thoughts in the wrong direction. The body is thus constructed as something negative, something to be overcome. For many centuries, it is women, not men, who have been associated with the body, and it is therefore women who are much more likely to experience trouble with their own bodies⁹.

According to Bordo, the obsession with thinness points to deeper problems that have been present in our culture, especially since women began to become more visible in the public sphere and began to aspire to positions that were previously reserved for men. Bordo argues that the ideal of the female body has become leaner and more boyish following periods of increased feminist movement activity. The boyish figure suggests freedom, independence, and may symbolize access to the “men’s world”:

Women may feel themselves attracted by the aura of freedom and independence suggested by the boyish body ideal of today. Yet, each hour, each minute spent in anxious pursuit of that ideal (for it does not come naturally to most mature women) is in fact time and energy taken from inner development and social achievement. As a feminist protest, the obsession with slenderness is hopelessly counterproductive¹⁰.

In the Czech (and Czechoslovak) context we can observe the popularity of leaner ideal of female body to some degree in the 1920s, following the first wave of feminism, and later, in a much more prevalent form at the beginning of the current century.

Anorexia combines many aspects and interpretations: it is often perceived as a rejection of adulthood and regression to childhood, as a rejection of female identity or female physicality. It can be also viewed as a rebellion against the subordinate position of women in society or as a disagreement with the reduction of women to an object of sexual desire. Helen Malson shows in her work several basic paradoxes in the discursive construction of this disorder. First, it can be constructed as an example of discipline or as a rebellion against it. Second, anorexics are characterized by a desire to disappear, to be invisible to the “disciplining gaze”; at the same time, their emaciated bodies attract much more attention than “normal” (i.e., non-anorexic and non-obese) bodies. Another paradox is that of “self-destruction” and “self-production” – starvation is

⁹ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, p. 5.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 159-160.

undoubtedly a form of self-destruction, but it can also form the basis of self-identification. The final aspect is passivity, the passive submission to a destructive process, and at the same time the active seeking out of death¹¹.

The source of this ambivalence is not only that individual experiences differ significantly from one another. Contradictions can also occur within individual bodies and individual stories that set out to make sense of the liminal experience that anorexia undoubtedly is. This, again, links eating disorders to traumatic experiences that are thought to be unrepresentable, beyond language¹². Autobiography itself opens important questions about the possibility of self-representation, and when the self-representation entails trauma these questions and paradoxes are even intensified¹³.

At the same time, autobiographical writing is always a certain way of seeking answers to the question of who I am, a way of discerning one's own place in the world¹⁴, therefore it strives for reducing those paradoxes. Besides, a narrative offers "the therapeutic balm of words", whose power is widely recognized by feminists as well as psychiatrists¹⁵.

Autobiographical narratives on *anorexia nervosa* are distinctly personal, but also firmly anchored in a broader social context, entering into dialogue with cultural representations and interpretations of eating disorders. While visual representations of the anorexic body are not characterized by much variation and reproduce the stereotype of the emaciated, bony, weak, and sad girl, interpretations of the causes of anorexia are quite varied. All of aspects in play are nevertheless connected to a question: "Who am I?". The search for or construction of one's own identity in the texts is carried out on at least two levels: firstly, on the level of the experience of anorexia itself, which is the central theme in them, and secondly, in the act of writing about oneself.

In my paper, I reflect on both moments of the search for or construction of one's own identity: the moment associated with illness and the moment of autobiographical writing. I ask how, in the retrospective narrative, the narrators perceive the connection between anorexic eating practices and their own identity, and also how the process of self-writing itself intervenes in this construction.

¹¹ Helen Malson, *The Thin Woman*, pp. 174-179.

¹² Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*, p. 6.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

¹⁴ Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska, "Nowsze problemy teoretyczne pisania o sobie. Przykład wypowiedzi autobiograficznych pisarzy polskich ostatnich dziesięcioleci" ["Newer Theoretical Problems of Writing about Oneself. An Example of Autobiographical Statements of Polish Writers of Recent Decades"], *Przestrzeń Teorii*, 2006, 6, pp. 51-67.

¹⁵ Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*, p. 7.

Why Write?

In their prose, the authors usually give reasons why they decided to write about their life and illness. The motivation to write their own story is twofold: in all the books we find a self-therapeutic moment, while many authors also stress the need to help others and to dispel the prejudices and stereotypes associated with eating disorders.

For example, Michala Jendruchová writes in the preface:

I am writing myself out of pain, I am coming to terms with myself. At the same time, I would like to describe to you, from the perspective of a former patient, the horrors experienced by an anorexic. I would like to bring some light into the lives of those who suffer from this disease and their loved ones, so that they do not lose hope¹⁶.

Along similar lines, Eva Stepanová states:

I cannot serve as an example of a perfect, brave and cured person, nor am I an expert in eating disorder treatment, but I am closer to the problem and to similarly “affected” people. My desire to warn is all the greater, my soul’s urging to help others all the more fervent¹⁷.

The altruistic motivation is not mentioned by the current psychologist and therapist specializing in eating disorders, Tereza Nagy Štolbová, who writes that she feels the need to speak out about what she has kept quiet for many years:

With this book, with the words I say in it about some days of my life, I transcend the long-standing and deep-seated desire to cover with my palms my excessively exposed face – the gateway to my pain and vulnerability – or the desire to be unseen, unheard, and therefore invulnerable...¹⁸.

An attempt to define oneself against the stereotypical media discourse about anorexia is found in most of the narrative. Eva Stepanová sums up this need in the words:

[...] the truth is often somewhere else than the media present to society. [...] the reason to start losing weight does not have to be only the desire for a slim figure. [...] There have been enough books describing anorexia as a teenage girl’s desire for a slim figure and model job. There have been enough stories of weight loss, hair or teeth falling out and subsequent “miraculous” cures with a “live happily ever after” ending. I want you to understand that things can be different. I want you to be able to read

¹⁶ Martina Jendruchová, *Už je to za mnou* [*It’s All Behind Me Now*], Praha, Vyšehrad, 2013 p. 13. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations (from Czech and Polish) are translated into English by the author of this paper.

¹⁷ Eva Stepanová, *Anorexie: Hlad po jiném světě* [*Anorexia: Hunger for Another World*], Praha, Vodnář, 2017, p. 9.

¹⁸ Tereza Nagy Štolbová, *Dcera padajícího listí* [*Daughter of Falling Leaves*], Praha, Triton, 2014, p. 15.

between the lines and not be afraid to name the problem. [...] I want to offer you my perspective and my insights – not only to those who are struggling or have struggled with a similar problem, but also to “ordinary” people for whom the subject is still taboo¹⁹.

In this way, the authors deal with an issue that is central to their identity. In order to find or construct their selves, they necessarily have to define themselves against the interpretative schemes of anorexia presented by various discourses. Nonetheless, while they reject popular interpretations of anorexia that focus primarily on the sickly female body and the desire for a slim, attractive figure, they repeat and internalize other interpretive schemes, namely those that focus on their mental processes and feelings. The desire to be thin is generally considered to be a manifestation of vanity; the explanation of anorexia as a consequence of mental discomfort, a troubled family background, or rebellion against the existing world order is much more favorably received in our society. However, this is not necessarily just an attempt at a more “flattering” interpretation of the illness itself. Since the authors consider the potential reader of the text during the writing process and assume that she will be a person who has experience with eating disorders, they give a socially acceptable key to the interpretation of her own problem as well. This creates a bond of trust, a relationship in which both the reader and the author can feel safe to reveal very intimate details of their lives and work together towards healing.

Happy Childhood

In the books, the authors conceive of their lives primarily in relation to their experiences with eating disorders. Only the actress Vlastina Svátková appears as a celebrity, assuming the general readers’ interest in her life. In other cases, the narrative constantly refers, explicitly or implicitly, to anorexia – even the time of the earliest childhood is reconstructed through the prism of later anorexic experiences. The narratives typically follow the axis of childhood – adolescence – anorexia – struggle with anorexia. More attention is paid to the period of adolescence, where the authors emphasize the experience of the changing female body, female physiology, and especially the recollections of the first menstruation. The “battle with anorexia” is largely won (at least for now) at the time of writing the autobiography. The only exception is Eva Steppanová, although some doubts also exist in the case of Petra Dvořáková.

Furthermore, the authors discuss the impact of anorexia on their behavior towards their loved ones and describe the conflicting feelings at the moment they decided to seek treatment. Healing and the motivation to heal never have a simple

¹⁹ Eva Steppanová, *Anorexie: Hlad po jiném světě*, pp. 9-10.

linear course; on the contrary, the desire to return to “normal life” long coexists in conflict with the urge to remain thin, and especially with the urge to control every gram of consumed food, and, through it, to control oneself and one’s life. Jendruchová, for example, explicitly names this in the passage below, in which these two opposing directions take the form of separate voices. The voice of anorexia is represented by the head, which can be seen as echoing the mind-body dualism:

The head, which remembers how it ruled the body before, counters: “You sinned a lot last night, you should skip breakfast...” No, I must not give anorexia a chance again. [...]

It’s brewing inside me. But I listen to what my body needs. [...]

It’s clear. I won this time. [...]

Lunch is coming up. “You should cheat as you sinned last night and had a big breakfast this morning”, my head tries again. I win again. What does my body say? “I had a perfectly normal breakfast. And now I’m hungry!” And so I listen to it²⁰.

The narrators also repeatedly stress that they had a positive, carefree relationship with their bodies and food in childhood. Stepanová considers herself a gourmand and a big eater – she pays attention to the above-average amount of food she regularly consumed as a child and teenage girl without gaining weight afterwards. Dvořáková writes that she loved to cook from a young age, while Jendruchová recalls eating at her grandmother’s house. Similarly, the authors did not perceive their bodies for a long time as an object that demanded more attention, adjustment or control. Moreover, Dvořáková stresses that she did not experience any split between her body and her own identity in her childhood. The dualism of body and soul that would later characterize her experience of anorexia did not exist then: “The self was the same as the body. I had a strong sense of my own identity”²¹.

The narrators describe their childhoods as mostly happy (except for Tereza Nagy Štolbová); they stress that their parents loved them. However, they often immediately add that they did not know how to express their parental love properly. The leitmotifs of the analyzed books are also the lack of separation between mother and daughter, as well as the controlling mother and the neglectful father. The narrators oscillate between being grateful to their parents for what they have given them and blaming them for their own psychological problems.

The exception is Tereza Nagy Štolbová, who in her pathos-filled book clearly sees the cause of her problem in the absence of parental (mainly maternal) love in her childhood. As a three-year-old girl, she was abandoned by both her parents, yet, in line with her essentialist understanding of gender roles, she feels abandoned

²⁰ Martina Jendruchová, *Už je to za mnou*, p. 92.

²¹ Petra Dvořáková, *Já jsem hlad*, p. 13.

primarily by her mother; she does not reflect much on her father's abandonment. She refers to her position in the world many times as "being cast out of the family": "Since childhood I remember the emptiness of my soul caused by my mother's abandonment and being cast out of the family. I missed my mother, who would protect me through her body"²². Even her surrogate parents did not provide her with the missing affection, which in turn she blames mainly on her stepmother; on the contrary, she can sympathize with her stepfather and tries to understand him.

In contrast to the reproachful and sometimes self-pitying tone of Nagy Štolbová's narrative, other authors attempt to portray their childhood as almost carefree. However, this picture has many cracks.

First Cracks

In many cases, the unproblematic relationship with oneself, and thus with one's own body, began to change only as a result of overhearing a comment by someone close to the girl who suggested that she should control her eating or pointed out her alleged shortcomings. Svátková describes a situation where her mother commented that her legs looked ridiculous in a miniskirt, which changed her perception of her own body:

And so I looked carefully, and sure enough, suddenly there was a different, new image in front of me: I look terrible, my legs are crooked!

It seemed to me that when I went out into the street in a short skirt, everyone was laughing and pointing fingers at me. That if I never wore a short dress again, maybe no one would notice my handicap...²³

Although Dvořáková recalls her mother's comment about the amount of food her daughter eats, she does not see it as a turning point in her relationship with food intake:

In my teens I didn't worry about food at all. I ate what I liked and as much as I needed. I didn't worry about my body. But I remember exactly the moment when I first realized that the question of appearance and weight is a part of life. I was eating apple strudel one night before going to sleep. My mom yelled at me not to stuff myself – don't I understand that I'll end up looking like a barrel!? It wasn't justified at all, I was at my optimum weight then. But it was the first time I realized I should be concerned about my body. Still, I don't think that this rebuke from my mom affected me in any significant way, that it was a moment that triggered something pathological²⁴.

²² Tereza Nagy Štolbová, *Dcera padajícího listí*, p. 15.

²³ Vlastina Svátková Kounická, *Modrý slon*, p. 35.

²⁴ Petra Dvořáková, *Já jsem hlad*, p. 23.

In most cases, such hurtful words are heard from the mouths of mothers. This is not surprising in a society where women are socialized to evaluate themselves and other women through the prism of their appearance and to regard physical attractiveness as a guarantee of success or personal satisfaction. In Czech society, this became intensified after the fall of communism – in the 1990s and 2000s women's bodies became a much more sexualized object than ever before. This was reflected not only in a boom of porn industry but also, for instance, in the omnipresence of sexist advertisement, where naked or half-naked female bodies are used to promote anything from a drill and washing machine, to a political party. As Alena Wagnerová noted, “[a]n important, often overlooked aspect of women's equality under socialism was that a woman was not a sexual object (unless she willingly lent herself to the role) and a woman's body was not public property”²⁵. It is only after 1989 that the female body became a commodity and women themselves became sexual objects in an unprecedented measure.

Dvořáková repeatedly mentions her mother's problematic and contradictory relationship to her own physicality and sexuality: her extreme shame at being naked or showing just a bit of bare skin, her hunching over in an attempt to hide her breasts, and her constant complaints about her wide hips and body shape in general. But this shame was also paradoxically accompanied by sexually provocative behaviour: “It seemed to me that she was actually always trying to tease people with her body and appearance, or at least to draw attention to it. I found it incredibly distasteful”²⁶. Moreover, the mother's persona often serves another function: not only does it sow the seeds of insecurity associated with the daughter's physicality, but it also becomes the basis for the daughter's identity construction, which is negatively defined in relation to the mother.

The vast majority of the authors retrospectively see the beginnings of their eating disorders not in the desire for an attractive body, but in the problems associated with family relationships, especially with the relationship with their mothers, but also in the feeling of extreme loneliness, alienation from the world and fear of the unknown. Usually, they are able to point to one specific event or period that triggered the anorexia, but they perceive it only as a point at which something that had been maturing in them for a long time culminated, mainly due to the absence of an emotional background in the family. They felt that they were living in a world in which they did not fit, in a world that seemed alien or dangerous, in which they were unsure of their place. They write about the need for love, the lack of which – or the inability to accept it – was thought to fuel anorexia.

²⁵ Alena Wagnerová, “Co přinesl a nepřinesl ženám socialistický model rovnoprávnosti – aneb nejen jesle a traktoristky” [“What the Socialist Model of Equality Did and Did Not Bring to Women, or Not Only Nurseries and Female Tractor Drivers”], in Linda Sokačová (ed.), *Gender a demokracie: 1989–2009* [*Gender and Democracy: 1989–2009*], Praha, Gender Studies, 2009, p. 18.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

I Am hunger

Food restriction and other anorexic eating habits gradually become the only constant and desirable point in the life of the writers. Thus, they are not only a kind of negative restriction, but also reduce insecurity, filling the void that the narrators believe led to the development of the disorder. The uncertainty of one's place in the world, the uncertainty associated with the inability to answer the question of who I am, disappears. This is followed by identification with anorexia, or with hunger: "Maybe I'm not a person anymore, maybe I'm anorexia. Maybe I am already the hunger, and maybe I am already a piece of something abstract and non-existent [...]"²⁷. The conceptualization of anorexia in the prose is paradoxical: at times, the illness is seen as a way to find one's own identity, to be a person (or more precisely: a woman) and to have a concrete fixed identity. At other times, it is seen as an unwanted intruder that overwhelms the "true self" and does not allow the narrators to be themselves:

Sometimes it's not me acting or speaking, it's anorexia. It's really like I'm one body in two souls. One is completely empty, flat, white. That's me. And the other is anorexia. It's black and strong and sometimes it controls me in what I think that I think²⁸.

In such moments, anorexia is an external force that takes control of the person, takes over their personality, reduces their thoughts to questions about what was (not) eaten or how many grams less/more the scale shows today. It leaves no space or energy to develop other aspects of the personality: "I realize that the illness has completely taken away my whole personality, energy, goals, plans and feelings. I don't feel anything, wish for anything, or think about anything"²⁹.

However, neither of these positions is exclusively positive or negative. Even when the narrator separates herself from her eating disorder and sees it as an alien element, there is not necessarily a redemptive epiphany. Moments of merging with anorexia are similarly ambiguous – complete identification with the illness has many positives. Stepanová, for example, recalls how, through anorexia, she gained a solid identity, a sense of stability, and was able to discern who she was:

[...] when I was on the edge of life and not eating, I was "at least" anorexic. Now I'm not healthy... but I'm not sick either. I'm somewhere in between. I'm not anorexic because I eat. I lost what I had, but I was "at least" anorexic. Now I don't even have that³⁰.

²⁷ Eva Stepanová, *Anorexie: Hlad po jiném světě*, p. 25.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 89.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

The same is true for Dvořáková, for whom fasting was most often associated with positive feelings. First, it brought order, certainty, and predictability to her life: “Starvation is very strongly linked to a feeling of inner insecurity and threat. To a feeling of limitlessness. If there is a lack of fixed points and certainty in life, anorexia readily begins to replace them”³¹. Restricting food becomes a repetitive and repeatable routine, but at the same time it is firmly linked to a specific outcome – weight loss. Thus, it brings predictable consequences, and its meaning is graspable: “Food became the only area of my life where I saw a result and a clear link to how it works”³². Through not eating, at least one area of the narrator’s life was fully under her control.

Besides stability, self-starving gradually took on other positive meanings. During the course of anorexia, the narrator began to associate it with values such as purity, beauty, exclusivity, strength, and success. In contrast, she perceived eating as a failure and food as something disgusting and dirty³³. Similarly, Tereza Nagy Štolbová writes about feelings of purity and emptiness, invulnerability, strength and control over who she is³⁴. For both authors, over time, hunger became synonymous with truth, as it made the narrators’ outward appearance begin to reflect their inner state of mind:

The longer I starved, the more this form of being in the world and in my body grew through me. [...] My starvation was just a continuation of the homelessness and lovelessness that I have experienced throughout my life³⁵.

Finally, the body lives as the soul lives. It was important for me to feel that this was how my life was true. To eat was to enter into a lie, to do something that was not true³⁶.

Dvořáková gradually became addicted to hunger – it enabled her to live without lies, but it also provided her with “performance satisfaction” and gave her a sense of control. For her, hunger was a stable point and a certainty in the midst of the chaos of her son’s leukemia, dissatisfaction with her marriage, and remorse over her love affair with a Catholic priest. It seemed to be a point on which to build one’s own identity: “Hunger shaped my consciousness, defined who I was, it was my identity. And no one wants to destroy their identity. I was afraid that if I started eating, I would lose my direction in life, I wouldn’t know who I was”³⁷.

In an attempt to overcome anorexia, Dvořáková begins to search for other foundations of her identity and tries to define the boundaries of the “I”. For her,

³¹ Petra Dvořáková, *Já jsem hlad*, p. 127.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 89.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 89-90.

³⁴ Tereza Nagy Štolbová, *Dcera padajícího listí*, pp. 130-134.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p.128.

³⁶ Petra Dvořáková, *Já jsem hlad*, p. 90.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

autoeroticism is a keyway to find her own integrity and build her identity. Autoeroticism becomes a way of escaping from a marriage in which the narrator does not feel happy, but also a way to build or find a new identity. Gender is a key part of this identity, and not only for Dvořáková.

I Am (Not) a Woman

The way in which the author of *Já jsem hlad* searches for her “female identity” is strongly influenced by the aforementioned reading of the Jungian psychoanalyst and poet Clarissa Pinkola Estés. In her *Women Who Ran with Wolves* we observe a kind of reappropriation of an essentialist, strongly biologizing understanding of femininity. Here, wildness, fearlessness, and a close connection to one’s own body become a force to restore women’s forgotten courage and free them from the shackles of cultural and social norms. In the excerpt quoted at the end of the previous subsection, Dvořáková juxtaposes concepts such as “body”, “femininity”, and “nature”. For her, autoeroticism becomes a means of constructing her own female identity, which would have clear boundaries, give the desired security and safety, and whose source lays in oneself (as a bodily being), not someone or something external.

Across all the books analyzed, the changes that the authors have undergone in their perception of their gender since childhood are evident, and these changes follow a very similar pattern. Some of the authors verbalize them directly, while in others they are visible only in hints.

For all of the authors, adolescence is a key period, but in retrospect, they also look at their childhood through a gender lens. They perceive starvation as a kind of protest against growing up and becoming an (adult) woman. They stress that they did not fit into the “girl world”³⁸, or they see themselves as a creative, impulsive, spirited, and opinionated child who liked to tinker but without being “boyish”³⁹. We observe here the authors’ attempt to emphasize that their appearance, and especially their behavior, did not fit the model of a “good, quiet, modest little girl”. However, they reflect this only retrospectively in adulthood. They present childhood as a period in which gender difference was not important to them, they did not know that gender could be a meaning-making and normative category. As a result, they could behave spontaneously, and their temperament was not suppressed by gender norms.

The period of adolescence, when the individual undergoes significant physical changes and is exposed to new social expectations, brings a significant change. These relate to norms of behavior and to the relationship with oneself. In this

³⁸ Tereza Nagy Štolbová, *Dcera padajícího listí*, p. 71.

³⁹ Petra Dvořáková, *Já jsem hlad*, p. 12.

period, the authors mention the experience of the first menstruation and the intensely observed physical changes as determinants. The authors also began to perceive womanhood as something defined primarily by the body, evaluating it as undesirable. Being a woman began to mean “having feminine curves” and, above all, bleeding regularly and having to be ashamed of this bleeding and of oneself. Importantly, however, the narrators’ shame only emerges as a consequence of their families’, especially their mothers’, reaction to their first menses. In almost all the books, the mother acts as the person who teaches her daughter that monthly bleeding must be hidden and cannot be talked about.

Gradually, the daughters internalize the embarrassment and shame they observe in their mother, and the object of these emotions eventually becomes the entire rounded body they perceive as synonymous with femininity at puberty. Suddenly, they are different in outward appearance and physiology from the boys with whom they lived in the same world in childhood. Now they look and act differently. Restricting food thus becomes a way of prolonging childhood and postponing the sexual difference in time:

I don’t want to be a woman. I don’t want to be healthy. I want to be “healed” but not healthy. There’s a difference between the two. I would like to have children one day, but I can’t imagine myself in the role of an adult. The idea of getting my period again one day drives me absolutely insane. I hate the blood coming out of my body, it’s disgusting to the max. Same with noticeable breasts. Is it really me, or is it anorexia already?⁴⁰

Denying oneself nutrients is also an opportunity to punish one’s body and oneself as a woman. In fact, the authors imply in various ways that an anorexic woman is not a full woman. Jendruchová enumerates the steps she takes to recover and to become “a full woman again”⁴¹. For her, healing, which includes the practice of hormonal yoga, is a path back to womanhood. Tereza Nagy Štolbová writes about aversion to the female body and to adult women in general:

I used to hide my body under baggy clothes. I avoided the world of women and mothers. Both provoked a deep resentment in me, activated by memories of the wounds this world had brought me. I distrusted women and did not want to belong to them⁴².

For the authors anorexia was an escape from oneself as a woman. But what did “being a woman” mean to them? What exactly were they rejecting? The authors gradually discovered new connotations of the word “woman” that were no longer limited to specific physicality. They then often interpreted their healing as an understanding and acceptance of a “true womanhood” that they had previously

⁴⁰ Eva Stepanová, *Anorexie: Hlad po jiném světě*, p. 203.

⁴¹ Michala Jendruchová, *Už je to za mnou*, p. 90.

⁴² Tereza Nagy Štolbová, *Dcera padajícího listí*, p. 130.

either rejected or misunderstood. But this “true womanhood” did not necessarily mean the same thing to everyone.

In Dvořáková’s case, it is the aforementioned wildness, the untameability, which she fully realized through reading *Women Who Ran with Wolves*. The reappropriation of the essentialist perception of womanhood ultimately helps her to defy the social norms of a good housekeeper and a smiling wife who takes care of the household and the children. It provides her with a tool that allows her to define herself even against the expectations of her husband:

I think he saw in me a princess, not only in appearance but also in character. A good doll with long hair. Nice and smiling. He didn’t want to see my inner savage. He overlooked it, and so I suppressed it and hid it too. I wanted to be a good and exemplary wife. He didn’t want my extravagance and I rejected it for him. I wanted to be orderly. I wanted to conform to his idea. I was convinced that’s what I was supposed to be. I didn’t know that the real femininity was hidden in the savage in me. And that if I suppress the savage, I suppress the real woman, I suppress my nature⁴³.

Through her identification with the archetypal *la loba*, Dvořáková can overcome the limitations of the social perception of the female role, reject her husband’s expectations, define herself in opposition to her own mother, and return to the way she perceived herself as a child, at a time when she did not have to correct her character according to imposed gender norms. Nevertheless, for her, femininity remains closely linked to a specific physicality, which she no longer rejects, but rather perceives as almost sacred, thanks to her reading of Estés. She considers childbirth and postpartum complications to be the moment of “female initiation” – for through them she was able to directly experience the pain and filth that she believes are defining for women⁴⁴.

Tereza Nagy Štolbová and Vlastina Svátková also perceive the experience of childbirth and motherhood as a kind of milestone in their lives and in their way of understanding what it means to be a woman. However, these experiences have different functions for them. For the author of *Dcera padajícího listí*, childbirth was pivotal in that it changed her attitude towards her own body:

For the first time in my life I began to notice my body with joy. A dark period of self-harm and hatred directed against my body was over. [...] My body made possible the miracle of conception. My body is good. It can receive love and be loved. Even by me⁴⁵.

⁴³ Petra Dvořáková, *Já jsem hlad*, pp. 61-62.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

⁴⁵ Tereza Nagy Štolbová, *Dcera padajícího listí*, p. 153.

The experience of motherhood replaces the space that starvation used to fill. Through motherhood, her hunger for love is satisfied; and she can finally become a woman⁴⁶.

While Dvořáková emphasizes the connection of childbirth and motherhood with a kind of original wildness, for Nagy Štolbová these experiences provide self-love based on the traditional role of women as mothers. The necessity and ability to provide love to someone else (a son) becomes more significant than finding maternal love for oneself in the outside world. For it is through the necessity and ability to care for her own child that she finds this within herself.

Both authors' interpretations of these experiences are quite unambiguous; they fit into a project of a comprehensive grasp of one's own life, which, despite various digressions, has a linear development and tends towards wholeness. The situation is different for Vlastina Svátková, for whom the question of what it means to be a woman returns many times. Just as in the case of previous authors, the experience of childbirth helps her to accept her own body⁴⁷, but the role of mother and wife is often at odds with her specific idea of an emancipated woman. Svátková's narrative is built on contradictory discourses. On the one hand, there is an exacerbated heteronormativity and an acceptance of the perception of women as submissive homemakers and wives:

Lately I haven't been writing or creating much, I felt empty... With my son in my arms, I fought for my rights. I grumbled that I was the one who had to do everything [at home]. That I was a maid and no one appreciated it. That I hadn't received a flower in a long time. That he [= her husband] wouldn't take a plate under his food, showing his indifference. That he doesn't desire me, that he must have another woman, that he doesn't help me and talks rubbish, that he has dashed all my hopes and dreams... Full of anger, despair, and remorse, I looked at my son's face, which was squealing like a chick seeking safety. In his face I saw my reflection, when as a child on my knees I begged my parents not to fight anymore... [...]

I saw the past and found the strength to change the present. Tears streamed down my face and washed away all pride, the desire to fight and win over my man. I put on a sexy dress, used red lipstick for the first time, and began to vacuum up the crumbs left on the floor by my husband. Instead of reproaching him, I stroked his hair and told him I was proud of him⁴⁸.

This perception of the woman as a housewife who maintains order in the home while still keeping her body beautiful and attractive to the male gaze appears relatively late in Svátková's narrative. In fact, the author links her eating disorder to her denial of the traditional female role and identification with the emancipated, independent woman. The second – and contradictory – discourse on which her

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

⁴⁷ Vlastina Svátková, *Modrý slon*, pp. 98-102.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 142-143.

narrative rests is a specific form of liberal feminism, which comes to the fore in the repeatedly varied confession, “For many years I ‘fought’ for my women’s rights”⁴⁹. The author reflects many times on her earlier belief that “a woman must be stronger than a man, tough, resolute, unyielding. A woman must fight a man, fight for her rights, her pride and a good life, or she will live it all unhappy and disappointed like my mother”⁵⁰. Gradually, she concludes that for a long time she did not understand what it meant to be a woman: “I felt I was a strong woman, and yet I was far from knowing what it was to be a WOMAN: gentle, kind, smiling, wise, praising, caring, hospitable, generous, mysterious, modest, loving, feminine...”⁵¹.

What Dvořáková had to break away from as the cultural shackles that bind “true womanhood” is, for Svátková, the essence of womanhood. In *Modrý slon*, she describes her journey to this realization, yet for all her attempts at linearity and consistency, we find here significant cracks, “failures” to live up to that conservative ideal. Svátková writes that she learns the role of mother, housekeeper, and wife, but at the same time often fails, which leads her to remorse⁵². Her efforts are inconsistent, as she often overlooks the unattainability of this ideal. She repeatedly argues that the ideal of the emancipated woman, which she has followed for most of her life, is flawed and that true womanhood can only be realized in the role of a caring wife and mother.

Relational Character of Writing and Identity

All the authors struggle with their own gender – social expectations and norms connected to being a woman lead them to a problem of defining themselves as persons. They try to construct a stable identity for themselves but fail as long as they construct it in the spirit of the abstract Western stereotype of the person as an autonomous actor, completely independent of interpersonal relationships, isolated from social influences and uninfluenced by biological forces. Only the recognition that the subject is not a disembodied mind, but someone who experiences desire, feels emotions, and whose identity is always relational, offers a chance for success.

Overcoming anorexia thus requires a radical change in the understanding of what it means to be oneself. It requires acknowledging a greater interconnectedness with the world around, but also with one’s own body, one’s own emotions, feelings, and fears. It entails a rethinking of all the relationships one finds oneself in: to oneself, to one’s body, to family, to loved ones, to friends.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 153.

Also, to hunger itself, which, as an absence, can no longer fulfill the role of substitute or basis of identity that it used to fulfill. It no longer provides the basis for any bonds and relationships; it hides an emptiness and inertia. Thus, refusing food (and often sex as well as other forms of intimacy) does not lead to a productive delineation of the boundaries of the self. Instead of autonomy, independence, and power, it ultimately offers isolation and alienation. Moreover, the depletion caused by hunger and lack of nutrients sooner or later makes it impossible to live a fulfilling life, placing one in a kind of in-between space that is neither life nor death: "I wanted to live, but it seemed that I could not live with anorexia because I was at the end of my strength, and at the same time I could not live without it"⁵³.

The experience of anorexia has thus led all the authors to extreme isolation. Paradoxically, this opened up the possibility of rethinking the many relationships in which they found themselves. It made them seek a balance between autonomy and the external, the potentially hurtful and unpredictable, which enabled them to start building their own identity on firmer foundations than hunger and absence.

Dvořáková explicitly names this process. She gradually abandons the construction of her own identity as independent of the outside world. She begins to realize that the *self* is always necessarily and unavoidably situated in multiple relationships. At the same time, she is reassessing her faith:

The essence of Christianity is only closeness with God, entering into intimacy and a true relationship with him. [...] I have come to know that confession, the sacrament of reconciliation, is purifying. But not for purity itself, but precisely because of the bond that can be created between man and God⁵⁴.

Purity here is no longer a goal that ultimately isolates a person from the world but becomes a means of establishing a relationship with what is external to the person – in Dvořáková's case, a relationship with God.

The process of autobiographical writing itself is also essential to the processing of the anorexic experience, as it helped the authors to name their own emotions, fears, attitudes, and to reinterpret diverse relationships or pasts. Moreover, it allowed them to establish interpersonal connections in several ways. First, almost all of the authors address someone close to them in their prose and try to symbolically establish a dialogue: for instance, Nagy Štolbová included fragments addressed to her mother, Dvořáková included letters or messages to an unspecified Joss. Second, writing prose with the intention of publishing it presupposes the existence of a reader, which establishes another kind of relation. Authors have to trust their readership to some extent, which feeds back to them and also has implications in extra-literary practice.

⁵³ Petra Dvořáková, *Já jsem hlad*, p. 93.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 130.

In addition, the writing process that resulted in the publication of prose also became the starting point for a new identification – identification as a writer. For Petra Dvořáková, *Já jsem hlad* was her second published book, the first one, *Proměněné sny [Dreams Transformed]* (2006) receiving the prestigious Magnesia Litera Prize, and today she is a very prolific writer associated with the acclaimed publishing house Host. Tereza Nagy Štolbová was the only one who later chose a career not as a writer but as a therapist, a profession that strongly influenced the vocabulary and psychoanalytic approach of her book. Michala Jendruchová later published other prose pieces, all of which draw heavily on her own experiences with eating disorders and whose main characters deal with issues related to the acceptance of their own bodies and its needs. The actress Vlastina Svátková also continues to write, and her writing shows a strong tendency to pass on her experiences to women who suffer from problems with self-acceptance. The youngest of the authors, Eva Stepanová, has not yet published another text, but – as her Facebook profile suggests – she is an aspiring teacher of creative writing.

The process of autobiographical writing helped the authors to understand formative experience retrospectively. Moreover, based on extra-literary sources such as interviews or Facebook posts, the fact that their texts were published and found an audience from whom they subsequently received feedback, can be seen to have brought them important empowerment. It gave them the feeling that someone needed them, that they could be of help – and it was with this intention that they originally embarked on writing.

One of the oldest functions of narrative is thus manifested here, namely its ability to unify, to bring together what is scattered and dispersed⁵⁵. That unification takes place on at least two levels. Firstly, it is that ability to establish a relationship between the narrator and the audience (or the readership), an interpersonal bonding. Secondly, the unification takes place at the level of the construction of one's own story and self, as narrative identity theories remind us:

Narrative provides continuity and coherence to the subject's identity and, due to its temporal character, enables the person in the story to connect the different phases of life. Storytelling is not merely a representation of identity, but much more the creation of identity in the narrative act itself⁵⁶.

This tendency towards continuity and coherence is also the reason why we can perceive a certain degree of simplification of the ambivalence associated with

⁵⁵ Anna Pekaniec, *Czy w tej autobiografii jest kobieta? Kobięca literatura dokumentu osobistego od początku XIX wieku do wybuchu II wojny światowej [Is There a Woman in This Autobiography? Women's Personal Documentary Literature from the Early 19th Century to the Outbreak of World War II]*, Kraków, Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013, p. 96.

⁵⁶ Klára Soukupová, *Autobiografie v kontextu teorie pozicionality [Autobiography in the Context of Positionality Theory]*. Dissertation, Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, Ústav české literatury a komparatistiky, 2019, pp. 27-28.

anorexia in the analyzed narratives. In many cases, anorexia itself can be interpreted in terms of trauma, i.e., as a powerful psychosomatic experience which can alter memories and challenge the continuity of the individual. The autobiographical writing helps to rebuild this continuity.

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BEING A WOMAN AS A WOUND. CZECH WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING ON ANOREXIA NERVOSA (Abstract)

In postcommunist countries, there has been a rise in autobiographical testimonials about eating disorders (ED), mostly written by women. Women also make up the majority of people suffering ED, especially *anorexia nervosa* – a disorder that reflects an ambivalence about femininity and is closely linked to capitalism, consumer society and social inequalities. In neoliberal capitalism, thinness takes on certain moral qualities such as self-control, moderation, and independence. *Anorexia nervosa* can be seen as an exaggerated performance and embodiment of those qualities that, on a psychic level, are

linked to trauma: on the one hand, traumatic events might trigger it; on the other hand, the experience of ED itself is often traumatizing. In my article, I look at how this traumatic experience is transformed through writing. The process of autobiographical writing helped the authors to name their own emotions, fears, and attitudes, and to reinterpret various relationships or past events. Moreover, it allowed them to establish interpersonal connections in several ways. Firstly, almost all the authors directly address someone in their prose and try to symbolically establish a dialogue: e.g., they include fragments addressed to their mother or a close friend (Petra Dvořáková, Tereza Nagy Štolbová). Secondly, writing prose with the intention of publishing it presupposes the existence of a reader – another kind of relation is therefore established. Moreover, the writing process that resulted in the publication of autobiographical prose also became for most of the authors the starting point for a new identification – identification as a writer. This is another type of relation that is established within oneself. Through the establishment of relations and identifications, then, writing becomes an important part of healing.

Keywords: eating disorder, *anorexia nervosa*, neoliberal capitalism, autobiography, writing as healing.

A FI FEMEIE CA O RANĂ. SCRIERI AUTOBIOGRAFICE ALE AUTOARELOR CEHE DESPRE *ANOREXIA NERVOSA*

(Rezumat)

În țările postcomuniste, a crescut numărul de mărturii autobiografice – scrise în special de femei – despre tulburările de alimentație. Femeile reprezintă, de asemenea, majoritatea persoanelor care suferă de tulburări de alimentație, în special de *anorexia nervosa* – o tulburare care reflectă o așa-zisă ambivalență a feminității și care este strâns legată de capitalism, de societatea de consum și de inegalitățile sociale. În capitalismul neoliberal, însușirea de a fi slab/subțire dobândește anumite conotații morale, fiind asociată cu autocontrolul, moderația și independența. *Anorexia nervosa* poate fi văzută ca o performanță exagerată și o întruchipare a respectivelor calități care, la nivel psihic, sunt, de fapt, legate de traume: pe de o parte, evenimentele traumatiche pot declanșa această boală; pe de altă parte, tulburarea de alimentație este adesea traumatizantă. În articolul meu, analizez modul în care această experiență traumatizantă este transformată prin scris. Procesul de scriere autobiografică le-a ajutat pe autoare să-și numească propriile emoții, temeri și atitudini, precum și să reinterpreteze diverse relații sau evenimente din trecut. Mai mult, le-a permis să stabilească legături interpersonale în mai multe moduri. În primul rând, aproape toate autoarele se adresează direct cuiva și încearcă să stabilească, în mod simbolic, un dialog: de exemplu, ele includ fragmente adresate mamei sau unui prieten apropiat (Petra Dvořáková, Tereza Nagy Štolbová). În al doilea rând, scrierea de proză cu intenția de a o publica presupune existența unui cititor – astfel, se stabilește un alt tip de relație. Mai mult, procesul de scriere care a dus la publicarea prozei autobiografice a devenit, de asemenea, pentru majoritatea autoarelor, punctul de plecare pentru asumarea unei noi identități – cea de scriitoare. Acesta e un alt tip de relație, care se stabilește în raport cu propria interioritate. Prin configurarea unor relații și a unor noi identități, scrisul devine, deci, un proces de vindecare.

Cuvinte-cheie: tulburare alimentară, *anorexia nervosa*, capitalism neoliberal, autobiografie, scrisul ca vindecare.

“I AM NOTHING MORE THAN A WORD IN HUMAN FORM”. VIIVI LUIK’S POETICS OF IDENTITY¹

“Literature [...] is the verbal expression of human feelings, a message from a human being to a human being, a message about [another] human being to a human being. How would we be able to understand others if we did not believe that they feel the same as we do?”² This is how Estonian novelist, poet and essayist Viivi Luik (b. 1946) expresses her poetic credo and her view on the essence of being human in an interview for the literary journal *Looming* from 1983, two years before the publication of *Seitsmes rahukevad* [*The Seventh Spring of Peace*] (1985), an iconic autobiographical novel about the postwar generation. Retaining its urgency throughout her literary career, the topic of the need to relate to the other re-emerges in a longer reflective essay where Luik mentions a lifelong longing for “a perceptive and encouraging OTHER”, who would support the belief that “despite everything, you are not alone in the world, that somewhere there have been and still are OTHERS who feel the same [...] the (main) purpose of art is [to bring] this kind of message and pass it on from person to person”³.

In this article, I offer a discussion of Luik’s work with a focus on her third novel, *Varjuteater* [*The Shadow Theater*] (2010), a recognizably self-representational, generically ambivalent work where the desire to comprehend human existence emerges through the poetics of encounter and reciprocity of address, forming parallels and points of connection with Adrina Cavarero’s philosophical paradigm of the narratable self. Arguing that in the work of Viivi Luik, the poetics of identity – for her inseparable from the perception of the world and her self(hood), shapes and ultimately comes to prevail over the politics of identity, the article seeks to make visible the processes of construction of subjectivity that resist the expectations of gendered, national and (Eastern) European categories of identity.

Viivi Luik is one of the most well-known and well-loved contemporary authors and public intellectuals in Estonia, the author of three novels⁴ and thirteen poetry collections whose work has been viewed as “constitut[ing] a representative

¹ This article was written during my time as the Juris Padegs Research Associate at the Yale MacMillan Center for European Studies.

² Viivi Luik, “Vastused *Loomingu* küsimustele” [“Answers to the *Looming* Editors’ Questions”], *Looming*, 1985, 2, p. 253.

³ Viivi Luik, Hedi Rosma, *Ma olen raamat* [*I Am a Book*], Tallinn, Kirjastus SE&JS, 2010, p. 104.

⁴ Besides the two mentioned novels, Luik also published *Ajaloo ilu* [*The Beauty of History*] in 1991.

model for a whole generation of authors in Estonian literature”⁵. *Seitsmes rahukevad*, taking place in the fall of 1950 and the spring of 1951, is an autobiographical account of the author’s childhood in post-war Estonia in a family of the so-called new settlers (*uusmaasaajad*)⁶ in rural Viljandimaa. *Varjuteater* focuses on the time that Luik spent in Rome with her husband, Estonian diplomat and writer Jaak Jõerüüt, who held the position of the Estonian ambassador to Italy from 1998–2002, unravels as Luik’s metaphorical (life-long) journey to Rome that, constituting for her the quintessence of Europeanness as an existential rather than a purely cultural dimension. In terms of genre, it is an ambivalent or even enigmatic work in which the multiplicity of ways of reading and interpretation and the multifaceted dynamics of the addressee form an integral part of the organic texture of the work. On the one hand, *Varjuteater* is self-representational writing where the author emphasizes, sometimes in a hyperbolized manner, that she is mediating her life experience, that which she has lived through. On the other hand, self-revelational processes of direct autobiographical nature do not define the presented self or the novel’s text. In Adriana Cavarero’s paradigm of selfhood based on the narratable and interactive nature of identity, appearance can be comprehended as the narratability of the self. Identifying parallels and points of connection between Cavarero’s philosophical paradigm and modes of self-narration that characterize Luik’s literary *oeuvre*, I will focus on the poetic strategies of self-representation in *Seitsmes rahukevad* and in *Varjuteater*, where the desire to comprehend human existence emerges through the reciprocity of address and possibility of encounter and the creation of an autobiographical subject develops within a dynamic of appearance.

In her *Relating Narratives. Storytelling and Selfhood* (1997/2000), Adriana Cavarero presents a theory of selfhood that is centered on the concept of the narratable self, connecting self-perception to “the spontaneous narrating structure of memory and the narratability of identity”⁷. A comparable view has been advanced by Paul John Eakin who has highlighted the central role of self-narration in the creation of identity, allowing identity to be viewed as “living a narrative”⁸. This “fabric of lived experience” shapes and organizes life daily in the format of

⁵ Arne Merilai, “Of Hard Joy: Half a Century of Viivi Luik’s Creations. Poetry”, *Interlitteraria*, 18, 2013, 1, p. 212.

⁶ The so-called new settlers were given land confiscated from well-to-do farmers (farms with over 30 hectares of land) during the land reform of 1940–1941. The two waves of deportations – one in June 1941 in particular and the one in March 1949 included farmers whose households, in many cases, were very far from being “kulak farms”, that is, farms based on the exploitation of farm labor according to the Soviet ideology.

⁷ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives. Storytelling and Selfhood*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 34.

⁸ Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically. How We Create Identity in Narrative*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2008, p. 2.

series of partially unconscious fragments⁹ that, as an “interplay between socio-cultural structures and individual creativity”¹⁰, highlight the relational nature of identity and subjectivity¹¹. Although the conceptualization of selfhood and identity of Cavarero and Eakin bear certain resemblances, for Cavarero, the self is not synonymous with that of the individual or subjectivity but is close to Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of singular existent, which for Nancy replaces the concept of the subject, denoting “a singularity or a hereness (*haecceitas*) as the place of emission, reception, or transition (of affect, of action, of language, etc.)”¹². Cavarero’s paradigm relies on Hannah Arendt’s understanding of the uniqueness of each individual, which cannot be elaborated through philosophical thought that can only include those qualities and features that an individual shares with the other human beings¹³. Uniqueness – the “who I am” – is, according to Arendt, mediated through actions and speech and, according to Cavarero, through the (life) story¹⁴. It is not based on the individual’s ability to mediate his/ her story, but on the desire to be narrated: identity emerges through someone else’s mediation of our story¹⁵. The narratability of every human life is an essential category that precedes the story that someone lives and leaves behind. Cavarero’s understanding of the nature of identity is based on Arendt’s postulate of the necessity of the other: the uniqueness of the self can only be expressed through appearing to the other(s), which Cavarero, in turn, connects with the desire for narration¹⁶. In the preface to the English translation of Cavarero’s work, Paul A. Kottman emphasizes that in Cavarero’s approach, the “other” or the “necessary other”, as Cavarero refers to it, must be understood primarily as another person, as an existent, as a unique being¹⁷. According to Arendt, “appearing is not the superficial phenomenon of a more intimate and true ‘essence’. Appearing is the *whole* of being, understood as a plural finitude of existing”¹⁸.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 1-4.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 106. See also Marianne Gullestad, *Everyday Life Philosophers: Modernity, Morality, and Autobiography in Norway*, Oslo, Scandinavian University Press, 1996.

¹¹ Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories. Making Selves*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 43-98.

¹² Jean-Luc Nancy, “Introduction”, in E. Cadava, P. Connor, J.-L. Nancy (eds.), *Who Comes After the Subject?*, New York and London, Routledge, 1991, pp. 4-5.

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 181.

¹⁴ Paul A. Kottman, “Translator’s Introduction”, in *Relating Narratives. Storytelling and Selfhood*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, pp. vii-viii. See also Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 13.

¹⁵ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 20.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 20. See also Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 183.

¹⁷ Paul Kottman, “Introduction”, p. xii.

¹⁸ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 20. See also Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, San Diego – New York – London, Harcourt, Inc, 1971, p. 19.

According to Cavarero, everyone perceives herself and others as unique individuals whose identity can be told as a (life) story¹⁹. Identity (and uniqueness) rests on memory but is embedded not in the conscious process of remembering but in the spontaneous narrative structure of memory²⁰. The narratable self is an essential category through which we perceive ourselves and others. It has no (direct) connection to a specific (auto)biographical story, telling the story of one's or another's life in an oral or written medium. Cavarero refutes several assumptions of traditional (auto)biographical narrative, such as the possibility of conveying the truth about oneself, which has been one of the fundamentals of defining the so-called autobiography proper. According to Philippe Lejeune, autobiography entails both an autobiographical pact – a supposition “that there is identity of name between the author (such as he describes, by his name, on the cover), the narrator of the story, and the character that is being talked about” and a referential pact, on the truth (value) of autobiography, that functions as a “supplementary proof of honesty” indicating the extent of the autobiographical truth²¹. Cavarero, however, claims that the author does not tell the truth, but only claims to do so: “the self is the protagonist in a game that celebrates the *self as other* [...] presuppo[sing] the absence of another who truly is an other [...] the self is [...] here both the actor and the spectator, the narrator and the listener, in a single person”²². According to Cavarero, the uniqueness of identity can only be expressed via a perception of the narratable self and the desire for unity revealed as a story. Thus, the self cannot emerge by conscious and purposeful manifestation. Yet, in her work, Cavarero keeps returning to different forms of (auto)biographical narration, attributing to them, as it were, the possibility of transmitting selfhood and identity through narration. The narratable self is neither a word nor a text, but relying on the examples that Cavarero uses to make her argument, for example, the self-representational strategies of Karen Blixen and Gertrud Stein; it can be argued that both the word and the text are privileged sites for the self to be narrated, thus depending on the skills of storytelling.

*

In *Varjuteater*, the author/narrator retains affiliation with the national memorial framework via episodes touching upon the repressions of the Soviet period and the regaining of independence in August of 1991. The novel also focuses on the post-socialist unease of a European (be)longing after the collapse of

¹⁹ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 33. Although Cavarero's concept of the narratable self is not gender specific, female pronouns “she” and “her” are used in the English translation.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

²¹ Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 12, 22.

²² Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 40.

the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the novel was published in Estonian and addressed primarily to the Estonian reader, the axes of self-definition outlined in the novel connect to broader discussions of European memory and identity, along the axes of the distinction between East and West of Europe against the backdrop of the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the enlargement process of the EU. From the perspective of the (former) East, identity processes are hampered by the fear that there is no escape from marginality and that recognition on equal grounds in Europe may remain an unattainable ideal²³. Discussing how the meaning of Europe is imagined from Eastern Europe, Slavenka Drakulić proposes that Europe is "something that must be reached, that must be earned", something that grows both within reach and out of reach as "the promised land, [as] a new Utopia"²⁴. In *Varjuteater*, this is, for instance, made visible through the author's almost fanatical determination to view her whole life as a journey to Rome, the heart of old Europe, that I will discuss in more detail later on. The poetic-philosophical mindset of all Luik's work and present in *Varjuteater*, via an emphasis on relationality and narratability, facilitates the emergence of an autonomous agency that has the capacity of unhinging itself from the burden of the traumatic pasts via an intense focus on the universal characteristics of human existence. Although this does not exist independently of historical and sociocultural contexts, it can form connections and liaisons across time and space by surpassing the narrow(er) confines of contextually defined identity.

Similarly to the *Seitsmes rahukevad*, where gendered concerns have been cast aside both by the reception and by the author herself in favor of highlighting its status as the voice of the postwar generation, despite the fact that the protagonist of the novel is a five-year-old girl, in *Varjuteater*, gender is not highlighted as an identity category of major relevance. The protagonist of *Seitsmes rahukevad* is never called by her name and is only minimally defined by gender attributes. Also, in her consideration of the autobiographical roots of novel, Luik always refers to the protagonist as "a child" and never as a "girl"²⁵. Although it is not always possible to distinguish between the levels of "me" and "us" in the text, a consideration of the novel as a work of life writing enables a view of the novel as a story of a girl's childhood and the journey of becoming a female writer, a perspective also present though not strongly highlighted in *Varjuteater*. In *Seitsmes rahukevad*, the construction of subjectivity is centered around the struggle of psychological and poetic survival and the possibility of attaining autonomous subjecthood. Among the ruptures and dislocations characterizing the young protagonist's time-space, those caused by the breaking down of the

²³ George Schöpflin, *The Dilemmas of Identity*, Tallinn, Tallinn University Press, 2010, p. 266.

²⁴ Slavenka Drakulić, *Café Europa. Life After Communism*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1996, p. 12.

²⁵ Viivi Luik, *Inimese kapike [Our Human Storage]*, Tallinn, Vagabund, 1998, pp. 7-12.

dynamics of gender roles of the prewar Estonian society as the result of World War II and the onslaught of the Soviet regime play an important role.

In the opening pages of *Varjuteater*, the author/narrator briefly returns to the places, moods, and self-representational strategies of *Seitsmes rahukevad* (1985). This, however, does not point only toward the need to interpret the recognizable references to *Seitsmes rahukevad* in terms of thematic continuity but, as importantly, in terms of the poetics of self-representation. Thematic continuity emerges with reference to farms left empty due to the mass deportations of 1949 in the author/narrator's home area in Viljandimaa. The author/narrator relates this setting to her first memory of Rome, describing discovering a "thick, high-quality book with a picture of the Roman Colosseum" on the floor of a deserted farmhouse from which all family members had been deported²⁶. Emphasizing that "there would be no reason to play this old, worn, raspy and creaky deportation record yet again, had it not been the beginning of [her] journey to Rome"²⁷, Luik seems to refer to the outdatedness of the repressions of the Soviet regime as a literary topic at the end of the first decade of the new millennium and the frameworks of national memory based on the paradigm of "suffering and resistance"²⁸. In 1985, when *Seitsmes rahukevad* was published, deportation was not a topic that could be openly discussed. In the novel, it was mediated through the description of the games of the young protagonist wandering around deserted farms like a playground, claiming parts of the deserted farms as her possessions – a view not directly contradicting that of the Soviet ideology. If no other places are available, "children also play on gravesites", Viivi Luik has argued in an interview focusing

²⁶ Viivi Luik, *Varjuteater [The Shadow Theater]*, Tallinn, Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2010, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

²⁸ Ene Kõresaar, Kirsti Jõesalu, "Mälutööst elulooliste mälu-uuringuteni. Märkusi biograafilise kultuuriuurimise ja nõukogudejärgse Eesti mälu-uuringute seoste kohta" ["Post-communist Memories and Life Stories in Estonia: From Memory Work to Life Historical Memory Studies"], *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 27, 2021, 2, p. 358. In their overview of the development and foci of memory studies in Estonia, Kõresaar and Jõesalu point to the excessive dominance of "trauma narrative focusing on repressions of the Soviet regime" in the public discourses of memory that, in their opinion, had, by the turn of the century, started harming public memory by considering irrelevant the more calm and peaceful experience of the Soviet everyday. However, over the last years, the question of addressing traumatic memory has emerged with new intensity with a focus on intergenerational processes of transmission of memory both in the literary and essayistic work of the second and third-generation authors. See, for example, Imbi Paju, *Kirjanduskliinik [The Literary Clinic]*, Tallinn, Gallus, 2023, and Lilli Luuk, *Minu venna keha [My Brother's Body]*, Tallinn, Hea Lugu, 2022. In my research on the deportation narratives of Estonian and Baltic women, I have argued that despite the relatively wide circulation of the notion of collective trauma in public discourses of memory, emphasis on the successful survival of the regime has limited the possibilities of making visible the hurtful and potentially traumatic nature of individual repression experience. See, for example, Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, "Travelling Memory and Memory of Travel in Estonian Women's Deportation Stories", in Melanie Ilic (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 183-198.

on the impact of war and occupation on children's perception of the world and their possibilities of orienting themselves in it²⁹. When roaming around in empty farms, the protagonist simultaneously embodies the Soviet mentality of the early 1950s, "its treacherous pathetic optimism and cruel brightness" which, in Luik's view, is transmitted through certain features of the girl's character, e.g., her recklessness and unconcern for the others³⁰ and struggles to handle her fears on postwar rural landscapes surrounding her where one could find "a gun or a human being buried under a pile of timber"³¹. By returning to a scene from her earlier novel, using a different manner of describing it – now directly naming the reason why the farmhouse has been left empty – Luik also reminds her readers of the more indirect presence of this theme in *Seitsmes rahukevad*, the inclusion of which was at that time a very close call in terms of censorship.

In terms of politics of memory and identity, Luik's return to the deportation scene familiar from *Seitsmes rahukevad* in her *Varjuteater* can be interpreted both as an affirmation of belonging to a generation affected by the repressions and highlighting the need to retain a national memorial frame based on it as well as a way of distancing herself from it. *Varjuteater* delineates an identity trajectory that displays the solidarity of the author with her childhood rural landscapes distorted by the war and its aftermath and the footprints of the repressive apparatus of the Soviet regime that allows to relate the author to the conceptual frame of postmemory, as part of the generation referred by Eva Hoffman as a "hinge generation [...] the second generation after every calamity"³² that while retaining a loyalty to it also seeks the possibilities for a (semi)autonomous frame of memory and identity.

²⁹ Valle-Sten Maiste, "Maailm ja inimene kardavad vabad olla" ["The World and People are Afraid to be Free"], *Postimees: Arter*, 2000, August 26, p. 12.

³⁰ Viivi Luik, *Inimese kapike*, p. 10.

³¹ Viivi Luik, *Seitsmes rahukevad* [*The Seventh Spring of Peace*], Tallinn, Eesti Raamat, 1985, p. 3. The novel takes place during the times when the guerilla movement was still active, especially in Virumaa, Pärnumaa and Viljandimaa (where the novel takes place) and Võrumaa, that were Estonia's most deeply forested areas. By the time of mass collectivization, the dream of restored independence had vanished and revenge against the Soviet regime had become the major driving force behind the guerilla movement.

³² Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*, New York, Public Affairs, 2004, pp. xv, 103. Questions of transgenerational memory, including Garbiele Schwab's conceptualization of "the legacies of violence not only haunt the [...] victims but also are passed on through the generations" (*Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 1) emerge more strongly in Luik's first novel, *Seitsmes rahukevad*, and would merit a separate study as the focus of the current article is dominantly on questions of *Varjuteater*, whereas what can be referred to as remnants of postgenerational trauma could only be addressed via a more thorough discussion of *Seitsmes rahukevad*.

The most prominent autobiographical feature of *Seitsmes rahukevad* is the young narrator/protagonist's strong sense of time(s) and her struggle for the right to a future time frame accommodating her hopes and freedoms beyond a present that is in constant danger of being invaded by the events of the past. To confirm that the past does not have the power to define her, the phrase *minu asi* (my business) is frequently used in the novel, mediated both by the adult author/narrator's voice and that of the child narrator. It emerges especially powerfully in the episode where the young protagonist pokes around in a beehive and finds a German bayonet that she considers to have been "brought from a distant battlefield"³³. She feels "suddenly involved in a dark story", a feeling that cannot be alleviated or resolved in the way she usually deals with her fears by viewing them as her "prerogatives" as in this situation where she is on her own, her "privilege of fear" is of no help³⁴. After some reflection, she "cold-bloodedly wraps the bayonet in the paper again" and puts it back in the beehive, assuring herself: "This was none of my business"³⁵. Describing the discovery of a picture of the Colosseum in a picture book thrown on the floor by the deporters in *Varjuteater*, Luik revives the temporal frame familiar from *Seitsmes rahukevad*. "This did not concern me. It wasn't my business"³⁶ is her conclusion of the traces of deportation on the floor of an empty farm.

In an episode focusing on the events of August 1991, the exact time when Estonia declared independence, Luik describes walking on the streets of Tallinn, "with a cold weapon, a Swiss pocketknife in my pocket which our friend Heinz Stadler had given to JJ as a sign of friendship" that she now was holding on to "like a human hand"³⁷. Unlike the German bayonet in the beehive, this knife is not only "her (own) business", but forms a connecting link between her and other people she met on the streets in those days, who, like her, "were childishly and desperately [tucking] their hands into their pockets"³⁸. The author, however, is not only united with the others by the wish to protect themselves and their country but also by the willingness to use it. "I was ready to thrust the knife in the eye of a living person, a Soviet soldier, if necessary", she writes. "My flesh, bones and blood vessels will remember this decision until the hour of my death"³⁹. This lasting embodied memory attests to the inevitability of relationality at the limit of being human.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 23-24.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

³⁶ Viivi Luik, *Varjuteater*, pp. 9-10.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

Although the desire to determine the course of one's life without being haunted by the past is strongly highlighted in both novels, in *Seitsmes rahukevad* even with the help of a different font, it ultimately proves impossible. This is mediated via direct autobiographical representation that in *Varjuteater* seems to be further highlighted by the reduction of the author's life (course) to a journey to Rome, the starting point of which the author connects to the main theme of *Seitsmes rahukevad*: the journey toward her own time and space. Although the author does not let the reader of *Varjuteater* forget this symbolic trajectory along which she constructs her subjectivity, its power gradually fades away when the limits of direct self-representational practices increasingly come into focus.

Reminiscing about the events of August 1991, Luik points out that "a lot has been said and written about [...] in Estonia. There are as many thoughts and opinions about it as there were people who lived in Estonia that day"⁴⁰. Although elsewhere in her novel, the "I" cannot behold the self, in the description of the events of August 1991, the author's own experiences, impressions and memories emerge as the focus of the narrative: "I am talking about what I lived through"⁴¹, she highlights repeatedly. The emphasis on the "I" in the account of the events of August 1991 do not fit into Luik's conceptualization of the "I" as impersonal that for her is the basis for wholeness that unites the world and people. Yet it is precisely through the need to mediate her personal experience of the events of August 1991 that questions of utmost importance concerning her existence are posed to her: "I didn't know then that life is a tightrope, like walking on a knife's edge, and what is here today may be gone tomorrow. I didn't know yet that the little things in life that you find so annoying and share with others constitute happiness"⁴², she writes. During the two days she spent alone at home in August 1991, a connection is formed between her personal experience and perception of life and those of other people, her compatriots.

Relationality, which is the basis of self-perception in the novel, is mediated in different episodes from strongly differing vantage points. The author/narrator overhears a conversation in a grocery store about the fear of Soviet military action against people on the street and in the seat of the government seeking to restore national independence. Comparing the reactions of the people in the grocery store to her own, she writes: "This state of being ready for anything united the saleswoman with the writer and the physician with the plumber like blood, united people as a nation perhaps more than all patriotic speeches put together"⁴³. Here, she does not relate to her fellow Estonians through a perception of narratability as a defining feature of all human beings but through clearly perceived and expressed

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

knowledge of similar modes of comprehension of the experience of a concrete historical event.

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A dialogical essay co-authored by Viivi Luik and Hedi Rosma titled *Ma olen raamat [I am a Book]* (2010), which was originally planned to be published together with *Varjuteater* provides a differing perspective of mediation and narratability – one that ultimately prevails in the novel as well⁴⁴. Referring to her whole literary oeuvre more broadly but embracing also *Varjuteater*, in her response to one of Rosma’s questions, Luik elaborates her poetic credo that mirrors her perception of the meaning and nature of art at the beginning of her literary career that was outlined at the beginning of the article. Addressing Luik, Rosma marvels “you are exactly what you write, and you write exactly as you are”, and Luik replies:

[...] you are talking about something here that I feel in a very special way about myself. That I am a book. What I write is not “a creation”, is not “a text”, is not “poetry” and not “prose”, but ME. And yet this ME is impersonal in a strange way, it is part of the world. [...] I feel that I am nothing more than a word in human form. WHOSE word and WHAT word, I still must find out with my life⁴⁵.

The perception of the uniqueness of identity – who I am – and its narratable nature that emerges from such self-definition can be related to Cavarero’s thought. According to Cavarero, it is not the purposeful process of remembering or the (specific) parts of the story mediated by memory. Still, the perception of the narratability of the self to oneself and others matters. The narratable self, which according to Cavarero is the “home of uniqueness”, is above all a feeling or perception of familiarity “in the temporal extension of a life story” which is always relational: “to the experience for which the I is immediately [...] the self of her own narrating memory – there corresponds the perception of the other as the self of her own story”⁴⁶. For Luik, words acquire their power through formulation: “What I write about, what I want to EXPRESS, has nothing to do with writing or being able to write, but becoming a word [...] for me, the world exists when it is worded”⁴⁷. Although she perceives “I” as a word, she does not perceive words as her “I” representing her subjectivity. Just as in Cavarero’s definition of identity,

⁴⁴ One critic has viewed the work as an “explanatory note to *Varjuteater*” that complements the novel where “images and thoughts that did not fit into the novel, but help to grasp better the author’s attitudes” can be found (Joel Sang, “Sõnale alluv maailm” [“The World Subjected to the Word”], *Keel ja Kirjandus*, 2011, 3, p. 212).

⁴⁵ Viivi Luik, Hedi Rosma, *Ma olen raamat*, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 56, 58.

the narratable self does not mean knowing one's own story, but knowing the narratability of the self, for Luik, (her own) words do not explain her self, at least not in a comprehensible, perceptible way at the given moment. From such a perspective, the need to look for a recognizable, unified autobiographical narrative disappears, even if *Varjuteater* retains its status as also a work of life writing. According to Cavarero, biographies and autobiographies "never have an author [but] result from an existence that belongs to the world, in the relational and contextual self-exposure to others"⁴⁸. What Luik reveals in her work (in a direct autobiographical vein) is not what appears there. It is possible that what she reveals seems incomplete or insufficient for the reader focusing only on that. This may also be the reason why *Varjuteater* may seem ambivalent genre-wise and not satisfy readerly expectations of those not leaving room for "the exposable and the narratable"⁴⁹ that assumes a presence within the gaps of (direct) self-representation⁵⁰.

The perception of the impossibility of Luik's own words that cannot explain her self to her can be related to Cavarero's paradigm of selfhood that is based on the need for the mediation of one's story by another. In *Seitsmes rahukevad*, Luik

⁴⁸ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 37.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁵⁰ Several well-known literary figures of the older generation also view *Varjuteater* as a remarkable novelistic achievement. Viewed as the long-awaited sequel to the iconic *Seitsmes rahukevad* (Joel Sang, "Sõnale alluv maailm", p. 212), it has even been considered the yardstick by which to evaluate the contemporary landscapes of Estonian fiction, "as proof of what real literature is in relation to what is presented to us as literature today" (Rein Veidemann, "Viivi Luik – ajatu teeline" ["Viivi Luik – a Timeless Traveler"], *Postimees. AK*, 2010, November 27, p. 9). Jaak Jõerüüt has highlighted the ways in which the novel "subverts the canonic borders of the genre [...] in its internal currents, subtexts, its seemingly simple (a long journey to Rome) but internally very subtly complex composition like an icebreaker that makes way for something, leaving free water behind" (Jaak Jõerüüt, "Muutlik varjuteater. Küsinud Doris Kareva" ["The Changeable Shadow Theater"], *Sirp*, 2011 January 7, p. 7). However, for several critics, *Varjuteater* does not so much fall between generic categories but fails them. For instance, according to Johanna Ross, "based on external parameters [the text] could easily be classified as a travelogue, a memoir or even an essay" ("Miks häbeneda muinasjuttu?" ["Why Should One be Ashamed of a Fairy Tale?"], *Vikerkaar*, 2011, 3, p. 100) and according to Maarja Kangro, "an uninformed reader [...] could consider *Varjuteater* to be a travel diary with a fictional element" ("*Hommage* iseendale" ["*Hommage* to Oneself"], *Looming*, 2011, 4, p. 583). Both point to such generic categorization possibilities partly because, in their opinion, the work does not live up to them. Ross's slightly ironic definition of the work as a fairy tale (Johanna Ross, "Miks häbeneda muinasjuttu?", p. 100) shows that it would not be convincing if viewed as a travelogue or a memoir due to the fictionalization process that exceeds the boundaries of ordinary reality. Kangro admits that if the author herself wants to define the work as a novel, the reader/ critic should accept it, at the same time indicating that the work would not meet the requirements of the travel diary genre, especially in terms of its representation Rome as the reader is not provided with an overview of its culture and history, but with a subjective inside view of the author's "own Rome" (Maarja Kangro, "*Hommage* iseendale", p. 585).

describes a game she liked to play with her grandmother called “Tell me what I did!” or “Tell me what I was like!”:

Hardly could anything have happened with my participation, when I already demanded that it be retold to me, and during this telling, my actions were elaborated in detail and an effort was made to guess what I may have been thinking during these actions. [...] Although I remembered very well what someone had done or said, it had to be repeated to me by... the others⁵¹.

Rosma comments on the game in the following manner: “The retelling seems to CONFIRM what happened and give it MEANING. But it also means observing events from a distance”⁵². In Cavarero’s paradigm of the narratable self, narrating is not actual retelling but the perception of the self as narratable which, according to Cavarero, is the only possible way of self-perception that is always also relational. In the passage quoted above, the desire to be narrated assumes the shape of a story mediated by the first-person narrator. Although Cavarero’s thought is developed based on many literary stories, the knowledge of oneself as a narratable self does not require its mediation as a story but the recognition of narratability in oneself and others. *Seitsmes rahukevad* is a polyphonic work in which the perception of the world of the adult first-person narrator who has become aware of her vocation as a poet and the five-year-old child’s limited perception of the world intermingle. The whole narrative structure of the novel could be viewed from the principle of narratability: the adult narrator does not “retell” what she could have perceived and thought as a child, but different layerings of narrative impulses emerge in the novel, forming not-so-much a coherent narrative but an existential unity. At the same time, the structuring that emerges in the novel through the emphasis on “my business” (and “my time”) subordinates the child protagonist’s world to the aims of the adult narrator.

The possibility of perceiving one’s narratability (only) through the mediation of another also emerges in *Varjuteater*, perhaps most clearly in the episode that recounts how Luik showed up at the door of the Writers’ House in Tallinn on a windy winter evening at the age of sixteen when she left home intending to become a writer. This episode is mediated by two interrelated perspectives: what the author herself mediates as her memory and how her arrival at the Writers’ House was narrated by the hostess of the House at the time, Aunt Malle, “who packed and cleaned and checked in the evenings whether the windows were closed, and the doors were locked”⁵³. This event has a special meaning for the author as she connects it to the pattern that she gives her life: “I was on my way to Rome on that winter night of 1963”, she writes, “sixteen years old, without any

⁵¹ Viivi Luik, *Seitsmes rahukevad*, p. 184.

⁵² Viivi Luik, Hedi Rosma, *Ma olen raamat*, p. 62.

⁵³ Viivi Luik, *Varjuteater*, p. 181.

money, wearing only a thin coat, walking against the wind at the nightfall to catch the bus, to catch my fate”⁵⁴. When the author/narrator returns to this episode later, she is, however, unable to link it to the life pattern that she had previously set up as the nexus of her life story. Now, this episode’s meaning does not lie in the author/narrator’s ability to recount what she remembers but in Aunt Malle’s mediation of the story to the others. In this form, the event can be viewed as a key to comprehending the dynamics of representation and appearance in the novel. “Aunt Malle, who at one time worked at the Writers’ House, saw this face of mine, which I have never seen”, writes the author/narrator:

She had a story that she sometimes lovingly told the older writers. [...] It was a story about how one winter evening she stayed late in the Writers’ House [...] and how a voice seemed to tell her [...] Malle, go and see if the door on the street side was still closed... And then what did she see? [...] What did she see there behind the door when she saw me? No one knows, neither do I, but I know that it was the same as what I have seen when I have seen a few times in my life that which remains behind the mask and makes all living beings one breed⁵⁵.

When the grandmother in *Seitsmes rahukevad* is not willing to respond to the main character’s demand, “Grandma, what was I like when I did not want to come any further?”⁵⁶, the child narrator tries to derive possible versions of her story based on her previous experience of the story-telling game. However, these versions do not satisfy her desire to be narrated, as they do not relieve her feeling of being “perplexed and helpless”; given the possibility of “liv[ing] them through once more through her grandmother’s words” would have made it “more homely, more everyday and understandable [for her] than it had been in reality”⁵⁷. Although the game seems to be merely a creative pastime of a somewhat needy child with a vivid sense of fantasy, it makes visible the pervasive presence of fear on the landscapes of her rural postwar childhood where in spring, in addition to flowers, “secret graves and hideouts” may have become emerge from under the melting snow⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 181-182. The phrase “makes all living beings one breed” (in Estonian “kõiki elavaid teeb üheks tõuks”) comes from a well-known poem by Luik titled *Inimese käsi liigub valgel lehel* [*Across the Empty Page Moves a Human Hand*], published in her most well-known collection of poetry *Rängast rõõmust* (1982). According to the poem, what “makes all living being one breed” is an understanding that “all times have their own particular kind of pain”, that can be understood as a perception of the historicity of human existence that in the poem permeates the flesh and bone of the speaker but cannot be (as yet) formulated in words. See Viivi Luik, *Rängast rõõmust* [*Of Hard Joy*], Tallinn, Eesti Raamat, 1982, p. 38.

⁵⁶ Viivi Luik, *Seitsmes rahukevad*, p. 184.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 185.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

In the case of Aunt Malle's story, however, the author as an autobiographical subject cannot identify herself with the main character of the story but can become aware of her narratable self whose unique existence can be perceived, but not named and described, is revealed to her. "If one would know what it was" that Aunt Malle saw, "[i]f only one would know", writes Luik⁵⁹. Reaching an understanding that it is not possible to represent oneself, Luik tells the story of the other, revealing him/her and her own unique identity as a narratable self. The "I" that Luik can write about, which is "impersonal" and as such a part of the world, is transferred to everything that can be written/narrated about: "If I talk about some landscape, some city or some person, I am that landscape, that city, that person"⁶⁰. The basis of writing is the perception of the whole, the inevitability of relationality that is held together by the frames time where the difference can be grasped in simultaneity. "For me, the world is a whole", writes Luik, "everything that happens, happens at once", but "all times have their distinctive kind of pain"⁶¹, and it is the ability to perceive difference in this way that allows us to see the world as a whole.

Much of *Varjuteater* consists of portraits of people about whom it is impossible to tell clear-cut stories with truth value that would convince the reader according to commonplace understandings of the nature of life writing. These are the people whom the narrator briefly meets in Rome and Berlin and with whom she exchanges only a few awkward sentences, sometimes constricted by multiple language barriers: e.g., the girls of the "Mask of Venice" chapter, the girl in Berlin whom the author gave her blue flower, the freezing beggar girl in Rome, the girl in Tallinn whose hand held the two-branched lucky Christmas tree with a mitten with crimson magic clover ornament. Some of these stories, such as the story of the beggar girl in front of the Parioli supermarket, are mediated in detail, fictionalizing or even mythologizing the main character(s) right before the reader's eyes. Standing with outstretched arms in a "classical pose", the beggar girl has "eyelashes like bird's wings", "clear eyes [...] like altar candles", and her child's eyes "mischievous [like] those of a cherub", her long hazel hair covering her like "a coat and a coat collar"⁶². Abounding in cultural references, the description includes, for example, references to the virgin combing her hair in a forest cave in the popular sentimental romance novel *Waga Jenoweve* [*Pious Jenoweve*], which was published in Estonia in several translations at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, and references to stereotypical Italian notions of female beauty and the heritage of classical antiquity. Such description removes the beggar girl from her immediate everyday context where the author meets her and

⁵⁹ Viivi Luik, *Varjuteater*, p. 182.

⁶⁰ Viivi Luik, Hedi Rosma, *Ma olen raamat*, p. 35.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁶² Viivi Luik, *Varjuteater*, pp. 231-233.

gives her a deeper symbolic meaning. At the same time, the story's linguistic, poetic, and narrative components are partially made visible, emphasizing the narrator's contingent and limited access to the beggar girl. From the telling, it can also be questioned whether the author/narrator perceived the beggar girl in this manner or whether the narrated story expresses only her narratability that is here realized by the mediation of one possible story. From this perspective, the story of the beggar girl forms an interesting point of comparison with Aunt Malle's story, as the author does not have access to the meaning of Aunt Malle's story. The story about the beggar girl cannot be conveyed to the girl as it would not be understandable to her due to the language barrier and symbolically also because the beggar girl is illiterate. These stories reveal the unique identity of both Luik and the beggar girl: their narratable self, the capacity of every human being for a story, which, however, can only emerge within the relational possibility of addressing the other.

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By featuring the trajectory of her life as a journey toward Rome, Luik highlights the relevance of the role of a pattern in the self-perceptual model based on narratability. In an entirely different vein, the question of the pattern or design constitutes a point of departure for Cavarero concerning the story of a stork in Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* that is included at the beginning of Part IV in the section titled "The Roads of Life". It tells the story she repeatedly heard in her childhood, of a man who wakes up at night to a loud noise and runs outside to see that the water has broken the dam in his yard. Tripping and falling, guided only by the sound of water in the dark from the broken dam, the man repairs the dam. When he wakes up in the morning, he is surprised to see that his footprints have left the image of a stork on the ground⁶³. The story itself, however, is not so important as its mediation. "When I was a child", Blixen writes, "I was shown a picture – a kind of moving picture, since it was created before your eyes and while the artist was telling the story of it"⁶⁴. By "moving picture", Blixen means that, while telling the story, "the storyteller began to draw [...] a plan of the roads taken by a man"⁶⁵, and as a result of the mapping process, the image of a stork appears. According to Cavarero, the way of mediating a story is a confirmation that a drawing or a pattern is not an illustration of the story: "The design is the story", just as "the pattern that every human being leaves behind is nothing but their life story"⁶⁶. According to Cavarero, the question that Blixen asks herself (and the

⁶³ Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa*, Putnam, London, 2017, pp. 224-225.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 224.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 2.

reader) is of central importance – “When the design of my life is completed, will I see or will the others see, a stork?”⁶⁷ – because it highlights the inability of human beings to perceive their existence. For Cavarero, the design “is not one that guides the course of life from the beginning [...] the design is what life, without ever being able to predict or even to imagine it, leaves behind”⁶⁸. Each life draws a unique pattern with its course, which does not rely either on the fulfillment of a certain role or the embodiment of hidden depths, but which is a “totally apparent figure of a unique existence suggests a unity”⁶⁹. Returning to Blixen’s question, Cavarero emphasizes that the “figural unity of the design, the unifying meaning of the story can only be posed, by the one who lives it, the form of a question. Or in the form of a desire”⁷⁰.

Repeating over and over in the opening chapters of her novel that she has been on her way to Rome all her life, Luik creates a clear pattern through which she seems to interpret herself. After the first mention to the book with the picture of the Colosseum on the floor of the empty farmhouse, the journey to Rome is mentioned a few pages later: “Whatever I did these forty-nine years, I was still on my way to Rome”, she confirms, only to return to the topic a few pages later: “I was on my way to Rome and it was no joke”⁷¹. However, as both the words “I” and the phrase “on the way to Rome” appear at the beginning of the novel with excessive frequency, they seem to appear as a poetic exaggeration while their function as a reliable thematic structuring device is called into question.

In Luik’s novel, Rome comes to function as an existential category, an identity trajectory that would get her closer to an understanding of the “who” she is. At the same time, it is a central marker of politics of identity and though its intensity seems to point to hyperbolization harboring the possibility of eventual dissipation, it can also be read as an urgent need for a (re)vision of European belonging disrupted by the fall of the Iron Curtain that redrew possibilities for spatial and cultural imaginaries. When padre Vello (Vello Salo), an Estonian Catholic cleric based in Frascati near Rome, writes to Luik to ask her advice in relation to the publication of anthology of Estonian poetry in Italian, they develop a(n) epistolary friendship, and Salo invites her to visit him. “I marveled about that over and over and over”, writes Luik, “as I never thought that this was a place that really existed, and that one can go there”⁷². Yet when she reaches Rome, her perception of “this center of the Christian world” shifts as she feels the immenseness of the distance

⁶⁷ Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 226. See also Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

⁷⁰ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 2.

⁷¹ Viivi Luik, *Varjuteater*, p. 12, 21.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 27.

separating the people “on this and that side of the Alps”⁷³. Discussing the novel *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* [*Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator at Piazza Vittorio*] (2006) by the Algerian writer Amara Lakhous, Lucia Boldrini argues that “the truest meaning of [...] Europeanness may best reside in those that arrive into it seeking integration, not in those that already assume, unthinkingly, their belonging to it”⁷⁴. In the case of Luik, the question is more complicated as she is at the same time (throughout her life) arriving but also already part of Europe and becoming, together with fellow Estonians, part of Europe again when Estonia declares its independence in August 1991.

This central trope of the novel nevertheless creates readerly expectations of the author’s ability to make sense of her life trajectory and the people she has met in a unified and comprehensive way when she finally arrives in Rome. However, on the evening of her arrival in Rome, right after she had seen the Colosseum for the first time, Luik feels lost: “I didn’t know where I was. I had deliberately not studied the city plan before coming to Rome, nor had I read any books on Rome”⁷⁵. During her first walk, she does not know if she can return home since she “had left [her] map on the corner of the table at home”. She is also not sure if her “key will even unlock the front door of the house”⁷⁶. Once there, the author/narrator doesn’t seem to know where the roads will lead her, some seemingly simple path or everyday errand has taken her not only to unknown places but also unknown times in the past. Gradually, Rome becomes even more uncontainable and unknown, canceling all previous assumptions and expectations. The first day in Rome seems to last seven years, the famous streets of the old city unexpectedly turning into underground passages and caves. The Roman winter feels “like the end of the world” that one might experience “in a time of plague and famine” and not in modern Europe. One can never be sure if the people one meets in Rome “are flesh and blood creatures at all, or if they are ghosts having a bit of fun at your expense”⁷⁷. “Everything is possible in Rome”⁷⁸, the author/narrator concludes.

In *Varjuteater*, the pattern exists for the author from the beginning of the work but from the beginning of her existence perceptibly and indisputably. Luik also recounts how as a child, she started writing numbers and dates into a checkered school notebook to reach the year 2000 to create a numerical pattern of life for herself. “I did not know how to solve this task”, Luik writes, “but the solution had

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

⁷⁴ Lucia Boldrini, “Rock, Mirror, Mirage: Europe, Elsewhere”, in Vladimir Biti, Joep Leerssen, and Vivian Liska (eds.), *Europe: The Clash of Projections*, Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2021, p. 116.

⁷⁵ Viivi Luik, *Varjuteater*, p. 34.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

to take me to the wide world”⁷⁹. On the one hand, through the motif of the journey to Rome, the author ties together memories of her childhood and youth: discovering the image of the Colosseum in a book spread out on the floor or an empty farm, making a list of the years in checkered school notebook and setting off for Tallinn on a winter evening in 1963 that highlights the need to comprehend life through (the image) of a single journey or pattern. On the other hand, the author/narrator acknowledges the incompleteness and inadequacy of such a process. Retrospectively commenting on the numbers in her notebook, she states: “And yet they were merely... numbers written in blue ink on squared paper in two slanted columns. A piece of brittle, yellowish paper and cheap primary school ink, nothing else”⁸⁰. It is, therefore, from the very beginning of the novel that the possibility of the clear pattern or design perceivable for a person as a guideline or a map of his or her life starts to crumble, proceeding in accelerating manner through the novel up to its last page where the author maintains: “In Rome, you learn that you don’t know what it all is, and that you don’t need to know it. [Just] live”⁸¹. The numbers written in blue ink in slanted columns cannot be solved like a mathematical task. The pattern we live, according to Cavarero, cannot be perceived by the one whose life it concerns. But it is possible to desire a pattern and a story.

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⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ *Ibidem* p. 307.

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“I AM NOTHING MORE THAN A WORD IN HUMAN FORM”. VIIVI LUIK’S
POETICS OF IDENTITY
(Abstract)

This article offers a discussion of the work of Viivi Luik, one of the most well-known and well-loved contemporary authors and public intellectuals in Estonia, with a focus on her two autobiographical novels, the iconic *Seitsmes rahukevad* [The Seventh Spring of Peace] (1985) and *Varjuteater* [The Shadow Theater] (2010). Although recognizably self-representational, Luik’s work is generically ambivalent, particularly *The Shadow Theater*, where the desire to comprehend human existence emerges through the poetics of encounter and reciprocity of address, forming parallels with Adriana Cavarero’s philosophical paradigm of the narratable self. Identifying points of connection between Cavarero’s relational paradigm of selfhood and modes of self-narration that characterize Luik’s

literary *oeuvre*, the article focuses on Luik's poetics of identity that shapes and ultimately comes to prevail over the politics of identity, resulting in processes of construction of subjectivity that resist the expectations of gendered, national and (Eastern) European categories of identity.

Keywords: life writing, Estonian literature, Viivi Luik, Adriana Cavarero, relationality, narratable self.

„NU SUNT DECÂT UN CUVÂNT ÎN FORMĂ UMANĂ”
POETICA IDENTITĂȚII ÎN SCRIERILE LUI VIIVI LUIK
(*Rezumat*)

Articolul analizează scrierile lui Viivi Luik, una dintre cele mai cunoscute și apreciate scriitoare și intelectuale publice contemporane din Estonia, și se focalizează pe două dintre romanele sale autobiografice, ambele considerate emblematice pentru creația sa: *Seitsmes rahukevad* [*A șaptea primăvară a păcii*] (1985) și *Varjuteater* [*Teatrul umbrelor*] (2010). Deși cu un caracter autobiografic vădit, creația lui Luik se dovedește ambivalentă generic, reprezentativ în acest sens fiind mai ales *Teatrul umbrelor*, în care dorința de a cuprinde întreaga existență umană ia forma unei poetici a întâlnirii și a reciprocității adresării, o poetică afină paradigmei filosofice a sinelui narabil, elaborată de Adriana Cavarero. Pornind de la identificarea unor conexiuni între paradigma relațională a sinelui, susținută de Cavarero, și modalitățile auto-reprezentării narative specifice *operei* literare a lui Luik, articolul problematizează poetica identității din textele lui Luik, care modelează și reușește să contracareze politicile identitare canonice, pentru a dezvolta un proces al construcției subiectivității ce se opune orizontului de așteptare stabilizat de categoriile identitare tipic masculine, naționale și (est-)europene.

Cuvinte-cheie: bioficțiune, literatură estonă, Viivi Luik, Adriana Cavarero, sine narabil.

BIBLIOGRAFIA ROMANULUI ÎN LIMBA ROMÂNĂ TRADUS ÎN LIMBA POLONĂ PÂNĂ ÎN 2023

Documentul de față își propune să înregistreze toate romanele în limba română traduse direct în limba polonă și publicate – integral (în volum ori în foileton) sau fragmentar – în Polonia între 1931 și 2023 (octombrie). Acesta reprezintă o lucrare de pionierat și prima bază de date completă, care cuprinde toate titlurile de romane în limba română publicate vreodată în Polonia, dovedind așadar că traduceri literare din limba română sunt importante și mereu prezente în peisajul literar polonez. De asemenea, materialul nostru oferă lista traducătorilor și traducătoarelor romanelor respective, dând astfel vizibilitate celor care au contribuit la prezența literaturii române în Polonia. Documentația s-a făcut pe baza colecțiilor Bibliografiei Literare Poloneze (Polska Bibliografia Literacka) și ca urmare a cercetării noastre sistematice în arhivele revistelor literare și în cataloagele bibliotecilor din Polonia.

Completând datele din DCRR – *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc* (2004 și 2011) cu propriile noastre înregistrări, am reperat cele 86 de traduceri poloneze ale 83 de romane în limba română publicate în volum și, de asemenea, 55 de traduceri poloneze de fragmente ale romanelor în limba română publicate în reviste literare sau online. Am folosit datele bibliografice din DCRR pentru edițiile românești publicate până în anul 2000, iar datele bibliografice ale romanelor publicate după 2000 au fost verificate pe site-urile editurilor și în catalogul Bibliotecii Naționale din România. Deși am făcut tot ce ne-a stat în putință pentru a găsi toate fragmentele romanelor în limba română traduse în limba polonă, suntem conștienți că există o probabilitate ca această listă să nu fie completă, deoarece piața literară poloneză se caracterizează printr-un număr semnificativ de reviste de nișă la care nu mai avem acces și, de asemenea, cu siguranță există câteva inițiative de traducere care nu au reușit să ajungă la publicul larg și care nu au fost înregistrate în arhivă.

În procesul de colectare a datelor am respectat următoarele criterii:

1. Criteriu geografic/politic: spre deosebire de DCRR, am ținut cont doar de traduceri directe din limba română în limba polonă. De asemenea, observând o creștere a interesului pe piața literară poloneză pentru romanul publicat în Republica Moldova, am decis să includem producția românească moldovenească. De aceea folosim termenul “romanul (scris) în limba română” care respinge clasificarea națională în favoarea criteriului de limbă;
2. Criteriu de limbă: de asemenea, i-am exclus din corpul nostru pe autorii traduși prin intermediul unei alte limbi: Panait Istrati (tradus din limba franceză) și Ion Druță (tradus prin intermediul limbii ruse);

3. Criteriu cronologic: în organizarea materialului documentar am respectat principiul cronologic pentru a oferi o imagine coerentă a reprezentării anumitor epoci literare românești în traducerea poloneză, așadar am introdus înregistrările după anul primei ediții din România.

Pentru a evidenția caracterul eterogen al importului literar din spațiul românesc, am distins traduceri complete (tabelul 1) și cele fragmentare (tabelul 2 și 3)¹. Fragmentele romanelor evidențiate în tabelele 2 și 3 au fost publicate ori în reviste literare și antologii, ori online, în cadrul unui proiect de promovare a literaturii contemporane românești în Polonia, intitulat „Busola literară”, inaugurat de Institutul Cultural Român în 2020.

Lista de abrevieri:

E. P. L. = Editura pentru Literatură
 E. P. L. A. = Editura pentru Literatură și Artă
 E. S. = Editura de Stat
 E. S. P. L. A. = Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă
 E. T. = Editura Tineretului
 LnŚ = Literatura na Świecie

PIW = Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy
 TEiM = Księgarnia Wydawnicza Trzaska, Evert i Michalski
 WUJ = Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego
 Wydawnictwo MON = Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej

Tabelul 1. Traducerile poloneze complete ale romanului scris în limba română.

Ediția în limba română						Ediția în limba polonă				
	Autoare/autor	Titlu	Loc	Editură	Anul primei ediții	Traducătoare/ traducător(i)	Titlu	Loc	Editură	Anul primei ediții
1.	REBREANU, Liviu	Ion	București	Universala-Alcalay	1920	ŁUKASIK, Stanisław	Ion	Warszawa, Kraków	Gebethner i Wolff	1932
2.	REBREANU, Liviu	Ion	București	Universala-Alcalay	1920	BIEŃKOWSKA, Danuta	Ion	Warszawa	Instytut Wydawniczy Pax	1972
3.	REBREANU, Liviu	Pădurea spânzuraților	București	Cartea Românească	1922	ŁUKASIK, Stanisław	Las wisielców	Kraków	Wydawnictwo Literacko-Naukowe	1931
4.	REBREANU, Liviu	Pădurea spânzuraților	București	Cartea Românească	1922	BIK, Stanisław	Las wisielców	Warszawa	PIW	1980
5.	PAPADAT-BENGESCU, Hortensia	Concert din muzică de Bach	București	Ancora S. Benvenisti	1927	WRZOSKOWA, Janina	Koncert muzyki Bacha	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1981

¹ Tabelele sunt accesibile în regim de acces liber pe platforma Zenodo: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8414928>.

6.	PETRESCU, Cezar	Întunecare	București	Biblioteca z. „Universul”	1927	ŁUKASIK, Stanisław	Ciemność	Kraków	Wydawnictwo Literacko-Naukowe	1933
7.	PETRESCU, Cezar	Întunecare	București	Biblioteca z. „Universul”	1927	FLORANS, Rajmund	Mrok	Warszawa	Wydawnictwo MON	1957
8.	CARAGIALE, Mateiu	Craii de Curtea-Veche	București	Cartea Românească	1929	STEFANOWSKI, Aleksander	Fanfaroni ze Starego Dworu	Warszawa	PIW	1968
9.	PETRESCU, Camil	Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război	București	Cultura Națională	1930	FLORANS, Rajmund	Ostatnia noc miłości, pierwsza noc wojny	Warszawa	PIW	1963
10.	SADOVEANU, Mihail	Baltagul	București	Cartea Românească	1930	FLORANS, Rajmund	Zaginiony	Warszawa	PIW	1960
11.	PETRESCU, Cezar	Fram, ursul polar	București	Editura z. „Curentul”	1932	BIEŃKOWSKA, Danuta	Fram, niedźwiedz polarny	Warszawa	Iskry	1968
12.	REBREANU, Liviu	Răscoala	București	Adevărul	1932	FLORANS, Rajmund	Bunt	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1959
13.	BART, Jean	Europolis	București	Adevărul	1933	BIEŃKOWSKA, Danuta	Europolis	Gdańsk	Wydawnictwo Morskie	1974
14.	ELIADE, Mircea	Maitreyi	București	Cultura Națională	1933	HARASIMOWICZ, Irena	Maitreji	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1988
15.	SEBASTIAN, Mihail	De două mii de ani	București	Editura Naționala-Ciornei	1934	MAŁECKI, Dominik	Od dwóch tysięcy lat	Wrocław	Książkowe Klimaty	2020
16.	BLECHER, Max	Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată	București	Vremea	1936	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Zdarzenia w bliskiej nierzeczywistości	Sejny	Pogranicze	2013
17.	BLECHER, Max	Inimi cicatrizate	București	Universala	1937	KLIMKOWSKI, Tomasz	Zabliźnione serca	Warszawa	W. A. B.	2014
18.	ELIADE, Mircea	Nuntă în cer	București	Cugetarea	1938	FLORANS, Rajmund	Wesele w niebie	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1977
19.	SADOVEANU, Ion Marin	Sfârșit de veac în București	București	Socec	1944	BIEŃKOWSKA, Danuta	W świetle gazowych lamp	Warszawa	PIW	1976
20.	STANCU, Zaharia	Desculț	București	E. S.	1948	CZARA-STEC, Dusza, SAMOZWANIEC, Magdalena	Bosy	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1951
21.	CAMILAR,	Negura	București	E. S.	1949	HORODYSKI, Roman	Mgła	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1951

	Eusebiu									
22.	SADOVEANU, Mihail	Mitrea Cocor	București	E. P. L. A.	1949	FLORANS, Rajmund	Mitria Kokor	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1951
23.	SADOVEANU, Mihail	Nada Florilor. Amintirile unui pescar cu undița	București	E. T.	1950	FLORANS, Rajmund	Wyspa Kwiatów. Ze wspomnień rybaka	Warszawa	Nasza Księgarnia	1955
24.	VAIDA, A. G.	Scânteii în beznă	București	E. P. L. A.	1950	SKARŻYŃSKI, Zdzisław	Iskry w mroku	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1952
25.	DUMITRIU, Petru	Drum fără pulbere	București	E. S. P. L. A.	1951	FLORANS, Rajmund	Droga bez kurzu	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1953
26.	STANCU, Zaharia	Dulăii	București	E. S. P. L. A.	1952	CZARA-STEC, Dusza, BUŁAKOWSKA, Jadwiga	Psy łańcuchowe	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1954
27.	CĂLINESCU, George	Bietul Ioanide	București	E. S. P. L. A.	1953	BIEŃKOWSKA, Danuta	Biedny Ioanide	Warszawa	PIW	1973
28.	TUDORAN, Radu	Toate pânzele sus!	București	E. T.	1954	WRZOSKOWA, Janina	Wszystkie żagle w górę	Warszawa	Iskry	1958
29.	DUMITRIU, Petru	Pasărea Furtunii	București	E. T.	1955	WRZOSKOWA, Janina	Ptak burzy	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1956
30.	BARBU, Eugen	Groapa	București	E. S. P. L. A.	1957	WAJDA, Fryderyka, WAYDA, A.	Jama	Warszawa	Iskry	1960
31.	ȘTEFĂNESCU, Al. I.	Să nu fugi singur prin ploaie	București	E. T.	1958	BIEŃKOWSKA, Danuta	Nie biegaj samotnie po deszczu	Warszawa	Iskry	1963
32.	BARBU, Eugen	Șoseaua Nordului	București	E. S. P. L. A.	1959	BIEŃKOWSKA, Danuta	Szośa Północna	Warszawa	PIW	1961
33.	CĂLINESCU, George	Scrinul negru	București	E. S. P. L. A.	1960	BIEŃKOWSKA, Danuta	Czarna komoda	Warszawa	PIW	1962
34.	PREDA, Marin	Risipitorii	București	E. P. L.	1962	WRZOSKOWA, Janina	Marnotrawcy	Warszawa	PIW	1965
35.	SADOVEANU, Ion Marin	Taurul mării	București	E. T.	1962	WRZOSKOWA, Janina	Byk morski	Warszawa	Nasza Księgarnia	1977
36.	STANCU, Horia	Asklepios	București	E. P. L.	1965	WRZOSKOWA, Janina	Asklepios	Warszawa	Nasza Księgarnia	1969
37.	IVASIUC, Alexandru	Vestibul	București	E. P. L.	1967	BIEŃKOWSKA, Danuta	Westybul	Warszawa	PIW	1970
38.	PREDA, Marin	Intrusul	București	E. P. L.	1968	FLORANS, Rajmund	Intruz	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1972
39.	STANCU, Horia	Fanar	București	E. P. L.	1968	WRZOSKOWA, Janina	Fanar	Warszawa	Nasza Księgarnia	1971
40.	STANCU, Zaharia	Ce mult te-am iubit	București	E. P. L.	1968	BIEŃKOWSKA, Danuta	Jak bardzo	Warszawa	Czytelnik	1972

							cię kochałem				
41.	BARBU, Eugen	Princepele	București	E. T.	1969	BIENKOWSKA, Danuta	Książę	Warszawa	PIW		1979
42.	CĂLINESCU, Matei	Viața și opiniile lui Zacharias Licher	București	E. P. L.	1969	HARASIMOWICZ, Irena	Ţyie i opinie Zachariasza Lichera	Warszawa	PIW		1972
43.	POPESCU, Petru	Prins	București	E. P. L.	1969	SZUPERSKI, Zbigniew	Osaczony	Warszawa	PIW		1973
44.	STANCU, Horia	Întoarcerea în deșert	București	E. P. L.	1969	WRZOSKOWA, Janina	Powrót na pustynię	Warszawa	Nasza Księgarnia		1974
45.	BLECHER, Max	Vizuina luminată	București	Cartea Românească	1971	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Rozświetlona jama. Dziennik sanatoryjny	Wrocław	Książkowe Klimaty		2018
46.	TITEL, Sorin	Lunga călătorie a prizonierului	București	Cartea Românească	1971	SZUPERSKI, Zbigniew	Długa podróż więźnia	Kraków	Wydawnictwo Literackie		1975
47.	DUMITRIU, Dana	Masa zarafului	București	Eminescu	1972	HARASIMOWICZ, Irena	Biesiada lichwiarza	Warszawa	PIW		1975
48.	IVASIUC, Alexandru	Apa	București	Eminescu	1973	WAJDA, Fryderyka	Woda	Warszawa	PIW		1978
49.	IVASIUC, Alexandru	Păsările	București	Eminescu	1973	WRZOSKOWA, Janina	Ptaki	Warszawa	Książka i Wiedza		1979
50.	POPESCU, Dumitru Radu	Vânătoarea regală	București	Eminescu	1973	KANIA, Ireneusz	Łowy królewskie	Warszawa	PIW		1979
51.	GRECEA, Ion	Fata morgana	București	Eminescu	1973	WRZOSKOWA, Janina	Fatamorgana	Warszawa	Wydawnictwo MON		1980
52.	CUBLEȘAN, Constantin	Iarba cerului	București	Albatros	1974	COTELNIC, Janina, COTELNIC, Mihai	Trawa	Warszawa	Iskry		1981
53.	ȚOIU, Constantin	Galeria cu viță sălbatică	București	Eminescu	1976	BIENKOWSKA, Danuta	Grzech pierworodny	Warszawa	Czytelnik		1985
54.	DUMITRIU, Dana	Duminica mironosițelor	București	Cartea Românească	1977	WEINSBERG, Adam	Parada hipokrytek	Warszawa	PIW		1988
55.	TITEL, Sorin	Pasărea și umbra	București	Eminescu	1977	SZUPERSKI, Zbigniew	Ptak i cień	Kraków	Wydawnictwo Literackie		1983
56.	ADAMEȘTEANU, Gabriela	Dimineată pierdută	București	Cartea Românească	1983	KLIMKOWSKI, Tomasz	Stracony poranek	Warszawa	W. A. B.		2012
57.	CĂRTĂRESCU, Mircea	Travesti	București	Humanitas	1994	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Travesti	Wołowiec	Czarne		2007
58.	POPESCU, Simona	Exuvii	București	Nemira	1997	STRUZINSKA, Justyna	Wylinka	Wołowiec	Czarne		2002

59.	IUGA, Nora	Sexagenara și tânărul	București	Albatros	2000	JURCZAK, Kazimierz	Dama z młodzińcem	Kraków	Universitas	2018
60.	ȘTEFĂNESCU, Cecilia	Legături bolnăvicioase	Pitești	Paralela 45	2002	HRYHOROWICZ, Zdzisław	Chorobliwe związki	Warszawa	Green Gallery	2009
61.	MANEA, Norman	Întoarcerea huliganului	Iași	Polirom	2003	JURCZAK, Kazimierz	Powrót chuligana	Sejny	Pogranicze	2009
62.	LUNGU, Dan	Sunt o babă comunistă!	Iași	Polirom	2004	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Jestem komunistyczną babą!	Wołowiec	Czarne	2009
63.	FLORIAN, Filip	Degete mici	Iași	Polirom	2005	WCISŁO, Szymon	Małe palce	Wołowiec	Czarne	2008
64.	FLORIAN, Filip, FLORIAN, Matei	Băiuțeii	Iași	Polirom	2006	WCISŁO, Szymon	Starszy brat, młodszy brat	Wołowiec	Czarne	2009
65.	FLORIAN, Filip	Zilele regelui	Iași	Polirom	2008	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Dni króla	Wrocław	Amaltea	2016
66.	MANEA, Norman	Vizuină	Iași	Polirom	2009	JURCZAK, Kazimierz	Kryjówka	Warszawa	Czytelnik	2012
67.	PĂRVULESCU, Ioana	Viața începe vineri	București	Humanitas	2009	BRYKNER, Karolina, KLIMKOWSKI, Tomasz	Życie zaczyna się w piątek	Kraków	WUJ	2016
68.	TEODORESCU, Cristian	Medgidia, orașul de apoi	București	Cartea Românească	2009	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Medgidia, miasto u kresu	Wrocław	Amaltea	2015
69.	TEODOROVICI, Lucian Dan	Celelalte povești de dragoste	Iași	Polirom	2009	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Inne historie miłosne	Wrocław	Amaltea	2018
70.	VOSGANIAN, Varujan	Cartea șoaptelor	Iași	Polirom	2009	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Księga szeptów	Wrocław	Książkowe Klimaty	2015
71.	MĂLAICU-HONDRARI, Marin	Apropierea	București	Cartea Românească	2010	MAŁECKI, Dominik	Bliskość	Wrocław	Książkowe Klimaty	2015
72.	VIȘNIEC, Matei	Domnul K. eliberat	București	Cartea Românească	2010	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Pan K. na wolności	Kraków	Universitas	2019
73.	TEODOROVICI, Lucian Dan	Matei Brunul	Iași	Polirom	2011	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Matei Brunul	Wrocław	Amaltea	2014
74.	COMAN, Dan	Parohia	București	Cartea Românească	2012	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Parochia	Kraków	Universitas	2019
75.	FLORIAN, Filip	Toate bufnițele	Iași	Polirom	2012	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Wszystkie sowy	Wrocław	Amaltea	2018
76.	SCHIOP, Adrian	Soldații. Poveste din Ferentari	Iași	Polirom	2013	BARTOSIEWICZ, Olga	Żołnierze. Opowieść z	Kraków	Universitas	2018

							Ferentari			
77.	VIȘNIEC, Matei	Negustorul de începuturi de roman	Iași	Polirom	2013	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Sprzedawca początków powieści	Kraków	Universitas	2018
78.	MIHULEAC, Cătălin	America de peste pogrom	București	Cartea Românească	2014	JURCZAK, Kazimierz	Złota dziewczynka z Jassów	Warszawa	Noir sur Blanc	2023
79.	LUNGU, Dan	Fetița care se juca de-a Dumnezeu	Iași	Polirom	2014	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	O dziewczynce, która bawiła się w Boga	Wrocław	Amaltea	2017
80.	LUNGU, Doina	Simfonia unui criminal	Chișinău	Prut Internațional	2014	BARTOSIEWICZ, Olga	Symfonia złoczyńcy	Kraków	Korporacja Ha!art	2016
81.	BRANIȘTE, Lavinia	Interior zero	Iași	Polirom	2016	BARTOSIEWICZ-NIKOLAEV, Olga	Wewnętrzny zero	Kraków	Universitas	2019
82.	PĂRVULESCU, Ioana	Inocenții	București	Humanitas	2016	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Niewinni	Kraków	EMG	2019
83.	TEODORESCU, Cristian	Cartea pisicii	Iași	Polirom	2017	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Kocie opowieści	Wrocław	Amaltea	2019
84.	ȚÎBULEAC, Tatiana	Vara în care mama a avut ochii verzi	Chișinău	Cartier	2017	MAŁECKI, Dominik	Lato, gdy mama miała zielone oczy	Wrocław	Książkowe Klimaty	2021
85.	ȚÎBULEAC, Tatiana	Grădina de sticlă	Chișinău	Cartier	2018	JURCZAK, Kazimierz	Szklany ogród	Wrocław, Warszawa	Książkowe Klimaty, Noir sur Blanc	2023
86.	SEREBRIAN, Oleg	Pe contrasens	Chișinău	Cartier	2021	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Pod prąd	Wrocław	Amaltea	2023

Tablel 2. Romanele în limba română traduse fragmentar în limba polonă și publicate în volum.

Ediția în limba română					Ediția în limba polonă							
Autoare/autor	Titlu	Loc	Editură	Anul primei ediții	Traducătoare/ traducător	Titlu	Loc	Tip de publicație	Titlu de publicație	Editură/ număr	Anul primei ediții	Pagini

1.	REBREANU, Liviu	Ion	București	Universala-Alcalay	1920	ŁUKASIK, Stanisław	Ion	Warszawa	antologie	Wielka literatura powszechna. T. 6: Antologia, część druga	TEiM	1933	90-92
2.	REBREANU, Liviu	Ion	București	Universala-Alcalay	1920	BIENKOWSKA, Danuta	Oświadczyń	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	9 (17)	1972	59-69
3.	SADOVEANU, Mihail	Hanu-Ancuței	București	Cartea Românească	1928	WAWRZKOWICZ, Stanisław	Zajazd Anusi	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	2 (70)	1977	20-37
4.	SADOVEANU, Mihail	Nunta domniței Ruxandra	București	Cartea Românească	1932	BIEDRZYCKI, Emil	Wesele gospodarówny Roxandy	Warszawa	antologie	Wielka literatura powszechna. T. 6: Antologia, część druga	TEiM	1933	87-88
5.	ELIADE, Mircea	Maitreyi	București	Cultura Națională	1933	HARASIMOWICZ, Irena	Maitreji	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	1 (186)	1987	85-119
6.	STANCU, Zaharia	Rădăcinile sunt amare	București	E. S. P. L. A.	1958	CZARA-STEC, Duszaa	Kwitnący bez	Warszawa	antologie	Kwitnący bez i inne opowiadania	Iskry	1959	5-18
7.	BARBU, Eugen	Princepele	București	E. T.	1969	BIENKOWSKA, Danuta	Książę	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	2 (70)	1977	46-61
8.	POPESCU, Petru	Prins	București	E. P. L.	1969	SZUPERSKI, Zbigniew	Osaczony	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	9 (17)	1972	75-90
9.	PETRESCU, Radu	Sinucidere din Grădina Botanică	București	Eminescu	1971	KANIA, Ireneusz	Samobójstwo w Ogrodzie Botanicznym	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	1-2 (342-343)	2000	161-183
10.	MICU, Mircea	Patima	București	Cartea Românească	1972	BIK, Stanisław	Zawziętość	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	11 (31)	1973	282-297
11.	ȚOIU, Constantin	Galeria cu viță sălbatică	București	Eminescu	1976	BIENKOWSKA, Danuta	Ganek z dzikim winem	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	6 (155)	1984	269-321

12.	BĂNULESCU, Ștefan	Cartea de la Metopolis	București	Eminescu	1977	ROSSI, Ewa	Księga Metopolis	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	1-2 (342-343)	2000	31-66
13.	GEORGESCU, Paul	Revelionul	București	Editura Eminescu	1977	KANIA, Ireneusz	Noc sylwestrowa	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	1-2 (342-343)	2000	216-237
14.	SIMIONESCU, Mircea Horea	Bibliografia generală	București	Nemira	1992	KANIA, Ireneusz	Bibliografia ogólna	Kraków	periodic	Dekada Literacka	11 (169)	2000	12-14
15.	SÎRBU, Ion Desideriu	Adio, Europa!	București	Cartea Românească	1992	JURCZAK, Kazimierz	Żegnaj, Europo!	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	5-6 (442-443)	2008	183-207
16.	ELIADE, Mircea	Jurnal	București	Humanitas	1993	KANIA, Ireneusz	Fragmenty dziennika	Kraków	periodic	Dekada Literacka	11 (169)	2000	10-11; 18
17.	SEBASTIAN, Mihail	Jurnal, 1935-1944	București	Humanitas	1996	KOTLIŃSKI, Jerzy	Otwarcie sezonu	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	5-6 (442-443)	2008	209-221
18.	POPESCU, Simona	Exuvii	București	Nemira	1997	HRYHOROWICZ, Zdzisław	Książka kucharska	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	1-2 (342-343)	2000	315-327
19.	POPESCU, Simona	Exuvii	București	Nemira	1997	STRUZIŃSKA, Justyna	Kryjówki	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	1-2 (342-343)	2000	293-305
20.	MIHALI, Felicia	Din Țara Brânzei	București	Image	1999	ROSSI, Ewa	Maj	Kraków	periodic	Dekada Literacka	11 (169)	2000	14-15
21.	ȘTEFĂNESCU, Cecilia	Legături bolnăvicioase	Pitești	Paralela 45	2002	HRYHOROWICZ, Zdzisław	Renato	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	11 (44)	2007	54-56
22.	BRADEA, Ioana	Băgău	București	Editura Est	2004	KLIMKOWSKI, Tomasz	w piątek wieczorem	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	11 (44)	2007	56-57
23.	ADAMEȘTEANU, Gabriela	Întâlnirea	Iași	Polirom	2003	KOTLIŃSKI, Jerzy	Spotkanie	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	5-6 (442-443)	2008	89-107
24.	CRĂCIUN, Gheorghe	Pupa russa	București	Humanitas	2004	JURCZAK, Kazimierz	Pupa Russa	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	5-6 (442-443)	2008	5-35

											443)		
25.	LUNGU, Dan	Sunt o babă comunistă!	Iași	Polirom	2004	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Jestem komunistyczną babą!	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	5-6 (442-443)	2008	250-267
26.	LUNGU, Dan	Raiul găinilor	Iași	Polirom	2004	WCISŁO, Szymon	Kurzy raj	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	5-6 (442-443)	2008	235-248
27.	MIHALACHE, Ștefania	Est-falia	București	Paralela 45	2004	KLIMKOWSKI, Tomasz	Est-falia	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	23-25
28.	VIGHI, Daniel	Misterele Castelului Solitude sau despre singurătate la vreme de iarnă	Iași	Polirom	2004	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	O samotności podczas zimy	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	62-63
29.	FLORIAN, Filip	Degete mici	Iași	Polirom	2005	WCISŁO, Szymon	Małe palce	Warszawa	periodic	LnŚ	5-6 (442-443)	2008	121-172
30.	ILIS, Florina	Cruciada copiilor	București	Cartea Românească	2005	KLIMKOWSKI, Tomasz	Krucjata dziecięca	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	32-36
31.	MORAR, Ioan T.	Lindenfeld	Iași	Polirom	2005	KLIMKOWSKI, Tomasz	Lindenfeld	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	52-56
32.	MANOLESCU, Ion	Derapaj	Iași	Polirom	2006	KLIMKOWSKI, Tomasz	Rumunia. 2005	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	12-15
33.	RAȚIU, Daniela	In vitro	București	Cartea Românească	2006	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Nie będziesz czynił żadnej rzeźby	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	10-11
34.	RĂDULESCU, Răzvan	Teodosie cel mic	Iași	Polirom	2006	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Truskawkarnia Sowy Kaliopi	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	40-41
35.	BAȘTOVOI, Ștefan	Iepurii nu mor	Iași	Polirom	2007	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Zające nie umierają	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	42-43
36.	BOBE, T.O.	Cum mi-am	Iași	Polirom	2007	KLIMKOWSKI,	Jak spędziłem	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	18-22

		petrecut vacanța de vară				Tomasz	wakacje						
37.	TEODORESCU, Lucian Dan	Cercul nostru vă prezintă:	Iași	Polirom	2007	KORNAŚ- WARWAS, Joanna	Nasz cyrk przedstawia:	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	46-48
38.	URSU, Horia	Asediul Vienei	București	Cartea Românească	2007	KLIMKOWSKI, Tomasz	Pochwała świni, albo Ta świnia nie jest świnia	Warszawa	periodic	Lampa	8 (53)	2008	58-61
39.	IUGA, Nora	Hai să furăm pepeni	Iași	Polirom	2009	BARTOSIEWICZ, Olga	Chodźmy nakraść arbuźów	Warszawa	periodic	Wyspa. Kwartalnik Literacki	4 (48)	2018	26-37
40.	COMAN, Dan	Căsnicie	Iași	Polirom	2016	KORNAŚ- WARWAS, Joanna	Święta zimowe	Kraków	periodic	Nowa Dekada Krakowska	5/6 (43/44)	2019	126-139

Tabelul 3. Romanele în limba română fragmentar traduse în limba polonă și publicate online în cadrul proiectului „Busola Literară” (pol. „Kompas Literacki”) organizat de Institutul Cultural Român de la Varșovia.

Ediția în limba română					Ediția în limba polonă				
	Autoare/autor	Titlu	Loc	Editură	Anul primei ediții	Traducătoare/ traducător	Titlu	Anul primei ediții	Site
1.	COSAȘU, Radu	Supraviețuirile 6. În jungla unui bloc de gheață	Iași	Polirom	2007	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Przeżycia 6. W dżungli lodowego bloku	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-supravietuirile-6-in-jungla-unui-bloc-de-gheata-de-radu-cosasu/pl
2.	LĂZĂRESCU, Florin	Lampa cu căciulă (Ursoaica Lili și Balena Goliat)	Iași	Polirom	2009	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława*	Niedźwiedzica Lili i Wieloryb Goliat	2020	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-prezinta-volumul-lampa-cu-caciula-de-florin-lazarescu/pl
3.	PARASCHIVESCU, Radu	Fluturile negru	București	Humanitas	2010	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Czarny motyl	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-fluturile-negru-de-radu-paraschivescu/pl

4.	ROSETTI, Adina	Deadline	București	Curtea Veche	2011	SUWARA, Magda*	Deadline	2020	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-expeditii-prin-noi-tinuturi-ale-creatiei-romanesti-deadline-de-adina-rosetti/pl
5.	AGOPIAN, Ștefan	Tache de catifea	Iași	Polirom	2012	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Aksamitny Tache	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-tache-de-catifea-de-stefan-agopian/pl
6.	SORA, Simiona	Hotel Universal	Iași	Polirom	2012	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Hotel Universal	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-hotel-universal-de-simona-sora/pl
7.	SOVIANY, Octavian	Arhivele de la Monte Negro	Iași	Polirom	2012	SUWARA, Magda*	Archiwa z Monte Negro	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-arhivele-de-la-monte-negro-de-octavian-soviany/pl
8.	CHIVU, Marius	Sfârșit de sezon	Iași	Polirom	2014	BARTOSIEWICZ-NIKOLAEV, Olga	Koniec sezonu	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-sfarsit-de-sezon-de-marius-chivu/pl
9.	BITTEL, Adriana	Cum încărunește o blondă	București	Humanitas	2015	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Jak siwieje blondynka	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-cum-incarunteste-o-blonda-de-adriana-bittel/pl
10.	IRIMIA, Florin	Misterul mașinutelor chinezești	Iași	Polirom	2017	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Tajemnica chińskich samochodzików	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-misterul-masinutelor-chinezesti-de-florin-irimia/pl
11.	SANDU, Ana Maria	Pereți subțiri	Iași	Polirom	2017	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Cienkie ściany	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-pereti-subtiri-de-ana-maria-sandu/pl
12.	ZOGRAFI, Vlad	Șapte Octombrie	București	Humanitas	2018	JANOWSKA-LASCAR, Radosława	Siódmego października	2020	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-expeditii-prin-noi-tinuturi-ale-creatiei-literare-romanesti-sapte-octombrie-de-vlad-zografi/pl
13.	NICOLAIE, Ioana	Cartea Reghinei	București	Humanitas	2019	KORNAŚ-WARWAS, Joanna	Księga Reghiny	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-cartea-reghinei-de-ioana-nicolaie/pl

14.	VREMEȘ, Cristina	Trilogia sexului rătăcitor	București	Humanitas	2019	BARTOSIEWICZ-NIKOLAEV, Olga	Błądząca pleć. Trylogia	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-trilogia-sexului-ratacitor-de-cristina-vremes/pl
15.	POTCOAVĂ, Alexandru	Viața și întoarcerea unui Halle	Iași	Polirom	2019	BARTOSIEWICZ-NIKOLAEV, Olga	Życie i powrót niejakiego Halle	2021	https://www.icr.ro/varsovia/busola-literara-viata-si-intoarcerea-unui-halle-de-alexandru-potcoava/pl

* Traducerea a fost realizată în cadrul festivalului „Luna Lecturilor de Autor” și a fost pusă la dispoziție de Biblioteca Publică Municipală din Wrocław.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE ROMANIAN-LANGUAGE NOVEL
TRANSLATED INTO POLISH UNTIL 2023
(Abstract)**

The main objective of the *Bibliography of the Romanian-language Novel Translated into Polish until 2023* is to present the complete list of the novelistic production written in Romanian, also by authors from the Republic of Moldova, and published in Poland in Polish translation (in volume or in fragments) between 1931 and 2023. It represents a pioneering work and the first exhaustive database containing all the Romanian-language novel titles ever published in Poland; thus, it can serve as a valuable resource for researchers of Romanian literature from around the world. It contains 86 Polish translations of 83 Romanian-language novels published in volume, as well as 55 Polish translations of excerpts from Romanian-language novels published in literary magazines or online. The bibliography was created based on the *Dicționarul cronologic al romanului românesc [The Chronological Dictionary of the Romanian Novel]* (2004 and 2011), *Polska Bibliografia Literacka [Polish Literary Bibliography]* (<https://pbl.ibl.poznan.pl/dostep/>) and the library queries in Poland (at the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków and the National Library in Warsaw).

Keywords: Romanian literature, Polish literary translation, novel, novel database, cultural exchange.

COMPTEs RENDUS / BOOK REVIEWS

RADU MÂRZA, *Călători români privind pe fereastra trenului. O încercare de istorie culturală (1830–1930)* [*Romanian Travelers Looking Out of the Train Window. An Attempt at Cultural History (1830–1930)*]. Foreword by Ovidiu Ghitta, Polirom, Iași, 2020, 211 p.

Travel writing (travel literature), which has been around since ancient times, is characterized by its ability to portray reality from the travelers' perspective. As with other forms of writing, travel literature has been influenced by a number of factors – political, economic, cultural, religious, social and even human (see Percy G. Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, 2015). For this reason, travel literature includes numerous textual forms/types which may or may not be similar to each other. In line with these observations, Percy G. Adams identifies three subcategories of travel literature: a. "travel letters" – formal or informal narrative travel writing with a single addressee; b. travel diaries/*récit de voyage* – non-fictional writings, organized by days and hours (e.g. the logbook); c. narrative writings proper – not always written in the first person, but providing a lot of information and place names; most of the time, they precede the description of the trip, often including essays about nature or the advantages of the journey. Radu Mârza discusses precisely this last category in his latest book, *Călători români privind pe fereastra trenului* [*Romanian Travelers Looking Out of the Train Window*].

Like all nineteenth-century activities, travelling increases the need for modernization, for a "fundamental change in mentality [...] and in society" (as Mircea Angheliescu emphasizes in his 2015 study *Lâna de aur. Călătorii și călătoriile în literatura română* [*The Golden Fleece. Travelers and Travels in the Romanian Literature*]). It is known that Romanians began to travel by train outside the Principalities long before the development of the railway industry in Romania. In the first decades of the 19th century, contact with the West and with the landscape they travelled through required a "travel ceremony" (preparing the route, renting the stagecoach, travelling the route) which influenced the travelers' perception of the whole journey. We are talking about a change in the travelers' perception of time and space, which changes with the arrival of the "iron road" (p. 18).

Radu Mârza's research looks at Romanian travelers in the Kingdom and in Transylvania in relation to rail travel. "What does the traveler see when he looks out of the train window?", "What does he think about?", "What interests him when he describes what he sees out of the train window?", "How does he see the other travelers on the train or on the platform or how does he see the station?" (p. 15) are just some of the questions that arouse the historian's curiosity. The volume reveals a first century of rail travel – between 1830 and 1930 – captured by the man of letters: 1. the first Romanian travelers (Petrașe Poenaru, Ion Codru Drăgușanu, George Bariț, Ion Ghica, N. Filimon); 2. the *Belle Époque* period (A.D. Xenopol, Iosif Vulcan, Nicolae Iorga); 3. the interwar period (Liviu Rebreanu, Demostene Botez).

With the development of the railway industry in Europe there was also a change "of a social and cultural nature" (p. 15). The individual's (traveler's) way of relating to space changed completely, as contact with the West led to an awareness of the differences between civilizations, critical comparison ("not like ours") and the impulse towards progress and imitation (see, in this respect, Adrian Marino's *Carnete europene. "Însemnare a călătoriei mele făcută între anii 1969–1975"* [*European Notebooks. "Notes on My Travels from 1969–1975"*], 1976). Just as Dinu Goleșcu was "frightened" by the West, Romanian travelers looking out of the train window were surprised by the way the "iron road" became a living constant of the journey, marking the perception of the individual.

Following closely the travel of 19th century Romanians, Radu Mârza has captured the effects of rail travelling on the traveler. In the individual's relationship with nature, the train is a means of communication, which "modifies not only his visual perception, his perception of the nature travelled

through, [...] but also that of time and space” (p. 18). Seen through the train window, the landscape becomes much more dynamic. As with photography or cinema, the perception of space and time changes. In front of the traveler, a film unfolds in which the foreground changes rapidly; the traveler becomes a witness, a close observer of the events unfolding.

The experience of travelling by train, the dazzling mass of images and the detailed notes on how the train works (Petrache Poenaru, Ion Codru Drăgușanu) amplified the traveler’s feelings. Of course, the development of the railway industry led not only to a democratization of travel, but also to a social reconfiguration of the individual. The 19th century saw a social change: the birth of the middle class. In line with these historical events and as a result of the industrial revolution, the train is amplifying the emergence of new areas of activity (industrial, commercial, administrative, etc.).

At the same time, the aristocracy of the mid-19th century increasingly travelled by train, investing time in social activities. There is a change in leisure habits. From indoor and outdoor leisure facilities (cafés, restaurants, clubs, casinos, theatres, boulevard walks, etc.), the traveler begins to “prefer” new social spaces such as the platform, the compartment, the station restaurant, the waiting room. Thus, the development of transport, and in particular of train travel, has influenced the social process of democratization of travelling (p. 27). By agreeing to travel in a train carriage, the passenger is constrained by the confined space of the compartment. As a result, socialization occurs between people from different social, cultural and professional backgrounds (as the experiences of N. Filimon, N. Iorga and Liviu Rebreanu show).

The railway industry has also led to the construction of new premises. As urban planning took place around the “iron road”, 19th century railway stations were not seen as mere buildings, but as real “gateways to cities” (p. 30). Railway history thus marks new forms of socialization, in which the railway station begins to be a social and cultural institution of great significance for the 19th century. Romanian travelers capture both the constant development of society (Petrache Poenaru, Ion Codru Drăgușanu, Mihail Sadoveanu, Liviu Rebreanu) and the actual construction of the railway (George Bariț, Alexandru D. Xenopol), as well as the change of the political regime – Liviu Rebreanu (p. 35). At the same time, the extension of the railways intensified the problem of territorial domination. For example, in Romania the desire to unite the historical territories grows as the railway transforms the territory into a “nation-space” (p. 32).

Just like the cinema, the train becomes a place of uninhibited intimacy and love affairs. Unfortunately, the historian has not considered fictional literature. This could have given him many details of how the train becomes a place of intimacy (as in I.L. Caragiale, Liviu Rebreanu, E. Lovinescu, etc.). The railway references used are taken from memoirs, correspondence, press reports and travel books. They provide information on the dating of the main railway projects (in 1842 the railway line between Bucharest and Giurgiu, in 1856 in Banat, in 1860 in Dobrogea, in 1868 in Transylvania, etc.), but also details on the development of terminology (an adaptation of neologisms or even linguistic calques): “debarcader”/ “imbarcader” for platform, “saloane” for waiting rooms, “drum de fer”, “trăgan” for the train lining (p. 52), “viaduct” etc. (especially for the first Romanian travelers: Petrache Poenaru, Ion Codru Drăgușanu, George Bariț, Ion Ghica, N. Filimon).

One would have expected to find a detailed study of the space the traveler crosses; a poetics of space along the lines of the dialectic proposed by Gaston Bachelard: inside-outside, of closed and open space. As such, one could follow the way in which the space of the train shapes the passenger’s intimacy, on the one hand, and, on the other, the transformation of the train into a space of passage (between openings) between civilizations and cultures. The accounts of Romanian train travelers from the early decades of our railway history present little detail about the landscape (p. 189). Taking into account the travelers’ descriptions of the interior spaces of the station, the technical details and the advantages of train travel, the space of the train can also be analyzed from this point of view.

Certainly, historian Radu Mârza’s attempt at cultural history has the merit of opening up new research perspectives. Like other historians (Mihai Chiperi, Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu), Mârza offers a complex picture of the modernization of the Romanian space throughout the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century. On reading the pages of the memories and impressions of

Romanian travelers, the reader easily enters the world of train travel between 1830 and 1930, where the Baedeker (the travel guide) – replaced, this time, by the writers' travel notes – accompanies him/her from one setting to another.

Lucreția PASCARIU
 “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iași
 Faculty of Letters

ANGELO MITCHIEVICI, *Farmecul vieților distruse. Câteva reflecții despre ratare [The Charm of Destroyed Lives. Some Thoughts about Failure]*, București, Humanitas, 2022, 348 p.

The latest book signed by Angelo Mitchievici proposes a reflexive approach, through the perspective of self-knowledge, to a sufficiently challenging and unusual theme, that of failure. The natural tendency, moreover, of human nature to write, record and focus more on a positive, central existential side, that of fulfillment, imposes in itself the exploration of the reverse side, natural and human, of his reflection in the mirror, where he faces the other. Far from being consolidated in the form of a concept or negative pedagogy, as the author himself states, the theme of failure is presented in Angelo Mitchievici's book on the fictional and neutral field of literature, starting from Cioran's philosophy, where failure is the core, obsessive idea, and particularizing each individual case. Once again, literature manages to achieve its noble goal of offering perspectives, variants, cases, without imposing and without condemning.

With its entire suite of synonymous terms, from non-fulfillment to derealization, failure crosses the literary field in multiple forms, all coming together under the common sign of the ontological, since failure concerns the totality of existence down to the roots of one's destiny. The taste of reading this “intellectual investigation”, in Ioan Stanomir's terms, reveals a horizon of lives apparently dissolved of all meaning, drained of any possibility of reaching the fulfillment organically craved by human nature, which paradoxically, precisely by omission, gives meaning to their existence. From *The Desert of the Tatars* to *The Great Gatsby*, *Macbeth* or Mihail Sadoveanu's *Locul unde nu s-a întâmplat nimic [The Place Where Nothing Happened]*, from Voltaire to Mircea Eliade, Mircea Cărtărescu and the adventures of the comic strip hero Corto Maltese, Angelo Mitchievici's book conducts a survey of fictional underachievers who either accepted failure in their lives or not, who either resigned to it or fought to learn something from it, who evolved cognitively and spiritually or gave in to failure. Are failure and the feeling of failure the same thing? Is there an equivalent relation between the two terms, or not? A man who perceives affectively the emotion of failure, is he necessarily a loser? Reading the text reinforces the idea that the relationship between the two terms is one of an adversarial nature. It is possible to live with this sense of failure without ever really knowing it. Perceiving the feeling of failure leads to the nostalgia of *what if*. Questioning the present in relation to the echoes of past failures, as is the case with the feeling of vocational failure. A telling example in this regard is Professor Gavrilescu from Mircea Eliade's *La țigănci [With the Gypsy Girls]*, who lives permanently in the shadow of a life that will not have been, which fuels this sense of failure. At the same time, a fundamental notion emerges from the lines covered so far: at the organic level, the feeling of failure is by definition opposed to the rational, therefore, it is located deep in the soul, from where it never disappears.

Another interesting aspect touched upon in Angelo Mitchievici's study is failure viewed through the lens of philosophy and literature alike. In the struggle between philosophy and literature, philosophy is the loser – in thematic terms. In the chapter devoted to Voltaire's work, it is not Candide who misses his existence, but philosophy itself. As long as philosophy dictates the moral

course of the character's existence – a character emptied of content at that, failure is inevitable. Accepting life outside the philosophical system is the first step towards healing and, why not, towards fulfillment. Candide finally manages to anchor himself in a fragment of existence, which is impossible to do without renouncing the principles that influenced him up to that point in life. Could Candide be a loser? Perhaps, but as long as there is a sense of failure at the center of the catastrophe, Candide remains a defeated winner of fate.

In the same seductive manner of the text, literature is joined by examples of nuances of failure from the world of cinema, in the films *The Big Cracker* (Marco Ferreri) and *The Fatal Passion* (Louis Malle), both ruled by the sign of decadence, a familiar theme to the author and addressed by Angelo Mitchievici in his previous research. The decadent landmarks from the first film come together under the umbrella of epicureanism, the *dolce far niente*, but also that of saturation, a morbid excess that forms a single meaning towards a single destination: failure. In the case of *La Grande Bouffe*, where fulfillment, the equivalent of maximum happiness, is reached, where all that could be added is exhausted, the whole system is stifled, so the vacuum of suicide becomes the exceptional attraction. Erotic decadence is illustrated in *Fatal Passion*, where failure wears the mantle of the *femme fatale*, the enigmatic and destructive heroine of the decadent era of the late 19th century. What emerges here is a splendid image of failure in its erotic, almost enchanted essence, which leads to the decline of only one candidate for failure: the man who is predestined to failure in the form of the *femme fatale*. In this way, his life acquires a particular charm, the charm of destroyed lives.

Whether we are talking about fictional worlds or biography, one thing is certain: failure implies the sharpening of the assumed non-fulfillment, appropriated by the process of existence. The loser is perfectly aware not only of his experiences, but also of the way in which the loss gave him the key to self-knowledge. On the one hand, in his perpetual restlessness, Cioran has a deep dissatisfaction with the ephemerality of everything that exists, with the lack of eternity, transposing the idea in his reflections on failure: the failed man is crowned with the aura of wisdom precisely through the fact that he realizes the perishability of existence and, paradoxically, this gives him peace and comfort in the midst of failure: nothing is worth the effort. On the other hand, the book concludes with the theological perspective on failure in the parable of the prodigal son, where failure becomes the path to salvation, the triumph against failure through failure. Thus, self-knowledge is complete and success takes the place of failure. The charm and, why not, the balance and harmony of destroyed lives are installed, all recoverable in a book whose pages fascinate and invite day-dreaming.

Alongside Angelo Mitchievici's previous books dealing with decadence and Decadentism – *Mateiu I. Caragiale. Fizionomii decadente* [*Mateiu I. Caragiale. Decadent Physiognomies*] (2007), *Decadență și decadentism în contextul modernității românești și europene* [*Decadence and Decadentism in the Context of Romanian and European Modernity*] (2011), *Simbolism și decadentism în arta 1900* [*Symbolism and Decadentism in 1900's Art*] (2011), the present volume undoubtedly captures a reflexive-aesthetic expression of these themes, which transcends the didacticism of intellectual research by its much more intense, much more confessional character. The author assumes this personal approach as a consequence of the assimilation of the discursive metabolism of the themes of decadence. Dandyism, *la femme fatale*, the Moldavian Crepuscularism in *The Place Where Nothing Happened* are evoked and analytically revisited, this time in a manner that suggests a deep meditation on the human condition. Also, the references to cinematography are not accidental; they are due to the profile of the author as a film critic, Angelo Mitchievici being also the columnist behind the film chronicle in the cultural magazine *România literară*.

Therefore, the present book is the image of a refined essayistic regrouping of the arts, literature and film under the discreet, almost intimate pen of the prose writer.

Raluca Georgiana BABII
 "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Iași
 Faculty of Letters

ȘTEFAN BAGHIU, OVIO OLARU, ANDREI TERIAN
(eds.), *Beyond the Iron Curtain. Revisiting the Literary System
of Communist Romania*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2021, 274 p.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, intellectual elites – regardless of their ideological alignment at the time of the totalitarian regime – created a discursive community based on an anti-communist ethos, manifested mainly in literary historiography. The outcome is visible, first and foremost, in terms of the construction of the scholarly canon and, consequently, the reception of literature after December 1989. As Alex Goldiș points out in one of his books (*Critica în tranșee: De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului* [*Criticism in the Trenches: From Socialist Realism to Aesthetic Autonomy*]), the birth of the “autonomy of aesthetics” in the melting pot of anti-communist literary criticism (in order to prevent political interference) has survived to this day, as evidenced by the school curricula or the outdated methodologies used to teach literature in schools. A series of clichés have proliferated in the Romanian consciousness and discourse, metonymically substituting “communism” for “murder”, thereby leaving no room for interpretation, nuance or revision.

In these circumstances, *Beyond the Iron Curtain*, edited by Ștefan Baghiu, Ovio Olaru and Andrei Terian, aims to revisit the system of Romanian literature during communism, “beyond anticommunist interpretative commonplaces” (p. 21). At the forefront of the studies is Andrei Terian’s article, which deconstructs the anticommunist ideology of post-revolutionary Romanian historiography (Nicolae Manolescu, Eugen Negrici and Marian Popa providing relevant case studies). Using the concept of a “metahistorical” perspective, which is a priori to the discourse of literary criticism and history, Andrei Terian investigates the mechanisms by which literary history is highlighted from a metanarrative point of view. Socialist Realism (1948–1964) is a hiatus in the “development” of Romanian literature, due to the interference of political and ideological apparatuses in the cultural field. It is also the reason why, Andrei Terian explains, post-communist literature is seen as decadent, as a downgrade after the 1960s and 1980s generation had re-established a unit of measurement of real “value”. At the end of his considerations, Terian questions Hayden White’s theory because it derives from the idea that “the acknowledgement of a certain ‘logic’ of history also entails its unconditional acceptance” (p. 39). In order to overcome this paradox of historical evolution taking completely different metahistorical forms, the author establishes that the *perspective* (personal value system) of historiography plays an important role in shaping the metahistorical component. In this regard, there can be empathetic, antipathetic, apathetic or pathetic perspectives.

The rurality and “the formula” of socialist realism in the Romanian novel have often been overlooked by literary critics for at least two reasons: being subordinated to politics, socialist realism has not yielded any “great masterpiece” (ergo, it does not deserve to be explored in detail) to Romanian literature. Secondly, the vulgus argues that ruralism becomes a minority issue with the urbanization of modernity or, when it is performed, it falls prey to idolization. In her article, Daiana Gârdan reads the Romanian novel from the Stalinist period through quantitative investigations in terms of themes or stylistics. What she demonstrates is that, in essence, the distinct formal characteristics of this sub-genre make it possible to discuss a widespread literary phenomenon with a complex thematic texture (corporeality, temporality, and the human condition) and a high level of formalization that cannot be overlooked. Emanuel Modoc begins his analysis of the functions of the rural milieu in the Romanian novel from 1948–1989 with a rather interesting statement from the point of view of canonical construction: “we can now retrospectively acknowledge that the strategy of vilifying perhaps the most representative theme indicative of Romanian identity – rurality – has led to the consolidation of a literary canon that is nonetheless modern” (p. 84). Modoc’s study shows the different “sides” of the rural decorum (which means that the use of rural tropes does not imply an assimilated ruralism) negotiated through different narrative formulas: as a utopia in the first phase of the dictatorship, then as a counter-utopia (in the case of novels that thematized collectivization) and as a background to the import of magical realism, for example, through which the communist project

was demystified. Cosmin Borza's purpose in "The Faces of Rural Modernity in the Romanian Novel of the Agricultural Collectivization" is to question platitudes about collectivization as a "war against the peasantry" by investigating "vulnerable categories and the bureaucratization of the relationship between the individual/community and the state" (p. 68). If Borza comes to the pertinent conclusion that the collectivization process and the ideological thaw contributed to the expansion of the social universe of the Romanian novel, Andreea Mironescu demonstrates that gender hierarchies were reinforced throughout socialist modernism, by applying a gender studies analysis to Nicolae Breban's most well-known novel.

The year 1968, when Nicolae Ceaușescu refused to invade Czechoslovakia despite the Warsaw Treaty, is of great historical importance for the Romanian literary system. The second group of articles focuses on the types of cosmopolitanism exercised by post-1968 literary groups or productions. Doris Mironescu uses the concept of "vernacular cosmopolitanism" to analyse the subversive mechanisms of the Iași Literary Group, which was neither heroic nor fully opportunistic. Moreover, as Mironescu concludes, "performative conviviality was an instrument for the group manifestation of dissident attitudes" (p. 129). While Imre József Balázs explores the way in which the values of the West and capitalism were recontextualized in the trilingual magazine *Echinox*, precisely as subversive political mechanisms, Ștefan Baghiu and Costi Rogozanu provide a thorough analysis of the myth of the superstar in the communist period, with an application to (the death of) Marin Preda, who epitomises the Eastern European correlative of the Western "bohemia". In the spirit of detective inquiry, Ramona Hârșan demonstrates how metafiction (along with its adjacent forms such as the pluristratified autofictional extension) was imported from Western (postmodern) culture as an alibi for anti-communist ideology that passed invisibly through unofficial censorship. Finally, Mihai Iovănel observes how translations of UFO (non)fictions have seen an inflation since 1968. These narratives were imported thanks to the "epistemological metaphor" that was compatible with the communist metanarrative during the Cold War: there are aliens behind capitalist governments plotting against their own citizens. However, Western borrowing weakens with the 1970s and 1980s because of the isolationist measures imposed by Ceaușescu.

In the last section of the book, Adriana Stan, Ovio Olaru, Alex Goldiș and Costi Rogozanu contribute with case studies on Romanian literature under communism in a transnational context. Ovio Olaru's article focuses the debate on the ideological "history" of German microculture during the totalitarian régime, distinguishing three periods (an ethnocentric one, one that adopted ideas from Western Marxism during Ceaușescu's ethno-nationalism, and an internationalist one), and the reasons why it dissolved after the downfall of communism. Adriana Stan traces the import of structuralism across the Iron Curtain and how it was assimilated by Romania or Hungary, for example. She shows that French theory respects core-(semi-)periphery transfers and is shaped by local idiosyncrasies when imported. After analysing the impact of translated French and Latin American novels on Romanian culture, Alex Goldiș provides a few useful observations on Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, among which the fact that translations establish intercultural relations but do not define them entirely. Costi Rogozanu's study draws parallels between different cases of dissidence (Petru Dumitriu, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Czesław Miłosz), attempting to propose a rereading of the Gulag experience from the perspective of the West's fascination with Eastern violence.

In conclusion, *Beyond the Iron Curtain* is the first volume in the history of Romanian criticism to open its analysis to the ill-famed communist period, which needs to be looked at through so many lenses and methodologies relevant to 21st century theory, such as gender studies, distant reading, criticism of suspicion or world-system analysis.

Emanuel LUPAȘCU

Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca,
Faculty of Letters

CĂLIN TEUTIȘAN, *Scenarii ale criticii: protagoniști, metode, interpretări* [*Scenarios of Criticism: Protagonists, Methods, Interpretations*], Cluj-Napoca, Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2021, 276 p.

Published in 2021, the volume *Scenarii ale criticii: protagoniști, metode, interpretări* [*Scenarios of Criticism: Protagonists, Methods, Interpretations*] by Călin Teuțișan represents the author's plea in favor of various members of the Cluj academic community, aiming to outline clear directions regarding the interpretative hypotheses they promote.

Right from the title, the work announces a complex theme due to the plurality of perspectives for approaching "scenarios of criticism" within the academic space of Cluj. In this regard, the objectives set by the researcher and highlighted from the beginning ("Argument: Pentru o comunitate critică" ["Argument: For a Critical Community"], pp. 7-12) target the identification of connections, whether superficial or deep, among certain Cluj critical figures. Furthermore, the argument seeks to highlight the "turning points" (p. 7) located between generations of critics, with an emphasis on the relationship established with predecessors and the way they deviate from the options promoted by them. Călin Teuțișan's merit lies in tracking the evolutionary paths of a critical community consisting of critics from different time periods associated with the Cluj school of literary studies, each with sometimes divergent interpretative perspectives.

Regarding the adopted methodology, the researcher opts for an analysis from the perspective of the "categorical" on one hand (p. 8), and on the other hand, he focuses on "historical recovery". The parameters underlying this approach are exclusively of a conceptual-theoretical nature. The following seven chapters, under a process of detailed analysis, map out the architecture of the book, articulating the evolution of Cluj literary criticism based on different historical periods.

The first chapter, "Sinteza critică a unui postlansonian" ["A Critical Synthesis of a Post-Lansonian"] (pp. 13-29), focuses on the literary historian and comparatist D. Popovici, who adopts a specific critical typology of "historical scientific determinism" (p. 14). However, his interpretive practice is influenced by the deep model taken from Gustave Lanson, which explains the critic's post-Lansonism orientation. Among the identified surface models are the French professors M. Roques and Paul Hazard. Under the influence of these models, D. Popovici's merit for the Cluj school lies in highlighting the role of synthesis before text analysis, as well as that of the theory of criticism before applied criticism, ultimately echoing the idea of an alternative canon.

The next chapter focuses on "Critica între metafizică și raționalism. Utopia organică" ["Criticism between Metaphysics and Rationalism: The Organic Utopia"], subjecting to analysis Ioana Em. Petrescu's critical discourse. Due to the cultural object benefiting from an "intuitive translation" (p. 32), the critical formula adopted by Ioana Em. Petrescu aims at revelatory criticism, operating with rationalist tools. Rationalism becomes the very method of operation, while metaphysics serves as the finality, and their formative energy is exerted on the poetic. Thus, the discussion touches on the transition from the category of the individual to that of the rational, allowing for a definition of postmodernism as a mode of "rehabilitation of the category of the individual" (p. 37). This view sees the individual as a dynamic system that complements modernism through a partial coincidence of the two directions, rather than a mere continuation of a cultural phase that has already concluded. The critic also focuses on clarifying the concept of a "cosmological model" through a more explanatory and systematizing type of criticism.

Another perspective on paradigm shifts, focusing on the transition from modernism to postmodernism, is outlined in Chapter III ("Tentațiile metodei. Între 'critica pură' și 'știința literaturii'" ["The Temptations of Method: Between 'Pure Criticism' and 'Literary Science'"]) from the perspective of the critic Liviu Petrescu. With an interpretive practice rooted in the field of literary science, the volume *Poetica postmodernismului* [*The Poetics of Postmodernism*] provides a theoretical framework for postmodernism, analyzed with essentially modernist tools. Directed

towards the model of postmodernism's definition proclaimed by Jean-François Lyotard, Liviu Petrescu describes this postmodern phenomenon in terms of the episteme emerging against the backdrop of an internal erosion process. In this context, the postmodern fragmentism is investigated by the critic in opposition to the modernist totalitarianism.

In Chapter IV, titled "Poetici și stilistici. Istoria literară ca mediere critică" ["Poetics and Stylistics: Literary History as Critical Mediation"], Călin Teuțișan examines the critical discourse and analytical competencies of Ion Pop, largely derived from the perspectives of the Geneva School. The status of Ion Pop as a critic is much more evident through his monographic work in volumes dedicated to Nichita Stănescu and Lucian Blaga, revealing the stakes of the critical act, oriented towards "synthesis" and "periodization". Later, the monographs dedicated to Ilarie Voronca, Gellu Naum, or Ioan Alexandru are examined from the perspective of the relationship between the ontological and the aesthetic, with an emphasis on the dialectics of the avant-garde and the neo-modernist. However, the map of avant-gardism is re-evaluated with the volume *Avangarda în literatura română* [*The Avant-Garde in Romanian Literature*], published in 1990, which, connected to the features of the European avant-garde, highlights the specific nuances of Romanian avant-garde manifested in its "political engagement", "eclectic nature" and "modern synthesis" (p. 90). Ion Pop's construction of the avant-garde is based on the idea of synthesis. The critic's mediating capacity is evident through the excessive use of the term "neo-modernism" applied in the analysis of the poetic generation of the 1960s and 1970s in the volume *Poezia românească neomodernistă* [*Romanian Neomodernist Poetry*]. The reader's attention is also drawn to Ion Pop's roles as a "mentor of the Echinox poets" (p. 95) and a poet himself.

Mircea Muthu's history and theory are also organized between mediation and synthesis, according to the research in Chapter V ("Morfologia culturală, între estetică și balcanologie" ["Cultural Morphology: Between Aesthetics and Balkanology"]). This chapter begins with the two research directions proposed by the critic, namely aesthetics and Balkanology. From the perspective of the first direction, the merit of the critic lies in distinguishing between the two categories, general aesthetics and applied aesthetics, with his inclination towards general aesthetics. The influence of aesthetics in Muthu's Balkan studies is based on the relationship between written and oral culture, or in other words, between the visual and the auditory. His Balkanological research allows for a differentiation between "Balkanism" and "Balkanness", followed by a mapping of the meanings of Balkanism. As noted by Călin Teuțișan, Mircea Muthu's panoramic view provides a systematization of the issues related to the identity of the Levant in relation to Western Europe, and later the debate extends to self-identity as well.

Chapter VI, which occupies a significant part of the work (pp. 145-210), presents Corin Braga's perspective on "the archetypology of the imaginary and the archetypology of culture" (as the chapter is titled). Viewed from the perspective of the phenomenological analysis of the imaginary, the volume *Lucian Blaga. Geneza lumilor imaginare* [*Lucian Blaga: The Genesis of Imaginary Worlds*] contains a series of interpretations influenced by psychoanalysis. Meanwhile, the monographic study *Nichita Stănescu. Orizontul imaginar* [*Nichita Stănescu: The Horizon of the Imaginary*] benefits from an analysis with psychoanalytic tools and is seen as a "psychoanalytic criticism thesis" (p. 153). These concepts are later detailed in Braga's critical approach, oriented towards theoretical exercises synthesized in the work *10 Studii de arhetipologie* [*10 Studies of Archetypology*], where the debates focus on the synapses established between the age of psychoanalytical criticism and the age of psychohistory/psychogeography. In the analysis of the volume *De la arhetip la anarhetip* [*From Archetype to Anarchetype*], carried out by Călin Teuțișan, the transition from the concept of "archetype" to that of "anarchetype" in Braga's work is considered. Operating with the latter concept allows for the discussion of the distinction between postmodernity and post-postmodernity. Another conceptual innovation by Corin Braga and a different form of operation of the work is that of "eschatype" (p. 166), through which a work becomes capable of "archetypal invention" (p. 167). In the series of cultural analyses of the imaginary, psychoanalytical criticism studies, psychohistory, and psychogeography are not overlooked. These studies allow for the definition of utopia, but find their

functionality in Corin Braga's work under the generic concepts of "anti-utopia" and "counter-utopia" (p. 179). Additionally, Corin Braga's investigations benefit from a psychoanalytic reading, focusing on the "psyche of the authors studied" (p. 186), which enables a change in the interpretation vector, the analysis now starting from the author's perspective. Braga's output as a prose writer is summarized as oniric literature which takes shape in the cycle of novels *Noctambulii* [*The Noctambulists*] and in the dream journals *Oniria* and *Acedia*.

The last chapter, "Sinteze douămiiste și postdouămiiste" ["Syntheses of the 2000s and Post-2000s] deals with a series of critical approaches including representatives of the Cluj School of Literary Studies who have organized their research in one of three directions: critical monographism, critical and historico-literary synthesis, and quantitative and World Literature studies. In the second orientation, we find Alex Goldiș' study, *Critica în tranșee: De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului* [*Criticism in the Trenches: From Socialist Realism to Aesthetic Autonomy*], a "cultural morphology" (p. 218) focused on the crisis that marked the discourse of local criticism after 1948. To provide a deeper analysis of political and aesthetic discourses from the 1960s and 1970s, Alex Goldiș resorts to a suspicious critique and implicitly to ideological symptomatology. More recent literary studies focus on "distant" readings", in the terms of Franco Moretti, which allows them to be incorporated into the sphere of the concept of *World Literature*. Initially applied to comparative literature, this concept transcends boundaries and also finds functionality in literary history, literary theory, and literary criticism. Before considering the applicability of this concept in contemporary Romanian literary studies, Călin Teuțișan provides an overview of quantitative research methods promoted by Moretti, with an emphasis on digital schemes reduced to graphs, maps, and trees. Among the post-millennial critics of the Cluj School interested in quantitative studies and *World Literature* are Emanuel Modoc, who revisits avant-gardism in *Internaționala periferiilor* [*The International of Peripheries*], Ștefan Baghiu, who focuses on translated literature, Daiana Gârdan, who conducts quantitative analysis of the novel from a spatial perspective, and Ovio Olaru, who conducts research in the field of *Digital Humanities*.

Ionuța ILIEȘ

Technical University of Cluj-Napoca
Faculty of Letters

Robert CINCU, *Postmodernismul în teoria literară românească* [*Postmodernism in Romanian Literary Theory*].
Foreword by Ioana Bot, Alba Iulia, OMG Publishing, 2021, 232 p.

Mapping the efforts to define, delineate, and clarify a controversial literary concept carries an unmistakable canonizing dimension. The theoretical and methodological disputes inherent in postmodernism research have, from its earliest attempts at conceptual circumscription, emphasized an awareness of the work-in-progress nature of the studied cultural phenomenon. Within the field of Romanian literary theory, segmented by the limitations of a political context that precluded synchronization with the most current Western debates, the belated adoption of the term and the initiation of efforts to quantify the permeability of native culture to postmodernist literature ensued.

In *Postmodernismul în teoria literară românească* [*Postmodernism in Romanian Literary Theory*], Robert Cincu chronicles the evolution of the postmodernism concept in Romanian literary theory from a chronological perspective. Positioned at a considerable temporal distance from the "battles" waged to circumscribe the features of the postmodernist cultural phenomenon, the critic objectively analyzes the contributions of Romanian theorists and assesses their impact on what could be defined as the theoretical canon of postmodernism. The critic consistently employs canonization

techniques, selecting a group of representative authors whose theoretical insights have been validated and have influenced the consolidation of other such insights.

Starting from the second half of the 1980s to the present day, Romanian literary criticism has predominantly focused on defining and individualizing the postmodernist movement. The theoretical field has diversified and been nuanced, crystallizing into a genuine Romanian theoretical canon. Robert Cincu reconstructs the stages of the postmodernism concept in Romanian culture, highlighting the most important sequences in the Romanian biography of the concept. The shaping and reshaping of the canonical configuration of Romanian postmodernism theory undergo the interpretative frameworks provided by the stylistics of critical discourses, focused on clarifying a concept in the making for Romanian literature. The readings proposed by the author in various theoretical texts clarify the rise of the theoretical canon of Romanian postmodernism and broaden perspectives on the domestic space's synchronization efforts with a central subject in Western debates. By expressing the intention to reconfigure "a history of postmodernism theorizing in Romanian culture", Robert Cincu not only conducts a literary analysis but, through a remarkable dissociative spirit, captures the interconnections between literature and theory, between the object and subject of critical discourse. As a literary historian concerned with the comprehensive impact of the researched ideas, the author of the volume takes sufficient methodological precautions. The author chronology meticulously structures his argument, and his own definitions attributed to postmodernism take a secondary role, complementing the critical scenario of evaluating and confronting various theoretical perspectives put forth by writers.

This panoramic view of theoretical discussions in the Romanian space is masterfully achieved by Cincu, demonstrating how the specificity of theoretical hypotheses crystallized over more than two decades adapted to the dismantling of demands imposed by totalitarian ideology by using stylistic strategies that relied on subversiveness and discursive ambivalence. The first part of the volume is dedicated to the rise of the postmodernism concept in Romanian culture, with the cultural phenomenon's biography beginning between 1974–1985. The reconfiguration of the postmodernist theoretical canon starts from its very foundations, simultaneously integrating a cultural recovery initiative. The first theoretical contribution to defining postmodernism in the Romanian culture is identified by the author as belonging to the Americanist Andrei Brezianu. His article, "Post-modernii americani. O traiectorie spre viitor" ["American Post-Modernists: A Trajectory towards the Future"], was published in 1974 in the cultural magazine *Secolul 20*, overturning the prejudice about the lack of information regarding this literary phenomenon, given that "in 1986 many Romanian theorists still spoke of postmodernism as a poorly known trend" (p. 26). Following the innovations of American prose characterized as postmodern, Brezianu identified key features of the cultural phenomenon: its "isolated" nature, nonconformism, intertextuality, the aesthetic reactualization of old literature, permeability to new means of communication, and a "self-sufficient" register that presaged the abandonment of the "Romanian strictures of the past centuries" (p. 27).

The analysis of theoretical discourse not only acts as a catalyst for Robert Cincu's endeavor but also represents one of the most challenging strategies of canonizing theories, supporting the ingenious observations of the literary historian, and providing a possible explanation for the genesis of ideas and potential influences leading to their consolidation. Thus, Brezianu's article "partially appears as a report on the main topics discussed at the seminar where we can assume the author participated" (p. 28). Through another stylistic observation, highlighting the incompatibility between Brezianu's enthusiastic argument and the final paragraph, written in a "wooden language, typical of communist magazine editorials", the critic subversively explains the discursive mechanisms the article's author employs to publish his text by outwitting censorship. Andrei Brezianu's text represents a somewhat obscure foundation of the Romanian theoretical canon of postmodernism, a fact that can be explained by the author's intention to highlight some particularities of the cultural phenomenon as it manifests itself in the American prose, without delving into the then thorny issue of the existence or possibility of Romanian postmodernist literature.

However, the generality of his contribution is complemented by the following pieces of the theoretical canon. Ion Bogdan Lefter's text, which opens the volume *Postmodernism. Din dosarul*

unei "bătălii" culturale [*Postmodernism: From the File of a Cultural "Battle"*] (2000), provides a biography of the term *postmodernism* in Romanian culture, attempting to establish its initial occurrences. The critic correlates the term's appearance in Romanian literature with the essays by English scholars who introduced it in the prefaces and studies accompanying translations. Ion Bogdan Lefter cites, as an example, the preface "Poemul ca gest" ["Poetry as Gesture"], written by the English scholar Ștefan Stoenescu, which accompanies his translation of Frank O'Hara's poems (1980). Robert Cincu notes that postmodernism is not analyzed as a bundle of distinct features or as a generative source of literary forms; instead, it becomes a label meant to justify placing Frank O'Hara's poetry "in a broader context, so defining postmodernism constantly remains in the background" (p. 31). The critic also draws attention to the imprecision of the attribution of the term, which starts to encompass numerous frames of reference, a point also suggested by Ion Bogdan Lefter. With Alexandru Mușina, the Romanian theoretical canon of postmodernism gains greater precision in defining the senses of the concept through the description of the new type of sensibility that led to the emergence of the concept of everyday poetry. The new sensibility is augmented by a "new anthropocentrism". Robert Cincu identifies in Alexandru Mușina's theory a clever strategy to alleviate the methodological difficulties of defining the postmodernist cultural phenomenon and notes that "Mușina sometimes prefers to describe postmodernism not by what this trend specifically entails, but especially by what this literary trend failed to capture" (p. 34). Also relevant is Mușina's theoretical discourse evolution from the enthusiasm of establishing a new cultural paradigm to skepticism and insistence on its unfulfilled promises by highlighting the need to describe and individualize the trend in relation to something else. It is worth mentioning that Jean-François Lyotard defined postmodernism as a series of changes in modernist literary style and expression. While Fredric Jameson emphasized the schizoid nature of postmodern art, which he believed reflects the fragmentation of the self, Lyotard's definition focuses on the existence of a complex artistic paradigm that combines multiple meanings of the past and the plurality of postmodern contemporary realities.

The 1983 edition of *Caiete critice* brings together a series of theoretical contributions by some of the most representative critics of the 1980s. According to Nicolae Manolescu, postmodernism is directly related to two other artistic movements, the avant-garde and "mannerist modernism". Since it fails to create new literary forms, the postmodern cultural phenomenon "constitutes a form of tempered avant-garde aesthetic exercise" (p. 38). Robert Cincu demonstrates that generalization and relativization are not only tempting but also risky for theorists aiming to decipher the mechanisms supporting the functioning of a system. The critic shows how, despite its coherence, the terminological framework employed by Manolescu is imbued with semantic instability. The methodological choices guiding Manolescu's argumentation have a positive effect, extracting another set of emblematic features for postmodernist literature: irony, intertextuality, the bookish trait, self-citation, and the excessive use of clichés. Magdalena Ghica (a pseudonym for Magda Cârneli) adds consumerism and fragmentation to the list of characteristics, intuitively completing the descriptive "geography" of the concept upon which future contributions to the analysis of the postmodernist phenomenon will be based. In this initial stage of configuring the theoretical canon of postmodernism in the Romanian context, the main intention is to define the phenomenon and capture its facets, manifestations and characteristics.

After an initial period of intuitive theoretical exploration, it is time to test the first hypotheses and evaluate their adaptation to Romanian culture. The 1986 volume of *Caiete critice* marks the integration of the cultural phenomenon into Romanian literature. Consequently, it is "entirely dedicated to the theoretical clarification of the concept of postmodernism" (p. 45). The core of the debates revolves around a Western bibliography that becomes known and disseminated by Romanian theorists in their own studies. This issue of the *Caiete critice* gathers Romanian initiatives to clarify the concept, interviews with writers, and translations of some of the most important contributions of Western theorists. Translations of texts by John Barth, Gerald Graff, Jean-François Lyotard, Ihab Hassan, or Guy Scarpetta mark another stage of permeability of the local cultural milieu to the postmodernist phenomenon. The debates are no longer purely intuitive but are supported by an

awareness of the importance and cultural relevance of a trend that successfully avoids the possibility of being conventionally defined by explanations of its specificity and limitations.

Robert Cincu meticulously analyzes the theoretical contributions of the writers present in the volume, paying attention to the methodological toolkit, conceptual clarity and stylistic nuances of each discourse. From Eugen Simion's demonstration highlighting the impossibility of articulating a definition of postmodernism, to the articles by Livius Ciocârliu or Nicolae Manolescu emphasizing the ongoing nature of postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon and the richness of perspectives from which it is approached, this literary trend emphasizes the volatility of scientific definitions and the methodological arsenal. The postmodern essays written by Mircea Cărtărescu, Călin Vlasie, and Ioan Buduca blend various applications of the main features of the trend, which the author of the volume identifies as "a discourse occasionally metaphorized/confessional, constructed from short phrases that give the impression of universally valid truths, namely aphoristic sentences" (p. 63). The relationships between theorists and Western bibliography are interpreted and integrated by the critic into the hermeneutic equation aimed at explaining the mechanisms supporting this performative complexity of postmodernist manifestations. Contributions by Andrei Pleșu, Radu G. Țeposu and Monica Spiridon amplify the performative nature of the trend and relativize the possibility of the existence of a "definitive" and entirely edifying bibliography, as postmodernism is still evolving and undergoing conceptual clarification.

The sensitive points of Romanian postmodernist theory are unveiled by the author of the volume, who critiques the digressions, inconsistencies, and heightened doses of conceptual abstractions, explaining their genesis. Robert Cincu analyzes the theories put forth by Ioana Em. Petrescu, Liviu Petrescu, Gheorghe Crăciun, Carmen Mușat, or Mihaela Ursa and reveals the network of interactions and theoretical contaminations with various critical orientations that panoramically depicted the cultural environment in the second half of the 20th century. The influences of textualism and deconstructivism reveal the dimension of generational fracture implicated by the postmodernist cultural phenomenon, as it pertains to "not an entire generation, but an important segment within that generation", with postmodernism dissociating itself from the "neo-modernist, late-modernist, neo-avant-garde" tendencies present within the same generation (p. 184).

The end of the debates underlines the necessity for systematizing and synthesizing the conclusions of the discussions, leading to the emergence of dictionaries proposing interpretations of key terms used in discussing the postmodernist movement. This event marks the canonization of the movement and its theoretical extension. The author of the volume demonstrates that the diversity of opinions, contradictions and conceptual inconsistencies correspond to the ethereal physiognomy of the postmodernist cultural phenomenon. The Romanian theoretical canon only serves to show that "a hallmark of postmodernism itself" lies precisely in the "fact that a consensus cannot be reached regarding the classification of Romanian theories on postmodernism" (p. 218).

A cultural phenomenon that has acquired the guise of a new episteme in which language, knowledge and literature function in a novel and diversified manner, postmodernism attracts a range of theoretical reflections that best reflect the harmonization strategies of a particular cultural space with a subject that poses serious conceptualization difficulties. In the volume *Postmodernism in Romanian Literary Theory*, Robert Cincu highlights all the nuances of configuring indigenous theories of postmodernism and, implicitly, all the stages of articulating a theoretical canon meant to reflect the cultural and ideological specificities of the cultural milieu, by attempting to define it in relation to the shaping force this culture exerts upon it, and adapt it to this culture's social-political and artistic realities.

Alexandra OLTEANU

"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Iași
Faculty of Letters

CONTRIBUTORS

Stefan Baghiu, Ph.D., Lecturer

Affiliation: Faculty of Letters and Arts, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.

Contact details: Lucian Blaga University, 10 Victoriei Str., 550024 Sibiu, Romania. Email: stefan.baghiu@ulbsibiu.ro

Alina Bako, Ph.D., Lecturer

Affiliation: Faculty of Letters and Arts, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.

Contact details: Lucian Blaga University, 10 Victoriei Str., 550024 Sibiu, Romania. Email: alina.bako@ulbsibiu.ro

Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, Ph.D., Research Assistant Professor

Affiliation: Faculty of Philology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków.

Contact details: Institute of Romance Studies, Adam Mickiewicz Avenue 9 A, 31-120 Kraków, Poland. Email: olga.bartosiewicz@uj.edu.pl

Laura Cernat, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Researcher

Affiliation: KU Leuven, FWO (Flemish Research Foundation).

Contact details: KU Leuven, Faculty of Arts, Blijde Inkomststraat 21, box 3311, 3000 Leuven, Belgium. Email: cernat.laura@kuleuven.be

Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu, Ph.D., Lecturer

Affiliation: Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.

Contact details: Babeş-Bolyai University, 31 Horea Str., 700506 Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Email: andrada.pintilescu@ubbcluj.ro

Leena Käosaar, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Affiliation: Institute of Cultural Research, University of Tartu.

Contact details: University of Tartu, Ülikooli 16, 51014 Tartu, Estonia. Email: leena.kaosaar@ut.ee

Tomasz Krupa, Ph.D., Research Assistant Professor
Affiliation: Faculty of Philology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków.
Contact details: Institute of Romance Studies, Adam Mickiewicz Avenue 9 A, 31-120 Kraków, Poland. Email: tomasz.krupa@uj.edu.pl

Anca-Simina Martin, Ph.D., Lecturer
Affiliation: Faculty of Letters and Arts, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.
Contact details: Lucian Blaga University, 10 Victoriei Str., 550024 Sibiu, Romania. Email: anca.martin@ulbsibiu.ro

Ioana Moroşan, Ph.D., Research Assistant
Affiliation: “G. Călinescu” Institute of Literary History and Theory, Romanian Academy.
Contact details: Romanian Academy, 13 September Str., sector 5, 050711, Bucharest, Romania. Email: ioana.morosan@inst-calinescu.ro

Larisa Prodan, Ph.D. Student
Affiliation: Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.
Contact details: Babeş-Bolyai University, 31 Horea Str., 700506 Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Email: prodanlarisa29@gmail.com

Manca G. Renko, Ph.D., Research Associate
Affiliation: The Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences (ZRC SAZU).
Contact details: Institute of Culture and Memory Studies ZRC SAZU, Novi trg 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia. Email: manca.renko@gmail.com

Brigitte Rigaux-Pirastru, Ph.D., Research Associate
Affiliation: CHUS, Catholic University of the West, Angers, France, and 3L.AM, University of Angers, France.
Contact details: Catholic University of the West, 3 place André Leroy | BP 10808 49008 Angers cedex 01, France. Email: bpirastru@uco.fr

Bavjola Shatro, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Affiliation: Faculty of Education, Aleksander Moisiu University, Durrës.

Contact details: Aleksander Moisiu University, Lagjja 1, Rruga e Currilove, Durrës, Albania. Email: bgami@kent.edu

Lola Sinoimeri, Ph.D. Student, Researcher

Affiliation: Sorbonne University and Paris 8 University; CEFRES – French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences, Prague.

Contact details: CEFRES, Na Florenci 3, CZ-110 00 Prague 1, Czech Republic. Email: lola-sinoimeri@riseup.net

Olga Słowik, Ph.D., Independent Researcher

Contact details: Email: olga.slowik.olga@gmail.com

Natalija Stepanović, Ph.D. Student

Affiliation: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London.

Contact details: University College London, Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom. Email: natalijastepanovic@yahoo.com

Fanni Svégel, Ph.D. Student

Affiliation: Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

Contact details: Eötvös Loránd University, Múzeum körút 6-8., H-1088 Budapest, Hungary. Email: fanni.svegel@hotmail.com

Snizhana Zhygun, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Affiliation: Faculty of Ukrainian Philology, Culture and Art, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University.

Contact details: Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Lukyanenka str. 13b, Kyiv, Ukraine. Email: s.zhyhun@kubg.edu.ua