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**Lena Constante: The Bilingualism of Feminine Writings
or About the Ineffable**

Summary

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Key-words: bilingualism, Romanian communism, trauma, confessions, self-translation, discursive footprints, ineffable

We believe that the various contemporary challenges of the construction of memory, be they issued by the literary practices or by the extra-literary discourses, have refreshed the interest for memoirist writings. Setting as goal to draw attention to the resources of language when faced with trauma, our paper suggests new research directions for this field. Approaching the memoirs that were written bilingually, in order to apply a historic and literary reevaluation, allows us a double closeness to the object that is being researched, out of the necessity to reenact “history”.

The epicenter for our reflections is the memoirist triptych written by Lena Constante, *L'évasion silencieuse. Trois mille jours, seule, dans les prisons roumaines* (*The Silent Escapes*), written in French, the Romanian version, as translated by the author herself, being titled *The Silent Escape: Three Thousand Days in Romanian Prisons* and, respectively, *The impossible escape. The political prison for women in Miercurea Ciuc: 1957-1961*. From the point of view of the writing of both texts in French, we have sought to complete the research of Lena Constante's text through a dialogue with the prison memoirs written by Madeleine Cancicov, in the same language of “secondary biography”, *Le Cachot des marionnettes. Quinze ans de prison. Roumanie 1949-1964*. The contrastive analyses of these texts resizes the space being investigated, by marking some misappropriated variants of expressing traumas. The choice of the French language is not the only common ground for the two memoirists. Outside of the texts, inside the Miercurea Ciuc penitentiary, inmates Lena Constante and Madeleine Cancicov were cell mates for two years, along with tens of other women.

In the endeavor to follow a figurative reading, we choose to “listen to the phrase, to the never-ending modulations inside it which transform us into beings of utterance” (my translation), using the force of utterance as a selection criteria. We are preoccupied then with the search for and identification of just those areas which – under an apparent inconsistency – escape analysis and genre interpretation.

Trying to address these hypotheses, we progressively examine the institutional, biographical and conceptual contexts that this type of writing voices. The bibliographical resources regarding this formula for “writing the past” have become visibly richer in the past decades. Going through the literature, we are now able to remark on the different theoretical approaches, that have tried to answer matters about the relationship between experience and writing. By recovering the critical discussions

we can extend our reflection, by examining the category of the ineffable, within the unique circumstance in which it is grafted unto the phenomenon of the bilingualism of writing, both being at the center of our focus regarding the literature of political imprisonment. Bilingualism is not understood here with the meaning that practicing both languages would be (elusive, in fact) perfectly balanced, but rather that the author writes and publishes in two different languages. Our research sets out to approach the writings of Romanian female writers, singled out, first of all, through their choice of the French language as a form of expression. The new analyses and the contribution our endeavor brings to the literature of concentrationary spaces all answer questions about the study of the text's genesis, about bilingualism and about practices of self-translation within the expression of trauma, the imaginary of languages (the French and the maternal language) in utterance („*esthétique du dire*”), the relationship established by the memoir with the literary space, the aporias of the ineffable and the discursive traces of it.

Thus, the object of our study proves that the ineffable is that point of neuralgia around which this type of writing is built, nourished and unfolded. In order to utter the trauma (and especially in the case of the volumes used for this research), the ineffable is not just a simple theme, but rather a part of the written gesture, that it processes, making it present. In actuality, the author applies a style of writing that does not claim to surrogate itself to the literary language. Marked by the ineffable, the writing showcases various shapes that interrogate the possibilities of language, manifesting, simultaneously, its limitations. Consequently, this research presents the ineffable as an essential reading key in literary or extra-literary works that we have analyzed, or – extrapolating, in the memoirs that reference traumatic aspects regarding the recent past.

Memoirs manage to “keep themselves at a distance” from the historical truth in various ways, and the cases shown along our process become pertinent examples of an indirect representation of trauma. In the texts confessing detention, recurrently, the tendency of authors to claim that they cannot “utter” the experience has been observed. However, when closely examined, the works are able to pass on the traumatic events through a *different language*, through a misappropriation.

This observation allows us to bring forth the idea that the studied texts seem to express the experience of the communist detention, the so-called “indescribable”, by distancing the trauma and through a language that questions or negotiates the reality of that particular event. Analyzing the ineffable proves that the respective writings do not offer confessions about a lived reality, but rather that they place inside the narrative a doubt about the singular and individual experience, giving shape

to confessional forms. Thought out as a hermeneutic piece that completes the already existing research in the field of concentrationary trauma confessions, our approach is part of the reflection on the “singular utterance”, its goal being to extend the notion of articulating traumas, into an oblique shape.

The second chapter focuses on the confessional speech from the point of view of the bilingual profile of Lena Constante and her memoirist writings. The author's biography, francophone and francophile, constitutes the hard nucleus of our hermeneutic process, through the identification of the specificity of the confessional pact. This chapter brings forth arguments and details of a historical and literary nature, as well as interpretive, based on which the presence of the French language and culture in the artistic endeavors of the author are reconstituted. Thus, the “French network” of professional and human relationships that gave the author a coherence of identity, both before as well as, especially, in the post-detention period, is rebuilt.

While studying the link between confession and fiction, the third chapter continues to explore the ways in which representation is made problematic. This chapter looks at thinking about confession as a self-standing genre, where the ineffable becomes an aporia and bilingualism illustrates the language's ability to represent. Implicitly, our endeavor moves the analysis towards the problematic aspects of bilingualism and the bilingual cultural identity, as it is constructed by the biographies of memoirists and by the expression of trauma in another language. We looked thus at the functions and consequences of crossing from one linguistic space into another within the phenomena of rewriting memoirs. The endeavor focuses on the relationship that the author has with the two languages, reconstituting a linguistic biography by overlapping the cultural spaces with which she has come into contact with, but also through the history of the writing of the two versions.

Chapter four has, on the one hand, a reading from the point of view of traductology of the bilingual versions of *The Silent Escape*, opening a conversation about the position as self-translator of Lena Constante. With the intent to advance a coherent frame of reference for the understanding of the expression “through four hands”, we focus our attention on the motivations and ways of rewriting, and later on, the endeavor shifts its angle of analysis towards the characteristics of the translation. Self-translation will be seen as a distinct species of the theory of the ineffable, presented in a counterpoint manner. The direction of the translation process is from the French language towards the Romanian language and consists of rewriting the original text. On the other hand, this chapter brings about the rhetorical analysis of the volumes of memoirs, in terms of the generic porosity that this particular genre circumscribes.

Anchored, on the one hand, in theoretical considerations which stem from the memoirist recovery in the area of literary history, the endeavor aims to bring attention to some reenactments “following in the footsteps” of the text, which arrive from the direction of a literature seen, often times, as if being at the outskirts. Our interest in the discursive footprints and the ineffable remains of the writing, and not in the reconfiguration based on events of the studied literature, has posed challenges pertaining to both methodology and concept, that we have sought to address by appealing to theoretical bibliographical resources from very different fields.

Lastly, given these analyses we can conclude that the literary testimony of Lena Constante is a “hybrid form”, that denies any rigid theoretical indexation, that her writing resists the norms of categorization established through usage. At the edge of things, we could say that we are dealing with an “experimental” type of writing, if the generator of the experiment were not, as an existential experience, one so violent that it cancelled any aesthetically playful comfort of the writing. The subjectivity of discourse, the placing inside the narrative of the events and the turning of the reader into an instrument amount, in turn, to variables that destabilize the genre. In the case of the body of texts studied, the linguistic dimension and the expression of the trauma in another language, the self-translation process from French into Romanian, the different system for representation in the fine arts, are all just facets that supplement meaning. Working both under formal constraints, under the “traumatic memory”, but also submitted to the regime of rewriting, Lena Constante's memoirist project gave birth to a type of subjective literature that passes on a sense of “the rest”, escapes the forms and particularities of the genre, depending on the dynamic of remembrance and the strength of utterance.