

**Spectres of Patriarchy:  
Reading Absence in Jorge Semprun**

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## Declaration of Authorship

I, Avril Tynan, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

Jorge Semprun's narratives of memory are intricately manipulated and mediated, exhibiting to the reader a carefully selected performance of communicable and comprehensible experience, concentrated on the page and between the covers. However, his effusive presentation of text is merely a veneer, obscuring the abyss of an incommunicable and unimaginable history. Semprun's secrets lie in the silenced substrata of his literary and cinematographic projects, illuminated through close readings and comparative analysis. From the gaps and ellipses in his works emerges the unwanted and unwritten (unwriteable) spectre of a useless and absent father, concealed in the visible in-visibility of fetishized memory. Eliding the paternal figure, Semprun challenges the universality of the Lacanian phallic signifier, the *nom-du-père*, and undermines the paternalistic and patriarchal Symbolic structures of his life and works. José María Semprún Gurrea haunts every word of his son's memorial enterprise, becoming a duplicitous voice that negates and displaces subjective identity as a self distinct from an other. The phallogocentric construction and perception of history, expressed by a dominant and unwavering patriarchal discourse, is subverted, as the fatherly elision liberates the author from the paternalistic constraints of linguistic order. From the silenced negative space of literature emerge the Derridean spectres of forgotten others: woman, the exile, the dead, haunting the insidious structures of European patriarchy. Semprun's works transgress the boundaries of absence and presence, life and death, sublimating time, space, and identity, so that textual absence engulfs the narrative: the author writes himself out of existence. Semprun is haunted by a paternal phantom, but his auto-erasure demonstrates that he too is already a ghost, his repetitious absence from the life of his own son a chilling revelation of the causes and effects of the failures of paternity and patriarchy in the post-World War II era.

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## Introduction

### Spectres of Patriarchy: Reading Absence in Jorge Semprun

*Never trust biographies. Too many events in a man's life are invisible.*

-Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*.

The life of Jorge Semprun<sup>1</sup> comprised a fascinating amalgamation of the political and cultural extremes of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. Born in Madrid on 10 December 1923 to an upper-middle-class Republican family, the fourth of seven children born to José María Semprún Gurrea and Susana Maura Gamazo, Semprun's early years were spent living in Calle Alfonso XI, close to the Parque del Retiro. His home schooling was dominated by a Catholic and political education, supplemented by artistic, linguistic and literary teachings, thanks to multi-lingual governesses and his father's immense library.<sup>2</sup> In 1932, Susana died of septicaemia,<sup>3</sup> and two years later José María married his children's Swiss-German governess, Annette (Anita) Litschi.<sup>4</sup> Semprun's family were well connected to the Republican government: his maternal grandfather, Antonio Maura y Montaner was a prominent figure under Alfonso XIII, an influential advocate for the Restoration, and five-time Prime Minister and governor for both Liberal and Conservative parties.<sup>5</sup> Among Maura's children, Miguel and Gabriel would enter the political arena within the controversial Second Republic (1931-39), while Honorio became a committed Falangist and Monarchist who was killed by Republican rebels in 1936.<sup>6</sup> Semprun's father, José María Semprún Gurrea, was a key figure in the Republican government, and his commitment to Catholic and Republican values remained resolute throughout his life. In the summer of 1936, while the family were holidaying in Lekeitio, in the Basque country, Civil War broke out in Spain, with military uprisings in major cities across the country, including in Madrid. The family fled Spain from the port of Bilbao, arriving in Bayonne where they were accommodated by Jean-Marie Soutou, one of Sempún Gurrea's *Esprit* contacts.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after, Semprún Gurrea was recruited by the government of the Spanish Republic-in-exile as *chargé d'affaires* in The Hague,

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<sup>1</sup> In line with the parameters of this thesis within French literature, I have used the French transcription of Semprun's surname. In the transcription of the same surname when applied to other members of the family, such as Semprun's brothers or his father, I have preserved the Hispanic accent (acento agudo) over the 'ú'.

<sup>2</sup> 'La bibliothèque paternelle' occupies a mysterious symbolic space for Semprun, evoking '[un] désir enfantin, douloureux, de savoir et de possession'. Only one book from this library survived the military coup in 1936, accompanying the family on holiday: Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. *Adieu*, 48-49.

<sup>3</sup> Tidd, *Jorge Semprún: Writing the European Other* (London: Legenda, 2014), 5. According to Augstein, the cause of death is unconfirmed. *Lealtad y Traición: Jorge Semprún y su siglo* [2008], trans. by Rosa Pilar Blanco (Barcelona: Tusquets, 2010), 36-37.

<sup>4</sup> Tidd, 'Jorge Semprún and the Myth of Woman', in *A Critical Companion*, ed. by Ferrán and Herrmann, 139; Augstein, *Lealtad y Traición*, 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Federico Sanchez*, 71; Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Federico Sanchez*, 71-72; Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 4-5. Miguel is also credited as one of the founders of the Second Republic.

<sup>7</sup> *Adieu*, 15.

where Jorge would attend school for two years,<sup>8</sup> before Dutch sympathy with the Franco regime forced the family back into exile. Moving back to Paris to study at the prestigious Lycée Henri-IV with his elder brother Gonzalo in 1939,<sup>9</sup> Jorge quickly mastered the French language and excelled at his studies, finding particular interest in the study of philosophy, for which he came second in the national *Concours général* in 1941, and planned to study further at the Sorbonne.<sup>10</sup>

With Nazi occupation of France evoking Franco's fascist grip on Spain, the teenage Semprun's involvement with the Résistance movement occurred 'tout naturellement'.<sup>11</sup> Establishing a connection with the Parti communiste français (PCF) and the *Franco-tireurs et partisans – Main d'œuvre immigrée* (FTP-MOI), Semprun made contact, through Michel Herr, son of Lucien Herr, with *Jean-Marie Action*, part of the wider *Buckmaster* network, directed by Henri Frager.<sup>12</sup> Arrested by the Gestapo in October 1943 in Joigny, Semprun was tortured and incarcerated in Auxerre prison for four months.<sup>13</sup> From there, he was deported to Buchenwald concentration camp via Compiègne on 27 January 1944, where he arrived on 29 January and was registered as a *Rotspanier* (Red Spaniard), prisoner number 44904.<sup>14</sup> Buchenwald was not a new camp at the time, having been established in 1937 as a re-education centre for political detainees (opponents to Hitler's NSDAP), and many German Communists had already been incarcerated within various facilities since the party had come to power in 1933.<sup>15</sup> By the time Semprun arrived, strong networks of Communist resistance had been established within the infrastructure of the camp itself and, with his knowledge of French, Spanish, and German, Semprun was appointed to the *Arbeitsstatistik*. Here, he worked alongside other political detainees allocating prisoners to labour duties, a task which enabled them to undertake carefully organised sabotage work, such as assigning known Communist activists to certain roles within the camp that would be most disruptive, and preventing their movements to smaller – often fatal – satellite camps.<sup>16</sup>

As Allied forces entered Buchenwald on 11 April 1945, Semprun was swiftly returned to France, though the act of repatriation was frustrated by Semprun's exilic status within the country. As he tells it in *Le Grand Voyage*, as a Spanish national with only refugee status in France, he was unable to receive any of the financial aid being handed out to his comrades.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Si la vie*, 38-39.

<sup>9</sup> *Si la vie*, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Si la vie*, 43-44. See also *Le Langage*, 103.

<sup>12</sup> *Si la vie*, 45-46; *L'Écriture*, 79; *Le Langage*, 62.

<sup>13</sup> See *L'Évanouissement*, 35-46.

<sup>14</sup> Ferrán and Herrmann (eds.), introduction to *A Critical Companion*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> See *Quel beau* for a discussion of Communist networks within Buchenwald 110; 210-14.

<sup>16</sup> See *Quel beau*, 32-34. For a discussion of the resistance work carried out in Buchenwald, see 201-09.

<sup>17</sup> See *Le Grand Voyage*, 129-35.

After the war, Semprun worked as a translator for UNESCO, although his readjustment to civil life was complicated by continued efforts to remember and to write his experiences of the camp. Eventually choosing a life of political activism, in order to orientate himself towards the future, rather than the past,<sup>18</sup> Semprun began full-time undercover work with the Parti communist espagnol (PCE) in 1953.<sup>19</sup> In 1954, Semprun's work within the PCE was rewarded, as he entered the Central Executive Committee alongside Dolores Ibárruri – la Pasionaria – and Santiago Carrillo. However, as Nikita Khrushchev gave his report at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, titled 'On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences', criticising the regime of Josef Stalin and the purges that had dominated the post-war period, cracks were beginning to show in the structure of the PCE and in the beliefs held by its members.<sup>20</sup> After Josef Frank was found guilty of collaboration with the Nazis during the 1952 Slánský show trial in Prague, Semprun had remained silent, despite having worked alongside Frank in the *Arbeitsstatistik* and being, therefore, assured of his innocence.<sup>21</sup> However, with the failures of national strikes in 1958 and 59, Semprun became disillusioned by the obsolete strategies employed by the PCE that were entirely out of line with the social, economic, political, and cultural realities of Spain at that time.<sup>22</sup> Removed from undercover operations by Carrillo in 1962, Semprun's expulsion from the party alongside Fernando Claudín<sup>23</sup> coincided with the beginnings of a meteoric literary career.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, the party would go on to adopt a number of the approaches proposed by Semprun and Claudín under the auspices of Carrillo's new *Eurocommunism*: 'As Régis Debray would later remark to Carrillo himself, the only "sin" that Semprun and Claudín seemed to have committed was that of being right before their time'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> 'Ainsi, entre 1945 et 1947, je ne parviens pas à écrire sur l'expérience de Buchenwald. [...] La thérapie face au poids de ce passé destructeur, c'était la politique. Car la politique, surtout celle de la gauche révolutionnaire, est toujours tournée vers l'avenir, vers demain.' *Le Langage*, 75-76.

<sup>19</sup> Before 1953 he had worked voluntarily with both the PCF and the PCE, but his permanent involvement with the PCE was due largely to the draw of returning (even clandestinely) to Spain. *Si la vie*, 92-93.

<sup>20</sup> Nicoladze, *La Deuxième Vie de Jorge Semprun: Une écriture tressée aux spirales de l'histoire* (Castelnaule-Lez, France: Éditions Climats, 1997), 51.

<sup>21</sup> *Autobiographie*, 119.

<sup>22</sup> *Autobiographie*, 224-50.

<sup>23</sup> Official dates vary across 1964 and 1965. See Herrmann and Ferrán, introduction, 35 n.9. The terminology used, referring to 'exclusion' and 'expulsion' in equal measure, is also open to discussion. See Txetxu Aguado, 'Dissidence, Citizenry, and Witnessing: Three Screenplays by Jorge Semprun', in *A Critical Companion*, ed. by Ferrán and Herrmann, 199 n.10.

<sup>24</sup> *Le Langage*, 50-51.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Ofelia Ferrán, 'Memory and Forgetting, Resistance and Noise in the Spanish Transition: Semprun and Vázquez Montalbán', in *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*, ed. by Joan Ramon Resina, 204.

Following a short marriage immediately after the war,<sup>26</sup> Semprun had his first son, Jaime, in 1947 with the actress Loleh (Marie-Laure) Bellon, to whom he was briefly married.<sup>27</sup> His later marriage to Colette Leloup in 1963 lasted until her death in 2007, and the two were buried side by side in Garentreville, with Semprun's coffin wrapped in the flag of the Spanish Republic, according to his request.<sup>28</sup>

With the publication of *Le Grand Voyage* in 1963, Semprun was awarded the Prix Formentor in 1964, and the book was subsequently published in twelve other languages.<sup>29</sup> From this point, his literary oeuvre expanded rapidly, primarily in French, and occasionally in Spanish, to critical acclaim both in France and abroad, culminating in his admission to the prestigious Académie Goncourt in 1996 (and the highly controversial debates surrounding his rejected candidacy for the Académie Française).<sup>30</sup> Semprun would return to politics in 1988, as Spanish Minister for Culture in the Socialist government of Felipe González (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) until a reshuffle in 1991, amid continued controversy and crisis at the heart of the party.<sup>31</sup> Semprun died in 2011, and the body of work that he left behind, including novels, autofictional narratives, plays, film scripts and screen plays, speeches, essays and articles has been – and continues to be – a source of creativity, reference, and analysis for readers and researchers across the globe.

Semprun's engagement with an extensive range of cultural, political, historical, intertextual and multilingual issues precludes his confinement to one specific area of analytic research. Instead, his works have been considered both individually and comparatively from the perspectives of German, Spanish, French and English, as narratives of exile, memory and trauma, Republicanism, the Holocaust, Communism, bilingualism, maternal loss and European cohesion. Early work on Semprun was dominated by his inclusion in the Holocaust canon, and an acute interest in what Lawrence Langer terms the 'nonchronological method'<sup>32</sup> employed provocatively in *Le Grand Voyage* and throughout subsequent work. Allusion to Proust, propagated by the now quasi-anecdotal *Survie et réinterprétation de la forme Proustienne:*

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<sup>26</sup> This first marriage is shrouded in mystery, but is mentioned in Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 7 and Xavier Houssin, 'Jorge Semprún, un écrivain au paysage intime bouleversé', *Le Monde*, 8 June 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Augstein, *Lealtad y Traición*, 231.

<sup>28</sup> Official Reuters statement, 'L'écrivain espagnol Jorge Semprún est mort', *Le Monde*, 7 June 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Although the Spanish version was notoriously left blank, as Franco's censorship prevented the book's publication. *Le Langage*, 72-73; *L'Écriture*, 350-54.

<sup>30</sup> *Le Langage*, 30-31.

<sup>31</sup> These events are recounted in detail in *Federico Sanchez*. Semprun recounts his resignation in favourable light, as a compromise drawn up between himself and González. *Federico Sanchez*, 243-44.

<sup>32</sup> Lawrence Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 252.

*Proust-Déry-Semprun*,<sup>33</sup> and two pieces by Brett Ashley Kaplan,<sup>34</sup> enabled discussion of the conflation of temporal planes as an imaginative device that allows Semprun ‘to survive trauma by seeking respite through aesthetic pleasure’,<sup>35</sup> despite his explicit disinclination towards Proust’s work.<sup>36</sup> Françoise Nicoladzé has offered a significant contribution to the field of study in three monographs, beginning with *La Deuxième Vie de Jorge Semprun: une écriture tressée aux spirales de l’histoire*, which presents a deeply personal approach to Semprun’s literary treatment of identity and death. In 2002, *La Lecture et la vie, œuvre attendue, œuvre reçue: Jorge Semprun et son lectorat* innovatively combined narrative analysis with responses from questionnaires sent out to Semprun’s readers, compiling a uniquely creative and investigative reaction. Her most recent work, *Relire Jorge Semprun sur le sentier Giraudoux pour rencontrer Judith* is remarkable for its attempts to trace a purely literary thematic across his oeuvre. The breadth of her comparative analysis of French literature is noteworthy in itself, but also provides a fascinating tour ‘en abîme’<sup>37</sup> through Semprun’s life and works that marks a new contextual and stylistic genre of research. Elsewhere in French language research, María Angélica Semilla Durán’s *Le Masque et le masqué: Jorge Semprun et les abîmes de la mémoire* is of particular note, as it prematurely departs from traditional research trajectories, such as Buchenwald and the PCE, to turn towards the centrality of the maternal figure in literature and in the creation of a stable identity. More importantly for this thesis, Semilla Durán sets the groundwork for research that will question the neutrality of Semprun’s literary works, recognising that autobiographical writing both is and is not the life of the author.<sup>38</sup> María Liénard Ortega’s unpublished thesis, *Images féminines dans l’univers fictionnel et autofictionnel de Jorge Semprun*, stands out for what it attempts to achieve in mapping the progression and significance of female characters through Semprun’s oeuvre, although the sheer volume of examples employed through analysis ultimately results in little more than a superficial engagement with scattered concepts. Finally, interviews conducted with Semprun by Gérard de Cortanze, Jean Lacouture, and Franck Appréderis, (the latter two published posthumously in

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<sup>33</sup> The integration of Egri’s work into the text demonstrates its foundational position in Semprunian research, forming an inter- and intra-textual point of reference and identification for the author himself. See *L’Algarabie*, 38.

<sup>34</sup> “‘The Bitter Residue of Death’: Jorge Semprun and the Aesthetics of Holocaust Memory’, *Comparative Literature*, 55.4 (2003), 320-37, and *Unwanted Beauty: Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Brett Ashley Kaplan, ‘The Bitter Residue’, 335.

<sup>36</sup> Semprun overtly criticises the style of Proust’s work, *L’Algarabie*, 39-40; 298. He states that he only concluded his reading of *À la recherche* (begun in 1939) in 1982, *L’Écriture*, 193.

<sup>37</sup> Nicoladzé, *Relire Jorge Semprun sur le sentier Giraudoux pour rencontrer Judith* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2014), 13.

<sup>38</sup> See Semilla Durán, *Le Masque et le masqué: Jorge Semprun et les abîmes de la mémoire* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2005), 7.

2012 and 2013 respectively) confront a number of intricate details obscured by the use of fiction, and directly interact with the author independently of his works.

In English, research has, until very recently, been primarily undertaken in the shape of theses, journals, and book chapters. Of note are articles by Colin Davis, and Davis and Elizabeth Fallaize, for what they offer in the treatment of the concentrationary experience and of the relationship between memory and identity. Work by Susan Rubin Suleiman, on the repetition and revision of the *Beruf/Berufung* anecdote upon Semprun's entering Buchenwald, questions the problematics of witnessing and testifying, while Bella Brodzki's *Can These Bones Live?* assesses the exhaustive processes of writing and living as continuous and contiguous practices that leave writing perpetually open-ended and unfinished. Gina Herrmann's *Written in Red: The Communist Memoir in Spain* approaches the deeply embedded political agenda of Semprun's autobiographical works, reading him 'first and foremost, as a Communist writer'.<sup>39</sup> Through comparative analysis with the works of Teresa Pàmies, Herrmann unmaskes their dissident autobiographies as a means of disentangling the subject from a conflicted past of misplaced ideological commitment, merging generosity and fraternity with show trials and selective memory. As narratives of exile and the Spanish Civil War, Semprun's works perform the paradoxically creative and constrictive potentials of physical and linguistic displacement, demonstrated through analyses by Michael Ugarte and Tijana Miletić.<sup>40</sup> Ursula Tidd has contributed a number of profoundly insightful articles to the field of research that demonstrate the perpetual cycles of 'autothanatological'<sup>41</sup> writing, and the significance of the maternal absence at the centre of an inexhaustible quest to write the self. Recently, three English language book-length studies – two monographs and one edited collection – have appeared in quick succession. Tidd's *Jorge Semprún: Writing the European Other*, Daniela Omlor's *Jorge Semprún: Memory's Long Voyage* and Ofelia Ferrán and Gina Herrmann's edited *A Critical Companion to Jorge Semprún: Buchenwald Before and After* have all significantly advanced the field of research through their careful consolidation of biography and scholarship. More importantly, they all indicate the critical move towards analysis of Semprun's lesser-known works, including his films, plays, and speeches, and engage with undervalued themes, such as art, feminism, incest, intertextuality, and philosophy.

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<sup>39</sup> Gina Herrmann, *Written in Red: The Communist Memoir in Spain* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 18.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Ugarte, *Shifting Ground: Spanish Civil War Exile Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989); and Tijana Miletić, *European Literary Immigration into the French Language: Readings of Gary, Kristof, Kundera and Semprun* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008). Interestingly, Ugarte positions Semprun alongside other exiles from Spain, such as Max Aub, Luis Cernuda, and Juan Goytisolo, while Miletić welcomes Semprun among literary immigrants into the French language, such as Milan Kundera and Romain Gary, underlining the contentiousness of the exilic narrative position.

<sup>41</sup> See Tidd, 'The Infinity of Testimony and Dying in Jorge Semprun's Holocaust Autothanatographies', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 41.4 (2005), 407-17.

Remarkably, of course, it should be noted that scholarship applied to Semprun's book-length narratives incontrovertibly and immensely exceeds research undertaken on his plays, essays, speeches, interviews, or scripts. Within this initial bias, a further public and scholarly predisposition favours particular works, such as *Le Grand Voyage*, *Autobiographie de Federico Sánchez*,<sup>42</sup> and *L'Écriture ou la vie*, which are seen as explicit discussions of specific events in Semprun's life, namely Buchenwald, or Communist politics. The aim of this thesis is to expand discussion of Semprun and his works beyond these contextual limitations, eliminating the temptation to categorise his oeuvre (as is explicitly done in Ferrán and Herrmann's introduction<sup>43</sup>) that thereby restricts the scope of research to a specific range of texts. Of course, through natural development, some works have proved more relevant than others to the ideas exploited in this particular thesis. Semprun himself claimed that 'mes livres sont presque tous des chapitres d'une autobiographie interminable',<sup>44</sup> evoking Philippe Lejeune's argument that an author 'n'est réductible à aucun de ses textes en particulier'.<sup>45</sup> Semprun's texts should not be read in isolation, but as contiguous voices of the author. Therefore, equal weight is applied to narrative, film, and theatre, as continual processes of engagement with memory and communication. Similarly, Semprun's commitment (or otherwise) to Lejeune's *pacte autobiographique*, does not cloud the selection or interpretation of his works. The extensive debates surrounding Semprun's texts (individually and collectively) as 'autofiction' essentially dismantle and reduce each work in the quest to distinguish 'autobiography' from 'fiction', with a far greater sense of importance, truth, historicity, and interest awarded to the former. *Le Grand Voyage*, *Autobiographie*, and *L'Écriture* have all benefited from this bias, since they overtly establish a sense of verisimilitude through the identities of protagonist, narrator, and author, whether directly as Jorge Semprun, or indirectly through one of his many confirmed pseudonyms (Gérard Sorel and Federico Sánchez in this case).<sup>46</sup> Previous research has consistently attributed greater value to texts and passages perceived as autobiographical, and corroborated by historical fact; however, the preconceived perception of fiction as a hindrance to truth needs to be revised.

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<sup>42</sup> French translations have been used for any of Semprun's texts originally written in Spanish: *Autobiografía de Federico Sánchez*, *Federico Sánchez se despide de ustedes* and *Veinte años y un día*. The use of translations is not to limit the reach of this thesis to that of a 'French' author, but to create a stable platform for thematic comparison between texts.

<sup>43</sup> See Ferrán and Herrmann, introduction, 12. They reduce narratives to four categories, while films, and 'Theater, Essays, and Other Texts' make up independent categories.

<sup>44</sup> Gérard de Cortanze, *Jorge Semprun: L'Écriture de la vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 264.

<sup>45</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 23.

<sup>46</sup> See Lejeune, *Le Pacte*, 13-46 for more on the vicissitudes of autobiographical identity.

In autobiography, Lejeune claims, the reader seeks out differences, while in the case of fiction, the reader attempts to establish similarities 'malgré l'auteur'.<sup>47</sup> Semprun's use of fiction should not be interpreted as a means of distorting the truth, but as an alibi for reality:

Si vous, lecteur, vous jugez que l'autobiographe cache ou altère une partie de la vérité, vous pourrez penser qu'il *ment*. En revanche il est impossible de dire qu'un romancier ment: cela n'a aucun sens, puisqu'il ne s'est pas engagé à vous dire la vérité. Vous pouvez juger ce qu'il raconte vraisemblable ou invraisemblable, cohérent ou incohérent, bon ou mauvais, etc., mais cela échappe à la distinction du vrai et du faux. [Original italics.]<sup>48</sup>

Fiction engages the reader in '*le pacte fantasmatique*', where fictional clues are indirect '*fantasmes révélateurs*'<sup>49</sup> of the author. Despite Semprun's admission that 'la vérité essentielle de l'expérience' can best be conveyed only 'par l'artifice de l'œuvre d'art',<sup>50</sup> analysis has typically sought to draw a line through his fiction in order to draw out the autobiographical truth. Yet, the *pacte fantasmatique* encourages the investigation of fiction as the only medium that cannot lie,<sup>51</sup> and that, through comparison with autobiography ('l'un *par rapport à l'autre*'<sup>52</sup>) reveals what Lejeune terms 'l'espace autobiographique': 'l'espace dans lequel s'inscrivent les deux catégories de textes et qui n'est réductible à aucune des deux'.<sup>53</sup> This approach encourages an investigation into the fiction itself, precisely where the author knew we would not look: 'Pour savoir, chercher la fiction'.<sup>54</sup>

In Semprun, *l'espace autobiographique* corresponds precisely to a gap or an absence, betrayed by *fantasmes révélateurs* hidden in plain sight but overlooked by readers seeking verifiable facts and figures. Through trauma studies, the site and importance of this space is revealed, as the author's deliberate manipulation of the text can be interpreted as a façade to mask underlying traumatic memory. Superficially at least, both the content and form of Semprun's works provide an elaborate foundation for discussion of traumatic repetition and the belated return of repressed memory. Langer, for example, whose reading centres on *Le Grand Voyage* as a Holocaust narrative, demonstrates how the juxtaposition of past, present and future within the cattle truck indicates the author's entrapment within the perpetual

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<sup>47</sup> Lejeune, *Le Pacte*, 26.

<sup>48</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *L'Autobiographie en France* (Paris: Armond Collin, 1998), 66.

<sup>49</sup> Lejeune, *Le Pacte*, 42.

<sup>50</sup> *L'Écriture*, 167.

<sup>51</sup> 'Seule la fiction ne ment pas; elle entrouvre sur la vie d'un homme une porte dérobée, par où se glisse, en dehors de tout contrôle, son âme inconnue.' François Mauriac quoted in Lejeune, *Le pacte*, 41.

<sup>52</sup> Lejeune, *Le Pacte*, 42.

<sup>53</sup> Lejeune, *Le Pacte*, 42.

<sup>54</sup> Kalinka Alvarez, 'Virtual Subject(s), humor and self-referentiality in Éric Chevillard's blog *L'Autofictif*', *International Colloquium in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century French and Francophone Studies* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 26-28 February 2015).

present of a traumatic memory that *'does not end [original italics]'*.<sup>55</sup> In Suleiman's work, she picks up on the repeated narration of the *Beruf/Berufung* episode as a 'revision'.<sup>56</sup> Retold across *Quel beau, L'Écriture* and *Le Mort*, she argues that in the repetition of this anecdote, Semprun not only re-writes it but re-views it, demonstrating the curative processes of testimony that prove the victims' developing mastery over the event. Page after page of unpunctuated, unstable narrative, slipping from one voice to another and in and out of chronological sequence, as seen in *L'Évanouissement*, or even in *Autobiographie*, evokes the unmediated immediacy of oral testimony,<sup>57</sup> while the split narrative voice (such as Federico Sánchez/Jorge Semprun in *Autobiographie*) – characteristic of Semprun's literary style – suggests Robert J. Lifton's traumatized 'second self' where 'one's sense of self is radically altered' by a traumatic event, provoking a doubling that creates a 'different person'.<sup>58</sup> Semprun's works thus naturally lend themselves to a reading of trauma, yet not all memory is traumatic, and, as Omlor prudently recognizes: 'trauma [should not be] considered in isolation from "normal" functions of memory but rather as a very specific facet of them'.<sup>59</sup>

Traumatic memory is distinguished from other forms of memory by the unique temporal delay that separates the experience of the event from its return as a symptom of trauma. In Freud's example of a train crash, in which 'someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident',<sup>60</sup> he emphasizes the lapse of time before symptoms of the shock appear. Freud terms this temporal delay 'latency' through which trauma can be diagnosed only after 'the successive movement from an event to its repression to its return'.<sup>61</sup> Latency points to an inherent void within the structure of trauma itself, an inaccessibility at the moment of experience that precludes its instantaneous registration. This temporal delay points to an understanding of trauma that hinges on a gap, rather than a symptom. The sequence of extraordinary events that made up Semprun's life do lend themselves to the suggestion that the author may have suffered from some form of post-traumatic stress disorder, but there is no publically available medical proof to support this. Nonetheless, his works clearly convey literary representations of trauma, but as the author,

<sup>55</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (eds.), *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 67.

<sup>56</sup> See Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 132-58.

<sup>57</sup> Pierre Janet's traumatic or oral memory opposes narrative memory: 'Narrative memory is described as linguistic, coherently structured, comprehensive, and highly constructed; traumatic memory is described as bodily, sensory, fragmented, intrusive, non-narrative, and accurately preserved'. Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 133.

<sup>58</sup> Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 137.

<sup>59</sup> Daniela Omlor, *Memory's Long Voyage* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 28.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Caruth, *Trauma*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 7.

Semprun makes a choice to present these *seemingly* unmediated qualities, *choosing* not to realign chronology or explain repetitive and circular practices. The frantic traumatic panic read through these works may in fact be the result of subtle mediation on the part of the author, desiring to recreate a *traumatic effect* that is intentionally employed in order to encourage a quick and easy association with an obviously traumatic and quantifiable encounter for the reader.<sup>62</sup>

Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, argues that if theory is correct in its assertion that trauma lends itself to the impossibility of representation, then we cannot assess the psychic and social status of trauma victims through direct recourse to their representation of events, instead 'one will have to become a reader of the ellipsis, the gap, the absence, and this means that psychoanalysis will have to relearn the skill of reading broken narratives'.<sup>63</sup> Trauma is, by its very nature, invisible, and is misled by direct assertions of its representation. In an epigraph from her work *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth quotes Michael Herr,<sup>64</sup> a former war correspondent, from his book *Dispatches*, published in 1977, where he writes:

It took the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did. The problem was that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes.<sup>65</sup>

Not everything that is captured can be expressed, or can even be *known* to be expressed, remaining a silent absence for days, months, even years, before it is even acknowledged. Semprun studies have been dominated by the active quest for expressions of particular events and experiences, such as Buchenwald or exile, that essentially craft the interpretation of narratives to fit a prescribed theme. Considering traumatic memories instead as the gaps or ellipses of text, betrayed by fictionalized *fantasmes révélateurs*, enables a new reading of Semprun to emerge. No longer blinded by the benign repetitions of overt traumas like the Holocaust, this thesis looks to the gaps and absences of narrative: the unwritten and the unwritable.

This thesis sets out to explore the absences within Semprun's otherwise effusive and consuming textual practice. Walter Benjamin's *One-Way Street* deconstructs society and history in order to reconstruct them through the minutiae of popular culture: the insignificant events that are overlooked yet unconsciously fundamental to the understanding of time and space. In

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<sup>62</sup> Certain events can be historically verified through dates and facts, and pertain to a reading of trauma: for example imprisonment in Buchenwald, Weimar, Germany from 1943 to 1945; entry into Bayonne, France in 1939, expulsion from the PCE in 1964, and the death of Susana Maura in 1932.

<sup>63</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 155.

<sup>64</sup> Not related to the aforementioned Michel or Lucien Herr.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 10.

one short section sub-titled 'Stamp Shop' he writes: 'To someone looking through piles of old letters, a stamp that has long been out of circulation on a torn envelope often says more than a reading of dozens of pages'.<sup>66</sup> Benjamin indicates how the proliferation of words written to be read is in fact not always the most interesting or important piece of the puzzle, and should not always be the focus of our attention. Overlooking the seemingly peripheral or marginal details, what Raymond Williams terms 'structures of feeling' are entirely ignored; but by turning to the apparently insignificant absences and silences of Semprun's works, his world can be reconsidered, as the attentive reader exposes 'what is actually being lived, and not only what it is thought is being lived'.<sup>67</sup> We must consider what has not been written, or what has been hidden in the constant verbal expression, repetition, and articulation that garner so much attention. Simply because something cannot be seen, or has not been presented to vision as narrative, does not mean that it does not exist, or that it never existed at some point.

Semprun's texts present the visible marks of communicable experience and memory; what they elide however, that which remains invisible, is nonetheless a vital constituent of the text. In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Le Visible et l'invisible*, he demonstrates how the invisible is not opposed to the visible, but is a part of it; it is what ensures that the visible remains visible:

L'invisible n'est pas le contradictoire du visible: le visible a lui-même une membrure d'invisibilité, et l'in-visible est la contrepartie secrète du visible, il ne paraît qu'en lui [...], Les *comparaisons* entre l'invisible et le visible [...] ne sont pas des *comparaisons* [...], elles signifient que le visible est prégnant de l'invisible, que pour comprendre pleinement les rapports visibles [...] il faut aller jusqu'au rapport du visible à l'invisible. Le visible d'autrui est mon invisible; mon visible est l'invisible d'autrui. [Original italics.]<sup>68</sup>

Like a blind spot in the human eye, caused by the very function of sight itself,<sup>69</sup> invisibility enables visibility:

Quand je dis donc que tout visible est invisible, que la perception est imperception, que la conscience à un "*punctum caecum*", que voir c'est toujours voir plus qu'on ne voit, – il ne faut pas le comprendre dans le sens d'une *contradiction* – Il ne faut pas se figurer

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<sup>66</sup> Walter Benjamin, *One-way Street and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. by E. F. N Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1979), 91.

<sup>67</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Structures of Feeling', in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 131.

<sup>68</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible, suivi de notes de travail* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 269.

<sup>69</sup> Blindness at a particular point in each eye is caused by the physical block corresponding to the location of the optic nerve that carries impulses from the retina to the brain. 'Ce qu'elle ne voit pas, c'est ce qui fait qu'elle voit, c'est son attache à l'Être, c'est sa corporéité, ce sont les existentiels par lesquels le monde devient visible, c'est la chair où naît l'*objet* [original italics].' Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible*, 301-02.

que j'ajoute au visible [...] un non-visible [...] Il faut comprendre que c'est la visibilité même qui comporte une non-visibilité [...] L'invisible du visible. [Original italics.]<sup>70</sup>

Transposing Merleau-Ponty's ideas into the realm of visual art, Derrida underscores the essence of art as an *ultravisibilité* 'non-liée au visible'.<sup>71</sup> In *Mémoires d'aveugle* he argues that the visible essentially produces its own blindness: 'Cette hétérogénéité de l'invisible au visible peut hanter celui-ci comme sa possibilité même [...] la visibilité du visible, par définition, ne peut être vue'.<sup>72</sup> In Semprun's works, the reader has been blinded by the obtuse visibility of narrative text that is, in reality, haunted by its own invisibility. Blinded and misled by belief in the mono-faceted structures of visibility, the reader sees nothing.

The co-dependency established between sight and the eyes has been overstated, concludes Derrida, for the loss of sight does not preclude the loss of the eyes themselves, and the loss of the eyes does not inhibit seeing, if in a non-visual manner. It is tears, and not sight, that are the essence of the eye:

Au fond, au fond de l'œil, celui-ci ne serait pas destiné à voir mais à pleurer. Au moment même où elles voilent la vue, les larmes dévoileraient le propre de l'œil. Ce qu'elles font jaillir hors de l'oubli où le regard la garde en réserve, ce ne serait rien de moins que l'*aletheia*, la *vérité* des yeux dont elles révéleraient ainsi la destination suprême: avoir [à voir] en vue, l'imploration plutôt que la vision. [Original italics.]<sup>73</sup>

Derrida challenges the deification of sight as the sole purpose of the eye, for it is the tear, the function that distinguishes man from animal and which veils the eye that simultaneously unveils vision:

L'aveuglement qui ouvre l'œil n'est pas celui qui enténèbre la vue. L'aveuglement révélateur, l'aveuglement apocalyptique, celui qui révèle la vérité même des yeux, ce serait le regard voilé de larmes.<sup>74</sup>

The gaps and absences of Semprun's works function as tears – as *larmes* and as *déchirures* – that *dévoilent* the invisible truth of his broken narratives. The command to look beyond the visible engages research with the spectral, since it is through the ghostly and the phantomatic that the binary of visibility and invisibility can be definitively transgressed or seen *from the other side*.

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<sup>70</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible*, 300.

<sup>71</sup> This term is not present in the printed edition of Derrida's introduction to the Louvre exhibition, but is mentioned in the VHS version. Jacques Derrida, *mémoires d'aveugle*, Jean-Paul Fargier (dir.), France, Musée du Louvre/Duran/Les Films D'Ici, 1991, 16min (VHS).

<sup>72</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'autportrait et autres ruines* (Paris: Édition de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990), 50 (print).

<sup>73</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle*, 125 (print).

<sup>74</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle*, 128 (print).

The ghost is the unwanted figure of a persistent presence that comes and goes, or materializes and evaporates at will. Often returning to enact revenge, Slavoj Žižek has argued that the dead return because *'they were not properly buried, i.e., because something went wrong with their obsequies [original italics]'*.<sup>75</sup> They return as the collectors of an unpaid symbolic debt, to right an injustice, or to heed a warning, and, once their task has been completed, they disappear again. In their temporary intrusion (back) into the world of the living, they cause a breakdown of literal and metaphorical borders. Neither living nor dead, the ghost occupies a liminal (in-) existence that ruptures the linearity of time, as the past becomes an ontological trace within both the present and the future. Ghosts walk through walls, and they undermine the permanency of binary oppositions: life/death, presence/absence, visible/invisible, past/present. Semprun's texts are haunted by the ghosts of his past, but they are haunting presences in themselves: visible marks that betray invisible traces. Transgressing the limits of genre, pronouns, narrative, and even the reassuringly solid form of the book, plots and characters break free of their carefully constructed home within a narrative and intrude into other works, returning as an uncanny *déjà vu* for the reader. Through *Spectres de Marx*, Derrida draws from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the persistent presence of the Communist ideology throughout Europe as examples of ghostly traces that are both visible and invisible, and his *hantologie* revolves around the concept that the ghost is always present, even where we perceive only of an absence. In the context of Semprun's works, the ghost becomes a critical figure because it forces the reader to look beyond what is being presented as concrete and known, or as Esther Peeren writes, it *'[draws] attention to what exists in the shadows and is usually ignored'*, calling attention to *'cultural and historical blind spots'*.<sup>76</sup>

This thesis questions what Semprun has hidden in plain sight, looking beyond the visible to what has been absented behind the verbose and overwhelming presence of text, and what falls into the abyss of the gap between each page, each word, and each letter. At the forefront of this investigation is a resounding silence that pierces every aspect of narrative – whether literary, cinematographic, or theatrical – Semprun's own father, Semprún Gurrea. Throughout Semprun's works, narration – explicit or implicit – of his father is virtually absent. With the exception of *Adieu, vive clarté...*, which offers a more lengthy insight into the family's early years in exile, and the demise of the once powerful father, narration of Semprún Gurrea is meagre to entirely non-existent. He is wholly absent from *Le Grand Voyage*, although Nicoladzé attributes this absence to Semprun's continued involvement as an executive in the PCE, and therefore, she claims, he would not have been in a position to evoke the contentious

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<sup>75</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 23.

<sup>76</sup> Esther Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 13.

aristocratic milieu of his childhood.<sup>77</sup> Throughout the remainder of Semprún's oeuvre, Semprún Gurrea appears intermittently, confined without exception to reminiscence and to a contextual and literal background. Where his name is evoked, it is always as a link to the political and cultural scene of pre-war Spain, as a prominent public figure with little sentimental or domestic description.

Born in Madrid in 1893, José María de Semprún y Gurrea<sup>78</sup> was a lawyer, a Catholic, an intellectual, a diplomat, a poet and a writer. In his political career, he was the civil governor of Toledo, and later of Santander, under the Second Republic.<sup>79</sup> Associated closely with José Bergamín, he was a founding member of the Spanish review *Cruz y Raya*, and contributed frequently to the leftist literary review *Esprit*. Vowing never to return to Spain while Franco was still alive,<sup>80</sup> Semprún Gurrea died in 1966, still in exile, the representative of the Spanish Republican government-in-exile in Rome.<sup>81</sup> While some work has been published on Semprún Gurrea's political and literary career,<sup>82</sup> these investigations never explore his family life, making only biographical assertions about the names of his wives, the dates of marriages, and the number and birth dates of his children. Secondary research on Semprún's father has been limited to fleeting remarks in a few rare publications, such as Omlor's analysis of *Vingt ans et un jour* in 'Reassessing History, Rediscovering Memory: Jorge Semprún's *Veinte años y un día*', where she links Semprún Gurrea to nostalgia and postmemory, arguing that he 'appears like a spectre at decisive moments of the novel'.<sup>83</sup> Franziska Augstein's *Lealtad y Traición: Jorge Semprún y su siglo [Loyalty and Betrayal: Jorge Semprún and his Century]*<sup>84</sup> promises a fascinating biographical approach that includes interviews conducted with Semprún's brothers and sisters. However, the silences that surround Semprún's relationship with his father are never confronted, greeted with only more silence and secrecy. Moreover, Augstein's approach is fundamentally based in historical fact and interview, neglecting to challenge her theories through narrative analysis. Recently, a short sub-chapter by Nicoladzé, 'Jorge Semprún and the

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<sup>77</sup> See Nicoladzé, 'Jorge Semprún and the Writing of Identity: Family Origins and Fictional Construction', in *A Critical Companion*, ed. by Ferran and Herrmann, 40.

<sup>78</sup> This is the name Semprún Gurrea employs for his work *República, libertad, estatismo: escritos, con sus fechas*. I shall refer to him in this thesis as Semprún Gurrea according to convention.

<sup>79</sup> Gonzalo Redondo Gálvez, *Historia de la Iglesia en España, 1931-1939: La Segunda República, 1931-1936* (Madrid: Rialp, 1993), 379, n.6.

<sup>80</sup> '[À] Rome, dans l'appartement [...] où mon père est mort, sans avoir revu l'Espagne, sans avoir voulu y retourner du vivant de Franco.' Federico Sanchez, 109. 'Il n'aurait jamais accepté de rentrer en Espagne, Franco vivant.' Cortanze, *L'Écriture de la vie*, 191.

<sup>81</sup> Redondo Gálvez, *Historia de la Iglesia en España*, 379, n.6.

<sup>82</sup> For example, in Redondo Gálvez, *Historia de la Iglesia en España*, he appears under section 3.2, 'Los hombres de *Cruz y Raya*'.

<sup>83</sup> Daniela Omlor, 'Reassessing History, Rediscovering Memory: Jorge Semprún's *Veinte años y un día*', *Nomenclatura: aproximaciones a los estudios hispánicos*, 1.1 (2011), 10.

<sup>84</sup> Original German: *Von Treue und Verrat. Jorge Semprún und sein Jahrhundert*. Read in Spanish translation, all translations from this text into English are my own.

Writing of Identity: Family Origins and Fictional Construction' in Herrmann and Ferrán's edited collection, and a paper by Semilla Durán entitled 'Padre(s) y hermano(s): estrategias de autoconstrucción en *Adieu, vive clarté* de Jorge Semprún y *El exilio fue una fiesta*, de Carlos Semprún Maura' ['Father(s) and Brother(s): Strategies of Autoconstruction in Jorge Semprun's *Adieu, vive clarté* and Carlos Semprún Maura's *El exilio fue una fiesta*'], have directly confronted the paternal figure. Despite their pertinent and insightful comments on the father-son relationship, they have been largely overlooked by mainstream research, falling outside the expectations of Semprunian discourse, and particularly the centrality of the maternal figure that dominates contemporary understanding.

Exploring the absence of the father figure permits a greater understanding of the family dynamic that is very specific to Semprun's life and writings, but it is simultaneously an indication of a rupture in the wider application of paternity and patriarchy. André Gide's infamous quotation, 'Familles, je vous hais!'<sup>85</sup> is often misquoted and taken out of context as an attack by the author on his own family. In reality, Gide refers to an expanded frame of reference with the term 'famille' as a "'cellule" [...] une geôle dont il est parfois difficile de s'échapper [...] qui peut s'appliquer à d'autres univers clos comme les familles politiques'.<sup>86</sup> Gide does not refer simply to the confines of his immediate family, but makes a statement on the societal and cultural pressures that promote constraint and submission, imprisoning the individual within preconceived orders. He refers, in other words, not only to a hatred for paternity, but also to patriarchy, narrowly defined as 'the system in which the male head of household [has] absolute legal and economic power over his dependent female and male family members'.<sup>87</sup> More widely, Gerda Lerner defines patriarchy as: 'the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general'.<sup>88</sup> Mary Harlow designates the specificity of paternal power [*patria potestas*] as the foundation of patriarchy; a system governed both domestically and publically by 'fatherhood and the ability to produce heirs'.<sup>89</sup> Reading paternal absence in Semprun enables a reappraisal of both private and public

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<sup>85</sup> 'Familles je vous hais! foyers clos; portes refermées; possessions jalouses du bonheur.' André Gide, *Les Nourritures terrestres et les nouvelles nourritures* [1897] (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), 74.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Désalmand and Philippe Forest, *Cent grandes citations expliquées* (Aleur, Belgium: Marabout, 1991), 96.

<sup>87</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Women and History, Volume One: The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 238-239.

<sup>88</sup> Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 239.

<sup>89</sup> Mary Harlow, 'In the Name of the Father: Procreation, Paternity and Patriarchy', in *Thinking Men: Masculinity and its Self-Representation in the Classical Tradition*, ed. by Lin Foxall and John Salmon (London: Routledge, 1998), 155.

dynamics, since 'the family not merely mirrors the order in the state and educates its children to follow it, it also creates and constantly reinforces that order'.<sup>90</sup>

In the introduction to her monograph, Tidd claims that Semprun's writing and thought is haunted by 'the European patriarchal imaginary'.<sup>91</sup> Reconsidering the paternal figure as an absence destabilises the core of the patriarchal imaginary, engaging with it *from the other side*. If Semprun's patriarchal speaking position is 'predicated on the silencing of the female subject as other whose difference is appropriated into the masculine universal',<sup>92</sup> then the absence of the central male figure creates an opportunity for the speaking position to be decentred, and all moral codes, laws, and structures wrapped up in the security of a stable patriarchy to be dispersed across a dynamic multivocal narrative. In absenting the paternal figure, Semprun offers the opportunity to comment on wider structures, free from the dominant patriarchal voice that governs the way experience is structured, both in the present and in the representation of memory. Semprun's narratives subversively attack not only the father, Semprún Gurrea, but the entire patriarchal structure initiated by generations of paternal function. Undoing the historic construct of patriarchal thought and practice, Semprun's works are liberated from the limitations and organization of the past.

Discussion of paternity and patriarchy in Semprun is therefore not limited to analysis of the biological father, Semprún Gurrea, but is expanded to incorporate the paternal function or position – the Lacanian Symbolic father – and thus the limitations of patriarchal structures. Within this enlarged framework, the *patrie*, or fatherland, is naturally incorporated, as a symbol of the political and social structures that command a sense of belonging and security. Semprun's position as an exile is therefore assimilated throughout this thesis, since exile indicates a rupture that displaces the singularity of the *patrie*, dissociating the subject from the 'cellule' or 'geôle' of a patriarchal fatherland. Exile will not be considered as a specific facet of Semprun's works, but as an inherent feature of their production and reception, becoming in itself a subversive form of patriarchy.<sup>93</sup> Tidd's belief in Semprun's speaking position rooted in the patriarchal masculine universal of French and Spanish economies is preserved, but is fragmented by the rupture of exile. This thesis demonstrates how the paternalistic structures that govern Semprun's life and works are undermined and criticised through his own narratives, and more importantly, it will analyse the highly personal reasons behind this aversion to the paternal. The author's elimination of the paternal figure commands a review of Semprun's

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<sup>90</sup> Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 217.

<sup>91</sup> Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 10.

<sup>92</sup> Tidd, 'Exile, Language, and Trauma in Recent Autobiographical Writing by Jorge Semprún', *Modern Language Review*, 103 (2008), 698.

<sup>93</sup> Semprun even claims 'J'avais fait de l'exil une patrie'. *L'Écriture*, 353.

works, emancipated from the structural presences that determine social, cultural, and literary imaginings.

Significant attention will be paid to *L'Évanouissement*, *La Deuxième Mort de Ramón Mercader*, *L'Algarabie*, *La Montagne blanche*, *Netchaïev est de retour*, *Adieu, vive clarté...*, *Le Mort qu'il faut*, and *Vingt ans et un jour*, along with the short story *Les Sandales* and Semprun's only published play, *Le Retour de Carola Neher*. In a number of cases, these works are themselves practically invisible, having received only limited public and critical acclaim, often dismissed as linguistically or thematically inaccessible, or lacking autobiographical verisimilitude. *L'Évanouissement* has received almost no scholarly attention, not helped by Semprun's own confusion over the narrative, calling it 'un livre de transition',<sup>94</sup> 'le brouillon approximatif de quelques livres postérieurs',<sup>95</sup> 'que je ne pensais pas publier'.<sup>96</sup> *Netchaïev* has received only limited critical analysis, while *L'Algarabie*, *La Deuxième Mort*, and *La Montagne* have rarely been comparatively analysed, although they have all received attention as individual pieces. *Le Mort* and *Vingt ans* have been the subject of wider critical debate, but almost always within a larger discussion of specifically Holocaust (*Le Mort*) or Communist (*Vingt ans*) themes. With the exception of a three-quarter page commentary in Tidd's chapter in Ferrán and Herrmann's volume, *Les Sandales* has been entirely ignored by researchers, presumably given its apparent dissimilarity to the rest of Semprun's oeuvre.<sup>97</sup> The use of both close readings and comparative analysis will be fundamental, and so, at times, this thesis benefits from additional comparisons with other sources, including the remainder of Semprun's narrative texts, theatre and cinema (including his most widely known films, of which primarily *La Guerre est finie* will be used), and more obscure works, such as *Montand, la vie continue*, and the televised discussion with Elie Wiesel, *Se taire est impossible*.

Chapter One considers narrative as the site of traumatic memory, and thus as the site of a complex relationship between knowing and not knowing, between visibility and invisibility. Haunted by the inexhaustibility of memory, Semprun's narratives are shot through with holes [troué], wounded by the act of writing itself. Reading through wounds exposes the fragility of memory and narrative, constructed upon absence and invisibility. Offering an impossible (non-) site for the encounter with the other, and for the haunting potential of memory still to arrive in the future, Semprun's narratives expose the invisibility of the visible. Through Akira Lippit's 'avisuality', invisibility is reformulated, considered as a form of social invisibility, as something (or someone) which, despite appearing in plain sight, is not apprehended, or, in Peeren's words, it 'pertains to subjects who are materially present and can be physiologically perceived but

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<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 34.

<sup>95</sup> *Adieu*, 96.

<sup>96</sup> *Le Langage*, 73.

<sup>97</sup> Omlor calls it an 'erotic short story', *Memory's Long Voyage*, 29.

nevertheless remain unacknowledged'.<sup>98</sup> Avisuality represents a means of concealing memory from narrative – *hidden in plain sight* – unseen by the male gaze of the patriarchal imaginary. In five of Semprun's texts, one character continues to reappear, yet passes unobserved by the reader or the narrator: Heidi, a waitress who first appears in *L'Évanouissement*, before returning, sporadically, to haunt four more texts over the next three decades.<sup>99</sup> Transformed into a fetish object for the consumption of the erotic male gaze, Heidi represents the presence of an absence, the visibility of invisibility. Over-exposed, Heidi's visibility in the text is undermined by her feminine and submissive roles, rendering her invisible in the eyes of the reader. Encrypting the invisible within the structure and process of narrative, Heidi is revealed as a symbol of the critical absence at the epicenter of Semprun's work and memory: his father.

The revelation of the absented father figure deserves greater attention. Chapter Two divulges the reasons behind Semprun Gurrea's absence from the text, and the resulting impact upon the construction of Semprun's self-identity. It is not only the biological father figure who is absent from these narratives, but paternal figures in general are consistently portrayed as absent, useless, or dead. Drawing on biographical data supplied in *Adieu*, and philosophical considerations of paternity through Friedrich Nietzsche and Emmanuel Levinas, this chapter demonstrates a systematic degradation of Semprun Gurrea within the life and literature of his son. Semprun's life is shown to be a repetition of his father's, and the desperate attempts to rupture and redirect the fatal inevitability of familial and political failure support the desire to sever the paternal lineage. Through *La Deuxième Mort* and *L'Algarabie*, Semprun tries and fails to absent the paternal figure, realising too late that he is symbiotically implicated in the figure of the son as the other within the self. Attempts to eliminate the paternal figure are ultimately a form of self-effacement, as the authorial sense of continuous self-identity is always already under-erasure [*sous rature*].<sup>100</sup> The final section of this chapter addresses how and why Semprun avoids confrontation with the paternal imago, drawing on the discovery of Semprun Gurrea's encryption in the first chapter. In *Le Mort* and *Vingt ans*, Semprun attempts to redeem the paternal figure through literature and the perpetual process of mourning, in order to recreate a paternal role model and transform his past into an unobstructed future.

As a contrast to this in-depth analysis of the paternal figure, Chapter Three redirects research back towards the feminine form, and primarily the maternal figure. Having gathered a

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<sup>98</sup> Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 36.

<sup>99</sup> Given the thematic angle taken by this research, and the demonstration of narrative as a developmental process for the author, there is frequent recourse to chronological study, which cross-references narrative with relevant biographical data.

<sup>100</sup> Spivak translates Derrida's term 'sous rature' as 'under erasure'. 'This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out/ Since it is necessary, it remains legible.)' Translator's preface to *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xiv.

great deal of interest in recent years, Susana Maura's centrality to the Semprunian narrative is questioned. While her absence is, certainly, a contributing force for authorial creation and identification, it is argued that her nonpresence is only a displacement for the greater paternal absence. Through Semprun's later works, women regain a sense of individual agency that sees them liberated from the confines of the earlier patriarchal narratives, and appeals to the acceptance of the maternal death. Women are not relegated to the margins of Semprun's works, but, seen through *Le Mort*, brought to the forefront of every abject experience in order to regain control of his loss, and to encounter the idealised other in an imperative to remember. Developing themes of language and exile – typically associated with the maternal figure – the neglected short story *Les Sandales* is analysed as a work which deals explicitly with conflicts between countries, languages, and women. Demonstrating the subversive power of absence and silence, female voices emerge from the gaps of *Les Sandales*, displacing the centrality and ubiquity of the patriarchal imaginary. Finally, the slow but definitive rise of female emancipation is traced across Semprun's works, and particularly in *Vingt ans*, through mythical and fictional characters that connect women to the political transitions and liberations rising from modern-day Europe, and more specifically from Spain. Women in Semprun are marginalized, but in different ways that slowly begin to hand back – from patriarchy to matriarchy – their rights and freedoms through a haunting agency that liberates and emancipates women, and particularly the maternal figure, from her abjected position. The liberated maternal form denigrates the absented patriarchy, forcing reappraisal of the wider European condition and democratic transitions, giving back a voice to all those forgotten in the 1977 *pacto del olvido* (pact of forgetting).

The final chapter assumes the incest taboo as the foundation of patriarchal culture, society, and moral law, and reflects on how Semprun's transgressive and reckless attitude towards the original sin disrupts this universal constant. There is no implication that incest here is a result of biographical events, instead, it is a thematic structure that controls linguistic and cultural order and informs social and psychological development. Miletić considers the associations of incest and bilingualism in her monograph through a highly theoretical framework; the aim here is to discuss not only incest but Semprun's evident dismissal of the powerfully persuasive incest taboo as a means of overthrowing the Lacanian *nom-du-père* and the societal structures that fall under this order. Through *L'Algarabie*, Semprun transgresses the ultimate taboo; undoing conventional patriarchal boundaries that define what may and may not be written or spoken, the denial of exogamy can be read as a necessary act in order to destabilise and decentre patriarchal identity. As an almost anecdotal formation of *relative* identity, incest in *La Montagne* is fundamental to the creation and structure of the protagonists and the narrative, and informs the emasculation of the male figure. This chapter concludes with

an analysis of *Vingt ans* and the direct implications of incest on Semprun's own familial *milieu*, and particularly the unspoken and absented paternal figure. Undermining the stability of the taboo and liberating the Avendaño family (and more generally Spain) from the oppressive traditions governed by patriarchal authority, *Vingt ans* provokes a discussion of the wider applications of incest to the democratic European dynamic.

The insidious hauntings of paternity and patriarchy are slowly brought to the forefront of Semprun's works, and demonstrate how he attempts to overcome unspeakable silence and oppressive forgetting that have been dictated by authoritarian figures throughout his life. Searching through the invisible absences of these narratives, this thesis exposes the true depths of the author. The absences in these four themes demonstrate that the fragmented elisions of memory erase our present understanding of an author who is haunted by his own reputation, and by the words written by and about him. The ghosts of Semprun's life and works, hidden beneath both memory and narrative, continue to haunt, entrapping the author in a repetitious cycle of absence. Beginning with the haunting absence of the father, Semprún Gurrea, this thesis concludes with the haunting absences of Semprun's own children, casting the light of failed paternity onto the author himself, embodying the cycle of repetition he had so desperately attempted to avert. Leading hidden lives, away from the media and away from the haunting presence of their father, the voices of the second generation protest their reduction to ventriloquist dummies for the memories of the past and demonstrate the crises of post-war paternity and patriarchy.

## Chapter One

### *Trou* Memories or, How to Tell the *Hole* Story

*On ne parle tant de mémoire que parce qu'il n'y en a plus.*

-Pierre Nora, *Entre mémoire et histoire.*

Semprun's works are haunted by memory: memories of death, suffering, and annihilation in Buchenwald; of childhood and family unity in Spain; of political silences and unspoken truths; and of memory itself. This haunting demonstrates the indelible trace of the past; invisible but ever-present in the content and structure of each narrative. The ineffaceable past haunts each text as the spectre of memory that has not yet returned, and that remains always just out of reach, extending into an unattainable past and an impossible future. As the site of trauma and alterity, the text is vitiated, shot through with holes, where phantoms enter and leave at will. Yet in Semprun, haunting is not only effected as invisibility, but in and through the visibility of the text. Semprun's works are haunted to the core, through the process of inscription itself, a process that marks (as a mark) the transgression of the boundary between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, life and death. In his works, the ghost haunts through the words on the page, the moment of inaccessibility that 'ne joint et n'ajointe qu'en séparant'.<sup>101</sup> The skiagraphic text, 'cette écriture de l'ombre',<sup>102</sup> reveals as it veils the infinite potential of spectral memory, as each word disappears at the moment of writing. Semprun's spectral writing invokes phantoms, demonstrating memory that is still to come and to come back; memory that is not yet present, but never wholly absent. Through the feminine and submissive waitress of the café in Ascona, a figure who is very much visible, yet entirely unseen, this chapter considers the significance of memory that is rendered *in-visible*, memory that exceeds the visual. Semprun perverts the gaze of the patriarchal imaginary in order to hide *in plain sight* the uninvited ghosts of unwelcome memory. From the structures of Semprun's texts – the narrative that we are given to see – emerges the phantom of the paternal figure, encrypted within the invisibility of the visible.

Semprun's phantom writing means that his narrative is not constructed positively, through the visibility of the text, but negatively, by the invisible: the shadow and the ghost. All narratives of memory, composed of re-presentations of the past, are essentially founded on absence. In 'Time in Autobiography', Burton Pike writes:

The past does not exist. There are memories of it – scattered shards of events and feelings – but they are re-created within a later context. There is no way to retrieve the original fact or experience. The only way of giving the illusion of doing so is to reinvent

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<sup>101</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle*, 58 (print).

<sup>102</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires d'aveugle*, 54 (print).

the past in the present. Writing [...] is a way of making this process systematic; the act of writing fixes the pseudopast and the present in relation to each other, and lends to both the appearance of permanence.<sup>103</sup>

The process of writing memory redeems the past, bringing it into the present; transforming absence into presence. 'Words on paper' mark the site of memory, transforming the 'site of reading into a memorial space'.<sup>104</sup> Bringing the past back into focus – into *sight* – narrative transforms the past into the present, where it can 'challenge, exasperate, edify, and invite [the reader] into a dialogue between themselves and their past'.<sup>105</sup> These sites [sights] of memory '*ne sont pas ce dont on se souvient, mais là où la mémoire travaille* [original italics]'.<sup>106</sup>

For Pierre Nora, in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, sites [sights] of memory resist the inertia of history, becoming a living memorial to the events of the past:

Mémoire, histoire: loin d'être synonymes, nous prenons conscience que tout les oppose. La mémoire est la vie, toujours portée par des groupes vivants et à ce titre, elle est en évolution permanente, ouverte à la dialectique du souvenir et de l'amnésie, inconsciente de ses déformations successives, vulnérable à toutes les utilisations et manipulations, susceptible de longues latences et de soudaines revitalisations. L'histoire est la reconstruction toujours problématique et incomplète de ce qui n'est plus. La mémoire est un phénomène toujours actuel, un lien vécu au présent éternel; l'histoire, une représentation du passé.<sup>107</sup>

As the '*laboratoire* [original italics]'<sup>108</sup> of memory, however, the narrative does not present memory as a stable and complete object, but rather implicates the process of memory. The site [sight] of memory is undermined by a process that negates visibility. Narrative appears to present the return of memory, but it simultaneously and unavoidably presents the reciprocal absence of future memory. As Semprun notoriously claimed in conversation with Elie Wiesel in 1995:

Plus j'écris, plus la mémoire me revient. C'est-à-dire qu'après ce dernier livre, j'ai encore plus de choses à dire qu'avant de commencer le premier. Comme si l'oubli avait été si profond qu'il fallait le travail de l'écriture, de la mémoire volontaire, de la recherche volontaire dans le passé, des images, des souvenirs, des visages, des anecdotes, même des sensations, elles reviennent. De là ma théorie que c'est une

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<sup>103</sup> Burton Pike, 'Time in Autobiography', *Comparative Literature*, 28.4 (1976), 337-38.

<sup>104</sup> James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>105</sup> Young, *Texture of Memory*, 89.

<sup>106</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Présentation', in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, x.

<sup>107</sup> Nora, 'Entre mémoire et histoire', in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, xix.

<sup>108</sup> Nora, 'Présentation', x.

écriture inépuisable, à la fois impossible et inépuisable. On ne peut pas dire, mais on n'aura jamais tout dit. On peut dire à chaque fois davantage.<sup>109</sup>

The absence of memory does not simply beget its presence, for each new memory betrays an inherent invisibility: 'l'invisible du visible'.<sup>110</sup> The work of memory extends simultaneously into an infinite past and an infinite future, with memories always still to come and to come back.

The narrative is not a *lieu de mémoire*, but a *non-lieu*, an absent site [sight], a skiagraphy. Presenting memory as invisibility – or as the invisible of the visible – Semprun's works encourage the reader to keep *looking*; to continue the work of memory, preventing the stagnation of the past and the annihilating fate of forgetting. The site [sight] of memory is haunted, invoking absence and invisibility, conjuring ghosts at the (*non-)*lieu of inscription. Like a Derridean spectre, Semprun's works demonstrate the impossible and inexhaustible process of memory: neither present nor absent, 'ils sont toujours là, les spectres, même s'ils n'existent pas, même s'ils ne sont plus, même s'ils ne sont pas encore [original italics]'.<sup>111</sup> Derrida claimed that ghosts were not simply *revenants*, returning from the past in the present, but were *arrivants*, waiting to come, or come back, in the future: 'Au fond, le spectre, c'est l'avenir, il est toujours à venir, il ne se présente que comme ce qui pourrait venir ou re-venir: à l'avenir'.<sup>112</sup> Memory acts like a spectre, a ghost that can never be captured or exposed – brought to vision – but that is always anticipated and expected, so that the process of memory cannot end because there is always something waiting to come or come back. Narrative represents the site [sight] of the spectral return, a return that comes both from the past and the future, and that dis-appears at the moment of inscription. Vanishing simultaneously into the past and the future, the text is unstable, out of focus, vitiated and shot through with holes. Semprun described the process of writing as impossible and inexhaustible, because every moment that he believed to be the capture of these memories would actually come to slip away from him – into the past *and* the future – implicating a further process of writing, and further memories to uncover.

As in Proust, 'memory becomes the work of retrieving a past *and* of previewing a future', so that memory of the past is 'interwoven into projections of the future'.<sup>113</sup> Despite Semprun's aversion to Proust's work, the two authors share a range of literary characteristics: the never-ending work of memory that precipitates a vertiginous conflation of time zones; the unwilling kaleidoscopic 'reminiscence of reminiscence'<sup>114</sup> that creates a web of memory; and the retrieval of the past through progression into a narrative future. The narratives of both authors

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<sup>109</sup> *Se taire*, 18.

<sup>110</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible*, 300.

<sup>111</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 279.

<sup>112</sup> Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 71

<sup>113</sup> Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty*, 60.

<sup>114</sup> Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty*, 62.

are tirelessly constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed by their own haunted processes of memory. The final work of Proust's seven volume series, *Le Temps retrouvé*, suggests the cathartic completion of his memorial task, but the linguistically disjointed *re-trou-vé*, reveals the ghostly impermanence of memory. This title exposes memory as inherently haunted, fragmented by forgetting as the necessary condition of remembering, where each new *retrouvaille* [*re-trou-vaille*] is haunted by a persistent *trou*. This endless process of incomplete and ungraspable memory nonetheless demonstrates the only process there can be: the man who never forgets can never remember anything.<sup>115</sup> This spectral structure is mirrored in traumatic memory, where Caruth argues that 'the historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all'.<sup>116</sup> Freud's period of latency, an interval of absence, distinguishes the unique character of traumatic memory. For a narrative to be a narrative of traumatic memory, it must demonstrate its own inaccessibility: it must be incomplete, invisible, spectral.

'*Trou-matic*'<sup>117</sup> narrative must be, as Butler reasoned, 'broken'. Suleiman argued that Semprun's narratives demonstrate the 'literary performance of the working through of trauma',<sup>118</sup> but a narrative *of* trauma is not a traumatic narrative. If Semprun's narratives are to represent trauma, they must be *trou-matic*, testifying not to an event, but precisely to an absence: to the inaccessibility of trauma itself. The traumatic event, Dori Laub argues, 'although real, took place outside the parameters of "normal" reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time'.<sup>119</sup> For the victim, the traumatic event is thus a non-event; it 'has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence'.<sup>120</sup> In order to reflect the non-event of trauma, the narrative must be a *non-lieu*, a non-site [non-sight] that reproduces the essential absence and invisibility of a *trou-ma*. The text must reproduce the original wound of trauma,<sup>121</sup> not as a visible mark but precisely as the invisible and inaccessible non-event. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud analyses Torquato Tasso's story of Tancred and Clorinda in *Jerusalem Liberated*, where he writes that:

<sup>115</sup> 'As Beckett, in speaking of Proust, puts it: "The man with a good memory does not remember anything because he does not forget anything".' Kaplan, 'Bitter Residue', 331.

<sup>116</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 8.

<sup>117</sup> Jo Labanyi borrows this term from Hal Foster as a play on Lacan's 'traumatic realism'. 'History and Hauntology; or, What Does One Do with the Ghosts of the Past? Reflections on Spanish Film and Fiction of the Post-Franco Period', in *Disremembering the Dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*, ed. by Joan Ramon Resina, 78.

<sup>118</sup> Suleiman, *Crises of Memory*, 158.

<sup>119</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 69.

<sup>120</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 57.

<sup>121</sup> Trauma finds an etymological root in the Greek '*trauma*' or 'wound' that was, according to Caruth, 'originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body'. In later usage however, 'particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud's text, the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind'. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3.

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes out with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again.<sup>122</sup>

As Caruth writes, Tancred's re-wounding of Clorinda is compelling because 'a voice [...] is paradoxically released through the wound. Tancred does not only repeat his act but, in repeating it, he for the first time hears a voice that cries out to him to see what he has done'.<sup>123</sup> The *trou-matic* narrative must present, in the place of resolution, the invisible and inaccessible absence of the non-event. The act of writing must therefore be an act that constantly re-opens the wound, that re-produces the original absence, and that rejects the possibility of absolute representation. The act of writing must invoke phantoms – memories that remain to come and to come back – *because* it re-opens the original wound, *because* it re-produces the original trauma. *Trou-matic* narrative is visceral; the book is, as Edmond Jabès writes, 'un moment de la blessure'.<sup>124</sup> The first page re-opens the wound, whether through reading or writing, so that the narrative becomes an indelible mark of impossible memory: invisible, but ever-present. As Jabès advises in *Le Livre des questions*: '*Marque d'un signet rouge la première page du livre, car la blessure est invisible à son commencement* [original italics]'.<sup>125</sup>

Through the sword or the pen, Tancred and Jabès establish the *trou-matic* narrative as an open wound; shot through with holes, it bleeds trauma. Kathryn Robson, in her work *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Life-Writing* notes that:

To remember and narrate trauma means, then, to attempt to write in and through wounds, through the holes within memory that represent the incursion of the past into the present. Yet how does one 'write (through) wounds'? [...] The wound is a visceral image, the mark of violence on the skin, before healing has taken place. It remains after the initial moment of rupture, pointing back to the moment of violence and forward to the possibility of healing. Narratives of trauma [...] emerge from the wound, from a time between injury and healing, a time when the effects of trauma remain as powerful and as insistent as ever. Writing, in this formulation, is not akin to healing; writing finds its roots in the open wound rather than the closed scar.<sup>126</sup>

The task of the survivor is to keep the wound open, to constantly return to the *non-lieu* of the original missed event: the non-site of non-sight. Laub argues that the traumatic event '*produced*

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<sup>122</sup> Freud quoted in Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 2.

<sup>123</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 2

<sup>124</sup> Edmond Jabès, *Le Livre de Yukel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 29.

<sup>125</sup> Edmond Jabès, *Le Livre des questions* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 11.

<sup>126</sup> Kathryn Robson, *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Life-Writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 27-28.

*no witnesses* [original italics]', that the incomprehensible structure of the event even at the moment of its occurrence 'precluded its own witnessing'.<sup>127</sup> The *trou*-matic narrative performs the failure of sight [site] at the heart of the traumatic event, a failure that constitutes its very (lack of) structure. Shot through with holes, the corporeal *trou*-matic narrative is constructed negatively through the breaks and tears [déchirures/larmes] that reveal [dévoile] the *alētheia* of trauma: a failed witnessing, a failed *sight*.

The wounded text, a narrative shot through with holes, represents memory perforated by absence that eludes the grasp of visibility. The event, although it took place within *my* life, as an experience of *my* own, seems alien: it remains as unknown as if it had belonged to *someone else*, as if it had been experienced by *someone else*. The open wounds of *trou*-matic narrative signify an otherness that cannot be assimilated into the sequence of 'my' life. It is a direct representation of Henri Raczymow's 'mémoire trouée', memory shot through with holes. Raczymow developed this term as an expression that he, as a descendant of Holocaust survivors, felt was apt to describe his own sense of absent memory, an inherited *trou*-ma that was never his in the first place.<sup>128</sup> Raczymow's term is similar to what Marianne Hirsch calls 'postmemory':

To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. This is, I believe, the structure of postmemory and the process of its generation.<sup>129</sup>

*Mémoire trouée* is shot through with the absences of an other's memory, an inherited *trou*-ma that presents, in the place of a remembered event, only an absence or invisibility, an empty memory or non-memory, twice removed. The wounds of *trou*-matic narrative may not be one's own, but the received wounds of an other. Raczymow's own *mémoire trouée* was shaped by the absences inherited from his family after the Holocaust, but in Semprun's works, it appeals to a broader ethical encounter with the other. While Semprun rejected Primo Levi's infamous claim that the survivors of the Holocaust were not the 'true witnesses',<sup>130</sup> his works navigate a

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<sup>127</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 80.

<sup>128</sup> 'De quel droit parler, si l'on n'a été, comme c'est mon cas, ni victime, ni rescapé, ni témoin de l'événement.' Henri Raczymow, 'La Mémoire trouée', *Pardès*, 3 (1986), 180.

<sup>129</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>130</sup> Primo Levi discusses the idea that true witnesses are the 'submerged', those who did not return, in *The Drowned and the Saved* [1986], trans. by Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 83. However, Semprun disagrees, claiming: 'Certes le meilleur témoin, le seul vrai témoin, en réalité, d'après les spécialistes, c'est celui qui n'a pas survécu, celui qui est allé jusqu'au bout de

complex dialogue with the ‘drowned’ through wounded narrative. Levi claimed that the task and the duty of the ‘saved’ was to speak for the dead: ‘in their stead, by proxy’,<sup>131</sup> and in Semprun’s works, narrative gaps and absences invoke phantoms, indicating the potential for an ethical encounter with the memory of the other. With the millions of lost voices in the Holocaust, many still unaccounted for, and the silences of futures never begun, Langer’s acknowledgement that the Holocaust was not just a loss of lives but a loss of ‘potential futures’<sup>132</sup> is portrayed through the *trous* of narrative and the encounter with the phantom. Through narrative ellipsis, Semprun confers a voice to the other, a dialogue of memory that waits to come and to come back. Semprun’s conversation with Wiesel articulated the realisation that his own narratives would never say everything, and could never speak for all those who were lost. His own words would only ever convey the political experience of a *Rotspanier*, and could not speak from the perspective of Jewish devastation.<sup>133</sup> Through absence, Semprun offers a humbling tribute to the silent and unknown experience that was not his own, and to the spectrality of memory without end.

*Trou*-matic narrative is constructed around the absence of the other, around an alterity that can never be overcome. The book becomes the absent word of an other’s absent memory: ‘[la] mémoire infinie d’un mot manquant’.<sup>134</sup> The task of the *trou*-matic narrative is to maintain absence and invisibility, to reflect the inherent absences of memory. The attempt through narrative to capture memory, to make it visible, to achieve its articulation, automatically negates the fragile structure of *trou*-ma. Butler writes:

Trauma is, by definition, not capturable through representation or, indeed, recollection; it is precisely that which renders all memory false, we might say, and which is known through the gap that disrupts all efforts at narrative reconstruction. [...] The sign of the trauma and its proof is precisely its resistance to the narrative structure of the event.<sup>135</sup>

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l’expérience, et qui en est mort. Mais ni les historiens ni les sociologues ne sont encore parvenus à résoudre cette contradiction: comment inviter les vrais témoins, c’est-à-dire les morts, à leurs colloques? Comment les faire parler. Voilà une question, en tout cas, que le temps qui passe réglerait de lui-même: il n’y aura bientôt plus de témoins gênants, à l’encombrante mémoire.’ *Le Mort*, 16.

<sup>131</sup> Levi, *The Drowned and The Saved*, 84.

<sup>132</sup> Langer quotes from Holocaust survivor Philip K: ‘We’ll never recover what was lost. We can’t even assess what was lost. Who knows what beauty and grandeur six million could have contributed to the world? Who can measure it up? What standard do you use? How do you count it? How do you estimate it?’. Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 15.

<sup>133</sup> As Wiesel points out to Semprun: ‘Toi, tu comprends, tu avais une vie active à l’intérieur du camp, tu savais pourquoi tu étais là, tu étais résistant, tu te battais, tu faisais partie de la Résistance. Moi, j’étais “un musulman”, comme on disait à l’époque n’est-ce-pas, j’étais un objet. Je ne savais pas ce qui se passait’. *Se taire*, 12.

<sup>134</sup> Edmond Jabès, *Le Livre du partage* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 36.

<sup>135</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 153.

Absence is the only means of accurately representing [re-presenting] trauma, firstly because it demonstrates the impossibility of representation, but secondly as a paradoxical sign of its proof. To be able to represent trauma negates its most unique characteristic – its non-existence as an unknown event – exposing it to denial and indifference. Memory that can be made visible, that can be put into words and presented, cannot be traumatic; it cannot be wounded or shot through with holes. Transforming the ungraspable and intangible traumatic memory into narrative only provokes suspicion and disbelief: ‘All this cannot be true, it could not have happened. You must have made it up’.<sup>136</sup> *Trou*-matic narrative preserves the invisibility and absence of the original *non-lieu*, re-asserting the invisibility and inaccessibility of the event: the impossibility of sight [site]. A *trou*-matic narrative is a negative text, a skiagraphy, constructed by shadows and absence; the paradoxical affirmation of the impossibility to affirm.

Semprun’s narratives must be read as spectral, haunted to the core, as an act of writing and reading through the wound. As a *trou*-matic narrative that negates as it asserts, the text must be read *from the other side*, to ‘[show] up not what we can know, but rather what we cannot know’.<sup>137</sup> As a (non-) site, haunted by phantoms of the past (and of an other’s past), Semprun’s narratives demonstrate memory as spectral: memory that is still to come and to come back, memory that remains always inaccessible. Shot through with holes, these phantoms enter through the tears [déchirures/larmes] of the text, exposing the invisibility of the visible. This analysis continues with an exploration of the written text, ‘not in the form of an unravelling that exposes what is hidden, that makes visible what is secret, but rather by making visible the “very invisibility of the invisible within the visible”’.<sup>138</sup>

### Haunting Memories, Phantom Secrets

*Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has a claim, she is not claimed.*

-Toni Morrison, *Beloved*.

In Semprun’s works, the invisibility of the visible can be brought to light – brought into focus – through close reading of the text itself, exposing the phantom structure of its own *trou*-ma. To reveal that which we cannot know does not refer to analysis of the absences and gaps as such, but rather to the invisibility within each word; to the open wound revealed by the act of writing

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<sup>136</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 68.

<sup>137</sup> Robson, *Writing Wounds*, 25.

<sup>138</sup> Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light: (Shadow Optics)* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 41.

itself. Despite the overt presentation of narrative, the text must be read as a visible trace of the invisible, as a *trou* of memory hidden in plain sight. Semprun's narratives are spectral, shot through with holes, pointing to gaps and absences: to memory that is still to come and to come back, in spite of its presence in the present. In *Donner la mort*, Derrida distinguishes between two forms of invisibility: 'l'in-visible visible', and 'l'invisibilité absolue'.<sup>139</sup> The visible in-visible describes that which has a structure of visibility but can be removed from sight and made to appear invisible. A hand hidden under a table for example, or the interior organs of the body are 'de l'ordre du visible'<sup>140</sup> in that they can be brought to the surface through accident or operation. Absolute invisibility, on the other hand, 'ne relève pas du registre de la vue'<sup>141</sup> and has no visible structure, such as music, voice, or touch. However, absolute invisibility does not denote inexistence, on the contrary, it promotes the secrecy of the non-visible, 'cryptée [encoded or encrypted] [...] dissimulé dans l'ombre'.<sup>142</sup>

On pourrait imaginer un secret qui ne se laisse transir ou traverser, donc ne se défasse ou ne s'ouvre, comme secret, qu'à l'audition, ou en se laissant toucher, sentir, et justement parce qu'il échappe au regard ou parce qu'il est invisible – ou encore parce que ce qui en lui est visible garde secret le secret qui n'est pas visible. On peut toujours exposer à la vue une chose qui reste secrète parce que son secret n'est accessible que par d'autres sens que la vue. Une écriture, par exemple, si je ne sais pas la décrypter (une lettre écrite en chinois ou en hébreu, ou tout simplement d'une écriture manuelle indéchiffrable) est parfaitement visible mais scellée pour la plupart.<sup>143</sup>

To read Semprun's works as the *non-lieu* of *trou*-matic absence is not only to consider the flipside of narrative presence, but to read the invisibility of the visible. The invisibilities of his works do not lie only in the gaps and absences of narrative, but in the structure of the visible itself. Reading *through* the visible, *beyond* it, reveals, at the point of the visible, something else instead.

In Akira Lippit's *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, Derrida's two concepts of visibility are taken to excess, 'au-delà du visible',<sup>144</sup> to avisuality:

Avisuality not as a form of invisibility, in the sense of an absent or negated visibility: not as the antithesis of the visible but as a specific mode of impossible, unimaginable visibility. Presented to vision, there to be seen, the avisual image remains, in a profoundly irreducible manner, unseen. Or rather, it determines an experience of seeing, a sense of the visual, without ever offering an image. A visibility without images,

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<sup>139</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), 124-25.

<sup>140</sup> Derrida, *Donner la mort*, 124.

<sup>141</sup> Derrida, *Donner la mort*, 125.

<sup>142</sup> Derrida, *Donner la mort*, 123. Translation from Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 89.

<sup>143</sup> Derrida, *Donner la mort*, 122-23.

<sup>144</sup> Derrida, *Donner la mort*, 124.

an unimaginable visuality, and images without visuality, avisibility. All signs lead to a view, but at its destination, nothing is seen. What is seen is this absence, the materiality of an avisual form or body.<sup>145</sup>

Avisibility enables Semprun's narratives to be read beyond the visible text; exposing the invisibility of the visible and bringing to light the open wounds that structure his own process of spectral writing and remembrance. Avisibility, indeed, is an acutely painful term in respect of the Holocaust and Semprun's own experience in Buchenwald, in which the traumatic event not only precluded its own witnessing by the victims, but was manifestly ignored by executioners and by-standers alike. In *L'Écriture* Semprun introduces an American soldier, lieutenant Rosenfeld, as he is giving tours of the camp to local residents: 'Il [Rosenfeld] rappelait aux civils de Weimar qu'ils avaient vécu, indifférents ou complices, pendant plus de sept ans, sous les fumées du crématoire'.<sup>146</sup> When he later visits Weimar with the same lieutenant, on 23 April 1945, he writes: 'J'avais été frappé par sa proximité: quelques kilomètres seulement séparaient Buchenwald des premières maisons de Weimar. Sans doute le camp avait-il été construit sur le versant opposé de l'Ettersberg. La ville en devenait invisible pour nous'.<sup>147</sup> If witnessing was impossible from '*inside the event* [original italics]' potential witnesses on the *outside* 'failed one-by-one to occupy their position as a witness'.<sup>148</sup> Despite the palpable visibility of the camps from the outside, nothing was seen.

*L'Écriture* labours this attack on the failure of the by-stander witness as Semprun narrates an expedition from the camp, shortly after liberation. Setting out in search of drinking water with a few comrades, Semprun finds himself in front of a small house on the outskirts of an adjoining village: 'C'était une maison assez cossue. Mais ce qui m'a frappé, m'immobilisant sur place, c'est que, située comme elle l'était, de ses fenêtres on devait avoir une vue parfaite sur l'ensemble du camp'.<sup>149</sup> Semprun 'visits' the house, discovering the perfect view, from the living room, of Buchenwald:

Je m'approche des fenêtres de la salle de séjour et je vois le camp. Je vois, dans l'encadrement même de l'une des fenêtres, la cheminée carrée du crématoire. Alors, je regarde. Je voulais voir, je vois. Je voudrais être mort, mais je vois, je suis vivant et je vois.<sup>150</sup>

While in terms of trauma, the event goes unwitnessed, taking place, according to Laub, in a '*historical gap* [original italics]',<sup>151</sup> in real terms, it did not. The Holocaust was, in many ways,

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<sup>145</sup> Lippit, *Atomic Light*, 32.

<sup>146</sup> *L'Écriture*, 109.

<sup>147</sup> *L'Écriture*, 138-39.

<sup>148</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 81.

<sup>149</sup> *Le Grand Voyage*, 178.

<sup>150</sup> *Le Grand Voyage*, 182.

<sup>151</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 84.

the avisual event par excellence: it took place in plain sight, supported by a wealth of photographic, eyewitness and literary proof, and yet, it went unseen on an international scale.

Avisuality in narrative represents memory hidden in plain sight, marking an excess visibility that 'exceeds the capacity of the spectator to see it, to withstand its very specularly'.<sup>152</sup> For Semprun's narratives, avisuality thus functions as a perversion of the patriarchal imaginary. Where narratives of political camaraderie, Buchenwald and resistance are expected to conjure up images of masculinity, fraternity, and patriarchy, intrusive and peripheral figures of women and femininity are eclipsed. Yet, the abstention of these figures from narratives does not necessarily play out through the text itself; rather, it is imposed by the reader. Women in Semprun may be marginal, but they are *there*; yet they become avisual, essentially overlooked or ignored by the reader because they contradict imposed expectations of narrative and memory. Blinded by a patriarchal zeitgeist that renders invisible and absent the voices of women, the reader fails to engage with the text as a visual site [sight] of memory. Whether employed intentionally or accidentally by the author, avisuality therefore provides a cunning means to disguise – render invisible – selected and undesirable memories from the reader. Avisuality is spectrality, since the visible text betrays the underlying *trou* of memory that is still to come and to come back in the future. Avisuality is not invisibility, avisuality is the visibility of the open wound. The primary figure of avisuality for discussion in Semprun's works is Heidi, a young Swiss waitress: familial, feminine, servile and compliant, her persistence throughout four works goes unnoticed through the eyes of the reader and the patriarchal imaginary. Appearing first in *L'Évanouissement* as the waitress of the café in Ascona, Heidi returns in *La Deuxième Mort* as the air hostess Heidi Grühl, before reappearing in *L'Algarabie* as the tour guide and later café owner, and finally in *Netchaïev*, as the waitress in Ascona once more. Haunting these narratives like a phantom, she demonstrates the spectrality of memory; shot through with holes, always inaccessible and ungraspable. Moreover, however, her avisuality proves the encryption of the invisible within the visible, and the open wound of a memory hidden in plain sight within the structure of the narrative itself.

Heidi's first appearance comes mid-way through Semprun's second work, *L'Évanouissement*. In the narrative, Manuel (a pseudonym for Semprun) finds himself in Ascona on the advice of his 'grand-père' Jean-Marie,<sup>153</sup> who recommends a stay at his house in Locarno where Manuel can write: 'tout dire, tout raconter, témoigner'.<sup>154</sup> This journey to Switzerland, half a year ahead of the present of narration (in hospital, immediately following the fall from

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<sup>152</sup> Lippit, *Atomic Light*, 41.

<sup>153</sup> Semprun did not have a grandfather named Jean-Marie. He probably refers here to the family friend and later brother-in-law Jean-Marie Soutou. The relationship between Semprun and Soutou is discussed further in Chapter Two.

<sup>154</sup> *L'Évanouissement*, 32.

the train, the day after Hiroshima) is, in essence, the central necessary event for the narrative to take place. The conversation with Jean-Marie takes place in the summer, in Paris, and the journey cannot be planned until the winter, allowing time for Manuel to arrange the correct papers for his travel. It is on travelling to finalise his visa documents that Manuel falls (or jumps) from a train, '*l'évanouissement*' that titles the novel. As the reader discovers of course, years later in *L'Écriture*, Ascona turned out not to be a place for writing, but the location of the 'choix radical' between writing and life.

As Semprun tells it in *L'Évanouissement*, it is while he is sitting in a café on the banks of the lac Majeur with his lover Lorène that he (Manuel) is struck by a flashback of snow, brought on by the blinding sunlight reflected from the windscreen of an oncoming car. The image of snow, which features periodically in Semprun's works, has been typically associated with memories of Buchenwald, exemplified by the freezing winters of central Germany.<sup>155</sup> The whirlwind of seemingly unwilling and incoherent memories triggered by this flash of light supports the sense of a traumatic narrative that evades capture, occurring '*outside the range of human experience* [original italics]'.<sup>156</sup> As the narrative steadily digresses from conventional grammatical and temporal structures, the narrator switches between the third and first person of narration, and jumps between memories of childhood in Madrid, Laurence in Paris, arrest by the Gestapo in Joigny, and even memories that are in the future of the present of narration, back at Lorène's house. In *L'Écriture*, this event is associated with Semprun's infamous abstention from writing, the moment where he chose to live rather than to remember and to write:

À Ascona, donc, sous le soleil de l'hiver, j'ai décidé de choisir le silence bruissant de la vie contre le langage meurtrier de l'écriture. J'en ai fait le choix radical, c'était la seule façon de procéder. J'ai choisi l'oubli, j'ai mis en place, sans trop de complaisance pour ma propre identité, fondée essentiellement sur l'horreur – et sans doute le courage – de l'expérience du camp, tous les stratagèmes, la stratégie de l'amnésie volontaire, cruellement systématique.<sup>157</sup>

As Omlor points out however, 'an act of forgetting that is voluntary cannot be considered to be forgetting at all. If one forces oneself to forget, the thing to be forgotten is ever-present in that effort of forgetting'.<sup>158</sup> In other words, memory of Buchenwald remains avial: it is not perceived or comprehended, but it is present and conscious.

The snow that appears to trigger Manuel's digression into traumatic reminiscence, snow that is explicitly linked to memories of Buchenwald in *Quel beau* and *L'Écriture*, for

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<sup>155</sup> See Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 89-90.

<sup>156</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 100.

<sup>157</sup> *L'Écriture*, 292.

<sup>158</sup> Omlor, *Memory's Long Voyage*, 24.

example, functions rather as a veil [voile] that obscures the memory of atrocity. In cinematographic and literary works of the Spanish Civil War, Labanyi writes that ‘the image of snow blotting out the traces of landscape and with it memory’ is a common sign, so that ‘there is a traumatic crisis of memory related to a geographical displacement or “loss of place”’.<sup>159</sup> Ascona is neither a *lieu de mémoire* nor a *lieu d’oubli*, but a site of avisuality, where the metaphorical blanket of virginal white snow temporarily covers or freezes memory, making it *appear to be* absent or invisible: the visible in-visible. The snow does not reveal memory, but veils it, under a ‘blanc textuel’<sup>160</sup> that implicates the absences and invisibilities within the structure of memory and narrative. Like in trauma, the memory is not *not there*, it has simply not yet returned, a factor that can account for the associations of the image of snow with both remembering and forgetting.<sup>161</sup> Neither functions without the other, so that the image of snow and the accompanying avisuality of memory signify the spectrality of the memorial process: memories that are still to come and to come back, memories that are neither present nor absent.

Heidi’s entry into the narrative, coinciding with this flash of snow, provides an additional veil to mask or render invisible memory of the past. In the book, Manuel and Lorène have a conversation in the café, during which Manuel experiences this flashback of snow, and at the end of which Lorène gets up and leaves. Manuel calls the waitress to order another coffee: Heidi enters the narrative. The appearance of a young Swiss waitress cannot be anything other than deliberate: Switzerland remained neutral throughout the Second World War, unoccupied by Axis or Allied forces, and the docile and girlish waitress opposes the machismo and volatile environment of Buchenwald. Heidi is the opposite of every memory Semprun could associate with the concentrationary universe, a visible layer of metaphorical snow that veils the site [sight] of memory. Heidi’s entry into the narrative triggers a string of memories that appease traumatic memory. Evoking a childhood memory learning German in Madrid with his brothers and German governess, the name of Heidi, the Swiss waitress, arouses in Manuel – as it does in the average reader – memories of Johanna Spyri’s late 19<sup>th</sup>-century children’s book, *Heidi*. The remembered episode, despite its articulation under the guise of Manuel, clearly relates to Semprun through reference to the childhood home on rue Alfonso XI in Madrid, *l’allée des Statues*, and the German governesses. Generating nostalgic memories, Heidi appeases the

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<sup>159</sup> Labanyi, ‘History and Hauntology’, 67.

<sup>160</sup> Marie-Eve Pelland has written a thorough thesis on the use of ‘blancs textuels’ in Semprun’s works: ‘L’essentiel de l’expérience concentrationnaire semble être relégué à un blanc textuel caractérisé par du non-dit, des silences, des ellipses, des blancs typographiques’. ‘Spirales narratives et blancs textuels dans *L’Écriture ou la vie de Jorge Semprun*’, 7.

<sup>161</sup> For example, the image of snow is associated with the white pages of the unpublished Spanish translation of *Le Grand Voyage*, indicating an endless process of remembering and writing. *L’Écriture*, 351-354. See also Pelland, ‘Spirales narratives et blancs textuels’, 52-56.

threat of traumatic memory, enabling a temporary forgetting of Buchenwald by rendering it avisual.

For Robert J. Lifton, in conversation with Caruth, extreme trauma radically alters the victim's sense of self, creating a traumatized double:

Of course, it's not a totally new self, it's what one brought into the trauma as affected significantly and painfully, confusedly, but in a very primal way, by that trauma. And recovery from post-traumatic effects, or from survivor conflicts, cannot really occur until that traumatized self is reintegrated. [...] So the struggle in the post-traumatic experience is to reconstitute the self into the single self, reintegrate itself.<sup>162</sup>

Nostalgia precisely enables the victim to reintegrate the past self into the present 'by encouraging an appreciative stance toward former selves; excluding unpleasant memories; reinterpreting "marginal, fugitive, and eccentric facets of earlier selves" in a positive light; and establishing benchmarks in one's biography'.<sup>163</sup> Constantine Sedikides et al. demonstrate how nostalgia is called upon when the self is susceptible to existential threats, providing a 'reservoir of memories and experiences' that buffer the threat of mortality and the belief in the futility of life. 'In particular,' they argue, 'nostalgia is instigated when a contrast is perceived between past and present selves, be it individual or collective.'<sup>164</sup> Manuel's reminiscence of childhood in Madrid is the act of nostalgic reverie that enables the meaningful reconstruction of the traumatized victim by integrating the childhood self (prior to exile and Buchenwald) with the later image of the self in Ascona. Heidi's associations with childhood in Madrid banish 'unpleasant memories' and facilitate Manuel/Semprun's choice to live and to forget the past.

Thanks to the nostalgic memories triggered by Heidi, memory of Buchenwald is rendered avisual. The memory has not been forgotten, but it has been temporarily displaced or removed from sight [site], rendered invisible or absent. The memory is still present, but it is unseen, veiled by a blanket of nostalgic reverie, deferred to an inaccessible future. Nostalgic reverie returns the reader to a place and time before Buchenwald, before war, and even before exile. Heidi indicates a complete reversal of narrative chronology, from Switzerland in the winter of 1945 to childhood in Madrid, before the summer of 1936. However, this literary anachronism cannot undo the past, but only delay its eventual and inevitable arrival from a spectral future. In *Adieu*, published much later in 1998, Semprun attempts the same anachronistic reversal of narrative progression by returning to a time before Buchenwald:

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<sup>162</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 137.

<sup>163</sup> Fred Davis quoted in Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, Lowell Gaertner, Clay Routledge, and Jamie Arndt, 'Nostalgia as Enabler of Self Continuity', in *Self Continuity: Individual and Collective Perspectives*, ed. by Fabio Sani, 232.

<sup>164</sup> Sedikides et al., 'Nostalgia', 231-32.

Ce livre est le récit de la découverte de l'adolescence et de l'exil, des mystères de Paris, du monde, de la féminité. Aussi, surtout sans doute, de l'appropriation de la langue française. L'expérience de Buchenwald n'y est pour rien, n'y porte aucune ombre. Aucune lumière non plus. Voilà pourquoi, en écrivant *Adieu, vive clarté...* il m'a semblé retrouver une liberté perdue, comme si je m'arrachais à la suite de hasards et de choix qui ont fini par me composer une sorte de destin. [...] Même si le hasard ou la chance m'avaient évité de tomber dans le piège de la Gestapo [...] j'aurais été ce garçon de quinze ans qui découvrait l'éblouissante infortune de la vie, ses joies aussi, inouïes, à Paris, entre les deux guerres de son adolescence.<sup>165</sup>

Semprun attempted, in this narrative, to revert back to a point in time where the experience of Buchenwald would not be able to interfere with his memories or his writing, because it would not yet have happened. Yet the title is open-ended, presenting, in the place of a full-stop, an ellipsis. These three dots are the grammatical mark of an absent presence: they imply that something is missing, that something is still to come. The narrative issues from this elliptical title in full knowledge that it is waiting for something to happen. Despite the anachronistic return to a point in time where Buchenwald had not yet happened, the narrative is expectant for its arrival, waiting for it to come (back), both as an event in time, and as a memory. *Adieu's* ellipsis implicates the presence of memories through their absence, an absence that is never any more than a temporary deferral. Nostalgic reverie precludes the witnessing of the event because it has not yet arrived from the future, nonetheless, it cannot negate its existence. Heidi's inference of nostalgia renders memory of Buchenwald avial by pushing it out in front, to a point in the future that still remains to come and to come back.

Heidi's role in Semprun's texts is phantomatic, evoking the spectrality of memory and narrative. In *L'Évanouissement*, Semprun narrates Manuel's address to the waitress: '–Heidi! Appelle-t-il. Il entend la voix de la serveuse du café qui dit: voilà, j'arrive, et ses pas, derrière lui, en effet, se rapprochent [italics added]'.<sup>166</sup> Like a Derridean spectre, Heidi *arrives* into the narrative, coming from the back, disappearing into the future: 'la réapparition du spectre comme apparition *pour la première fois* [original italics]'.<sup>167</sup> Heidi returns, or arrives, into Semprun's narrative from Spyri's earlier storybook; travelling into the present from the past, she begins by coming back. From the moment of her first arrival into Semprun's texts, she anticipates a future return: *à venir*, forcing the memories of Buchenwald into an unattainable future. As Manuel eventually gets up to leave the café and join Lorène, he calls Heidi, he pays, and he leaves. There is a break in the narrative, a *trou* through which Heidi slips, disappearing from the narrative into an expectant future. Heidi demonstrates that the future extends out in front of the past, but that 'ce qui se tient *devant* elle doit aussi la précéder comme son origine:

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<sup>165</sup> *Adieu*, 101.

<sup>166</sup> *L'Évanouissement*, 120.

<sup>167</sup> Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 22.

*avant* elle. Même si l'avenir est sa provenance, il doit être, comme toute provenance, absolument et irréversiblement passé [original italics].<sup>168</sup> Reflecting the visibility of the invisible, Heidi's presence in the text marks the future return of memory: illustrating how memory cannot be selectively forgotten, only veiled, and rendered avial.

Heidi's return across four further works indicates the inherent haunting of the *trou*-matic narrative. Appearing in the place of unassimilated traumatic memory, she represents a trace, a Lacanian *symptôme*, an involuntary sign of a trauma that has not yet arrived.<sup>169</sup> The *symptôme* is a visible trace of otherwise invisible trauma: not the visibility of the trauma, but the visibility of the trauma as an invisibility that is *still to come*. Presenting traumatic memory *from the other side*, the *symptôme* indicates the return of traumatic memory 'from the future'.<sup>170</sup> As a *symptôme*, Heidi's systematic returns across *La Deuxième Mort*, *L'Algarabie*, and *Netchaïev* demonstrate the spectrality of *trou*-matic memory: arriving into the text, gesturing to the present absence of memory, before disappearing once again into a narrative future, memory is impossible and inexhaustible, always out in front, then coming from the past, ungraspable and inaccessible. Her returns indicate a gap or an absence, a *trou*; the visible invisibility of memory. Heidi's appearances in these four narratives signal the visible invisibility of the experience of death at the heart of the text: *trou*-matic memory of Buchenwald is *there*, but it is rendered avial. For as long as she continues to return, as a *symptôme* of memory to arrive in the future, the trauma remains to come and to come back. Nearly thirty years later in *L'Écriture*, Semprun rewrites, almost word for word, this same scene in the café by the lac Majeur in Ascona. This time, there is only one difference: Heidi is not there. Lorène and Semprun – no longer using the pseudonym of Manuel – have exactly the same conversation as was transcribed three decades earlier. Lorène then gets up to leave in exactly the same manner as before, but this time, after she has left, Semprun does not call Heidi; instead, like *Adieu*'s elliptical title, there is only another break in the text, a gap in the narrative where Heidi should have been.<sup>171</sup>

*L'Écriture* marked Semprun's most autobiographical work to date: declining to use any pseudonyms, he finally fulfilled Lejeune's autobiographical pact (a pact that many nonetheless feared would signal the suicide of the author). Moreover, *L'Écriture* also provides an incredible insight into the experience of Buchenwald, literally returning the author to the site of the trauma. In 1992, having spent the morning in Buchenwald with his grandsons Thomas and Mathieu, Semprun spends the night in the Hôtel de l'Éléphant, where 'la neige était de nouveau

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<sup>168</sup> Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 16.

<sup>169</sup> See Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre 1: Les Écrits techniques de Freud 1953-1954* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 215.

<sup>170</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 55-56.

<sup>171</sup> *L'Écriture*, 276.

tombée sur mes rêves'.<sup>172</sup> Dreaming of the snow in Buchenwald, Semprun wakes into the dream that has become his life: 'Je ne rêvais plus, j'étais revenu dans ce rêve qui avait été ma vie, qui sera ma vie'.<sup>173</sup> Back in the camp, before liberation, Semprun is returned to the original site of trauma, once again *inside the event*. This time, however, the event is witnessed: *L'Écriture* establishes a temporal and spatial circularity, so that the entire text becomes a narrative that is written from inside the event, literally recreating the site [sight] of trauma; the open wound itself. By '*re-experiencing* [original italics]'<sup>174</sup> the event, Semprun is able to begin the therapeutic process of working-through trauma, articulating and transmitting the story, 'constructing a narrative [and] reconstructing a history',<sup>175</sup> and reconciling his shattered sense of self. Heidi's disappearance from the text reflects this cathartic effort of witnessing, a mastery over the *symptômes* of traumatic memory:

In the case of complete recovery, the person does not suffer any more from the reappearance of traumatic memories in the form of flashbacks, behavioral reenactments, and so on. Instead the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality.<sup>176</sup>

The return of snow to the narrative, and Heidi's concurrent absence, indicates the concluding arrival of the *trou-matic* memory, a return to the very invisibility of the event. Finally, this time, the invisible and absent *trou-ma* is put into narrative structure: Semprun seemingly writes a narrative *of* trauma, rather than a traumatic narrative.

Yet Heidi's absence from *L'Écriture* is exactly that: a gap, an absence; a visual. *L'Écriture* was published only one year before Semprun's conversation with Wiesel, in which he claimed that writing his memories was impossible and inexhaustible, explicitly recognising that writing *L'Écriture* ('ce dernier livre'<sup>177</sup>) had only served to prolong the work of memory. In the transcript of an interview with Gallimard at the time of *L'Écriture*'s publication, Semprun was asked: 'Êtes-vous ainsi parvenu au bout de la mémoire?'. He replied:

À partir du moment où s'accomplit le premier travail de mémorisation, tout revient peu à peu. Mais je me suis aperçu que j'avais tellement oublié que certains souvenirs, que je sais présents, restent à retrouver. Je peux aller encore plus loin.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *L'Écriture*, 388.

<sup>173</sup> *L'Écriture*, 393.

<sup>174</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 67.

<sup>175</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 69.

<sup>176</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, 176.

<sup>177</sup> *Se taire*, 18.

<sup>178</sup> Gallimard, 'Rencontre avec Jorge Semprun, à l'occasion de la parution de *L'Écriture ou la vie* (1994)'.

Semprun acknowledges the avisuality of memory through his expectation of future memory from the past, so that Heidi's disappearance does not mark the resolution of trauma, but rather its impossible inaccessibility. In *L'Écriture*, it is not that Heidi does not return, but that in this second retelling, thirty years later, we are still waiting for her to arrive; we are waiting for her return. She arrived in *L'Évanouissement* from Spyri's children's book, but in *L'Écriture* she still remains to come – to arrive – in the future. What if Heidi were not symptomatic of the avisuality of traumatic memory of Buchenwald, but rather of memory that has been ignored – rendered invisible – through the eyes of a patriarchal imaginary?

### Narrative Crypts and Encrypted Narratives

*Imagine that a cat is in a soundproof box. At zero time, a photon will be emitted towards a half-silvered mirror. If the photon passes through the mirror, a trigger on a gun will be fired and the cat would die. If, on the other hand, the photon is deflected, the trigger on the gun will not fire and the cat will be alive. There is no way to know if the cat is dead or alive until the lid of the box is opened. Until then, the cat is neither dead nor alive, and one can only be certain when one opens the box.*

-Chris Brawley, *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature*.

Heidi is not invisible; she is patently visible throughout a number of Semprun's narratives, evoking the invisibility of the visible, the avisuality of an open wound. Through close reading of Heidi's appearances in each narrative, this chapter reveals why and how her avisuality functions as a mark of invisible memory. The spectrality of her arrivals illustrates an open wound that cannot be confronted through narrative, but that is systematically and comprehensively obscured. While her spectrality indicates the impossible and inexhaustible process of writing, and the *trou*-matic structure of memory, it also demonstrates memory that exceeds articulation by the author; memory that is deliberately and manipulatively rendered invisible, hidden in plain sight. In the twenty-seven years separating the publication of *L'Évanouissement* from *L'Écriture*, Heidi makes three further appearances: in *La Deuxième Mort*, at length in *L'Algarabie*, and obliquely in *Netchaïev*. Through each haunting return, she demonstrates the expectant arrival of future memory, of narrative that has not yet been written, and of a gap or absence rendered avisual.

In *La Deuxième Mort*, the protagonist Ramón boards a *Swissair* flight from Amsterdam to Zurich. Intending to steal some time from the American CIA agents who are following him, he is preoccupied with thoughts of his wife, Inés, and the trail of telegrams he has sent her which must be destroyed to ensure her safety. His train of thought is interrupted as a hand touches his shoulder, and an air hostess requests his drink order. Again, Ramón drifts back into memory,

this time two years prior to the present of narration, before being roused once again by the return of the air hostess with his drink. They flirt; she reveals that she is from Küsnacht in Switzerland, and throughout the flight she reappears at various intervals, before requesting, as the flight begins its descent into Zurich, that Ramón take her for dinner that evening.<sup>179</sup> As the protagonist descends from the plane, the narrator offers a simultaneous insight into the actions of the air hostess:

Ainsi, au moment même où Ramón Mercader se présente devant le guichet du contrôle de police, à l'aéroport de Zurich, des choses bougent dans le monde, à cause de lui. Heidi Grühl, pour sa part, a franchi le portillon du couloir réservé au personnel navigant. Dans le vestiaire des hôtesses, elle retrouve Bertha Gutschli qui vient d'arriver de Stockholm. Elles babillent, aussitôt, en *schwizerdutch*, car si Heidi est originaire de Küsnacht, Bertha est née à Richterswil, de l'autre côté du lac.<sup>180</sup>

Revealing the name of the air hostess for the first time, Semprun conveys subtle similarities between Heidi Grühl and the earlier Heidi of *L'Évanouissement*. Not only their names, but their origination from two towns on either side of Lake Zurich (Wädenswil in the earlier narrative, and Küsnacht in the second) geographically and culturally links the two figures. Heidi's appearance in *La Deuxième Mort* is a re-appearance, a 're-apparition [original italics]',<sup>181</sup> an arrival from *L'Évanouissement* (an arrival from Spyri's *Heidi*) that demonstrates the spectrality of memory and narrative. As the narrative voice deviates from its focus on Ramón in order to divulge the seemingly peripheral sapphic relationship between Heidi and Bertha before Heidi disappears from the narrative once more, the role of the air hostess seems frivolous. Yet it is precisely the appearance of inconsequentiality that grants Heidi her potential as avisual, and thus significant for the narrative.

Semprun (re)writes Heidi as a lesbian, in a voyeuristic scene that titillates the scopophilic supremacy of the masculine gaze. Lesbians, according to Terry Castle, are 'never with us, it seems, but always somewhere else':

In the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight, out of mind, a wanderer in the dusk, a lost soul, a tragic mistake, a pale denizen of the night. She is far away and she is dire.<sup>182</sup>

The lesbian, compared even to the male homosexual, is always peripheral, intangible, and unseen, and even when she is patently present, she is 'elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot'.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 321-29.

<sup>180</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 337-38.

<sup>181</sup> Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 22.

<sup>182</sup> Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 2-3.

<sup>183</sup> Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 2.

Castle argues that the lesbian is ‘apparitional’ because she cannot be seen – even when she is manifestly there – ‘because she has been “ghosted” – or made to seem invisible – by [patriarchal] culture itself’.<sup>184</sup> The lesbian is an outlaw and a troublemaker to be exorcised from society: ‘Politically speaking, the lesbian is usually treated as a nonperson – without rights or citizenship – or else as a sinister bugaboo to be driven from the scene at once’.<sup>185</sup> Socially speaking, the lesbian is the avidual figure par excellence: Heidi’s homosexuality in *La Deuxième Mort* is a means of rendering her invisible – presented to vision, but irreducibly unseen. This voyeuristic scene is absolute visibility: through the eyes of the narrator, Heidi’s body is mapped out as a sexualized and exhibited form; and yet the scene goes unnoticed. Sandwiched between reports of Ramón’s movements in Zurich, without so much as a paragraph break in the text, the scene is over-exposed, extending beyond visibility and into avisuality: presented to vision, nothing is seen. Heidi literally disappears in plain sight, into the structure of the text; vanishing into the shadows, through the *trou* of narrative once again.

Reflecting the servile and feminine role of Heidi the waitress in *L’Évanouissement*, the role of an air hostess embodies the submissive nature of woman, rendered invisible by patriarchal society. As a lesbian, Heidi demonstrates how the voyeuristic male gaze renders her avidual by paradoxically over-exposing her, reducing her to a sexualized object. Heidi demonstrates how lesbians in patriarchal society are ghosted: conforming neither to the traditional role of a man nor of a woman, the lesbian is liminal, so that her refusal of the ‘economic, ideological, and political power of a man’<sup>186</sup> denies her a social presence. Beyond visibility, the lesbian is a paradox: ‘though nonexistent [she] nonetheless appears’.<sup>187</sup> Through *L’Algarabie*, Heidi returns to haunt, on two ostensibly separate occasions, as a tour guide and former waitress. In her first re-appearance, Semprun explicitly acknowledges Heidi’s return, ‘emprunté’ from the earlier *La Deuxième Mort*: ‘Heidi Grühl, hôtesse de la *Swissair* dans un vieux roman d’Artigas, était devenue entre les mains du Narrateur actuel la longiligne et polyglotte *Heidi-long-legs*, cicéronesse de ce groupe de visiteurs de la Z.U.P.’.<sup>188</sup> From the inception of her elaborate nickname, ‘Heidi-long-legs’, the tour guide is subjected to the erotic male gaze: ‘blonde et susurrante’,<sup>189</sup> murmuring into the loudspeaker, Heidi submits to the misogynistic scrutiny of the Japanese tourists and the narrator as she plays ‘trop évidemment du microphone baladeur comme d’un symbole phallique’.<sup>190</sup> Again, Heidi clearly is not absent, but as a tour guide she is socially invisible, mediating and transferring information about the

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<sup>184</sup> Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 4.

<sup>185</sup> Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 5.

<sup>186</sup> Monique Wittig quoted in Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 4-5.

<sup>187</sup> Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 46.

<sup>188</sup> *L’Algarabie*, 87.

<sup>189</sup> *L’Algarabie*, 87.

<sup>190</sup> *L’Algarabie*, 88.

history of the Z.U.P., rather than generating it herself. The sexually charged language of her episodic (re)appearance (amounting even to the lexicon of prostitution – the ultimate social invisibility), reduces Heidi to an ‘erotic object of the patriarchal heterosexual male gaze’.<sup>191</sup> Imposing male fantasy and obsession onto the ‘silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning’,<sup>192</sup> the ‘strong visual and erotic impact’<sup>193</sup> of Heidi’s description renders her avial. Over-exposed, Heidi is visible *only* as a sexualized body for the consumption of the erotic male gaze; she nonetheless remains socially, politically and culturally invisible. Laura Mulvey connotes the ‘*to-be-looked-at-ness* [original italics]’<sup>194</sup> of women as a sign of the reciprocity between the passive female object and the active male gaze, that acts, in psychoanalytic terms, to circumvent the threat of castration inherent in the meaning of woman as sexual difference. Mulvey argues that men overcome this threat through ‘fetishistic scopophilia’, whereby the object (woman) is transformed into an item of physical beauty that becomes ‘reassuring rather than dangerous’.<sup>195</sup>

Heidi’s excess visibility fulfils male (sexual) desire in the pursuit to obscure the threat of absence. Reduced to a physical and erotic structure, Heidi is fetishized, transforming invisibility into visibility. In Freud, the fetish object arises from the disavowal of the castration complex: the child, seeing that the mother does not have a penis, imagines either, in the case of boys, the potential future threat of castration or, in the case of girls, that the loss of the penis has already taken place. The fetish is constructed as a ‘substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and [...] does not want to give up’.<sup>196</sup> It therefore represents a dual and paradoxical belief force: ‘it remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it’.<sup>197</sup> Two contradictory fragments of knowledge, ‘both the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration’,<sup>198</sup> or the belief that the mother once had a penis and the knowledge that she now does not, are maintained side by side in the fetish object. The fetish arises from the subject’s disparity between what is visible and what is knowable, so the knowledge that something *is there* is maintained side by side with the knowledge of its absence. The fetish essentially provides a form of ‘psychic cover-up’, an ‘alibi for what is

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<sup>191</sup> Tidd, ‘Exile, Language and Trauma’, 698.

<sup>192</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* [1989] (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 15.

<sup>193</sup> Mulvey, *Visual and Other*, 19.

<sup>194</sup> Mulvey, *Visual and Other*, 19.

<sup>195</sup> Mulvey, *Visual and Other*, 22.

<sup>196</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Fetishism’, in *The Standard Edition of the complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XXI 1927-1931*, trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), 152-53.

<sup>197</sup> Freud, ‘Fetishism’, 154.

<sup>198</sup> Freud, ‘Fetishism’, 156.

deemed to be missing',<sup>199</sup> so that fetishism compensates for a lack of visual acuity – a loss of sight – and becomes a visible trace of the invisible. Providing a site [sight] of visibility, Heidi's construction under the male gaze as a scopophilic fetish object displaces the concomitant fear of absence and invisibility. The fetish object is visibility par excellence, but only insofar as visibility masks invisibility, evoking a spectrality or 'phantomatic'<sup>200</sup> visibility 'which presents us now with one face now with another, without making both visible in the same instant'.<sup>201</sup> As Giorgio Agamben writes:

The fetish confronts us with the paradox of an unattainable object that satisfies a human need precisely through its being unattainable. Insofar as it is a presence, the fetish object is in fact something concrete and tangible; but insofar as it is the presence of an absence, it is, at the same time, immaterial and intangible, because it alludes continuously beyond itself to something that can never really be possessed.<sup>202</sup>

Fetishistic avisuality demonstrates the spectrality of *trou-matic* memory and narrative, presenting visibility and invisibility as reciprocal and interrelated elements. The fetish object compensates for the inexhaustibility and impossibility of memory and narrative, but only as the presence of this absence, as the visibility of invisibility. In Heidi's short incursion into the narrative as a tour guide, the dispossession of her loudspeaker by the Japanese terrorists (a metaphorical castration of the fetish object) provokes a furious outburst. Reaffirming the threat of absence, Heidi breaks free of her submissive and sexualized role, but she is abruptly devastated by the author, who kills her ferociously: 'Exit *Heidi-long-legs!*'.<sup>203</sup> She is explosively over-exposed.

Once again, Heidi's disappearance from the scene is only temporary, before she returns in the final stages of the narrative, as the reader is returned to Ascona and the café on the banks of the lac Majeur. Defined only as 'plus tard', the narrative moves abruptly from a conversation between the two *actual* narrators, Carlos Bustamente and Élizabeth (Anna-Lise), and Artigas, to follow Élizabeth's journey to Ascona, where she hopes to find the house that Artigas stayed in during the winter of 1945, a house that he spoke to her about in one of his lengthy taped recollections. Élizabeth finds the house, but cannot get in – no one responds to her knocks at the door. Instead, she finds the café of which he also spoke, and its owner, now a woman in her fifties, 'originaire de Suisse alémanique [...] Elle avait seize ou dix-sept ans, à

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<sup>199</sup> Alys Eve Weinbaum, 'Ways of Not Seeing: (En)gendered Optics in Benjamin, Baudelaire, and Freud', in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 417.

<sup>200</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 'Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture', in *Theory and History of Literature: Volume 69* [1977], trans. by Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 35.

<sup>201</sup> Agamben, 'Stanzas', 37.

<sup>202</sup> Agamben, 'Stanzas', 33.

<sup>203</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 122.

l'époque'.<sup>204</sup> Heidi, a young waitress at the time and now the café owner, remembers Artigas (Manuel/Semprun) and their conversations: 'Un jour, à l'occasion d'un événement quelconque, incident ou nouvelle dans le journal, on ne sait plus, Heidi avait appris qu'il revenait d'Allemagne où il avait été interné dans un camp nazi'.<sup>205</sup> In *L'Évanouissement*, conversation between Heidi and Manuel was brief, limited to superficial discussion of Switzerland and Spyri's story-book. The discussion between Heidi and Élizabeth in *L'Algarabie*, however, betrays a more significant relationship. Engaged in conversation, Heidi is privy to information about Semprun's (Manuel's/Artigas') past, and to the traumatic memories that he claims to have chosen to forget in Ascona. Heidi represents the necessary presence of the 'other' in the position of the one who hears the victim bear witness to trauma, 'the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time'.<sup>206</sup> Avisual, Heidi *is* traumatic memory: the inscription of an absence and the visibility of invisibility. However, Élizabeth's encounter with Heidi negates her avisuality as a peripheral and socially invisible ghost, bringing her 'back into focus'<sup>207</sup> and acknowledging her presence as a figure of the past and link to unknown and unwritten memories. Heidi tells Élizabeth that she still has the manuscript of a poem written by Artigas in the café in Ascona so many years earlier. Yet, despite Élizabeth's insistence that Heidi find the poem, it remains unseen, and the former waitress remembers only a few lines: 'Mais elle se souvient parfaitement du début, qu'elle récite par cœur, encore étonnée, parce qu'elle le trouve étrange. Dérangeant même. *La mort a le visage aigu des filles nubiles...* [original italics]'.<sup>208</sup> In spite of her visibility, the memories Heidi provides for Élizabeth are fragmentary. Élizabeth never discovers the remainder of this poem, and nor does the reader: it hangs on the brink of an expectant future in the same way that *Adieu's* elliptical title, or Heidi's repeated narrative arrivals, continue to point towards the perpetual extension of the past into the future. In her unique possession of this poem, and its incompleteness, Heidi demonstrates the absent centre of *trou*-matic memory and the impossibility of narrative. Heidi returns to *L'Algarabie* not with a memory, but with the absence of a memory: a fragment, gap, or ellipsis where the memory should have been.

Symptomatic of the future return of memory, Heidi demonstrates the visibility of trauma as an invisibility that is still to come. Unlike the Lacanian *symptôme* however, as a fetish, Heidi's role cannot be involuntary. The fetish represents not the repression of an event that waits to return in the future, but its disavowal. The fetish, Žižek claims, is the '*envers*' of the *symptôme*:

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<sup>204</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 554.

<sup>205</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 554-55.

<sup>206</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 57.

<sup>207</sup> Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*, 2.

<sup>208</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 555.

That is to say, symptom is the exception which disturbs the surface of the false appearance, the point at which the repressed Other Scene erupts, while fetish is the embodiment of the Lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth. Let us take the case of the death of a beloved person: in the case of a symptom, I 'repress' this death, I try not to think about it, but the repressed trauma returns in the symptom; in the case of a fetish, on the contrary, I 'rationally' fully accept this death, and yet I cling to the fetish, to some feature that embodies for me the disavowal of this death.<sup>209</sup>

The creation of a fetish object cancels the full effect of loss or absence by presenting a substitute to which the subject can cling on: '*the fetish which enables you to (pretend to) accept reality "the way it is" [original italics]*'.<sup>210</sup> Heidi's presence in the text – her excess visibility – does not necessarily indicate memory that is still to come – as a *symptôme* does – but rather compensates for, and disavows, its absence. The fetishist continues to believe in the presence of something he knows to be absent, or as Octave Mannoni wrote: 'Je sais bien, mais quand même...'.<sup>211</sup> Narrative fetishism represents an opportunity for Semprun to recuperate the losses of his childhood by reconstructing and reconfiguring absence in the present of narration.

Through fetishism, Semprun is able to acknowledge the absences of his past, 'mais quand même' to employ fiction in the pursuit of constructing a temporary substitute. Triggering nostalgic memories, and reversing narrative chronology, Heidi is the fetish object that compensates for the losses of exile and childhood. Narrative fetishism employs the text itself, and the processes of writing and reading, as a means of reconstructing a past that the author knows to be lost, creating a literary substitute for intolerable absence. In Freud, the fetish reassures the child's castration anxiety by disavowing the threatening absence of the mother's penis. In Semprun's works more specifically, the fetish can be considered to substitute the mother entirely, disavowing her loss and her absence from his life. Through Heidi, Semprun is able to disavow her death by constructing a fetish that represents childhood memory, innocence and servitude. Semprun knows that his mother is dead, and yet he clings to the fetish in order to cancel the full effect of her loss. Susana Maura is kept alive through Heidi as fetish object, in order that Semprun does not have to come to terms with the full realisation of her absence from his life and memory. The maternal figure is encoded or encrypted within the narrative as a fetish object that compensates for her loss and invisibility. Assimilating the maternal figure into the structure of the text itself, incorporated as part of the writing process, her absence is encrypted within the narrative, as an open wound that cries out from the shadows of the text. Simultaneously acting to veil [voile] and reveal [dévoile] this open wound, Semprun's narrative fetishism transforms the site [sight] of memory into a crypt, a *non-lieu*, in

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<sup>209</sup> Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan In Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 1992), x.

<sup>210</sup> Žižek, *Enjoy!*, xi.

<sup>211</sup> 'Je sais bien, mais quand même...' is the title of a chapter in Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'imaginaire ou l'autre scène* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 9-33.

which the mother is kept alive *as* dead – present *as* absent – within the structure and process of writing.

In *L'Écorce et le noyau*, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok develop their theory of encryption, in which an inner crypt preserves an absence in a way that it *appears* at once present and absent. Like a protective covering of visibility that shields invisibility and absence, the crypt preserves the lost object as a living dead, deceptively indicating a continued presence in spite of indisputable absence. Within the crypt, absence is both disavowed and accepted, so that the crypt acts in the same way as the fetish to the extent that it too veils the possibility of absence. The lost object is, until further notice, a liminal absent presence, a living dead. For Semprun, the encryption of his mother means that until the crypt is opened, her existence or non-existence cannot be proven either way. He essentially maintains her as a living dead, on the margins of both life and death, precluding confrontation with the realisation of her loss. Heidi fulfils the task of encryption, rendering a visual the lost object, simultaneously concealing and revealing, or as Derrida writes:

Une crypte ne se présente pas. Une certaine disposition des lieux est aménagée pour dissimuler: quelque chose, toujours un corps de quelque façon. Mais pour dissimuler aussi la dissimulation: la crypte qui d'elle-même se cèle tout autant qu'elle recèle.<sup>212</sup>

Like the fetish, the crypt is constructed 'grâce à la double pression de forces contradictoires, érigée dans sa ruine, étayée par ce qui n'interrompt jamais son travail de sappe ou de mine'.<sup>213</sup>

Heidi encrypts the lost maternal figure, concealing the open wound as a visible presence within the structure of narrative itself. For as long as the crypt holds, the loss can be disavowed. Once the crypt is opened however, Semprun would have to confront the realisation of the death of his mother and the reality of her absence. In *L'Algarabie*, this metaphorical crypt finally *is* opened. Shortly after the narrative flash-forward that transports the reader, with Elizabeth, from Paris to Ascona to meet Heidi, Artigas is murdered and castrated. Following Freud, the fear of castration that the fetish alleviates is definitively realised: the absence is accepted. In the dying moments of Artigas' life, he is transported back to the family home in Madrid, where he finally confronts this absence, in what should be a cathartic realisation of loss. Within the crypt, the object is excluded, sealed off behind the walls of an inner psychic tomb, an image that correlates with the maternal bedroom conjured up through conversation between Elizabeth and Artigas, so that the mother is directly linked to the notion of encryption. The tension between the disavowal of Susana's death and the acceptance of this loss builds up

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<sup>212</sup> Derrida, 'Fors: Les mots anglés de Nicolas Abraham et Maria Torok', foreword to *Cryptonomie: Le Verbier de l'homme aux loups*, by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (Paris: Aubier Flammarion, 1976), 12.

<sup>213</sup> Derrida, 'Fors', 27.

throughout the narrative: the desire to open the crypt (enter the bedroom) is always twinned with the fear of realising loss and absence.

Within the crypt (or the locked bedroom), the mother is preserved as a living dead, so that opening this room will force Artigas to confront the reality of his loss, proving, definitively, the finality of Susana's death. The cathartic entry into the bedroom at the end of *L'Algarabie*, as Artigas is in the throes of death and castrated, demonstrates the metaphorical downfall of the crypt and the reunion with the living dead figure of the mother. In the narrative, Artigas imagines making his way towards this closed door, his body getting weaker and weaker, inching closer, on his hands and knees, breathlessly:

Et voilà. Il vient de relever encore une fois la tête, il vient de faire un effort épuisant pour s'appuyer sur ses coudes afin de gagner quelques centimètres, de se rapprocher ne fût-ce que de quelques centimètres de cette porte close, et voilà qu'elle s'ouvre, précisément. Ouverte la porte close sur le mystère troublant de la mort. Ouverte la porte de la chambre funéraire où je vais enfin pouvoir m'allonger sur le grand lit conjugal. [...] Je serai enfin revenu dans le sein maternel. Dans le giron maternel de ce lit conjugal et mortuaire où s'allongea jadis le corps sans vie de ma mère. Dans le sein maternel de la mort qui me poursuit *desde que he nacido*.<sup>214</sup>

Artigas' final wish is to see his mother for one last time, to be reunited with her in death:

Je regarde cette porte ouverte, ce trou de lumière orange dans la nuit sans fin du couloir. Tout ce qui me reste de force se concentre dans ce regard. Et mon crâne va éclater, ma vie va s'écouler finalement par mes yeux qui se vident de toutes les beautés du monde. [...] Enfin. Enfin je vais savoir. Une silhouette de femme, le corps cambré, sans doute devant la glace lunaire de la grande armoire, vient d'y apparaître. La robe du soir scintilla de mille paillettes.<sup>215</sup>

Coinciding with the moment of castration, the entry into this bedroom (crypt) demonstrates the unveiling of a fetish and the realisation of absence, the final confrontation with the loss of his mother. No longer split between disavowal and acceptance, Mannoni's 'je sais bien, mais quand même...' can finally be reduced to a devastating but conclusive 'je sais bien; je vais savoir'. The crypt has been opened; the death can no longer be disavowed. But something goes wrong: the female silhouette in his mother's bedroom is not Susana Maura but Pola Negri, a Polish actress Artigas/Semprun had much admired as a child. The narrator tries to negate this vision of Pola: 'Je sais bien que ça ne peut pas être Pola Negri. C'est ma mère qui apparaîtrait en robe du soir dans l'encadrement de cette porte enfin ouverte. [...] Pola Negri, c'est bien plus tard'.<sup>216</sup> But his mother never appears.

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<sup>214</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 579-80.

<sup>215</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 580. The same memory is evoked in *Adieu*: 'La longue silhouette de ma mère vêtue d'une robe de soir'. *Adieu*, 46.

<sup>216</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 581.

In the narrative, the opening of the bedroom door (crypt) coincides with the death of Artigas; biographically, however, Susana's bedroom door was reopened when Semprun's father re-married. As the crypt is opened to reveal the phantomatic silhouette of Pola Negri, the narrative triggers a childhood memory:

Ma vie avec [Pola Negri] commence en 1935, juste avant la guerre civile, avec *Mazurka*. J'avais douze ans, une institutrice allemande nous avait conduits voir ce film. Quelques jours après, à la table familiale, mon père avait fait des commentaires lyriques sur la beauté de Pola Negri. Je l'avais haï sur-le-champ. Il m'avait déjà trompé avec ma mère, il avait commis le crime de lui survivre, d'en épouser une autre, il n'allait pas recommencer en me disputant l'amour de Pola Negri.<sup>217</sup>

The phantom that emerges from the crypt is not the mother, but a memory of the father. Through narrative fetishism and encryption, Semprun creates enclaves in his texts that conceal memorial absences. Emerging from the text like linguistic scars, encrypted writing fractures the narrative, revealing the invisibility of the visible. Heidi represents a linguistic avisuality, a cryptonym in narrative that reproduces both the symptom and the mechanism of absence: revealing and concealing memory through textual encryption. Cryptonyms, 'des mots qui cachent',<sup>218</sup> demonstrate the visibility of the invisible: the linguistic and textual presence of absence. Narrative crypts are not only constructed through literary imagery, but through the structure of the text itself. The avisuality of *trou-matic* memory is reproduced through each page, so that, as Abraham and Torok argue: '*les mots ne seraient pas seulement des messagers des pulsions refoulées mais aussi, et par définition, l'instrument même de leur refoulement* [original italics]'.<sup>219</sup> Heidi herself is a cryptonym, a linguistic and textual trace of a narrative absence that the author refuses to acknowledge.

In *Adieu*, Semprun evokes, with limited embellishment, the second wife of his father, a woman he considered an imposter to the maternal void left by his own mother:

[Ma belle-mère] Ou marâtre, je ne sais quel terme conviendra le mieux. La deuxième femme de mon père qu'il avait épousée après la mort de Susana Maura. Et qui était notre dernière gouvernante allemande. Originnaire de la Suisse alémanique, plutôt, du village de Wädenswil, sur le lac de Zurich.<sup>220</sup>

Anita L., nicknamed 'la Suisse' <sup>221</sup> by Semprun and his brothers, unexpectedly inherits (or rather was the inspiration behind) the attributes formerly ascribed to Heidi. While Semprun only ever peripherally evokes his stepmother, she has always appeared as a figure of derision

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<sup>217</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 581.

<sup>218</sup> Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *Cryptonomie: Le Verbier de l'homme aux loups* (Paris: Aubier Flammarion, 1976), 115.

<sup>219</sup> Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *L'Écorce et le noyau* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 420.

<sup>220</sup> *Adieu*, 59.

<sup>221</sup> *Adieu*, 60.

and scorn, a disgrace to the memory of his mother and an imposter who forced a rupture between the father and his children. Her presence in the narrative is jarring, a disturbance that accounts in part for her avisuality, but she also represents the ideal *non-lieu* for the encryption of disavowed absence. Linguistically, Heidi is a typically Germanic name, ostensibly adopted to stereotype the children's *marâtre*, 'la Suisse', and her role as governess. At the level of a cryptonym, German is highly visible: it is a language rarely used in Semprun, despite his fluency and use of this language in Buchenwald (a language, therefore, that essentially saved his life). Yet the intrusion of German passes unseen, avisual, incongruous with the expected discourses of French and Spanish. Nonetheless, Heidi's initial (re)appearance in *L'Évanouissement* triggered memories of learning German in the family home in Madrid, memories that can be connected directly with 'la Suisse' and, ultimately, with the man who encouraged the learning of German in childhood: Semprun's father, Semprún Gurrea.<sup>222</sup>

Anita L. does not return to haunt, but she facilitates the encryption of the critical absence in Semprun's life and works: his father. Creating an almost imperceptible linguistic scar within the narrative, Heidi represents the disavowed absence of the paternal figure. The paternal disappearance haunts the *trou-matic* narrative through the text itself, as the symptom and the condition of absence. Encrypted within the narrative as an archetypal figure of femininity and submission, the father figure is ghosted by the same patriarchal society that extols masculine and paternal values. Semprún Gurrea's invisibility is authorised by the very society that ought to produce his visibility. Encrypted as Heidi – a lesbian, a waitress, an air hostess – Semprún Gurrea is made to disappear. Yet, the invisibility of the visible is betrayed by the encryption of the German language, producing an avisuality within the structure of narrative. In a final text, Heidi appears obliquely, invisibly, as a linguistic insistence of paternal absence.

In *Netchaïev*, Heidi casts a faint spectral shadow over the narrative, appearing invisibly as an absent presence. In a café in Ascona, on the banks of the lac Majeur, Julien Serguet waits for a phone call from Daniel Laurençon – Netchaïev – in December 1986. The location is unmistakably familiar and, as Julien is dazed by the sunlight reflected off the windscreen of an oncoming car '[d]es paillettes brillent, blanches comme neige tourbillonnante, derrière ses paupières closes',<sup>223</sup> the narrative déjà vu directly links Julien with *L'Évanouissement's* Manuel. Julien finally receives a phonecall: '*Une jeune employée de l'hôtel tout proche courait vers lui:*

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<sup>222</sup> 'Attention: mon père considérait que les occasions d'apprendre le français allaient être très nombreuses au cours de la vie, que le français nous était tellement naturel qu'on pourrait toujours l'étudier un peu plus tard, et qu'il valait mieux apprendre au départ une langue plus difficile, comme l'allemand. Dès l'âge de trois ans, l'allemand a été ma deuxième langue.' *Si la vie*, 30-31.

<sup>223</sup> *Netchaïev*, 269. The same sentence is repeated almost word for word, 280.

on le demandait au téléphone. Cinq heures. Daniel Laurençon était au rendez-vous [italics added].<sup>224</sup> The same moment is repeated from the perspective of Daniel, in Paris:

Daniel Laurençon composait le numéro de l'hôtel d'Ascona, tout en regardant par la fenêtre du salon [...] On répondait à Ascona, *la voix de femme avait un accent rugueux, Suisse alémanique*. Il demanda à parler à Julien Serguet. Oui, en effet, M. Serguet attendait un coup de fil, on allait le chercher! *Un accent de Zurich, c'est ça*. [Italics added.]<sup>225</sup>

Heidi's identity is never fully revealed, but is implied through the location of the café and the young female employee with a Zurich accent. Heidi is invisible: her social invisibility replicated by a genuine invisibility from the perspective of Daniel and the reader. She is there, but at the other end of the phone; she is there, but absent and invisible. Avisual, reduced to the fetish of her *schwizerdutch* accent, Heidi is beyond visibility; invisible, but not inexistent. Žižek argues paradoxically that 'the opposite of *existence* is not nonexistence, but *insistence*: that which does not exist continues to *insist*, striving towards existence'.<sup>226</sup> Heidi demonstrates the insistence of the phantom through Semprun's narratives: absent and invisible, the spectre cannot be forgotten or erased. Perforated by the insistence of absence, by a memory that has not been and cannot be confronted, Semprun's *trou-matic* narratives are ruptured by open wounds. Semprun Gurrea is absent from the narratives of his son, but despite his invisibility, he *insists*, rupturing the stability of narrative, crying out from the tears [déchirures/larmes] of the page. Heidi is not invisible, she is manifestly visible throughout Semprun's oeuvre, but she demonstrates the invisibility of the visible, the open wound: the father. In much the same way that trauma is communicable only through gaps, absence, and ellipses, so the narrative crypt becomes '*le symbole même du non-symbolisable* [original italics]',<sup>227</sup> the presence of an absence, and the visibility of invisibility. Semprun's father does not exist in these narratives, but he *insists*, through the structure of text, through the ruptures, gaps, and absences of writing.

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<sup>224</sup> Netchaïev, 289.

<sup>225</sup> Netchaïev, 290.

<sup>226</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), 22.

<sup>227</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 306.

### Conclusion: Memory Hidden in Plain Sight

*The only way we could deal with this trauma was to dissociate and put everything into our 'Babushka' boxes and pretend they didn't exist.*

-Janet Baljeu, *Downloading Spirit*.

Semprun's cryptographic narratives serve to radically designify the linguistic relationship between signified and signifier, liberating the text from culturally and socially mediated expectations of literature. *Trou-matic* narratives are thus produced through a process of un-writing, a process whereby absence, the *non-symbolisable*, becomes the foundation of the text. *Trou-matic* narrative presents only the visibility of the invisible, so that one must read beyond the visible to reveal the open wound that cannot be grasped or articulated. In *Autobiographie*, Semprun reproduces this sense of concealment, describing memory as a Russian *babouchka* doll:

Une de ces poupées russes de bois peint qui peuvent s'ouvrir et qui contiennent une autre poupée identique mais plus petite, qui en contient une autre, et une autre encore, jusqu'à ce qu'on arrive à la dernière, de taille très réduite, celle qu'on ne peut plus ouvrir.<sup>228</sup>

Memory within memory: Semprun's *trou-matic* narratives function as a memorial Matryoshka doll, where within each memory nests another, smaller, more deeply encrypted, unseen yet not inexistent; avisual. Memory veiled by memory, rendered avisual, hidden in plain sight, in the structure of the narrative itself, the visible in-visible. In *Autobiographie*, Semprun reveals the final *poupée* of memory. From Foixá in north-eastern Spain in 1976, he remembers returning to The Hague a decade earlier with his wife Colette, 'et à l'intérieur de ce souvenir m'en revint un autre, beaucoup plus ancien, de 1937, quand j'étais enfant et que mon père était chargé d'affaires de la légation de la République en Hollande'.<sup>229</sup> Semprun remembers attending mass with his father in the Alexanderstraat church, the priest's tirade against the *Rouges espagnols*, and his father's furious and desperate rant. Like the cathartic revelation of the opened chambre-crypt in *L'Algarabie*, the 'dernière *babouchka* de la mémoire [original italics]'<sup>230</sup> reveals the open wound of Semprun's *trou-matic* narratives of memory, crying out from the shadows of the text: the father.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> *Autobiographie*, 207.

<sup>229</sup> *Autobiographie*, 207.

<sup>230</sup> *Autobiographie*, 207.

<sup>231</sup> In the epilogue to *Federico Sanchez*, when Semprun really returns to this bedroom and childhood home in 1991, he is again struck by a memory of his father: 'J'avais quitté à petits pas l'appartement de mon enfance, le lieu dévasté de ma mémoire enfantine. J'ai pensé soudain à mon père...' 248.

In *Le Livre du partage*, Jabès writes: 'Il n'y a pas de détours – le détour est trou de mémoire. Peur de l'inconnu. Carence. Lacune'.<sup>232</sup> This chapter has shown that Semprun's narratives must be read as the site of a *trou*-ma, shot through with holes, revealing only the visibility of the traumatic and inconceivable invisible centre. At the centre of his narratives is the memory of the father, encrypted within and through the process of writing itself. Narrative is transformed into a crypt that commemorates the father through a structure that maintains the paternal figure as a living dead. Abraham and Torok initially developed their theory of encryption as an extension of Freud's theory of transgenerational haunting. They believed that memory could be transferred unconsciously, from one generation to the next, through gaps and euphemisms in discourse, so that 'a story may be transmitted without ever being openly told or consciously understood. So the haunted subject hides away a secret it never knew'.<sup>233</sup> Semprun's works do not only reveal the absence of one's own memory, as a process of remembrance that extends into an infinite past *and* future, but the absence of *an other's* memory. Constructed upon invisibility and absence, Semprun's narratives are ruptured by an epigenetic transfer of *trou*-matic memory, an intergenerational trauma. The whole [hole] problem with *trou*-matic narrative is that the text encrypts absence: the unknown, the unlocatable, the other. Peeling apart the Matryoshka doll of narrative, this chapter has revealed Semprun's relationship to narrative, memory, and to his father as relationships of alterity, shot through with holes. Heidi's fetishistic avisibility within Semprun's narratives compensates for the loss of the phallic object, and therefore for the waning structure of patriarchal society itself, constructed around the signification of the phallus. Semprun's works are undermined by the paternal and patriarchal structure through which they have been written and received, haunted from within by paternal absence. Semprun's narratives are haunted: by memory, by trauma, by future narrative, and by the father – by memories of the father and by the father's memories. This intergenerational or transgenerational haunting initiates discussion of the relationship between father and son to be continued in the next chapter, as a relationship that is fundamentally haunted by alterity and instability. The son and his narratives are constructed upon the essential alterity of the other: the absent father. In Semprun's works, this is reflected in the fragmented style of narrative and identity, but further, it betrays the true extent of a troubled relationship between father and son.

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<sup>232</sup> Jabès, *Le Livre du partage*, 19.

<sup>233</sup> Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 78.

## Chapter Two

### Like Father, Like Son: The Return of Paternal Fate

*I would have begun with the story of the generation that raised me, which is the only place to begin.*

-Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent*.

Semprun's cryptographic narratives enable paternal invisibility, reproducing the presence of the father in the text as an absence. Semprun's elision of the paternal figure is at the centre of this chapter, understanding why the father is rendered invisible, and what the effect of this absence has been upon the author and his works. The intra-narrative exclusion of the father provides a stark contrast with the author's extra-narrative identification with the paternal surname – the name branded on the cover of his books – suggesting that narrative thus provides a place of refuge where the author is able to reconstruct a new identity, a new origin that differentiates him from an inherited continuity. Semprun embraces interchangeable pseudo-fathers who fulfil political, cultural, or familial functions, creating a utopian paternal lineage to inherit and perpetuate through narrative. However, the proliferation of pseudo-paternal figures distorts the identities of author, narrator, and protagonist. If one's identity is constructed through opposition, as 'a question of *relation*, of self to other, subject to other, inside to outside',<sup>234</sup> then Semprun's reconstruction of an identity based upon potentially infinite others undermines the stability of his subjective position: who am *I*, if *I* am all others? In eliminating the paternal figure, Semprun's identity is destabilised, transforming narrative into a site of alterity, where the voice that speaks is always already the voice of an other. To write autobiographically is to write the other, to interact with an inner alterity that transforms the process of writing the self into a work of writing absence. Semprun's works are haunted by a paternal absence that *insists* from the enclaves of linguistic silence as a mark of the son's failed process of mourning, transforming the site of memory into a site of continued encounter with the dead, a process of Derridean *Gedächtnis*. The dead father is encrypted in narrative; kept alive *as* dead, present *as* absent, so that the autobiographical *I* is a mark of the visible invisible, the self as other. Through narrative, the paternal figure is displaced, rendered invisible, prompting the disturbance of paternal and patriarchal values. Undermining the stability and presence of the father, Semprun refutes the primacy of a patriarchal world view.

The paternal absence in Semprun's narratives has been rendered avial by a research culture that side-lines discussion of the father in favour of an affective contribution to work on the lost maternal figure. Semprun Gurrea's absence has been effectively doubled – his *invisibility rendered invisible* – through scholarship that neglects to comment upon either intra-

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<sup>234</sup> Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.

or extra-textual silence. In a prime example, Herrmann comments on the role of Communist relationships in Semprun's post-Buchenwald experiences, arguing that: 'When he was rescued from Buchenwald Semprun was an orphan in more ways than one, and was welcomed into the Communist family, in whose symbolic ancestry Pasionaria figures as the self-sacrificing Mother Courage'.<sup>235</sup> Ostensibly commenting on the surrogate familial and maternal roles played respectively by the Communist party and by Ibárruri, Herrmann claims that Semprun 'substitutes ties with lost primary figures (mother, father, siblings) with secondary ones (Carrillo, Pasionaria, Stalin himself, fellow comrades)'.<sup>236</sup> Yet, the meaning of the term 'lost' is not explained, so that Semprun's father, and six brothers and sisters are *ghosted* – made to appear invisible, or even dead – alongside the mother. In 1945 however, and upon his return to Paris from Buchenwald, Semprun was not an orphan, and indeed, would not be an orphan for a further two decades. Herrmann's use of this term is jarring. If it is employed semantically, it is not explained, and the significance of 'lost' relationships within the family left hanging. If it refers instead to an oversight, it demonstrates perfectly the double invisibility of paternal absence, assuming orphanhood through lack of explicit reference to the father in narrative and analysis.

Through close reading of Semprun's texts, it is clear that father figures are consistently absent from his works: missing, dead, or useless. In this chapter, the paternal orphan is interpreted on three different levels: biographical, biological, and fictitious. The biographical father refers exclusively to Semprun Gurrea as the father of the author, even where he is not the father of the protagonist or narrator within a text; the biological father refers to the fulfilment of the genealogical paternal position, and thus to a relationship between father and son within narrative, even where the father and son are not explicitly Semprun Gurrea and Semprun; finally, the fictitious father refers to the illusory creation of paternity established between two individuals, despite no genetic kinship. In Semprun, all three of these paternal concepts are systematically dismantled, exchanged, and disjointed. In *Federico Sanchez*, for example, where Semprun conforms to Lejeune's *pacte autobiographique*<sup>237</sup> whereby he is identified simultaneously as author, narrator and protagonist,<sup>238</sup> the arrival of a photograph of his father from a childhood friend in the Netherlands establishes a narrative link between the biographical father and son. However, Semprun Gurrea remains within the dead space of the photograph, temporally and spatially frozen in The Hague in 1939, petrified at the moment exile

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<sup>235</sup> Herrmann, *Written in Red*, 175.

<sup>236</sup> Thomas Play quoted in Herrmann, *Written in Red*, 176.

<sup>237</sup> Lejeune defines autobiography as: '[un] récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité [original italics]'. *Le Pacte*, 14.

<sup>238</sup> 'Pour qu'il y ait autobiographie [...] il faut qu'il y ait identité de l'auteur, du narrateur et du personnage [original italics]'. Lejeune, *Le Pacte*, 15.

was to recommence for the family.<sup>239</sup> Conjuring the ghosts of the past, ‘cette image d’outre-tombe’<sup>240</sup> establishes a biographical link between father and son, but it is an association limited to a specific time and place, performed only within the ‘fantomatique’<sup>241</sup> frame of the photograph. Moreover, the father is evoked purely in his political role as *chargé d’affaires*, and the photograph, clipped from a local paper, situates him within a public, rather than private, domain. Biological fathers are established in *La Montagne*, for example, and *Vingt ans*, but abruptly terminated through death and separation. In *La Montagne*, the father of Antoine, Nicolas de Stermaria, dies in a stupid drunken accident shortly before Antoine is born; Karel Kapela’s father commits suicide; and Juan Larrea, (assuming the childhood of the Spanish author of the same name), spends his formative years living with his aunt Micaela in Madrid, a ‘visión del Paraíso’ [‘vision of paradise’]<sup>242</sup> compared to the ‘triste y adusta’ [‘sad and severe’]<sup>243</sup> religious family home in Bilbao. In *Vingt ans*, the father of twins Isabel and Lorenzo, José María Avendaño, whose exhumation and reburial is witnessed through the narrative, dies before the twins are born. *Netchaïev* and *L’Algarabie* juxtapose biological and fictitious fathers, problematizing the nature of the relationship, defined either through a genealogical or sentimental bond. In *Netchaïev*, Daniel Laurençon (Netchaïev) is brought up by Roger Marroux, the ‘père [...] usurpateur’<sup>244</sup> after his biological father, Michel Laurençon, commits suicide three years after returning from Buchenwald. The tension between son and intrusive fictitious father is palpable throughout the narrative. Finally, *L’Algarabie* turns the typical lineage of fatherhood on its head. The narrative inverts the paternity of twin daughters Perséphone and Proserpine from Eleuterio Ruiz to Rafael Artigas, before the role of father is abandoned completely, with significant implications for patriarchy and masculinity more widely.

Herrmann’s apparent oversight in the term ‘orphan’ is curiously reciprocated through Semprun’s own narratives, where he is transformed into a paternal orphan through the literary rejection and failure of father figures. Despite multiple attempts to recreate the father-son relationship: biographically, biologically, and fictionally, the connection is always disjointed or ruptured. Of course, narrative absence is not the same as actual absence, and while Herrmann’s term may be accurately applied to Semprun’s works, it is incorrect in respect of his life. Nevertheless, to be orphaned does not necessarily reflect a death, but rather an absence, an abandonment or a dissociation. Through *Adieu*, it becomes clear that Semprun *does* see himself as an orphan, in response to an actual paternal absence in life that is reflected in narrative.

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<sup>239</sup> See Federico Sanchez, 206-13.

<sup>240</sup> Federico Sanchez, 207.

<sup>241</sup> Federico Sanchez, 209.

<sup>242</sup> María Fernanda Iglesia, *Juan Larrea: Vida y poesía* (Bilbao: Bilbao Bizkaia Kutxa, 1997), 11. All translations from Spanish my own.

<sup>243</sup> Fernanda Iglesia, *Juan Larrea*, 11.

<sup>244</sup> *Netchaïev*, 251.

Presenting both Semprun and Semprún Gurrea in their respective roles of son and father, and establishing an autobiographical link between author and narrator, *Adieu* offers an explicitly detailed account of the father-son relationship. Unlike *Federico Sanchez*, or even *La Deuxième Mort*, which introduce Semprún Gurrea through purely cultural and political associations, *Adieu* confronts the interpretation of the paternal figure in a domestic and sentimental environment. Although Semprún Gurrea's historic and literary attributes are not dismissed, they are not the primary focus. *Adieu* is a significant narrative in the context of the father-son relationship because it must be read, first and foremost, as a work written by a son, and is exceptional in Semprun's oeuvre as a text that speaks overtly from this position of vulnerability and physical and emotional disruption. In *Adieu*, Semprun systematically dismantles the image of the powerful and influential paternal figure, demonstrating a biographical absence that corresponds to narrative invisibility.

As a narrative of the discovery of adolescence and exile, *Adieu* resonates with the effects of Republican defeat in Spain. Transforming the lives of the Semprun family, exile marks the first step towards paternal absence, as Semprún Gurrea struggles to adapt to life in France after his affluent lifestyle afforded by the Spanish government:

L'exil et la défaite en avaient fait une sorte de prolétaire, ou de déclassé de l'intelligentsia, jeté dans une déréliction presque absolue. Parfois, cette incapacité oblomovienne de faire face aux contingences pratiques de la vie m'avait touché chez mon père. Car s'il lui arrivait d'être irritant, il lui est aussi arrivé d'être sublime, dans l'exercice de cette inadaptation.<sup>245</sup>

In her under-appreciated paper, 'Padre(s) y hermano(s),' Semilla Durán refers to the 'invalidación del padre' ['invalidation of the father'] implicated throughout *Adieu*, as the pathetic zenith of the 'destrucción sistemática de la imagen paterna' ['systematic destruction of the paternal image'].<sup>246</sup> She writes: 'A partir de la confirmación del exilio, la imagen doliente del padre despojado será la única que atravesará los territorios del recuerdo, ese padre hundido en una tristeza definitiva y privado del sentido de su existencia'. ['From the moment of exile, the sorrowful image of the bereft father will be the only image to punctuate zones of memory; this father, plunged into a definitive sorrow and deprived of his sense of existence'.]<sup>247</sup> Defeated in Spain, Semprún Gurrea submits to defeat in France too, arriving at the *préfecture de police* after the occupation of France by the Nazis in June 1940 to request French naturalisation in order to

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<sup>245</sup> *Adieu*, 109.

<sup>246</sup> Semilla Durán, 'Padre(s) y hermano(s): estrategias de autoconstrucción en *Adieu, vive clarité* de Jorge Semprún y *El exilio fue una fiesta*, de Carlos Semprún Maura', *Badebec* 1 (2011), 180. All translations from Spanish my own.

<sup>247</sup> Semilla Durán, 'Padre(s)', 172.

‘partager le sort de la France meurtrie!’.<sup>248</sup> Thrown into what Semprun describes as a ‘désarroi paternel’,<sup>249</sup> Semprún Gurrea is sometimes endearing, but most often depicted as uneasy and pathetic, no longer the powerful and influential role model he had been in Spain.

Augstein argues that Semprun no longer respected his father as the head of the household, although he continued to admire his fervent republicanism. After 1939, Semprun’s relationship with his father reached new lows ‘cuando su progenitor ya no pudo mantenerle’ [‘when his father could no longer support him’],<sup>250</sup> prompting the dissolution of ‘la autoridad patriarcal, el derecho de veto, la credibilidad’ [‘patriarchal authority, power of veto, credibility’].<sup>251</sup> Semprún Gurrea’s political and cultural demise is mirrored in sentimental and domestic disarray:

Quelles inquiétudes, quelles questions formuler à un père distant – ou plutôt: ne sachant pas établir la distance adéquate, qui doit être un mélange tendrement savant de disponibilité et d’autorité – intimidé par sa solitude, son inadaptation à la réalité, confronté à une tribu de sept garçons et filles ayant besoins affectifs et intellectuels fort différents, vu leur âge varié?<sup>252</sup>

Unable to fulfil the paternal position either publically or privately, Semprún Gurrea’s defeat marks not only the inauguration of an eternal exile, but the start of the demise of fatherhood. Semprún Gurrea is infantilised, reduced to a helpless and dependent infant, reliant upon his own children. In the central Matryoshka episode of *Autobiographie*, repeated in *Adieu*, Semprun’s Sunday visit to church with his father in the Netherlands demonstrates the dispossession of the paternal figure and his infantilisation in the eyes of his children. As the priest launches into a scathing attack on the ‘rouges espagnols’, inciting holy war against these enemies of the Church, Semprún Gurrea is unable to follow the intricate details of this tirade, and asks his son to translate the outburst once they have left the church. Bristling with anger, Semprún Gurrea returns to the church, confronting the priest through his son, who will act as interpreter and translator.<sup>253</sup> Beginning as a structured argument, Semprún Gurrea’s discourse becomes desperate, and as the priest walks away, ‘mon père continua à parler dans le vide, à s’adresser à un interlocuteur devenu invisible. [...] Mon père est resté immobile, figé dans un silence douloureux’.<sup>254</sup> Rather than inciting details of Semprún Gurrea’s cultural and literary successes, *Adieu* must be read as a desperate confession, where the author expresses the heartfelt disappointments of a son watching his father fall apart.

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<sup>248</sup> *Adieu*, 110.

<sup>249</sup> *Adieu*, 119.

<sup>250</sup> Augstein, *Lealtad y Traición*, 193.

<sup>251</sup> Augstein, *Lealtad y Traición*, 193.

<sup>252</sup> *Adieu*, 113.

<sup>253</sup> *Adieu*, 22-25.

<sup>254</sup> *Adieu*, 25-26.

The decline of the paternal figure is not strictly limited to the public domain, and to the linguistic and political challenges afforded by exile, but is intimately linked to debilitating failures that had already begun in Spain: the disappointments of the Second Republic, the demise of Susana Maura, and the concurrent rise of *la Suissesse*. Semilla Durán draws attention to the overbearing role of the despised stepmother in the disintegration of the paternal figure. She argues that the ‘madrastra’ [*marâtre*] not only improperly appropriated the maternal role, but displaced and re-appropriated the paternal imago, so that Semprún Gurrea is ‘sistemáticamente invalidada en cada una de las esferas del comportamiento’ [‘systematically invalidated in each one of the behavioural spheres’].<sup>255</sup> Through *Adieu*, the image of Semprún Gurrea is infantilised, feminised, and ultimately rendered redundant, imposing what Semilla Durán terms ‘una orfandad compartida’ [‘a shared orphanage’] on the children:

Los niños han perdido a su madre, el Padre ha perdido la Patria, todo han sido reducidos a la condición de ‘refugiados’, mendigos de un espacio ajeno, de una identidad confiscada. Y el poder del padre ha sido insuficiente para impedir la derrota, como lo ha sido para reavivar la llama vacilante de la vida materna.<sup>256</sup>

[The children had lost their mother, the father had lost his homeland, and all had been reduced to the condition of ‘refugees’, beggars in alien space, their identity confiscated. And the power of the father had been insufficient to prevent the defeat, just as it had been insufficient to relight the flickering flame of the mother’s life.]

Echoing Herrmann’s semantic orphanhood, the narrative invisibility of the paternal figure is a reflection of biographical absence, brought on by defeat, loss and displacement, and represented through a complete withdrawal of fatherhood.

Semilla Durán argues that the paternal absence is overcome through an ‘inversión de roles, en la cual el hijo se convierte no solo en “muleta” del padre – problemas lingüísticos –, sino que parece asumir su tutela’ [‘inversion of roles, in which the son is transformed not only into a “crutch” for the father – the linguistic problems for example – but actually seems to assume his guardianship’].<sup>257</sup> As in the example of the church sermon in *The Hague*, Semprún inverts the roles of father and son, becoming the ‘heredero privilegiado [...] el sustituto paternal por excelencia’ [‘privileged heir [...] the paternal substitute par excellence’].<sup>258</sup> Revising paternal lineage, the roles of father and son are inverted. Juxtaposing traditional ancestral descent in reverse chronological order, this inversion not only serves to substitute the paternal role relinquished by Semprún Gurrea, but invalidates the past. Reconstructing the past through narrative, Semprún regains control over his childhood, going back in time to repair the damage

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<sup>255</sup> Semilla Durán, ‘Padre(s)’, 179.

<sup>256</sup> Semilla Durán, ‘Padre(s)’, 170.

<sup>257</sup> Semilla Durán, ‘Padre(s)’, 175-76.

<sup>258</sup> Semilla Durán, ‘Padre(s)’, 177-78.

caused by his own father's defeat in Spain, negating a tragic history of loss and exile. Yet this inversion of roles proves to be no more than a repetition, as the son does not replace his father but replicates him, creating not a reversal of history but an endless tragic cycle of defeat. In *Adieu*, Semprun infamously alludes to the predestination of his own political and literary career, following in the footsteps of his father or maternal grandfather:

Il était établi, en effet, que je serais écrivain, que je poursuivrais la tradition paternelle. [...] La seule alternative à cette vocation d'écrivain qui m'était attribuée, inscrite dans mon hérédité familiale, c'était ma mère qui la formulait parfois, avec une tendresse ironique. Ou amusée, du moins. 'Écrivain ou président de la République!' proclamait-elle à la cantonade.<sup>259</sup>

There is an eerie echo that undermines the autonomy of the son and predestines his independent endeavours to mirror the failures of his father. Semprun's work in the French Resistance was unsuccessful, failing to prevent Hitler's gains across Europe or the deaths of millions at the hands of Nazism. His efforts with the PCE to overthrow Franco's fascist regime, the same task his father's Second Republic had failed to do, was equally ineffective. The illumination of the true values of Stalinism and the cult of Stalin further undermined decades of clandestine work for Semprun, as if the years of risks, sacrifices and dangers had only played into the hands of a conviction he believed to be preventing.

The paternal fate haunts the son. For John Irwin, reading William Faulkner, the past is recycled and repeated on a contextual and structural level of narrative, so that the past reappears in the present, and every character or narrative is a repetition of another. Expanding on the words of Quentin Compson's father in *The Sound and the Fury* that 'tragedy is second hand',<sup>260</sup> Irwin writes: 'We are second-hand. You are a copy of a copy. [...] My fate was determined by my father as your fate is determined by yours'.<sup>261</sup> For Semprun, as for Faulkner, the son has no autonomy, fated to repeat the actions of his father, signalling societal and biological decay and degeneration. Paternal haunting here is not performed as a ghost in the narrative, as in *Hamlet*, but enacted through the generation of sons themselves, evoking the return of phantoms and the spectrality of *trou-matic* narrative. Nietzsche's four part philosophical novel *Also sprach Zarathustra [Thus Spake Zarathustra]* demonstrates the inevitability of generational haunting through the infinite processes of paternal legacy and inheritance, claiming that both the vices and the virtues of the father are passed down to the son, irreversible and inexorable. Nietzsche's philosophy stems from a lifelong fear of inheriting the illness that (he believed) had caused the premature death of his father and subsequently of

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<sup>259</sup> *Adieu*, 20-21.

<sup>260</sup> William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* [1929] (London: Vintage, 1995), 97.

<sup>261</sup> John Irwin, *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 111.

his younger brother. Attributing philosophical thought to autobiography, Ben-Ami Scharfstein claims that in *Zarathustra* in particular, the author displays the signs of a son desperate to overcome the unavoidable destiny he felt had been handed to him – unwilling and unwanted – by his father, namely ‘predestination to an early death’.<sup>262</sup> As Scharfstein concludes:

Nietzsche was, in effect, accusing his father of passing on to him his weakness and the possibility of an early similar death, for which reason he, Nietzsche, would denounce and surpass nationalism, Christianity, and conventional truth and goodness, everything connected with the father he felt so close to. For all these signified the death whose threat to him he had painfully learned to oppose with life and life’s values. His father, he had come to feel, had been drawing him, as he had drawn Joseph, his brother, down to the grave. This feeling, I think, is the nerve of the emotion that animates Nietzsche’s philosophy – the simultaneous longing for the father and rejection of him.<sup>263</sup>

As in Nietzsche and in Faulkner, Semprun cannot rewrite or rectify the failures of his father, and provides in his own existence the site of paternal haunting. The past is replayed over and over, blurring the distinctions between past and present so that the bleak future offers only further *arrivals* of an already predestined past.

Narrative, therefore, may not only represent a site of biographical reflection, but a creative apparatus that intentionally absents the paternal figure. In the opening pages of *Federico Sanchez*, Semprun returns to Rue Alfonso XI in Madrid in 1988, to take up his residence as Minister for Culture under the PSOE. Returning to the same road he had been forced to abandon in the summer of 1936, the circularity of his life is complete: ‘après deux guerres, l’exil, Buchenwald, le communisme, des femmes, quelques livres, me voici revenu à mon point de départ. [...] La boucle était bouclée’.<sup>264</sup> Life, haunted by the paternal fate, proves to be only a monstrous cycle of inescapable predictability, where each action is only a repetition of another. Eliminating the paternal figure through narrative produces a site of reconstruction, where the symbolically orphaned son is able to create an independent destiny, uninterrupted by the return of the past. Semprun’s rejection of paternal figures from his works – whether biographical, biological, or fictitious – suggests the Nietzschean imperative to ‘denounce and surpass’ all that was associated with his father, in order to break with the past and to prevent the inevitable eternal return. Through his narratives, Semprun demonstrates an auto-orphanhood that will abruptly terminate the paternal legacy and liberate him from his fated trajectory. Offering the chance to reconstruct the past and to re-create an autonomous destiny, narrative liberates the author from the external pressures of inheritance and predestination,

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<sup>262</sup> Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *The Philosophers: Their Lives and the Nature of their Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 295.

<sup>263</sup> Scharfstein, *Philosophers*, 295.

<sup>264</sup> *Federico Sanchez*, 10.

and the imperative to repeat and replicate. The author essentially becomes the father of himself, inciting an original and virtuous legacy.

However, Semprun's narratives do not simply exclude the father in an optimistic vindication of paternal flaws, but eliminate paternity more generally. The absence of fathers in narrative is doubled by a complimentary lack of sons. In *L'Algarabie*, for example, Eleuterio Ruiz and Acracia Seisededos have four daughters, while other protagonists remain notably childless; in *La Deuxième Mort*, Ramón and Adela have one daughter, Sonsoles; in *Netchaïev*, Marc Liliental/Laloy and Adriana Sponti, and Luis Zapata have daughters; and finally, in *La Montagne*, none of the protagonists produce male heirs. Redemption from the failures of the past lies in the possibilities of the future, but it is a future already doomed to repetition, undermined at every turn by the insidiousness of a past that continues to return. Semprun's attempts to eliminate his paternal heritage may prevent the interference of the past in his own present and future, but they would offer no escape from the inevitable inheritance of his own original failures being passed on to his children. Through narrative, Semprun transforms himself into an exemplary orphan, unencumbered by fathers or sons. Absolved of a past and of the need to worry about a future, Semprun can bask in a liberal orphanhood that rescinds continuity and interaction.

Semprun's narrative creation of an auto-orphanhood disables the haunting return of paternal fate. However, this narcissistic self-enclosure, eliminating the individual's capacity to integrate into a wider community, or into the past or future, demonstrates the orphan as the absolute other. In Levinasian philosophy, the orphan is highlighted, with the widow and the stranger, as the exemplary other, 'le faible, le pauvre',<sup>265</sup> the homeless or the refugee who is vulnerable and alone, and who has no protection within patriarchal society. Orphanhood is not a state of independent selfhood, in which one's origins can be autonomously created and maintained, but is in fact a state of alterity, in which the loss of all external relationships dictates the impossibility of constructing a stable identity. The elimination of paternal figures severs ties with the patronym, the *patrie*, and the patriarchy, so that the orphan is a liminal figure of sterile anonymity. The Semprunian orphan cannot progress; he cannot advance into the future or build on the past: he is a moment of the present, but a present that is essentially absent, unstable, invisible, and other. Narrative orphanhood ostensibly provides a site of auto-construction, a utopian new beginning where the individual is unburdened by an inherited past or future; but in effect, it points to the spectral instability of the autobiographical *I*, and a vacuous subjective identity constructed upon absence. Through narrative, Semprun

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<sup>265</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Le Temps et l'autre* [1947] (Paris: Quadrige/Presses universitaires de France, 1983), 75.

manipulates the paternal absence in order to substitute, at will, any number of temporary father figures, enabling the construction and reconstruction of orphaned identity.

### Being Jorge Sempru/ún

*No sé cuál de los dos escribe esta página.*

-Jorge Luis Borges, 'Borges y yo'.

*[I do not know which one of us has written this page.*

*-Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings.*]*

Haunted by the return of the past, the son is a visible trace of the invisible father. For Levinas, 'la paternité est la relation avec un étranger qui, tout en étant autrui, est moi; la relation du moi avec un moi-même, qui est cependant étranger à moi'.<sup>266</sup> In other words, the father both is and is not his son. Paternity is a relationship that extends into the future while integrating the past; it is the continuation of the self through an other. Father and son are symbiotically tied to one another, through a relationship that doubles and externalises the original father: 'La paternité n'est pas simplement un renouvellement du père dans le fils et sa confusion avec lui, elle est aussi l'extériorité du père par rapport au fils, un exister pluraliste'.<sup>267</sup> Paternity is a question of self to other, of father to son, and of absence to presence. Levinas writes that 'je n'ai pas mon enfant; je suis en quelque manière mon enfant [original italics]'.<sup>268</sup> Paternity is alterity and it is not alterity, it is the relationship between the self and the other who is already oneself. Semprun's narrative identity is at the heart of this section: constructed upon the paternal precedent, identity is never one's own; it is already a relationship of self to other and of father to son. Orphanhood, therefore, is the negation of identity: to be orphaned is to lack a paternal precedent, to be shot through with absence. The Semprunian orphan fractures the synergetic relationship between father and son: absencing the paternal figure, the son negates his own existence; he eliminates the other (the father) within the self (the son). Semprún Gurrea's absence from narrative signifies the infinite void at the centre of Semprun's own identity: if *I* am not my father, then *I* am not. Semprun's narrative identity is liminal, on the brink of permanent self-erasure, consumed by an absence that both is and is not the autobiographical *I*. Through Semprun's works, the paternal absence is frequently substituted by a multitude of phantom pseudo-fathers, who enable the son to adopt temporary identities and inner narratives. The orphan facilitates the ever-expanding opportunity for the construction of new relationships,

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<sup>266</sup> Levinas, *Le Temps*, 85.

<sup>267</sup> Levinas, *Le Temps*, 87.

<sup>268</sup> Levinas, *Le Temps*, 86.

playing *hôte* (both guest and host) to an infinite family of others.<sup>269</sup> In the end, however, the *hôte* is no more than absence, for without father figures, without some paternal precedent, the son disappears. Through *La Deuxième Mort* and *L'Algarabie*, Semprun's narrative identity is analysed as a reflection of his own coming to terms with the father: identity is split and doubled, haunted by the spectre of paternity, so that through narrative, the author reveals what it means to be Jorge Sempru/ún.

Absenting the father from narrative in order to reflect a biographical lack and to overcome the inheritance of an unwelcome destiny, the Semprunian orphan creates a void that plays host to temporary replacement paternal figures. In 'Padre(s)', Semilla Durán argues that the absent paternal role is continually exchanged amongst the historic and literary figures that perforate Semprun's narratives:

Guías políticos y culturales, introductores a los grandes textos, proveedores de alimentos espirituales, ejemplos de Resistencia o de radicalidad, introductores a la vida sexual [...] una proliferación de imágenes paternas parciales, que componen una especie de mosaico funcional y que de alguna manera encubren el abandono progresivo de todo intercambio efectivo profundo entre padre e hijo.<sup>270</sup>

[Political and cultural guides, initiators to great texts, suppliers of spiritual nourishment, examples of Resistance or of radicalisation, chaperons into sexual life [...] a proliferation of partial paternal imagoes, that make up a type of functional mosaic and that in some way mask the progressive abandonment of any effective profound exchange between father and son.]

Overcoming paternal absence through a continual cycle of substitution, the son adopts a new father figure in light of specific needs and curiosities. Through *Adieu* in particular, Semprún Gurrea is replaced by a variety of transitional fathers. Gide, Baudelaire, Kessel, Darío, Rimbaud and Giraudoux among others introduce the teenage Semprun to the adventures and discoveries of women and Paris, at a time when his father was unable to do so. Kessel's *Belle de Jour* for example, influenced Semprun's vision of women around Paris, transforming first a woman on the *métro* and later Héléne, wife of a ship captain, into prostitutes, who could guide the teenager's sexual awakening. Baudelaire's *Chant d'automne* offers a poetic map of Paris and familiar reference point for the young boy as a *flâneur* venturing outwards from the burial place of so many of these paternal substitutes, the Panthéon. Finally, Jean-Marie Soutou,<sup>271</sup> a family friend, is represented in *Adieu* as an additional figure of guidance and support. Semprún Gurrea's physical and emotional absence is overcome through the constant circulation of

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<sup>269</sup> The *hôte* here is a figure of otherness and a reminder of the ethics of hospitality, evoking Camus and Levinas, and Derrida's reading of Blanchot's *L'Instant de ma mort, Demeure*.

<sup>270</sup> Semilla Durán, 'Padre(s)', 177.

<sup>271</sup> Semprun even dedicates *Adieu* to Soutou: 'À Jean-Marie Soutou, pour son amitié vigilante et fraternelle de toute une vie'.

potential paternal substitutes: living and dead, French and Spanish, poets and politicians. Of course, these temporary paternal figures cannot directly replicate the original imago, but they compensate for his absence, becoming transitory role models, guides, and teachers.

Substituting paternal absence with pseudo-fathers or ghosts of paternity, Semprun's own identity is thus constantly submitting to transformation, a temporary reflection of a transient father. In *La Deuxième Mort* and *L'Algarabie*, paternal figures are multiplied: despite Semprún Gurrea's peripheral appearance in both narratives as a cultural and historical character, the paternal role is attributed elsewhere, across duplicate father figures, creating an unstable structure of paternity. The proliferation of partial paternal figures fundamentally undermines the son's ability to construct a stable sense of self, so that narrative identity is always subject to change and misinterpretation. *La Deuxième Mort* is a detective thriller centred on the eponymous Soviet spy who travels from Spain to Amsterdam followed by the American CIA, who find themselves pursued in turn by a Soviet anti-spy team. Ramón is found dead – a presumed suicide – in his hotel room in Amsterdam, and is identified by another guest in the hotel, William Klinke, who is writing a screenplay about the 'original' Ramón Mercader del Rio, the assassin of Leon Trotsky. Ramón Mercader is an orphan from a young age: his mother, Sonsoles Avendaño de Mercader died in 1936, and his father, José María Mercader y Bulnes was killed by firing squad only a year later. Mercader is evacuated to the Soviet Union and returns in 1956 to live with his aunt Adela in Cabuérniga, Spain. Towards the very end of the narrative the reader discovers, through a discussion between Georgui Nicolaievitch Oujakov and George Kanin, that Ramón Mercader in fact never existed, or at least not since his death in 1942. The young man 'repatriated' from the Soviet Union to Spain in 1956 was instead Ievgueni Davidovitch Guinsburg, orphaned himself only a year after Ramón, following the death – by firing squad – of his own father, David Semionovitch Guinsburg, in 1938.

The exceptionally convoluted plot introduces all three forms of narrative fatherhood: as the father of Ievgueni, Semionovitch Guinsburg is a biological father, while José María Mercader fulfils both a biological and fictitious role – he is the biological father of Ramón, but the fictitious father of the falsely repatriated Ievgueni. Finally, Semprun also introduces the biographical father, through reminiscence, as a friend of the defunct José María Mercader. Semprún Gurrea's role in the narrative is exclusively non-paternal, while both Guinsburg and Mercader are drafted in to fulfil competing paternal roles. Essentially, however, all three men signify partial 'imágenes paternas' ['paternal imagoes'], whereby the biographical father is 'uno más de los educadores, iniciadores o protectores posibles' ['another of these possible educators, initiators or protectors'].<sup>272</sup> The multiplicity of paternal figures means that, when the

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<sup>272</sup> Semilla Durán, 'Padre(s)', 177.

father 'comienza a mostrar sus limitaciones o desfallecimientos, puede ser rápidamente sustituido por otro que lo compensa, y que protege al hijo del irrespeto y al padre de la desvalorización' ['begins to show limitations or weaknesses, he can be rapidly substituted for another who will compensate him, and who will protect the son from disrespect and the father from being devalued'].<sup>273</sup> The creation of Mercader and of Guinsburg offers Semprun the chance to exonerate the biographical father from his demise following exile. As Semilla Durán argues: 'el narrador se ve obligado a reequilibrar la imagen paterna, y a hacer de su "invalidez" simbólica un rasgo heroico' ['the narrator feels obliged to rebalance the paternal imago, and to make of his symbolic "incapacity" a heroic trait'].<sup>274</sup>

Guinsburg and Mercader are both assassinated – in 1937 and 1938 – their deaths a mirror image of one another. Felipe de Hoyos, as one of the Falangists sent to assassinate Mercader, remembers his death, 'dans la lumière des phares, devant la rangée de fusils braqués sur lui':

Ensuite, au moment où les fusils ont été verrouillés, dans un cliquetis métallique, il a levé le poing droit, poing fermé, dans le salut du Front populaire. Il a brandi le poing et il a crié quelque chose, qu'on n'a pas entendu, dans le fracas de la décharge.<sup>275</sup>

In an eerie repetition, Oujakov later describes the death of Guinsburg: 'Il est mort fusillé, c'était l'hiver, l'aube tardait à venir, alors on a allumé les phares de quelques automobiles et il est mort dans la lumière des phares, le poing dressé, en criant "Vive le parti de Lénine!"'.<sup>276</sup> In contrast, Semprún Gurrea disappears imperceptibly from history and narrative: Adela's photograph immortalises him in 1931 (before the death of Susana Maura), and a final memory conjures him in the summer of 1936, just before exile.<sup>277</sup> Semprún Gurrea disappears without a trace. In Adela's words: 'Je me demande ce qu'il est devenu, je n'ai plus jamais entendu parler de lui'.<sup>278</sup> The author transforms Mercader and Guinsburg into fearless martyrs of republican ideals: fist raised, loyal to their beliefs until the end, they accumulate 'heroic traits' that exonerate the biographical father from his endearing but pathetic failed fatherhood. The unmistakable visual link to Francisco de Goya's *El Tres de mayo* in the deaths of Mercader and Guinsburg, a painting depicting the execution of Spanish rebels by Napoleon's French soldiers, displayed in the Prado in Madrid, evokes Semprun's Sunday visits to the museum with his father. The illuminated figure of the martyr – and even the stigma on his right hand – is a reminder of the revolutionary Catholic figure Semprun would so much have liked his father to

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<sup>273</sup> Semilla Durán, 'Padre(s)', 177.

<sup>274</sup> Semilla Durán, 'Padre(s)', 176.

<sup>275</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 229-30.

<sup>276</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 408.

<sup>277</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 128; 246.

<sup>278</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 247.

have proven to be. Despite Semprun's assertion that the raised fist does not evoke triumph or threat in his memories, it does express a childish fraternal gesture of solidarity, hope, and loyalty, particularly to Madrid<sup>279</sup> – passions betrayed by Semprún Gurrea. Conferring a vision of idealised paternity onto these substitute fathers, Semprun absolves his biographical father of failure and weakness, manipulating narrative representation to fit his needs as son.

Nonetheless, all three father figures disappear in quick succession: in 1936, 37, and 38. While not necessarily due to death – since Adela cannot identify the eventual outcome of Semprún Gurrea – their disappearances are all triggered, directly or indirectly, by political unrest and the outbreak of Civil War in Spain. Each disappearance reflects the original withdrawal of the biographical father following exile and maternal death, and no individual substitute succeeds in completely mitigating this primary loss. Semprún Gurrea, narrated only by his patronym, is duplicated through José María Mercader, who adopts the paternal forename, and the two friends were, according to Adela, identical in many aspects.<sup>280</sup> Guinsburg and Mercader similarly share a pseudo-fatherhood of the protagonist, and are eliminated as interchangeable figures through the haunting déjà vu of their deaths. None of the fathers are active protagonists in the narrative, evoked only through reminiscence, so that all three appear as phantoms, with no one individual able to realise a physical potential. There is no single whole paternal figure, but many small spectres of *potential* fathers, each temporarily fulfilling specific needs of the son. However, paternal multiplicity, designed to overcome absence, ultimately results in a profound disturbance of identity. In a recurring nightmare, the protagonist fails to distinguish between the biological and the fictitious fathers, haunted by an ungraspable paternal ghost:

Comme toujours, la première image de ce cauchemar était celle de la lumière crue des phares d'automobile, éclairant la silhouette dressée d'un homme, contre un mur, criant quelque chose. [...] Et dans son cauchemar, le visage de son père, David Semionovitch, demeurait insaisissable. [...] Ainsi, dans son cauchemar, cet homme qui criait, face aux fusils, avait toujours, malgré qu'il savait que c'était son père, toujours le visage de José María Mercader, [...] et il sortait alors de ce cauchemar abominable, couvert de sueurs froides, mais avec l'étrange certitude rassurante de cette fraternité qui unissait les deux morts, l'avocat catholique et le bolchevik juif, fusillés à une année d'intervalle dans la lumière aveuglante des phares d'automobile.<sup>281</sup>

Thanks to the abundant photographs in Adela's home, the protagonist's identity is perforated by memories of a father who both is and is not his own. *La Deuxième Mort* demonstrates the

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<sup>279</sup> See *Adieu*, 76-78. In childhood photographs, Semprun and his brothers can be seen making this same gesture together. Semprun later replicates this emotive memory through the imposition of an anonymous photograph in his 1973 film *Les Deux mémoires*.

<sup>280</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 246.

<sup>281</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 457-8.

work of postmemory, and the relationship the second generation bear to the 'personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up'.<sup>282</sup> Adela's photographs and stories provide an affective link with the past that causes the protagonist to construct a doubled or split identity, built upon the scattered fragments of an other's memory. For Hirsch, 'these experiences were transmitted [...] so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right'.<sup>283</sup> Ilevgueni assumes not only the identity of Ramón, but his memories, an entire 'adopted' past that is integrated alongside his own.

Adela's photographs and stories substitute the protagonist's paternal absence, so that he assumes an identity that is not his own and renders him 'doublement orphelin'<sup>284</sup> after both fathers suffer the same fate, their deaths a mirror image. In the transference of identity from father to son, the confusion of multiple paternal figures profoundly undermines the stability of the son's sense of self: the protagonist is Ramón/Ilevgueni, both the Spaniard and the Russian, yet inherently incomplete and subject to transformation. If one's own identity is a repetition of one's father, then with two fathers, the subject accumulates two identities: split and doubled by paternal multiplicity. For Semprun, the abundance of paternal substitutes in narrative enables him to redeem the memory of Semprún Gurrea as a weak and failed father, and impose heroic traits that elevate him to an idealised figure of paternity. Yet, his motives are not entirely altruistic. The son is a repetition of the father: if the father exercises weak or undesirable characteristics, the son will inherit these objectionable vices, but if the father can be represented as an enviable role model, a figure of admiration and heroism, then the son acquires these more attractive traits. The deconstruction and reconstruction of potential fathers is an essentially narcissistic act, aspiring to redeem memory of the father in order to ensure the redemption of the son. Semprun constructs partial paternal imagos as a profound indirect investment in his own self-image, abusing the inherent absences of transgenerational memory as a site of reconstruction and revision. However, these paternal substitutions are temporary, achieving only a fleeting concealment of the father figure, and rendering him not inexistent but avisual.

Throughout years of clandestine work, Semprun's own identity was altered, manipulated, and rendered avisual by a multitude of pseudonyms and *noms de guerre*. Rafael Artigas, Carlos Bustamente, Federico Sánchez, Juan Larrea, Manuel Mora and Gérard Sorel among others provided a life-saving mask for identity, constructed and assimilated temporarily and at will. Each new name represents a break in paternal identity, a temporary erasure of a

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<sup>282</sup> Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

<sup>283</sup> Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

<sup>284</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 458.

patronym and a political and cultural *patrie*. In attempting to alter one's own identity it is, at base, the identity of the father that is rendered avial. However, these pseudonyms, recurring in narrative, only *mask* the true, underlying identity. Semprun is rendered avial by the proliferation of temporary new identities, but he nonetheless exists. He becomes the visible invisible, haunting each pseudonym, each name representing only the presence of an absence. In an edited study, Fabio Sani refers to 'self continuity' as a foundation of psychological well-being. Self continuity refers to the ability to perceive oneself through a continuous existence, and a lack of continuity 'constitutes a fundamental threat to identity'.<sup>285</sup> Drawing on William James' *The Principles of Psychology*, Sani writes:

[James] recognized that across time we have different experiences and thoughts, and, therefore, we have a different self every day. Importantly though, he noted that we have a sense that all these selves pertain to the same and continuous self, a sense of 'unbrokenness in the stream of selves'. He explained this sense by referring to the fact that the experiences and thoughts of these different selves are all pervaded by the same feelings of 'warmth' and 'intimacy', which do not apply to the experiences and thoughts of others.<sup>286</sup>

Despite the proliferation of pseudonyms, fake passports, *noms de guerre* and even *noms de plume* (Semprun published within the PCE under the name Federico Sánchez), the subject's identity remains fundamentally unchanged: the subject remains Jorge Semprun, and therefore the son of Semprún Gurrea.

However, narrative orphanhood disrupts this sense of self continuity. The orphan is son of no one and son of everyone, *hôte* to any number of potential father figures. The elimination of a founding father figure ultimately destabilises the son's identity: if Semprún Gurrea is absent, then Semprun is absent. The son becomes a ghost, he disappears, his own existence negated by paternal inexistence. At the end of *La Deuxième Mort*, de Hoyos returns to Adela's house in Cabuérniga, the same place he remembers having assassinated José María Mercader nearly thirty years earlier, and finds three headstones lined up in the cemetery near the house. Each one is inscribed with a name and a date: Sonsoles Avendaño de Mercader (17 juillet 1936), José María Mercader y Bulnes (5 septembre 1937), and the final headstone carries two names: Ramón Mercader Avendaño-Inés Alvarado de Mercader (16 avril 1966).<sup>287</sup> Ramón/Ievgueni is ultimately buried with the wrong family, under the wrong name, in the wrong country. Ievgueni disappears, his death consumed by the false second-death of Ramón, acquiring a patronym and

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<sup>285</sup> Fabio Sani (ed.), introduction to *Self Continuity: Individual and Collective Perspectives* (New York: Psychology Press, 2008), 3-4.

<sup>286</sup> Sani, introduction, 3.

<sup>287</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 487.

a *patrie* that are not his own. But he leaves a trace; confiding in his fictitious father's assassin, de Hoyos, Ievgueni imparts his memory:

Ievgueni Davidovitch est mort, et à Amsterdam, de toute façon, il n'avait livré de ce séjour à Sotchi que quelques bribes éparpillées. Je suis le seul, désormais, à connaître tous les détails de ce dernier voyage de Guinsburg, dans son pays.<sup>288</sup>

The confusion of Ramón and Ievgueni's identities reaches its apex in death: who has died? Whose memories continue? The protagonist adopts both identities, so that while it is Ramón's name that is memorialised in stone, it is the memories of Ievgueni that are passed on for future generations. Neither Ramón nor Ievgueni has a son, and while Sonsoles is ostensibly the daughter of Ramón, she is of course, in reality, the daughter of Ievgueni, leading Semprun to question, in the final lines of the narrative, 'Le sang aurait-il séché, le sang des Mercader?'.<sup>289</sup> *La Deuxième Mort* articulates the infinite potential of the orphaned son as *hôte* to the memories of others, but it also demonstrates the sterility of the narrative orphan. The subject assumes potentially infinite identities of the other, a mirror to the memories and actions of others, but he also submits to an absolute loss of identity.

The relationship of paternity shows how the identity of the son is essentially only ever a repetition of the father. At the heart of the individual self lies the insidious continuity of the paternal other who founds the subject's identity and cannot be altered by the integration or substitution of temporary identities. The self is inherently *troué*, shot through with holes, absent and invisible, since it returns always to an other – to an absence that cannot be accessed or assimilated. As Butler argues, 'I am not fully known to myself, because part of what I am is the enigmatic traces of others'.<sup>290</sup> Self continuity begins with an other, it begins beyond the self, with an absence that can never be fully assimilated. Narrative provides a site where self continuity takes shape, temporarily, through the construction of pseudo-fathers and pseudo-identities. The neuropsychiatrist Oliver Sacks observed a case of a man with severe Korsakov's syndrome in a neurological institution. The man could remember nothing for more than a few seconds, and flitted, without hesitation, between different fictional improvisations of a world he could not remember: 'for him they were not fictions, but how he suddenly saw, or interpreted, the world [...] a phantasmagoria, a dream, of ever-changing people, figures, situations – continual, kaleidoscopic mutations and transformations'.<sup>291</sup> His multiple lives and narratives are a means of compensating for the abysses of amnesia that open up, 'continually creating a world and self, to replace what was continually being forgotten and lost [...] for such

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<sup>288</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 496.

<sup>289</sup> *La Deuxième Mort*, 498.

<sup>290</sup> Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 46.

<sup>291</sup> Oliver Sacks, *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat* (London: Picador, 1985), 115.

a patient *must literally make himself (and his world) up every moment* [original italics].<sup>292</sup> Unable to maintain an inner narrative, the patient constantly creates stories and identities in order to recreate a temporary sense of self continuity: 'he is driven to the proliferation of pseudo-narratives, in pseudo-continuity, pseudo-worlds peopled by pseudo-people, phantoms'.<sup>293</sup> Semprun's identity is constructed upon infinite others, upon alterity at the most extreme, and upon absence. For a stable sense of self continuity to take shape, the individual must be able to establish their place along a spectrum that begins in the past and ends (provisionally) in the present. Narrative reflects a unique site where authorial control over past, present and future enables the construction of robust self continuity. In *La Deuxième Mort*, Mercader, Guinsberg, and Semprun Gurrea all evoke phantoms, pseudo-fathers that enable Semprun to construct a sense of self continuity within narrative. Semantically orphaned in 1936 following Republican defeat in Spain, Semprun overcomes the paternal absence by literally *making it up*, making himself up: constructing, through narrative, a new sense of self, a new identity. Semprun becomes a phantom, among a world of phantoms of his own creation. However, spectral identity is not stable, and as *La Deuxième Mort* draws to a close, Ramón/Ievgueni is buried with the wrong family, in the wrong country, under the wrong name, demonstrating the disruption of self continuity. Returning to a paternal absence, or to a father figure that cannot be known, the son's identity is negated. 'Doublement orphelin', Ramón/Ievgueni disappears, consumed by a paternal subversion that reduces all potential fathers and sons to absence. The orphan is absence, the other, the impossibility of identity: without a father, the orphan cannot be. Ievgueni is never repatriated to his rightful patronym or *patrie*, and yet Ramón is falsely immortalised on the tombstone. Ramón/Ievgueni remains eternally frozen in an identity that is at once split and doubled: he disappears, *they* disappear. Absenting the paternal figure through narrative, and constructing a liberal auto-orphanage that releases him from oppressive inheritance, Semprun disappears.

Semprun's narratives demonstrate the relationship between father and son through subtle textual clues that simulate the ambivalent attitude of a son coming to terms with an identity that both is and is not his own. The father is the foundation of the son's identity, with the self created intergenerationally from both a 'personal history and the social cultural history in which our personal history is embedded [...] a self that is defined as much by one's place in a familial history as a personal past'.<sup>294</sup> Identity in Semprun is spectral; it is never one's own. The necessary presence of the other – the father – at the core of identity is demonstrated through

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<sup>292</sup> Sacks, *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*, 116.

<sup>293</sup> Sacks, *The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*, 117.

<sup>294</sup> Robyn Fivush, Jennifer G. Bohanek, and Marshall Duke, 'The Intergenerational Self: Subjective Perspective and Family History', in *Self Continuity: Individual and Collective Perspectives*, ed. by Fabio Sani, 131-32.

*L'Algarabie*, where disjointed self continuity reaches an apex. Set following the counter-factual death of Charles de Gaulle at the climax of the events of May '68, Semprun divides the city of Paris among several competing pseudo-political groups. The resultant once-great community of the Z.U.P. is plagued by fighting, crime, and libertinage; a society brought to its knees by political unrest. The present of narration begins in October 1975: Franco is on the verge of death, and Rafael Artigas, a Spanish exile living within the community, is trying to obtain identity papers in order to return to Spain, his country of origin. Disturbed from his planned itinerary by the news that Perséphone, a young woman he has been intimately involved with, has been kidnapped by Jo Aresti's Corsicans [*les Corses*], Artigas never makes it back to Spain, and is murdered in the street at the end of the narrative.

*L'Algarabie* is typically seen as a work about the absent mother figure, where Spanish is read as the *mother* tongue and Spain the *mother* country, with the Semprunian desire to be reunited with his absent mother in death at the forefront of critical imagination.<sup>295</sup> However, as in *La Deuxième Mort*, there is an overlooked association of paternity that can be rediscovered through an emphasis of the *patrie*, and the rupture with the fatherland caused by exile.<sup>296</sup> Edward Said describes the experience of exile as an 'unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home'.<sup>297</sup> Exile fragments the individual's sense of self continuity, it is 'fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past'.<sup>298</sup> Just as dissociation from the patronym triggers disunity within the self, the ruptured relationship to the *patrie* provokes a similar unravelling of self-identity. The loss of the fatherland, like the loss of the father, triggers a parallel sense of 'orphanhood'.<sup>299</sup> Throughout *L'Algarabie*, the Semprunian orphan returns as a figure of exile, as the paternal role is revoked, substituted, and rescinded anew. At the beginning of the narrative, Semprun introduces Perséphone and her twin sister Proserpine, the youngest of four daughters to Ruiz and Acracia/Demetria Seisdedos. Mid-way through the text, during an angry confrontation between Proserpine and Ruiz, the reader discovers that Ruiz is not the father of the twins.<sup>300</sup> Shortly before Artigas will die, it is revealed via an external narrative voice that: 'Eleuterio venait de lui révéler que c'était lui, Artigas, le vrai père, selon les liens du sang, ceux

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<sup>295</sup> Lisa Luengo argues that the return to the 'chambre maternelle' in the closing moments of Artigas' life signals the desire to be reunited with his mother in death. 'Linguistic Labyrinth in Jorge Semprun's *L'algarabie*', *Transitions: Journal of Franco-Iberian Studies*, 1.1 (2005), 93-109.

<sup>296</sup> Spanish, after all, is Semprun's language of poetry, religion, and numbers, all linguistic ties to the figure of the father. See *Le Mort*, 83.

<sup>297</sup> Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Reflections on Exile: And Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 173.

<sup>298</sup> Said, 'Reflections on Exile', 177.

<sup>299</sup> Said, 'Reflections on Exile', 182.

<sup>300</sup> 'Pourquoi as-tu fait ça? [...] Je veux que tu m'expliques pourquoi tu as dit à Perséphone que tu n'étais pas son père!' *L'Algarabie*, 225.

du moins de la semence, de Perséphone (et de Proserpine, par voie de conséquence, les deux sœurs étant jumelles)'.<sup>301</sup> Despite this revelation, which casts new light upon the entire preceding narrative,<sup>302</sup> Artigas appears wildly indifferent. As he makes his way across the Z.U.P. to finalise his identity papers once and for all, he is not even thinking about his paternity,<sup>303</sup> rather, he is thinking about the woman who has been dealing with his identity papers, Rose Beude, and their recent sexual encounter. The paternal role is rejected twice: first by Ruiz, who shrugs off any parental involvement largely unsympathetically, and then by Artigas, who shows no interest in adopting the responsibility. The twins, just like Ramón/Ievgueni in *La Deuxième Mort*, are left doubly orphaned. Yet the absence of paternity in *L'Algarabie* is not simply a criticism of the paternal father and of negated identity, but is an attack on masculinity and paternity more widely.

Formerly a proud macho figure with 'une réputation d'énergie génitale sans cesse corroborée par de multiples expériences, rarement tenues secrètes, avec des femmes de tous âges, mais particulièrement du plus jeune',<sup>304</sup> Ruiz suffers from a 'longue et douloureuse maladie'<sup>305</sup> (prostate cancer) that afflicts only males, destroying the strength of his masculinity at the same time that his paternity is rescinded. Continuing the feminisation and infantilisation of the paternal figure seen in *Adieu*, the dynamic between men and women is inverted, as men systematically submit to the empowered position of women. Aresti, for example, is humiliated by Perséphone who uses him for sex, and is entirely subservient to his own mother: 'Ma mère, Laetitia. Je ne fais rien sans son accord et sa bénédiction'.<sup>306</sup> Unlike the adoption of substitute father figures, as seen in *Adieu* and *La Deuxième Mort*, in *L'Algarabie* Semprun compensates for paternal absence through the fortification of women who are ascribed typically masculine traits. Demetria is described as a 'matriarche',<sup>307</sup> while the eldest of her daughters, Penthésilée, leads the strong, female-only *Amazones de la Seine*.<sup>308</sup> Yannick de Kerhuel, liberated from the 'sévère mais injuste'<sup>309</sup> patriarchy of her father is sexually liberated and headstrong, while Paula Negri, the lesbian friend and confidante of the protagonist, is, thanks to her sexuality, 'not a woman',<sup>310</sup> since she 'has no sex; she is beyond the categories of sex'.<sup>311</sup> The inversion of stereotypical gender roles reaches a climax in the encounter between Artigas and Rose. Rather

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<sup>301</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 566.

<sup>302</sup> In particular, the revelation of a quasi-incestuous relationship between Artigas and Perséphone.

<sup>303</sup> 'Mais ce n'est pas à cette brève rencontre avec Demetria, aux révélations d'Eleuterio sur sa paternité, qu'il pense en traversant la chaussée de la rue Dauphine, c'est à Rose Beude.' *L'Algarabie*, 569.

<sup>304</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 216.

<sup>305</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 221.

<sup>306</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 510.

<sup>307</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 64.

<sup>308</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 229.

<sup>309</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 91.

<sup>310</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 143.

<sup>311</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 144.

than contemplating his newfound paternity, Artigas is occupied with thoughts of his earlier sexual encounter, an act of sodomy that further feminises the once powerful and dignified male characters of the Z.U.P.

Sodomy perverts traditional gender roles and the typical hierarchy of social and cultural conceptions of male/female passivity and dominance. Within a homosexual relationship, the act of sodomy influences perceptions of masculinity and femininity, so that, as Leo Bersani writes: '*to be penetrated is to abdicate power* [original italics]'.<sup>312</sup> The partner in the position of penetrated is the more submissive, and therefore conforms to expectations of femininity. The sodomisation of a man by a woman, however, as seen in D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, or works by the Marquis de Sade, equalises, or even inverts, the masculine/feminine relationship, because 'while the genitals of male and female are different, men and women are alike in that they both possess an anus: "Male/female differences are annulled in anal equivalence"'.<sup>313</sup> Demonstrating the destruction of masculine prowess and power, as is seen through Ruiz's cancer or Aresti's passivity, Rose's sodomy of Artigas would represent gender equality. Yet the act depicted in *L'Algarabie* clearly maintains Rose as the submissive feminine character, opposing Artigas as the more powerful male figure:

Rose Beude à demi nue, courbée devant lui, lui offrant la face cachée de son astre nocturne, l'y recevant avec un long gémissement de bonheur et de surprise ravie; le souvenir de ce plaisir sodomisateur, ou sodomisé, bien sûr, puisqu'il fut partagé et qu'il est probablement impossible de déterminer qui en eut la meilleure part.<sup>314</sup>

Artigas' choice to participate in sodomy must therefore be seen not as an act of feminisation, or denunciation of masculinity, but as a further rejection of *paternity*. Refusing the possibility of procreative heterosexual activity, Artigas only accelerates the decline of masculinity and the demise of the Z.U.P. Paternity is a process of continuity and exteriorization, a process that depends upon reproductive capabilities: Artigas' sodomy undermines and rejects the development of paternal roles, so that the entire society of the Z.U.P. is petrified by a destructive orphanhood. *L'Algarabie* eliminates the figure of the father through the destruction of masculinity and the overt rejection of paternal roles by Artigas and Ruiz, but it simultaneously abolishes the figure of the (potential) son through the inherent sterility of sodomy. Clearly Artigas can produce children, since the twins are his daughters,<sup>315</sup> and yet he chooses to engage in an act of non-reproductive sex that refuses any redemptive continuity for

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<sup>312</sup> Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2010), 19.

<sup>313</sup> Lindsay Anne Hallam, *Screening the Marquis de Sade: Pleasure, Pain and the Transgressive Body in Film* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2011), 12.

<sup>314</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 565.

<sup>315</sup> Again, it is relevant that no sons are the product of these relationships.

a society on the verge of complete destruction. The failure of paternity consumes the Z.U.P., so that, like the orphan, it disappears, ghosted by paternal absence and the negation of identity.<sup>316</sup>

*L'Algarabie* is a quest for identity, but it ultimately demonstrates that identity is always absent; it is never one's own. The exchange of memories between Artigas, Carlos, and Semprun demonstrates the fluidity of self-identity: the subject is never present, he is only ever *hôte* to infinite temporary others. The masks covering the real identity of Semprun slip throughout the narrative: *Lettre sur le pouvoir d'écrire*, written by Claude-Edmonde Magny, is addressed to Artigas as 'à Jorge de...'<sup>317</sup> and his identification as the author of *Le Grand Voyage* and as a case study within Peter Egri's *Survie et réinterprétation* refers unquestionably to the true author of the book.<sup>318</sup> Semprun plays *hôte* to these temporary masks and pseudonyms: he is their host and their guest, an orphan, an absence for their presence. As Artigas makes his final journey across the Z.U.P. in search of Rose, in order to finalise the identity papers that will enable his return to Spain, he is set upon by a group of thugs and murdered. In the throes of death, he makes a final symbolic return to the childhood home in Madrid and to his (Artigas'/Semprun's) mother's bedroom. This concluding return *is* identification: shedding the pseudonym of Artigas, returning to the beginning, to the foundations of self continuity, the narrator marks a return to the self, to Semprun. But Semprun has no identity of his own, and as these final dreamlike memories concur, the return to the self is ultimately a return to the other: to the father.

As the door to the 'chambre [...] conjugale et mortuaire'<sup>319</sup> of his mother finally opens, Artigas/Semprun enters, and is symbolically reborn in the *mother* country, through his *mother* tongue, in the room of his *mother*.<sup>320</sup> Yet, of course, the one person who is absent from this scene is the single figure that we would expect to see: Susana Maura. Instead, Artigas/Semprun sees a blurry silhouette that he confuses with that of the admired Polish actress, Pola Negri, triggering a memory of jealous conflict with his father. The absence of the maternal figure in these dying moments, where Artigas/Semprun should have been symbolically reborn into the childhood home in Madrid, demonstrates how the discontinuous identity of the protagonist is constructed upon an exiled and unstable loss. The pseudonym, Rafael Artigas, is the one who dies, and Jorge Semprun the one who is reborn, returning the protagonist to his patronym and to his *patrie*. The emasculation is a symbol of the sterility that haunts the narrative, but it is an unproductiveness that only affects the political pseudonym, and not the patronymic author.

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<sup>316</sup> Indeed, no one knows what the Z.U.P. stands for – several possible meanings are given in the narrative. See *L'Algarabie*, 84.

<sup>317</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 175.

<sup>318</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 38.

<sup>319</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 580.

<sup>320</sup> See Luengo, 'Linguistic Labyrinth', 104-107; Tidd, 'Myth of Woman', 139.

Semprun's quest for identity is resolved through this return to Madrid at the end of the narrative, but it is not through a heartfelt welcome to the 'giron maternel'<sup>321</sup> as previously conceived, but through a destitute realisation that the single stable figure to which every discontinuous self will always return is that of the father.<sup>322</sup> The death of Artigas does not return us to the presumed self continuous identity of Semprun, but to the identity of his father: Semprun Gurrea. The identity of the son never existed in the first place, but was always defined by his relationship to the paternal other. In *Identification Papers*, Diana Fuss writes that 'in perhaps its simplest formulation, identification is the detour through the other that defines a self. [...] The subject *is* identification; the I become other'.<sup>323</sup> Identity is never a stable construct to begin with but fluid and liable to change because it is always in some way unknown or other. Arthur Rimbaud's claim that 'Je est un autre',<sup>324</sup> is seen throughout Semprun, as the identity of the subject is never and has never been his own, but is always already the identity of an other that has been entrusted to the self, so that some part remains fundamentally ungraspable and unknowable. Identification is spectral, it 'invokes phantoms',<sup>325</sup> and so it must, for the identity of the son is founded upon the paternal haunting.

Semprun's attempts to make himself an orphan throughout his works suggest the desire to avoid the inevitable inheritance of his paternal fate; but in becoming an orphan, the price is his own identity. To write oneself is to write one's father, and to avoid writing one's father is to avoid writing oneself. Playing *hôte* to the paternal other, Semprun and Semprun Gurrea become inseparable: 'Since the two opposing principles exist by means of the very opposition between them, like left and right, high and low, father and son, they are always and everywhere implicated in one another'.<sup>326</sup> Semprun does 'write' his father – the other – but unknowingly, like an insidious concurrent inscription every time he attempts to write himself. Each page of Semprun's works is written by an I who is not only other, but is *hôte* to an infinite alterity. When Semprun writes *je*, he simultaneously writes both *tu* and *il*, so that *je* may be better represented as *j/e*, demonstrating the fracture at the centre of the self, and the part that is unknown – though we will never know which part. Semprun's identity is never stable or fully present, remaining always spectral: there is no self, only a *hôte* of others that constructs a transient, alteritous identity: *j/e*, the orphan, the exile, the stranger, the other.

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<sup>321</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 580.

<sup>322</sup> Similarly, in the epilogue of *Federico Sanchez*, Semprun returns (physically) to his childhood home, only to be confronted by a memory of his father. The episode is uncannily similar to a number of the passages in *L'Algarabie* and *Adieu* about the corridor in the Madrid home and the maternal bedroom but, concluding 'la boucle était bouclée', Semprun is not reunited with his mother but instead with his father, and the narrative constructs a cyclical sense of enclosure. *Federico Sanchez*, 245-49.

<sup>323</sup> Fuss, *Identification Papers*, 2-3.

<sup>324</sup> Arthur Rimbaud quoted in Désalmand and Forest, *Cent grandes citations*, 147-50.

<sup>325</sup> Fuss, *Identification Papers*, 1.

<sup>326</sup> Irwin, *Doubling and Incest*, 140.

In Serge Doubrovsky's study of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, he interrogates the construction of the narrating 'je' through the 'Petites Madeleines'<sup>327</sup> that represents the desire of the narrator to distance himself from the names he has inherited from his parents, and particularly his patronym, Proust. Doubrovsky asks: '*le Narrateur est-il ou n'est-il pas Marcel Proust?, pour conclure en général: il l'est sans l'être tout en l'étant [original italics]*'.<sup>328</sup> The ultimate repression taking place in this scene of the madeleine is, through the capitalisation of the Petites Madeleines (P(roust) M(arcel)), the suppression of identity, the name and surname of the narrator who desires to be '*non identifiable [original italics]*'.<sup>329</sup> Throughout Proust's epic oeuvre, Marcel remains without a patronym, simulating the autobiographical pact through only his first name, allowing for a fickle reading of the intra-textual Marcel to be both the same and other as the extra-textual Marcel Proust. When Proust writes 'je', argues Doubrovsky, this 'je' both is and is not the author, it is both self and other. Ultimately, however, Proust's dissimulation of his identity through the erasure of his patronym leads Doubrovsky to conclude that '*on naît Marcel. Mais on est Proust [original italics]*'.<sup>330</sup> In other words, the insidious inheritance of patronym and of paternity begins long before the son is even born, evoking the inevitability of the paternal fate. Modifying Doubrovsky's words slightly, the narrators and protagonists of Semprun's works – the narrating *j/e* – both are and are not Jorge Semprun himself, '*il l'est sans l'être tout en l'étant*'. Semprun's self-made status as orphan and stranger is a means of severing the ties with his patriarchal inheritance – his patronym and his *patrie* – but it cannot alter the fact that he is, and always was, the son of Semprún Gurrea.

Semprun's works are autobiographical, but they are also non-autobiographical: they are about the self *and* the other, the son *and* the father, the essential absence at the centre of identity. The author of these works is Semprun, but it is also the son of Semprún Gurrea, and therefore it is also Semprún Gurrea himself. The son comes second, and he always will; he can only ever be a copy of a copy, his fate determined by his father as his father's fate was determined by his father's father. In Doubrovsky's reading of Proust, he admonishes the narrator's attempts to auto-create through the elimination of his patronym as an act that leads to his eventual anonymity: '*À force de vouloir se faire un nom tout seul, il s'est rendu anonyme [original italics]*'.<sup>331</sup> The existence of the son is governed by the prior existence of a paternal figure, and Semprun's attempts to eliminate the role of the father are paradoxical by their very nature: the son cannot erase his father without simultaneously erasing himself. The infinite

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<sup>327</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, *La Place de la madeleine: Écriture et fantasme chez Proust* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1974), 119. Doubrovsky is intrigued by this transcription that signifies a proper noun and therefore the transformation into a name.

<sup>328</sup> Doubrovsky, *La Place de la madeleine*, 117-18.

<sup>329</sup> Doubrovsky, *La Place de la madeleine*, 120.

<sup>330</sup> Doubrovsky, *La Place de la madeleine*, 121.

<sup>331</sup> Doubrovsky, *La Place de la madeleine*, 145.

alterity of identity can best be represented through a visual division of the author's patronym: Sempru/ún. The Francophone spelling, which elides the Hispanic tonic accent, has become familiar to readers of Semprun, and the two names are used interchangeably, despite the oral distinctions this accent imparts. Often, as Omlor points out, the accenting of Semprun's surname demonstrates the bias imposed by critics, who 'tend to express their view of Semprún's Spanish or French affiliations by either accenting his surname or not, making it follow either Spanish or French orthographical rules'.<sup>332</sup> Yet there are more significant consequences that can be read through the loss of the Hispanic accent found in French.<sup>333</sup> It is the ultimate marker of Semprun's relationship with his father: by dropping that accent, Semprun distances himself from a paternity that he can never hope to escape completely. It is an acknowledgement that he is the son of his father, but it is an optimistic attempt to demonstrate that there remains the possibility to rupture the eternal return of the paternal inheritance that has haunted him for longer than his own life. It is an acceptance of his father as a part of himself – no pseudonyms, no politics, only the biological lines of blood – but it is a sad reminder of the hope that perhaps things will be different this time, perhaps things will not be fated to fail. It is a representation of the eventual recognition that 'on naît *Semprun*, mais on est *Semprún*'.

### The Wound and the Wall: On Mourning and Narcissism

*Je suis endeuillé donc je suis.*

-Jacques Derrida, *Points de suspension*.

Nicoladzé argues that Semprún Gurrea is synonymous with the Spanish Republic, and that Semprun's final wish to be buried in France, his coffin wrapped in the Republican flag, 'expresses better than any long speech ever could the tension felt over a lifetime and the closeness Semprun ultimately felt to his father, whose attitude he was able to accept in old age'.<sup>334</sup> Encapsulating the ambivalent relationship between father and son, the image conjured up by Nicoladzé reflects a unity in death, a fusion between self and other, one tightly encircling the other. The symbiotic relationship between father and son is the focus of this section, demonstrating how and why the paternal duad is constantly entwined. Nicoladzé discusses the

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<sup>332</sup> Omlor, *Memory's Long Voyage*, 8. It is worth noting that the Spanish spelling is becoming more common even amongst French language scholars. Tidd, for example, opts to accent the surname in her more recent works.

<sup>333</sup> Of course, a number of linguistic arguments can be made in association with the French signature and a divergence from the *mother tongue*. It is also not impossible that the *afrancesado* form of Semprun's surname was a stipulation of his publication at the time in a country uneasy with expressions that may be deemed 'foreign'.

<sup>334</sup> Nicoladzé, 'Jorge Semprún and the Writing of Identity', 41.

harmony achieved through Semprun's own death, but she overlooks years of disharmony triggered by the death of Semprún Gurrea. This section begins with the paternal death in 1966, and continues from the narrative site of encryption, *L'Évanouissement*, that was the focus of Chapter One. The paternal death represents a loss, the loss of a 'love object' in the terminology of Freud and Abraham and Torok that is not worked through in narrative, but pathologically integrated into the site of memory itself. Semprún Gurrea is kept alive through narrative, as his death is disavowed by the son, and the processes of mourning cannot take place. Through Derrida, this section demonstrates how interminable mourning does not drag the subject, or indeed his narratives, into the past, but engages with the lost object in a future-oriented evolution that transforms the self through dialogue with the other.

The paternal spectre haunts Semprun's narratives through the gaps and absences of text, through the dual identity of the authorial *j/e*, and through the son himself. This thesis has demonstrated Semprún Gurrea's encryption as the waitress of a café in Ascona, Heidi, a fetish compensating for an absence or loss that has been disavowed. Unspoken and unwritten, the paternal spectre haunts cryptographic text as the invisibility of the visible, an open wound that evades articulation and memorialisation through narrative processes. Heidi, rendering the paternal figure avidual, conceals this 'plaie ouverte',<sup>335</sup> encircling it with a wall, encrypting it, and preventing the realisation of absence. Semprún Gurrea nonetheless *insists* from within the crypt, but his memory is concealed behind the walls of the intrapsychic tomb, constructed 'avec les pierres de la haine et de l'agression'<sup>336</sup> (the *marâtre*), so that the subject is deterred from entering. The open wound is concealed amid a psychic topography, a pseudo-world, 'un monde fantasmatique inconscient', that accommodates the loss as 'un mort-vivant, un mort qu'on veut bien garder en vie, mais comme mort, qu'on veut garder jusque dans sa mort à condition de le garder, c'est-à-dire en soi, intact, sauf donc vivant'.<sup>337</sup> For Abraham and Torok, encryption takes place through the fantasy of incorporation, preserving a gap or open wound where the realisation and acceptance of loss should have taken place, so that incorporation designates the refusal to mourn,<sup>338</sup> the refusal to accept a loss and the transformative import of that loss. In Semprun's texts, the failure or refusal to mourn his father results in cryptographic narrative, shot through with holes, with wounds that cannot be expressed, prohibited from language.

Heidi's first arrival in Semprun's narratives takes place in *L'Évanouissement*, published only one year after the death of Semprún Gurrea in 1966. Through linguistic cryptonymy, Heidi's arrival coincides with a flashback to memories of childhood, and the arrival of a layer of snow that conceals the past. Alongside the 'lumière aveuglante des phares d'automobile' seen

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<sup>335</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 272.

<sup>336</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 273.

<sup>337</sup> Derrida, 'Fors', 25.

<sup>338</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 261.

by both José María Mercader and Ievgueni Davidovitch Guinsburg in *La Deuxième Mort* before their respective assassinations, the flash of light seen by Manuel reflects the paternal death, so that Heidi's arrival marks the incorporation of inexpressible loss, the moment that it is '[avalé] et *mis en conserve* [original italics]'.<sup>339</sup> The incomprehensible moment of the *trou*-matic event, represented by a blinding light that *negates sight*, is swiftly followed by the image of snow, concealing the open wound. Semprún Gurrea's absence from narrative, representing a textual *trou*, reflects an inconsolable grief that cannot be put into words, that denies even the cognizance of its absence and leads to incorporation: 'les pertes que ne peuvent – pour quelque raison – s'avouer en tant que pertes'.<sup>340</sup> In incorporation, the disavowal is so profound that even the denial cannot be put into words, 'jusqu'à interdire de faire un langage de son refus de deuil, jusqu'à interdire de signifier que l'on est inconsolable'.<sup>341</sup> The result is the construction of the *caveau intrapsychique*:

Le deuil indicible installe à l'intérieur du sujet un *caveau secret*. Dans la crypte repose, vivant, reconstitué à partir de souvenirs de mots, d'images et d'affects, le corrélat objectal de la perte, en tant que personne complète, avec sa propre topique, ainsi que les moments traumatiques – effectifs ou supposés – [causes de la perte]. [Original italics.]<sup>342</sup>

The fantasy of incorporation reveals a gap or absence where the expression of loss should have taken place, the open wound of a paternal death that has not been worked through or mourned. Abraham and Torok opposed incorporation with introjection, a process, not unlike Freudian mourning, that demonstrates the ability to formulate loss and absence. Nicoladzé argues that in *L'Évanouissement*, 'the author undertakes a literary task of mourning, in response to the death of his father'.<sup>343</sup> Thanks primarily to the date of the narrative's release, it lends itself towards the process of introjection, and yet, *L'Évanouissement* is a narrative of incorporation, reflecting the denial of mourning; or more significantly still, the failure to undertake or even to recognise that the task of mourning should take place.

Language is central to the processes of introjection, indicating the ability to formulate absence *as* absence, to give shape to the loss and share it with others:

D'abord la bouche vide, puis l'absence des objets devient paroles, enfin les expériences des mots elles-mêmes se convertissent en d'autres mots. [...] Introjecter un désir, une

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<sup>339</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 266.

<sup>340</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 265.

<sup>341</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 265-66.

<sup>342</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 266.

<sup>343</sup> Nicoladzé, 'Jorge Semprún and the Writing of Identity', 41.

douleur, une situation, c'est les faire passer par le langage dans une communion de bouches vides.<sup>344</sup>

*L'Évanouissement* cannot be a narrative of introjection because it does not express the paternal loss, indeed, it does not even express that a loss has taken place, but meticulously evades confrontation with the realisation of absence. Manuel embarks on a journey of recovery to Switzerland on the advice of his grandfather, Jean-Marie,<sup>345</sup> a figure who is not a biographical referent, but most likely represents Jean-Marie Soutou, a 'partial paternal imago' and family friend. Yet Jean-Marie's role is not paternal, rather, he is employed to function as *grand-père*,<sup>346</sup> disavowing that there is a paternal absence to be substituted. Throughout the narrative, as Manuel weaves across Paris and across history in search of his identity documents for travel to Switzerland, the labyrinthine text (similar to the meandering narrative trajectory of *L'Algarabie*) carries him, and the reader, further away from the family home in Gros-Noyer-Saint-Prix. Indeed, it is upon his return to this town from Paris that Manuel falls or jumps from the train 'juste au moment où il entrait en gare'.<sup>347</sup> This fall delays his journey, creating a lengthy detour that precludes his return to the family home and to the paternal figure. There is no word of Semprún Gurrea throughout the narrative, so that Heidi's arrival coincides with the concealment of his loss, disavowing the paternal absence and demonstrating the inexpressibility of the open wound.

Over the next three decades, on occasion, cracks begin to show in the formation of the crypt, as Semprún Gurrea makes casual appearances across a number of narratives, but always through reminiscence, and in narrative dead space. The loss of Semprún Gurrea begins to take shape, but always as a loss that refers to an other. The paternal absence is not an absence of *my* life – for absence is always substituted in Semprún's works – but is the paternal loss of *an other*, of Ramón or Ievgueni, for example, and never Semprun. *Adieu*, however, marks a turning point for the fantasy of incorporation and the inauguration of the process of introjection. Establishing Semprún Gurrea and Semprun in their respective roles as father and son, Semprun also fulfils the autobiographical pact, so that the biographical father is at once the father of the author, the narrator, and the protagonist. Revealing the creative inspiration behind Heidi – *la Suisse*, Anita L. – *Adieu* unveils the invisibility of the visible: the metaphorical crypt crumbles, exposing the open wound, and forcing the subject to confront the realisation of loss. Externalising memories, reliving the words, scenes and affects that had constructed the intrapsychic tomb, the loss is put into words and realised as a loss, and the literary task of mourning can begin.

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<sup>344</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 263.

<sup>345</sup> *L'Évanouissement*, 31.

<sup>346</sup> *L'Évanouissement*, 31.

<sup>347</sup> *L'Évanouissement*, 18.

In Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia', he argues that mourning is a necessary if painful process that must be worked through after a loss. Mourning is considered to have been successfully completed once the lost object is 'detached' from the ego, which will go on to form new libidinal attachments:

Bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, [...] the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. [...] Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it. [...] It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.<sup>348</sup>

For Freud, it is through processes of remembrance that mourning can take place. Articulated through language and released as memory, the lost object is identified as an absence: the subject can identify what has been lost and what this loss means to him. Language is imperative: it is employed to give figurative shape to that absence, acknowledging the import of the loss, and anticipating the process of introjection. Through the memories and stories evoked in *Adieu*, Semprun gives shape to the paternal absence as an emotional and physical loss that had begun years before his actual death, until the lost object can be separated, definitively, from the ego. In the final pages of *Adieu*, Semprun follows a sombre and sentimental *retour en arrière* to Biriadou on 22 August 1939, where 'pour revivre l'arôme fantomatique de ce lointain passé', he recites a few lines of a poem by his father: 'Vers les vallonnements violets du Ponant / le jour enfonce sa proue dans un long hochement...'.<sup>349</sup> Reminded of another of his father's poems, originally in Spanish and translated into French in the text, Semprun remembers hearing these poems 'dans le jardin de la maison de Santander'.<sup>350</sup> Remembering his mother's declaration in this garden that he would become 'écrivain ou président de la République', the text projects suddenly forward, to 1975 and eventually to 1995,<sup>351</sup> as Semprun returns to Santander, in the search of this garden from his childhood.

Overcome by the unchanged state of his surroundings, Semprun's return to this childhood garden literally transports him into the past: 'tout était comme autrefois. C'était autrefois'.<sup>352</sup> Returned to childhood, to a time before exile, to a place where his mother was still alive, the past is revived as Semprun hears his father reciting poems in the garden:

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<sup>348</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 245.

<sup>349</sup> *Adieu*, 274. Semprun omits the accent of his father's name in this text.

<sup>350</sup> *Adieu*, 275.

<sup>351</sup> In the present of narration Semprun explains that he retraces his steps 'il y a trois ans', from which I am proposing the year in question is 1995. *Adieu*, 276.

<sup>352</sup> *Adieu*, 278.

*Se acabarán las tardes, pero la tarde queda... [Les après-midi passent, mais reste l'après-midi...] J'entendais la voix de mon père récitant des vers. Si je m'étais retourné, peut-être l'aurais-je aperçu, près du massif d'hortensias, au pied de la véranda. J'aurais vu un homme jeune, de trente-deux ans, qui aurait pourtant été mon père.*<sup>353</sup>

Through narrative, Semprun returns his father to this sentimentally significant garden and buries him a second time, this time properly. Laid to rest in his rightful place, the paternal phantom will no longer return to haunt: his debts have been settled, his unfinished business concluded, his mourning is complete. Returning the father to the country he loved but would never return to alive, *Adieu* offers a redemptive opportunity for both the son and the father; a successful mourning that liberates the ego from its attachment to the lost object. This emotive passage suggests a final departure and separation of father and son, as Semprun returns his father to the house in Santander in 1925: before the death of Susana, before exile, before Franco was even a General. *Adieu* marks the emancipatory and cathartic release of the phantom father who had haunted the life of the son. But looking again at this penultimate passage of *Adieu*, the juxtaposition of the *conditionnel passé* immediately after the recollection of the father's voice reciting the poem is striking: '*Si je m'étais retourné [...] J'aurais vu un homme jeune, [...] qui aurait pourtant été mon père* [italics added]'.<sup>354</sup> What if the man behind him, reciting the poems of his father were not Semprún Gurrea but were Semprun himself?

Abraham and Torok argue that when the crypt threatens to crumble 'le moi tout entier devient crypte, dissimulant sous ses propres traits l'objet de l'amour occulte'.<sup>355</sup> Threatened with the loss of an encryption that has enabled the disavowal of an absence 'le moi va fusionner avec l'objet inclus'.<sup>356</sup> In other words, Semprun and Semprún Gurrea become a single absence, an absence that is at once present and absent, that marks a turn from mourning to suicide,<sup>357</sup> an interminable process of mourning that threatens the loss of the self every time the loss of the other is (almost) accepted. The reciprocity between Semprun and his father throughout his narratives demonstrates the relationship of paternity as a relationship of interminable mourning, in which the paternal figure cannot be conceived of as an absence, because he is always and already the son. Semilla Durán argues that in *Adieu*, the roles between Semprun and his father are inverted, but more than this, Semprun *becomes* his father, fused with him, transformed by his loss, so that the self *becomes* other, in order to prevent absolute and definitive absence. In *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, Freud argues that 'if one has lost a love-object, the most obvious reaction is to identify oneself with it, to replace it from within, as it

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<sup>353</sup> *Adieu*, 278.

<sup>354</sup> *Adieu*, 278

<sup>355</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 273.

<sup>356</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 273.

<sup>357</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 273.

were, by identification'.<sup>358</sup> In *Adieu*, the loss is not introjected – given shape with language – but is devoured, so that the lost object is not detached from the ego but assimilated by it. If it is Semprun who repeats the words of his father, he brings the lost object back to life, giving him a voice, keeping him alive *as* a part of himself. Mourning, then, becomes 'pathological',<sup>359</sup> it becomes melancholic, and it becomes suicidal. To successfully mourn means to have surrendered the other, but in incorporation the other cannot be given up because he is *a part of the self*. In keeping the father alive, Semprun is simultaneously keeping himself alive, and vice versa, so that melancholia becomes the threat of suicide.

Semprun's cryptographic narratives present the site of this interminable mourning, as the author is caught up in a process of writing that presents the self and the other simultaneously, through the ruptured pronoun *j/e*. The attempt to write, to use language to work through loss and to mourn, is an act that destroys as it creates. Writing in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Butler observes the transformative potential of grief, arguing that the loss of an other implicates the self, by decomposing the bonds and ties that constitute what we are in relation to others. She argues: 'It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. [...] Who "am" I, without you?'.<sup>360</sup> Transcribed as *j/e*, the Semprunian narrative voice is an orphan: composed of the infinite alterity of the paternal other he is punctuated by the voices of others. Can he really mourn his father successfully, if mourning means to separate and discard the other, the 'you'? Or would this mourning not threaten the integrity of the self, the 'I'? While Semprun Gurrea may no longer be able to speak for himself, and may only exist through his son, Semprun too cannot exist without his father. If Semprun uses *Adieu* in order to successfully mourn, returning his father to Spain and leaving him at the holiday villa in Santander, then 'the tie' between son and father will have been irreparably ruptured, so 'I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well'.<sup>361</sup> Semprun realises, in the closing passages of *Adieu*, that his father cannot be successfully mourned, that he cannot be detached from the ego without mutilating his own identity, without *j/e* becoming *j/...* Semprun's narratives are shot through with holes, but text attempts to give shape to these absences, to *boucher les trous*,<sup>362</sup> and yet it is a process that is itself shot through with holes, that is suicidal and self-destructive. Narrative is spectral: it is a

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<sup>358</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'An Example of Psycho-Analytic Work', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXIII (1937-1939): Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), 193.

<sup>359</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', 243.

<sup>360</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 22.

<sup>361</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 22.

<sup>362</sup> This reflects both the narrative site as *troué*, and Abraham and Torok's concept of introjection 'conçue comme une communion des "bouches vides"'. *L'Écorce*, 263.

liminal site of the encounter between the dead and the living, between the other and the self, and it is constructed *because of* this encounter, through the very processes of interminable mourning.

In *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* Derrida rejects the possibility of 'successful mourning' as a brutal assassination of the dead. Evoking Semprun's own claim that speaking was impossible and yet inexhaustible, he argues that 'parler est impossible, mais se taire le serait aussi, ou s'absenter ou refuser de partager sa tristesse'.<sup>363</sup> To remain silent is to abandon the dead to a second death: 'on risque de le faire disparaître encore, comme si on pouvait ajouter de la mort à la mort, et indécentement la pluraliser ainsi'.<sup>364</sup> Yet, to speak or write in the voice of the other, *as him*, commits the same infidelity to the dead as silence: we cannot speak *of* the dead, *for* him, but must speak *to* him, for fear of eliding his voice with ours, and killing him once again. Derrida does not create parallels for mourning and melancholia; instead he designates two forms of mourning, drawn from Hegel: *Erinnerung* and *Gedächtnis*. Associating introjection with *Erinnerung*, the memory of the dead is conserved as an interiorising recollection, so that parts of the other are preserved within the subject. *Gedächtnis*, on the other hand, is not to be seen as melancholia or as a form of incorporation, but is an interactive, future-oriented, thinking memory, that provokes a continued encounter with the dead. Derrida defines the former as remembrance of the dead, oriented towards the past, and the latter as a thinking memory, which seeks out potential new attachments, engaging the future. *Erinnerung* will only preserve fragments of the dead, snippets of memories, words and voices, traces of a past that will never be present, while *Gedächtnis* is an ongoing and creative encounter between the dead and the mourner that engages the other *as other* in the production of a future-oriented memory. Mourning should not be oriented towards a past deemed to have really and properly existed, whereby a trace of the dead and of the past is preserved. Instead, it should invoke memories that are still-to-come, encouraging the continued interaction and interconnectedness with the dead through an interminable process of constructive mourning. Derrida does not condone the abandonment of the dead, in which the boundaries between the dead and the living are severed completely, but insists that they remain 'ouverte et au fond interminable, autrement dit *sans fin* [original italics]'.<sup>365</sup> *Adieu* is not the proof of a literary task of mourning, instead, it demonstrates how the dead other, the father, will not and cannot be given up, but will be incorporated into future processes of *Gedächtnis* – writing, speech, and thought – maintaining the symbiotic relationship between father and son. The dead are assimilated into narrative, integrated into the process of writing itself, so that narrative becomes the site of this continued

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<sup>363</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'In mémoriam: de l'âme', in *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), 15.

<sup>364</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Les morts de Roland Barthes', *Poétique* 47 (1981), 277.

<sup>365</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Apories: Mourir – s'attendre aux 'limites de la vérité'* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), 136.

encounter, brought into existence through the interminable processes of mourning. Semprún Gurrea continues to haunt the narrative, rejecting the possibility of cathartic mourning and demonstrating how the son's process of writing is indebted to the return of his father.

Yet Semprún Gurrea's interjections in narrative are increasingly manipulated, tied to the narcissistic endeavour to write the self through the interminable mourning of the other. *Le Mort* introduces fleeting glimpses of a vindicated Semprún Gurrea who, despite only appearing peripherally in the narrative, is indispensable to its instigation and conclusion. *Le Mort* has garnered critical attention for the questions it raises over autobiographical veracity.<sup>366</sup> In this argument, however, the possibility that some areas of narrative have been fictionalised or manipulated engages pertinent debate with respect to the representation of Semprún Gurrea. Compared to paternal depictions in *Adieu*, the interactions between father and son in *Le Mort* demonstrate the potential of *Gedächtnis*, whereby the narrative is transformed from a sorrowful tale of death into a narrative of future-oriented change and adaptation. When a letter arrives at Buchenwald addressed to the *Politische Abteilung* requesting information about Gérard (Semprun), the internal organisations of the PCE and the PCF react quickly in order to ensure that Gérard can 'disappear' within two days. Fearing that the requests of the letter will ultimately lead to Gérard's execution, internal officials decide to arrange a potential 'exchange' with a soon-to-be-dead *musulman*. Spending the night in the infirmary, Gérard befriends the future cadaver, François L., a Parisian student, who is the same age as Gérard, and would have arrived on the same transport from Compiègne. Ultimately, François dies during the night, and in the end, Gérard's exchange is not required. It is only in the final chapter, as Gérard returns from the infirmary, that Semprun reveals the origins of the letter and its requests: *l'ambassadeur de Franco à Paris*. Gérard is put on trial by the internal committee, suspicious that a fascist diplomat would be looking to exchange pleasantries with an incarcerated Communist militant. Gérard protests that the association must come from a former connection with his own father, before the Civil War, when the two families probably knew one another:

J'imagine très bien comment ça s'est passé. Inquiet de ne plus avoir de lettres de moi [...] mon père avait dû chercher à joindre, de façon directe ou détournée, une ancienne connaissance, cet ambassadeur, José Félix de Lequerica. Et celui-ci, le cours de la guerre tournant définitivement à l'avantage des Alliés, n'avait pas trouvé inutile ni inconvenant d'accéder à cette requête, demandant de mes nouvelles par la voie diplomatique.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> For example, the existence of François L. has always been disputed, likened to the invention of the *gars de Semur* in *Le Grand Voyage*. Further, the narrative appears to some critics as a means of establishing referential links between works. See Michèle Touret, 'Jorge Semprun, le témoin fictif', in *Le Roman français au tournant du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. by Bruno Blanckeman, Aline Mura-Brunel, and Marc Dambre (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2004), 103-114; Carol L. Bernstein, 'Semprun, Philosophy, and the Texture of Literature', in *A Critical Companion*, ed. by Ferrán and Herrmann, pp. 107-24.

<sup>367</sup> *Le Mort*, 187.

It is this initial concern for information by Semprún Gurrea that is at the origin of the note, the narrative events, and *le mort qu'il faut* himself. Semprun writes his father into a memory of Buchenwald that may or may not even have taken place, conversing with him, indirectly, via this letter, the proof of an encounter being sought between father and son.

However, the narrative almost turns sour, as Semprún Gurrea's hasty and foolish actions prove counter-productive. Gérard's trial is cut short, but there is a bitterness that remains felt by those who rallied to help him: 'Dire qu'on a pris des risques pour te protéger! On avait même trouvé le mort qu'il fallait... Et tout ça pour rien! À cause d'une demande de l'ambassadeur de Franco à Paris adressée à von Ribbentrop!'.<sup>368</sup> Much like the infantilized bourgeois intellectual represented in *Adieu*, here again Semprún Gurrea's incapability to adapt to life after privilege is exposed. The effect produced is one of irrational love and concern, much like one would expect from the parent of a child detained by the Nazis; but this image seems immediately incompatible with every other depiction of Semprún Gurrea previously encountered. In a scathing attack by Semprun's brother, Carlos, the paternal moral turpitude is violently assaulted, as he claims that their father was completely indifferent 'con respecto al sufrimiento de sus hijos maltratados o a las víctimas del holocausto [...] un personaje vano, ambicioso, mezquino, a veces violento, de un formalismo extreme y casi pretencioso' ['towards the suffering of his mistreated sons [beaten by their stepmother] or towards the victims of the Holocaust [...] a vain, ambitious, small-minded man, sometimes violent, extremely formalist and almost pretentious'].<sup>369</sup> Semprun defended his father's disinterest in the Holocaust, arguing that at the time, no one wanted to hear about the camps,<sup>370</sup> but it nonetheless seems that the appearance of this letter sent at the bequest of Semprún Gurrea is entirely aspirational, with little support from biographical sources.

Did Semprún Gurrea really request that this letter be sent? Or perhaps more importantly, why does Semprun write that he did? Semprun/Gérard and François are all essentially interchangeable, and their differing fortunes were determined simply by fate: Gérard was lucky enough that the inmate charged with filling out his identity card changed his profession from *Student* to *Stukateur* (according to his anecdote), while François had no such similar luck.<sup>371</sup> Yet it was not upon entry into the camp that the fates of the two men were decided, rather, their fates were predetermined by their fathers. Gérard and François are almost identical except for one key factor: their fathers. Indeed, the two fathers are nearly

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<sup>368</sup> *Le Mort*, 189.

<sup>369</sup> Quoted in Semilla Durán, 'Padre(s)', 180-81.

<sup>370</sup> Augstein, *Lealtad y Traición*, 192.

<sup>371</sup> See Suleiman, *Crises of Memory*, 156. Tidd however has noted that 'while it is correct that his identity was recorded as a *Stukateur* in the prisoner number card index (*Häftlingsnummernkartei*), his profession was in fact recorded three times as "student" on his prison personal record card (*Häftlings-Personal-Karte*) and two other personal records'. *Writing the European Other*, 58.

identical, 'un agrégé de lettres, féru de culture classique et de belle prose française'<sup>372</sup> François' father shares similarities with the biographical Semprún Gurrea, but differences emerge from their individual reactions to French defeat. The father of François is a prolific collaborator, who assists in the arrest of his son and ultimately condemns him to death in Buchenwald: 'le père de François avait été projeté par la défaite de 1940 dans un activisme pronazi nourri de désarroi désespéré, de nihilisme antibourgeois. Homme de culture, il était devenu homme de guerre avec passion'.<sup>373</sup> This passage evokes Semprún Gurrea's own 'désarroi paternel' as demonstrated in *Adieu*, and the pitiful journey he makes to the *préfecture* in Paris, requesting French citizenship in order to share in the defeat of the country that had granted him asylum. Two men, shaken by the same event, take very different paths, and their resulting actions directly impact the fates of their sons. In Irwin's work on Faulkner, he raises an intriguing question about the fate of the son, asking 'does the son have free will, or does a man's father determine a man's fate?'.<sup>374</sup> Gérard appears to answer Irwin's question as he says of François: '[il] n'était pas encore mort, mais il était déjà abandonné'.<sup>375</sup> François' premature death is dictated by the premature loss of his father. The sons do not have free will, nor are their fates determined by the officials of Buchenwald, but predetermined by paternal relationships and actions. Gérard remarks of François that 'son âme l'avait déjà quitté',<sup>376</sup> suggesting that part of him is already dead. François is abandoned, destroyed from within by the absence of his father. Whether in life or in death, the son and the father must operate as one, and Semprun uses François in *Le Mort* to tentatively demonstrate the outcome of his own fate if he were to permanently rupture the bond between himself and his own father.

However, in *Quel beau*, Semprun notes that in the spring of 1945, the *Politische Abteilung* requested information on prisoner number 44904, a request that it transpired came from the ambassador to Franco in Berlin, M. de Lequerica, who was attempting to negotiate Semprun's release from Buchenwald. What is interesting about the earlier rendition of this episode is that, not only does Semprun emphasise the potential betrayal he would have felt if he had been released, and his relief that these negotiations failed,<sup>377</sup> but that the father is not explicitly involved. Quite the contrary, Semprun writes: 'Sans doute quelqu'un de ta famille était-il intervenu auprès de Lequerica. Il y avait plein de personnes importantes et bien vues du

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<sup>372</sup> *Le Mort*, 141.

<sup>373</sup> *Le Mort*, 142.

<sup>374</sup> Irwin, *Doubling and Incest*, 141.

<sup>375</sup> *Le Mort*, 141.

<sup>376</sup> *Le Mort*, 141.

<sup>377</sup> 'Une angoisse honteuse, terrifiante, t'a saisi, à l'idée que tu pourrais abandonner tes camarades, les trahir, en quelque sorte, que tu pourrais retrouver la vie d'avant, la vie dehors, sans eux, contre eux peut-être. Mais, heureusement, ces démarches des autorités espagnoles n'ont pas eu de suite.' *Quel beau*, 375.

régime franquiste, dans ta famille'.<sup>378</sup> Specifying paternal involvement in *Le Mort* is a deliberate attempt to venerate the father figure and to make it appear that he cared. Contradicting the images garnered of Semprún Gurrea from Carlos' work, and *Adieu* in particular, *Le Mort* seems deeply aspirational, as the son imbues the father with 'heroic traits', and with a kindness, compassion, and drive that idealise the father figure in a manner that seems entirely unprecedented. Nietzsche is quoted as saying that 'if one had no good father, one should then invent one',<sup>379</sup> and Semprun adopts this idea by redeeming the father through an entirely fictionalised representation that elevates him to the idolised role the son feels he should have taken. As a work of the continued processes of mourning, *Le Mort* demonstrates the narcissistic incentive to manipulate the paternal imago. Pathological mourning reinforces the ambivalence of the paternal relationship, whereby the subject does not only recollect happy memories of love, but is also reminded of 'all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed'.<sup>380</sup> This internal conflict, exacerbated by the identification of father and/as son – the narrative *j/e* – means that both love and hate come to operate upon the subject, 'abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering'.<sup>381</sup> Turning upon itself as a substitute for the other 'the ego can kill itself',<sup>382</sup> and so Semprún Gurrea is idealised in *Le Mort* in order to facilitate the narcissistic salvation of the threatened self. Without redeeming the father in some way, without narcissistically elevating him to a figure Semprun can love, the ego becomes self-tormenting, sadistic, and suicidal. *Le Mort* offers Semprun the chance to re-invent the paternal imago, if only for his own narcissistic wellbeing. Semprun constructs two paternal figures: François' father is shot through with failings and reprehensible traits, while Gérard's father is a symbol of adoration, celebration and diligence, so that Semprun leads himself (and the reader) to believe that *his* father cared for him, *his* father looked out for him, *his* father was a good man, *his* father is the man he wishes to identify with and wishes to become. Semprun invents an ideal father, *his own* ideal father, so that his own process of interminable mourning will not become a process of interminable suicide.

It must be acknowledged that the events of *Le Mort* probably never took place, but they had to be written. Semprun creates a new memory that is future-oriented, and that engages father and son in a narcissistically redemptive scenario that exonerates Semprún Gurrea from the feminized, infantilized images drawn in *Adieu*. In *Vingt ans*, Semprun demonstrates the continued encounter with the paternal other *as other*, constructing narrative that is shot through with holes, creating a site for transformation and interminable mourning.

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<sup>378</sup> *Quel beau*, 374.

<sup>379</sup> Scharfstein, *Philosophers*, 292.

<sup>380</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', 251.

<sup>381</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', 251.

<sup>382</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', 252.

The relationship between self and other transforms the process of writing into an act that engages alterity, so that narrative takes shape around the gaps and absences of the unknown and the ungraspable other self. In July 1956, historian Michael Leidson arrives at La Maestranza, the Avendaño family home, in time to witness the twentieth and final repetition of the death of José María Avendaño. The youngest of three brothers, and the most liberal and balanced, José María's murder by country peasants was a tragedy. His death left behind the eldest brother, José Manuel, an unpleasant and arrogant Fascist, and the middle brother, José Ignacio, a Jesuit priest, along with José María's widow, Mercedes Pombo, and their posthumous twins, Isabel and Lorenzo. The history of the estate and of the family are slowly unravelled, before José María is exhumed and reburied alongside a 'deuxième mort',<sup>383</sup> Chema 'el Refilón' Pardo, a childhood friend and co-conspirator in the revolt that led to the assassination. The final performance of the death will feature Lorenzo as his own father, and will see the two corpses buried 'dans la même crypte [...] mais dans des tombes différentes'.<sup>384</sup>

Lorenzo's re-enactment of the paternal death signifies the Nietzschean eternal return, enclosing the posthumous son amid a destiny that was prescribed before his birth. Omlor writes that:

Figuratively, Lorenzo is thus thrown into a present which fuses with the past and in which he has to bring about his own coming into being. Since he impersonates the father he never met he feels as if he had planted the seed that led to his own conception.<sup>385</sup>

Lorenzo is the Semprunian orphan, becoming his own father, again and again, as self and dead other are fused in a sterile cycle of paternal repetition. Lorenzo has no prospect of escape or transformation. Enclosed in atemporality he is doomed to incest and a double murder-suicide: 'Il va se passer ce qui a toujours été écrit: dans son sang, dans son imagination, dans le destin trouble de sa lignée'.<sup>386</sup> Haunted by paternal fate, *Vingt ans* offers the chance to liberate the son from the phantom father by burying him once and for all in a final morbid performance. Gabriele Schwab writes that: 'Where there is no grave, one cannot mourn properly; one remains forever tied to a loss that never becomes real'.<sup>387</sup> The grave gives figurative shape to absence or loss, providing a site for mourning to begin. In her memoir *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, Ruth Klüger writes: 'When there is no grave, we are condemned to go on mourning [...] By a grave I don't necessarily mean a place in a cemetery, but simply clear

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<sup>383</sup> *Vingt ans*, 29.

<sup>384</sup> *Vingt ans*, 53.

<sup>385</sup> Omlor, 'Reassessing History, Rediscovering Memory', 4.

<sup>386</sup> *Vingt ans*, 412.

<sup>387</sup> Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 3.

knowledge about the death of someone you've known'.<sup>388</sup> Lorenzo's repetition of the paternal death prevents successful mourning, effectively keeping the dead alive, revived and re-assassinated each year. Finally, in 1956, twenty years after the original death of José María, the pathological repetition of the past is overcome by the literal exhuming and reburial of the dead. In Raquel's words to Lorenzo: 'C'est fini, Lorenzo, maintenant c'est fini, toutes les mauvaises choses vont finir aujourd'hui'.<sup>389</sup> Twenty years on, Lorenzo will finally be freed from the phantom of his father through this significant act of mourning; but it is a complete mourning that will prove suicidal.

The conclusion of the final burial sequence is followed by Lorenzo's consummation of an incestuous relationship with his sister that will ultimately lead to their deaths.<sup>390</sup> The process of mourning comes to an end, Lorenzo commits suicide. Throughout the re-enactment of José María's death, Lorenzo was kept alive by the paternal other, but after the father is definitively re-buried, Lorenzo loses the part of himself that he never knew, the part that was other, and that kept him alive through the infinite alterity of the orphan. While *I* am my father, *we* are both alive, but once *I* have lost *you*, *I* go missing as well. Through *Vingt ans*, Semprun demonstrates the horrors of so-called 'successful mourning', supporting Derrida's theory that mourning should be, and must be, interminable. However appealing it may be to abandon his father and attempt to forge a new future, free from the destiny prescribed to him, he cannot, and he must not. Any attempt to separate himself from his father will ultimately be self-destructive and suicidal, a literary auto-erasure that disrupts the complex internal alterity of the orphan, exile, and stranger. Yet, while *Vingt ans* appears to demonstrate the tragic destiny of a son liberated from an even more tragic intergenerational and unknown paternal fate, it actually represents an attempt to encounter the father through literary reconstruction and re-enactment.

It is relevant that *Vingt ans* is written in Spanish, a language typically associated with the maternal figure, but a language that – particularly through the visualisation of the split Sempru/únian patronym – can be seen as an association with the father. As in *La Deuxième Mort*, Semprun splits and duplicates the paternal role, providing both a biographical patronym, Semprún Gurrea (without a first name) and a biological father, José María, who is ostensibly charged with the filial paternity of the twins. The morbid tone that overrides the narrative is one of Nietzschean 'predestination to an early death', that consolidates the inheritance of a paternal fate and the suicidal effects of abandoning the dead. But there is an alternate ending,

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<sup>388</sup> Ruth Klüger, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 2001), 80.

<sup>389</sup> *Adieu*, 260.

<sup>390</sup> 'Un après-midi, dans la chambre de leur mère, nus tous les deux, il [Lorenzo] tua d'abord sa sœur, puis il tira une balle dans la tempe.' *Vingt ans*, 352. Again, the maternal bedroom is a site of death.

and an alternate father. In the closing pages of the narrative, after the final burial ceremony, as the family prepares to leave La Maestranza, Lorenzo finds Isabel going through photographs that had been hidden in a book in the family library. The photographs are of a naked woman, their mother, Mercedes, sometimes with their father, and sometimes with another man. They were taken in Biarritz by a young English photographer, Timothy, at the end of the newlyweds' honeymoon. Timothy is allegedly gay, and apparently participates only voyeuristically in the couple's sexual encounter. But these photographs betray another story: 'Satur [Saturnina, the maid] a d'abord pensé que c'était une pédale, qu'il était tombé amoureux de [José María], mais ils ont dû s'en servir tous les deux'.<sup>391</sup> Timothy clearly was not only the voyeur, but 'peut-être même davantage',<sup>392</sup> an almost entirely inconspicuous detail that serves to alter the outcomes of the narrative. At various points in *Vingt ans*, the reader has been reminded of Biarritz as the town in which Isabel and Lorenzo were conceived, 'certainement à Biarritz, c'était facile à calculer'.<sup>393</sup> Timothy's involvement with Mercedes in Biarritz casts doubt over the paternity of the twins, demonstrated through the contradictory conclusions of the narrative. While Satur claims that the Avendaño family reaches a tragic end following the double murder-suicide of the incestuous twins, the narrative proper concludes with Isabel's triumphant departure from Spain, breaking the cycle of tragedy. As the children of José María, Isabel and Lorenzo are doomed to the continuation of his tragic destiny; but as the children of Timothy, Semprun opens up a redemptive possibility of escape from the vicious cycle of eternal return. The narrative never reaches a conclusion, extending in two distinct directions, with two fathers and two differing possibilities. *Vingt ans* is punctuated by questions, gaps and absences that serve to prolong the destiny of the twins. Semprun is not questioning his own paternity,<sup>394</sup> but he is acknowledging that the paternal other remains a figure of infinite alterity who can never be fully known or assimilated.

The conception of the twins in Biarritz – a French town on the border of Spain, neighbouring Biriadou<sup>395</sup> – to a Spanish *or* an English father indicates the originary division that haunts their lives from the moment of conception. The gaps in the narrative figuratively open

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<sup>391</sup> *Vingt ans*, 413. There is a strong hint here that José María and Timothy also have sex, reflecting themes of sodomy and the destruction of masculinity and paternity discussed earlier. Further, prior to their marriage, Mercedes and José María also engage in acts of sodomy.

<sup>392</sup> *Vingt ans*, 367.

<sup>393</sup> *Vingt ans*, 227.

<sup>394</sup> Nor is he commenting on homosexuality. Despite his rigorously Catholic, Bourgeois and patriarchal upbringing in Spain, 'l'homosexualité, telle qu'on en parlait autour de moi, était une bizarrerie assez innocente, un travers ou caprice d'artiste: il faut bien que talent se passe'. *Adieu*, 233.

<sup>395</sup> The importance of Biarritz and Biriadou cannot be overlooked. As towns on the border of France and Spain they are synonymous with the rifts and losses caused by exile, death, and militancy. In *Adieu*, Semprun expresses his desire to be buried in Biriadou (244), and this wish was honoured after his death with the erection of a memorial stone in the town. See Francisco Javier Pradera, 'Jorge Semprun and His Heteronym Federico Sánchez', in *A Critical Companion*, ed. by Ferrán and Herrmann, 69 n4.

the crypt, allowing the other to haunt, so that *Vingt ans* is a narrative of limitless potential outcomes, the meeting ground of inexhaustible others: José María, Semprún Gurrea, Lorenzo, even Federico Sánchez – Semprun’s other self. Semprun demonstrates how the continued encounter with his father is transformative, oriented towards the future, towards the construction of the self *and* of the other. Semprun demonstrates that lacunae still exist, that narrative will always be shot through with holes, and that the infinite alterity of the other within the self means that the self can never be fully written; but this is why he writes. *Vingt ans* is not a narrative about repeating the past; it is a text that engages the principles of *Gedächtnis* in order to project itself into the future. Leaving silences, unanswered questions, and possible (un)endings, Semprun demonstrates how the process of mourning is never complete. He does not simply repeat the past of his father, but integrates it into his own present and future, ‘submitting to a transformation [original italics]’<sup>396</sup> that cannot be predicted, relying upon this relationship to the other in order to relate to, develop, understand, and write the self. Semprun’s narratives are undone by the paternal relationship, shot through with holes, or as Butler writes: ‘My narrative falters, as it must. Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something’.<sup>397</sup>

#### **Conclusion: *La mort continue*...**

*When the grave was uncovered to receive the coffin, I noticed a thick orange root thrusting into the hole. It had a strangely calming effect on me. For a brief moment the bare fact of death could no longer be hidden behind the words and gestures of ceremony. Here it was: unmediated, unadorned, impossible to turn my eyes away from. My father was being lowered into the ground, and in time, as the coffin gradually disintegrated, his body would help to feed the same root I had seen. More than anything that had been said or done that day, this made sense to me.*

-Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*.

In *Montand*, Semprun provides a biographical approach to the life of his close friend Yves Montand (born Ivo Livi) the celebrated actor, himself the son of an Italian Communist refugee. Given the nature of the biography, it has been sorely overlooked in any discussion of Semprun himself, and yet it provides an indirect insight into the relationship between self and other, and more particularly between father and son. After the death of Montand’s father in 1968, Semprun realises that son and father continue to converse, and that Montand’s actions are always tied to the paternal other. In 1982, as Semprun watches Montand’s performance at the

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<sup>396</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 21.

<sup>397</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 23.

Metropolitan Opera in New York, he realises with a blinding flash ('un éclair aveuglante de clarté'<sup>398</sup>) that the paternal ghost has invaded the stage: 'C'est à son père que Montand parle, bien sûr, dans le silence de ce vacarme d'ovations et de rappels'.<sup>399</sup> Through narrative ventriloquism, Semprun attributes the following words to Montand:

Tu vois, je suis là, père, et je n'ai rien oublié [...] et me voici libre, à ta place peut-être, en ton nom peut-être, et je suis Ivo Livi, fils de Giovanni, je n'oublie pas, ne m'oublie pas, la vie continue...<sup>400</sup>

Speaking to his father, in the name of his father, Montand accepts his fate as the son of Giovanni Livi, reacquainting himself with his own patronym, and accommodating the paternal spectre. Hidden in an ostensibly biographical text of an other, Semprun engages his own ongoing dialogue with his father, through words that do not bury him, but keep him alive; alive as dead, a living dead who haunts the gaps and absences of narrative. The interminable process of mourning, enacted through narrative, means that the book cannot be closed, the text cannot end, that the process of writing the self is a process that engages the other. Semprun's life goes on, through the life and works of his own son.

Reading Derrida's *Spectres de Marx*, Gayatri Spivak remarked that it was a 'how-to-mourn-your-father book'<sup>401</sup> and in contrast, Semprun's texts appear as 'how-not-to-mourn-your-father books'. The wound [*plaie*] of the paternal loss that Semprun attempts to wall in does not go away but waits to be reopened through the processes of mourning. Semprun writes in the name of the father – literally – but with a cryptographic clue that destabilises his own origins and the future-oriented processes of writing and mourning, opening up narrative to potential transformation, and to the accommodation of the paternal other. In a poem from 1953, re-transcribed in *Autobiographie*,<sup>402</sup> Semprun refers to *himself* as an orphan. The fundamentally paternal role of the PCE and of Stalin<sup>403</sup> results in a pre-emptive orphanhood that begins to demonstrate how the narrative voice is always open to dialogue with the other.

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<sup>398</sup> Montand, 342.

<sup>399</sup> Montand, 342.

<sup>400</sup> Montand, 342.

<sup>401</sup> Spivak, 'from *Ghostwriting*', in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, ed. by María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 318.

<sup>402</sup> 'La classe ouvrière est orpheline / Sont orphelins [...] / Notre père est mort, notre camarade à tous, / Notre Chef est mort, notre Maître à tous [...] / Notre Staline est mort, camarades.' *Autobiographie*, 135-36.

<sup>403</sup> Semilla Durán refers to '[le] père symbolique représenté par le Parti et les individus qui l'incarnent', *Le Masque*, 243; Herrmann calls the PCE a 'surrogate family', *Written in Red*, 189; and Nicoladze argues that 'the biological, Catholic father [excluded from the Communist vision of the world articulated in *Le Grand Voyage*] replaced by an ideal and ideological father: Brecht's "Party with a thousand eyes"', 'Jorge Semprun and the Writing of Identity', 40.

In the transcription of Semprú/un, or even the narrative pronoun *j/e*, Semprun demonstrates a partial orphanhood, whereby the presence of the father is engaged alongside his absence. If orphanhood means suicide, then so too does complete identification with the paternal figure, so that through the rupture of identity, precisely through the gaps and absences of one's relationship to oneself, the subject is phantomatically constructed. The father does not drag the son backwards towards a premature death, as Nietzsche believed his father was doing, but enables the son to continue progressing and developing. Through the interminable processes of mourning, narrative provides a site for transformation, for change, and for the future. Writing in the name of the father, but through narrative that is shot through with holes, Semprun's works begin to displace the primacy of the paternal figure. In the next chapter, Semprun's future-oriented narratives disjoint the unanimity of the paternal figure and of the cultural and political structures that are founded upon its supremacy. By both accommodating and rejecting the paternal figure, representing Semprún Gurrea as both a presence and an absence, Semprun threatens the Lacanian symbolic order and patriarchal structure.

### Chapter Three

#### Against Patriarchy: Writing Women and Feminine Writing

*History is full of accidents, and literature is not.*

-Evan Horowitz, 'Narrative Accidents and Literary Miracles'.

In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Lerner argues for the construction of a woman-centered world that will 'enable women and men to free their minds from patriarchal thought and practice and at last to build a world free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that is truly human'.<sup>404</sup> She argues that the androcentric world-view of history cannot be rectified simply by 'adding women', but must be the result of a 'radical restructuring of thought and analysis'.<sup>405</sup> To be woman-centered means: 'ignoring all evidence of women's marginality, because, even when women appear to be marginal, this is the result of patriarchal intervention; frequently also it is merely an appearance'.<sup>406</sup> This chapter provides a feminist approach to Semprun's works that does not simply 'add' women to the empty spaces of narrative, but that assesses texts from the perspective of female sight and voice. Subverting the primacy of the paternal figure and of the patriarchy in the construction of narrative and identity, this chapter engages the voices of women – and particularly the voice of the mother – as a reflection of the unwritten and unspoken aspects of history. Reading Semprun's texts from the abjected voice of the female other, the 'absolute invisibility' of narrative is revealed, and the perception of his works as definitive and stable sites of memory once again negated. In Semprun's works, women are spectral, presented in negative space, maintained on a fragile boundary between life and death. Women transgress the margins of narrative, pointing to the *trous* or wounds of history and memory, and to the failure of patriarchal language to accommodate the voice of the other. In order to write the other side of history, Semprun must adopt the abjected voice of the female other, speaking from memorial silences that have been rendered avial by patriarchal structures. The abjected female voice is the invisibility of the visible; it is the foundation of Semprun's narrative presence, demonstrating how his works persistently undermine and decentre the paternal figure. First, this chapter demonstrates how Semprun re-engages the maternal figure in narrative, through a phantomatic female form that transforms vitality and life into a future death. Narrative becomes a site of death, of life *as* death, presence *as* absence that articulates authorial mastery and control over loss. The female body signifies death as an event that cannot be captured, that disappears like a ghost into an interminably expectant future. The patriarchal narrative voice fails to articulate the death of the m/other because it cannot express abject alterity; yet Semprun's continued narrative attempts to recount her

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<sup>404</sup> Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 229.

<sup>405</sup> Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 220.

<sup>406</sup> Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 228.

death give shape to her absence *as* absence, placing the maternal figure at the centre of the text. Rendered avidual by the patriarchal voice, the return to the maternal absence decentres narrative, turning attention towards the invisibility of the visible.

Women in Semprun are spectral, as 'silhouettes plus que figures'<sup>407</sup> they oppose the transcendent male norm because they are 'unfinished, mutilated, and lacking in autonomy'.<sup>408</sup> They hover on the border of irreality and inexistence, the eroticized whim of the narrative male gaze, sublimated at will from palpable sexuality to disorienting dismemberment. In *L'Évanouissement*, Kiki, a prostitute from a brothel on the rue d'Athènes, and even Laurence, the narrator's lover, are reduced to unstable figments of narrative imagination and reverie, dissolving under the touch and the gaze of the narrator.<sup>409</sup> Entering the narrative without a trace, as a disembodied voice over a public telephone at the *gare du Nord* in Paris, Laurence disappears from the text just as quickly: 'nul ne sait plus rien d'elle'.<sup>410</sup> In the film *La Guerre*, the sexual encounter between Nadine and Diego (Semprun) is transformed into a juxtaposition of hands, mouths, and limbs, until Nadine opens her legs and the whole shot is overexposed to leave her floating in sexual ecstasy. As Emma Wilson argues in her work on Alain Resnais, 'For a critic in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, "Resnais depicts their love as a dream, their bodies bleached white like some vision of the sublime"'.<sup>411</sup> Pierced by transparency, becoming faint shadows rather than autonomous characters, the bodily absence of these women evokes the unsettling instability of a ghost. Disembodied and abjected, reduced to a figure of dependency, women surrender to the male gaze which paradoxically assures and annihilates their subjective existence.

According to Semprun, this dream-like or fantastical representation of women is a result of his time working undercover in the PCE:

Je crois pouvoir dire que la chose que j'ai mieux réussi dans ma vie, c'est la clandestinité – or, celle-ci interdit les rapports de séduction. Complètement. [...] C'est peut-être une compensation à cette abstinence qui apparaît dans mes romans, où il y a eu un foisonnement de personnages féminins, d'aventures et d'histoires. Ce sont tous les rêves que je n'ai pas réalisés dans la réalité.<sup>412</sup>

For Tidd, however, the de-realisation of the female form lends itself to a reading of maternal loss. The unattainability of spectral femininity provides a reassuring paradox: a woman cannot

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<sup>407</sup> Françoise Nicoladzé, *La Lecture et la vie, œuvre attendue, œuvre reçue: Jorge Semprun et son lectorat* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 111.

<sup>408</sup> Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 220.

<sup>409</sup> Kiki, for example, a prostitute in a brothel on the rue d'Athènes in Paris 'semblait se dissoudre', while Laurence is fragmented, 'un éclat de présent'. *L'Évanouissement*, 133-36.

<sup>410</sup> *L'Évanouissement*, 68.

<sup>411</sup> Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 115.

<sup>412</sup> Semprun quoted in Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 42-43.

die if she never existed in the first place. Thus, Semprun avoids confrontation with 'a woman who could abandon him in death, which would constitute a textual quasi-repetition of [his] maternal bereavement'.<sup>413</sup> In *La Montagne*, Semprun engages the maternal spectre through the interminable exchange and substitution of female characters. Juan's replacement of Franca with Nadine – seventeen years her junior – is a feeble attempt to defer the onset of death. Even when death does arrive in narrative, it is wildly corporeal, so that the boundaries between life and death, or presence and absence become confused. When Ulrike de Stermaria, Antoine's aunt, commits suicide, she sends her body on a vigil along the Vltava in full view and full form, displaying her body as an iconographic ideal. Death does not mean eternal absence, but rather the preservation of the female body in a state of spectrality, the presence of an absence. Juan's all-consuming account of Buchenwald draws Laurence into the underworld of the camps, leaving the lovers 'épuisés, comme un couple de gisants'.<sup>414</sup> Neither living nor dead, they are immortal statues, preserved in time and space. Laurence is absent from the present of narration, but she is never allowed to become completely obsolete. Semprun refuses her permanent absence by subjecting her to a devastating accident that will leave her wheelchair-bound 'entre la vie et la mort',<sup>415</sup> reflecting her liminality between presence and absence.

Yet Semprun's engagement with the female body as a living dead does not only ensure its preservation beyond death, but implicates the persistence of death *in* life. As Juan looks at the vibrant and youthful body of Nadine, he is overwhelmed by memories of death in Buchenwald that negated the physical forms of the inmates: 'Fièvre de son corps lisse et dru, ferme, flamboyant: son corps glorieux de jeune Juive d'après la honte et le massacre. [...] Mais il ne parvenait pas à voir Nadine, il ne voyait que la mort'.<sup>416</sup> Flesh is twisted into an image of degradation and destruction, as the putrid and abject deaths of Buchenwald overwhelm the vitality of the physical form. The fear of death emanates from the vivacious corporeal form of the young woman, provoked precisely by the unadulterated materiality of her body. The body begins to die from the moment it is born, and women represent the physicality of a death that is still-to-come, the presence of a future absence. In Semprun, the tension between life and death, or presence and absence, plays out through the bodies of women, who represent life *as* death, or presence *as* absence. When death appears to him in person through narrative, as it does in *Vingt ans*, for example,<sup>417</sup> it is always as the body of a woman. Despite all the deaths experienced in Buchenwald – deaths that were exclusively male – it is the female body that signifies mortality, because death, like femininity, is absolutely other.

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<sup>413</sup> Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 37.

<sup>414</sup> *La Montagne*, 119.

<sup>415</sup> *La Montagne*, 303.

<sup>416</sup> *La Montagne*, 198.

<sup>417</sup> See *Vingt ans*, 362.

In order to bear witness to another's death, argues Kathryn Robson, 'one must first testify to one's own survival, however meaningless it may seem, and thus to the difference between life and death'.<sup>418</sup> To narrate the death of the m/other means to depart from it, to portray it as an event that is distinct from one's self: to write that 'you are dead' means that 'I am alive'. Through narrative, however, Semprun gives shape to the maternal death, not only as an event that he survived, but as an event that he (re)experiences by speaking from the abjected female position. To engage with the death of the m/other, Semprun must overcome the differences between life and death, presence and absence, or male and female by adopting the voice of the abject other. In *La Deuxième Mort*, the only two female figures of note are Inés Alvarado Lima, the wife of Ramón/Ievgueni, and Adela Mercader, his aunt. Both women are pierced by a sense of relinquished control, whereby the narrator appears to direct their actions and thoughts, often without even bothering to change narrative voice or position. Inés' appearances in the work are punctuated by a fluctuating narrative voice: 'elle' slips seamlessly into 'je' so that memories and actions of Ramón and of his wife become merged.<sup>419</sup> Even Inés doubts her own existence without the objectifying gaze, touch, and words of Ramón,<sup>420</sup> exemplified in the commonality of their death(s).<sup>421</sup> In many ways, Adela and Inés are entirely superfluous to the narrative: they offer nothing to the text except a puppet voice to be mastered and articulated by the narrator. Yet, in this way, Semprun engages with narrative *from the other side*, taking on the voices of women. Immersed in the narrative of the female body, he crosses over into death itself, into absolute alterity.

The desire to assume a position of otherness and to (re)experience the maternal death stems from the original event of Susana Maura's passing. In Augstein's biography, the maternal death is recounted differently by each of the Semprun children. Neither a timescale nor a cause can be unanimously attributed to her death: Gonzalo claims that her illness lasted two years, while Maribel claims that 'fue muy rápido [it was very quick]'.<sup>422</sup> Carlos attributes her death to an undetectable brain cancer, Maribel to a serious bout of flu, and Jorge to septicaemia.<sup>423</sup> Jorge claims that in the final weeks of her life his mother was delirious, and the children were forbidden from entering her room. The event of death itself therefore took place behind closed doors, unwitnessed by the children: Susana's death was '*not experienced* [it was] literally

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<sup>418</sup> Robson, *Writing Wounds*, 118.

<sup>419</sup> See *La Deuxième Mort*, 118; 244.

<sup>420</sup> 'Son regard, ses mains, sa bouche, sur son corps à elle, comme si elle n'existait vraiment, pour elle-même, dans sa plus radicale et solitaire intimité, qu'en fonction de ce regard, de ces mains, de cette bouche...' *La Deuxième Mort*, 393-94.

<sup>421</sup> As the inscription on their shared tombstone testifies, the two die on the same day in an uncanny coincidence that suggests the symbiotic dependence of Inés upon her husband. *La Deuxième Mort*, 487.

<sup>422</sup> Augstein, *Lealtad y Traición*, 37.

<sup>423</sup> Augstein, *Lealtad y Traición*, 37.

missed [original italics]'.<sup>424</sup> Through Semprun's works, the moment of maternal death is always absent, but it is conveyed through the deaths of other women. Semprun's works attempt to recreate the event of the maternal death in order to bear witness to it for the first time, in order to have something to remember. In *L'Évanouissement*, *La Montagne*, and *La Deuxième Mort*, Susana's death is re-enacted through the deaths of three female protagonists, providing Semprun with an opportunity to experience her death and to bear witness to it through narrative.

Each of these works demonstrates a rejection of autonomous female characters that signifies the transgression of alterity, as Semprun penetrates the text in order to experience the maternal death. In *L'Évanouissement*, Eve, the female driver for Manuel's clandestine trip across the border from France to Spain, dies on the return journey in a collision with an oncoming out-of-control car. Driving past the Lac de la Négresse near Biriadou, just across the French border, the moment of her death at the intersection of France and Spain represents the loss of the mother, forever left behind in Spain.<sup>425</sup> In *La Montagne*, it is Laurence who submits to a car accident and, despite surviving, suffers life-changing injuries that leave her wheelchair-bound.<sup>426</sup> Finally, in *La Deuxième Mort*, Inés dies while being pursued by the American CIA agents, as she hits a pile of stones in the road and loses control of her car. In each case, these women reflect the idealised mother figure: Eve, the first woman; Laurence, who revives Juan upon his return from Buchenwald, evoking life and sensuality; and Inés, whose name originates from the Greek roots of purity and chastity. The transformation of the unwitnessed maternal death into a narrative event signifies the desire to re-view the passage from life to death that was missed in childhood. The female body is transformed into what Jean Améry terms the 'prey of death', whereby the body is isolated and alienated from the mind, so that 'a living person can be transformed so thoroughly into flesh and by that, while still alive, be partly made into the prey of death'.<sup>427</sup> Semprun reduces the female body to a mass of flesh that is intended to suffer and to die, or following Améry's equation: 'Body = Pain = Death'.<sup>428</sup> There is a sadistic fascination with the death of the mother here, but there is also a desire to witness it, to understand it, and ultimately, to control it.

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<sup>424</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 168-69.

<sup>425</sup> The coincidence of Eve's death at this geographical location is clearly tied to Semprun's experiences of childhood loss and exile. In *Adieu*, he writes of Biriadou: 'ce lieu de frontière, patrie possible des apatrides, entre l'une et l'autre appartenance [l'espagnole et la française] [...] Voilà un lieu qui me conviendrait parfaitement pour que se perpétue mon absence'. (244) Eve's death at this lake is anticipated by the inherent absence of this location, and even Semprun's own desire to be buried there. *Adieu*, 244. In *Autobiographie*, Semprun refers to the lac de la Négresse as a 'borne-frontière de ma vie, ce qui te séparait de moi'. *Autobiographie*, 199.

<sup>426</sup> *La Montagne*, 303.

<sup>427</sup> Jean Améry, 'Torture' [1966], in *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (London: Granta Books, 1999), 40.

<sup>428</sup> Améry, 'Torture', 34.

In Améry's essay, 'Torture', the body is nothing but a mass of flesh awaiting death, governed by the vicissitudes of the torturers:

With heart and soul they [the torturers] went about their business, and the name of it was power, dominion over spirit and flesh, orgy of unchecked self-expansion. I also have not forgotten that there were moments when I felt a kind of wretched admiration for the agonizing sovereignty they exercised over me. For is it not the one who can reduce a person so entirely to a body and a whimpering prey of death a god, or at least, a demigod?<sup>429</sup>

The torturer, the one who violates the body of the other, is also an enviable figure of control and power. In the creation of fragmented and disembodied female forms, subjected to the will of the male narrator, Semprun elevates himself to the position of torturous 'demigod', exercising sovereignty over the bodies of spectral women. Violating the boundaries of the other's body, Semprun is able to control what they do, think, and remember, transgressing the borders of alterity. Semprun's engagement with alterity is essentially a masculine and patriarchal act, 'penetrating' the text and 'possessing' the female body. Re-creating the maternal death through narrative is not only an attempt to experience or to witness it, but ultimately reveals Semprun's desire to control it, to regain mastery over the losses of his own life. The deaths (or almost) of Eve, Laurence, and Inés are all the result of car crashes, articulated in such a manner to be perceived as 'accidents'. However, as Evan Horowitz points out, 'history is full of accidents, literature is not'.<sup>430</sup>

In literature, the narrator knows what is going to happen, and the author is automatically the 'demigod' of the events that unfold. Certainly, events may occur erroneously or with little warning for either or both the reader and the characters, but these events cannot be classed as 'accidents' in the traditional sense:

What makes accidents accidental, above all, is that they take us by surprise. If we wanted, we might point to other notable features, but what is most essential to the modern understanding of accidents is that they are untimely, unintended, and unforeseen.<sup>431</sup>

In literature, there are always clues to the 'accidental' event, and even more importantly, there is a relationship of cause and effect. If the accident were inconsequential to the narrative, it would not take place. In literature, 'accidents' are never untimely or unintended, although they can be unforeseen for the reader and the choreographed characters. The accidents that befall the women in Semprun's works are precisely not accidents in the typical sense, indeed, they are often indicated (if perhaps only in hindsight) throughout the course of the narrative: the title of

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<sup>429</sup> Améry, 'Torture', 36.

<sup>430</sup> Evan Horowitz, 'Narrative Accidents and Literary Miracles', *Philosophy and Literature*, 35.1 (2011), 69.

<sup>431</sup> Horowitz, 'Narrative Accidents', 56.

*L'Évanouissement*, broken down to read Eve-anouissement, predicts the death of the young woman; Laurence's absence from the present of narration, coupled with her quasi-death through the vicarious re-experiencing of Juan's time in Buchenwald, signals her untimely death; and the close associations between Inés and the deceased Sonsoles Avendaño,<sup>432</sup> along with the necessity of Ramón's gaze for her existence, prophesise her imminent demise as soon as Ramón's 'suicide' has been announced. There is a sense of André Bernstein's concept of 'foreshadowing' that transforms the (maternal) death into an event that is inevitable and expected. Foreshadowing imposes 'a closed universe in which all choices have already been made, in which human free will can exist only in the paradoxical sense of choosing to accept or wilfully – and vainly – rebelling against what is inevitable'.<sup>433</sup> Narrative clues, in retrospect, become 'harbinger[s] of an already determined future' that accommodate the maternal loss as an inevitable and unavoidable event.

At the same time, narrative traces of a future death are symptoms of a would-be heroic son who chastises himself for not seeing, in time, the illness and death of the mother. Bernstein refers to this as 'backshadowing':

A kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come*. [Original Italics.]<sup>434</sup>

Through foreshadowing and backshadowing, Semprun regains control of the maternal death as an event that was inescapable, that conformed to a narrative plan, presenting both a cause and a consequence.<sup>435</sup> The maternal death is not only experienced and witnessed, but mastered. Through narrative 'accidents', Semprun reconstructs the maternal death, repeating it, articulating and transmitting a narrative that enables him to bear witness *for the first time* to the missed event. At the same time, the very particular manipulation of the testimonial process through literary 'accidents' redistributes narrative power in a way that emulates Freud's interpretation of Little Ernst's 'Fort/Da' game, that seeks to master, rather than mourn, the loss of the mother. Bordering on a sadistic recreation of Freud's game, Semprun reimagines the death of his mother again and again, killing her himself, so that the death is his doing (and undoing). Each death (*Fort*) is only temporary, as the women are regenerated (*Da*), and the act

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<sup>432</sup> 'Sonsoles Avendaño n'était-elle pas morte en 1936? que pouvais-je avoir à faire avec cette jeune morte?'. *La Deuxième Mort*, 125.

<sup>433</sup> Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions*, 2.

<sup>434</sup> Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions*, 16

<sup>435</sup> Indeed, Adela's concept of a 'mort qui rôdait', applied retrospectively to a photograph of Susana Maura, blurs the boundaries of life and death, transforming the maternal figure into a living dead, a prey of death. *La Deuxième Mort*, 133.

of disappearance and reappearance means that the son gains control of a death that could not be understood at the time.

The selection of these accidents is itself deliberate. If we assume Semprun's version of his mother's death, then it was lengthy and slow, the result of a fatal form of blood poisoning that kills its victim from the inside out, attacking the natural functioning of the body. Car accidents contrast with this in their violent machinery and mechanical outpourings of man-made fibres, more similar to the artificial assembly-line deaths that were the product of the Nazi concentration camps. In order to circumnavigate his consistent inability to testify to the death of the m/other, Semprun must assimilate her death to those he was able to experience fully in Buchenwald.<sup>436</sup> And yet, the moment of death still cannot be captured. In all three texts, the deaths elude the present of narration, and are missed not only by the protagonists but by the narrator himself. In *L'Évanouissement*, Manuel is told of Eve's death by Antonio several days after the event; in *La Montagne*, Juan is on holiday (illegitimately) with Franca when he receives a phone call informing him of Laurence's accident, with the true extent of this call not revealed to the reader until the end of the text; and in *La Deuxième Mort*, the death of Inés is recounted belatedly, as Arthur Floyd details the dénouement of the Mercader case.<sup>437</sup> Despite his attempts to master the maternal death through the power play of 'accidents', Semprun consistently fails to detail the experience. In each case, the female death is recounted belatedly through the voice of a male protagonist or narrator, who gives shape to her absence as absence. Articulating death through the patriarchal imaginary of the camps, the male voice of narrative constantly circles around – but never discloses – the absent and unwritten centre. The moment of death evades narration, and yet it is at the centre of the narrative, it is what has been missed but what must be found. Semprun's words fail at the moment of maternal death, and yet the event nonetheless '*claims the narrative*, since it decentres and defocalizes the significance of all the rest [original italics]'.<sup>438</sup> Rendered avizual by the patriarchal imaginary, the maternal death haunts narrative through silence and absence, the unwritten centre that founds every written word. Susana Maura is immanent: the invisibility of the visible, the absence of presence, unwritten and unseen and yet at the heart of every narrative. In Semilla Durán's words, the mother is perceptible behind the shattered and reconstituted narrative voice: 'Elle sera toujours là, au bout de toute recherche, derrière chaque mot, blessure inguérissable et douce, manque absolue, obsession'.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> 'Fully' in that, contra-Wittgenstein, he lived *through* them and can bear some sort of witness to them.

<sup>437</sup> See *La Deuxième Mort*, 469; *La Montagne*, 87 and 303; *L'Évanouissement*, 216.

<sup>438</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 171.

<sup>439</sup> Semilla Durán, *Le Masque*, 54.

Tidd argues that Semprun speaks from a phallogocentric patriarchal position, rooted in the masculine universal that abjects the feminine as absolutely other.<sup>440</sup> Throughout *L'Évanouissement*, *La Montagne*, and *La Deuxième Mort*, women are objectified under the male gaze, stripped of their subjectivity and autonomy. However, the failure to represent the moment of death, even when seemingly mastered by the patriarchal voice through literary 'accidents', demonstrates that the male voice is not infallible. To testify to the death of the m/other, Semprun must speak from ellipsis and absence, from the silence of the female voice, rejecting the ubiquity of the patriarchal position. Bringing the feminine to the forefront of memory and narrative, the dominant male voice is displaced, enabling the voice of the silenced m/other to emerge from the text. This takes place much later, in works of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and in particular *Le Mort*, which will be the focus of the next section. With time, Semprun's women develop a level of autonomous agency that encourages their grip upon a multivocal approach to narrative. As the patriarchal voice is displaced, women come to occupy a greater role in the narrative, and their independence reflects the wider societal changes that followed the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Three of Semprun's later works: *Le Mort*, *Les Sandales*, and *Vingt ans* will contribute to this chapter, and the timings of their publication reflect the variations in the author's approach to women, and more specifically to his mother.

### ***Revenons au rêve: Reverie, Reveille and Revenants***

*Nul ne réveillera cette nuit les dormeurs.*

-Louis Aragon, *Chanson pour oublier Dachau*.

Buchenwald is a male territory, with masculine powers and patriarchal structure: it is not a woman's world. In all of Semprun's discussions of Buchenwald, female appearances are negligible: the visit by the young women of *Mission France*, recounted in *L'Écriture*; the disembodied voice of Zarah Leander; the mythical stories of Ilse Koch; or quantitative reference to the brothel in *Quel beau* represent rare incursions of the feminine into the camp.<sup>441</sup> Indeed, the suggestion of femininity or beauty at the heart of the experience of death is disconcerting. Attempting to relate the experience of Buchenwald to a young French soldier (Marc, the husband of Laurence) after liberation, Semprun commences with a memory of Pola Negri, but 'il [Marc] était choqué. [...] L'apparition de Pola Negri à Buchenwald le déconcertait'.<sup>442</sup> Women,

<sup>440</sup> Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 43.

<sup>441</sup> See *L'Écriture*, 159-164 for the visit of the *Mission France* women; *L'Écriture*, 209 and *Le Mort*, throughout for reference to Zarah Leander; *Le Grand Voyage*, 166-176 for details of Ilse Koch; and *Quel beau*, 356-58 for reference to the brothel.

<sup>442</sup> *L'Écriture*, 99-100.

and particularly the idolised mother, are not compatible with the experience of Buchenwald, and yet, the centre of a world filled with abject death and alterity is ironically the ideal place to encounter the lost maternal figure. Rather than a locus that desecrates the memory of the adored mother, Buchenwald arranges certain similarities with the lost maternal figure, as a place where the other is given (and given back) a voice. Re-writing and re-experiencing the camps through the testimonial enterprise, Semprun creates an ideal 'milieu de mémoire'<sup>443</sup> in which to encounter his mother. In *Le Mort*, and *Le Retour*, women are temporally and spatially linked to the camp experience and to the political ramifications of Nazi and Stalinist Buchenwald. From the world of abject murder emerges a bizarrely opportune environment in which to indirectly discuss the incommunicable experience of the maternal death. This section demonstrates how Susana Maura is rooted in the experience of Buchenwald, and how by re-immersing himself in this environment of death through literature, Semprun is able to encounter the lost other at the heart of abject political oppression and fraternal camaraderie. *Le Mort* comes closer to the experience of death than any of Semprun's other works. Here, death truly stares him in the face, lying side by side with him, as he prepares to embody the deceased in order to ensure his own survival. *Le Mort* ventures right to the heart of death at Buchenwald, as Gérard (Semprun) must spend the night sharing a bunk with François L., where the death of the other becomes an imminent death of the self, through the proposed 'swap' that is arranged to take place. This experience, and its recollection in *Le Mort*, provides the perfect milieu for Semprun to encounter the immediacy of the maternal death.

Susana's death infiltrates the Buchenwald experience through *Le Mort* as Semprun recounts, on three separate occasions, a dream that occurs twice during the short period covered in the narrative. Roused from sleep in the opening pages of the book, Gérard dreams that he can hear banging, and identifies the noise as the hammering of nails into a coffin. Although he does not give details, he claims to be aware that this banging is only taking place in his dream, and that he will wake up shortly, disturbed by the noise.<sup>444</sup> Gérard wakes up to see Kaminsky and Jaime Nieto standing over him, come to relay the news of a letter that has arrived at the *Politische Abteilung* and requests information about him. As the dream is evoked a second time, Gérard realises that it was perhaps not interrupted by the noise of the banging, but initiated by it: 'n'étaient-ce pas plutôt les coups de poing de Kaminsky sur le montant de la litière qui avaient, à la fois, fait naître et interrompu un rêve auquel ils donnaient une forme dont je pourrais me souvenir?'.<sup>445</sup> Gérard claims to be certain that the coffin being nailed shut is

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<sup>443</sup> Nora, 'Entre mémoire et histoire', xvii.

<sup>444</sup> *Le Mort*, 17.

<sup>445</sup> *Le Mort*, 89.

that of his mother, despite his conviction that this is impossible.<sup>446</sup> The third account relates the same dream, but on a different night, two days later, while Gérard has succeeded in sleeping in the *Revier* after the death of François. Again, the dream occurs as Gérard is roused from his sleep by the sounds of banging, this time by Ernst Busse, come to interrogate him after the true content of the letter has been revealed. The dreams themselves are given no significance throughout the narrative, and while the returning image of the maternal death can be attributed to the horrors of the camps and of the traumatic failure to reconcile the event of death, extra-textual clues contribute to a wider reading of these dreams that integrate the maternal figure into a world of death, machismo, and camaraderie.

Upon his first return to Buchenwald in 1992, 47 years after liberation, for the filming of Peter Merseburger and Sabine Brüning's *Weimar: Klassik, Kult und Stacheldracht* [*Weimar: Classic, Cult, and Barbed Wire*], Semprun struggled to describe the unwelcome sensation of homecoming:

It may come across as very odd; maybe it is even horrible to hear this. For me it is horrible to say it: I feel at home. In this uncanny place, which is perhaps the uncanniest place for everyone... I have... come home.<sup>447</sup>

The uncanny [*unheimlich*] return to Buchenwald is linked to a return to the home [*heim*] of the maternal and to the maternal as home. Here, in the underworld of the camps – the site of death – Semprun is closest to the lost maternal figure: in the world of death, one can be with the dead. In the third retelling, Gérard identifies a second source of the banging noise which comes to superimpose itself over the sound of the hammer and nails on the coffin. Gérard remembers 14 April 1931, the day the Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed, and the day his mother hung the red, gold, and purple flags over the balcony of the family home in Madrid. Met with the sight of Republican victory, the quiet neighbourhood is suddenly awash with the sound of the neighbours slamming closed their shutters.<sup>448</sup> If the *Revier* in Buchenwald, the epicentre of death and destruction, is the ideal milieu in which to encounter the maternal death, Semprun does not see his mother in her dying state, as the final nails enter her coffin, but instead idolises her as a figure of his childhood: 'Il n'y a donc pas de père non plus. Il y a une mère, jeune et triomphante, belle, dressée dans un éclat de rire provocant. Il y a les oriflammes de la

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<sup>446</sup> '(Et je savais que c'était le cercueil de ma mère que l'on clouait, même si, simultanément, ma propre voix intérieure me disait dans le rêve que c'était impossible, que le cercueil de ma mère n'avait pas été fermé devant moi, cloué sous mes yeux; impossible, de surcroît, qu'il l'eût été dans le paysage océanique qui m'entourait au cours de ce rêve déclenché par les coups de poing de Kaminsky, mais, bien sûr, cloué hors de ma vue dans l'appartement familial de la rue Alfonso XI, Madrid).' *Le Mort*, 89.

<sup>447</sup> Semprun quoted in Ulrich Winter, 'Semprun's Germany – Germany's Semprun', in *A Critical Companion*, ed. by Ferrán and Herrmann, 203.

<sup>448</sup> 'Le bruit de ces volets de bois fermés à la volée se superpose à celui du marteau sur le cercueil, les bruits de la vie aux bruits de la mort.' *Le Mort*, 169.

république'.<sup>449</sup> Evoked independently of the paternal figure, mother and son are reunited in a mutual life/death that returns the mother to her youthful and living form while subjecting the son to an imminent death.

Again, the tension between life and death, permanence and transience, presence and absence pierces Semprun's narration of the maternal figure, augmented through reference to the coffin. In folklore, the nailing of the coffin represented the final moment in which the dead could still come back to life. In a critical review of literature, published in 1801, Tobias Smollett reviews a series of published lectures by Benjamin Rush about animal life. He includes the case study of a young woman roused from death and brought back to life at the final, critical, moment:

A young lady [...] after having been confined to her bed for a great length of time, with a violent nervous disorder, was at last, to all appearance, deprived of life. Her lips were quite pale, her face resembled the countenance of a dead person, and her body grew cold. She was removed from the room in which *she died*, was laid in a coffin, and the day for a funeral was fixed on. The day arrived, and, according to the custom of the country, funeral songs and hymns were sung before the door. Just as the people were about to nail the lid on the coffin, a kind of perspiration was observed on the surface of her body. She recovered. [...] It seemed to her as if in a dream, that she was really dead; yet she was perfectly conscious of all that happened around her. She distinctly heard her friends speaking and lamenting her death at the side of her coffin. She felt them pull on the dead clothes and lay her in it. This feeling produced a mental anxiety which she could not describe. She tried to cry out, but her mind was without power, and could not act on her body. She had the contradictory feelings as if she were in her own body, and not in it, at the same time. It was equally impossible for her to stretch out her arm or open her eyes, as to cry, although she continually endeavoured to do so. The internal anguish of her mind was at its utmost height when the funeral hymns began to be sung, and when the lid of the coffin was about to be nailed on. The thought that she was to be buried alive was the first which gave activity to her mind, and enabled it to operate on her corporeal frame. [Original italics.]<sup>450</sup>

At the moment where the coffin is to be closed, fear rouses the young woman from her catatonic state, seemingly bringing her back to life. In Semprun's dream, he does not remember the moment of his mother's death, but rather the point at which she was to be permanently excluded from the world, where there could be no mistakes, no miraculous return from the dead.

The author of an article from the *Literary Chronicle* in 1823 expresses the love and subsequent grief of his dear friend, Henry Morel and his wife, Eveline, writing: 'There are few sweeter pictures in human life, than the union of two lovers; there are few more distressing

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<sup>449</sup> *Le Mort*, 169.

<sup>450</sup> Tobias George Smollett, *The critical Review: Or, Annals of Literature, Series 2, Volume 32* (London: S. Hamilton/Falcon-Court, 1801), 423.

than their separation'. To illustrate his point, he chronicles their young love, their marriage, and the swift deterioration of Eveline's health. At the funeral, the narrator observes that:

When they were nailing up the coffin, the young widower rushed from my arms into the room, tore open the lid, and threw himself on the body. We could scarcely oblige him to let the operation proceed, whilst he incessantly exclaimed that we were burying his Eveline alive; as she lay in her bridal attire in the coffin his bewildered imagination conceived she was still living. No force could drag him from the apartment, though every blow of the hammer on the lid of the coffin seemed to strike upon his breast. [...] His Eveline as at length separated from him for ever; and his grief, from being outrageous, subsided at length into melancholy and total silence. [...] A premature decay carried him off at the end of the year, and he now lies beside her in the same grave.<sup>451</sup>

It is not so much the moment of death that loved ones in these short reviews find so traumatic, but *the point of no return* from the dead, the moment of eternal separation. In *Le Mort*, Semprun and his mother play out a relationship of union in life and distressing separation in (her) death that can only be overcome through reunion in mutual death. Gérard claims that it is the coffin of his mother that he can hear being nailed shut, but, within the underworld of the camp, there is no reason that this may not be a premonition, or even the desire, of his own coffin. At the heart of Buchenwald, Semprun is temporarily reunited with his mother in a fatalistic union of death, where the nailing of his own coffin, as he lies inert in a catatonic slumber, represents the long-awaited reunion with the lost maternal figure.

However, the nailing of the coffin is not actually what occurs in Semprun's dream. The noise of the hammer on the lid of the coffin, infiltrating his dream from the real-world sounds of Kaminsky and Busse banging on the wooden slats of his bed, is actually what *awakens* him from reverie. In Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, a female patient relates the following dream she had heard at a lecture:

A father had been watching day and night beside the sick-bed of his child. After the child died, he retired to rest in an adjoining room, but left the door ajar so that he could look from his room into the next, where the child's body lay surrounded by tall candles. An old man, who had been installed as a watcher, sat beside the body, murmuring prayers. After sleeping for a few hours the father dreamed that *the child was standing by his bed, clasping his arm and crying reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see that I am burning?'* The father woke up and noticed a bright light coming from the adjoining room. Rushing in, he found that the old man had fallen asleep, and the sheets and one arm of the beloved body were burnt by a fallen candle. [Original italics.]<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Reuben Percy and John Timbs, *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction: Volume 1* (London: T. Dolby, 1823), 91-92.

<sup>452</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1937], trans. by A. A. Brill (Woking: Unwin Brothers, 1990), 470.

What troubles Freud about this scenario is 'why dream rather than wake up?'<sup>453</sup> when waking would have saved the son's burning arm sooner. He interprets this dream as wish fulfilment to see the child alive again, since the dream state prolongs the 'return' of the child as living: 'If the father had waked first, and had then drawn the conclusion which led him into the adjoining room, he would have shortened the child's life by this one moment'.<sup>454</sup> For Lacan, however, the dream only repeats the father's failure to respond to the child's pleas, killing him a second time.<sup>455</sup>

Lacan experiences a dream remarkably similar to that of Gérard, in which the sound of knocking infiltrates and assimilates itself into a dream within conscious, before causing his waking: 'Quand le bruit du coup parvient [...] à ma conscience, c'est que ma conscience se reconstitue autour de cette représentation – que je sais que je suis sous le coup du réveil, que je suis *knocked*'.<sup>456</sup> The act that wakes the subject in fact prolongs the state of sleep by introducing a further dream. Assimilating the noise of banging, Semprun dreams 'pour ne pas se réveiller'.<sup>457</sup> It is not the dream itself that constitutes a traumatic memory for Semprun, but the act of waking. As Caruth interprets Lacan's reading:

To awaken is thus precisely to awaken only to one's repetition of a previous failure to see in time. The force of the trauma is not the death alone [...] but the fact that, in his very attachment to the child, the father was unable to witness the child's dying as it occurred. *Awakening*, in Lacan's reading of the dream, *is itself the site of a trauma*, the trauma of the necessity and impossibility of responding to another's death. [Original italics.]<sup>458</sup>

Gérard extends his dream to compensate for the missed event. Within the dream itself, the maternal death has not yet arrived, even if it is imminent: it is only upon waking, upon regaining the confines of the camp, that Gérard is forced to realise (again) the truth of his mother's death. Awoken from the dream, Gérard returns to a world in which his mother is already dead and he is not, where each reawakening is a traumatic reliving of the moment of death: 'j'allais revivre ce que j'avais déjà vécu'.<sup>459</sup> Even from the inner depths of the dream, Gérard knows that he will wake up, that the sound of the hammer on the coffin determines a definitive separation: 'Je savais surtout que j'allais me réveiller, que les coups redoublés – un marteau, sur le bois du

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<sup>453</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 94.

<sup>454</sup> Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 471.

<sup>455</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 103.

<sup>456</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire XI: Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* [1964], ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 56.

<sup>457</sup> Lacan, *Séminaire XI: Les Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, 57-58.

<sup>458</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 100.

<sup>459</sup> *Le Mort*, 167.

cerceuil? – allaient me réveiller d’un instant à l’autre’.<sup>460</sup> In the imagined re-experiencing of the life of his mother, the moment of her burial – where she can no longer return or reawaken – is the moment that forces him back into the world of the living to confront her death. Sleep becomes a state of temporary and partial death, where the boundaries between life and death are blurred and overlapped, so that the lost other can be re-found and reunited with the bereaved subject.

Buchenwald is transformed from a *lieu* of death into a *milieu*: an active and interactive site where memories can be encountered and engaged with. While no return to Buchenwald, whether through physical visits, narrative, dream, or recollection can bring back the lost mother, it does enable Semprun to encounter her and to interact with her in ways which would not be available in any other location. Through a complex juxtaposition of dreams, Semprun elaborates the system of revival through reverie in *Le Retour*, where the audience are invited to experience the collision of life and death as he reanimates the actress Carola Neher, Goethe, Blum, and a range of *musulmen* from Buchenwald and Serbia. Staged in Weimar, in the Soviet Cemetery in the heart of the city, this play tackles both Nazism and Stalinism, depicting Buchenwald as the uncanny home of death. Again, death intersects dream, unsettling the boundaries between the living and the dead. In scene four, one of the *musulmen* notices a man lying on top of a grave; the *musulman*’s rhetorical question ‘Je me demande s’il est mort!’<sup>461</sup> is met with derision, as another replies that ‘En général, les morts s’allongent dans la tombe!’<sup>462</sup> A short while later, in scene nine, this dishevelled man gets up and walks towards their group, as the first *musulman* interrogates his recovery: ‘Ainsi, vous n’étiez pas mort? Vous dormiez?’<sup>463</sup> Identified by Semprun as *le survivant*, the audience discover their position as spectators to the dream of the last living survivor of the Holocaust. The man smiles and replies:

Mais qu’est-ce que je suis: le rêve ou le rêveur? En tout cas, vous n’étiez pas dans mon rêve... Il y avait Goethe, et Léon Blum, bien entendu... [...] Il y avait des ‘musulmans’, aussi... Au-delà de la vie, déjà, de tout espoir... Se déplaçant avec une lenteur infinie sur l’esplanade du Petit Camp, autour du bâtiment des latrines... Il y avait Zarah Leander, dans mon rêve... Rien ne serait vrai dans la mémoire sans la voix de Zarah Leander, les dimanches sur L’Ettersberg! Mais il n’y avait pas d’oiseaux... Et vous non plus, vous n’y étiez pas... D’où arriviez-vous? De quel autre rêve?<sup>464</sup>

The complex vacillation of a dream in a dream is referenced several times in the play, as the survivor (evidently from Buchenwald) and the young *Muslim* from Serbia juxtapose their two

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<sup>460</sup> *Le Mort*, 166.

<sup>461</sup> *Le Retour*, 18.

<sup>462</sup> *Le Retour*, 18.

<sup>463</sup> *Le Retour*, 26.

<sup>464</sup> *Le Retour*, 26.

experiences, neither one certain who is the dreamer and who is the dream. In the end, the young *musulman* persists, asking what he can do to help the *survivant*, who replies with the command 'Vous souvenir...'.<sup>465</sup> The interactive milieu of Weimar, the play, and the dreams promote the ideal sites to engage with memory, through the creation of an experience that will never stop evolving. While the imperative to remember in the play appears to relate directly to the shared experiences of genocide – whether under Nazism, Stalinism, or the Bosnian War – the complexities of remembering and forgetting are linked back subtly and indirectly to maternal memories.

Through the complex play of dreaming, the *survivant* brings back to life figures from his memory, including Goethe, Blum, and Carola Neher. Neher, who died in 1942, laments her revival, breaking down in tears and exclaiming: 'Pourquoi m'avoir fait revenir? Pourquoi m'avoir arrachée à l'ombre muette de la mort?'.<sup>466</sup> The *survivant* claims to have brought her back to life because he is a great admirer of her work, and wishes to introduce her to the *musulmen* of his dream; but also because he wishes to inform her about her son, Georg Becker. Running through the facts of Neher's life, she cuts in, reciting the words of a letter she wrote to her son in a soviet orphanage, 'la dernière trace de sa vie'.<sup>467</sup> The *survivant* informs her that the letter only reached Georg twenty-six years later, much to her horror. This short section seems largely inconsequential, representing only a further peripheral dream sequence; but there is an underlying desperate search for reunion between mother and son that exemplifies Semprun's conflicted relationship with maternal loss. Through these communicative dreams, temporal and spatial chronology is overcome, dislocating strict coherent logic and permitting the revival, return, and reunion of lost figures. The apparent political agenda harboured in the *survivant's* call, 'vous souvenir...', is not just an injunction pertaining to the events that plagued 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, but is an interconnecting imperative to remember for the son and for the mother. Through discussion of Buchenwald and of the Holocaust, Semprun discreetly implicates his own personal memories of his mother in an unlikely association that links abject death with the imperative to never forget. Using the medium of theatre, in which the past is literally revived, recreated, relived and re-experienced in a traumatic and anachronistic portrayal on stage, memories are brought back into the present, and ghosts are conjured up and drawn into contemporary debates and discussions.

Jaime Céspedes writes that Semprun chose Carola Neher for this work because she was 'more tragic as well as more dramatic, since the fact that no one knows exactly how or when

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<sup>465</sup> *Le Retour*, 55.

<sup>466</sup> *Le Retour*, 35.

<sup>467</sup> *Le Retour*, 46.

she died gives her figure the ghostly dimension that Semprún recreates'.<sup>468</sup> Certainly, *Le Retour* is about the memory of *le dernier survivant*, and of the continued atrocities in the world, a call to remember and to continue to interact with the ghosts of the past, and to come together for a cohesive European future. But the play is also about the absent memory of a young woman, who died tragically in an unmarked grave, and a message for her orphaned son that goes missing. A memory that went unwitnessed, that cannot be written, that is eternally absent. This second narrative is easily overlooked, but is critical to our understanding of Semprun and of the intentions behind his works: the memory of his mother is precisely what is missing, just as she herself was absent from his life. Through narrative, Semprun recreates memories he would not otherwise have – even if these memories may be adopted and adapted from elsewhere, or even purely fictitious – so that he may testify to a death that haunts him. He invents, bringing his mother back to life, killing her off, in order to testify, to remember, and to never forget. Semprun is the *dernier survivant* in this play, but he is also the young orphaned Georg Becker, both compelled to remember events that were never truly their own.

At the heart of the horrific camp experiences, Semprun offers a small route of access to the *trou-matic* and painful missing events of his life. Within this world of the abject, no one would expect to find references to the sacred and idolised maternal figure, and yet it is, in every sense, the ideal milieu for an encounter with the dead other. Semprun does not relegate women to the margins, but brings them to the forefront of his works through political and cultural associations, and the imperative to remember that haunts his writing. Women, and particularly the maternal figure, are not absent from Semprun's works, even if they do not take on central and autonomous roles; they are always there, an obsession, hidden behind each word. The mother, and women more generally, are never written out of Semprun's texts, but are the very purpose and foundation of their writing: each text is a literary quest to recreate, rediscover, and remember a figure that slips dangerously far from memory. Through the following analysis of *Les Sandales*, the silenced mother is reciprocally and symbiotically implicated in every word and in every aspect of her son's development and narrative process.

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<sup>468</sup> Jaime Céspedes, 'Jorge Semprún, Brecht, and Theater', in *A Critical Companion*, ed. by Ferrán and Herrmann, 264-65.

### Displacing the Patriarchal Voice in *Les Sandales*

*Venice is sinking. The whole city is slowly dying. One day the tourists will travel here by boat to peer down into the waters, and they will see pillars and columns and marble far, far beneath them, slime and mud uncovering for brief moments a lost underworld of stone.*

-Daphne du Maurier, 'Don't Look Now'.

*Les Sandales* demonstrates how women in narrative have been literally submerged by the dominant male voice. Threatening to speak up, to encroach upon the language of the paternalistic voice, women are silenced, rendered invisible by a patriarchal narrative. However, the short story also demonstrates how women return to haunt, and how their presence within Semprun's texts is always felt, even when it cannot be perceived. Semprun's works have been accused of being phallogocentric, but close analysis reveals paternal and patriarchal centrality are displaced through a feminine writing that brings the abstracted female voice back to the forefront of narrative. Derived from phallogocentrism (the phallus as privileged signifier) and logocentrism, (privileging the word as a means to full truth and presence), phallogocentrism 'refers to the dominance of patriarchy through language and representation'.<sup>469</sup> Semprun's works certainly *appear* phallogocentric, but with the father relegated to the gaps and absences of narrative, the universality of patriarchy and paternity is undermined at every turn. The paternal absence in Semprun's works does not only impact upon narrative content, but upon structure; upon the conception, perception, and inscription of language that result from the ineffectual and unstable phallic signifier. Semprun's works are spectral, and this spectrality translates into the voices of the absolute other – woman – so that narrative is feminine, inherently unstable and transgressive. *Les Sandales* is neither a well-known nor an obviously profound piece of work, but it indicates a move towards a woman-centered narrative that enables a radical restructuring of memory and history. *Les Sandales* explicitly confronts patriarchy as a hierarchical institution governing language and identity, so that Semprun writes *against patriarchy*, employing what Hélène Cixous refers to as 'l'écriture féminine'.<sup>470</sup>

In the fictional narrative, France Babelson, a French lawyer living in America, arranges to meet the married man she is having an affair with, Bernard Boris, at the Hotel Monaco in Venice. The narrator offers flashbacks to their affair, meeting and sleeping together across the world intermittently over nearly twenty years. Arriving in Venice the day before Bernard, France receives a message from him, delivered by the hotel reception, evoking the forbidden and controversial love between Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt. Half an hour before Bernard is due to arrive, France prepares herself: getting dressed, putting on make-up, and tying her

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<sup>469</sup> Tidd, *Writing the European Other*, 46 n.78.

<sup>470</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* [1975] (Paris: Galilée, 2010), 37.

high heeled sandals. She returns to the lobby and goes to wait on the jetty for Bernard's taxi. Seeing him arrive she runs forward, but the heel of her sandal gets caught in the wood of the jetty and she falls into the canal and drowns. Bernard sees nothing and waits all evening for her at the bar. Eventually his phone rings and Bernard answers to hear his wife, Clémence, who has discovered the affair thanks to a fax France sent (perhaps intentionally) to the family home: 'Elle cherchait quoi? À me mettre au courant? À te forcer la main, t'obliger à choisir?'.<sup>471</sup> The line goes dead and the narrative ends.

Through the love triangle established between Bernard, the domestic and homely wife Clémence, and the more nomadic and sexual mistress France, Semprun sets up a tension that reflects his own relationship towards French, the language that seduced him as an adolescent, and Spanish, 'la langue de mon enfance – maternelle, matricielle'.<sup>472</sup> There is no explicit reference towards Clémence as a Hispanic figure, yet she represents the familiarity and 'family home' of the *langue maternelle*. Semprun's relationship towards France/French, on the other hand, is fueled by literary and sexual curiosity and desire that evoke the aggressive and erotic language used in both *Le Mort* and *Adieu*.<sup>473</sup> Epitomising Baudelaire's 'femme passante', France represents the illegitimacy of the adopted language of exile, parodying linguistic tension through a marital affair. As the narrative draws to a close, however, and Clémence discovers his infidelity, Bernard is thrust into the silence and absence of Semprun's original exile: 'La voix de Clémence se brisait soudain. Elle avait une sorte de sanglot, la communication s'interrompait'.<sup>474</sup> The narrative ends in silence.

Ugarte argues that 'to be in exile is to think oneself both present and absent',<sup>475</sup> it is to be marginal, to be on the limits of something or somewhere, on the threshold, 'on shaky ground'.<sup>476</sup> To be in exile is to belong neither to France nor to Spain, to exist in an unstable liminality between the two; it is to exist, essentially, in absence. Through the choice to write in French over Spanish for the large majority of his works, Semprun has been accused of using language to silence and evacuate the maternal influence, eclipsing his Iberian origins under the veil of an adopted language. However, *Les Sandales* shows that while French and Spanish (France and Clémence) appear to be in competition, both only act to eclipse the essential absence of exile. Edward Said claimed that exile is 'the unhealable rift forced between a human

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<sup>471</sup> *Les Sandales*, 38.

<sup>472</sup> *Adieu*, 134.

<sup>473</sup> In *Adieu*, Semprun's love of French came not from a choice for discipline or concision but simply 'du désir, de la curiosité, une prémonition de plaisir. J'étais séduit, c'est tout, heureux de l'avoir été: ça se passait dans le bonheur'. *Adieu*, 149. In *Le Mort*, the language referring to French becomes more aggressive: 'Je désirais vraiment posséder cette langue, succomber à ses charmes mais aussi lui faire subir les derniers outrages, la violenter.' *Le Mort*, 83.

<sup>474</sup> *Les Sandales*, 39.

<sup>475</sup> Ugarte, *Shifting Ground*, 174.

<sup>476</sup> Ugarte, *Shifting Ground*, 227-28.

being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted'.<sup>477</sup> As the affair is discovered, and Bernard is literally exiled from the family home by his aggrieved wife, he is thrust back into the silence and absence of exile: he is left with nothing. Semprun's narrative voice does not prioritize one language over another, for when he chose to adopt the French language and to assimilate completely into French culture, he did not eliminate his Spanish heritage but rendered it avial:

La langue espagnole ne cessa pas pour autant d'être mienne, de m'appartenir. De sorte que je ne cessai jamais d'être à elle – traversé par elle, soulevé par elle –, de lui appartenir. Je ne cesserai pas d'exprimer avec ses mots, sa sonorité, sa flamboyance, l'essentiel de moi-même, à l'occasion.<sup>478</sup>

*Les Sandales* does not end with resolution between Bernard and Clémence, but with an apocalyptic prophesy of silence. Written from exile, from the absence of a home, *Les Sandales* represents the essential losses of childhood.

Exiled from the family home by Clémence, Bernard is literally 'unhoused',<sup>479</sup> thrust into the present/absent world of exile. In 'Memento', Theodor Adorno writes that 'in his text, the writer sets up house. [...] For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live'.<sup>480</sup> As an exile and a bilingual, Semprun claimed that 'ma patrie n'est pas la *langue*, ni la française ni l'espagnole, ma patrie c'est le *langage* [italics added]'.<sup>481</sup> Yet *Les Sandales* refuses both *langue* and *langage*, concluding with a shattering silence as the telephone line goes dead. Through his affair, Bernard demonstrates the instability of the exile's 'home', displaced from one language to another and from one country to another. The paradoxical home that Semprun sets up in his work is inherently unstable, constantly displaced and fluctuating. 'In the end,' concludes Adorno, 'the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing'.<sup>482</sup> At the core of Semprun's writing there cannot be a home and there never will be, because the 'lost centre',<sup>483</sup> 'left behind forever'<sup>484</sup> remains always in abeyance. *Les Sandales* demonstrates that to write from exile is to write from silence; from a gap or absence, *from the other side*, absolutely other, woman. Woman is the exile par excellence: exiled from the system of phallogocentric signification, she is the lack against which the masculine identifies itself, subverting a dialectical binary as a female absence that sanctions male presence. France and Clémence jointly validate

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<sup>477</sup> Said, 'Reflections on Exile', 173.

<sup>478</sup> *Adieu*, 149-50.

<sup>479</sup> Borrowed from 'unhousedness'. George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* [1969]. (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), viii.

<sup>480</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Memento', in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* [1951], trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 87.

<sup>481</sup> 'Vous avez une tombe au creux des nuages...', 77.

<sup>482</sup> Adorno, 'Memento', 87.

<sup>483</sup> Steiner, *Extraterritorial*, viii.

<sup>484</sup> Said, 'Reflections on Exile', 173.

Bernard's existence, and as they disappear at the end of the short text, he too is stripped of his identity and of his narrative home. France and Clémence do not represent French and Spanish as individual *langues*, rather, they indicate the femininity of *langage* as a system that inheres in exchange and essential absence. To write from exile as an 'apatride',<sup>485</sup> is to write without a *patrie*, to write without a father. *Les Sandales* is a narrative of exile, not because it discusses Republican losses in Spain, but because it adopts a transgressive and unstable narrative position that abjects patriarchal structures: it is a feminine writing.

As France stumbles and drowns, the narrative appears to suggest the ('accidental') narrative murder of the mistress language. Yet Bernard and Clémence do not reconcile, and the narrative ends with an apocalyptic prophesy of exilic silence. Instead, France's death is an explicit attack upon paternity and patriarchy as imposed hierarchical structures of language and society. France's surname, Babelson – the son of Babel – demonstrates the alterity of the female subject. France has no identity of her own: her forename is borrowed from a traditionally patriarchal civilization, and her surname is inherited from a paternalistic patronymic tradition. France's identity is shaped and authorised by the masculine norm, by an omnipresent father. Owned and possessed by a paternal name and tradition that precedes her, France's identity is only validated by the name of the father. Trapped within an inescapable historical construct, France tries to overcome the imposition of the phallogocentric tradition: she has a good job, she is independent, well-travelled, intelligent, nomadic, and yet she cannot escape the patriarchal grip upon her life and destiny. In Venice, surrounded by the watery walls that imprison and slowly consume the city, the patriarchy claims its next victim. Minutes before France will die, the Italian receptionist, Giovanni, is reading about the destruction of the Russian satellite Mir, and tells France the meaning of the word: 'Mir, madame Babelson, c'est à la fois la communauté villageoise de l'ancienne Russie... Et c'est l'univers... La paix, également... Un seul mot pour les choses essentielles, n'est-ce pas génial?'.<sup>486</sup> The unity and cohesion represented by Mir, by Babel, and by patriarchal rule are systematically destroyed – like the satellite – through *Les Sandales*. Consumed by the patriarchal tradition which both affords and withholds her identity, France disappears into the waters, into the city itself, feeding the same patriarchal structure that annihilated her own character. France is the remnant of a mythical civilization, the utopian city of Babel, a unanimous and unilingual people who were separated by God. She is the remnant of an idealised father, the spectre of a patriarchy that never existed. Her name signifies nothing but an absence, a myth, a fallacy [phallacy], the *illusion of patriarchy*. Semprun demonstrates how the traditionally patriarchal societies of France and Spain have been

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<sup>485</sup> 'Vous avez une tombe au creux des nuages...', 76.

<sup>486</sup> *Les Sandales*, 36.

annihilated by failures and defeats, consumed by an inescapable past. France dies, but the spectre of patriarchy lives on.

Bernard Boris, a man with no patronym (or two patronyms) loses his dominant patriarchal grip upon the narrative. The fax sent from France to Clémence undermines Bernard's control over his own life, as his lies are uncovered by its silent penetration into the family home. In Clémence's words over the telephone:

C'est l'acte manqué le plus réussi que je connaisse, car j'imagine que vous aviez une combine pour vous communiquer en secret la moindre des choses, tu as toujours eu le sens de l'organisation, et là, patatras et pataquès, vingt ans après, elle t'envoie un fax révélateur – il ne manque que les Polaroid de vos ébats – à ton adresse familiale.<sup>487</sup>

Words that are never spoken, but that demonstrate a hushed communication between the submissive female voices of narrative, ultimately turn back upon Bernard, revealing decades of deceit and dishonesty. Bernard loses control, as the fictional women reclaim their independence and silent subversive power over narrative and destiny, displacing the masculine subject. Indeed, the narrative is not written with the words of a patriarchal voice, but with the silent language of an anonymous femininity. As France trips into the canal and drowns, the event is 'missed', as Bernard once again sees nothing. The uncertainty of France's whereabouts haunts the narrative like the Camusian 'fall', representing an absent event that nonetheless claims the narrative. While the short story appears, at first glance, to instigate the 'accidental' death of the mistress, the entire narrative is written in this illegitimate and imposturous language. France may be dead, but she lives on through the language that is used to inscribe her death, lingering on as a haunting absent presence that permeates the entire narrative.

Falling into the Grand Canal in Venice, France disappears: she is drowned, obscured by the water. Yet her death in Venice,<sup>488</sup> in the waters that surround, support, and will eventually consume the city, is a death *into* the city itself, *into* its structure, *into* its visibility. France's death, *even though it is missed*, represents the central absence of an unattainable narrative. As she disappears from the text, she disappears *into* it, transformed into a haunting trace through the use of the French language. Her death is missed, and yet it is always present, her haunting presence assimilated into the structure and form of narrative through language itself. She died, but she is still there, in Venice, even where Bernard does not see her. Under the surface of writing, under the surface of Venice, the feminine is there, unseen, distorted by the murky diseased waters of patriarchy,<sup>489</sup> but never absent. Bernard never sees the fax that enters his home, nor does he witness France's death, and nor can he see Clémence's disembodied voice

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<sup>487</sup> *Les Sandales*, 38.

<sup>488</sup> This is a play on Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*.

<sup>489</sup> This is a reference to Mann's work and the plague of cholera that consumes the protagonist, Gustave (von) Aschenbach and the city. Essentially, the city is the cause and consequence of its own demise.

over the telephone, and yet these *invisible* events claim the narrative. Rendered invisible by the patriarchal imaginary that literally *does not see women*, Bernard's web of lies is undermined by the very women he believed too weak to turn upon him. Feminine strength in Semprun is not brash or overt, it is insidious, subversive, invisible, and it accumulates power precisely because it is unsuspected and unseen.

Lerner argues that 'women are essential and central to creating society; they are and always have been actors and agents in history', yet 'their marginality in the meaning-giving process of interpretation and explanation has been a dynamic force, causing women to struggle against their condition'.<sup>490</sup> Lacanian acquisition of language, constructing linguistic and cultural codes for the child that are presided over and imposed by the *nom-du-père*, is dominated by a paternalistic order to which women and children are subjected, breaking the bond between the mother and child. Where language breaks down however, this order is destroyed, and the pre-Symbolic registers, dominated instead by a maternal figure, are brought back to the forefront of communication and development. Semprun writes from '[une] nouvelle patrie sans aucune des horreurs du patriotisme',<sup>491</sup> a new home, a *matric*. *Les Sandales* portrays the dissolution of Lacanian language, as patriarchal and paternalistic dominance is undermined and destabilised by an essentially transgressive and deviant female voice. In *Les Sandales*, language is essentially unstable, vitiated by a sense of fluidity and displacement. Through this short narrative, Semprun engages with a feminine form of writing, not dissimilar to Cixous' more visceral *écriture féminine*. Semprun's writing, in its exilic decentralisation and multivocal approach is a feminine writing. The patriarchal voice we assume to encounter gives way to the maternal voice hidden in the shadows:

Je parlerai de l'écriture féminine: *de ce qu'elle fera*. Il faut que la femme s'écrive: que la femme écrive de la femme et fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture, dont elles ont été éloignées aussi violemment qu'elles l'ont été de leurs corps; pour les mêmes raisons, par la même loi, dans le même but mortel. Il faut que la femme se mette au texte – comme au monde, et à l'histoire –, de son propre mouvement. [Original italics.]<sup>492</sup>

Cixous' concept is bodily, with reference to the eternal mother and of the corporeal writing with breast milk, where 'elle écrit à l'encre blanche'.<sup>493</sup> The feminine voice in Semprun is written precisely in white ink, as a reciprocal double of the patriarchal black ink of expression. The voice of woman – of the mother – is there, but is unseen, veiled by the dominant marks of masculine black ink. Yet the white ink is no less important than the black; although it cannot be

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<sup>490</sup> Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 5.

<sup>491</sup> *Adieu*, 149.

<sup>492</sup> Cixous, *Le Rire*, 37.

<sup>493</sup> Cixous, *Le Rire*, 48.

seen, it points to the significance of the invisibility of the visible, and the unwritten text that haunts every narrative.

Miletić argues that Semprun's narrative voice creates a distinct break between the language of his childhood and the language of exile, expressing a rupture between memory and narrative:

As a political exile, the political part of his being is what he finds closest to his mother tongue, whilst his childhood and concentration camp experiences are best verbalised from the distance given by the adopted tongue. Besides, memories of political activities are probably furthest removed from the emotional uses and meanings of the mother tongue. It was emotionally safe for Semprun to recount these passionate, but nevertheless impersonal, experiences in his mother tongue.<sup>494</sup>

Publishing under Semprun, rather than Semprún Maura, which would be more typical of Hispanic tradition (and was the name used by his brother Carlos for publication), the author apparently elides identification with the maternal. Yet, *Les Sandales* shows how the maternal voice is not absent, but rather is preserved and protected through silence and invisibility, haunting the text as an untouchable and impenetrable presence. Semprun's works appear phallogocentric, paternalistic, and patriarchal, but with each word he undermines the dominance and the centrality of the father figure and of the masculine structure of language. Semprun's works are not phallogocentric, but anti-phallic. Speaking from a position that tirelessly undermines patriarchal command, his writing is feminine. In *l'écriture féminine* there is no dominant voice, rather there is a shared acceptance of the other that offers an alternative to the laws of the father, tearing down traditional separations and hierarchies: there is no mastery, no single truth, only open-ended possibility. *L'écriture féminine* is a political act, because its motivation is to revolutionize the liberation of women from male oppression and current patriarchal order. *Les Sandales* is not only about linguistic variation and the exilic tensions between displaced centres but is a tentative step towards the complex upheaval of patriarchal authority, evacuating the paternal figure from his public and private rule over family and society. There is significance to the absent centrality of the mother figure, but more widely to the multivocal approach that gives back a voice to the unheard feminine other. Female voices in Semprun are not loud, but they are there; a haunting present absence, an invisible white ink that hides in the shadows of the dominant patriarchal text. *Les Sandales* marks the entry into a feminine revolution for Semprun's works, becoming woman-centered, as women are slowly emancipated, displacing patriarchal authority and subverting the linguistic order of

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<sup>494</sup> Miletić, *European Literary Immigration*, 32. Nicoladzé also comments on Semprun's choice of Spanish over French, arguing that political and publication restrictions imposed the use of French in his first work, and the subsequent use of French was only logical, maintaining 'la même langue en raison des correspondances établies entre les épisodes'. *La Deuxième Vie*, 136.

the Symbolic. The final section of this chapter continues this exploration of the vast European consequences of this feminine revolution. As patriarchal authority is decentred, unheard voices of hidden others can finally be distinguished, promoting the multivocal expression of European memories, previously dominated by the false illusion of a unified and singular voice.

### **The Politics of Female Emancipation**

*One is a hysteric; two are a movement.*

-Tania Modleski, *Old Wives' Tales: Feminist Re-Visions of Film and Other Fiction*.

*Les Sandales* showed how the structure of narrative is silently undermined by an unspoken female voice that disrupts the paternalistic and patriarchal voice of the narrator. Nonetheless, the female position is constantly threatened by instability and exclusion, as the oppressive patriarchal narrative attempts to ostracise and eliminate the female voice. The voice of woman comes to stand for the exclusion of all non-dominant narratives: the voices of the other(s), the strangers and the orphans. Through analysis of Semprun's last published work of fiction, *Vingt ans*, this section argues that the author subversively attacks the exclusion of his own exiled voice from the historical narrative of the Spanish Civil War through a subversive re-alignment of the female voice. Applied to a wider historical and European context, *Vingt ans* draws attention to the omission of controversial and uncomfortable memories from the historical discourses of the past. Through the extraction of female voices, Semprun overthrows the dominant narratives of historical memory, traditionally portrayed by an authoritative patriarchal voice, and recommends that knowledge and understanding of past events should not be taken at face value.

In the years leading up to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, significant developments had been granted in the progressive acknowledgement of women's rights. As Franco came to power, however, these rights were rapidly revoked. Through 1936 and 1938, the *Fuero del Trabajo (Work Legislation)* legally subordinated women to men in all areas of public and private life:

Under the *patria potestad* clause of this law, women were considered to be minors under the guardianship of their husbands or fathers, who had exclusive authority and propriety rights over them. Married women had no legal authority over their children, nor did they have equal rights to joint property. Within the marriage contract, only the wife had the obligation to maintain fidelity, and in the event of separation or abandonment by her husband, she was left without legal rights. Single women, for their part, could not leave their father's home and authority except to enter into marriage. In the working world, women were barred from practicing certain professions and were

denied positions of authority in commerce. Above all, women's moral behaviour was strictly legislated; therefore, if a single woman were to have a child out of wedlock, for example, the father of the child could legally deny her maternal rights.<sup>495</sup>

Recent feminist successes under the Second Republic, such as the right to vote and the right to divorce, were replaced with patriarchal, nationalistic and Catholic ideologies, commonly referred to as *nacionalcatolicismo* [national-Catholicism], which replaced contemporary society with a traditional familial model that would 'reconoce a la familia como célula primaria natural y fundamento de la sociedad, y al mismo tiempo como institución moral dotada de derecho inalienable y superior a toda ley positiva' ['recognise the family as the natural and primary cell and foundation of society, and at the same time as a moral institution endowed with inalienable rights and superior to all positive law'].<sup>496</sup>

The marginalisation of women in Semprun's works, reduced to spectral figures of woman-wife-mother, seems to replicate this archaic and fascist mentality that suppressed the rights and voices of women. In *La Guerre* and *Netchaïev*, for example, Semprun selectively subordinates women to a patriarchal authority that suppresses their activities and their voices. *La Guerre's* Marianne is a figure of domestic stability, pestering Diego to end his clandestine work with the PCE in order that they can have children; and *Netchaïev's* Juliette Blainville, mother of Daniel Laurençon/Netchaïev is weak and indecisive, shared between Roger Marroux and Michel Laurençon until she is 'rendue à' Michel by Roger as compensation for the former's experiences in Buchenwald.<sup>497</sup> Eventually suffering a nervous breakdown after Daniel's presumed death, Juliette is left in the care of Véronique, with whom Roger sleeps. The 'primary natural cell' of the family, evoking Gide's familial 'cellule' or 'geôle', is fiercely upheld through these traditionalistic, subordinated women who conform to the ideals of Francoist national-Catholicism, literally imprisoning them within the home.<sup>498</sup> However, this female subordination is only partially true: over generations, the traditional moral and civic values attributed to women are slowly eclipsed by a more vibrant, active, and politically motivated generation of women who enter the typically masculine arenas of work, sexual promiscuity, and rejection of linear family values. Diego finds himself torn between the traditional Marianne and the much younger, rebellious and anarchic Nadine. While Marianne represents the domestic and maternal women of the Franco era, Nadine signals a break in traditional values, determined to instigate acts of terrorism to compensate for the passive political approach of preceding generations. In *Netchaïev*, Juliette's almost comedic depiction of a Freudian hysterical woman is

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<sup>495</sup> Akiko Tsuchiya, 'Women and Fiction in Post-Franco Spain', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Spanish Novel from 1600 to the Present*, ed. by Harriet Turner and Adelaida López de Martínez (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 212-13.

<sup>496</sup> *Fuero del Trabajo*, Article XII, 3. Translation from Spanish my own.

<sup>497</sup> *Netchaïev*, 33.

<sup>498</sup> In the case of Juliette certainly, since she appears under a sort of house arrest.

contrasted with the highly intelligent and strong figures of Sonsoles Alberdi and Béatrice Liliental, the daughters of the men involved in Netchaïev's disappearance. Sonsoles and Béatrice are defiant and independent young women. Intelligent, autonomous, and politically motivated, they oppose the oppressive masculine patriarchy of post-war France. In Semprun's works, female liberation demonstrates democratic transition, and the coming to terms with memories and events of the political and historical past in Europe.

Female emancipation, both political and sexual, is a rebellion against Francoist dictatorship. Emancipated women represent the cultural and political transition to democracy as they break free from the oppressive history of patriarchy and fascism. Through *Vingt ans*, Semprun revokes female subordination and the oppressive patriarchal and paternalistic traditions typically linked to totalitarianism. He presents anti-maternal figures: whores, lesbians and libertines, who are disengaged from traditional Francoist values, but who are also, therefore, the antithesis of the idealised maternal imago assumed to permeate these works. Nonetheless, as *Les Sandales* showed, the negation of the maternal figure from narrative does not signal an absence, but rather a reciprocal invisibility that upholds the text. *Vingt ans* presents a cohort of anti-maternal figures who break away from traditional stereotypes of femininity, negating the assumption of a woman-wife-mother who would represent, for Semprun, the embodiment of his own mother. The Francoist 'cult of female domesticity, encoded in the image of the "ángel del hogar" ["angel of the home"]'<sup>499</sup> is gradually overturned in order to hand back to women their subversive power over men and to undermine patriarchal stability. Rather than elicit a volatile feminist rebellion against oppression however, Semprun's depiction of female emancipation is more subtle, rendered avial by the hierarchical patriarchal imaginary. It is precisely this social invisibility that gives women their haunting agency throughout the narrative, as their gradual ascension to autonomy comes to silently dominate the text.

*Vingt ans* returns repeatedly to Artemisia Gentileschi's two paintings of *Judith slaying Holofernes*: one displayed in the National Museum of Capodimonte in Naples (c. 1614-20), and the other at the Uffizi Museum in Florence (c. 1614-18). Gentileschi's painting holds a significant and poignant memory for Mercedes. Her visit to see the work in Naples triggered an erotic lust for her husband, José María, that led to the consummation of their marriage. Inspired in part by Caravaggio's own version of *Judith beheading Holofernes* (c. 1598-99), Gentileschi's painting is not only a representation of the Biblical story of the Israelite heroine Judith slaying the Assyrian general Holofernes for the sake of the Jewish people, but is also famously considered to be an imagined self-portrait of revenge. Held down by Judith's maid,

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<sup>499</sup> Ofelia Ferrán, 'Memoria de la melancolía by María Theresa León: The Performativity and Disidentification of Exilic Memories', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 6.1 (2005), 63.

Abra, Holofernes is beheaded by the young Jewess, who slices the throat of the intoxicated General, a look of complete concentration and indifference on her face. In a scene that is said to represent Gentileschi's fantasy of her cathartic release of rage on the mentor who stood trial for her rape, the painting reclaims, both for Gentileschi, the Jewish people, and for female society, a sense of independence and individuality that had been lost for so many centuries to a tyrannical patriarchy. While the painting can be read as the cathartic and redemptive triumph of woman over man, in *Vingt ans*, it is also subversively re-written in order to undermine the purity of the women. As Mercedes speaks about the painting, first to her husband, and later to her brother-in-law, José Ignacio, the men claim, in almost identical words, an astonishing knowledge of the Jewish heroine.<sup>500</sup> However, the Judith that both brothers refer to is not from the painting by Gentileschi, or even by Caravaggio, but from a little acclaimed play by Jean Giraudoux, performed at the Théâtre Pigalle in Paris in 1931.

In the play, Judith is not a vengeful rape victim, nor is she the solemn and concentrated figure of Gentileschi's two paintings, or even the innocent virgin of myth, instead she is a modern and seductive young woman who, through a number of various mis-identifications and frustrated conversations, falls in love with the sworn enemy of the Jewish people, Holofernes, and 'virtually talks [him] to death'.<sup>501</sup> Consummating their relationship, Judith beheads Holofernes 'par amour'<sup>502</sup> before a story is concocted for the rest of the town that conforms to the legend, and she returns as a saint and saviour of the Jewish people. Torn between her memorialisation as 'Judith la putain' or 'Judith la sainte',<sup>503</sup> her heroic act and favourable memorialisation is only made possible by her powers to deceive and seduce the men around her. This 'power of woman' or *Weibermacht topos* exposes grave weaknesses in the security and stability of traditional patriarchy. For Lisa Rosenthal, 'The *Weibermacht topos* provided a form for the figuration of distrust and anxiety about women's sexual nature, which is represented as capable of disarming male physical strength and undoing even the most powerful practitioners of reason'.<sup>504</sup> Judith's defeat of Holofernes in Giraudoux's play, and the later convenient revision of the event, transpires due to the young girl's sexuality and persuasion that weakens male authority, reason, and assertiveness. As Theodore Ziolkowski argues, 'The play turns out to be an exposé of religious hypocrisy or, at least, of what the author

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<sup>500</sup> See *Vingt ans*, 88-89; 372.

<sup>501</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski, 'Re-Visions, Fictionalizations, and Postfigurations: The Myth of Judith in the Twentieth Century', *The Modern Language Review*, 104.2 (2009), 322.

<sup>502</sup> 'Elle a tué par amour.' Jean Giraudoux, *Judith: Tragédie en trois actes* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1932), 253.

<sup>503</sup> Giraudoux, *Judith*, 255.

<sup>504</sup> Lisa Rosenthal, *Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 126.

regards as the lies on which religion is based – a total inversion of the biblical myth'.<sup>505</sup> The subtle intertextual references to this play, supplied by José María and José Ignacio, imply a cautious suspicion about the gradual sexual liberation and wider emancipation of women, threatening not only the autonomy and security of men, but the traditions of patriarchal society. Women become a threat to the traditional patriarchal oppression that provides and maintains the structure of totalitarian society and structure by using sexual power to corrupt any men in their path. Unlike the fraternal bonds so typical of Semprun's work, *Vingt ans* presents the inverse: steadfast friendships and loyalties between women. The relationship between Judith and her maid Abra, a loyal companion and co-conspirator in the murder and concealment of Holofernes, is mirrored in Semprun's treatment of Mercedes and her maid Raquel as a complicit friend and confidante. These female bonds, parodying the traditional and expected fraternal bonds of Semprun's life and works, offer an insight into the rising power of female characters to overturn the patriarchal structures that have bound them for so many years. The subversive *Weibermacht* steals its way into the text through associative relationships between women that lead to the downfall of formerly powerful male characters who represent, more generally, the oppressive ideals and structures of the Franco regime.

Don Roberto Sabuesa and José Manuel Avendaño are archetypal figures of nationalist Franco mentality who, through their misogynistic attitudes and archaic morals represent an anti-modernity that underlines the totalitarian regime. Sabuesa, a policeman and former Franco agent, is renowned for his brutal torture methods, and his views on virginity and female chastity, explosively delivered over a civilised dinner with the Avendaño family, betray his melodramatic Francoist sympathies. Declaring that any man agreeing to marry a woman who is no longer a virgin to be a homosexual, his opinions are traditional to the point of irrationality: 'Des pédés, des pédés invétérés: tout ce qui les excite dans le con de la femme c'est la trace, la marque du membre qui l'a déjà dépucelée!'.<sup>506</sup> José Manuel, explicitly sympathetic to the right-wing political grip on Spain, holds a similarly misogynistic view of women: his possession of Mercedes, claimed as the eldest brother's 'droit de cuissage'<sup>507</sup> emulates the corrupt and nepotistic society of Franco's reign. But the entire narrative works to undermine and belittle the grip both men hold over the Avendaño family and the wider community of local Spain. When Sabuesa arrives at José Juan Castillo's house to question him about a so-called Federico Sánchez, he catches sight of Castillo's daughter, Nieves, who reminds him vividly of one of thirteen young girls he arranged to be executed in 1939. Nieves never speaks, but she elicits a sensation of sexual arousal coupled with hatred and anger that destabilises Sabuesa's

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<sup>505</sup> Ziolkowski, 'Re-Visions, Fictionalizations, and Postfigurations', 322-23.

<sup>506</sup> *Vingt ans*, 55-56.

<sup>507</sup> *Vingt ans*, 213; 252; 378.

composition, 'son regard était devenu très bizarre – une mine de violence contenue, extrêmement étrange – lorsqu'il avait vu Nieves'.<sup>508</sup> Nieves' spectral presence alone undermines his masculine and authoritarian role. Moreover, Mercedes' apparently guilt-ridden sexual encounters with her brother-in-law, inflicted upon both her and Raquel, are perhaps not as they seem. Beningo Perales, a family friend, sympathetically observes the arrangement as a 'relation forcée', in which the elder Avendaño brother abuses his role at the head of the family to take advantage of the two women.<sup>509</sup> Yet Mercedes later confesses to Satur that although her brother-in-law was a tyrant, 'elle adorait coucher avec lui, [il] était infatigable, [elle] ne pouvait plus s'en passer pour les besoins de la chair même s'il était si loin de son âme, si leurs âmes étaient si loin l'une de l'autre'.<sup>510</sup> José Manuel does not only use the two women sexually for his own pleasure, he is also desperately in love with Mercedes, so that it is she who takes on the dominant role in their perverted relationship. After all, Mercedes is not as naïve and helpless as she appears: she initiates the first sexual encounter with José María after their marriage; she encourages the young maid, Luciana, to remain in their room on this first sexual engagement and therefore sets a precedent for the introduction of voyeurs into their relationship; and, along with Raquel, she continues to exploit her sexuality for her own means: sleeping with the American historian Michael Leidson, flirting with Beningo Perales who has always been in love with her, and continuing the affair with José Manuel as the object of his sexual *and* emotional affections.

These subtle observations invert the assumed authority of the male characters, and see the women regain control over their own lives and bodies, and even take control of the men around them. In the final pages of the narrative, women are granted ultimate liberation from the grip held over the family by Sabuesa and José Manuel. Both men leave the property, furious after the final reburial ceremony, followed shortly by Mercedes and Raquel, free from the belligerent oppression that had haunted them.<sup>511</sup> The subversive power struggle and eventual emancipation of women indicates the failure of linear familial structures and traditional morals and values of female domesticity: the *ángel del hogar* is effectively obsolete. Semprun further exaggerates this point through his treatment of all women in the narrative, who digress at every turn from the typified and idealised role of woman-wife-mother that literally imprisoned women within defined and specific roles. Isabel, the twin sister of Lorenzo, struggles throughout the narrative to become the modern, emancipated woman she desires to be, desperate to lose her virginity and to avoid the traditional stigmas associated with femininity. Though her power struggle is conveyed through a very particular (sexual) tension with her twin

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<sup>508</sup> *Vingt ans*, 175.

<sup>509</sup> *Vingt ans*, 213.

<sup>510</sup> *Vingt ans*, 352.

<sup>511</sup> *Vingt ans*, 228.

brother, it is a wider comment on the projected expectations of women and the hypocritical values maintained by so-called modern men.<sup>512</sup> In the end, Isabel leaves the property and Spain to begin a new life and a new family, breaking the terrible cycle of tragedy that haunts her family lineage, to which her brother has resigned himself to submit.<sup>513</sup> In the context of Spanish transition from Franco's dictatorship to liberal democracy, it is clear to see the emancipation of women as the renunciation of the oppressive totalitarian past. In the release of archaic patriarchal traditions, women represent the trajectory of modern-day Spain away from this dictatorial culture. There is no single female triumph, but a slow and insidious rise to power that undermines patriarchal dominance and tradition. Modern women in *Vingt ans* are emancipated and freed from an oppressive past under the Franco dictatorship, demonstrating a rebellion against their history and suppressed modernity.

Mari Paz Balibrea argues that Franco's ascension to power triggered a 'crisis of modernity' in Spain:

All those modern projects the Republic had made conceivable and attainable were now being wiped out by Francoism. [...] While the term Republican exile refers most often to the brutal experience of being expelled from the land, it would be accurate to extend its meaning to the experience of being brutally expelled as well from one's own relation to modernity.<sup>514</sup>

Semprun's emancipation of women is a direct attack on the oppressive effects of the Franco era as felt and lived by a Republican exile. As he undermines the political past of the Franco regime, undoing the moral and social spaces that were governed by a totalitarian ideology, the idolised *ángel del hogar* is emancipated and liberated from the despotic regime that had tied her down within the private institution of the family. This move (back) towards modernity signifies a reversal of the oppressive effects of the Franco regime, impacting upon the perception of subversively powerful femininity in Semprun's works. Giving a voice to the other, *Vingt ans* articulates the re-integration of the voice of Republican exile back into the historical and cultural narrative of Spain. Ugarte explains that Republican exiles were exiled twice over: first politically, and later semantically, as their temporal and spatial deterritorialization from Spain

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<sup>512</sup> Isabel attempts to rid herself of the 'tabou de la virginité' on a number of occasions, but each time is met by resistance from men who do not want to taint her or subject her to prejudice. *Vingt ans*, 296-300. When Lorenzo attempts to take Isabel's virginity '[il] jouit tout de suite, et ne put se maintenir en état de pénétrer Isabel pour enfin la déflorer'. *Vingt ans*, 409.

<sup>513</sup> There are clear links here to Isabel's departure (*Vingt ans*, 414) and characters of Henrik Ibsen's plays, such as Dina in *Pillars of Society*, where the decision to leave the repressive country demonstrates the emancipation of women and their triumph over traditional patriarchal and paternalistic values. See Ross Shideler, *Questioning the Father: From Darwin to Zola, Ibsen, Strindberg, and Hardy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 70.

<sup>514</sup> Mari Paz Balibrea, 'Rethinking Spanish Republican Exile: An Introduction', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 6.1 (2005), 10.

during the Civil War essentially refused them any access to the meaning-giving process of post-war narrative and reconciliation. Through *Vingt ans*, Semprun comments on his own lost voice as a Republican exile, whose individual memory cannot be properly integrated into national and collective commemoration. Written in Spanish, it is Semprun's attempt to advance the construction of recovering Spanish memory, even when the memories he had of war and Franco's dictatorship were memories fostered in France and the Netherlands. Semprun emancipates female characters in order to hint towards the slow liberation of his own voice so many years after the war, as a displaced and suppressed voice of exile:

The status held by Republican exile within Spanish history and historiography is thus richly paradoxical: it is both central and residual; it has been dismissed and ignored by many and yet, its absence is structurally indispensable to any understanding of dictatorial *and* democratic Spain. There is arguably no more resilient ghost haunting actually-existing Spanish (post)modernity than that of Republican exile.<sup>515</sup>

Semprun releases his grip on the apparent marginalisation of women to demonstrate the persistent articulation of (literally) exiled memories.

The dominant post-war narrative can be reinterpreted as a patriarchal discourse that belittles and marginalises the voices of the exile: the absolute other, woman. As a Republican exile, Semprun's voice of Civil War testimony is displaced, and through his narrative emancipation of women he fights back against the patriarchal imposition of post-war exclusion and silence. Restoring his relation to modernity through the literary emancipation of women, Semprun overcomes the pact of silence and, symbolically, his experience of exile. Visualising the text as a mass grave, like the ones still being exhumed in Spain today, *Vingt ans* represents a symbolic cemetery that functions 'to show that the Spanish society of the present has not adequately dealt with the past, and that the predominant narrative of Spanish history that has evolved in post-Franco Spain does, indeed, need to be re-articulated'.<sup>516</sup> Through the emancipation of women, Semprun undermines the strength and dominance of patriarchy and demonstrates the struggle of the voice of the other (of women or of the dead) to break through the overriding oppression of a dominant patriarchal narrative of history. However, as Ferrán points out:

The mass graves still being exhumed today in Spain, are ghostly embodiments of an uncomfortable past *in the present*, reminders, most uncomfortably of all, that the transition to democracy has been uneven and incomplete, that Spanish society still has great debts with its past, that the appropriate *lieux de mémoire* still need to be created. They will not be able to be created, however, until that predominant narrative of recent

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<sup>515</sup> Paz Balibrea, 'Rethinking Spanish Republican Exile', 3.

<sup>516</sup> Ferrán, '*Memoria de la melancolía*', 71.

Spanish history is questioned and undermined, and an acknowledgment is made of the ways in which the transition was precisely *based on*, and *built upon*, the negation of a true engagement with the past. [Original italics.]<sup>517</sup>

Semprun's text sets out to question and undermine the perception of a single, verifiable, and historically accurate version of events by negating the stability of the predominant narrative and subsequently of any 'true engagement with the past'. The patriarchal voice is the dominant narrative that must be undermined and questioned, and the feminine voice is the one that cries out silently to be heard. Through *Vingt ans*, Semprun undermines the dominant narrative of the text through the voices of the avial female characters: the maids, Satur and Raquel, whose marginalised voices – both as women and domestic servants – are oppressively masked by the dominant patriarchal narrative of Federico Sánchez. Their voices represent the unheard stories of Republican exile, whose individual memories are overpowered by the leading political narrative of history. As the silenced voice of the other begins to emerge from the absences of narrative, *Vingt ans* reflects the return of the dead and the ensuing crisis of patriarchy.

Satur and Raquel are grandmother and granddaughter, and their role as domestic servants displaces them automatically away from the central narrative. For Peeren, in *The Spectral Metaphor*, domestic servants have typically been marginal figures of subjection, opposed to the ruling authority of the household; in part simply because they were at the bottom of traditional domestic hierarchies, but also because they were assumed to lack intelligence, class, and information.<sup>518</sup> Yet, controversially, it is the servants who had unadulterated access to gossip, discussion, and information, precisely because they were perceived as *invisible*, rendered avial by the upper classes. Unseen and unheard, their brief and obscure appearances to serve tea, fix corsets, or fulfil other menial duties were never considered a threat to the upper echelons of the property. As *Vingt ans* narrates a conversation between Mercedes and Leidson as he is taken to her bedroom at night, Raquel can be seen as both present and absent. Arriving at Mercedes bedroom '[Raquel] s'effaçà pour le laisser passer',<sup>519</sup> and as they speak 'Raquel se déplace de-ci de-là, silencieuse. Aux aguets?'.<sup>520</sup> At an earlier dinner, playing host to Mercedes, José Manuel, José Ignacio, Leidson, Benigno and Sabuesa, Raquel serves the meal, but, once her job is complete '[elle] s'était retirée dans un angle de la salle à manger, attentive au moindre désir des convives'.<sup>521</sup> She is a silent witness, easily overlooked but nonetheless privy to a wealth of information: she is beneath suspicion and interest. Yet she betrays (to the reader) her shrewd mannerisms through a highly selective

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<sup>517</sup> Ferrán, '*Memoria de la melancolía*', 72.

<sup>518</sup> See Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 76-109.

<sup>519</sup> *Vingt ans*, 65.

<sup>520</sup> *Vingt ans*, 180.

<sup>521</sup> *Vingt ans*, 53.

outpouring of stories and information. Questioned by Sabuesa about the 'fête' the following day, the narrative tersely details her stoic silence on the matter: 'ce n'était pas elle qui racontait les histoires'.<sup>522</sup> But the next day, when Lorenzo arrives at the property, Raquel, despite her earlier claim, becomes the ideal storyteller: 'Raquel sait parfaitement raconter, elle a un don et un charme certain pour le récit'.<sup>523</sup> Recounting the absurd conversation about virginity and Sabuesa's misogynistic outbursts, Raquel is the ideal witness to the events:

Elle était restée dans un coin de la salle à manger pendant tout le repas, attentive à la bonne tenue du service, devançant même les désirs des convives, allant de l'un à l'autre, silencieuse et efficace. Ce qui ne l'empêcha pas d'entendre la conversation et d'en mémoriser les moments les plus intéressants. Elle reproduit la discussion sur la virginité avec tant de précision et de vivacité expressive que Lorenzo finit par éclater de rire.<sup>524</sup>

Raquel is avissual, overlooked by the narrator and the reader, and yet she becomes an unexpected storyteller. Satur too, described as a 'témoin', is privy to decades of stories and confessions in the household, 'elle se réjouissait d'être traitée avec une telle confiance: ils lui racontaient toutes leurs pensées et tous leurs chagrins, ils vivaient devant elle naturellement, sans la moindre cachotterie'.<sup>525</sup> Yet her potential role as narrator is snatched away by the dominant patriarchal voices of the narrative that manipulate and re-word her original stories, questioning her reliability as a witness.<sup>526</sup>

Commonly accepted as the 'fantôme'<sup>527</sup> narrator of the text, Federico Sánchez consistently attempts to undermine Satur's voice. Along with José Manuel and Leidson, the men dismiss Satur's words as the ramblings of an aged and unreliable woman. In a conversation between José Manuel and Satur, he asks how long she has been at the property, 'Depuis toujours, répéta Satur. Il y a toujours eu des secrets, et j'ai toujours été au courant',<sup>528</sup> but José Manuel claims that Satur's version of events is nothing more than puerile lies: 'L'histoire est assez marrante lorsque c'est toi qui la raconte [...] mais sais-tu qu'elle est absolument fausse?'.<sup>529</sup> Having requested to hear the maid's version of events, Leidson seems to get bored of the account as he is retelling it to Sánchez, interrupting himself and requesting that the two men go for lunch, before later dismissing her 'merveilleux' story as 'une invention ou un

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<sup>522</sup> *Vingt ans*, 143.

<sup>523</sup> *Vingt ans*, 259-60.

<sup>524</sup> *Vingt ans*, 259-60.

<sup>525</sup> *Vingt ans*, 392.

<sup>526</sup> *Vingt ans*, 344.

<sup>527</sup> *Vingt ans*, 124 and 348. Also referred to as 'fantomatique', 178 and 308.

<sup>528</sup> *Vingt ans*, 265.

<sup>529</sup> *Vingt ans*, 265.

mensonge'.<sup>530</sup> Certainly, Satur's version of events is by no means more truthful or accurate than those given in the official narratives of Sánchez/Semprun, for both must be subject to question, but there is something in the way that Satur's version is always excluded by the male voice that betrays a failure to listen. In defence of Satur, and on seeing Raquel lead Leidson into Mercedes' bedroom, Benigno 'put par hasard s'assurer que les histoires de Satur, du moins en ce qui concerne les événements de Biarritz, en ce lointain été 36, n'étaient pas une simple fable, une simple humeur fébrile'.<sup>531</sup> Thus, there is a truth to Satur's narrative that is marginalised by the predominant (patriarchal) narrator, 'becoming a text-in-a-text, [...] enfolded inside that of another, more trustworthy narrator'.<sup>532</sup> In *Vingt ans*, Satur's narrative is treated as legend or myth, but it is with this myth of property acquisition thanks to a game of cards – a story José Manuel explicitly claims to be 'fausse' – that the narrative proper commences. If Satur's version is not to be believed, simply due to her role as maid, then the entire narrative must be thrown into disrepute.

Female voices try to break through, but they are always taken over or altered by the male narrator. Semprun uses the female voice in *Vingt ans* to demonstrate how true engagement with the past is always subject to negation and denial, to alteration and frustration. To engage with the past is ultimately to engage with absence, with the intangible scattered shards of events and feelings. Demonstrating how the dominant narrative must be questioned and undermined, Satur's imposed silence by male narrators represents an untold story and an unheard truth that is manipulated by the phallogocentric dominant political voice. Women represent individual and collective memories that have been silenced by a patriarchal tradition that is reluctant to make space for, or to accept, deviations and variations of a sanctioned historical discourse. Exactly as one finds in the collective memory of Spain and of historical memory of the Franco-era, Satur's version may not be the real one, but nor is Sánchez's or José Manuel's. It is this ambiguity of truth that so accurately brings *Vingt ans* to demonstrate the vagaries of Spanish memory. Peeren writes that: 'Servants are not so much omniscient narrators representing authority and control, or first-person narrators providing their own perspective on the action, as secondary ghostwriters'.<sup>533</sup> Satur as ghostwriter demonstrates that there is no single, verifiable, and historically accurate version of events: there are different memories, varying degrees of witnessing, and adaptations in narrative style and content. Satur only ever recounts her version of events orally; it is left to the men – to the phallogocentric narrative voices of Semprun's texts – to actually write them down, to provide a mark that testifies to the past. In the gap between oral testimony and written testimony,

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<sup>530</sup> *Vingt ans*, 353 and 410.

<sup>531</sup> *Vingt ans*, 215-16.

<sup>532</sup> Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 84.

<sup>533</sup> Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 84.

Semprun's narratives demonstrate the same deleterious effects imposed by historians on events of the past.

The primacy of written testimony to oral testimony has eclipsed large portions of history since debates over veracity and fallibility have plagued the latter, despite the fact that misrepresentation, mistake, and deceit occur in both sources.<sup>534</sup> Langer argued that when oral witnesses testify, they reveal the 'vast imaginative space' that separates 'what he or she has endured from our capacity to absorb it'.<sup>535</sup> Written memories, on the other hand, 'strive to narrow this space, easing us into their unfamiliar world through familiar (and hence comforting?) literary devices'.<sup>536</sup> In other words, the male narrators of *Vingt ans* act to 'portray (and thus refine) [original italics]'<sup>537</sup> the original and erratic oral testimony in order, ostensibly, to facilitate readership. However, the desire to adapt the original version in order that it will conform to the preconceived ideas of the past, working to support and further validate the dominant narrative, essentially *dictates* how oral testimony will be heard and re-written. In *Vingt ans*, the translation of Satur's oral testimony to Sánchez's written one involves a literary manipulation of the original version, effacing and altering the female voice so that anything not conforming to the wider patriarchal viewpoint is suppressed in favour of a more convenient storyline. Satur is never granted space within the narrative to fully expand upon her stories: she is an eyewitness condemned to oral testimony, and therefore her words are subject to change, misinterpretation, and manipulation by others. She possesses valuable insight, but her words are adopted and altered by the dominant patriarchal voices of the narrator. The silencing of female narrators demonstrates how voices of history are lost, and how the vicissitudes of oral testimony are streamlined into a conveniently articulate narrative that facilitates distribution and interpretation, illustrating the (mis)perception of the past from the present.

Through *Vingt ans*, Semprun comments on the lost voices of Spain's past and, indirectly, on the silenced memories of 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century European history. Following the death of General Franco and Spanish transition to democracy in the mid- to late 1970s, little was publicly accepted or explained about the events that had gone on throughout the Civil War and under the dictatorship. Even today, as a key member of the European Union and the United Nations, Spain's apparent disinclination to legally pursue any commonly accepted figures of historic war crimes has been condemned by the UN and by international politicians and media.

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<sup>534</sup> Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments* is an obvious example of the trust attributed wrongly to a written 'testimony'. Enric Marco's thirty-year 'public lie' as a Spanish deportee to Mauthausen and later president of the *Amical Mauthausen* is a further example of misrepresentation. See Ofelia Ferrán, *Working through Memory: Writing and Remembrance in Contemporary Spanish Narrative* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 88.

<sup>535</sup> Langer quoted in Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 60.

<sup>536</sup> Langer quoted in Bernard-Donals and Glejzer, *Between Witness and Testimony*, 60.

<sup>537</sup> Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 19.

Yet Spanish silence on the crimes had to be implemented for the greater good of the population. Signing the amnesty agreement in 1977, Spanish officials accepted a temporary amnesia of the events of the 36-year long unrest and dictatorship, but as that silence extends into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where Spain is implicated in the UN purges of other totalitarian regimes, the spotlight is being slowly turned back. Introducing his article on historical memory in post-Franco Spain, Sebastiaan Faber writes:

There are two ways to interpret Spain's recent obsession with its violent twentieth-century past: as a symptom of collective pathology or as a sign of socio-political health. In the first reading, Spain is finally beginning to pay the price for its almost thirty-year long *pacto del silencio* [pact of silence] or *pacto del olvido* [pact of forgetting], the elites' stubborn refusal to come to terms with the Civil War and Francoism, even after the country's transition to democracy in the late 1970s. Never properly buried, mourned or exorcised, the nation's ghosts have now come back to haunt it. In the second reading, Spain's democracy – increasingly stable and vibrant, having withstood an attempted coup, endemic terrorism, and political corruption – is poised to face its final challenge: working through its past, reconciling remaining differences, and establishing a truly national collective memory.<sup>538</sup>

Expanding on the sensitive differences between amnesty and amnesia in Spain, Santos Juliá claims that 'oblivion'<sup>539</sup> was the price Spain had to pay for peace. Silence was forcibly imposed in order to prevent further disturbance, to muffle the deafening babble of voices and experiences with a single dominant narrative. This silence continued well into the democratic years, and even beyond Felipe González's fourteen-year rule from 1982 to 1996, where his own Socialist Party 'was so bent on presenting Spain as a modern, normal European nation that it turned a blind eye to the country's not-so-European recent past, including the PSOE's own institutional history in exile'.<sup>540</sup> Transitional Spain was both aware of and deeply fearful of its past, while being acutely mindful of the precarious fragility of its future, as Faber writes: 'Although Spain's transition was in one sense haunted by historical memory, then, it immediately proceeded to repress that memory for stability's sake'.<sup>541</sup>

Spain remains balanced on a precarious tension between remembering and forgetting, faced not with a silence, but with an endless babble of silenced voices. As unnamed mass graves are exhumed, haunting memories of the dead continue to return:

Most theories of collective memory (*memoria*) see its formation as a function of individuals' memories (*recuerdos*) of shared experiences, which are in turn transformed through exposure and contact with each other. [...] The question of collective historical

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<sup>538</sup> Sebastiaan Faber, 'The Price of Peace: Historical Memory in Post-Franco Spain, A Review Article', *Revista hispánica moderna*, 58 (2005), 205.

<sup>539</sup> See Ferrán, *Working Through Memory*, 24.

<sup>540</sup> Faber, 'The Price of Peace', 211.

<sup>541</sup> Faber, 'The Price of Peace', 214.

memory is theoretically complex enough, but in the case of Spain further complications arise due to the precarious nature of the Spanish nation, which is after all one of the most politically and regionally divided in Europe. While in [Pierre] Nora's work the existence of France as an entity is a given, in Spain's case it is doubtful not only if there *is* something like a national collective memory, but that there *should* be one. [...] Both the Francoist and the democratic governments worked hard to establish and institutionalise a national memory; but the exclusions and gaps were such that their versions never quite achieved sufficient legitimacy. This does not mean that no collective memories have existed, just that many of them have been at odds with the official version promoted by the powers that be. [Original italics.]<sup>542</sup>

Satur and Raquel represent the unheard and forgotten voices of memory: silenced and untold, yet constantly and persistently – to the point of distraction – they keep trying to make their voices heard. Leidson belittles the importance of Satur's narrative, even interrupting his own recital of it, and yet Satur's voice *insists* as an inextinguishable constant silence of untold stories and memories.<sup>543</sup> In *Vingt ans*, this gives the impression of conflicting storylines and conclusions, concealed narrative voices and intertextual references: do the twins die or not? Who is Federico Sánchez? Why does Gentileschi's painting play such a central role? In such a politicised text, it would be impossible to avoid the obvious comparison with the ungraspable collective historical memory of Spain. Where no single official version exists, but the narrative voice of the moment is privileged with the assumed 'truth', we encounter a significant absence at the very centre of history and narrative.

Semprun's approach is multivocal and displaced, inferring the tension between remembering and forgetting that comments both on the wider discussion of national and international reparations and memory, and on the original absent centre as identified by Semilla Durán: the mother. Susana Maura's Sephardic Jewish heritage links her to the Biblical heroine Judith, and conveys a sense of her displaced yet powerful effect upon the author and his texts.<sup>544</sup> More interestingly, however, is the inclusion of Satur in *Vingt ans*, as a definitive link to the absent maternal figure. In *Adieu*, Semprun tells us that when he was seven years old, his mother surprised him while he was going through her wardrobe and, rather than scold him, asked him to help her choose what to wear that evening:

Elle me garda même auprès d'elle lorsque Saturnina (chambrière dévouée, *ama de llaves*, 'maitresse des clefs', c'est-à-dire, gouvernante ou intendante de la famille, qui ne pardonna jamais à mon père d'avoir intronisé la Suisse à la place conjugale et fut

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<sup>542</sup> Faber, 'The Price of Peace', 214-15.

<sup>543</sup> *Vingt ans*, 352.

<sup>544</sup> See Tidd, 'Myth of Woman', 152 n.14. Augstein, however, compares Judith to Semprun's first wife, Loleh, arguing that Holofernes' castration by Judith is a parody of Semprun's emasculation in marriage. *Lealtad y Traición*, 234-35.

renvoyée par celle-ci) lui laça le corset festonné de dentelle noire qui lui permettrait de passer une robe serrée et habillée pour sa sortie nocturne.<sup>545</sup>

Satur's inclusion in *Vingt ans* is a means of establishing an indirect connection with Susana Maura, who remains absent from the text throughout. However, the subtle clue to her *insistence* in the narrative, provided by Satur, demonstrates how absence and silence are simply the tools of patriarchal imposition, used to narrow and refine historical memory. Semprun's elision of his mother from the later text is neither amnesty nor amnesia, for she is never truly absent from his narratives, always haunting the text as an echo or mirror image of the written word. The maternal figure does not need to be written explicitly, since she is underwritten in every word through Cixous' *écriture féminine*. Susana is neither silent nor absent, even when she cannot be seen or heard, for she is symbiotically wrapped up in Semprun's every word. When he writes, she writes, and he writes because he wants to maintain a connection with her: she is dependent upon his work just as his work depends upon her.

#### **Conclusion: Ghostwriting**

*This society of yours is a bachelors' club. You don't see women.*

-Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*.

In *Refiguring the Father*, Patricia Yaeger and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace write:

The problem, as we see it, is not simply to change our focus from father-as-center to mother-as-center but to reinvent the discourse of the father altogether, to move outside an oedipal dialectic that insists upon revealing the father as law, as the gaze, as bodiliness, or as the symbolic, and to develop a new dialectic that refuses to describe the father function as if it were univocal and ahistorical.<sup>546</sup>

Semprun's writing does not speak as a marker of counter-modernity, subordinating and suppressing the female voice through a dominant patriarchal narrative, but rather genders the articulation of memory to demonstrate the marginalisation and silencing of particular narratives of the past. Women are peripheral in his texts, but they cry out to be heard, just as the forgotten and repressed memories of the Spanish Civil War dead (and the dead of countless other European atrocities of the recent centuries) are slowly upsetting the stability of the present, as the unearthing of mass graves (both literally and metaphorically) brings back to life the ghosts of a past believed to have been lost forever. Through slow and gradual emancipation of these female characters, Semprun gives (back) a voice to the forgotten other(s), in order that

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<sup>545</sup> *Adieu*, 114.

<sup>546</sup> Patricia Yaeger and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace quoted in Shideler, *Questioning the Father*, 15.

he can speak in his or her place, and articulate long lost memories. At the same time, he comments on his own elision, as a Republican exile, from the narrative of Spanish history. Temporally and spatially excluded from the dominant narrative but desperate to be heard, Semprun is constantly articulating and rearticulating his own stories.

Semprun's writing gives the impression of a patriarchal and misogynistic text that deliberately aims to exclude and repress the voices of women; but through analysis it is clear that the form and content of every work is haunted by a silent and invisible double text: Cixous' *écriture féminine*. For those who cannot speak for themselves, Semprun offers his own writing up in order to be haunted by the voices of the silent and silenced other. These absent presences signify, through their silences, more than the original text ever could, through the associative responsibility to consider the silences of collective, historical, cultural, and political absences today. By displacing the dominant patriarchal narrative of memory that occupies a contemporary centrality in understanding, Semprun reveals the peripheral silences that still need (and want) to be addressed. This multivocal approach to history is thoroughly progressive, and accompanies a duality that signifies Semprun's broadly feminised writing and the incursion of the maternal voice.

In his later works, and particularly in *Vingt ans*, Semprun demonstrates how the maternal absence is never absolute, but is a symbiotic counterpart to his own presence that propels his writing and existence. While this central absence may never be explicitly articulated, it is always present as a haunting manifestation that counterbalances the construction of narrative form and content. Unlike the earlier attempts to control the maternal loss through re-living and re-witnessing his mother's death, Semprun's 21<sup>st</sup>-century narratives continually remember and honour her life. Susana Maura is a haunting presence, not only in particular texts, but in the very act of writing by the son. The act of writing becomes a skin of memory that envelops the losses and absences of childhood.<sup>547</sup> Maternal memories are ungraspable and transient, but rather than constantly chase after them, attempting to recapture childhood memories and the moment of death (as seen in early works), Semprun accepts the haunting presence of his mother within the gaps and spaces of his texts. Writing *with* her, rather than *about* her, Semprun's memories of his mother are no longer a fleeting trace of the past, but are a mark of her presence in the present. Semprun writes in the name of the father, literally *in his name*, under his name, obscuring the maternal influence, and yet this chapter has demonstrated how the stability of patriarchal structure is undermined in narrative, in a deliberate attempt to attack the redundancy of the paternal figure. Cixous writes that 'Un texte

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<sup>547</sup> '—Alors, vous vivez avec Auschwitz? —Non, je vis à côté. Auschwitz est là, inaltérable, précis, mais enveloppé dans la peau de la mémoire, peau étanche qui l'isole de mon moi actuel.' Charlotte Delbo, *La Mémoire et les jours* (Paris: Berg International, 1985), 13.

féminin ne peut pas être plus que subversive'.<sup>548</sup> Displacing the paternal precedent, the patriarchal structure of narrative becomes transient and transgressive, feminine. The narrative voice of woman unsettles the primacy of the paternal referent, excluding the subject from entry into the Lacanian order of the Symbolic: the realm of identity, of language and social order. In the next chapter, these attempts to undermine the *nom-du-père* result in a profound disturbance of narrative content and form, as the dismantled patriarchal structure of the family is thrown into chaos.

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<sup>548</sup> Cixous, *Le Rire*, 59.

## Chapter Four

### *Père-version: Incest and the nom-du-père*

*He is not my father; he is the seducer of my mother.*

-Friedrich Hebbel, *The Patricide: A Dramatic Night Painting*.

In a patriarchal society, 'the father held absolute power over all the members of his household. In exchange, he owed them the obligation of economic support and protection'.<sup>549</sup> Semprun's works attempt to foreclose the primacy of the paternal figure; however, they therefore risk fracturing the public and private systems of organisation and exchange upon which society, culture and language are constructed. Following Lacan, who believes that the presence of the father prevents and prohibits incest between mother and child, Semprun's elision of the paternal figure marks the dissolution of the taboo against incest. *L'Algarabie*, *La Montagne*, and *Vingt ans* all provide significant incestuous themes and plots, ranging variously from direct incest between father and daughter or brother and sister, to indirect incest between friends. Through the breakdown in patriarchal order, these incest plots signify a means of overcoming the authority of the father, rejecting paternalistic construction of order and exchange, fracturing the continuation of genealogical power between father and son, of 'pouvoir patriarcal, ses lois, son discours, sa socialité'.<sup>550</sup>

Incest in Semprun should thus reflect a break with the paternal fate, and a narcissistic and redemptive creation of a utopian society and identity. Yet incest is also the result of undisputed paternalistic authority and control within the domestic environment. Lacan's father is Symbolic, linguistic rather than biological, so that his function is not diminished by absence, but indeed is this absence itself. Lacan's concept of the *nom-du-père* is both of the father and *not* of the father, both the *nom* and the *non*, so that the Symbolic father is 'le Père mort'.<sup>551</sup> The Lacanian father is already absent, a ghost, a name, a spectre of patriarchy. Lacan argues that 'rien n'existe que sur un fond supposé d'absence. Rien n'existe qu'en tant qu'il n'existe pas. [...] Dans l'ordre symbolique, les vides sont aussi signifiants que les pleins'.<sup>552</sup> Semprun's works are constructed upon absence, upon paternal absence, but paternal absence as the inherent foundation of narrative. Throughout his texts it appears that he attempts to undermine the paternal position, and yet, narrative itself inheres in the structures of paternal absence. The *nom-du-père* represents 'within the Symbolic, that which made the Symbolic possible',<sup>553</sup> and is,

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<sup>549</sup> Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 239.

<sup>550</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977), 189.

<sup>551</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 556.

<sup>552</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 392.

<sup>553</sup> Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), 108.

as the 'paternal metaphor',<sup>554</sup> the linguistic signifier par excellence. This chapter assumes the father as the foundation of linguistic and social organisation and exchange, but the father *as already absent*. The *nom-du-père* is 'the absence that precedes all lacks, rather than the presence that precedes all beings',<sup>555</sup> and each narrative, therefore, is at once a rejection and a reassurance of the paternal position. Semprun's works attempt to negate the primacy of the phallic signifier, and yet they cannot take shape without it. An absent presence, the paternal figure is at the centre of every literary text. Semprun's incestuous narratives speak *from the other side*, from a liminality and exclusion beyond the orders of taboo, from the gaps and absences of social and historical memory. In his narratives, Semprun exposes the hypocrisies of patriarchal society, of a world-view that selectively absents memory and history, and of a family that is itself haunted by the spectres of patriarchy.

In *L'Algarabie*, the sexual relationship between the exiled protagonist Artigas and his twin daughters, Perséphone and Proserpine, is retrospectively identified as incestuous in the penultimate chapter of the book. Carlos-María Bustamente Andreu, Artigas' friend and double, is also implicated in a triadic incestuous plot with his aunt Inès and cousin Mercédès Casamitja Andreu, although the chronologically earlier relationship with Inès is only revealed in the final pages of the narrative. In *La Montagne*, the family of Antoine de Stermaria is haunted by a lineage of incestuous love and tragic death: 'Toutes les Stermaria, en effet, aussi loin que les documents de famille permettaient de remonter dans le temps, avaient toujours été follement amoureuses de leurs propres frères'.<sup>556</sup> A further form of incest is found in the relationship between the three male protagonists, Antoine, Juan, and Karel, through their endogamic exchange of lovers, and incest is also suggested between Juan and Franca. In *Vingt ans*, incest between twins Lorenzo and Isabel represents the culmination of a tragic destiny, both for the family and for Spain, through a reading of the Civil War, torn between resolution and disparity. 'Dampened'<sup>557</sup> forms of incest also take place between Lorenzo and Raquel, the maid of his mother Mercedes, and between Mercedes and José Manuel Avendaño, the eldest brother of her deceased husband. These incestuous storylines all implicate the double bind of patriarchy, haunted by a ghost of the past that rejects modernity and legal order in place of atavistic digression and anachronism. Incest demonstrates the attempt to confront patriarchal rule, challenging the establishment of paternalistic exogamy; yet incest is precisely the enactment of

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<sup>554</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 109.

<sup>555</sup> Maud Ellmann (ed.), introduction to *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* (New York: Longman Group, 1994), 19.

<sup>556</sup> *La Montagne*, 208.

<sup>557</sup> Rank uses this term in *The Incest Theme* to refer to incest where substitutes for the mother or father are involved. Substitutes for the erotic relationship with the mother include the stepmother and sister, while substitutes for the hated father include the stepfather and the uncle.

that authority. Sublimating the roles of father and son, incest is haunted by the very structure it attempts to disable, reflecting the insidious nature of patriarchy and of the paternal ghost.

The most well-known story of incest, that of Oedipus who falls in love with his mother and kills his father, culminates in the son's act of self-blinding. 'Blinded' by the violation of the taboo, blindness indicates 'the complete loss of personal, sexual, and political power'.<sup>558</sup> Demonstrating a fate worse than death, Oedipus makes of himself a site [sight] of memory, 'an example of what happens when taboos are violated'.<sup>559</sup> Projected into a world of invisibility, Oedipus' transgression of the taboo represents the paradoxical nature of incest, enabling him entry into a spectral realm, into the gaps and absences of history and memory, while excluding him from the world. For Semprun, Oedipal incest is anticipated, reflecting a rudimentary attempt to reconnect with the lost maternal figure. Otto Rank argues that 'love for the mother, anchored in the unconscious, was disguised and repressed by powerful opposite impulses and substitute impulses (hatred of the father)'.<sup>560</sup> He claims that the son's 'intense affection for the mother necessarily leads to a certain jealous animosity toward the father. [...] This explains excessive hatred toward the father as a symptom of the repression of intense erotic love for the mother'.<sup>561</sup> The death of Susana Maura becomes a pretext for Semprun's displaced erotic affection for his mother and hostility towards his father. Although in Semprun the Oedipal theme is only recreated in *Vingt ans* (and here only in a diluted form) through the incest between Lorenzo and Raquel (a substitute for Mercedes) or even between Lorenzo and Isabel (a 'displacement of affect'<sup>562</sup> from the mother to the sister), further variants of the Oedipus complex recur through the generations of the Avendaño family, as the rivalry between the Avendaño brothers for the affections of Mercedes 'corresponds to the rivalry of father and son over the mother'.<sup>563</sup> Yet, while the Oedipal theme should correspond to the son's conquest over paternal authority, in Semprun it demonstrates the subject's sublimation into the invisible structures of patriarchy, the son's blindness to his own transformation into his father. Oedipus' sentence was his own blindness, a loss of the visual acuity that enables the world to be structured and ordered, or for separate things and people to be differentiated, so that Semprun's own literary enactment of incest reflects his loss of self into an all-consuming paternalistic order.

Throughout *L'Algarabie*, Freudian fantasies of abduction and rescue provide a backdrop for reunion between son and mother on the one hand, and patricide on the other. Drawing on

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<sup>558</sup> Georgina Kleege, *Sight Unseen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 69.

<sup>559</sup> Kleege, *Sight Unseen*, 68.

<sup>560</sup> Otto Rank, *The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend: Fundamentals of a Psychology of Literary Creation* [1912], trans. by Gregory C. Richter (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 121.

<sup>561</sup> Rank, *The Incest Theme*, 60-61.

<sup>562</sup> Rank, *The Incest Theme*, 466.

<sup>563</sup> Rank, *The Incest Theme*, 398.

Freud's work, Rank argues that the son's belief that 'the mother must be unhappy at the father's side – that she longs passionately to be rescued by her son',<sup>564</sup> functions 'as an unconscious expression of the mother's unattainability for the son. Translated into conscious terms, it corresponds to the thought that the father has taken the mother [...] from the son'.<sup>565</sup> In the closing scenes of *L'Algarabie*, as Artigas/Semprun returns to his childhood home in Madrid and is confronted with a memory of his father, Semprún Gurrea is drawn as the unlawful kidnapper of both the mother and later Pola Negri, a rival to the son's own love for these women.<sup>566</sup> Throughout *L'Algarabie*, the protagonist sets out to rescue helpless women from the grip of patriarchal abuse. Perséphone's abduction by Jo Aresti, an intertextual parody of Perséphone's abduction and rape by Hades in the ancient Greek myth<sup>567</sup> sends Artigas on a lengthy and convoluted search across the Z.U.P. to her rescue. In Semprun's version, however, the rescue is futile, since, rather than depicting the naïve, fickle, virginal, or even humanitarian Perséphone of the myth,<sup>568</sup> her abduction is a ruse designed to free her from the oppressive failed patriarchy of her ailing 'father' Ruiz, and the paternal lies she has been subjected to throughout her life. Having freely run away, Perséphone's eventual 'rescue' by Paula Negri (and not Artigas) turns out to be unnecessary, since the young girl had already exploited her 'kidnapper' and the services of his brothel. Indeed, none of the women in *L'Algarabie* are actually in need of rescue: Yannick de Kerhuel, the famous 'putain de Mao'<sup>569</sup> who betrayed her lover and is now returning to join Aresti's brothel, is independent and sexually liberated, so that her kidnap cannot be a pretext for rescue. More explicitly still, two young Japanese women, working for Mao, captured by *jeunes noctards* during the kidnapping of Yannick from the bus, are taken to a hidden garden where they are disarmed and gang-raped. In what should be a scene of horror and discomfort, these two women regain control of the 'rape' and turn it into a vibrantly exciting sexual experience: 'la joie déraisonnable des victimes'.<sup>570</sup> In Semprun's works, fantasies of abduction and rescue are subject to question: the abduction was only an illusion, the rescue cannot take place. Attempting to displace patriarchal rule, the son assumes the role of father, taking his place, becoming him, so that fantasies of abduction and rescue are undermined by the 'rescuer' son's replacement of the paternal 'kidnapper'. This is what blindness corresponds to in Semprun's works: the inability to see the other *as other*, the loss of

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<sup>564</sup> Rank, *The Incest Theme*, 64-65.

<sup>565</sup> Rank, *The Incest Theme*, 64-65.

<sup>566</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 581.

<sup>567</sup> Also known as the Roman myth of Proserpina and Pluto.

<sup>568</sup> See Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 5, V. 385-571; Homer's *Hymn to Demeter*; Claudien's incomplete *Le Rapt de Proserpine*; Lully's *Proserpine*; or Gide and Stravinsky's *Perséphone* for different interpretations of the myth of Perséphone [Persephone/Proserpina/Proserpine].

<sup>569</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 118.

<sup>570</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 126.

differential and intersubjective identity. Incest comes to represent political, personal and sexual sterility: the sublimation of father and son.

These examples draw out the double bind of incest, demonstrating the insidious nature of patriarchal authority and the continuity of the paternal figure. Setting out to rescue fallen women from the abuses of patriarchy, the protagonist of *L'Algarabie* assumes the role he is trying to oust, perpetuating the cycle of paternal haunting, a sort of 'blind' obedience to follow in the footsteps of the father. Blindness corresponds to the illustration of patriarchy as a structure that inheres in absence and silence, a biological and cultural construction that haunts the gaps and absences of history, unseen and yet universal. This chapter assumes the paternal figure as the absent central foundation of culture, society, law, and language. Following Lacan, the father sanctions the child's entry into the Symbolic order, a realm of movement and heterogeneity, of 'language, the unconscious and an otherness that remains other'.<sup>571</sup> However, Lacan does not argue simply that it is the father per se who authorises the child's entry into the Symbolic; rather it is the *nom-du-père*, a figurative rather than biological father. Unlike maternity, which is 'proved by the evidence of the senses [...] paternity is a hypothesis, based on an inference and a premiss [sic]'.<sup>572</sup> In other words, paternity is founded on a void or an absence, whereby it correlates to a state of invisibility, unlike maternity which is clearly visible through pregnancy and childbirth. The Lacanian *nom-du-père* promotes the name over the person, reiterating the eternal return of the patronym that predestines the fate of the son. The *nom-du-père* is at the centre of language and law, so that the paternal absence *as absence* is inherent within the processes of writing.

For Lacan, the Symbolic order is derived from the father's initial imposition of a taboo against incest. Lacan describes the infant as an 'Hommelette',<sup>573</sup> a scrambled mess of possibilities with no sense of subjectivity or kinship order, who is cooked into a man through comprehension of the self as a unified, autonomous whole. Existing initially as only one half of the mother-child duad, this blissful state of fixity and similarity, referred to as the Imaginary or the mirror stage, is 'the scene of a desperate delusional attempt to be and to remain "what one is" by gathering to oneself ever more instances of sameness, resemblance and self-replication; it is the birthplace of the narcissistic "ideal ego"'.<sup>574</sup> The presence of the father comes to shatter

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<sup>571</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 92.

<sup>572</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Moses and Monotheism, Part II', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XXIII (1937-1939)*, trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), 114.

<sup>573</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 845.

<sup>574</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 92.

this illusory world, intervening 'between the mother and the child, breaking up their spectral reciprocities'<sup>575</sup> and figuratively castrating the child:

[The father's] function is to introduce the law against incest into the Oedipal drama of the home. By forbidding 'incest' – or merger – with the mother, the father instates the symbolic order, which distinguishes parent from child, mother from father, sister from brother.<sup>576</sup>

As an orphan, Semprun's literary incest should demonstrate a break with the *nom/non* of the father that undermines paternalistic and patriarchal power, a symptom of linguistic, moral, and epistemological rupture. Yet narrative incest employs the very structures it seeks to undermine. Incest demonstrates the insidious nature of patriarchy, a structure that transgresses historical and cultural boundaries, that inheres in family lineage, and in the silences and absences of society; that passes unseen and yet is always present. Semprun's use of incest challenges not the paternal figure (Semprun Gurrea) per se, but patriarchy as a European constant that traverses time and space. The use of incest represents a desire to emancipate the subject from the dominion of the patriarch, and yet it inheres in the structures of patriarchy: to write absence is to write the Symbolic father *as absence*.

While Oedipus is the best-known example of historical and mythical incest, he is himself a vestige of patriarchal discourse. Mother-son relations are in fact the least common form of incest to be found in contemporary life, instead, (step-)father-daughter relationships dominate psychological and sociological fields. Rank argues that incest between son and mother (whether real or fantasy) is considered to be a greater transgression than between father and daughter because the primacy of the 'internal, physical blood relationship'<sup>577</sup> triggers an unconscious preclusion. More importantly, however, he identifies the realisation of father-daughter incest as a product of patriarchal rule: 'The father has an authoritative influence over his daughter, a *patriae potestas*, lending more force to whatever impulses and wishes he may have than is possible in the son's subordinate relationship with the mother'.<sup>578</sup> Rank essentially identifies the insidious nature of patriarchy in events of actual incest: the power of the male figure over the submissive and subservient female enables his possession of her. For Rank, Jane Ford, Herbert Maisch, Judith Herman, Janice Doane and Devon Hodges,<sup>579</sup> paternal power is augmented by a maternal absence or other source of rupture in the mother-daughter

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<sup>575</sup> Ellmann, introduction, 18.

<sup>576</sup> Ellmann, introduction, 18.

<sup>577</sup> Rank, *The Incest Theme*, 301.

<sup>578</sup> Rank, *The Incest Theme*, 301.

<sup>579</sup> See Jane Ford, *Patriarchy and Incest from Shakespeare to Joyce* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998); Herbert Maisch, *Incest* [1968], trans. by Colin Bearne (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973); Judith Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* [1981] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *Telling Incest: Narratives of Dangerous Remembering from Stein to Sapphire* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2001).

relationship that enflames the daughter's vulnerability in the eyes of her father.<sup>580</sup> With the mother absent, dead, or passive, the father becomes the dominant patriarch under whom the daughter is subservient and dependent, adopting the role of the absent mother. In essence, 'the incestuous family represents an extreme form of traditional family patterns. In incestuous families, fathers are dictatorial providers and mothers economically dependent, ill, or absent'.<sup>581</sup> The mother is therefore not a source of jealousy or conflict, but an absent prelude to the redistribution of familial identities and exponential paternal authority. Patriarchy, therefore, is both the legendary and mythical root of the incest taboo, and the contemporary cause of incest.

Incest in Semprun therefore reflects not simply the absence of the Lacanian Symbolic father, but paradoxically also demonstrates the haunting presence and strength of paternal authority. Through Semprun's works, the tension of incest and taboo, demonstrating at once the evidence of an absent father and the result of an overbearing *paterfamilias*, reflects an inescapable paternalistic destiny: *I am my father*. The dystopian system of endogamy disrupts the continuity or linearity of the past into the future, illustrating Semprun's aversion to the paternal fate, while tragically demonstrating the simultaneous impossibility of a continuous identity of his own. Incest is self-destructive; attacking the structures and laws of patriarchal order, the incestuous individual undermines his own place within it: if I negate the *nom/non* of the father, I preclude my own entry into the Symbolic and thus my own identity. In this chapter, incest represents a means of self-erasure, disappearing into the absence or invisibility – blindness – of patriarchy. Patriarchy does not exist, it is nothing but absence, and yet it is everywhere, haunting the gaps and silences of history, culture, and memory, permeating thought and order, so that Semprun's narratives become self-consuming spectres of a patriarchal discourse.

Remaining one of the most widely researched areas of literary, sociological and anthropological interest, Rank identifies incest as 'one of the most important driving forces in literary production'.<sup>582</sup> Literary incest, he claims, is the archetypal communicative device:

The incest theme is found in the works of the most important authors of world literature [...]. The works of these authors have entered the emotional life and intellectual culture of society because these authors were able to present shared human themes in a universally accessible and effective form.<sup>583</sup>

Incest demonstrates Semprun's ambivalent relationship towards his father, but it also indicates a wider repudiation of paternity and patriarchy in contemporary life. In this chapter, literary

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<sup>580</sup> See Ford, *Patriarchy and Incest*, 13-14.

<sup>581</sup> Doane and Hodges, *Telling Incest*, 56.

<sup>582</sup> Rank, *The Incest Theme*, 573.

<sup>583</sup> Rank, *The Incest Theme*, 95.

incest represents a means of self-duplication, creating a world of phantoms, doubles or shadows that overcome the haunting repetition of paternal fate. Offering the potential for narcissistic self-preservation through the creation of a utopic kingdom, incest is explored through relationship between the self and the other. Enclosed within a 'narrative hall of mirrors',<sup>584</sup> Semprun constructs an immortal *relative* identity through which his own stable sense of self is subject to negation and sterility. While Miletic has shown a thorough analysis of incestuous relationships in *L'Algarabie* and *La Montagne* as an example of the creative liberties available to a bilingual exile in his adopted tongue, her work fails to account for the later *Vingt ans*, and overlooks the foreclosure of the *nom-du-père* as the necessary primary act of linguistic creativity, emancipating language from the arbitrary structures of the Symbolic. Further, she considers incest only as content, rather than extending the interpretation of endogamy to include narrative form and structure, such as the *mise en abîme* formation of Semprun's works that imply an incestuous repetition or mirroring of events and experiences. Through intertextuality and intratextuality, Semprun's re-employment of the same images, references, and philosophies recreates incest as a linguistic phenomenon. Writing the taboo, through the content and form of his works, Semprun transgresses the limits between the speakable and the unspeakable, uncovering the secrets hidden by the prohibition. Incest in Semprun warns against the haunting repetition of the past, and our blind obedience to historical and cultural structure and order. Through incest, narrative dissolves into absence, an absence that, for Semprun, is ultimately self-effacing, as the incestuous autophagy of his works draws him into a narrative ellipsis from which he cannot escape: 'he literally writes himself out of existence'.<sup>585</sup>

### **Relative Identity: *Twincest* and Utopia**

*Two factors can explain incest: the first is the inborn and universal need for roots, intimacy and protection; the second, the fear of the outside world and a feeling of insecurity.*

-Tess Do, 'From Incest to Exile: Linda Lê and the Incestuous Vietnamese Immigrants'.

Incest ruptures intersubjective relations, dissolving distinctions between self and other, and sublimating identity into an enclosed system of repetition. In this section, Semprun's engagement with incest is analysed as a means of both constructing and deconstructing social and individual identity, sublimating kinship into a single unstable continuum. As an exile, Semprun's use of incest recreates a sense of familiarity, a duplication of one's own self-image that reconstructs what has been lost or displaced. For Miletic, Semprun's use of incest reflects

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<sup>584</sup> Wendy Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 127.

<sup>585</sup> Shideler, *Questioning the Father*, 110.

his attempts to 'restructure the past',<sup>586</sup> restoring a sense of unity or cohesion that was displaced or lost through exile. Said argued that exiles feel 'an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people'.<sup>587</sup> Uprooted from the country, language, and culture he knew as a child, Semprun's literary incest is a means of recreating a home from elements with which he is familiar,<sup>588</sup> reconstructing a pseudo-family or a pseudo-home in his own image. Semprun creates a narrative utopia through incest in which a new society, peopled by doubles or twins, mirror-images of the protagonist, enables the exile's restoration of lost and displaced roots. Through *L'Algarabie* and *Vingt ans*, incest reflects the desire to regenerate social and cultural structures, engaging with a narcissistic perversion that projects the self into a boundless future. Creating a utopian world in which 'I' am everyone, Semprun constructs a narrative hall of mirrors, a phantom cast of reflections and shadows. However, this incestuous utopia is ultimately no more than an isolated and sterile self-dissolution that negates intersubjective identity. As Edmund Leach writes: 'Individuals do not live in society as isolated individuals with clear-cut boundaries; they exist as individuals interconnected in a network by relations of power and domination. Power, in this sense, resides in the interfaces between individuals, in ambiguous boundaries'.<sup>589</sup> Semprun's pseudo-identity creates an "'I" who would be free from the domination of others but would in turn be wholly impotent'.<sup>590</sup> *La Montagne* reveals the impotence of *dystopian* incest, constructing a sterile society and a sterile individual that cannot exist, that cannot continue, that are spectral, interwoven into the fabric of a structure that consumes itself from an absent centre.

In ethnographer Margaret Mead's study of incest, she persistently questioned a member of the Arapesh tribe of Papua New Guinea on what would happen if a tribesman were to marry his sister. His incredulous response is widely known:

What, you would like to marry your sister! What is the matter with you anyway? Don't you want a brother-in-law? Don't you realize that if you marry another man's sister and another man marries your sister, you will have at least two brothers-in-law, while if you marry your own sister you will have none? With whom will you hunt, with whom will you garden, whom will you go to visit?<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>586</sup> Miletić, *European Literary Immigration*, 307.

<sup>587</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 177.

<sup>588</sup> Steiner, *Extraterritorial*, 8 and 11.

<sup>589</sup> Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication, The Logic by which Symbols are Connected: An Introduction to the Use of Structural Analysis in Social Anthropology* (Cambridge, IN: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 62.

<sup>590</sup> Leach, *Culture and Communication*, 62.

<sup>591</sup> Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* [1935] (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), 84.

The incest taboo arises from a desire to promote cohesion, solidarity, and communication between unlimited groups,<sup>592</sup> mixing what is considered same or self, with the other. Prohibiting the harmful effects of an 'excès d'identité',<sup>593</sup> the prohibition actively encourages interaction and exchange with dissimilar individuals, tribes, and families, extending relationships towards the other. Incest, therefore, is a system of self-enclosure that represents a desire for 'stasis, a refusal to circulate one's body, one's blood, even one's attention outside the sphere of one's own family'.<sup>594</sup> Yet, throughout history, incest has been exceptionally sanctioned and encouraged amongst nobility and gods,<sup>595</sup> because it enables goods, money, immortality, or even the family name to be preserved within a controlled framework. Prohibiting the 'admission of a stranger into an established bloodline – a crucial point when that bloodline is already deemed optimal',<sup>596</sup> endogamy reflects the narcissistic desire to preserve a divine or noble lineage from pollution. For the exile, incest represents a means of securing relations within a strict group, ensuring familiarity and stability.

It is this narcissistic desire to recreate a world in one's own image that can be applied through Semprun's works as a demonstration of the exilic wish to reconstitute a home and a family. In *L'Algarabie*, incest enables the (re)creation of a utopian world for the exile, underlined by desire to redeem the anarchic and degenerative Z.U.P., a civilization on the verge of collapse. Incest provides the exiled individual with the 'ability to create and recreate society from a single social atom [...] from a vacuum or chaos'.<sup>597</sup> Artigas' incest with his daughter, Perséphone, demonstrates the opportunity for the exile to begin again, at the centre of a new social framework where he is 'related by [incest] to all and by descent to none'.<sup>598</sup> Projected into an 'incestuous solitude',<sup>599</sup> Artigas' incest demonstrates how 'the domestic universe replaces the external one as the relevant framework of experience', so that he is able to 'reconstruct a personal universe [where] the incestuous father constructs his family on the

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<sup>592</sup> 'En face de l'endogamie, tendance à imposer une limite au groupe, et à discriminer au sein du groupe, l'exogamie est un effort permanent vers une plus grande cohésion, une solidarité plus efficace, et une articulation plus souple.' Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* [1947] (Paris and La Haye: Mouton & Co., 1967), 550.

<sup>593</sup> Françoise Héritier, *Les Deux Sœurs et leur mère: Anthropologie de l'inceste* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1994), 192.

<sup>594</sup> Elizabeth Barnes, *Incest and the Literary Imagination* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002), 4.

<sup>595</sup> In particular, examples of incest have been found among Ancient Greek and Ancient Roman Gods, and amongst the Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt, thus incest is both taboo and privilege. See John Middleton, *World Monarchies and Dynasties* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 433-34; Jean Rudhardt, 'De l'inceste à la mythologie grecque', in *Revue Française de Psychanalyse: Tome XLVI* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), 731-64. 'Well-known cases of condoned incest include the royalty of ancient Egypt, Thailand, Hawaii, and the Incan state of Peru.' William Arens, *The Original Sin: Incest and its Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 9.

<sup>596</sup> Ford, *Patriarchy and Incest*, 7.

<sup>597</sup> Arens, *Original Sin*, 120.

<sup>598</sup> Arens, *Original Sin*, 118.

<sup>599</sup> Arens, *Original Sin*, 117-18.

model of a kingdom, where his own authority, rather than society's rulings, reigns supreme'.<sup>600</sup> By transgressing the taboo and possessing that which is forbidden (his daughter), Artigas reclaims power over societal rules and cultural norms, elevating himself to the centre of a new social system where authority and power are his to govern and distribute. Employed precisely to prevent the intrusion of outsiders and otherness, incest perpetuates a pseudo-model of the traditional family unit, a pseudo-community generated from only one individual. The result, however, and as *L'Algarabie* betrays, is that the incestuous society is untenable. Because every member is only a double of the divine individual, they do not exist, transforming the Z.U.P. into a vampiristic community of spectres, a kinship of phantom reflections. Emulating the riddle on an epitaph quoted by Rank: 'Here lies the daughter, here lies the father, / Here lies the sister, here lies the brother, / Here lie the wife and the husband; / Still, only two lie buried here',<sup>601</sup> Juan Eduardo Tesone defines the incestuous relationship as 'narcissistic-omnipotent', whereby the status of the incestuous individual 'as a separate self is denied'.<sup>602</sup> He continues:

Thus, for example, the incestuous father of an adolescent girl expressed his fear that his daughter might be sexually assaulted whenever she went out of doors, saying '*if anything should happen to me... er... her*'. That slip of the tongue reveals the non-differentiation that governed their relationship. [Original italics.]<sup>603</sup>

Semprun employs incest to demonstrate his own dissolution into a societal structure of his own making, ensuring his longevity within a world created in his image. The losses of childhood and of Buchenwald, losses that ruptured the subject's sense of self, are overcome through a narcissistic incest that assures a divine and immortal self-preservation.

*L'Algarabie* perpetuates this model of narcissistic omnipotence through Artigas' friend and double, Carlos, who is transformed into an ideal figure of self continuity. Carlos' own involvement in incest, first with his aunt Inès and later his first cousin, Inès' daughter, Mercédès, reduces the family to a self-perpetuating triad. As a teenager, Carlos has sex with Inès, and many years later with Mercédès, who 'semblait être une métamorphose'<sup>604</sup> of her mother. Carlos ostensibly occupies all available male roles within the nuclear family structure: he is the father, father-in-law, and son, and thus the father of himself. At the centre of this domestic universe, Carlos' incest represents a mode of self-continuation, a 'narcissistic belief in the immortality of the self'.<sup>605</sup> Yet the 'self' that Carlos perpetuates is actually Artigas' self:

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<sup>600</sup> Arens, *Original Sin*, 146-47.

<sup>601</sup> Rank, *The Incest Theme*, 296.

<sup>602</sup> Juan Eduardo Tesone, 'Incest(s) and the Negation of Otherness', in *On Incest: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. by Giovanna Ambrosio (London: Karnac, 2005), 58.

<sup>603</sup> Tesone, 'Incest(s) and the Negation of Otherness', 58.

<sup>604</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 138.

<sup>605</sup> Irwin, *Doubling and Incest*, 65.

Carlos is no more than an illusion, exemplified by his dissolution into the self-annihilating structure of incest. As Wladimir Troubetzkoy, in *L'Ombre et la différence* writes:

Le double n'existe *pas*, car il ne peut pas exister. Il correspond, en effet, à une contradiction logique, qui fait que, s'il est *imaginable*, il est *inconcevable*. Le double est un mirage, un spectre, un trouble d'optique, le résultat d'une certaine réfraction selon un certain milieu, une aura fugitive, un halo évanescent autour de l'être. [Original italics.]<sup>606</sup>

The first time Carlos sleeps with Mercédès, in London, he experiences 'cette étrange sensation de dédoublement de la personnalité'<sup>607</sup> through which 'sa propre identité s'évapore comme de l'eau entre ses doigts'.<sup>608</sup> For forty-five minutes during the incestuous encounter, Carlos is sure that 'il n'avait pas été là. Il avait été ailleurs'.<sup>609</sup> Remembering a childhood in Madrid that corresponds to the biographical memories of Artigas/Semprun, Carlos senses that he has been doubled, returned to an absence that both is and is not his own. Blurring the structures of family identity, incest triggers the dissolution of the boundaries between self and other. The narrative uncovers the memories of Artigas slowly infiltrating Carlos, whose date of birth coincides with the arrival of the former in France from Spain (in other words, the date of his exile). Experiencing an 'absence de soi'<sup>610</sup> and becoming the 'Je anonyme'<sup>611</sup> during these strange transfers of memory, Carlos becomes a split or double of Artigas, an *unheimlich Doppelgänger*, who embodies the assured continuation of immortal self-love.

The Freudian double or *Doppelgänger* acts as an 'insurance against the extinction of the self',<sup>612</sup> and reconstitutes a sense of identity and belonging in a world shattered by alterity. Although incest never takes place between Artigas and Carlos, they represent a pseudo-incestuous relationship, whereby the boundaries of self and other are dissolved, and the two merge into one continuous conscious. For Freud, the relationship of the *Doppelgänger* with his double was:

Intensified by the spontaneous transmission of mental processes from one of these persons to the other [...] so that one becomes co-owner of the other's knowledge, emotions and experience. Moreover, a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other's self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> Wladimir Troubetzkoy, *L'Ombre et la différence: Le double en Europe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), 38.

<sup>607</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 150-51.

<sup>608</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 130.

<sup>609</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 151.

<sup>610</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 156.

<sup>611</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 155.

<sup>612</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* [1919], trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 142.

<sup>613</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, 141-42.

Re-establishing a sense of belonging in the world, literary incest reflects the exilic desire to reconstruct a stable sense of self identity, compensating for the shattering devastation of exile, bilingualism, and activism, resulting not only in the patronymic rupture 'Sempru/ún', but also an internalised split in the ability to conceive the subject as a cohesive whole. Yet Carlos outlives Artigas, indeed, Carlos is the one who takes over the narrative voice, penning Artigas' memories in his absence. Carlos is no longer the double of Artigas, but Artigas becomes *his* double, a pseudonym that survives the narrative until the revelation of the true narrators in the final chapter. Indeed, Carlos and Artigas are essentially no more than doubles of the author, Semprun, so that the whole narrative is reduced to a plane of inexistence, of vampiristic doubles and projections: '[le double] est moi ailleurs et en même temps, comme il est ce que j'ai été, mon passé, et mon avenir parce qu'il est mes désirs'.<sup>614</sup> The tension between doubles in *L'Algarabie* disrupts the typical sense of linear narrative projection, as the text is flooded by inexistent phantoms. No longer sure of which double is the original, *je* is quite literally *un autre*: '*c'est moi qui suis le double de l'autre* [original italics]'.<sup>615</sup> The real world of the narrative is absent, inexistent, and spectral. *L'Algarabie* exposes individual identity *from the other side*, as an inherently unstable and continuous formation that traverses the boundaries between self and other. In *Vingt ans*, the dissolution of individual and collective identity is exemplified through incest between twins. *Twincest* represents the attempt to recreate a sense of self, but it culminates in a complete dissolution of alterity as the self disappears into an *other* self.

Referred to by Herrmann as Semprun's 'most overt Communist apologia',<sup>616</sup> *Vingt ans* represents the Civil War conflict through the tense interrelations of the Avendaño family, and in particular the three brothers: José Manuel, Ignacio, and María. As the resolution of the war is suggested through the symbolic reburial of José María alongside Chema 'el Refilón' Pardo, the latter a childhood friend accused of the assassination of the former, in a bid to lay the past to rest, the youngest members of the family, twins Isabel and Lorenzo, represent the reverse of the fratricidal killings that constitute a civil war. Twins signify an individual being that has been irreparably ruptured, but that can be recombined through incest:

Quasi-identical in their genetic codes, inseparable from the very first moment of their conception, brother-sister twins recall most vividly the fantastic image of an androgynous being. Both male and female, the latter represents unity and wholeness before the separation of the sexes, and from the mother's body. Brother-sister incest is

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<sup>614</sup> Troubetzkoy, *L'Ombre et la différence*, 41.

<sup>615</sup> Clément Rosset quoted in Troubetzkoy, *L'Ombre et la différence*, 41.

<sup>616</sup> Herrmann, *Written in Red*, 171.

therefore an attempt at regression to the womb and to childhood, with the hope of recreating the lost unity.<sup>617</sup>

As the emblematic split or double, the (re)union of the twins through incest indicates a desire to overcome their unjust separation, (re)discovering unity and origin.

Isabel and Lorenzo reflect the reconciliation of violent exilic loss and rupture, symbolising a restorative and regenerative love. Maisch identifies the incestuous couple as living within their own 'secret world',<sup>618</sup> so that they become removed from temporal and spatial specificity, 'against a background of disharmony or disorganisation'.<sup>619</sup> As Artigas attempted to recreate a narcissistic utopia from the seat of the crumbling Z.U.P., incest between Isabel and Lorenzo is a sign of divine recreation and tolerance, of a new Spain that will rise from the ashes of the war. Their (re)union symbolises a divine (re)creation, reflecting the mythical origins of civilization. In his work on incest in Greek mythology, Jean Rudhardt demonstrates how the divine union between 'un premier couple'<sup>620</sup> was inevitable, and that incest between celestial brothers and sisters therefore went undeterred by the population (unlike incest between mortals). John Lash argues that according to Persian myth, the first parents on Earth were an androgynous and incestuous pair that developed, over time, 'the distinct form of the two sexes' assuming the biological reproduction of twins in the womb: 'They eventually mate to give birth to twins in seven sets, perfect brother/sister pairs who in turn mate incestuously and produce the human race in all its variety'.<sup>621</sup> He claims that 'in the beginning was the Duad, and the Duad was incestuous, reproducing itself'.<sup>622</sup> Incest between brother and sister is a sign of a new beginning following the Civil War and the disparity of the Avendaño family. Lorenzo and Isabel represent resolution and restoration, the end of the former regime, and the future-oriented progression of a free Spain.

Incest between twins represents the desire to recreate the lost bonds of family and country. Born after the death of their father, Lorenzo and Isabel are paternal orphans, and, according to Françoise Héritier, are thus 'fragile', and 'inachevé'.<sup>623</sup> Endogamy represents an attempt for the fragmentary child to recreate a family from the chaos of paternal absence, substituting his loss through narcissistic (re)union with the other half of the self:

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<sup>617</sup> Tess Do, 'From Incest to Exile: Linda Lê and the Incestuous Vietnamese Immigrants', in *France and 'Indochina': Cultural Representations*, ed. by Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 173.

<sup>618</sup> Maisch, *Incest*, 210.

<sup>619</sup> Maisch, *Incest*, 217.

<sup>620</sup> Rudhardt, 'De l'inceste', 757.

<sup>621</sup> John Lash, *Twins and the Double* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 24.

<sup>622</sup> Lash, *Twins*, 24.

<sup>623</sup> 'Un enfant né postume, qui porte le prénom de Pako qui l'identifie immédiatement comme tel, est considéré comme un être fragile parce que inachevé.' Héritier, *Deux sœurs*, 220.

Nostalgia for this other half, either lost or buried within oneself, endows sibling incest with a narcissistic scope where love for the other is also a form of self-love. The unity of each twin couple is the most striking manifestation of this narcissism. The incestuous relationship that binds [them] together [...] with their respective twin/lover reaches such a degree of intensity that their burning desire for unity is transformed into a desire for a complete symbiotic fusion, for in no other coupling can they find a union that binds together two perfectly equal beings.<sup>624</sup>

Incest enables the restoration of an individual and social kinship, as the subject regains a stable sense of self-identity through his relationship with an identical *other* self.<sup>625</sup> This *relative* identity negotiates the discontinuity of the individual, creating a narcissistic kinship where the other is only a doubled image of the self. Just like the *Doppelgänger* and the double, incest between twins represents a narcissistic self-preservation that will prevent the intrusion of alterity and overcome absence and loss. However, as Freud identified, although the theme of doubling initially arose from 'boundless self-love, the primordial narcissism',<sup>626</sup> the motif evolved from 'an assurance of immortality [into] the uncanny harbinger of death'.<sup>627</sup> In both *L'Algarabie* and *Vingt ans*, union with the double or the 'other half' signals the imminent death of the subject: the presence of Carlos, and more precisely the incursion of Artigas' memories into Carlos' conscious, predicts the demise of the protagonist; and the consummation of incest between Lorenzo and Isabel heralds their passing. Rank writes that the double, 'originally created as a wish-defence against a dreaded eternal destruction, [...] reappears in superstition as the messenger of death',<sup>628</sup> because it detracts from the stability of continuous self-identity, evoking Troubetzkoy's words: 'qui est qui? lequel est lequel?'.<sup>629</sup>

In *L'Algarabie* and *Vingt ans*, incest demonstrates the possibility for self-continuity through amalgamation with an other who resembles the self, but this merger negates the original being as an *I* distinct from *you*. Semprun's incestuous narrative utopia constructs a hall of mirrors in which every individual is only a double, and whereby the self is therefore only a double of an other. Incest between twins demonstrates the resolution of alterity, but only through the dissolution of the self, through the complete destruction of individualism and autonomy. In *Vingt ans*, it becomes clear that Isabel does not only desire to *have* her brother, but desires to *be* him: dressing androgynously, 'à la garçonnette',<sup>630</sup> and with her hair cropped,

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<sup>624</sup> Do, 'From Incest to Exile', 173.

<sup>625</sup> The same can be said of Juan and Franca in *La Montagne*: they are mistaken for twins, and incest is predicted. Again, Juan's traumatic past lends a sense of societal recreation from ruin, but his death can also be predicted through the presence of a Freudian double: 'Vous êtes identiques [...] Même sang, même race, même destin'. *La Montagne*, 83.

<sup>626</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, 142.

<sup>627</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, 142.

<sup>628</sup> Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytical Study* [1971] (London: Karnac Books, 1989), 86.

<sup>629</sup> Troubetzkoy, *L'Ombre et la différence*, 30.

<sup>630</sup> *Vingt ans*, 279.

Isabel highlights the similarities between herself and her twin brother. Incest represents 'la seule possibilité [...] de retrouver une pseudo unité',<sup>631</sup> where the individual can disappear into the narcissistic image par excellence: a double of the self. The incest between Isabel and Lorenzo is not necessarily regenerative and restorative; rather, it signifies the complete sublimation of a warring family, demonstrating how it has been permanently ruptured and torn apart by the actions of the past. Exogamy promotes a family bond between groups, ensuring reciprocity in times of unrest and conflict, so that quarrels and insults will remain 'seulement une affaire de famille; et la guerre sera évitée'.<sup>632</sup> Endogamy, on the other hand, represents a chaotic rupture in the network of family bonds, both on a domestic and a public level. For Irwin, doubling and incest are symbols of civil unrest, 'symbols of a region turned in upon itself'.<sup>633</sup> He argues that:

Doubling and incest are both images of the self-enclosed – the inability of the ego to break out of the circle of the self and of the individual to break out of the ring of the family. [...] Doubling and incest evoke the way in which the circle of the self-enclosed repeats itself through time as a cycle, the way that the inability to break out of the ring of the self and the family becomes the inability of successive generations to break out of the cyclic repetition of self-enclosure.<sup>634</sup>

There is a fatalistic sense of non-progression attributed to the incest between Lorenzo and Isabel that suggests their submission to a tragic destiny.

In theory, 'our own identity, subjectivity or sense of self is originally and essentially constituted by a relation to a potentially infinite number of others'.<sup>635</sup> Incest negates these intersubjective relations and therefore negates one's identity and position within familial and social structures. Preventing the intrusion of the other, and extending the self through *unheimlich* doubles, the negation of a differential network demonstrates the instability of *relative* identity. Unlike *L'Algarabie* and *Vingt ans*, *La Montagne* does appear, at first glance, to encourage exogamy through the exchange of women among the three protagonists. For Lévi-Strauss, the circulation of women provides the basis for civilized culture and the prohibition of incest: 'La prohibition de l'inceste est moins une règle qui interdit d'épouser mère, sœur ou fille, qu'une règle qui oblige à donner mère, sœur ou fille à autrui. C'est la règle du don par excellence'.<sup>636</sup> Amongst Juan, Antoine, and Karel, women are literally exchanged as gifts and possessions. Discovering Karel's desire for Nadine, Juan takes upon himself the power over her

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<sup>631</sup> Patrice Imbaud, 'A propos des Bienveillantes: Variations autour de la perversion', in *Les Bienveillantes de Jonathan Littell*, ed. by Murielle Lucie Clément (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 192.

<sup>632</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires*, 552.

<sup>633</sup> Irwin, *Doubling and Incest*, 59.

<sup>634</sup> Irwin, *Doubling and Incest*, 59.

<sup>635</sup> Arthur Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 138.

<sup>636</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires*, 552.

to decide that 'C'est moi qui te donnerai à Karel'.<sup>637</sup> Later, speaking of Mary-Lou, a 'cadeau d'Antoine',<sup>638</sup> Juan is reminded by Antoine that 'je te l'ai offerte',<sup>639</sup> and as such requests Nadine in return: 'je désire que tu me rendes ce gage'.<sup>640</sup> The exogamic exchange of female bodies provides the infrastructure for social and cultural life, fabricated upon their use, consumption, and circulation. This hom(m)o-sexual economy,<sup>641</sup> that Luce Irigaray claims is the condition for sociocultural life, functions by preventing degenerative regression into animalistic incest:

La société que nous connaissons, la culture qui est la nôtre, est fondée sur l'échange des femmes. Sans l'échange des femmes, nous retomberions – dit-on – dans l'anarchie (?) du monde naturel, dans l'aléatoire (?) du règne animal. Ce qui assure donc le passage à l'ordre social, à l'ordre symbolique, à l'ordre tout court, c'est que les hommes, ou les groupes d'hommes, font circuler entre eux les femmes: règle connue sous le nom de prohibition de l'inceste.<sup>642</sup>

Yet the circuit of exchange in *La Montagne* is crippled by the limitations of choice and lack of progeny,<sup>643</sup> resulting in a quasi-endogamic seclusion of the protagonists. Each of the women represents only a repetition or substitute of another, so that the pool of exogamic exchange is reduced to a spectral and unobtainable mirror image. Franca, for example, reminds Antoine of his aunt Ulrike, to the extent that his painting of Franca, *Nu bleu de dos*, resembles this late aunt. Betrayed by his lover, Ottla, Karel replaces her with Franca, while Franca herself is replaced by Nadine when she fails to meet Juan at a party, and Nadine evokes memories of Mary-Lou for Antoine. For Irigaray, '*Les marchandises, les femmes, sont miroir de valeur de/pour l'homme*' [original italics].<sup>644</sup> Women are blank spectres, assuming '*une valeur relative*' [original italics]<sup>645</sup> that is externally imposed by men: 'chacune ressemble complètement à l'autre. Elles ont toutes la même réalité fantomatique. Métamorphosées en *sublimés* identiques, échantillons du même travail indistinct [original italics]'.<sup>646</sup> In *La Montagne*, therefore, women are only a spectral veneer for relations that take place 'exclusivement, entre

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<sup>637</sup> *La Montagne*, 43.

<sup>638</sup> *La Montagne*, 116.

<sup>639</sup> *La Montagne*, 284.

<sup>640</sup> *La Montagne*, 284.

<sup>641</sup> See Irigaray, *Ce Sexe*, 178-89.

<sup>642</sup> Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, 167.

<sup>643</sup> None of the protagonists have any children: Karel's former marriage is plagued by sexual complications; Antoine's progeny would be doomed to the same incestuous fate as his predecessors; Juan and Laurence never have children, although Juan, in his dying moments 'pensa avec effroi qu'il ne laissait pas de traces de sa vie, vraies traces, vivantes, pas d'enfant, il aurait voulu'. *La Montagne*, 310.

<sup>644</sup> Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, 173.

<sup>645</sup> Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, 172.

<sup>646</sup> Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, 171.

hommes [...] Ce qui signifie que la *possibilité même du socio-culturel exigerait l'homosexualité* [original italics].<sup>647</sup>

What appeared initially as a vibrant exogamic community of exchange amongst the three protagonists is reduced to a handful of hom(m)o-sexual relationships between men. This reduced network of exchange correlates with what Héritier calls '*inceste du deuxième type*' [original italics].<sup>648</sup> According to her anthropological study, two types of incest can be differentiated: incest of the first type involves the direct sexual encounter of closely related individuals, while incest of the second type involves the indirect encounter between related individuals of the same sex who have slept with the same person. Although she initially stipulates the biological relationship of those inadvertently implicated in incest of the second type, the theme is broadened to include common adultery and even homosexuality.<sup>649</sup> Transposed onto *La Montagne*, Héritier's incest of the second type incriminates a number of women as unwitting participants in incestuous unions: Franca, for example, having slept with both Juan and Antoine, is therefore incestuously linked to Nadine, and even Ulrike. More importantly, the term applies wholly to all three male protagonists, who accumulate an incestuous bond that ties each to the next through their exchanges of female partners. Héritier's concept can be effectively substituted by a little-known term attributed to old English and persuasively employed by Javier Marías: *ġebrȳdguma*, a word rooted in the Anglo-Saxon origins of 'bridegroom':

Ese verbo designa la relación o parentesco adquiridos por dos o más hombres que han yacido o se han acostado con la misma mujer, aunque sea en diferentes épocas y con los diferentes rostros de esa mujer con el mismo nombre en todas sus épocas.<sup>650</sup>

[The word describes the relationship or kinship acquired by two or more men who have lain or slept with the same woman, even if that happened at different times and bearing in mind the different faces of that woman whose name remains the same through all time.<sup>651</sup>]

The non-existent modern equivalent, he proposes, would be 'co-fornicate', if it were a verb, 'co-fornicator', the noun, or 'co-fornication', the action itself. Reappearing later in his epic semi-autobiographical *Tu rostro mañana (Veneno, Sombra y Adios)* [*Your face tomorrow (Volume 3: Poison, Shadow and Farewell)*], the term indicates the delicate balances of past and future, and introduces sentiments of jealousy or even occasionally camaraderie between men. The relationship, therefore, although passing through a woman, is established between the two (or

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<sup>647</sup> Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, 189.

<sup>648</sup> Héritier, *Deux sœurs*, 11.

<sup>649</sup> See Héritier, *Deux sœurs*, 79.

<sup>650</sup> Javier Marías, *Mañana en la batalla piensa en mí* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1994), 208-09.

<sup>651</sup> Javier Marías, *Tomorrow in the Battle Think on Me* [1994], trans. by Margaret Jull Costa (London: The Harvill Press, 1996), 176.

more) men, through no control of their own. Signifying imperishable bonds between men that continue exponentially, the term has clear relevance to the male bonds that were fundamental to Semprun's experiences of Buchenwald and Communism. The term can be applied to the analysis of *La Montagne*, as Juan, Antoine and Karel are all linked to one another through *ġebr̄ydguma*.<sup>652</sup>

*La Montagne's* incest suggests what Miletic terms a 'continuation of brotherhood' and contributes to the 'utopian urge to be part of a special, closely knit community',<sup>653</sup> a society of brothers or a world of doubles. Employing narcissistic incest on a vast scale, the exaggerated pseudo-communist community absorbs individual identity:

Incest denies the crucial human distinction between We and They, which binds the perception and behavior of other beings. This loss of a social identity is achieved by a physical act [...] in which the sensory distinction between self and other is lost, so that the individual, momentarily at least, ceases to exist as a separate entity. [...] He becomes society itself, rather than a member of such a concept.<sup>654</sup>

*ġebr̄ydguma* results in the dissolution of male identity into a single but epically unstable and infinitely dispersed attempt to create an individual. The endogamic society Semprun creates through *La Montagne* is undermined by the instability and sterility of its member(s), who are all only *unheimlich* doubles of a proto-phantom. In other words, in Semprun's society, if *you* cannot exist over there as an independent and autonomous whole, then *I* cannot exist either. Semprun's extensive web of incestuous kinship is ultimately only a deceptive hall of mirrors.

Juan, Antoine, and Karel are not individual selves, but uncanny *Doppelgängers* of each other and of the author. Tesone comments on the illusory multiplicity of the incestuous family that is ultimately dissolved into a singular unstable (in)existence:

From the outside, the family group looks as though it consists of several members. But from the point of view of its mental functioning, there are no limits or boundaries to separate them. Such families operate as if the group was Hydra-like, with only one body but many heads. Expressed as an equation, its functioning would take the form:  $1+1+1=1$  and not 3.<sup>655</sup>

The protagonist(s) of *La Montagne* have no stable identity, reduced to haunting doubles of doubles, ghosts of ghosts. Semprun's dystopian network of incestuous identity is inherently unstable, undermined by a central and fundamental absence upon which everything else is (de)constructed. The structures of doubling and mirroring set up throughout these texts negate

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<sup>652</sup> Interestingly, it is the sense of this term (without the same terminology) that horrifies Sabuesa in *Vingt ans*, fearing the homosexual proximity of another man through any woman who is not a virgin. See *Vingt ans*, 55-56.

<sup>653</sup> Miletic, *European Literary Immigration*, 236.

<sup>654</sup> Arens, *Original Sin*, 135.

<sup>655</sup> Tesone, 'Incest(s) and the Negation of Otherness', 58.

their internal stability, awash with vampiristic reflections of reflections and phantoms of phantoms. Bowie argues that ‘the identification of oneself with another being is the very process by which a continuing sense of selfhood becomes possible’,<sup>656</sup> yet Semprun’s use of incest collapses the binary between self and other, negating the self as a distinct being. Semprun’s narrative is self-reflexive, but always as the perpetuation of an essential absence: individual and social identity are constructed upon traces, an originary lack that is not *there* but *toujours-déjà-là*, that ‘cannot be traced to any point of simple spatial or temporal presence – whether a present that is now past or one that is yet to come – because it is the underlying differential condition of any “presence” whatsoever’.<sup>657</sup> However, this process does not only function on the level of content, but at an inherent level within the form and structure of the text itself. Troubetzkoy writes that ‘je suis une relation qui n’existe qu’en fonction de mes relations, entre autres’,<sup>658</sup> and in the next section, Semprun’s narratives are shown to behave as mirror images – traces of traces – as the structure of each text betrays its own dissolution.

### Writing the Last Taboo

*For Lacan, as for Lévi-Strauss, incest is bad grammar.*

-Maud Ellmann, *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*.

The sense of doubling and mirroring established through protagonists and characters in *L’Algarabie*, *Vingt ans*, and particularly *La Montagne*, is mirrored through the construction of the narratives themselves. The incestuous structure of text distorts the exclusivity of narrative: each work is only an echo, a repetition, a trace of a trace. Conceived as a whole, Semprun’s narratives mirror a cycle of reflection and doubling, so that each text is a carefully interwoven stream of references, citations, repetitions and reproductions. His uses of *mise en abîme*, intertext, and intratext provide a textual form of incest that begins with reproduction, obscuring but never overcoming the original absences of paternity and the *nom-du-père*. Intertext, a term commonly attributed to Julia Kristeva, refers to the borrowing from, or allusion to, another text, including through the use of quotations. Intratext, a term not currently in common usage, refers to a more limited intertext, ‘within’ (‘intra’) the corpus of the same author, in this case, as the intertextual cross-references drawn from Semprun’s own work. *Mise en abîme* is an augmented form of intratext, where a narrative is repeated, on a condensed level, within that same narrative. All three methods recreate a sense of *unheimlich* déjà vu – or more precisely déjà lu –

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<sup>656</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 30-31.

<sup>657</sup> Bradley, *Derrida’s Of Grammatology*, 74.

<sup>658</sup> Troubetzkoy, *L’Ombre et la différence*, 34.

that reproduces the structural characteristic of endogamy. Across *L'Algarabie*, *La Montagne*, and *Vingt ans*, a variety of intertextual and intratextual devices are used, evoking the incestuous form of Semprun's works. Writing incest, Semprun exposes the fragility of narrative, reflecting the textual *non-lieu* of the exile. Constructed through repetition and mirror images, these narratives are never fully present; they are only traces of traces, the mark of the presence of an absence. For Derrida, no text is ever present: 'déjà tissé de traces pures, de différences où s'unissent le sens et la force, texte nulle part présent, constitué d'archives qui sont *toujours déjà* des transcriptions. Des estampes originales. Tout commence par la reproduction [original italics]'.<sup>659</sup>

In *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, Langer refers to *Le Grand Voyage* as a 'perpetual palimpsest':

Where nightmare imposes itself on normality, only to find normality recurring on top of it in a process repeating itself ad infinitum; and as the reader penetrates the layers of superimposed texts he learns that the 'meaning' of each layer depends on the one above and beneath, to the exclusion of none.<sup>660</sup>

Semprun's texts present a delicate web of references and connotations, where everything is linked to something else, and the encounter of texts and allusions influences the comprehension of any single narrated event. This to-ing and fro-ing within the pages of the text is not an uncommon image for the comprehension of Semprun's oeuvre, where the reader is sent backwards and forwards, temporally and spatially, in order to uncover hidden meanings in any single work. But it is also implicitly incestuous, burrowing further into the depths of the author's own work, drawing upon the past, repeating it, revising it, and creating a narrative hall of mirrors where each work or event is only an elaborate repetition of another. *La Montagne*, for example, uses art as its primary intertextual trace, constructing narrative through repetition and reproduction, as images and characters return to haunt the text. The image of a postcard with which the narrative opens, a reproduction of Joachim Patinir's *Le Passage du Styx*, exhibited at the Prado Museum in Madrid, and sent to Franca and Antoine from Juan, is picked up by the characters throughout the plot before it is integrated into the structure of the text itself. Antoine, Franca, and even Juan himself comment on the poor quality of the postcard as a visual reproduction.<sup>661</sup> In the final chapter, Patinir's image is visually reproduced as Juan commits suicide by drowning: 'L'eau du fleuve Styx l'emporta dans ses flots'.<sup>662</sup> Juan's suicide draws him into the cyclical *mise en abîme* structure of the book, becoming a self-authored 'très

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<sup>659</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Freud et la scène de l'écriture', in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 314.

<sup>660</sup> Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, 290.

<sup>661</sup> See *La Montagne*, 18; 94; 192.

<sup>662</sup> *La Montagne*, 310. The final chapter is also called 'Le passage du Styx'.

mauvaise reproduction'<sup>663</sup> of the image. Indeed, Juan is already a reproduction, an intertextual imitation of the Spanish poet, and also of Semprun.<sup>664</sup> Driven to speak about his experiences after watching a television documentary on the Nazi camps (a visual reproduction triggering a traumatic reliving) Juan's suicide is a further facsimile of that of Heinrich von Kleist, who concluded a suicide pact with his lover.<sup>665</sup> The first chapter, 'Une carte postale de Joachim Patinir' could be better rewritten as 'Une carte postale de Juan Larrea', a postcard *from and* a postcard *of* the protagonist, evoking both the first narrative in which Juan sends the postcard to Antoine and Franca, and the second narrative, in which Juan can be imagined within the frame of the postcard itself. *La Montagne* both creates and is created by the *mise en abîme* structure of intertextuality, building upon literary and creative traces to reproduce an incestuous narrative.

The intertextual trace of art throughout the narrative is deeply entrenched in the structure and plot, frequently employed as a precursor to events. Seeing Paolo Caliari's *L'Enlèvement d'Europe*, a visual reproduction of the classical myth, Karel uses the piece as an intertextual inspiration for his own article in the review *L'Autre Europe*, 'Le Soulèvement de Prague'. Even Antoine's painting, *Nu bleu de dos*, allegedly of Franca but actually resembling Ulrike, can be considered as an amalgamation of Henri Matisse's *Nu bleu* cut-out series and his series of sculptures, *Nu de dos*. Despite the artistic careers of the three protagonists, these intertextual references signal a lack of creativity and imagination, as everything they produce is somehow only a repetition of a previous work. Semprun himself infiltrates the *mise en abîme* structure of the work as Josef Klims, a musician who is working on a book titled *L'Écriture ou la mort*, the famously unpublished original title of *L'Écriture ou la vie*.<sup>666</sup> The incestuous duplication of the text is reproduced in the actions of the characters, as Juan revisits with Nadine the same galleries, museums, and cities he had previously visited with Franca,<sup>667</sup> provoking a sense of 'déjà vu, déjà vécu'.<sup>668</sup> Finally, Juan and Karel, collaborating on a work titled *La Montagne blanche*,<sup>669</sup> secure the whole book on a *mise en abîme* axis whereby nothing is original, and everything is a double of a previous endeavour, a poor reproduction. The derivative nature of the text, exemplified by the three protagonists' lack of artistic creativity, erases a sense of stability or originality, producing only a mirror image:

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<sup>663</sup> *La Montagne*, 18.

<sup>664</sup> *La Montagne*, 108-09. Semprun used this name in the PCE. Semprun's biography is reproduced through Juan, whose work with Jean-Marie-Action, capture at Joigny, deportation, and reunion with Laurence in 1945 are clearly descended from the life of the author.

<sup>665</sup> Kleist is evoked earlier in the novel, as a character in Juan's play, *Le Tribunal de l'Askanischer Hof*.

<sup>666</sup> *L'Écriture*, 229.

<sup>667</sup> See *La Montagne*, 94; 197.

<sup>668</sup> *La Montagne*, 197.

<sup>669</sup> See *La Montagne*, 96; 164; 233; 279.

Like reflections in actual mirrors, the reflected narratives are and are not the same as the 'original' ones. Moreover, such repetitions undercut the very notions of origin and difference. [...] Again here, events and memories, past and present voices and words are repeated and a clear sense of origin is erased.<sup>670</sup>

Just like incest, intertext and intratext eliminate the binary between original and repetition, or self and other, so that the text is only a reproduction, a phantom narrative that is *toujours-déjà-là*. This palimpsestic narrative structure builds upon what Kristeva calls '*intertextualité* [original italics]',<sup>671</sup> a sort of textual intersubjectivity that refuses to perceive text as a self-sufficient or self-enclosed system, but rather one that only comes into being through encounter with other words or texts: 'le mot (le texte) est un croisement de mots (de textes), où on lit au moins un autre mot (texte)'.<sup>672</sup> If every text is a reproduction, then Semprun's narratives are no more than absence, a mass of traces, of intertextual references and intersubjective relations still to be made, that only develop 'by reference to some other element that differs from it in space and time'.<sup>673</sup>

The same argument can be applied to *L'Algarabie*, which makes explicit reference to its own intertextual link to Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*. Required to save prostitute Fleur-de-Marie from le Chourineur, Rodolphe de Gérolstein's errant exile across the world, under different guises, resembles Artigas' quest for identity on a labyrinthine journey around the Z.U.P. Ultimately discovering Fleur to be his own daughter, the similarities between Artigas and Gérolstein are unmistakable. The modernised *mise en abîme* integration of Sue's text into Semprun's work includes the filming of *Les Mystères* on the streets of Paris, providing a costumed disguise for Rose Beude to spy on Artigas, and the two volumes of Sue's narrative appear in Carlos' apartment. *L'Algarabie* is an intertextual rewriting of Sue's work, and the choice of *Les Mystères* is perhaps deliberate since, as Mikhaïl Bakhtine argues in *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, this work is an exemplary intertextual narrative of socio-ideological voices of the era, a 'microcosme' of 'plurilinguisme Romanesque'.<sup>674</sup> *Les Mystères* is recycled as an intertextual point of reference. In the words of Carlos to Anna-Lise: 'Pense aux *Mystères de Paris*, [...] souviens-toi du rôle que ce texte a joué, direct- ou indirectement, sur notre histoire'.<sup>675</sup> Referring to their posthumous completion of Artigas' intratextual work, the construction of the text is fully internalised, incestuously compiled upon traces of traces and intertexts of intertexts. *L'Algarabie* becomes a self-perpetuating intratext: announcing 'j'écris

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<sup>670</sup> Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 131.

<sup>671</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Séméiotikè: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 146.

<sup>672</sup> Kristeva, *Séméiotikè*, 145.

<sup>673</sup> Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology*, 138.

<sup>674</sup> Mikhaïl Bakhtine, *Esthétique et théorie du roman* [1975] (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 223.

<sup>675</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 551.

*L'Algarabie*<sup>676</sup> only hours before he will die, Artigas' unfinished narrative is completed posthumously by Carlos and Anna-Lise, who are, of course, only a guise for the external author.

Throughout the narrative, Semprun borrows from his own biography and from his earlier works: *Heidi-Long-Legs*, the blonde hostess of the tourist bus, is borrowed from the air hostess of *La Deuxième Mort*, Heidi Grühl, and this earlier spy novel finds itself, in English translation (a double of the original French), 'entre les mains [de Fabienne], rue des Bourdonnais, ce jour de printemps où elle attendait Carlos',<sup>677</sup> with extracts directly quoted from the English translation.<sup>678</sup> The transcription of Artigas' memories, recorded by Anna-Lise, are borrowed from the biography of Semprun and repeated in the later *Adieu*,<sup>679</sup> while Artigas and Carlos are themselves pseudonyms from Semprun's time in the PCE. Semprun's persistent intrusion into the narrative through self-reference to Egri's *Survie et réinterprétation* in which *Le Grand Voyage* is analysed, and Claude-Edmonde Magny's *Lettre sur le pouvoir d'écrire*, addressed 'à Jorge de ...'<sup>680</sup> provide a biographical intratext that ricochets the meaning of the narrative backwards and forwards in time, and across the boundaries of reality and fiction. This incestuous behaviour consumes the narrative, and can be seen even in the linguistic devices employed in the text. A narrative that 'changea plusieurs fois de langue, comme un serpent change de peau, ayant hésité longtemps entre l'espagnol et le français',<sup>681</sup> *L'Algarabie*'s code-switching between French and Spanish – often elaborated upon by the narrator – creates a further intratext within each word.<sup>682</sup> Nothing in the narrative is original or singular, but always already there, doubled, twinned, a trace of a trace.

The intertextual structure of narrative is, for Roland Barthes following Kristeva, precisely what gives it 'texture': 'le texte étant un "voile" derrière lequel il fallait aller chercher la vérité, le message réel, bref le *sens* [original italics]'.<sup>683</sup> Semprun's intertextual play in *L'Algarabie* (and *La Montagne*) is only an elaborate performance of a characteristic present in all texts by all authors:

Tout texte est un intertexte; d'autres textes sont présents en lui, à des niveaux variables, sous des formes plus ou moins reconnaissables: les textes de la culture antérieure et ceux de la culture environnante; tout texte est un tissu de citations révolues. [...] Il y a toujours du langage avant le texte et autour de lui. L'intertextualité,

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<sup>676</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 541.

<sup>677</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 303.

<sup>678</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 305.

<sup>679</sup> This provides a further intertextual link to Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* through the repetition of the well-known opening passage: 'Je me suis couché de bonne heure [Original italics].' Semprun, *L'Algarabie*, 48 ; *Adieu*, 50.

<sup>680</sup> See *L'Algarabie*, 38; 175.

<sup>681</sup> *Adieu*, 56.

<sup>682</sup> See *L'Algarabie*, 44-45; 125.

<sup>683</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Théorie du texte', 6.

condition de tout texte, quel qu'il soit, ne se réduit évidemment pas à un problème de sources ou d'influences; l'intertexte est un champ général de formules anonymes, dont l'origine est rarement réparable, de citations inconscients ou automatiques, données sans guillemets.<sup>684</sup>

Every text is already a doubled trace: at once a trace of the society, period, language, and culture in which it was created, and a trace of the society, period, language, and culture in which it is read. The text itself, therefore, as a self-sufficient or enclosed system, does not exist, and cannot exist. The narrative takes on 'le statut non d'une *reproduction*, mais d'une *productivité* [original italics]',<sup>685</sup> constructed negatively through the differential relations between textual mirror images. This network of intertextual traces produces the narrative, and yet, at the same time, destroys it. Through constant repetition and return, the narrative is literally under erasure, *sous rature*. Every text is always already an intertext, a trace of a trace, the ineradicable mark of absence. At the centre of Semprun's works there is no original trace, no 'archi-trace',<sup>686</sup> so that each work marks nothing but its own inexistence, its own destruction; its own absence. Narrative is transported back and forwards in time, across boundaries of place and reality, because the linguistic trace is never *there*, it has never been *there*, but was *always already there*.

The incestuous narrative consumes itself, disappearing into its own absence, undermined by the network of endless mirror images and traces, as if trapped within the infinite regress between two mirrors. Text is the visible in-visible, a present mark of absence that begins to demonstrate how the incestuous narrative is inherently transgressive, sublimating the boundaries of absence and presence, self and other, reality and fiction. The text, like language, is built upon absence, constructed around the arbitrary but dynamic exchange of references that compensate for the essential absence of an infallible signifier. Following Saussure, language is a differential relationship between signs, whereby meaning is established only through difference to all other signs, marked intrinsically by what it is *not*:

For Saussure, no sign is ever simply 'present' in time or space – whereby it exists in, or refers only to, itself – because it cannot function without implicitly referring to other signs which are, thus, not simply spatially or temporally 'absent' either. In this sense, we might conclude that every sign is stratified – spaced out – in the sense that its meaning is always dependent on the traces of other signs that differ from it in both space and time.<sup>687</sup>

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<sup>684</sup> Barthes, 'Théorie du texte', 6.

<sup>685</sup> Barthes, 'Théorie du texte', 6.

<sup>686</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 90.

<sup>687</sup> Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology*, 69-70.

Semprun manipulates the inherent absence of language – the Lacanian *nom-du-père* – to obscure the endless echo of silence that resonates throughout his narratives. *L'Algarabie* employs a chaotic linguistic structure that disturbs the binary between signified and signifier, demonstrating how narrative is always under erasure, that it is never really there, but always absent, unwritten. Displacing the *nom-du-père* through anarchic linguistic form, Semprun draws the paternal figure into the centre of narrative, but *as an absence*. Disrupting the conventional strategies of narrative, absence begins to take precedence over presence, so that the text becomes its own mirror image, a shadow or double of its own inexistence. Semprun's palimpsestic anti-narratives display the exilic tension between inside and outside or absence and presence, and demonstrate the fragility of the authorial voice.

*L'Algarabie* is scattered with italicized fonts, a lack of punctuation, and broken parentheses. Artigas' memories, initially recorded by Anna-Lise, are transcribed in their spoken format, without punctuation, stumbling and stuttering over certain words. They are often interrupted by direct address to the young woman,<sup>688</sup> or supplemented by long, Rabelaisian sentences,<sup>689</sup> unexpected additional italicized comments from the/a narrator,<sup>690</sup> or third person address to 'le Narrateur',<sup>691</sup> provoking a sensation of errant, unsecured linguistic form. The unconventional use of parentheses exemplifies this point, as their abundant use varies dramatically from one instance to another. In some cases they act simply as an extension of the narrative, elaborating on an idea or event, for example: 'Le soleil venait de franchir, à l'est-sud-est, la limite des toits qui bordaient l'espace verdoyant de ce jardin récollet. (Mais non! D'où lui vient ce mot? [...]).'<sup>692</sup> Used as a means of narrative interruption and elaboration on the idea of the origin of a certain word, when the narrative proper begins again, the parentheses are clearly not integral to the plot, and the text can continue around them. In line with their most common usage, the inclusion or exclusion of the parenthetical text has no fundamental impact upon the flow of the narrative. In other places, the parentheses have a similar objective to expand and elaborate, but their appearance causes the text to jar or slip, and the narrative stream prior to the parentheses cannot be simply picked up again but must be reiterated:

Car 'la *Pepa*', qui se chantait sur un air de *chotis*... tout à fait voisin de celui d'une polka, mais au rythme un peu plus lent, 'la *Pepa*', donc (qui n'est autre chose que le féminin du diminutif Pepe du prénom José...) mais la *Pepa*, donc...<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>688</sup> For example *L'Algarabie*, 48-51; 557-60.

<sup>689</sup> For example *L'Algarabie*, 228-31; 361-64.

<sup>690</sup> For example *L'Algarabie*, 303.

<sup>691</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 124.

<sup>692</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 128; 229-31.

<sup>693</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 200-01; see also 101-02.

The removal of the parentheses would lead to non-sense of the narrative. In this case, the parentheses actually hamper the flow of the text, causing the narrator to have to move backwards – to reiterate – in order to continue and move forward. At other times, the parentheses are longer than the paragraph or sentence they elaborate, unsettling the balance of importance and reader attention,<sup>694</sup> and at other times parenthetical remarks persistently comment upon the text proper, appearing as an echo or whisper.<sup>695</sup> In *L'Algarabie*, these parenthetical structures exaggerate the sense of displacement that is at the core of the text. For Artigas, desperate to return home but caught up in the devastation of the Z.U.P., the exceptional use of parentheses – and their sheer frequency across the text – demonstrates the linguistic distresses of bilingualism and exile, a stylistic device that distorts the conventions of absence and presence.

The parenthetical ellipsis shifts narrative interest: diverging from the original comment or remark they displace or exile a portion of the text. In *Shifting Ground*, Ugarte writes that:

Lengthy parenthetical interruptions are in fact among the autobiography's most dominant stylistic plots, so much so that at times the inner narrative erases the outer one, questioning its own insignificance. [...] Exilic parentheses also question the function and feasibility of the closing marker (the end parenthesis), for the continuation of the outer structure cannot proceed as if the interruption never took place.<sup>696</sup>

Parentheses interrupt the fluidity of the narrative, just as the experience of exile interrupted the fluidity of the author's life, demonstrating an inverted manner of reading the text. Indeed, in a number of cases, the most important pieces of information are enclosed within a pair of parentheses: the discovery of Carlos' incest with his aunt Inès, the event that exposes his incest with Mercédès as a repetition, is not only relegated to the final pages of the narrative, but also undermined by its enclosure within parentheses. The same effect is produced when Anna-Lise recounts her own trip to Ascona in search of more information on Artigas, a trip that will take place many years after the present of narration:

Anna-Lise le regarde attentivement.

(Plus tard, [...]) [Original formatting.]<sup>697</sup>

The parentheses start where narrative time stops and when they end the narrative recommences fluidly. Yet, within the space of these parentheses – over ten pages – the narrator is temporally and spatially displaced. Within these grammatical structures, the exiled author is able to manipulate the text in order to travel freely across the boundaries of linguistic

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<sup>694</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 229-31; 545-56.

<sup>695</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 428.

<sup>696</sup> Ugarte, *Shifting Ground*, 104-05.

<sup>697</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 545.

structures. Representing a visual wall, parentheses reflect the borders of an exile's life, and their use, as Ugarte suggests, is important and unusual precisely because they discretely support the external text. Parentheses are the mark(s) of the fragile intratextual structure of an exile's life and text, where that which is enclosed – unspoken and displaced – vies for attention with the outer narrative. Semprun's use of parentheses is intimately incestuous: the grammatical enclosure is a visual depiction of endogamy, doubled and reflected through the twin structure of the marks. The inner text – the incestuous family – both supports and negates the external text, reflecting the exilic tension between inside and outside, as if at any moment the parentheses could burst, flooding the narrative with nefarious words.

The marginality of the exile is reflected in the quivering tension of these parentheses, with the text always on the borders of presence and absence, walled in but constantly pushing back against these boundaries, interminably extending the linguistic potential of enclosure. Parentheses visually represent the exile's desire to transgress the limits and boundaries that infringe upon his freedom and movement. They are the grammatical mark of exile par excellence, placing the exile and his speech within a textual refugee camp where he is both present and absent, visible and invisible, spoken and silenced: avisual. The desire to transgress the boundaries of these parentheses – to incorporate the inner text equally with the outer text – demonstrates intratextuality on a minute scale. Intratext and intertext, like incest, are transgressive, because they cross the established boundaries of the text, both as a physical structure and as a chronological narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. For Semprun, his uses of intertext in all its forms, including the vanguard use of parentheses, is a transgressive act that fights back against the imposed silences of post-war Spain. The liminal voice of the exile, unheard and often unacknowledged, breaks through the boundaries of text in a performance of resistance and antagonism. As Ricard Vinyes gallantly claimed:

I am ever more convinced that the nucleus of resistance, of democratic struggles, of opposition, is transgression, that is, the breaking of the law and of rules that occurs when one becomes aware of the existence of an oppressive situation, of an injustice... That is why I believe that the nucleus of a transmissible memory is transgression, because, inasmuch as it is an uprising against injustice, it unites past and present.<sup>698</sup>

Writing *of* incest and writing *as* incest perform transgressive acts that resist the regimented structure of patriarchal Symbolic order. Incest and intertext literally unhouse or decentre the exile, freeing him from linguistic structure and order, permitting an unrivalled narrative creativity.

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<sup>698</sup> Ricard Vinyes quoted in Semilla Durán, 'A Mirror of History: The Self and Its Reflections in Jorge Semprún Oeuvre. *Veinte años y un día: Duality and Vertigo*', in *A Critical Companion*, ed. by Ferrán and Herrmann, 163.

For Lacan, building on the work of Saussure, language is structured according to the Symbolic order, ultimately controlled by the *nom-du-père*, which represents not simply the incitement and maintenance of the incest taboo, but ‘the origin and ubiquitous condition of human language’.<sup>699</sup> Patriarchy and the father, actively rejected by Semprun throughout his corpus, can now be confronted through the very fibres of his texts: in language itself. These incestuous narratives, the writing *of* and *as* incest, attack patriarchal power by disrupting the Symbolic order that governs language, disjoining the arbitrary relationship between signified and signifier. The text is forced into a liminal *non-lieu* that directly reflects the status of the exile, and is liberated from paternal Symbolic structure. Intertext, borrowing the voice of an other, draws reader attention to what hides behind these disembodied references, to what one’s own voice was unable or unwilling to say, and what cannot be crafted into narrative form. Semprun’s texts reveal invisible gaps that lie beyond the Symbolic process and are ‘to be found in the mental as well as in the material world: a trauma, for example, is as intractable and unsymbolizable as objects in their materiality’.<sup>700</sup> Tidd argued that Semprun’s extensive use of citations and intertextual references caused a ‘self-dissolution [...] through ventriloquism – as if he seeks to become present by speaking the words and thoughts of another’.<sup>701</sup> Through this intertextual and bilingual ventriloquism, Semprun is able to dissolve the ‘self-other binary [and] enact the narrator’s repeated disappearance from the testimonial text, in a form of textual nomadism which performs his physical and political exile’.<sup>702</sup> In other words, in the absence of a reliable voice of his own, Semprun defers to the voices of others, silencing his own narrative even as he writes. To testify to the temporal and spatial *non-lieu* of exile, Semprun uses narrative ventriloquism to overcome absence and silence, borrowing the voice of a patriarchal and valued narrative figure. Ventriloquism disguises gaps in testimony; by adopting the voice of the other, the voice of the patriarchy, Semprun speaks in the only way he knows how, and with the only voice that will be heard. Tidd claims that Semprun speaks from a narrative position determined by the phallogocentric economy of patriarchy, and it is true that he does, but because it is ultimately *the only position from which to speak*.

In *Vingt ans*, the narrative closes with Isabel’s words to Lorenzo: “‘Adieu, mon amour, adieu jusqu’à la mort...’”.<sup>703</sup> *Entre guillemets*, this closing line is a mark of the voice of the other, extending forward through the ellipsis into a potential future. Lorenzo and Isabel’s twin relationship prevented either from assuming a full and autonomous role in the narrative, and

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<sup>699</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 13.

<sup>700</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 94.

<sup>701</sup> Ursula Tidd, ‘Living Among the Ruins of Memory and Language: Jorge Semprun and Testimony’, in *The Future of Testimony: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Witnessing*, ed. by Jane Kilby and Anthony Rowland (London: Routledge, 2014), 204.

<sup>702</sup> Tidd, ‘Living Among the Ruins of Memory and Language’, 204.

<sup>703</sup> *Vingt ans*, 414.

these words, borrowed from an external voice, are an intertextual link to the absence that underpins their existence and the stability of the narrative altogether. This external voice demonstrates how narrative is always under erasure, how it is not in itself stable or authoritarian but shot through with holes, with absence and silence. Who speaks? Whose voice emerges in this closing line? In the final section of this chapter, language and the incest taboo – two fundamentals of civilized society – are drawn into parallel. Both are transgressed, in Semprun's works, to demonstrate a subversive attack upon the primacy of the phallic signifier, but both rely upon the Symbolic function of the *nom-du-père*. Through transgression, Semprun's narratives break down, revealing the fragility of narrative and memory.

### Keeping it in the Family

*We believe that there is not a taboo against incest; merely against speaking about it.*

-Toni McNaron and Yarrow Morgan, *Voices in the Night: Women Speaking about Incest*.

The paternal figure is both a condition of the taboo *and* of incest, so that writing incest is not, in itself, an attack upon the patriarchal structure. Rather, Semprun's transgressive texts resist the oppressive imposition of patriarchy because incestuous writing disjoins language and narrative, rupturing the arbitrary relationships between signified and signifier or between word and meaning, provoking unmediated creativity and reinvention. The belief that bilingual exiles exhibit greater freedom in their narratives (as argued by Miletic and Steiner respectively) can be attributed to the emancipation of the relationship between signifier and signified, a disturbance that arises when 'the missing Name-of-the-Father leaves a hole in the symbolic universe'.<sup>704</sup> Bowie argues that foreclosure [*forclusion* (Lacan); *Verwerfung* (Freud)] of the *nom-du-père* 'is a violent refusal of symbolization and its effects are catastrophic'.<sup>705</sup> He claims that absence of the *nom-du-père* leaves the subject deluded and unable to comprehend the world:

The Name-of-the-Father is the 'paternal metaphor' that inheres in symbolization and thereby potentiates the metaphorical process as a whole; and it is an essential point of anchorage for the subject. Without it, metaphor, in the form of 'voices' and visual hallucinations, comes at the subject from without, from a 'Real' that is perfectly delusional yet cruelly concrete in its impact.<sup>706</sup>

The resulting narrative is not only imaginative and inventive, but 'psychotic'.<sup>707</sup> Transgressing the boundaries of different texts and of reality and fiction, Semprun's works transgress the

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<sup>704</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 109.

<sup>705</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 107.

<sup>706</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 109.

<sup>707</sup> Bowie, *Lacan*, 109.

foundations of right and wrong, presence and absence, so that ventriloquism – substituting the unspeakable gaps or holes of the Symbolic order – is perhaps rather hallucination. The foreclosure of the *nom-du-père* results in the fabric of the subject's reality being ripped apart, so that no meaningful Symbolic sense can be made of experience. The subject resorts to psychotic delusion and hallucination to overcome his inability to comprehend reality. *Vingt ans* and *L'Algarabie* demonstrate the hallucinatory and delusional effects of the foreclosed *nom-du-père* through intertextual and intratextual overlays that provoke doubts over the veracity and validity of the narrated events. Semprun's narratives do not simply transgress the incest taboo; they completely rupture the significance of the original sin, and the binaries between right and wrong or absence and presence, casting doubt over the infallibility of memory and language. Through incest, Semprun demonstrates how history and memory are subject to constant revision and reinterpretation, exposing the subjectivity of the past. Language and incest demonstrate that spectres of patriarchy are neither absent nor present, but rather are the paradoxical *absence of presence*.

*Vingt ans* initially appears to present an artistic intertext as *La Montagne* had done before it. Another postcard, this time a black and white reproduction of Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith et Holopherne* from the Capodimonte in Naples,<sup>708</sup> reappears throughout the text. The postcard is an intertextual reproduction of both the Biblical story of Judith and the fantasized *mise en abîme* revenge of the raped artist. The existence of the original postcard is troubled by the appearance of a second, sent by Lorenzo to his mother from the Uffizi gallery in Florence, depicting the second draft of the same painting by Gentileschi.<sup>709</sup> Through a short exchange in which Lorenzo and Mercedes quibble over the colour of Judith's dress in the canvas – a discussion that highlights the existence of more than one painting – they demonstrate how repetitions or mirror images both are and are not the same as the original. The entire plot of *Vingt ans* is a hall of mirrors, as the proliferation of narrative voices repeat and retell various stories, always as different versions of the same event. The death and reburial of José María, the event at the centre of the narrative, is retold throughout the text, but always slightly differently. Raquel, speaking for Mercedes in interview with Michael Leidson, relays the death as if she 'récitait un texte déjà écrit, comme un acteur qui récite son rôle'.<sup>710</sup> Of course, this version must be conveyed to a male narrator, Federico Sánchez, who retells it in his own words,<sup>711</sup> imposing a distance between the event and its dual presentation. Satur, compared to Faulkner in her ability to narrate, similarly relates to Leidson her own version of events, again relayed to Sánchez, while Domingo Dominguín tells his version to a narrator who 'ne s'appelle

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<sup>708</sup> *Vingt ans*, 67.

<sup>709</sup> *Vingt ans*, 369.

<sup>710</sup> *Vingt ans*, 367.

<sup>711</sup> *Vingt ans*, 53.

plus Larrea, ni Artigas, ni même Federico Sánchez'.<sup>712</sup> The narrative itself is constructed upon these erratic retellings of a singular event, overlaying conflicting and variable intratextual testimonies.

Indeed, two further versions are added, the first by Eloy Estrada and the second by Lorenzo, who both recount testimony by omission. Estrada narrates a convenient gap in his memory, a symptom of his attempt to deny his own role in the assassination,<sup>713</sup> and Lorenzo, whose lack of memory is due to circumstance as he was not born at the time of his father's death, has nonetheless taken on this story as his own, hastened by his role in the annual reenactment:

Il pourrait désormais raconter comment son père était sorti de la maison après avoir entendu la voix de Mayoral, complètement paniquée, pour voir s'approcher la furieuse expédition des journaliers de Quismondo. Et il pourrait le raconter car, tout au long de son enfance, il n'avait cessé d'écouter, avec une certaine frayeur, les récits terrifiants, interminables, de cette mort ancienne.<sup>714</sup>

Lorenzo's knowledge of his father's death highlights the *trou* of transgenerational memory. His is not a knowledge as such, something that can be forgotten, but rather something that was never there in the first place: an absence, a non-memory. Nevertheless, this empty memory still contributes to the duplication of narrative voices that eclipse the cohesion of the text, sending it ricocheting between characters, times, and places, with no single and defined retelling isolated and highlighted as the priority or original version of José María's death. Each voice becomes an intratext for the next, so that each version is laid upon the previous, recreating Langer's perpetual palimpsest. Yet, unlike the narrative back and forth of *Le Grand Voyage*, which contributed to the enhancement of meaning, here the overlapping voices begin to interrupt one another, clouding reader comprehension of the event: was Eloy there or not? Was it an assassination or a mistake? Who pulled the trigger? Set twenty years after the original event, doubts begin to creep into the narrative about the cohesion of the text and of the voices, highlighted further through the duplicitous retelling of the incest between Isabel and Lorenzo.

Satur, speaking to Leidson, recounts how, at eighteen years old, the twins fell in love with one another and consummated their relationship. Discovering their incest, Mercedes attempts to keep them apart but only succeeds in driving them closer together, towards a mutual suicide. However, the narrative proper closes with Isabel's triumphant departure 'en

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<sup>712</sup> *Vingt ans*, 334.

<sup>713</sup> *Vingt ans*, 28.

<sup>714</sup> *Vingt ans*, 227-28. This sense of inter- or trans-generational memory, where memory is passed down through gaps and absences returns us to Hirsch's concept of postmemory, Raczymow's *mémoire trouée*, and Abraham and Torok's *théorie du fantôme*, as seen in Chapter One.

Angleterre, aux États-Unis, n'importe où',<sup>715</sup> breaking the repetitions of fate and the curse of the family. The reader is presented with two versions, and while the first version, by Satur, is thrown into disrepute by Leidson, who refers to it, *in conversation with Lorenzo*, as an invention or a lie, it is this version that has taken precedence across Semprunian analysis. Does the incest happen or not? Do the twins live or die? In a further intratextual overlap, the reader must question the entire narrative as a singular and stable text, perforated by irregularities and uncertainties. Satur's dialogue with Leidson opens with a cleverly disguised but confusing change in location:

Moi, j'ai toujours raconté cette histoire comme si elle avait eu lieu dans une autre propriété, je ne sais pas pourquoi, peut-être pour ne pas raviver le mauvais œil, la malédiction des Avendaño, mais tout s'est passé ici, à La Companza...<sup>716</sup>

Again claiming that she was born in the property, Satur's account is this time corroborated by the unnamed narrator, who asserts that he spent time at La Companza – up until now identified as the home of the Dominguín family – towards the end of the 1950s in the presence of Satur, who 'se trouvait déjà dans la propriété avant la guerre, notre guerre'.<sup>717</sup> This detail is small but significant: the reader can no longer be sure whether the events of the narrative – and primarily the death of José María – took place at La Maestranza or La Companza, whether the Avendaño family or Dominguín family were involved, or even whether the events took place at all. The text is shot through with holes and an absence of resolution, demonstrating the failures of reconciliation and restoration after the Civil War. No single, state-sanctioned narrative can be identified, no cohesive univocal perspective, but rather a multiplicity of subjective individual voices, each one with a distinct interpretation and memory of the past. These numerous hallucinatory narratives reflect the fragility of memory. The past is easily manipulated, subject to revision and reinterpretation, with different voices and opinions creating confusing noises and resisting resolution. For the exile, and even for the postgeneration of the Holocaust, the subject's speaking position is marginal, in a liminal *non-lieu*, whereby his memories are particularly susceptible to manipulation, negated and overpowered by those who speak from the experience itself. Transmitting a story that is central, traumatic, and significant – both the death of José María and the incest – *Vingt ans* nonetheless demonstrates how this story is *not known*: a non-memory, an absence, as every event is subject to dispute, revision, and denial.

The doubts over the event of incest raised in *Vingt ans* create an unlikely parallel between the pan-national and panhistorical transgression of the incest taboo and Semprun's own temporally and spatially specific experiences of exile and Buchenwald. Casting doubt over

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<sup>715</sup> *Vingt ans*, 414.

<sup>716</sup> *Vingt ans*, 350.

<sup>717</sup> *Vingt ans*, 335.

the events in the narrative, Semprun suggests the wider implications of memory and testimony that are drawn from his works, and particularly their vulnerability to interrogation and denial. While incest seems like a minor theme in Semprun's works (particularly when we consider that it has no genuine biographical referent), it is symptomatic of the same problems that afflict the more obvious and historically based areas of his work. The intimate space of incestuous relationships is a significant move away from the traditional associations made between Semprun's works and the events of the Holocaust, exile, and Communism, yet all these events have been subject to the same scrutiny and manipulation across history. In her comparative readings of incest and the Holocaust, Janet Walker identifies key similarities and differences between the two traumatic events:

Cases of incest surely differ from cases of wartime trauma in their respective histories, specification, and sociopolitical import. This is why incest and the Holocaust would seem incompatible subjects for a single book. Whereas incest is generally taken to be familial and private, the Holocaust was sociopolitical and public; [...] and whereas incest is pan-national and panhistorical, the Holocaust was nationally and historically specific.<sup>718</sup>

And yet, she argues that both suffer from the same fierce accusations of annihilated witnessing and secrecy:

Both incest and the Holocaust have been subject to furious denial by perpetrators and other individuals and by highly organized groups such as the False Memory Syndrome Foundation and the Committee for Historical Review. Incest and the Holocaust are vulnerable to this kind of concerted denial because of their unfathomability, their unjustifiability, and the threat they pose to the politics of patriarchy and anti-Semitism respectively.<sup>719</sup>

False memory syndrome creates a final intertext through which to read *Vingt ans*. The reader does not know exactly what happens in the narrative and this persistent doubt and proliferation of lost voices subjects the work to constant reappraisal and rereading. Semprun plays with the delusional and hallucinatory effects of the absent *nom-du-père* in order to demonstrate how his own memories are subject to revision and insecurity. Mirroring Charlotte Delbo's opening claim in *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, 'Aujourd'hui, je ne suis pas sûre que ce que j'ai écrit soit vrai, je suis sûre que c'est véridique',<sup>720</sup> Semprun's manipulation of these narratives demonstrates how his memories may not be entirely truthful, and his testimony may not be completely accurate, but his texts provide the much needed agent of his own subjective

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<sup>718</sup> Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), xix-xx.

<sup>719</sup> Walker, *Trauma Cinema*, xxi.

<sup>720</sup> Charlotte Delbo, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1970), 7.

voice. In many ways, Semprun's narration of his own self-doubt provides a clever double bluff for those who would like to discredit his testimony, since the reader is advised in advance that the narratives are not based purely in historical fact. Memory is fallible, it is subject to reinterpretation and revision, but it is no less true despite these weaknesses: Semprun's works may not conform to the accuracies of historical fact, but they demonstrate historical truth.<sup>721</sup> *Vingt ans* raises doubts over the event of incest between the twins, but through these questions it provides a valuable insight into the very private and subjective experiences of memory and testimony. In *L'Algarabie*, a similar sense of intratextual hallucination is set up, provoking questions and doubts, and exposing the fragility of memory and narrative.

The incest between Artigas and Perséphone is only revealed in the penultimate chapter. In the moments leading up to Artigas' death, he is exposed as Perséphone's father, retrospectively implicating their sexual relationship as incestuous. In the case of incest between Oedipus and Jocasta, it was the discovery of the parental bond that turned a happy marriage into a sinful transgression; for Artigas and Perséphone too, it was only sex until it was incest. The small detail of paternal identity comes to retrospectively alter the entire structure and moral compass of the narrative. Again, Semprun parodies the questions raised by revisionists, calling for *L'Algarabie* to be reread in light of this new information which, despite seeming insignificant in theory, is colossal in practice and in the effects wrought on the text. But it is Artigas' response to this new information that causes greater consternation for the reader, since he appears to experience no guilt or regret over his unfortunate actions. Ruiz's revelation to Artigas about his paternity has no effect upon the protagonist: three times the narrator repeats the news of their incestuous relationship, and three times the narrator must interrupt the flow of the narrative: Artigas isn't thinking about that.<sup>722</sup> In truth, Artigas appears entirely disinterested by the revelations of incest or even of his new-found paternity of the twins, thinking instead of a sodomitic encounter with Rose Beude only hours earlier. To an extent, his disinterest can be justified by the reassuring knowledge that their relationship was never consummated,<sup>723</sup> yet *something* happened, and Rudhardt's work views incest as a desire, rather than the successful consummation of an act.<sup>724</sup> Artigas' disinterest in his cultural and moral transgression seems out of place, but it acutely represents the subjectivity of historical memory. The father figure does not view his retroactive incest as a transgression, ignoring the revelation of paternity in order to avoid confrontation with the issue. Artigas does not review

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<sup>721</sup> Laub's explanation of a survivor witness testifying to chimneys blown up in Auschwitz as an act of resistance highlights the difficulties of historical accuracy in memory. See Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 59-60.

<sup>722</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 566; 569; 574.

<sup>723</sup> *L'Algarabie*, 574.

<sup>724</sup> See Rudhardt, 'De l'inceste', 731-64.

the content of the narrative in the same way that the reader now does, justifying his own actions through a subjective lens that exempts him from guilt and recrimination: he did not know in the past, and thus in the present he is excused. This is a nod to the subjective interpretation of history and of the past: how do we see the past? How do we see the narrative of the past? How do we see our own actions?

Words can be misconstrued and misinterpreted, and are eternally vulnerable to misunderstanding and misuse in the wrong hands. We can all see, read, or hear the same thing and yet have entirely different versions of it, understanding and perceiving it in a completely dissimilar manner. Words and their meanings are always subject to change: since their relationship is only constructed negatively – defined by what they are *not* – their bond can be manipulated, gradually altering over time. Semprun exploits the fragility of language in order to demonstrate how the meaning of history changes over time, and is always vulnerable to falsification. Like language, right and wrong may be two fundamentally disparate concepts, but they too are only constructed negatively: what is wrong is only wrong because it is not right, and what is right now may not have been right several centuries ago. Incest, on the other hand, is believed to transcend this distinction: as the original sin, the incest taboo is an assumed ‘universal’ constant. But Artigas’ disregard for his own contravention of the incest taboo starts to shake the foundations of this unambiguous concept, placing a question mark over its existence in the first place. Semprun does not simply transgress the incest taboo but undoes the boundaries of transgressable prohibition: there can be no transgression if there is nothing to transgress. Through this unravelling of incest and the incest taboo Semprun challenges the structure of patriarchal order, releasing tradition and convention from the arbitrary construction of the *nom-du-père*. The Z.U.P., as a society, embodies the *non-lieu* of boundless confusion, with no fixed language, no structure or order, and no ruling party; it is the anti-Lacanian economy of Semprun’s elimination of the father. Negating the Symbolic order, *L’Algarabie* is the untransgressable (non-)site where the speakable meets the unspeakable, the phantomatic milieu of the ‘entre deux’,<sup>725</sup> between two mirrors.

*L’Algarabie*’s lawless, unstructured text demonstrates how the unbounded author is able to write freely once he has been liberated from conventional boundaries of acceptability, realism, and credibility: the Symbolic order of the *nom-du-père*. The disadvantage, of course, is that the Z.U.P., as a model of this anti-Lacanian, anti-Symbolic dis-Order, is also a perfect dystopian nightmare. The sense of community is lost, as warring factions battle on the lawless streets, prostitution and rape are rife and even language falls into an anonymous *sabir*, somewhere between French and Spanish. As an anti-Lacanian text, *L’Algarabie* is not so much

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<sup>725</sup> Raczymow, ‘La Mémoire trouée’, 180.

phallogocentric, as it stands accused, but anti-phallic. With the loss of the primary signifier of difference, the differential structure of language collapses back into primitive disarray, as Ellmann writes:

As signifier of the difference between the sexes, the phallus comes to stand for all the differences that structure the symbolic order. [...] In other words, the phallus is the kingpin in the bowling alley of signification: knock it over and all the other signs come tumbling down.<sup>726</sup>

The phallus, symbol of the paternal figure and the patriarchal structure, is displaced, leaving the Z.U.P., and the narrative, in the midst of a chaotic resistance to meaning and comprehension. The absence of difference throughout the narrative, exemplified by the fluid exchanges between Semprun, *le Narrateur*, Artigas, Carlos, and Anna-Lise, means that the elimination of the Symbolic order brings with it a dissolution of all distinction between self and other, a return to the Imaginary or Mirror stage. Incestuous writing absolves the author of a paternal figure, but *L'Algarabie's* hallucinatory ventriloquism demonstrates the twin loss of independent selfhood triggered by the negation of the *nom-du-père*. The Symbolic order has been ruptured, shot through with holes, no longer the foundation of a cohesive language and structure, but overwhelmed by the unrestrained hysterical voices of others. The narrative voice, an anti-phallic voice, is not singular or objective, but reflects a multitude of unresolved and conflicting cries. Incestuous narrative, like cryptonymy, represents the radical designification of language in order to absolve the author of writing the unwriteable. Incest demonstrates a process of un-writing, a process that undermines patriarchy and paternity by unravelling the structures of Symbolic order. Un-writing is essentially a process of writing *other than* what is written, of writing beyond language, of writing absence. The anti-phallic narrative is a narrative of absence: despite the presentation of text, words, and signs, the narrative presents *in the place of meaning* confusion, hallucination, and psychosis. Despite the overt and verbose prose of Semprun's works, his narratives present absence, the designification of language, the silence between words and meanings, the hole [*trou*] in the Symbolic order.

For Lévi-Strauss, language and exogamy were not so different, for the two systems were founded upon the exchange of signs or women,<sup>727</sup> in order to encourage 'la communication avec autrui, et l'intégration du groupe'.<sup>728</sup> Incestuous narrative is therefore a narrative of silence, one that negates communication and exchange, that misuses words and women. The un-written narrative is under erasure; it is not constructed according to an arbitrary system of exchange, but as a mirror image, a repetition or reflection, an endogamic

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<sup>726</sup> Ellmann, introduction, 19.

<sup>727</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires*, 568-69.

<sup>728</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires*, 565.

echo that is *toujours-déjà-là*. Incestuous narrative returns to a pre-Symbolic register, precisely to the Lacanian Mirror stage, an order of reciprocity and reflection, where the individual is only the continuation of an other, where self and other cannot be distinguished. Before language, before the prohibition of incest, before the *nom-du-père*, Semprun's narratives return to a world in which the imposition of the Symbolic father has not yet taken place. Incestuous narrative challenges patriarchal and paternal authority, but it also challenges independent selfhood and the Symbolic structures of the *nom-du-père*. The pre-Symbolic text enables Semprun to challenge the authority of the paternal figure, to negate the imposition of the *nom-du-père*, but it is a self-destructive narrative. The *nom-du-père* is what establishes alterity and autonomy; without this, the individual precludes his own entry into the Symbolic and thus his own identity. Un-writing is a process of self-erasure, an incestuous autophagy through which the author disappears into the infinite regress between two mirrors. Semprun disappears into the mirror image of his own pre-Symbolic text, literally writing himself out of existence: negating the *nom-du-père*, he cannot exist because there is no structure in which to exist. Through incestuous narrative, Semprun is reduced to a trace, a phantom, a spectre of patriarchy.

### **Conclusion: Spectres of Patriarchy**

*To tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns, although never as a presence or to the present. Ghosts return via narratives, and come back, again and again, across centuries, every time a tale is unfolded.*

-Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature*.

Incest is not the central feature of any of Semprun's narratives: the plots of *L'Algarabie*, *La Montagne*, and *Vingt ans* would function no less effectively or persuasively without the use of incestuous relations between characters. Yet reading incest enables the narrative to be decentred, to be re-read obliquely through a transgressive cultural, moral, and linguistic code that radically transforms the structure and content of literature. This methodological strategy reveals, in each case, the manipulation of literary incest as a means to obscure an originary absence: individual identity, creative innovation, even the absence of historical truth or fact. Incestuous writing constructs a familial fortress designed to compensate for the losses of exile, identity, memory, and history; but it is purely illusory, phantomatic, creating a hall of mirrors, a non-site [sight] of identity and memory that only diverts attention away from an ungraspable absence. At the centre of Semprun's narratives is a haunting absence that drives the construction of his text, promoted by a desperate desire to both reveal and yet simultaneously

to conceal this silent *trou*. Language is the radical response to silence, a textual counterbalance to the unspeakability of a haunting absence.

Undoing conventional binaries and transgressing taboos, incestuous writing:

Is a useful discursive strategy for opening up and reconceptualizing the dynamics of public power and private speechlessness [that] involves a blurring of the culturally sanctioned place given to a speaking subject, usually a paternal figure, with the place of a devalued and objectified person.<sup>729</sup>

Literary incest provides a framework for the decentralisation of the narrative voice that helps to demonstrate and understand 'how past histories are effaced and how these silenced narratives are recovered'.<sup>730</sup> And yet, Semprun's incestuous narratives are nonetheless haunted by a central absence or *trou* that cannot be given shape, that persists despite (or rather because of) these incestuous relations. Jean Renvoize writes that 'the secret of incest tightens bonds rather than loosens them; the family becomes even more cemented together as a result of sexual abuse',<sup>731</sup> so that incest acts to preserve a family secret. It is this family secret that haunts Semprun's works as a transgenerational phantom, an unspeakable silence that cannot be realised or put into words but that was *always already there*. Indeed, as Maisch concludes in his study of incest:

In complete opposition to the generally held attitudes and notions which are expressed in the motivation behind the law, most recent empirical surveys come to the conclusion that incest is not a cause but a symptom or result of a family whose inner order was as a rule already disturbed before the offence.<sup>732</sup>

Literary incest is the result of an inherited familial disturbance that seeps into narrative as an amorphous and silent phantom, a family secret handed down from father to son.

The family secret, in Semprun's works, relates to something that is unknown, unseen, something that is cryptic, and something that is, more importantly, perhaps not kept secret *by* the author, but kept secret *from* him. Abraham and Torok's theory of encryption preserved a transgenerational phantom within the psyche of the subject; a phantom not as a phantasmatic reminder of a lost love object, but 'les lacunes laissées en nous par les secrets des autres'.<sup>733</sup>

On appelle 'fantôme', en général, une formation dans l'inconscient dynamique, qui s'y est installée, non du fait d'un refoulement propre au sujet, mais du fait d'une *empathie directe du contenu inconscient ou renié d'un objet parental*. C'est dire qu'il s'agit là d'une formation qui n'a pas été, en tant que telle, le produit de l'autocréation du sujet

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<sup>729</sup> Doane and Hodges, *Telling Incest*, 33.

<sup>730</sup> Doane and Hodges, *Telling Incest*, 33.

<sup>731</sup> Jean Renvoize, *Incest: A Family Pattern* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 3.

<sup>732</sup> Maisch, *Incest*, 208.

<sup>733</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 427.

par le jeu des refoulements et des introjections. C'est dire encore que le fantôme qu'il porte en lui lui est étranger. [Original italics.]<sup>734</sup>

The phantom haunting Semprun's works is not only the ghost of his father, or even of his father's father, but the transgenerational phantom of an entire system of fatherhood, the ghosts of an entire decaying patriarchal tradition, passed down in the name of the father, an insidious absent presence of failure, missed opportunities and disappeared lives: the spectre of patriarchy.

Oedipus' self-blinding punishment for engaging in incest with his mother and killing his father provides a subtext that permeates Semprun's works. Blindness in Oedipus reflects the transgression of the incest taboo and thus of patriarchal order; but his blindness also correlates to the failure to realise that through this act he was only assuming the paternal position. Blindness is not only a punishment for challenging the patriarchal order, it is a warning, a message to all those who blindly repeat the actions of their father. Semprun's works demonstrate how he is no more than a mirror image of his father, repeating his mistakes, repeating the mistakes of the past. But this is more than simply a discussion of the tragic fate of a son; it is about Europe more widely, about the repetition of the atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and our failures to learn from the past. Incestuous narrative presents a threatening vision of a future that is never more than a repetition, the endless return of the past. Incest implies mimesis, doubling and repetition, the continuation of a vestigial system, the eternal return of the father, and thus Semprun's literary incest holds up a mirror to the failures of modern patriarchy and paternity, to our own blindness as a society that blindly and compulsively repeats the failures of the past. Through his manipulation of incest and incestuous language, Semprun constructs a narrative mirror image of contemporary society: a world in which we blindly follow the rules of a patriarchal order; an order that is never present, yet *toujours-déjà-là*; that is not autonomous and future-oriented, but haunted by an invisible and inescapable past, by spectres of patriarchy.

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<sup>734</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L'Écorce*, 439.

## Conclusion The Spectre of J.Semprun

*Ne jugez jamais de l'amour ou de la haine [qui] peut exister entre un père et son fils sauf si vous êtes l'un ou l'autre.*

-TL [Thomas Landman]

Text is a site of duplicitous visibility and manipulation; the narrative is only a detour, a disguise, a defence. This thesis has questioned the stability and veracity of the visible text, arguing that we have been blind to the author's cunning presentation of memory and history. There is more to Semprun's works than has been written – by scholars or by the author himself – a counter-narrative of silence and absence, a narrative of phantoms. This thesis has engaged with Semprun's works *from the other side*, reading beyond the text, exposing the gaps and silences of narrative. Reading absence and invisibility, this approach has revealed secret enclaves of the textual practice, aspects of memory and history that cannot be written, or that oppose narrative form. Absence in Semprun is not simply unwritten; it haunts the written text like a ghost, a mirror image or a double. Each narrative demonstrates the attempt to obscure something, someone, an absence in some way, concealed behind endless palimpsestic prose that draws the eye towards urgent and demonstrable events and memories: Buchenwald, the mother, Communism. And yet this blinding presence of overt reference is exactly that: blinding, so that uncomfortable and unwanted memories are literally entombed within a narrative that refuses to give them shape. This thesis has demonstrated how these silenced memories and voices are not inexistent but haunting, *insisting* through absence and invisibility. This research has exposed memories that have been hidden in plain sight, within the content and structure of the text itself; memories that are unspeakable, invisible: memories of the father, Semprún Gurrea. Close readings and comparative analysis of Semprun's narratives have revealed the troubled relationship between father and son, stemming from the emotional and physical detachment of Semprún Gurrea following the death of Susana Maura and Republican defeat in Spain. But this methodology has also uncovered a more widespread denunciation of the father. The father does not mean only Semprún Gurrea, it stands for every system, structure, and ideology introduced and promoted by a paternal figure.

While this research evolved from questions surrounding Semprún Gurrea's absence from the narratives and films of his son, it expanded to enable a greater understanding of what reading textual absence can reveal. This thesis has not only demonstrated a profound insight into the fragile relationship between Semprun and his father, but has shown how Semprun's narratives undermine paternal structures in all their forms. This conclusion argues that the systematic erasure of paternalistic structures through Semprun's works, such as patriarchy and

language, reflects a wider disenchantment with the organisation of post-war Europe that continues to drag contemporary society backwards, towards chaos and destruction. The future, read through Semprun's works, is only an illusion, a distorted spectre of the past. Finally, this conclusion asserts a personal attachment to the paternal spectre, as the author disappears behind his own failed fatherhood. Unwritten, Semprun haunts each narrative as the inexistent father he became for his own son, a spectre of a decaying patriarchy.

Semprun's works are haunted by the archaic systems of organisation and communication that roam the European landscape today: the structures of patriarchal society, of paternalistic and patronymic identification, the systems of inheritance and reliance upon the past. Spectres of patriarchy haunt our everyday lives: the language we use, the commercial exchanges of goods, even our own concept of identity.<sup>735</sup> Through narrative, Semprun undermines the insidious invisibility of these vestigial spectres of a past that refuses to disappear definitively, and that moulds itself to the present through a self-preservatory arrival in the future. Patriarchy is the greatest example of a structure haunting modern society and culture. A historic construct, it is intangible and ungraspable, and yet it permeates every aspect of day-to-day life. It is a haunting structure of inheritance and repetition, of the eternal return of the past and of inescapable predestination. Narrative becomes the site of this return, presided over by the Symbolic father and the structures of language and expression. Yet through the construction of a narrative hall of mirrors, Semprun demonstrates the fragility of modern life, gesturing towards an illusory future that is no more than the spectral return of the past. Everything, in Semprun's works, is no more than a reflection, a repetition, a phantomatic spectre of a past that refuses to be laid to rest. Articulating the unprecedented and traumatic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Semprun's narratives point to our failures to learn from the past, arguing that we are doomed to repeat these mistakes again. Lifelessly sleepwalking through our everyday lives, blindly repeating the failures of our fathers, we are all only ghosts, haunting reminders of the past.

Semprun's works do not simply offer a fatalistic view of contemporary society; instead they demonstrate how preoccupation with the past is interfering with the future. His ghosts do not return to seek vengeance or justice or to settle debts, they return with a warning: 'the ghost cannot order the son to do anything; it can only warn [him] not to repeat his father's mistakes'.<sup>736</sup> Semprun's works are not only about the past; they are about the future, but a future that is disappearing under the weight of history and memory, a future that is no more

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<sup>735</sup> Semprun himself notes that 'la femme était un être par définition anonyme, peut-être même innommable, sauf à se faire appeler par un nom d'homme', whether that be the surname of her husband or of her father. *Montand*, 98.

<sup>736</sup> Esther Peeren, 'Ghostly Generation Games: Multidirectional Hauntings and Self-Spectralization in Bret Easton Ellis's *Lunar Park*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 53.4 (2012), 314.

than fantasy or hallucination. The arrival of the future is a particular preoccupation of the son, since the two are indebted to the return of the past. In a work by Semprun's eldest son Jaime, *L'Abîme se repeuple*, the author is acutely aware of the presumed filiation between the generations. Yet he reformulates the question 'Quel monde allons-nous laisser à nos enfants?' into what he considers to be a far more pertinent interrogation: 'À quels enfants allons-nous laisser le monde?'<sup>737</sup> He continues: 'Jamais sans doute une société n'aura vanté à ce point la jeunesse, comme modèle de comportement et d'usage de la vie, et jamais elle ne l'aura dans les faits aussi mal traitée'.<sup>738</sup> Jaime refers to the expanding fissure fracturing the continuity of the family, to the alienation of entire generations separated by technological and linguistic change. But his words also express the importance of looking to the future rather than the past, to consider those who will carry the word, and not simply the word itself.<sup>739</sup> War and ideology have torn across European history and memory, destroying families and futures, and while the remembrance and preservation of these memories and histories is paramount, it only perpetuates this rupture. Events deemed to be unspeakable or inexpressible are at the root of the collapse of patriarchal society. Beyond language, beyond the Symbolic, the past that cannot be put into words haunts society *as an absence*. Semprun's works attempt to disengage the primacy of the phallus, revolting against the systems of paternalistic and patronymic inheritance, but they expose the insidious authority of the Symbolic father. To resist paternal structure is to risk one's own disappearance. This thesis challenged Tidd's claim that Semprun speaks from the patriarchal imaginary, but it concludes in agreement: Semprun *does* speak from a position that abjects women, but because he must, because there is no other position from which to speak, no other voice that will be heard, no other language that will be understood. In this world of traces and mirror images, repetition is the only form of survival. To disappear behind the father, or to disappear; the future is nothing more than a spectre of patriarchy. Paternal spectres haunt Europe, spectres of a crisis of masculinity and order, a world indebted to a past it cannot understand.

The post-war generation, also known as '*la génération d'après*',<sup>740</sup> the 'hinge generation',<sup>741</sup> or even the 'postgeneration',<sup>742</sup> are the 'jeunesse' of which Jaime spoke. They are the spectres of an entire generation that has been lost behind the unspoken words of their parents. For events such as the Holocaust, immense research has been conducted into the

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<sup>737</sup> Jaime Semprun, *L'Abîme se repeuple* (Paris: Éditions de l'Encyclopédie des Nuisances, 1997), 20.

<sup>738</sup> Semprun, *L'Abîme se repeuple*, 20.

<sup>739</sup> This is a play on Charlotte Delbo's *Qui rapportera ces paroles? Tragédie en trois actes*.

<sup>740</sup> See Annelise Schulte Nordholt, *Perec, Modiano, Raczymow: la génération d'après et la mémoire de la Shoah* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

<sup>741</sup> See Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: A Meditation on the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (London: Vintage, 2005).

<sup>742</sup> See Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*.

narratives of the second generation, voices of an absence passed down from parents who experienced unspeakable atrocity. The second generation are a vessel for the absent words of their parents, a generation tasked with the preservation, guardianship, and transmission of their parent's memories. An entire generation crushed by the weight of a past that was not its own. The post-war generation are a lost generation, invisible behind the weight of memory that has been handed down to them, that has become their own without ever truly belonging to them. Charged with inaccessible memories, the post-war generation are rendered phantoms, as others seek out – through them – memories that do not belong to them, that they cannot provide. The post-war generation has been a highly sought-after topic of research, but only ever as a point of access for the memories they are assumed to know. As individuals, as an autonomous generation, they are ghosts, forgotten and 'mal traités' by a society that prizes the past over the future. Reading absence is not a matter to be taken lightly, for absence embraces an entire future obscured by the past: in this paternalistic society, it is absence that is handed down from father to son.

Jaime Semprun, whose words resonate with the absent memory of the second generation, is indeed the greatest example of a spectre of patriarchy. Obscured by the life and works of his father, Jaime has disappeared from the research scene almost as efficiently as he disappeared from the works of his father. Born in 1947, Jaime was the only child of the union between Semprun and Loleh Bellon. In Augstein's biography, she writes that Jaime's forename was attributed at the request of his father, as a linguistic play on the French 'j'aime',<sup>743</sup> a suggestion that seems trite at best but perhaps reflects the short passing of time between Semprun's return from Buchenwald and fatherhood. Nonetheless, after this initial proclamation of love and kinship, the relationship between father and son began to disintegrate. Semprun and Loleh separated, and Loleh remarried to Claude Roy, a friend of Semprun's<sup>744</sup> who took over the role of step-father. Emerging from the depths of Semprun's narratives comes a chilling repetition of a far more personal paternal fate. The problematic paternal relationship between Semprun and Semprún Gurrea is mirrored in the eventual demise of the father-son dynamic between Semprun and Jaime. This absent relationship is at the centre of Semprun's works, through which he presents male characters, embroiled in their own experiences, memories, and pursuits, who are unable to deal with the added pressures and expectations of paternity: Artigas, who is apparently disinterested in his paternity of the twins; Michel Laurençon, who commits suicide three months before Daniel is born; and Juan Larrea, who would have liked children but commits suicide before this is possible. Semprun's narratives illustrate weak figures

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<sup>743</sup> Augstein, *Lealtad y Traición*, 231.

<sup>744</sup> Semprun and Claude remained good friends, despite the tension between Semprun and Loleh. Claude Roy was the second person to read Semprun's manuscript of *Le Grand Voyage* written in hiding in Madrid. *Le Langage*, 72.

of paternity, but they also emphasise the dual lives of these pseudo-fathers: Buchenwald survivors, exiles, politicians, activists. *La Guerre*, for example, indicates a conflict between family and activism that forces Diego/Semprun into an impossible situation where he must choose between the two.<sup>745</sup> There is a sense in these examples that narrative is employed to *excuse* paternal absence, demonstrating the internal conflict between the public and private spheres, between a personal domestic unity and a common ideological goal. In many ways, Semprun's absence from the life of his family, and particularly his son, can be put down to a self-effacing sacrifice in order to preserve the anonymity and safety of his son given the dangers he was running within the PCE. Nonetheless, each narrative returns repeatedly to the figure of a son abandoned by his father, and if the clandestine lifestyle can be applied to Semprun's absence in the early years of Jaime's life, it says nothing for the failure to rekindle this relationship after his expulsion.

Interestingly, it is *Netchaïev* that offers the most explicit reflection of Semprun's paternal role. Committing suicide three years after his return from Buchenwald, Michel Laurençon abandons his son Daniel (Netchaïev), but is replaced by his close friend Roger Marroux. The situation mirrors Semprun's own 'death' in Buchenwald and Claude's paternal substitution of Jaime. But more interesting still is Michel's attempt to reconnect with his son *from the other side*, from beyond the grave, through a letter addressed to Daniel and to be opened on his sixteenth birthday. *Heimkehr*, written from Michel to his unborn son, is a manuscript of around 100 pages detailing his experiences in Buchenwald: 'Une sorte de récit, une suite de réflexions où son père, Michel Laurençon, lui laissait en héritage l'histoire de sa survie à Buchenwald. De sa survie ou de sa mort?'.<sup>746</sup> On the first page of the text is a short dedication: 'À mon fils Daniel, parce qu'il a seize ans'.<sup>747</sup> Michel's letter is an attempt to reach out to his son, to explain his death and thus his paternal absence. In many ways, Michel never returns from Buchenwald, making Daniel the son of a ghost, inexistent, the trace of a trace. But what is so fascinating about this fictional letter is that it directly mirrors the dedication that appears in Semprun's first published work: 'Pour Jaime, parce qu'il a 16 ans'.<sup>748</sup> *Le Grand Voyage* is Semprun's own *Heimkehr*, the story of his survival in Buchenwald, the experience of passing through death. Believing to have 'traversé la mort',<sup>749</sup> Semprun returns a ghost, a 'revenant',<sup>750</sup> already dead. Semprun's attempt to excuse his own absence from his son's life is

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<sup>745</sup> Marianne frequently asks Diego to give up his position in the PCE in order to have a child with her.

<sup>746</sup> *Netchaïev*, 250-51

<sup>747</sup> *Netchaïev*, 251.

<sup>748</sup> Interestingly, Ferrán argues that *Le Grand Voyage* is dedicated to 'a young Spanish boy' in order that the memory of the 'long voyage' can be passed on. She does not connect the figure of the son to this dedication or this work of memory. *Working Through Memory*, 99.

<sup>749</sup> *L'Écriture*, 183.

<sup>750</sup> *L'Écriture*, 182.

one of a death that had preceded his birth: like Michel, he too died in Buchenwald and returned a ghost, a spectre of paternity. Semprun writes in *Quel beau* that 'on ne peut rien raconter à son fils, si on a un fils. C'est aux inconnus qu'on raconte le mieux: parce qu'on est moins concerné, mois solennel',<sup>751</sup> but *Le Grand Voyage* is a way of trying to rebuild the relationship from beyond the grave, an attempt to communicate impossible experience. Testimonial text is a means of passing on memories and experiences from father to son, so that the 'son becomes the bearer of his father's word'.<sup>752</sup> The paternal *Heimkehr*, both of Michel Laurençon and of Semprun, is an attempt to reinstate their paternal position and to (re)establish a link between father and son. Yet it seems that the *Heimkehr* is not truly an apology or an attempt to engage a discourse. Instead, it appears as a narcissistic means of preserving one's own voice, passing on one's own memories to a son who must become the guardian of the paternal word.

In effect, the son is charged not only with his own life, but with the continuation of his father's life. Jaime disappears behind the memories of his father and his father's memories, a puppet or a ghost, reduced to a repetitive ventriloquist of his father's words. Although he was a writer, editor, and filmmaker in his own right, Jaime never made radio or television appearances, and rarely agreed to interviews. A contemporary and friend of Guy Debord,<sup>753</sup> Jaime's evasion of 'la société du spectacle' ironically led to his elimination from a world that prizes mass media. When, on 3 August 2010, Jaime died suddenly, the events that followed were haunted by the shadow of his father. On the ninth of August, a press release from the *Éditions de l'Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, founded by Jaime, reported his death. On the eleventh, his friend and journalist, Jean-Luc Porquet, published an obituary in *Le Canard Enchaîné*, 'Quand un ami s'en va',<sup>754</sup> and on the twelfth, a further obituary appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Reaction to his death was slow but, as further reports began to surface, it became apparent that incorrect and misleading information was being peddled across the internet. The most shocking irregularity, of course, was a small chorus of people who were led to believe that Jorge Semprun, the father, had been the one to die. These were not entirely ill-informed claims: photographs of Jorge were being used by mistake or ignorance<sup>755</sup> and digressions were being made from a discussion of Jaime's work to an elaborate analysis of the publicly acclaimed works of Jorge and even Carlos. Jaime's death passed almost as imperceptibly as his life, and the paternal figure came to overshadow both his life and his death. Less than a year later, the death of Jorge Semprun was greeted by media frenzy, as the

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<sup>751</sup> *Quel beau*, 366.

<sup>752</sup> Shideler, *Questioning the Father*, 130.

<sup>753</sup> Letters written between the two have been assembled into a multivolume text, *Correspondance*.

<sup>754</sup> Reproduced online at Bernard Morlino, 'Hommage à Jaime Semprun par son ami Jean-Luc Porquet'.

<sup>755</sup> See Eric Conan, 'Jaime Semprun, le décès de l'immédiatique éditeur d'Orwell', and José Rosas Ribeyro, 'Jorge Semprún: la escritura, la vida, la memoria, las luces y las sombras'. Both believe there are no up-to-date photographs of Jaime at all.

international press spewed out obituaries, homages, and reprinted interviews that boasted the literary, cinematic, cultural and political achievements of a European icon. None of these reports drew attention to (if they even mentioned at all) the fact that he was also the father of the defunct Jaime Semprun. Jaime was a ghost long before he died, invisible from the media, obscured by the name of his father, the *nom-du-père*.

Yet Jaime's disappearance constitutes what Peeren terms a 'self-spectralization',<sup>756</sup> 'choosing to live as a ghost in order to free oneself of phantoms'.<sup>757</sup> Jaime made the choice to disappear from public life and from the shadow of his father in order to avoid repeating the same paternal fate. Jaime achieved what his father never could, to break the cycle of paternal repetition, to begin again, unimpeded by the return of the past. Jaime made a definitive break with the political and historical legacies handed down to him from his father and his father's father. He was the anti-Semprun: 'Opuesto absoluto de su padre, [él] formó partes de quienes dijeron rotundamente no. No al comunismo, no a la socialdemocracia' ['the absolute opposite of his father, he was among those who said categorically no. No to communism, no to social democracy'].<sup>758</sup> He was the antithesis of his father, the man who said no. While Semprun's career persevered tirelessly to continue and to better the political work begun by his father, Jaime's aversion to politics appears as a deliberate rejection of his patronym and his heritage, a mark of separation between father and son. But at what cost? If the repetition of the paternal fate ultimately leads to one's dissolution into a framework of return and mirror images, then the break in the Symbolic ancestry is equally ruinous. To dis-identify with the father is to reject one's position within the only order in which one can exist, it is to sacrifice one's own coming into existence; it is to be a ghost. The ghost of a ghost, Jaime is the spectre of an ailing patriarchal society, of a system and a history that has been handed down but that inheres in absence, that is failing, that is on the verge of collapse. Jaime paid the ultimate price for his own attempt to distance himself from his father: he literally disappeared behind him, masked by his image and his words, becoming a ghost, a spectre of patriarchy.

The elimination of the paternal figure throughout Semprun's works represents an attempt to overcome the institutionalised failures of paternity that haunt his life and literature. This research has revealed the paternal spectre, but it has also exposed Semprun's reluctance to confront his own son through narrative, and thus to depict his own role as father. Indeed, questions of identity are often brought up in light of Semprun's works, and the author was adept at transcribing his different identities as activist, adolescent, husband, friend, comrade,

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<sup>756</sup> Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 173.

<sup>757</sup> Peeren, *Spectral Metaphor*, 175.

<sup>758</sup> Rosas Ribeyro, 'Jorge Semprún'. Translation from Spanish my own.

politician, even grandfather.<sup>759</sup> But the one identity that evades every single narrative, consistently and deliberately, is *Semprun as father*.

In 1996, Semprun was interviewed on several occasions by Jean Lacouture, who posed questions on Semprun's childhood, his experiences in Buchenwald, engagement with the PCE and more broadly with Communist values and beliefs, bilingualism and, finally, his literary and cinematographic processes. During discussion of Semprun's early family life, and the potential premature adherence of his militancy, Lacouture asked: 'Vous-même, Jorge Semprun, êtes très proche de votre père, vous l'écoutez avec déférence, vous êtes inspiré par lui?' To which Semprun gave the following reply:

Oui, et c'est pour ça peut-être que m'interrogeant sur mes souvenirs d'enfance, je constate qu'ils sont presque toujours d'ordre politique ou historique [...] Mes souvenirs sont toujours liés aux récits de mon père, aux exposés qu'il faisait quand se réunissait sa nombreuse famille – nous étions sept frères et sœurs – aux heures rituelles du petit-déjeuner ou du diner. D'où un lien très fort avec lui et ses idées. Quand, plus tard, j'ai opéré une rupture en devenant communiste, il a toujours respecté ce choix, non sans le trouver absurde.<sup>760</sup>

Although this research readily questions quite how truthful this response is, it nonetheless suggests that there was a quiet sense of respect and admiration between father and son. Semprun has always excused his father's silences over Buchenwald,<sup>761</sup> and while this statement does suggest the reassuring inversion of the father-son relationship, as Semilla Durán has argued, it also points to a defiant complicity between the two men. The paternal spectre that haunts Semprun's works is not the ghost of his father; it is *his own inexistence* as a father for his eldest son Jaime, and the destitute structure of a failed patriarchy that continues to haunt modern-day Europe. Semprun was so concerned with the fear of repeating the past, and of being haunted by (what he considered to be) the persistent weaknesses of his father that he failed to heed the ghostly warnings that haunt his own works. Semprun's life was dedicated to the work of activism and politics, work that set out to rectify the mistakes of his father – defeat in Spain, the rise of Totalitarianism, and the duplicitous revelations of Communism – that he failed to realise he was repeating these mistakes himself. Vanishing into an unreachable spectral isolation, disappearing from the life of his son as his father had done before him,

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<sup>759</sup> Semprun's relationship with Thomas, Mathieu and Cécilia Landman is referenced throughout a number of his texts. Upon his death, it was Thomas who gave the majority of interviews (*Le Parisien, El país*, etc.), and it was Mathieu and Thomas who accompanied Semprun on his return to Buchenwald (see *L'Écriture*, 364). *Netchaïev* is dedicated 'À Mathieu L., pour qu'il continue la tradition du lycée Henri IV', and *L'Écriture* is dedicated 'À Cécilia, pour la merveille de son regard émerveillé'. However, these grandchildren are the children of Dominique Landman (Leloup), the daughter of Colette and therefore not biologically related to Semprun, and *do not carry his name*.

<sup>760</sup> *Si la vie*, 21-22.

<sup>761</sup> Augstein, *Lealtad y Traición*, 231.

Semprun is a spectre of patriarchy, a paternal ghost who failed his own son in the same way his father failed him: because he never existed as a father. Ghosts are everywhere in Semprun's works, and they are precisely where you least expect to find them. Spectres haunt the absences of his works: Jaime, Semprún Gurrea, the unwritten ghosts of a weak and illusory patriarchy. But the spectres are also *there*, right there, present yet absent, the author himself, a haunting presence of paternal inexistence. The text itself is haunted by the hand of a ghost who cannot perform or fulfil the paternal function, who fails to exist as a father. Even as he wrote, while he was still alive, *Semprun was already a ghost*: a paternal phantom, a spectre of patriarchy.

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## Filmography

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