

## Linguistic Labyrinth in Jorge Semprun's *L'algarabie*.

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When faced with geographical and linguistic exile, the exilic language becomes a land for the writer, and a tool allowing testimony to emerge. In turn, this process redefines autobiography: the language the autobiographer creates in exile changes his identity and demands a reconstruction of the self through the experience of linguistic exile. *L'algarabie*, by Jorge Semprun, illustrates the creation of a language neither French nor Spanish in which French serves as the instrument and Spanish serves as the substance to be sculpted. Semprun creates in *L'algarabie* a *langue*, placing the novel at the frontier of languages. This *langue* links the characters in the novel through an unspoken contract and escapes their control. Neither entirely Spanish nor entirely French, *L'algarabie* draws from both. In oscillating between both Spanish and French, Semprun questions the validity of autobiography as dispenser of authenticity and, while still using it as a platform for testimony, reshapes it to escape the rendition of a static image of the past.

Published in 1981, *L'algarabie* is a labyrinthian novel in which Semprun seemingly attempts to lose his reader. It follows the last day of Rafael Artigas, a Spaniard who has immigrated to Paris. *L'algarabie* draws on different genres. It has aspects of an historical yet fictional novel because it delves into the Spanish Civil War and Francoism. It is an autobiographical novel because events recounted in *L'algarabie* belong to Semprun's life. It is a novel on Spain and the effects of the Civil War on those who fought against Franco. It is also a novel which refers back to the "roman feuilleton," the "roman-populaire," and the picaresque. It even draws from "zarzuelas," traditional Spanish operettas. Semprun uses these different genres in order to create a testimonial novel where his childhood appears.

“Expliquer, peut-on expliquer?” (459).<sup>1</sup> This is the task Semprun sets himself in writing *L’algarabie*. Throughout this novel, Semprun endeavors to explain the losses in his life. First is the loss of his native country when he left Spain in 1936, fleeing Franco’s advancing troops, and thereby entering exile. Second is the loss encountered in Buchenwald where he experienced collective death making him question reality and existence. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Semprun confronts his mother’s death when he was eight years old.

In evoking loss, Semprun creates a *langue* in which he develops a method for communication escaping the cultural rigidity of French and Spanish languages. Semprun practices the insertion of Spanish into French, the reclaiming of French words, phonetics, etymology, genre patchwork, intertextuality and fragmentation in order to craft his *langue*.

Semprun questions the nature of autobiographical truth by refusing to adhere to the conventions of traditional autobiography. In connection with Semprun’s challenge regarding the writing of the self, however, I shall examine the relation between self, culture and language in the creation of an authentic voice of exile. Autobiography is a cultural act, in which language acts as “‘a focusing glass,’ which ‘brings together the personal, unassimilated experiences of the writer and the shared values of his culture’” (Eakin 73). Semprun feels he is a prisoner of Spanish culture, since culture and language reflect each other: “‘Il n’y a rien au monde que je déteste davantage que l’Espagne de Franco, et je ne parle pas seulement de son système politique, je te parle de son langage, cette infecte rhétorique castillane, cette langue de l’Empire’” (400). Spanish language must be transformed in order to provide Semprun with an acceptable channel for communication.

## Spanish Self and French Language

Although Semprun is adamant about writing in a language other than Francoist language, he nonetheless feels an undeniable loyalty towards Spanish language. Spanish is his native language and therefore it is continuous with his self through an unyielding bond. He cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from Semprun in this chapter are taken from *L’algarabie*.

unlearn his native language, nor can he dissociate himself from the images evoked by specific words in his native language which lose power when translated into the migrant one. Although Semprun deliberately writes in French, his bond to the Spanish language reveals the extent to which it has shaped him. As his first language, Spanish makes a claim on his self. Semprun's desire to write in French can only succeed if he internalizes the second language's concepts which can exist in parallel to the acquisition of the first language.

Semprun is not interested in substituting one Spanish language self for a French language self. He also refuses for the French language to become saturated with Spanish nostalgic frustrations made of impossible cultural translations. His answer to the limitations of each language is to expose those limitations in the rendering of his experience of exile. Rather than failing to create authenticity in the French language, he deliberately sabotages the attempt at a set testimony. In the process, he creates authenticity by alternating between both languages, and by placing himself at the frontier of languages themselves. Both the Spanish and French languages become devices placing Semprun in a linguistic no-man's land.

Semprun declares that a writer belongs to no land but that of language: "la condition idéale de l'écrivain était d'être apatride, de ne connaître, du moins, pour seule patrie que celle du langage" (396-97). In spite of this, it appears that a writer navigating between languages does not even have language to claim as his land. In this process of creating an identity delving into both languages simultaneously, what happens to the self? In *Dialogism and Schizophrenia*, Tzvetan Todorov discusses how languages create a linguistic conflict when they become internal discourses. They cannot content themselves with occupying half of the person's self as they naturally desire its entire occupation. As Todorov declares, they do not compartmentalize well as each compete for the totality of the self. This conflict potentially splits a person in two. Bilingualism can be experienced as two mutually exclusive languages competing for a person's attention (213). It is precisely this situation of mutual exclusion which Semprun wants to avoid.

*L'algarabie* is a novel drawing from both languages at the same time: Does it suppose that its reader is fluent in both languages, since Semprun refutes one's language power to encompass the self? *L'algarabie* reveals a cautious Semprun as each language challenges the authenticity of the other, language. He is hardly interested by self-reinvention in a migrant language or defining that which is transplanted from the mother tongue to the migrant one. More

specifically, he studies what is transplanted and then lost, what belongs neither to the one nor to the other, what is incommunicable and how to present it to the reader, while knowing that he might lose his reader in the process. What interests Semprun is what is beyond the communicable and his use of silence becomes essential in his pursuit. The placing of testimony in a linguistic no-man's-land is viewed as a reflection of an event's transmission always remaining beyond reach and in turn shows the impossibility of its cohesive transmission.

Exploration of the possibility for testimonial self-representation is made through the *langue* Semprun creates in which the reader discovers linguistic word play from Spanish into French. In this process, Semprun asks the reader to forego his expectation for a stable testimony.

Semprun imposes discomfort. Although written in French, *L'algarabie* draws on Spanish and refers to it. The reader is reminded that the French text is a mirror of Semprun's Spanish self, lying right below the French surface. For example, a dialogue is often translated back into Spanish: "—Allons, voyons! C'est fini, cette algarabie?" (195). Before introducing the reader to Quijano, nicknamed "el Pirulí," Semprun digresses and only returns to this new character on the following page. When "el Pirulí" returns, he declares his sentence in Spanish: "—*Vamos a ver! ¿Se acabó esta algarabía?* avait dit cet homme" (196). This sentence translates the French version while taking into account idiomatic expressions and different tense. Semprun detaches the Spanish from the French by placing it in italics, seemingly situating the Spanish language outside of the story's realm. However, in the next sentence he undoes this assumption by declaring: "Car il avait parlé en espagnol, bien sûr, / Il aurait été absurde, d'ailleurs, qu'il parlât en français, puisqu'il s'adressait à des compatriotes et qu'il semblait bien décidé à se faire entendre" (196). The words "bien sûr" warn the reader that the French text is an inexact transmission of the story which is actually taking place in Spanish. *L'algarabie* conceals origin and links testimony with a continuous absence.

Semprun is determined to place the reader in a state of linguistic indecision while disallowing the certainty of the idiom used. For example, when another character says: "—Ils parlent, ils discutent, ils crient, c'est tout ce qu'ils savent faire!" (222). Semprun clarifies which idiom she uses by saying: "Mais Proserpine a parlé en français, on l'aura remarqué" (223). By drawing attention to the French language, Semprun creates a state of indecision within the reader who no longer can take for granted that the language written is the authentic language of

retransmission or a translation, and for that reason lacks exactitude. Navigation between both languages insures a constant state of insufficiency translating the task of rendering testimony in the first place, as this example illustrates:

Mais ce bon mot — que l'on peut du moins considérer comme tel si l'on tient compte du fait que les deux hommes s'expriment en espagnol, langue dans laquelle *manco de Lepanto*, pour manchot dudit lieudit, est presque une formule toute faite, une périphrase aussi transparente pour parler de Cervantès que si l'on avait dit en français «l'auteur de *L'Avare*» pour parler de Molière. (205)

Translation constitutes a significant part of *L'algarabie*. It gives Semprun the opportunity to show the French reader the extent to which even simple concepts differ from one language to another and the diverse connotations they carry: “— Quel public? demanda-t-elle. Carlos et toi? Tu es mon mari, il est mon cousin germain. Qu'y a-t-il de public? / Elle parlait en castillan, bien sûr. Elle n'avait donc pas dit «cousin germain», mais «cousin-frère», comme on dit dans cette langue: *primo hermano*” (138). Grammatical differences point out the insufficiency of the French language as a container of the Spanish substance:

«c'est curieux, je savais pourtant que c'était mon père, j'étais fière qu'il le fût» (mais peut-être s'étonnera-t-on de ce subjonctif dans la bouche de Paula Négri, étonnement qui ne prouvera que l'ignorance linguistique de qui s'étonne: le castillan est, en effet, tout aussi riche, subtil et parfois même plus pervers que le français, du moins et précisément quant à l'emploi du subjonctif! «*Orgullosa de lo que fuera*», avait donc dit Paula, et elle aurait également pu dire «*que lo fuese*», car ce subjonctif-là se paie en castillan le luxe d'avoir deux formes [ . . . ], prenez-en de la graine). (497)

Semprun's confrontation of the French language is also directed at the proliferation of derogatory words: “l'Espagnol à cheveux blancs n'aime pas qu'on l'appelle pingouin. C'est un mot aussi bête que rital, macaroni, melon, bougnoule, raton, et caetera. La langue française en est farcie, de mots aussi cons” (13). In response to the labeling of Spaniards as *pingouins* or *espingouins*, Semprun integrates the words into his vocabulary, and thereby robs them of their

derogatory connotations: "Et même un Breton déterminé déteste se trouver sans voix et sans arguments devant un Espingouin sarcastique" (431). Pursuing his criticism, Semprun turns to the oral aspect of the French language by highlighting a foreigner's challenge in pronouncing the language, which is far from the phonetic Spanish language: "Il faut être tordu comme les Français le sont pour s'interdire de prononcer des lettres, et même des groupes de lettres, alors qu'elles sont bel et bien écrites, ou pour prononcer de la même façon des choses écrites différemment" (34).

In response to the challenge of pronouncing French correctly, foreigners transform it, thus introducing a metamorphosis of the language and alienation of the native speakers. In speaking of the definition given to the church of Saint-Sulpice, Semprun declares:

On dit saint-sulpice pour bordel (et les étrangers de la Zone, fort nombreux –Espagnols, Arabes, Portugais, Italiens, Yougoslaves–, qui trébuchent sur la prononciation de ce mot, disent souvent «saint-supplíce», ajoutant ainsi, par ce lapsus phonétique, une dimension nouvelle et non innocente –on sait bien que le langage est structuré comme un inconscient– à la signification du terme) (78-79).

Semprun claims the French language by redefining concepts, thereby distancing the French reader from the text.

### **Algarabie and Sabir**

The title itself announces Semprun's undertaking of the novel. The word "Algarabie" does not exist in French but is borrowed from the Spanish, "Algarabía," which has borrowed it from Arabic. Several times, Semprun offers a definition for the word. On page 211, he writes: "ce mot «algarabie» qui ne veut rien dire d'autre que «langue arabique», si l'on remonte à son sens premier." On page 542, he defines it as: "*L'algarabie* c'est le *charabia!* [. . .]; langage incompréhensible, jargon; criailerie confuse." Semprun has deliberately written a novel in which language is obscure and the many voices within it make themselves heard by covering others.

The word "algarabie" is used as a key to understand the linguistic labyrinth created by Semprun, a linguistic equivalent to a password where comprehension is linked to penetrating a language created specifically for the needs of the novel.

"Sabir" is another word appearing in *L'algarabie* which furthers Semprun's quest for creating a vehicle for testimony at the frontier of languages. Sabir is considered a language insofar as it links different mother tongues together. It is a mixed language whose most often cited form is the lingua franca of the Mediterranean ports in the past. The dominant lexicon of the sabir is Italian and Spanish. A sabir has a limited lexicon, designed to fulfill a specific function, an invariable morphology and a simplified syntax compared to the languages from which it draws. A sabir can never be a mother tongue since it appears when different languages merge and usually develops as a result of necessity. To speak a sabir is to underscore one's lack of origin. Lack or loss of origin refers back to the condition of exile which permeates Semprun's work. To read *L'algarabie* is to be in exile. This word, whose etymology comes from the Spanish verb "Saber" –to know– is useful in understanding Semprun's attempt to create a language born from the meeting of the Spanish and the French. Etymologically, Semprun desires the reader to know, understand and absorb his experience of exile. He uses it to describe the colony of Spaniards living in the Z.U.P. and translates his stance on languages:

Ils connaissent le sabir des Espagnols. D'ailleurs, quand ils parlent leur langue maternelle, il se produit un phénomène inverse et symétrique: les Espagnols de la Z.U.P. la caviardent aussi, leur langue maternelle, de locutions françaises, de gallicismes de toute sorte. En vérité, les Espagnols de la Z.U.P. ne parlent plus aucune langue correctement. Ils parlent, très précisément, un sabir: mot, ce dernier, d'origine espagnole, comme chacun sait, et qui situe parfaitement les sources déracinées de leur savoir langagier. (75)

Semprun's *langue* is described in *L'algarabie* as a sabir, a blend of languages leading to chaos and clamor. This word also points to their geographic and linguistic exile.

Semprun avoids crafting a realistic novel, thereby preventing the reader from being pulled in by the story told solely in French without oscillating between both languages. He plays

with the reader's expectation of authenticity in testimony and alienates him. His irony emerges with the two last words of the passage: "comme quoi même" dans les romans les plus démocratiques il y a ceux qui parlent et agissent et ceux qui se taisent et suivent les indications des premiers: on se croirait dans la vraie vie" (451-52).

"La vraie vie," in fact, must be rejected: "Mais nous n'allons pas tout bêtement poursuivre ce train-train narratif:[. . .]. Nous n'allons pas essayer de produire fallacieusement l'illusion de réalité" (255). He warns that *L'algarabie* is a convoluted novel with competing priorities: "Autant de points obscurs et discutables, parmi beaucoup d'autres, que le Narrateur ne peut esquiver lorsqu'il plante le décor historique de son récit, tout en étant incapable de les éclaircir définitivement" (61).

By the end of the novel, Semprun solves the linguistic origins of the novel. The novel is based on an outline for a story written in Spanish: "Plus tard, elle trouvera dans une chemise cartonnée une cinquantaine de feuillets agrafés ensemble, écrits en castillan, qui constituent bien évidemment le début d'un roman ou d'un récit" (546). Spanish is seen as invading French language by incorporating itself in daily exchanges: "Les habitants de la Z.U.P. utilisent d'ailleurs aussi ce mot, même quand ils sont français. Ils disent maricon, souvent, quand ils veulent être insultants" (76). Semprun's clash of French and Spanish, as well as questioning the novel's origin, adds to the linguistic confusion. The novel is viewed as a quest for its origin, as it resembles a patchwork of different genres. It relies heavily on intertextuality as a means to create an untraceable testimony. Origin is questioned when Semprun writes: "Avec une ironie non dépourvue de perversité, le Narrateur avait emprunté ce personnage d'hôtesse à Artigas lui-même, ou plutôt, à l'un des anciens romans d'Artigas, écrit il y avait fort longtemps sous son vrai nom (mais saura-t-on jamais le vrai nom d'Artigas? Son vrai nom supposé, faudrait-il plutôt dire)" (87). This passage brings to the reader's attention Semprun's other novels that also constitute works of self-representation. Semprun inserts *L'algarabie* in a chain of autobiographical works, thereby creating a puzzle in which each novel contains an aspect of his self-representation just like the pieces of a puzzle. In assembling all the novels together, the puzzle is complete, and his experience emerges, becoming visible.

The reader, therefore, is not only asked to be in constant movement along with the novel, but also to work as a detective, tracking down the many sources and clues Semprun leaves.

## Patchwork Genres

Semprun speaks of his novel as a "roman populaire." However, *L'algarabie* draws from different genres while often referring to the "roman populaire" in jest: "Puis la motocyclette bondit en avant dans un rugissement de son moteur (comme c'est bien dit, on se croirait dans un roman populaire!)" (68). He mocks the "roman populaire" thereby indicating his refusal to adhere simply one genre: "Une sorte de tremblement fiévreux a gagné le corps de Carlos. Il en a des sueurs froides. (Et ici le Narrateur ne peut s'interdire de se féliciter de la justesse de ses expressions, «tremblements fiévreux», «sueurs froides»: il finira vraiment par écrire comme un auteur populaire!)" (265). He borrows from different genres to create an autobiography escaping the confines of its genre, thereby creating a seemingly conflicted hybrid novel in which different genres compete with each other.

Semprun also borrows from the Spanish literary tradition of the picaresque. The pícaro is defined as a clever rogue, suggesting a dishonest person. The picaresque belongs to a class of literature in which the principal character is the Spanish pícaro, meaning a rascal, a knave, a rogue, an adventurer. However, the pícaro is often destitute, and travels aimlessly about the country. Although perceived as a rascal, he is a victim of a rigid caste system. The pícaro is an incongruous character in a novel on twentieth century France, particularly in a society that glorifies freedom and the individual, and has a social hierarchy nowhere near as rigid as that of feudalistic Castile. In *L'algarabie*, the pícaro is present in Artigas, and is less a victim than a marginal individual. The pícaro figure suggests that the Spanish exiles are an incongruous presence. Artigas has no aim in the Z.U.P. He is not a leader; he simply has not found a good enough reason to leave.

The presence of the picaresque in *L'algarabie* also lies in its style. Semprun links the numerous digressions to the picaresque while opposing them to the "roman-populaire" precept: "précepte auquel on pourrait avec brio opposer celui, contraire, ou du moins opposé, qui commande au déroulement du roman picaresque, lequel se soit de fourmiller d'épisodes multiples et de chemins de traverse multipliés" (124). *L'algarabie* takes on the picaresque to marginalize the reader, while involving him in a story from which he cannot escape. The notion of the aimlessness of the pícaro is reproduced in *L'algarabie*: "C'est l'avantage de ces romans

touffus, taillés sur le patron du genre picaresque hispanique, avec des personnages nombreux et des épisodes rebondissants: on peut aller de l'un à l'autre, revenir-en arrière, couper au plus court, se perdre apparemment dans les digressions, reprendre le fil un peu plus loin" (317). *L'algarabie* is also aimless and lost in its linguistic labyrinth.

Another Spanish tradition contaminates *L'algarabie*: the "zarzuela" defined as: "opérette espagnole d'une percutable grivoiserie langagière toute en ambiguïtés, double sens et sous-entendus, mais qu'on a toujours jouée collet monté jusqu'à présent" (248). The "zarzuela" appeals to Semprun in the capacity to play with orality.

Finally, the mixture of genres underscores the presence of silence in the novel. The many genres stand in opposition with one another – the roman populaire versus the historical novel, for example – and by contradicting each other, they point to the incompleteness of each genre. This incompleteness reveals the impossibility for each to take on the task of testimonial self-representation and this impossibility translates into silence.

Semprun refers to various authors thereby giving *L'algarabie* an appearance of patchwork made of different styles and genres. By adopting other references, Semprun's voice withdraws, thereby displacing responsibility while again questioning authenticity in testimony. The epigraph is by Rimbaud: "*Je suis réellement d'outre-tombe, et pas de commission*" (9). It places *L'algarabie* in intertextuality since Semprun cites Rimbaud, whose words recall Chateaubriand. Rimbaud also is referring to Chateaubriand and his *Mémoires d'outres-tombes*.

The web of allusion in *L'algarabie* includes Rimbaud, Chateaubriand, Ovide, Pétrone, Mallarmé, Lorca, Neruda, Appolinaire, Descartes, Salinas, Bernanos, Vidal i Barraquer, James, Unamuno, Montaigne, Goethe, Marx, Lukacs, Kundera, Foucault, Ortega y Gasset, Magny, Levi, Sue, Mauriac, Joyce, Borges, Hegel, Sartre, Proust, Fuentes, Goytisolo, Hemingway, Malraux, Aragon, Destouches, Maurras, Daudet, Céline, Keats, Bergerac, Burke, Cortés, Hernandez, Goethe, Marx, Vallès, Scheler, Blake, Byron, Bergson, Kierkegaard, Cassirer, Cabrera Infante, Bataille, Vian, Brown, Valéry, Molière, Cervantès, Engels, Malherbe, Rousseau, Halbwachs, Adorno, Pleynet, Kristeva, Claudel, Barrès, Verlaine, Brecht, Baudelaire, Husserl, Pascal, Sollers, Nizan, Rilke, Vallejo, Cossery, Marcuse, Avenarius, Foucault, Gide, Habermas, Braudel, Volpe, Lénine, Salinas, Kant, Bloch, Mann, Llosa, Villalonga, Delgado, Keyserling, Fielding, Balzac, Dickens, Flaubert, Tolstoï, Faulkner and Sade. Sometimes a writer's famous quote is

indirectly mentioned as in the case of Voltaire who with this quote is parodying Leibnitz: "Tout allait donc pour le mieux, dans le moins mauvais des mondes possibles" (220). These intertexts create a curious inversion: the life of the novel seems almost overshadowed by the literature it contains. Semprun refers to these writers, poets, philosophers and novelists with various degrees of significance, with some clearly possessing more meaning than others. His reference to Proust, for example, is particularly interesting. While Artigas maintains never to have read Proust, he also claims that Proust should never be read in French, but only in Spanish since, according to him, the Spanish language lends itself much better to Proust's style: "il déclarait préemptoirement que Proust était illisible en français, la seule façon de prendre un plaisir relatif à sa lecture consistant à se servir de la remarquable traduction espagnole de Pedro Salinas" (40). In this comment regarding Proust's style, Semprun remarks on the stylistic preferences linked to one language over another. Just as a chaotic style relates better to the Spanish syntax, the Spanish language mirrors Proust's winding and digressing sentences with better accuracy. Also, this statement serves as a clue for the reader who is warned early on in *L'algarabie* that the convoluted style is the result of a writer writing in French while thinking in Spanish: "(de la matière même, originelle et matricielle, du langage, de l'essence même du phrasé castillan – complexe, structurellement enclin au baroque, naturellement porté aux arabesques des incidentes et des digressions– sous-jacent chez lui, même lorsqu'il écrivait en français)" (40).

Sade is mentioned with the same intention of opposing order to chaos, by opposing French to Spanish.

Chacun, donc, fut prié de dire ou de redire son histoire, succinctement sans doute mais dans le déroulement aussi irréal qu'admirable d'un récit qui s'avance vers sa fin provisoire ou supposée, même s'il ne parvient pas à ses fins et quels qu'en soient les détours et les travers. Il faut dire que Paula était, sur ce point, semblable en tout idem aux personnages des romans sadiens obsédés par l'ordre et le rituel des cérémonies érotiques.  
(500)

Semprun confronts the preconception that an event's rendition can be delivered in a structured and linear manner while indicating that the French language contributes quite well to

order and structure. Therefore, Semprun wishes to force onto the migrated language a syntactic chaos. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes apparent that the syntactic chaos serves as a shield to distract the reader from Semprun's reluctance to confront the loss of his mother.

### Silent Clamor

Semprun is reluctant to address memories that address his life before exile. This is particularly apparent when he speaks of memories linked to his mother. Recollection of these memories occurs outside of *L'algarabie*'s plot, thus indicating Semprun's emotional distancing. Artigas dispenses them to his lover, who records them with a tape recorder. The silence of the "listener" is therapeutic since it encourages Artigas to explore his thoughts and his feelings. The absence and silence of the interlocutor guarantee a stronger voice for Artigas since the interlocutor cannot interrupt, contradict or challenge him. However, the stronger voice of the narrator can only be answered by silence. Therefore, silence is the condition for Artigas' voice to emerge most authentically. In *L'algarabie*, his childhood memories manifest themselves in italics, and appear randomly:

*Jamais je n'ai l'impression d'avoir vraiment été jusqu'au bout de ce parcours nocturne  
Chaque fois que je traverse en rêve En imagination Ce long couloir J'ai l'impression que  
quelque chose m'échappe Qu'il y a là Tout près mais inaccessible Derrière une  
épaisseur transparente mais infranchissable du rêve lui-même Du cheminement lui-même  
Qu'il y a là une ultime image Une dernière vérité Qui m'échapperont toujours. (575-76).*

The lack of punctuation underlines the sense of orality. Artigas speaks of his memories as pertaining to the realm of dreams because he has not yet been able to address them in the waking state. Also, because these memories emerge in the dream state, they prevent Artigas from confronting them. Artigas is a silent interlocutor who watches helplessly as his memories unfold. Silence serves to shield him from an exceedingly painful memory.

Semprun's most difficult memory to address is that of his mother, who died when he was eight years old. Throughout *L'algarabie*, the hallway of his childhood apartment is described at

length. The hallway and his mother's description are linked in Semprun's effort to describe through Artigas both her and the experience of her death. The hallway embodies the loss he feels when she passes away:

*Parfois ma mère s'avanceit toute seule dans le couloir pénombreux qui traversait l'appartement de part en part Qui commençait au vestibule et aboutissait avant de virer à angle droit à la porte de coucher de mes parents Quand ma mère y est morte cette pièce a été condamnée pendant deux longues années [. . .] Mais je passais devant la porte de la chambre de ma mère Sa chambre conjugale et mortuaire. (49)*

Semprun describes the impact of his mother's death on him. The overwhelming pain at the loss of his mother is translated into silence. In the last passage, the words "seule," "pénombreux," "condamnée" indicate the solitude in which the child enters when his mother dies. The terrifying experience of death at the age of eight repeats itself a decade later on a collective scale when he enters Buchenwald. Semprun's memories reside in silence, which plays in *L'algarabie* the ambiguous role of preventer and revealer of his trauma. While silence apparently conceals his memories, it is also the vehicle which enables them to surface.

Testimonial self-representation reveals Semprun's difficulty at accessing and communicating loss. The image of the long hallway is Semprun's possibility of retrieving memories of his mother and facing his death as well as hers. Semprun's sharing of memories through Artigas is intriguingly monolithic and static. It is closed to any suggestions from his interlocutor and isolated within *L'algarabie*. This divulging is thus done in silence as no one is there to engage a dialogue. As Semprun delves into memories harder to communicate, his voice retreats behind a monologue, thereby protecting himself from his state of vulnerability. Paradoxically the unspeakable takes him in search of a past made of certainties upon which he might rely. In doing so, he returns to his mother, to life as it was before exile—before his three exiles, from Spain, from democracy with France's collapse, and from existence with the experience at Buchenwald—and finally to Spain.

Artigas' death allows Semprun to return to the time before the first exile. As Artigas dies, a long hallway appears once more in front of him. In the moment of Artigas' death, Semprun

returns to a time before exile, when he was with his mother, with Spain –“la mère Méditerranée” (586-87), and with the Spanish language: “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*” (580). The insertion of italics is Semprun’s voice. Artigas’ last words are in Spanish and refer to his mother: “*ese diamante en el oscuro terciopelo de la noche*” (582). This is the expression he uses as a child to describe his mother’s beauty: “*«Le velours foncé de la nuit» me semblait la chose la plus belle La plus poétique du monde Puisqu’il n’existait que pour rehausser Pour mettre en valeur la beauté de ma mère*” (559). The linguistic no-man’s-land Semprun creates disappears with Artigas’ death.

*L’algarabie* officially ends with Artigas’ death. Semprun indicates he no longer endeavors to explain any linguistic challenges nor any convoluted plot. The last paragraph includes a sentence written in Spanish, which he refuses to translate. The reader no longer is in an “algarabie,” thus explanations are no longer required: “*Que nos quiten lo bailado, pense-t-il. [ . . . ] Mais il ne va pas traduire, foutre, non! Le roman est fini, nous sommes revenus dans la triste réalité: comprenez qui pourra*” (597).

The noise the “algarabie” creates in the novel takes on a new meaning with the last chapter. Semprun means it to be a clamor designed to cover his voice, and his reconnection with his mother. *L’algarabie* also allows Semprun to find his way through a convoluted linguistic labyrinth back to his origin, albeit along a path unknown to him. He accesses his loss by returning to his mother’s death and confronting his own.

The noise Semprun creates in *L’algarabie* also translates the inability to formulate the unspeakable: a child’s pain at the loss of his mother. Towards the beginning of the novel, Semprun speaks of a phenomenon whereby Spaniards leave their attic room at the top of apartment buildings and replace the French concierge:

Ledit phénomène avait également eu pour conséquence une transformation radicale de l’univers des bruits et des odeurs dans les cages d’escalier et les cours des mêmes quartiers, avec une augmentation sensible et mesurable du nombre de décibels [ . . . ], et une brusque apparition concomitante de fortes bouffées odoriférantes d’un genre nouveau

[. . .] des plats hispaniques les plus modestes, donc les plus agressifs pour l'odorat.  
(199-200)

This invasion is a translation of "L'algarabie" found in the novel. It serves as a mask, and in Sempun's case it allows him to occupy the reader with linguistic questions. This invasion of apartment buildings is similar to what happens to the French language in *L'algarabie*. Spanish language imposes its clamor and rudeness onto French language. This linguistic clamor enables Sempun to retreat behind it while he attempts to process his memories. Through his memories, Sempun's love for his mother and pain at her loss are irrevocably connected to the unspeakable. *L'algarabie* is the clamor covering the silence inside regarding her death. For Sempun, silence is a terrifying yet essential channel for his recollections. In *Adieu, vive clarté ...*, Sempun writes regarding *L'algarabie*: "pour la première fois, et quels que fussent les masques brandis, des souvenirs enfantins et intimes affleuraient dans l'un de mes livres" (56). The repetition of segments regarding Sempun's description of his mother, although pieced together differently in *Federico Sanchez vous salue bien, L'écriture ou la vie, L'algarabie* and *Adieu, vive clarté ...* attest to Sempun's necessity to make sense of his mother's death. Testimonial self-representation reveals, in fact, the silence of identities which any language—French or Spanish—is unable to penetrate. Silence translates Sempun's attempt at reuniting with his past. His experience of the hallway is silent (after his mother's death, he walks down the hallway alone), and his rendering of the event is silent as well, as the mix of styles and selves throughout *L'algarabie* point to his loss and the event is isolated within *L'algarabie*.

Sempun establishes a connection with the reader, while attempting to confuse him through linguistic labyrinths, convoluted references and complex story lines. After establishing Sempun's need to represent his past, deeply hidden and difficult for him to access, Sempun might be struggling in these labyrinths as much as the reader to whom he calls out. Sempun, as well as the reader, is pushed outside of *L'algarabie*, as he is also asked to make sense of a past he is either unable to control or unwilling to confront.

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