

A Biographical Novel of the Spanish Civil War: Lydie Salvayre's *Pas pleurer* (2014)

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article prend pour objet le roman biographique *Pas pleurer* (2014) de Lydie Salvayre où l'auteure élabore deux grands axes narratifs parallèles qui jaillissent des témoignages de la guerre civile espagnole: d'un côté le témoignage choc de Georges Bernanos dans son essai polémique *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* où il expose avec acuité la complicité des institutions séculaires et religieuses dans leur volonté meurtrière de contrôler la population par la terreur et la violence, et de l'autre celui de la mère Montse qui découvre en même temps la ville catalane républicaine et l'éblouissement de l'amour passionnel, témoignage dont le souvenir résiste aux effets dévastateurs du temps et de la maladie. L'analyse des deux axes narratifs permet de faire ressortir l'acte de résistance au coeur du roman et capté par son titre.

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Jeannette Gaudet

In her comprehensive study of Spanish Republican refugees, historian Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand describes their flight (known as *la Retirada*) over the border into France in 1939 as the most massive influx of refugees ever to have occurred in the country. After the fall of Barcelona, nearly half a million people poured over the border into France to escape Franco's advancing army. Since then, she states, the history of the refugees in the host country has been enveloped in a prolonged silence, superseded by the successive waves of dramatic events that were soon to engulf France and the whole of Europe. Her study of their history aims to contribute to addressing and redressing what she views as the apparent paucity of interest (until a recent surge in the 1990s) from French historians for a community of refugees and an event whose scale and impact on society as a whole was unprecedented at the time and marked the collective imagination. The reasons for the relative silence surrounding the Spanish community since *la Retirada* are multiple and complex, she explains further, noting among many others the comparative ability of the refugees to integrate relatively rapidly into French society.

Eighty years later, in the face of the inevitable generational shift and gradual disappearance of the survivors of *la Retirada* in France and elsewhere, first-hand testimony of the civil war is increasingly remote, fading into the ever more distant past and, already shrouded in silence, at risk of falling permanently into oblivion. In her biographical novel *Pas pleurer* published in 2014 and recipient of the prestigious Prix Goncourt that same year, Lydie Salvayre, who is the daughter of refugees, draws on her dual cultural heritage to (re)construct a turbulent period of the 20th century and its lasting repercussions on her family. The author, who belongs to what Marianne Hirsch defines as the generation of postmemory,¹ brings to light the memories of one member of a community of women, children and men whose recollection of the civil war remains vivid despite the passage of time. It is not the first time that Salvayre has evoked the civil war and its reverberations in her impressive body of work. As Warren Motte points out, "Spain, and most particularly the Spain of the Second Republic, the Civil War and its aftermath" is a recurring theme in her novels (23). Salvayre's explicit aim in *Pas pleurer* is to counter (however temporarily) the silence surrounding at least one member of the refugee community by giving voice to her mother, Montserrat Monclus Arjona, "de faire vivre [son nom] et de [le] détourner pour un temps du néant auquel il était promis" (15).

Salvayre's narrative is grounded in the past, in individual, family and national history as she establishes in the opening pages: "Dans le récit que j'entrepris, je ne veux introduire pour l'instant, aucun personnage inventé. Ma mère est ma mère, Bernanos l'écrivain admiré des *Grands cimetières sous la lune* et l'Église catholique l'infâme institution qu'elle fut en 36." (15) For José Luis Arráez, this statement of authorial intent serves to legitimize the novel's status as a biographic endeavour first and foremost. "Suivant cette déclaration d'intention auctoriale, tout en identifiant Lidia avec Lydie Salvayre, puis celle-ci avec la narratrice de l'histoire, le lecteur se situe apparemment face à la lecture de la biographie de la mère de la romancière," he writes (188). The author's mother has the same proper name as the character in *Pas pleurer* and her experience of the critical summer of 1936 provides one of the two primary sources of the narrative. Further

1 Hirsch defines postmemory as a "structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience" mediated by "imaginative investment, projection and creation" (106-7).

grounding the novel in biographical fact is the following couplet set off typographically in capital letters from the surrounding text reiterating through metaphor the personal origins of the source material²: “FUENTES ES MI VIDA / EN QUE MIS OBRAS BEBEN”³ (15). The same can be said for the other source from which Salvayre draws heavily in *Pas pleurer*: the French writer and essayist, Georges Bernanos, is the intertextual referent whose polemical work *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* establishes “un argument d’autorité, de la véracité des faits décrits,” according to Marianne Braux (71). Creative invention associated with fiction is momentarily explicitly held in abeyance – “Dans le récit que j’entreprends, je ne veux introduire, pour l’instant, aucun personnage inventé” (15) – while the narrator provides some of the general details of her mother’s early life, of her current situation as she approaches the end of it, and provides a snapshot of Bernanos observing the political developments in Spain in 1936 from his temporary home on the island of Majorca. The opening pages name, then, the two interlocutors with whom the narrative voice engages in her polyphonic text, interlocutors who offer stable identities beyond the pages of *Pas pleurer*. Thus Salvayre establishes for her narrative “une généalogie à la fois intellectuelle et familiale” (Braux 71).

Significant portions of *Pas pleurer* take the form of a lively conversation between the author and her elderly mother, Montse, as she relates the key historical moment that dramatically changed the course of her life as well as that of her family and, ultimately determined the future context of the narrator, Lidia. The interpersonal dynamics of the mother-daughter bond colour the exchange between the two with interruptions, expressions of impatience, humorous asides and comments reflecting the closeness of the relationship and the familiarity it breeds. In this respect, *Pas pleurer* fits a trend in French women’s writing that explores the complex relationship with the mother. Simone de Beauvoir’s *Une mort très douce* (1964) and Annie Ernaux’s *Je ne suis pas sortie de ma nuit* (1997) are only two of the most well-known examples that come immediately to mind.⁴

From his vantage point on Majorca, Bernanos, who, as regular contributor to the Catholic periodical *Sept*, was among the first writers to bring the bloody events unfolding in Spain to the attention of the French public, is the second narrative focus of the novel *Pas pleurer*. Bernanos died in 1948, the year Salvayre was born, and thus there can be no question of a conversation in the usual sense, such as is represented with the mother, Montse. The oral transmission of family history passed down through the generations – from mother to daughter in this case – is set against the written record Bernanos provided beginning in 1936 to a much wider audience through publication and dissemination of the essays in *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*. The narrator engages with the Bernanos figure through the medium of the written word, notably a parallel reading of his polemical work supplemented with other material drawn from the official historical record. The Bernanos story contrasts with the mother’s in tone and style maintaining a more formal register consonant with the status of Bernanos as a prominent cultural figure, and consistent with analysis of the acute moral and spiritual challenges the events pose to his system of beliefs. As well, *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* provides occasion for Salvayre to hold up Bernanos’s critique of the events and actors in the conflict as a mirror to developments in contemporary Europe, most notably the troubling resurgence of nationalisms, and to comment on them. At times, Bernanos’s voice is directly transposed in *Pas pleurer* through

2 José Luis Arráez quotes the author in an interview with M. Grosjean for the *Tribune de Genève* where she affirms the fictional nature of her biography stating: “Le récit s’inspire d’éléments de la vie de ma mère, mais pas totalement, même s’il y a une grande part de vrai” (188).

3 In his translation of the novel, Ben Faccini renders the couplet as “My life is a fountain / from which my deeds are nourished” (15).

4 *Pas pleurer* is not the first of Salvayre’s novels to probe the mother-daughter relationship. *La compagnie des spectres* (1997) presents a mother figure haunted by the murder of her uncle during the Vichy regime, and the devastating impact this sombre period of French history has on her relationship with her daughter years later.

numerous quotes from *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*, the longest of which—his acerbically titled “Petite leçon d’épuration nationale”—is several pages in length.

Delving into the life of the mother fits within a well-established tradition in French women’s writing, from Colette to Beauvoir to Chedid and Ernaux, and others; inscribing Bernanos as an intellectual forebear, on the other hand, is perhaps less intuitive. Bernanos was a controversial figure in his time and remains so today. The narrator of *Pas pleurer* quickly sums up Bernanos’s political, spiritual and ideological convictions as follows: “Il se déclare monarchiste, catholique, héritier des vieilles traditions françaises et plus proche en esprit de l’aristocratie ouvrière que de la bourgeoisie d’argent, qu’il excèrè” (12). In this respect, the narrator’s two interlocutors, Montse and Bernanos, form another of the “discordant pairs” identified by Marie-Pascale Huglo as being at the heart of the “Salvayre method” (35).

So how do these two very different biographies inform one another and how are they informed by one another in *Pas pleurer*? Beyond sharing the same general geographic location at the same moment in history, the two voices with which the narrator engages have little in common with each other. Montse and Bernanos are from vastly different worlds, their viewpoints conditioned and formed by the unique generational, social and cultural contingencies of Spain and France respectively. At the outbreak of the civil war, Montse is a fifteen-year-old peasant girl; hers is a voice that “emanate[s] from the lower reaches of society” (Motte 13). Politically speaking, the young Montse’s sympathies will align with the revolutionary aspirations of her adored older brother José. However, neither Montse nor her brother can be considered astute political analysts, nor do they have the perspective of an outsider such as Bernanos. Rather, they are naïve adolescents swept up in the idealism of the moment and the excitement of living through a period of time when real change, a revolutionary transformation of the status quo, seemed possible in Spain.

On the other hand, Bernanos had a long history of political engagement through his early association with the anti-republican nationalist movement in France, the Action Française, although his relationship with it was a vexed one at best. Citing Serge Albouy, Martin Hurcombe states that Bernanos had developed a reputation, through his novels and essays, as “un curieux sympathisant [de la droite française] réservant ses coups les plus durs à ceux de son propre camp” (131). While he was initially supportive of Franco, his position evolved over the course of the summer and fall of 1936 as he witnessed the terror unleashed by the Falangists on the unarmed population of Majorca. In response to the atrocities, Bernanos wrote his polemical essay *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*; his acerbic, uncompromising critique of the Spanish Nationalists served as “a springboard for a much broader critique of the Maurrassians, the young right in France, European fascism and the institution of the Catholic Church” (Hurcombe 129). This is not to suggest, however, that Bernanos lost his faith or changed political beliefs as a result of the injustices he witnessed.⁵

As Braux points out, through writing the two stories – that of her mother Montse and that of Bernanos – the narrator attempts to come to terms with what is in effect an “impasse logique,” a paradox created by “un excès de vie” on the one hand and “un excès de mort” on the other (70). Given that war is, by definition, an exercise in mutual extermination, the latter pole of this irreconcilable pair fits well within expectations for a biographical novel on the conflict in Spain. What is less obvious, of course, is the “excès de vie.” The latter is articulated through the dialogue with Montse, and the former through a sustained metaliterary engagement with Bernanos and his text, *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*. The youthful idealism of the young Bernanos (echoed later in his son Yves) is mirrored in the figure of Montse’s brother José. The focus of the discussion that follows is on the

5 On this subject, see Michel Winock (*Le siècle des intellectuels*, Seuil, 1999, pp. 367-72) and Marie-Thérèse Liron (*Bernanos et la guerre civile d’Espagne*, L’Harmattan, 2007, pp. 9-21).

intersections of this paradox as expressed in the narratives of Montse and Bernanos in order to highlight the points of resistance at the heart of the novel and captured in its very title. The shared and starkly contrasting narrative patterns of the two biographies—Montse's and Bernanos'—are intimately and inextricably intertwined, and emblematic of the paradox that is at the heart of *Pas pleurer*.

“L'année lugubre de Bernanos”

The story of José, Montse's older brother, provides an extended intersection with the Bernanos narrative and occupies a key position in the centre of the novel bridging chapters one and two. As noted, the two figures have little in common except for a passionate commitment to politically opposing ideologies, the anarchist left with José and the archconservative, antirepublican Catholic right with Bernanos. Situated politically and generationally on opposite sides of the spectrum, José and Bernanos nevertheless experience a similar profound moral crisis in the face of gratuitous violence and the cynical subversion of the ideals they cherish: for the young man, the discovery that his Republican comrades are capable of murderous brutality against the clergy and for Bernanos that the Falangists exercise an equally blind violence against unarmed peasants under the eyes and with the blessing of the Catholic Church. Narrating their stories in tandem, the author consistently draws parallels between them in their struggle with growing doubts about the means employed to achieve political ends as well as the strategies—verbal, psychological and physical—used by the various actors to justify them. Of course, the mental and emotional repercussions on the young Spaniard and the older French writer are shaped by the perspective afforded by age and experience and determined by them but are no less devastating for each. They will also deploy very different tactics to deal with the aftermath of disillusionment, Bernanos through his writing and José through a self-destructive path that leads inevitably to his violent death under circumstances that are never clarified.

With growing apprehension, Bernanos watched the local militia eliminate any opposition from anyone on the island of Majorca with Republican sympathies, real or perceived, or anyone merely expressing views inconsistent with Nationalist dogma. Faced with the steady and alarming accumulation of incidents he enumerates methodically in his text—the dead and burning bodies by the side of the road, the round-up of unarmed peasants in the night, the mass execution of prisoners, the sudden disappearance of a woman denounced by an envious neighbour—Bernanos is no longer able to avoid acknowledging and naming the terror unleashed by the Falangists under the guise of a holy war and sanctioned by the Church for what it is, a systematic purge: “sa sympathie [...] ne peut le soustraire à ce constat : l'épuration entreprise par les nationaux avec la benediction immonde du clergé est aveugle, systématique, et relève de la Terreur” (50). The deciding factor that brings Bernanos to break his silence and denounce the regime of terror comes when his own son Yves is traumatized by the murder of two peasants by members of his Falange unit. The parallel between José and Yves (mirroring Bernanos as a young man) is evident: the characters are approximately the same age, both are driven by their youthful idealism to take up arms, and both witness acts of extreme brutality committed by those with whom they are politically allied. In the face of his son's evident distress, Bernanos determines that to remain true to his moral conscience, to remain true, as he writes, “à l'enfant qu'il fût,” he can no longer remain a silent spectator (91):

Mais il se décide à franchir le pas, non pour convaincre, dit-il, encore moins pour scandaliser, mais pour pouvoir se regarder en face jusqu'à la fin de ses jours et rester fidèle à l'enfant qu'il fut et que l'injustice accablait. Il s'y décide car il voit son propre fils Yves déchirer en pleurant la chemise bleue de la Phalange après que deux pauvres diables, deux braves paysans palmesans, eurent été assassinés sous ses yeux. (91)

A similar incident precipitates a crisis for José when the ethical and moral cost of the revolution that he has unquestioningly espoused, defended and promoted is made evident. José's plan to join the Durruti Column and engage in active fighting is momentarily suspended while he enjoys a few days of freedom in Lérima fraternizing with other young people flocking to the city to join the ranks of the Republican army. His faith in revolutionary action begins to erode, however. What is highlighted by the narrative voice is the naiveté of the bombastic young recruits José observes, and his growing discomfiture at the deadly disjuncture between the reality of their situation and the disdain they profess for the trappings of the military. Their lack of training, lack of adequate weapons and lack of basic preparation for combat condemns them to being massacred by their well-equipped opponents. Whereas Bernanos brings a finely-honed intellect to bear on his analysis of the Nationalists and the Church, José's clarity of vision regarding the futility of the Republican enterprise in the face of superior weaponry is attributed to his peasant background and physical struggle with the earth:

Mais parce que, précisément, José est paysan, c'est-à-dire rompu à vaincre par le soc la terre aride, il sait bien que l'esprit ne vainc pas la matière, surtout si celle-ci prend la forme d'un fusil-mitrailleur MG34, il sait bien qu'on ne peut pas lutter avec trois pierres et un idéal fût-il sublime contre une armée surentraînée et pourvue de canons, panzers, bombardiers, chars d'assaut, pièces d'artillerie et autres engins hautement qualifiés dans la liquidation d'autrui. (131)

Just as Bernanos unmasks the cynicism of the discourse framing and justifying the violence of the Nationalists against the Republicans as a holy war against atheists and nonbelievers, a discourse fully supported by the Church, José comes to understand the emptiness of the slogans and the grandiloquent language, "tout le grand bluff amphigourique," of the various anarchist, communist and socialist factions—the FAI, the POUM, the PCE, and CGT among others—to foment revolutionary fervour among the peasantry and the working class (128). The political propaganda in evidence everywhere in the city is linked to the hollow and simplistic Catholic doctrine taught to children, "un catéchisme simpliste, écholalique, mensongèrement optimiste et qui fait avaler des couleuvres à ces adolescents rêveurs à coups de phrases grandiloquentes" (128). Adding to José's unease is the sudden awareness of his own active participation in the promotion of an equally vacuous political dream.

The turning point comes when José overhears two young men drinking and celebrating their recent exploit: the cold-blooded murder of two priests. José understands, to his horror, that blind brutality and hatred can be justified in the name of a cause, that killing can be a source of pride, and that the murder of the defenceless can be carried out without a hint of remorse by his compatriots in the struggle. The analogy with Bernanos is explicit: "[José] est terrassé, comme Bernanos est terrassé au même moment à Palma, et pour des raisons similaires" (134). Neither can ignore their moral conscience in the face of overwhelming evidence, and both are devoid of the hypocrisy necessary to shield themselves from facing difficult truths. Badly shaken by this encounter and abandoning his plan to join the Durruti Column, José responds instead to a more pressing duty and returns to the village to assist his father bring in the harvest. Bernanos also has a field of action open to him, writing, and through writing to denounce the atrocities he witnessed.

The narrator forges further links between Bernanos and José when the young man is compared to his archrival, Diego, who espouses the Stalinist wing of the Communist party and installs authoritarian control in the village. The terms and expressions José uses, or to be more precise that are attributed to him, to ridicule his adversary's hardline political attitudes and slavish commitment to bureaucratic order echo those of Bernanos, as the narrator points out parenthetically in the following example: "[Diego] avait à cœur de se carrer sur des principes en ordre (l'ordre odieux des pions, disait José bien qu'il n'eût

jamais lu Bernanos), des projets trapus et bien bornés et des idées bien rectangulaires” (161). Whether rationalized and justified by Stalinist, Anarchist, Nationalist or Falangist ideology, the *modus operandi* and the ultimate aims of all political factions in the civil war are the same: the exercise of power through fear and control.

Among the areas where Bernanos and José dramatically diverge is in their scope of action and in the outcome of the decision to remain true to themselves. In *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune*, the French writer launches a stinging critique of those responsible for and complicit in the bloodletting, whereas José initially remains silent on his return to the village in order to avoid giving way to his deepening deception. The need to act positively in some way to effect change in the village, the absence of support for the projects he devises, and the resulting lack of outlet for the young man’s energies are psychologically corrosive. The narrator meticulously details the mental processes undergone by the character as he attempts to come to terms with the slow death of his dreams. Still, as for Bernanos, “quelque chose en lui, de son rêve passé, refusait de mourir” (145). These factors, the relentless succession of defeats dealt the Republican forces, together with Diego’s despotic influence over the hearts and minds of the villagers, and his sister Montse’s marriage of convenience to Diego contribute to a deadly cycle of self-recrimination, self-loathing and grief for having believed in a better future: “Ce rêveur définitif qui avait perdu définitivement son rêve s’abîma dans un deuil qui était le deuil de sa révolte, le deuil de son enfance et le deuil de son innocence” (251). In December 1937, catching wind of a possible Falange attack, José and his friend Juan seize the moment to finally free themselves of the unremitting despair that has poisoned their lives by throwing themselves into a last desperate defense of the village, with tragic consequences.

“L’été radieux de ma mère”

In the lifetime that elapsed since Montse’s flight from Spain in 1939, age and cognitive impairment have significantly eroded her memory leading the narrator to speculate ruefully that the intervening years have had no lasting impact on her mother. Though the narrator admits at one point that this may be an exaggeration of the depth of her mother’s memory loss—Montse does recall the immediate members of her family, the death of her husband Diego (but not when he died), and her daughters, Lunita and Lidia, and remains somewhat attentive to the world around her—the loss is reflected in the structure of the novel by the ellipsis of seven decades. Of the three chapters that make up *Pas pleurer*, two are devoted to the critical months immediately following the military uprising in Spain. The third, comprising a mere nine pages of the 280 that make up the biographical novel, serves as a brief epilogue summarizing the final defeat of the Republican forces, Montse’s harrowing flight with her baby daughter Lunita into exile in France, and the official end of the conflict on March 28, 1939 bring the narrative rapidly forward to its self-reflexive conclusion on February 8, 2011. Further highlighting the loss of memory made evident by the ellipsis is the following anaphoric sequence:

Ma mère a oublié l’année 1938 et toutes celles qui ont suivi. Je n’en saurai jamais que ce qu’en disent les livres.

Elle a oublié les petits événements (petits au regard de l’Histoire et perdus pour toujours) et les grands (que j’ai pu retrouver).

Elle a oublié qu’en 38 les mauvaises nouvelles assombrèrent le ciel d’Espagne, et que l’armée républicaine perdit chaque jour du terrain. (272-73)

All these events, both large and small, have disappeared from Montse’s memory leaving the narrator to recover what she can from history books and other official sources to reconstruct her mother’s story “plein[e] de méandres et de trous” (105). Preserved from the ravages of her dementia, however, is a singular moment made all the more significant by its persistence and its resistance in the face of the damage wrought by disease and time.

The story surfaces from the depths of memory triggered by the televised image of a young man's beaming face at a political gathering. By association, the youth's enthusiasm and passion bring back for Montse her brother José's face, alive with hope on his return from his first trip to Lérima, similarly inspired by the dramatic social changes he has seen.

Capturing all that subsequently vanished with the defeat of the Republican forces, Montse's story – "l'unique aventure de son existence" (16) – encapsulates the light shining brightly against the darkness rendered so eloquently by the haunting title of Bernanos's essay, *Les Grands cimetières sous la lune* and, of course, by the grim bleakness of the latter's subject. The two figures are bound together in the incipit through a powerful image Salvayre draws from the pages of Bernanos's work. The author of *Les Grands cimetières sous la lune* captures the Spanish Catholic Church's complicity with the military in a particularly disturbing passage. Directly addressing the spiritual leader of the island, the Archbishop of Palma, Bernanos writes: "C'est un triste spectacle de voir vos vieilles mains, vos vénérables vieilles mains où brille l'anneau du Pasteur désigner en tremblant, aux justiciers, la poitrine des mauvais pauvres" (183). By aligning with the interests of the powerful military elite against those of the working poor, the hierarchy of the Church legitimized the actions of the Nationalists and condemned to death those most in need of its protection. The force of Bernanos's image lies in the repeated focus and juxtaposition of the frailty and weakness of the Archbishop's aged hands with the power of the gesture to deliver his spiritual charges to certain death. The Archbishop's gesture is a scandalous betrayal of the spiritual mission with which he is invested, symbolized by the glittering ring of the Shepherd on his finger. These same hands and this same image are evoked in the opening lines of *Pas pleurer*. In conjunction with the final words of the ritual prayer of absolution, the Archbishop's finger points to the "mauvais pauvres" before the firing squad. The fifteen-year-old Montse is effectively inserted into the Bernanos image through association, for, as the narrator states quite categorically, she belongs to the guilty group: "ma mère est une mauvaise pauvre." The image is subsequently situated in context—"On est en Espagne en 1936"—providing the historical dimension necessary to fully grasp the sinister nature of the Archbishop's act (11).

In Spain in 1936, the narrator explains further, the "mauvais pauvres" are defined as those who opened their mouths, refusing to be silent about the injustice of their social and economic conditions, a group to which her mother belongs by virtue of her first small act of resistance. This comes at the same time as the military uprising against the Republican government. Ironically, the insurrection saves Montse from what is destined to be her lot as an adolescent peasant girl, as she points out a lifetime later to her daughter. Rebelling against the life of servitude mapped out by a rigid social and religious hierarchy and centuries of Spanish tradition, Montse refuses in no uncertain terms to follow the path of submission set out for young girls of her class. Her resistance is unleashed by a single seemingly innocuous phrase pronounced by the wealthy landowner Don Jaime Burgos to whom she is presented for the position of maid in his household. He judges her appropriate with the condescending statement: "Elle a l'air bien modeste" (13). For Montse's own mother (the narrator's grandmother), the phrase is validating; she has raised a daughter who is suitably adapted to her menial condition in life and who will pose no threat to the social order. Her daughter, on the other hand, immediately decodes the phrase's underlying meaning, and the elderly Montse describes its impact on her adolescent self with a rapid succession of very physical, highly colourful images:

cette phrase me rend folle, je la réceptionne comme une patada al culo, ma chérie, una patada al culo qui me fait faire un salto de dix mètres en moi-même, qui ampute mon cerveau qui dormait depuis quinze ans et qui me facilite de comprendre le sens des palabres que mon frère José a rapportées de Lérima. (13)

Why do Don Burgos's words provoke such an extreme, immediate, and visceral reaction? In her fractured French, Montse provides the necessary context and interpretation: "Ça veut dire ... que je serai une bonne bien bête et bien obéissante!" (13). Obedience and submission are key to preserving the status quo. The casual statement from a member of the local bourgeois elite is deeply embedded in the structures of power maintaining the rural working poor in a position of subservience, no different from a well-trained domestic animal, as the mother explains for the benefit of her daughter and, of course, for the reader's. For Don Burgos, Montse's humble demeanour and physical appearance unmistakably bear the stamp of her inferior social condition; they are the visible mark of those appropriate to fulfilling the lowest of tasks with the requisite self-effacing gratitude. Don Burgos's simple phrase awakens a dormant political consciousness by providing meaning to the new language spoken by her brother José since his return from the city.

Following the interview, the sole course of action available to the fifteen-year-old in response to the servile image of herself captured in Don Burgos's phrase is to shout out her refusal. Montse's mother attempts to silence and placate her daughter by enumerating the many advantages associated with being in domestic service to the wealthiest family in the village, are vociferously rejected. Years later, Montse's memory of that conversation underscores in no uncertain terms the very paltry gains to be made in service to the Burgos household, each qualified derisively with the adjective "petit": "je toucherai un *petit* salaire et une *petite* prime annuelle [sic] avec quoi je pourrai me constituer un *petit* trousseau et même mettre de côté" (14, emphasis added). The adolescent Montse categorically refuses to comply or to conform to the role meted out to her claiming, to her mother's horror, that she would rather prostitute herself in the city than be a servant. The outbreak of war the following day ironically and conveniently puts an end to the question of employment with the Burgos family.

Montse's burgeoning political awakening is further nourished by her brother José whose own revolt against the established social order has been fuelled by his visit to Lérima⁶ and the region where the anarchist movement has succeeded in collectivising farms and factories, giving control of the means of production over to the workers. His dream of a better world seems to have found its fullest expression. The trip provides a very brief glimpse into a new and revolutionary social system based on the egalitarian principles achieved by the anarchist and communist groups then in control of the industrial and manufacturing sectors of the city. In effect, Montse's "été radieux" is also the compelling – and hidden – story of Barcelona's "parenthèse libertaire" (104). As local historian Nick Lloyd explains: "The attempt by workers in Barcelona to build a new society was one of the most remarkable revolutionary experiments in world history, comparable in depth to the Paris Commune of 1871 or Petrograd in 1917" (1465–67). In *Pas pleurer*, the narrative voice situates the workers' experiment in collectivisation within a broader historical context by alluding to the same two historical precedents – the Paris Commune and Petrograd –, while emphasizing the uniqueness of the Catalan achievement:

Il faut rappeler que, dans l'Europe de la fin du XIX^e et du début du XX^e, le courant libertaire connu des heures si fastes que les gouvernements mirent en place des moyens drastiques de le réprimer. Mais ... c'est en Espagne que ce courant trouva son expression la plus haute, et c'est en Espagne, le temps d'un bref été, que ce courant s'incarna. (109)

6 The name given the city, Lérima, is fictional but refers to Barcelona and the Catalan region. The fictional name unhinges the city (Lérima) from its geographic referent (Barcelona) serving as a reminder that both biographical and historical sources of the novel are shaped by the author's creative agenda. It also captures mimetically the masking of the "parenthèse libertaire" from collective consciousness and history.

For Montse, the overwhelming power of the experience and the social experiment is all the more significant for the stunning contrast with the impoverishment and misery of the village. The effort to communicate the extraordinary scene that greeted her fifteen-year-old self quickly overcomes her uncertain command of the French language: “Ma mère me raconte tout ceci dans sa langue, je veux dire dans ce français bancal dont elle use, qu’elle estropie serait plus juste, et que je m’évertue constamment à redresser” (111-12). In the following example, linguistic interference from Spanish begins with a past participle and quickly gives way in the mother’s speech to a tumbling sequence of synonymic substantives all in her native tongue as she attempts to convey the impact of the scene:

Une ambiance impossible à décrire, impossible, ma chérie, de t’en communiquer la sensation vivante pour qu’elle t’aille en plein cœur. Je crois qu’il faut l’avoir *vivi* pour comprendre la commotion, le choc, *el aturdimiento, la revelación que fue para nosotros el descubrimiento de esta ciudad en el mes de agosto* 36. (110, emphasis added).

Through a further succession of impressionistic phrases and images, the “impossible à décrire” is evoked: the streets decorated with flags and banners proclaiming the end of fascism, crowds of young people filling the streets, strangers fraternizing, the cafés, restaurants, bars and luxury hotels with open doors to the labouring classes, young women smoking and wearing pants in public without being labelled prostitutes, young foreigners of all nationalities lending their support to the Republican cause. The barricades in the streets and the damaged statues in the cathedral are the only suggestion of conflict in an otherwise joyously chaotic scene. What transpired in those few months in 1936 in Barcelona was nothing less than an urban revolution from below, Chris Ealham writes, “the greatest revolutionary festival in the history of contemporary Europe” (173).

Together with the material pleasures of drinking cold water from a crystal goblet and having access to indoor plumbing, Montse also discovers romantic and sexual love in the shape of an aspiring young French writer with the intriguing name of André. An incarnation of the romantic hero, André is a poet and a member of the International Brigade scheduled to join the frontlines the morning after they meet. Lasting barely twelve hours, the encounter with André is a brief but determining moment for Montse who falls in love “dès la première seconde, entièrement et pour toujours” (148). Not unexpectedly, even years later this emotional experience is beyond the elderly Montse’s linguistic power to communicate in French and she again lapses momentarily into Spanish in an effort to describe the sensation of first love to her daughter. It was “une joie insensée, une joie presque insupportable, une joie qui la soulevait de terre *como si tuviera pajaros en el pecho*” (150, emphasis added). Just as the meeting between the two young people is made possible by the extraordinary historical context in which they find themselves, so too does the context deny them any possible future after André leaves to join the International Brigade. Unaware of anything other than his first name, Montse is left with questions about his physical circumstances or, perhaps more to the point, about his very survival, questions that invade her thoughts continually over the decades that follow the encounter that changes her life irrevocably. Years later, for Montse’s daughters, the eldest of whom is the result of this very brief union, append the surname “Malraux” to the charismatic “André.”

The very brevity of Montse’s peak experience in Lérima interlaced with the corresponding ephemeral social experiment put in place in the city ensures that both retain all the quality of a utopian moment. Years later, the revolutionary moment embodying egalitarian principles that threatened the immutability of the old social order persists in memory, resisting the effects of time and disease. Writing brings to light the “parenthèse libertaire” overshadowed by history and concealed by the vested interests of all parties to the conflict for whom its existence is inconvenient or, more to the point, for whom its example as an alternate form of social organisation compromises self-serving political

agendas. For the narrator these include “les communistes espagnols,” “les intellectuels français ... tous proches du PC,” President Azaña “qui espérait en la niant trouver un appui dans les démocraties occidentales,” and “Franco qui réduisit la guerre civile à un affrontement entre l’Espagne catholique et le communisme athée”, among others (104-5).

Through the encounter with the city and the romantic figure, André, Montse “eut l’impression d’exister pleinement et en accord avec le monde” (278-79). This is not to say that during the remaining years of the civil war Montse’s life in the village is free from the inevitable internecine conflicts that erupt within and among factions struggling for political power, a struggle is played out in the tensions between José, her anarchist “poet” brother, and Diego, her rigid Stalinist husband. Nor is she shielded from the violence and death associated with armed struggle, the pain and grief of the loss of her brother José, the shattering of her own dreams of love and fulfillment or the trauma of defeat and exile. What remains of the years after *la Retirada*—the courage to resist the weight of the past—is captured both in the title of the novel *Pas pleurer* and in its epigraph from the Quixote: “¿De qué temes, cobarde criatura? ¿De qué lloras, corazón de mantequillas?”⁷

In the concluding paragraphs, the lives of the two protagonists are drawn together again through the author’s voice, this time a parallel and contrasting metaphor distills the paradox at the heart of the narrative: “L’été radieux de ma mère, l’année lugubre de Bernanos dont le souvenir resta planté dans sa mémoire comme un couteau à ouvrir les yeux” (279). No attempt is made to synthesize or otherwise resolve the antithesis thus preserving what remains still unresolved at the moment of narrative closure. Rather, the two experiences of the civil war continue to slowly inform one another, “elles infusent,” the author writes, articulating through the analogy the shared action of each on the other and on the author as metaphorical receptacle of the two.

The intertwined voices of Bernanos and Montse in Salvayre’s biographical novel renew attention to the postmemorial repercussions of the civil war in the Republican refugee community in France and are, as well, vibrant testimony to the conflict whose impact is still being felt eighty years on in Spain. The force of the testimony delivered by Bernanos in the pages of *Les Grands Cimetières sous la lune* is such that “j’en reçois un coup au cœur” the author revealed in a 2018 lecture at the Collège de France, articulating the depth of its impact through the violence of the image. In a biographical novel framed by war, it can hardly be surprising to find incidents of violence and brutality, of death and wholesale destruction, of human cruelty in all its myriad and inventive forms. What is more unusual, perhaps, is the counterpoint to Bernanos’s dark night of the soul that is Montse’s “été radieux.” In *Pas pleurer* the civil war brings with it the discovery of life, freedom and fulfillment on all dimensions of the human experience, political, social, emotional and sexual. The intensity of the episode in Lérima is alive in Montse’s memory and resists when all else, “tout le pesant fardeau des souvenirs,” disappears subject to the inevitable conditions of time, age and disease. The author’s task is to ensure that this extraordinary story also remains a part of collective memory by consigning it to the pages of a book “puisque les livres sont faits, aussi, pour cela” (278-79).

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7 For the epigraph, Faccini provides the 1885 translation of *Don Quixote* by John Ormsby: “What art thou afraid of, cowardly creature? What art thou weeping at, heart of butter-paste?” (9).

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