

Speak, Silence! The Whispered History of a Dislocated People

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Abstract: *Varujan Vosganian draws the attention of the Romanian public and literary critics alike to the tragic history of the Armenians by publishing, in 2009, the novel entitled, not coincidentally, Cartea șoaptelor (The Book of Whispers), which brings to light the silences that have burdened this people over time. I analyze here the two levels on which the metaphor of silence works in The Book of Whispers. Starting from the representations of silence and its semantics acquired in literature, the paper studies first the memorial level. This level can be glimpsed in the inevitable collision between the personal memory of the storyteller sealed by the whispers of the Armenian elders of his childhood and the collective one of his predecessors. The second level approached is the historical one because, depending on the context, it outlines destinies subjected to different forms of silence. The organization of the novel's argumentation on these two levels reveals the key elements that contribute to silence: the photograph, an omnipresent document in the constitution of the narrative, which is closely related to death, for the first level analyzed, and the liminal, for the second. These two elements generate a "postmemory" discourse meant, through the exorcising writing of The Book of Whispers, to end the silence shrouding those "unlived lives" that exist only in photographs and stories of the elderly, and to follow their echo imprinted on the scene of nineteenth- and twentieth-century history.*

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