

BOOKS

Linn Ullmann, *Neliniște, (De urolige)*, traducere de Ovio Olaru, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2020, 367 p.

The latest translation from Linn Ullmann, - one of the most important voices in the contemporary Norwegian literature - *Neliniște* (*De urolige* in the original Norwegian title), published by Editura Polirom in 2020, has previously been a success among the Scandinavian countries, being translated into sixteen languages and nominated at the Nordic Council Prize. This book tackles a variety of universal human experiences, from the problematic of memory and love to the perspective of death and its ways of manifestation. While the present novel can be considered a portrait of a missing father, Linn Ullmann's prose is undoubtedly one that documents more than a single image, that of the celebrated figure of Ingmar Bergman, and opens the discussion over the valability of human interaction, the relationship between different generations and the possibility of living with the constant feeling of solitude.

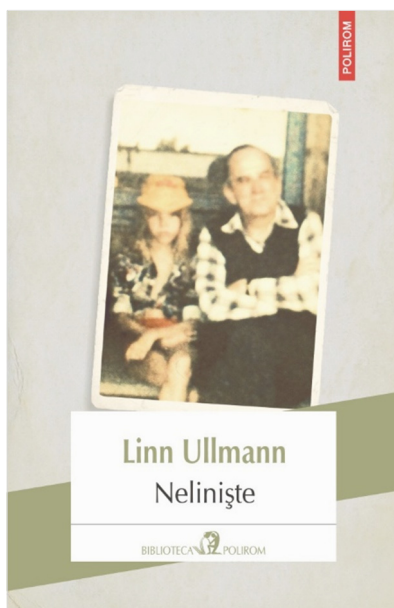
The book starts with exposing the central issues that are experienced by Linn Ullmann, the last children of Ingmar

Bergman and the daughter of the famous actress Liv Ullmann. In fact, the reader can perceive the importance of the act of remembering and that of understanding, two simultaneously actions that Linn Ullmann put to work in this documentary-prose. In other words, *Neliniște* is a writing that implies not descriptions of people and places, but, on the contrary,

descriptions of feelings that are left behind in the mind of the author as a result of what proves to be minor interactions or marginal dialogues. *To see, to remember, to understand* are passive actions that become relevant in the reconstruction not only of the father portrait, but rather in the fragile and personal understanding of life.

The volume is structured in six chapters that chronologically follow short daily moments from early ages of the daughter, Linn Ullmann, with sum-

mer vacations spent at Hammars to the final days of the father, Ingmar Bergman, now a ghostly presence on Fårö island. The red line that seems to connect all of the other points in this book is the fragmen-



tary perception of one's memory. The author doubles the feeling of strangeness and incoherence with a strong revelation of silence. What it should have been a documentary-prose and a monument for the power of communication is, in fact, almost a 'journal' of silence.

The portrait of the father and daughter is formed while revealing a few voice recordings taken months before Bergman's death. These recordings, usually named *our work* or *our project*, that were meant to document the life of one of the most known cinema directors prove to be in the end nothing but a sample of incomplete pieces of dialogues. The silence and the feeling of loneliness are caught in the absence of a purpose of these dialogues, commonly ending in monosyllabic affirmations (*'Are you missing Stockholm?/ Yes./ Are you missing theatre?/ Yes.'*). It is also a sense of rationally playing with reality in these short documentations; deleting or modifying events are part of a desire to build a different existence, comparable only with a cinematic, fictional character. Moreover, it is a perpetually degradation of the self which is brought to reader's attention in the process of forgetting memories, places and people. The real drama that this book evokes in this point is not only an absence of communication between two distinct personalities, but also a sense of losing the connection with one's individuality. The silence is complete and the death occurs when there is nothing to remember about the most intimate image of the self.

Regardless writing's methods of creating a certain sadness and taking into consideration a general distant approach in terms of family relationships, Linn Ullmann's volume is not a book about

despair and disappointment, but a meditation over love seen through the eyes of a young girl, which is forced to deal with double absence: both the father and the mother are always absent. While there is a legendary situation created around the image of the father, the same principles function when it comes to the maternal image. Liv Ullmann remains firstly an actress and only after a mother, becoming almost an anti-model to her daughter, a girl which develops a sense of guilt and a permanently fear of losing her only source of fragile stability. Therefore, it is also a desire to communicate an intimacy which never fully existed in reality, because, after all, everyone in Linn Ullmann's book is dealing with its own instability, isolation and loneliness. In the same way, the relationship between the two parents is a genuine outburst of passion, but by lacking a needed maturity, they remain in an unstable personality and act infantile on their turn when dealing with the condition imposed by real life.

Another relevant aspect when discussing the book is the conscience of aging and the close experience of death. To age is an act of labor, a work that impose boundaries for the body, as for the soul. There is a continuously obsession for work, in fact, for an equilibrium that imposes strict rules for the existence. Also, the process of time-passing is not only related to the feeling of dissolution, to death, but in the same time with the irreversible act of losing the control over memory. What the reader is facing is a slowly recognition of the fact that memory is what makes the real substance of an individuality. Death does not occur at a certain time and space, but is a progressive disappearance along with the material of memories, that being

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a final discovery for Linn Ullmann's document of absence and love.

Neliniște, in the exceptional and in-depth translation of Ovio Olaru, is therefore recommended not only to those passionate about Scandinavian literature, but also to those who are interested in an elusive style, like a cinematic exposure of life

depictions. This book is certainly a tribute for the close relation between language and memory, reality and fictional constructions of existence, as for love, time-passing and loneliness, as ways of modeling and reconfiguring identities.

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