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A Memoir of Passage: *Mort d'un silence*, by Clémence Boulouque

Jane E Evans, *University of Texas at El Paso*



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According to literary scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, the autobiographical works of St. Augustine and Rousseau were valued as “culture capital” for centuries in that they recorded “accomplished lives” (*Women* 5). Women’s life-writing, by comparison, was seldom taken seriously (*Women* 4). Not until the 1960s and 70s, following the bestseller status of personal narratives by Simone de Beauvoir, Anaïs Nin, and Mary McCarthy, to name just a few, were women’s voices heard (*Women* 6). Smith and Watson discern an important feature of late twentieth and early twenty-first century life-writing as well, namely, the narrator’s ability to negotiate several discourses (*Reading*, 146), including the political, the historical, and the psychological. “Memoirs,” for example, are considered “a mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant; the memoir directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator” whereas “Trauma narrative” and “Witnessing” allow their authors to divulge an unspeakable event and move beyond it towards a mentally healthy future (*Reading*, 198, 206-07).

Mort d'un silence, Clémence Boulouque’s memoir and first book, for which she was awarded the Prix Fénelon in 2003, was written when she was 26 years old. An example of trauma narrative and witnessing both, *Mort d'un silence* deftly weaves rhetorical, psychological, and political threads as it recounts its author’s childhood and her father’s death when she was

thirteen years old. Unlike the so-called “complete” confessional literature mentioned above, written during St. Augustine and Rousseau’s middle and old age, Boulouque’s personal writing moves by fits and starts in its re-exploration of her childhood relationship with her father, his suicide, the consequences of his act, her coming to writing, and her ultimate transformation into a creative adult. Rather than claiming to be comprehensive, *Mort d’un silence* discloses certain facts pertaining to the first-person narrator and her family while remaining silent about others. This oscillation between revelation and secrecy further underscores the author’s life-writing as a continual search for the self, an unfinished construct. My analysis focuses on the rhetorical, psychological, and political aspects of Boulouque’s first-person narrative account.

From its onset, *Mort d’un silence* defies easy categorization. The first sentence fragment, “New York, septembre 2001” (13) puts the narrator and the reader into a well-known city and disaster of recent history. We learn that the speaker used to enjoy cinnamon tea at Border’s Books and the view of St. Paul’s Chapel when not on the Columbia University campus. A second brief section refers to the disappearance of the World Trade Towers “one Tuesday morning” (13) as sentences give way to fragmentary expressions. The last two expressions sum up the New York City catastrophe as follows: “Le terrorisme, les absents” (14). The same preoccupations propel the subsequent narrative section in which we learn that the narrator’s name is Clémence, that she is French, and that she shares her personal story about terrorism and the dead with her university roommate as they wait for telephone service to be restored (17). The delay in hearing/reading the narrator’s account continues for four more pages as the brief outline of events on the well-recognized date of September 11, 2001 further entices the reader. The summative terms in this section, “Le terrorisme, mon père, ma perte” (18), leave the reader wondering how this charged series of words intersect and how they are relevant to the narrator’s

account. The almost identical spelling and sound of the last two terms enumerated, “père” and “perte” suggest a strong connection between the two words and their connotations; their unstated interrelationship, however, makes such thoughts speculation at this point in the work.

The omission of linking details about Clémence’s past heightens the reader’s curiosity about the narrator’s story at the beginning of *Mort d’un silence*. The author’s reliance on the rhetorical figures of paralepsis, aposiopesis, paronomasia, and praeteritio further enhances the reader’s interest. Paralepsis, the Greek word for “omission,” or “disregard” (Lanham 71) occurs at key moments in the text. For example, the narrator Clémence tells us, “Je suis la fille du juge Boulouque, du terrorisme, des années quatre-vingts, des attentats parisiens” (20).¹ Subsequently, she adds: “Et je suis orpheline de tout cela” (20). In the first utterance, she summarizes her life; in the second, she seemingly negates it. As in the opening pages of the book, the narrative simultaneously draws us in to read about Clémence’s story in more depth only to reject us by refusing to share the anticipated information.

A later passage follows the same movement of affirmation and then minimization: rather than concentrating on her childhood, the narrator returns to the present moment of writing in order to say, “Personne ne se souvient de mon père et la vague d’attentats des années quatre-vingts à Paris se confond avec celles qui ont suivi . . .” (20). The change in point of view from defining herself as a daughter to alluding to the additional terrorism that has marked her adult life illustrates the narrator’s tendency to understate her emotionally laden past. At the same time, it indicates the complex narrative scheme of the book: childhood memories and sensations are juxtaposed with those of two adult narrators, the 24-year-old Clémence, Columbia University student, and the 26-year-old Clémence, autobiographical writer.

Paralepsis appears in other scenes from *Mort d'un silence* in which the narrator recounts tragic circumstances from her childhood by placing herself back in time. For example, when she learns that her father will be accompanied by a bodyguard, she bursts into tears because such a change frightens her. Clémence, the adult writer, recalls the event physically rather than intellectually, as follows: “la sensation d’une main passée dans mes cheveux et de l’étoffe de la chemise de mon père sur ma joue” (35). Without understanding the reasons behind the extra protection for her father, the narrator states simply that she felt “emportée par quelque chose” (36). The absence of informational details on the adult narrator’s part coupled with the effectiveness of physical comfort in calming the nine-year-old Clémence bespeak the narrator’s ability to conjure up her childhood feelings. It is through paralepsis, in this case, the omission of numerous words describing her emotional state at nine years of age that the older Clémence gains credibility for her portrayal of her reactions as a child.

Likewise, paralepsis helps the narrator restrict the scope of her memories while hinting at the writing process as selection. She states, “Je ne parle que de cela. De mes yeux d’enfant sur son regard perdu Le reste n’est que vacarme, coups infligés pour rien” (59). These few lines reinforce the fact that at age nine, Clémence sensed that something was troubling her father but that his problems exceeded her capacity for understanding. Paralepsis allows the adult narrative voice to tell us that of her childhood memories, the ones relating to her father stand out; she refers to the lesser important ones using the terms “le reste,” “vacarme,” and “coups infligés” (59). By seeming to pass over her more insignificant memories, the narrator nevertheless alludes to the further richness of her relationship with her father.

Aposiopesis, or “stopping suddenly in midcourse – leaving a statement unfinished” (Lanham 15) also contributes to the tension between disclosure and concealment in the narrator’s

account. One such example occurs just months before her father's suicide, in a half-finished note to her paternal grandfather who had survived the extermination of European Jews in the 1940s because of his Turkish last name. In her note, Clémence says, "Beaucoup de choses ont jailli de notre vie: papa fait du terrorisme (...)" (87). The ellipsis closing the sentence implies that the thirteen-year-old Clémence simply did not have time to finish her letter. Re-read by the older Clémence, the ellipsis suggests that, as a child, she did not comprehend her father's *anti-terrorist* activities at the time that they were happening. Moreover, the ellipsis possesses a poignant quality, in that it stands for all the tragic events that the teenage Clémence would soon experience. For the young adult narrator who rediscovered the note years later, and for us, the readers, already acquainted with Judge Boulouque's date of death, the thirteenth of December, 1990, the ellipsis even appears ominous.

The narrator uses ellipsis similarly as she enumerates a series of expressions qualifying her father only to "finish" her thought as follows: "Je suis la fille d'un homme, qui était magistrat, qui n'a peut-être pas supporté le système . . . qui en a été fauché, qui. . ." (58). Aposiopesis at the end of the series reminds us of the years that have ensued from the time the narrator experienced her father's death to the time she chose to write about it. The older "voice," that of an adult, has gained a depth of understanding about her deceased parent that the young daughter lacked. Ellipsis is a visual indication of the fact that the narrator could continue her description of her father if she wanted to do so; it also suggests that she has limited her enumeration of the judge's traits in order to stress what she said initially, namely: "Je suis la fille d'un homme..." (58). Ellipsis paradoxically extends the sentence visually without enriching it with specific ideas: this is a further play on the disclosure-concealment dichotomy associated with memoir-writing as a process of selection and omission. Boulouque thereby denies the

possibility of any real closure to her story. It is up to the reader to interpret what the ellipsis means here. Is it a visual representation of her life that has continued since her father's death? Does it signify that her interpretation of her earlier life is subject to re-interpretation? These are some of the questions triggered by the memoir's open final sentence.

Like ellipsis, paronomasia, or "punning; playing on the sounds and meanings of words" (Lanham 73) involves manipulating the text as well as the reader. We have seen this device used to turn the reader's attention away from missing information, as in the previously-mentioned quotation, "Le terrorisme, mon père, ma perte" (18), in which the similar pronunciation of the last two nouns links them in the reader's mind regardless of the absence of any stated relationship between them. The narrator's use of the term "orpheline" is another case in point (20, 127). In the first occurrence of the term, she refers to herself as "orpheline de tout cela" (20). The antecedent of the previously-mentioned expression is a long sentence characterizing the narrator as "la fille du juge Boulouque, du terrorisme, des années quatre-vingt, des attentats parisiens" (20). Associated with the word "orpheline" are the notions of death, the lack of one or both parents, loss, and bereavement. At the same time, the sentence, "Et je suis orpheline de tout *cela*" [my emphasis] minimizes the narrator's childhood experiences in order to suggest that she has moved beyond her orphan status to adulthood. Recounting her story belongs to the vague future alluded to in the expression "de tout cela" (20). Through paronomasia, the term "orpheline" changes from merely being the opposite of "la fille" [daughter] to painting a picture of the adult narrator Clémence as the survivor of her father's death as well.

However multi-dimensional "orpheline" may strike us at the beginning of *Mort d'un silence*, the term, in summing up the narrator's writing near the end of the book, acquires an ironic cast. When the adult narrative voice declares that she is *only* an orphan with her story, "Je

ne suis qu'une orpheline avec son histoire" (127), we readers know that she is indeed a daughter who experienced her father's death while she was still a child, and so much more. Through her life writing, she has shared her childhood preoccupations, her thoughts as a foreign student at Columbia University on September 11, 2001, her concerns about the future of humanity, as well as her speculations about a possible commitment to writing (127) in the future. By resorting to her earlier use of "orpheline" to denote that she was bereft of her father, Clémence minimizes the importance of her memoir. Paronomasia enables her to maintain a modest tone in her writing.

Besides the word play on "orpheline," paronomasia is again evident in the narrator's use of the expression, "la fille du juge Boulouque." The term initially appears on page twenty, as the narrator reveals her identity for the first time. She explains who she is in the conventional way, that is, by disclosing her father's family name, "Boulouque." She later uses the same expression, "Fille du Juge," with the nouns capitalized, to refer to the mythic concept of following in her father's professional footsteps. The capital letters connote a formidable idea whose details the narrator has not explored; they also designate the daughter's essence as connected to her father's. A slightly altered version of the expression, "la fille du juge" mars Clémence's childhood. She is called "Sale fille de juge" during recess at school when she is 10 years old, at the height of the Gordji Affair in France (43). Although the "juge" mentioned here is generic, Clémence realizes for the first time while being taunted that her relationship with her father can be hurtful.

Near the end of *Mort d'un silence*, the lack of capital letters in the expression, "Je suis la fille du juge Boulouque" (125) complements the narrator's acceptance of the trite aspects of her story: Clémence understands that every daughter will confront the death of her father at some point, just as she realizes that she will always be judge Boulouque's descendant. In the three examples cited above, the word "fille" changes meanings from "daughter in a family" to

“despicable individual” to “adult in the same career as her well-known father” to “Judge Boulouque’s offspring.” The last example stresses the narrator’s importance in her own right as well: the sentence begins with “Je” and seems to lack an unspoken “sauf moi” emphasizing the continuous pertinence of the father-daughter relationship for Clémence, even years after her parent’s death: “Je suis la fille du juge Boulouque et cela ne rappelle plus rien à personne, *sauf moi*” [my addition]. With each utterance of the modified expression, “Fille du Juge,” the narrator makes a stronger statement about her own individuality, but without saying as much in so many words. Once again, playing on the meanings of the word “fille” allows the narrator to impart her psychological maturation to the reader without having to elaborate at length about it.

If the narrator relies on paronomasia or “punning” as a technique for imparting imagistic continuity to her text through the repetition of similar terms, she incorporates praeteritio into her text as another means for manipulating the truth. Praeteritio denotes the calling attention to something “by pointedly seeming to pass over it” (Lanham 68); it can be seen as “un refus simulé de dire une chose qu’on dit néanmoins par ce moyen” (Grisé 54). *Mort d’un silence* contains many instances of praeteritio, especially when the adult Clémence evaluates further investigative work into her father’s death as pointless. For example, she claims, “Relire les journaux qui doivent jaunir, regarder les cassettes vidéo des actualités. . . Je ne crois pas que j’y rencontrerais ce qui fait la substance de nos souvenirs” (61). As dismissive as the above sentences appear concerning old documents, they nevertheless convey important information about Clémence: first, that she has had access to old records, and second, that she has adopted new ways of thinking. She realizes that memories do not reside in things, but rather in our hearts. Even though she mentions the newspapers and videos about her father’s death only to discredit them, Clémence thereby creates a greater contrast between her younger self who collected

significant objects in order to remember, and her adult self who recognizes the true nature of memories.

In implementing the figure of praeteritio once again, the adult narrator sums up the first forty-six pages of *Mort d'un silence* by saying, “Je ne parle que de cela. De mes yeux d'enfant sur son regard perdu”(59). The two previous sentences form a complete paragraph that is striking in its brevity. Because of this, we pause for just a moment to digest it. What delays the resumption of our reading even further is our analysis of the paragraph's words, which are ironic. Not only does the adult Clémence capture her childhood feelings in the first third of her memoir, but she also indicates the transformation that she has undergone on the way to adulthood, in the years following her father's suicide. Her use of praeteritio strikes us as somewhat dishonest in that it nullifies her father's death as a transforming experience while enabling Clémence to reinscribe the image of her childhood naïveté on her reader's mind.

Praeteritio reappears as the narrator comments on her refusal to examine her late father's files. She states: “Je n'ai pas envie de m'affronter à tout cela, je n'en sortirais pas indemne. Et j'y mêlerais le souvenir de ses yeux tristes”(57). Although she seemingly passes over the details for not wanting to read the documents in question, her words hang heavily. Since Clémence has already described herself as hyper-sensitive, just like her father, the terms “Je n'ai pas envie,” “indemne,” and “J'y mêlerais” bespeak deeper feelings. Clémence couches her vulnerability regarding her father's death in the pretexts of not wanting to undertake the perusal of his old files and of not being able to perform the task impartially. Even visually, the idea of suffering again (“Je n'en sortirais pas indemne”) is buffered by the phrases referring to the narrator's lack of desire and probable ensuing sadness.

Besides admitting to protecting herself from the painful re-examination of the events surrounding her father's suicide, the twenty-six-year-old narrator alludes to the benefits of writing throughout her memoir. Her previous unsatisfactory attempts at life writing had overshadowed her faith in her authorial talent. Contrarily, she recognizes her success in this coming to writing as follows: "Ne pas garder mon deuil pour moi. Tuer le silence"(19). Writing, according to the narrator, provides her with the means for overcoming her silence about her father's death. Hence the title of the novel: *Mort d'un silence*. Clémence implies that as an author "killing her silence" about her father's suicide, sharing her work as well as her grief with her readers will be liberating. The expression, "Tuer le silence" (19) evokes the additional image of the narrator's moving beyond the cathartic act of committing her ideas to paper in order to embrace the future.

Towards the end of her personal narrative, Boulouque reiterates the psychological benefits of writing as follows: "En écrivant, j'ai retrouvé une mémoire que j'avais condamnée. Mes textes d'auparavant restaient inachevés et mes souvenirs en suspens. Je me protégeais d'eux et de moi" (127). A series of verbs connoting aggression indicates the violent, wrenching aspect of such a transformation: "Alors, je barre, je raye. Je biffe ce que j'écris, ce que je crois être moi, pendant quelques minutes ou quelques pages" (127). Implicit in the narrator's creation of her autobiographical account is the idea of excising less pertinent aspects. She sums up the process as follows: "Je me détruis, sans me tuer. Je suis l'aînée de mon père, qui rature sa vie au lieu d'y renoncer" (127). Ultimately, the writing act allows the twenty-six-year-old narrator to re-interpret her relationship with her father, recognize her separateness from him, and gain a healthy sense of control over her own life. In her words, she shapes her experiences for her memoir instead of giving up on life as her father did.

Writing as cure or “scriptotherapy” is a late 20th-century term referring to “the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment” (Henke xii-xiii). For the narrator, Clémence, this means recalling her childish reactions to the events leading up to her father’s suicide, re-examining her feelings as a university student in New York City in September 2001, and commenting on herself from the vantage point of a twenty-six-year-old engaged in writing her first book. In remembering her preoccupations at the age of nine, for example, the narrator insists on her similarity to other spoiled little girls by revealing her indulgence in sweets to the point of making herself sick (25-26, 47) and her imaginary illnesses in order to stay home from school (24-25). She also emphasizes the gestural rather than verbal bond that she shared with her father. For example, when she traveled by air for the first time, she wordlessly took her father’s hand at the moment of take-off, only to find it damp, like her own (30-31). Furthermore, she learned to laugh shrilly, like her father (61).

By comparison, the narrator of university age is able to articulate the political impact of September 11, 2001 for her, personally. At first, the noise interrupts the quietness of her morning routine (13-14). Later, in racing home after the World Trade Towers have been destroyed, she repeats “*Si je ne m’écroule pas*” as a mantra (18) while feeling tremendously alone. She also admits to having tried to escape her memories of her father by studying at Columbia University only to find out that “*les souvenirs n’habitent pas uniquement les lieux. Les lieux se détruisent*” (130). The jarring events of September 11, 2001 trigger the release, through speech, of the 24-year-old’s silenced memories, emotions, and personal story about the loss of her father. Later, with the encouragement of her friends, Clémence succeeds in putting her traumatic account down on paper.

Trauma, according to psychologists from the 19th-21st centuries, is “generally taken to mean a blow to the tissues of the body—or more frequently now, to the tissues of the mind—that results in injury or some other disturbance” (Kai 183). Although trauma is seen as affecting individuals, it has a community-related feature as well: people who have survived extreme events often do not feel connected to society or believe that the community supports them (Kai 186-87). Thus, exposure to an event reminiscent of one’s original trauma can provoke an emotional response similar to one’s reaction in the past (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 167) and can be a very isolating time. Moreover, one may only begin to understand the trauma in revisiting it, that is, in processing it for the first time from a more distant standpoint (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4).

In *Mort d’un silence*, the narrator’s witnessing the Twin Towers disaster and its devastation for New Yorkers plunges her back into the evening of December 13, 1990 when she heard her father’s gunshot and then lost him forever (Caruth, *Trauma* 5). Her reawakened feelings of helplessness and loss, accompanied by a large dose of compassion, thus compel her to share her own story with her roommate. Despite the fact that the Parisian community failed to support her family after her father’s death, her impulse is to help her fellow New Yorkers by donating her blood and time: this bears witness to the mental health that Clémence has reacquired in the eleven years following Judge Boulouque’s suicide. Certainly she has not forgotten her parent’s death, but she has surmounted it in feeling empathy towards others in distress.

The narrator’s retelling of her story in memoir form two years later further underscores the therapeutic aspect of writing. Psychologist Jennifer Freyd sums up the process as the “episodic interpretation and reintegration of previously disjointed sensory and affective memories” (170, quoted in Henke xii), whereas Shoshana Felman has called the retelling of a

traumatic experience the site of a “‘surrogate transference process’” in which the author anticipates “a public validation of his or her life testimony” (25, quoted in Henke xii). For Clémence, the twenty-six-year-old narrator, coming to writing also indicates a self-affirmation (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 21-23). By re-immersing herself in her earlier memories, she evaluates herself both at the moment of writing and at other points during her lifetime: she states, “...je ne témoigne de rien d’autre que de mon enfance espionne. Ce sont là des méfaits que je ne regretterai jamais – grâce à eux, j’ai davantage de souvenirs de mon père . . .” (75). The narrator makes no excuses for her misbehavior as a child; rather, she justifies the times that she eavesdropped on conversations not meant for her because they afforded her more memories of her father.

Additionally, she muses about her father’s suicide in terms of herself: she was thirteen at the time of his death and, at a moment just beyond the composition of her account, specifically, at twenty-six years, eleven months, and six days, she will have lived more than half her life without her father (20-21). What predominates in the previous sentence is the idea that the narrator has *survived* her father’s death. By commenting on feelings towards her late parent at three different ages, the narrator imparts continuity to her seemingly fragmented life-writing.

Only in reading the narrator’s memories of being a Columbia University student do we gain an awareness of her political preoccupation with the world at large, a characteristic of her young adulthood. It is here that she reveals her regrets as an adult. She apologizes to Americans in general for her presumptuous belief that she could share their pain on September 11, 2001 when she was not directly touched by the disaster. She also expresses feeling sorry for having imposed her desires on New Yorkers: she wanted to donate blood and volunteer at St. Luke’s Hospital, but was not needed (128-129). As she summarizes, “J’aurais voulu leur dire mon

amour” (129), we realize that she *has indeed* conveyed her feelings towards her adoptive country, albeit belatedly, through her written narrative.

At this juncture, we realize that Clémence’s *récit* has been told from the perspective of an individual, a “me,” versus a collective “them” until its final pages. As a solitary little girl and young woman, she always confronted her parents, grandparents, reporters, fellow students, and the like, alone. On the fourth to the last page of the book, however, the narrator feels a sense of community while attending a New York City synagogue on September 11, 2001. The rabbi exhorts his congregation to examine its “truths;” in using the first-person plural subject pronoun “nous,” we understand that he has included himself (128). As a result of this service, Clémence draws closer to her readers in the closing lines of her book, in which she intimates that others have endured loss and suffering similar to her own: “Ce passé, comme un pas qui nous porte. Vers eux. Vers nous. Vers. . .” (130). The final ellipsis, another example of aposiopesis, connotes the unfinished quality of her evaluation of the past. Although she has shared key events from “a significant slice of her life” (May 214), thirteen years in all, with her readers, the unknown future looms in the three points of suspension that conclude her life-writing.

As a first-person autobiographical account, however, *Mort d’un silence* makes no claim to tell everything about the author’s life, in the manner of Rousseau or St. Augustine. Instead, Clémence Boulouque’s adult narrator uses the rhetorical figures of paralepsis, aposiopesis, paronomasia, and praeteritio as a way to conceal and reveal information pertaining to distinct moments in her life. Through paralepsis, she downplays her spoiled pre-adolescence while focusing on her father’s death, her grief resulting from his demise, her reactions to the events of September 11, 2001 as a Columbia University student, and her committing her ideas to book form. Aposiopesis enables her to be speculative rather than definitive in her interpretations of her

father's life and of her relationship with this parent. She even utilizes this figure in her final thoughts at the end of her memoir. "Vers" followed by an ellipsis lets the narrator and the reader alike reflect on possible futures for the adult "Clémence." By relying on paronomasia, she connects ideas through the sound similarities of words, such as "père" and "perte," without having to analyze their interrelationship. This figure of speech allows her to be poetic, suggestive, and brief instead of longwinded. Even the praeteritio found in *Mort d'un silence* sheds light on the narrator's talent for manipulating her text and her reader. She saves time, space, and credibility by seeming to discount an idea in order to stress a different point, such as omitting any adult analysis of her past so that she only imparts a child's perspective of her father's death. The truth is that the twenty-six-year-old narrator/author makes detailed comments throughout *Mort d'un silence* about being a child between the ages of nine and thirteen and a university student. Boulouque's use of rhetorical figures in her life-writing emphasizes the notion that one's "truth" may be modified in order to fit a particular literary genre, such as one's memoirs. Through its reliance on selected rhetorical figures, Boulouque's memoir becomes a survivor's story depicting her individual passage from childhood to adulthood via changes in her perceptions about her father. By remembering the events leading up to her father's suicide in 1990 and beyond, she also recovers her sense of self. This exercise allows her not only to loosen the grip in which unexpressed traumatic memories have held her during the past decade and a half, but to see herself as part of larger communities, including New Yorkers in September 2001, and the Jews during the Second World War, that have survived mass losses and grief.

University of Texas, El Paso

Notes

¹Magistrate Gilles Boulouque was France's first anti-terrorist judge. Beginning in the 1980s, he was responsible for the files of the most dangerous criminals against the French state. In 1986, he called for the interrogation of Wahid Gordji, an interpreter working at the Iran Embassy in Paris, who was considered to be one of the principal terrorists behind the bombings in the French capital in 1986. Although Gordji originally took refuge in the Iran Embassy, he did eventually appear before Judge Boulouque. The latter chose not to detain the former. It was later believed that French hostages in Iran were freed in exchange for Gordji's independence. As a result of letting the Iranian suspect go, Gilles Boulouque was seen as a puppet of the Mitterrand government and the laughing stock of the French media (Ferrand, Markham). Because of interviews in which he openly justified his decision in the "Gordji Affair," he was indicted for "violating judicial secrecy" during his antiterrorist investigation. The most protected, yet solitary of French magistrates, Gilles Boulouque collapsed under the pressures of his work on the evening of December 13, 1990. He committed suicide at home by shooting himself in the head with his service revolver (Ferrand). His daughter Clémence, who heard the shot, was thirteen at the time.

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