

EXILE, IDENTITY AND ANAMNESIS IN *THE HOOLIGAN'S RETURN* BY NORMAN MANEA

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Abstract: Norman Manea's going into exile in 1986 was a turning point in his writing. America gave him the chance to reach a new fiction level. The American environment functions as a host for the author's rebirth, a new identity in a different space and time and opens up an opportunity for anamnesis. This anamnesis, in which the author's biography is sublimated artistically, grants Norman Manea the entirety of his identity, an identity in which memory is the main source and resource of his writing.

Using language as an ally to anamnesis, Norman Manea descends into his own past and rediscovers his identity. His memories represent the raw material for a literature that brings together stories of three fundamental experiences: Nazism (with its dehumanizing corollary, the Holocaust), communism (with the White Clown's perverse pleasure in "order and discipline") and exile, with language displacement.

The Hooligan's Return was brought out in 2003, almost simultaneously in the United States of America and Romania. In America, Norman Manea diversifies and rounds off the facets of his hybrid identity. It is this exile condition that stimulates his multiple selves. Norman Manea effectively offers America an explanation on how totalitarian regimes can last throughout history and how they can be accepted and reinforced through undemocratic ruling. Norman Manea remembers the history of Romania from a personal point of view that he shaped and perfected with the aid of literary devices.

Norman Manea is a writer who depicts humanity's drifting toward totalitarianism, a writer who is totally engaged, a writer of and on the marginality – temporal and spacial.

Keywords: Norman Manea, The Hooligan's Return, identity, exile, anamnesis

Norman Manea (born 1936) is a very important Romanian writer who continued his literary and essayistic work during his exile – he moved to Germany in 1986 and finally to the United States, two years later. He is currently living in New York, teaching literature at Bard College.

I believe Norman Manea's fiction and non-fiction books published in the United States relate extremely closely to the concepts of history, memory and totalitarianism. Memory virtually becomes an element of civilization, the recourse to memory being part of the democratization of the public discourse. Until 1986 Manea could have been considered a good author, but one that was *disconnected* from any historical and political context. It was only through America that Norman Manea became an *accomplished* writer because his memory, liberated and revived by living in a free country, allows him to remember and write about the realities in Romania, as he experienced them from birth, after being deported in Transnistria, withdrawing in the self-imposed "inner exile" under communism and, finally, after completely recovering his own past, through different literary forms. After all the restrictions reflected in his work were eliminated, the author achieved a different type of writing – uninhibited, innovative – the whole truth, fully acknowledged. Thus, for Norman Manea, the year 1986 was a *turning point*, a **landmark** in his history as it functions as a literary borderline separating Norman Manea, the Romanian writer, from Norman Manea, the American writer.

On the difficulty of placing the volume *The Hooligan's Return* in a literary genre

The Hooligan's Return was brought out in 2003, almost simultaneously in the United States of America and Romania. It was the author's first literary work conceived entirely on American soil. Mention should be made that, after Manea became professor at Bard College in New York, he wrote many substantial essays, that were included in the volume *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist* (twenty years later, in America, Manea got back to his essayistic manner of dealing with contemporary events, by publishing the volume of essays *The Fifth Impossibility: Essays on Exile and Language*, in which there are included portraits of several writers, texts that were also included in the volume *Plicuri și portrete*, published in Romania). Moreover, he re-wrote the novel *The Black Envelope*, while still preserving the essence of the version published in Bucharest in 1986. He also offered an American version of the volume of stories *October, Eight o'Clock*.

Concerning fiction, he published a book of short stories, *Compulsory Happiness*, but the stories had been written and published previously in Germany, the first country he went to as an exile. While in his short story collection Norman Manea experienced his being deported and returning to Romania as a generic form of suffering (in no way resembling his own particular context and identity), after moving to America, the anamnesis offers him a suitable frame for a precise and troubling recalling during which the protagonist reexamines his whole life and tries to bring his parents' and grandparents' history to attention. In this regard, *The Hooligan's Return* represents memory as a *narratable* fact. The temporal twists and turns without following any chronological order, the way he relates to his homeland upon returning to it in 1997, all these things lead to taking control and marking a new literary territory, *The Hooligan's Return* containing obvious literary connotations that go beyond a simple process of retrospection.

The difficulty of placing *The Hooligan's Return* in a specific literary genre has prompted me to make use of several concepts existing in the theories of literature and to see how they apply in the case of the above-mentioned literary work. Literary critics – among them Romanians and Americans – have questioned whether *The Hooligan's Return* is a fictional account, a memoir or an essay. These questions have been followed by many others, such as: to what extent are the facts narrated in the novel real? Why did Norman Manea entirely write this book, overwhelmingly related to Romania as it is, in America? What part did America play in the whole conception of *The Hooligan's Return*?

The Hooligan's Return is the first book on a large scale, resulting from the contact with the cultural American environment. At the same time, this book is, paradoxically, the one that made its author "return" to Romania. The American exile served as a fictional homecoming, revisiting of the past – definitely a risky enterprise. With *The Hooligan's Return*, Norman Manea found his place again in Romanian literature, and started being reviewed as a first-rate author.

American exile and identity

The exile did not paralyze Norman Manea, even though it required a sort of forced social and identity dislocation of the individual.

The exile is a singular, whereas refugees tend to be thought of the mass. The exile appears to have made a decision, while the refugee is the very image of helplessness, choicelessness, incomprehension, driven from his home by forces outside his understanding and control.¹

Identity reconstructs itself out of fragments, the past, in Norman Manea's case, is that part which

allows him to survive. It is an exile that feeds on memories, amplifying the present time.

Exile involves dislocation, disorientation, self-division. But today, at least within the framework of postmodern theory, we have come to value exactly those qualities of experience that exile demands – uncertainty, displacement, the fragmented identity.²

Exile is conceived more and more as the particular state of the intellectual who cannot “connect” to a (illusory and unfortunate) political command: “Exile as the typical condition of the modern intellectual – indeed, as the only condition that should command our respect”³. In America, the exile state is an everyday fact of life. Somehow, in America, the exile (and other human groups, according to sex, religion and race criteria) and the Native Americans are placed on the same level by the US Constitution, that renders interracial segregation inoperative; the law supports only one type of human relationship, all people are equal, the exile have the same rights and duties as the natives.

The intellectual who because of exile cannot or, more to the point, will not make the adjustment, preferring instead to remain outside the mainstream, unaccommodated, uncoopted, resistant.⁴

Norman Manea diversifies and dynamites his different identity sides. Exile promotes multiple, combining Is and sides. The writer's aim is to manage different Is, to control the hybrid. The so-called *outsider* becomes important in a society that no longer refers to a single center or decision maker. The American society no longer distinguishes between different components (when it comes to race or value), there is a dialogue between the *original matrix* of the American nation and the periodically added *centrifugal layers* that gravitate around the nucleus. In fact, America's prolificacy owes to this uninterrupted dialogue between locals and newcomers, the exiles are accepted as a *normal* and *wholly democratic* fact of life. And the exile's testimony is important when it comes to understanding the nature of the intellectual, who, in his/her homeland, faced countless obstacles in expressing his/her ideas.

¹ Mary McCarthy, “A Guide to Exiles, Expatriates and Internal Emigrés”. *Altogether Elsewhere. Writers on Exile*. Ed.: Marc Robinson (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1994) 50.

² Eva Hoffman, “The New Nomads”. *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Languages and Loss*, ed. Andre Aciman (New York: New Press, 2000).

³ Edward Said, “No Reconciliation Allowed”, *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Languages and Loss*, ed. Andre Aciman (New York: New Press, 2000) 48.

⁴ Edward Said, “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals”. *Grand Street* nr. 47, 1994, 116.

America, open space for memory

There are always turning backs, uncertainties, writing is not linear, not even in America. *The Hooligan's Return* will be the perfect example in all his work when it comes to un-linear, un-chronological books. *The Hooligan's Return* is considered by American and Romanian critics to be an exact testimony of exile, fractured and hybrid identity. Norman Manea managed to tell the story in its entirety as an authentic testimony, in a singular artistic form. The different selves (the Jewish writer, the formerly-living-in-a-communist-regime writer, the exiled writer) harmonize and construct the individual entity who identifies through writing.

Certainly the power of his writing appears undiminished by the effect of the indeterminacy it can sometimes produce. That goes with the sense of a twilit or purgatorial existence, in which the most obvious features of tyranny and suffering have become metamorphosed into their personal equivalents. Mr. Manea is most subjective of sufferers, but just for that reason he can involve us totally in his own awareness of it and the images of it that live in his narrative.⁵

As a writer, Norman Manea is offered the chance to tame his exile, writing becomes a *sine qua non* condition for a *bearable* exile. A sort of osmosis takes place between writing and exile, a “metaphysical condition” for survival.

Such persons have been so numerous in the last hundred years as almost to seem commonplace today. No one who reads can fail to be familiar with the works of writers who have reflected on the subject of exile, though often it is exile as a «metaphysical condition» or a noble effort to compensate for what has been «lost in translation» that is front and center, rather than exile as occasion for posturing or delusion.⁶

Norman Manea took to America a Jew's testimony to communism, a political system he had lived under. Luckily, there was a perfect match between the historical construction of America – a country that had refused any form of dictatorship and totalitarian attempts ever since its Declaration of Independence – and the testimony of a writer who had come from the Eastern part of Europe – and who had understood and described how totalitarian regimes distorted a citizen and a writer's liberties and options.

The recourse to memory is not just a simple narrative device, but is an essential part of his work and the act of writing. This anamnesis acquires a *unique and individual consistency in the American environment* Norman Manea uses to express himself; through essays and literature, it grants Norman Manea the entirety of his identity, an identity in which memory is the main source and resource of his writing. The American critic Reginald Gibbons pinpoints the fact that Norman Manea closely follows the contours of the absurd, crazy dimensions of everyday life:

But like Kafka himself, Norman Manea has imagined reality by moulding it, by following the contours of the absurd, insane dimensions even of ordinary life in the midst of war or dictatorship or deprivation. Manea has evoked and in his way memorialized human

⁵ John Bayley, “Treading the Edge of a Nightmare”. *The New York Times Book Review*, June 21, 1992, 31.

⁶ Robert Boyers, “In Exile from Exile”. *The New Republic*, January 19, 2004, 37.

suffering in a society “haunted,” as he has written, “by the demon of sadism and sly, stubborn stupidity,” a “social condition whose paradoxically destructive coherence mocked all attempts at logical explanation” (or of realistic fiction, we might add).⁷

Thus, with Norman Manea, imagination is “a scrupulously accurate reflection of a difficult experience”⁸. In Romania, Norman Manea was able to use his memories in his fiction, but they necessarily lacked any direct references to reality (the communist regime rejected both the Jew’s testimony and the image of everyday realities). In America, Norman Manea is cut away from his original environment and forgets his old habits when forced to dance on a thin wire, far from the ground (the circus is a frequent theme in his works), but he earns his right to remember and testify. His memory – from the age of 5, when he was deported to a concentration camp in Transnistria, to the age of 50, when he leaves Ceaușescu’s Romania – is the most valuable possession he brings to America. A memory that acquires literary value, and thus Manea becomes an excellent fiction writer without inventing a thing. Norman Manea is a fiction writer who reflects on human destiny, an author who finds himself in the right place to recollect incidents dating from his uncertain origins as a Romanian Jew and writer from interwar Bukovina.

Manea brings to America the struggle of a land – Eastern-Europe – affected by totalitarian regimes more than democracy. Communism is the central subject of reflection in Norman Manea’s books. In the United States the Holocaust has been repeatedly debated, but the Gulag is not that much of a public topic of discussion. But Manea did not want to be primarily a Holocaust writer, did not choose the Jews’ torment in World War II as his central theme. Manea compared and contrasted both 20th century totalitarian forms of government.

Both Holocaust and Gulag happened mainly in the East. After the war, the West European countries debated the Holocaust repeatedly, recognized their complicity and guilt in this horrible crime and so educated a new generation in the spirit of cordiality and responsibility. The Gulag was less of preoccupation in public debate, not only because it didn’t involve Western participation, but because it also shamed the great rhetoric of “progress”, constantly manipulated by communist propaganda in the East as well as in the West. To this day, the huge crimes of the communist dictatorships, from Soviet Union to Cambodia and China, from Romania to Albania and Afghanistan, have yet to become a central topic for discussion.⁹

Norman Manea effectively offers America an explanation on how totalitarian regimes can last throughout history and how they can be accepted and reinforced through undemocratic ruling. Norman Manea remembers the history of Romania from a personal point of view that he shaped and perfected with the aid of literary devices. Consequently, America plays a double role: providing the right environment that facilitates recollection and good reception for this sort of confessions.

Sebastian - a role model and the connotations of the term *hooligan*

⁷ Reginald Gibbons, „Imaginația lui Norman Manea”. Translation by Silvia Dumitrache. *Observator cultural*, no. 584, 21 iulie 2011, 8.

⁸ *ibid*, 8.

⁹ Norman Manea, *The Fifth Impossibility: Essays on Exile and Language* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012) 288.

During his exile, Norman Manea was impressed by the Romanian writer Mihail Sebastian's existential itinerary – his *Diary*¹⁰ was first published in Romania in 1997. It is the diary of a persecuted marginal, a Jewish writer who was not deported in a concentration camp, but was subjected to the anti-Semitic laws of the Antonescu government while living in Bucharest. Mihail Sebastian's name disappeared from the Bucharest press during World War Two and the play he wrote, *The Nameless Star*, was staged under a pen name in 1944. One decade before that, Mihail Sebastian explained “how I became a hooligan”, how he ended up being vilified and marginalized by Nae Ionescu, who wrote an anti-Semitic preface to his novel, *For Two Thousand Years*, that was published in 1934. The plot can be divided into three stages: the ascension of extreme right nationalist movements (coinciding with Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's social success and the assassination of Manciu, the Iași prefect), a relatively calm period and finally these movements' revival when Hitler came to power in Germany (1933). *How I Became a Hooligan* was written as a reply to the torrent of accusations he faced after the novel was published. It was one of the biggest scandals in the interwar period. The Romanian Jews felt betrayed by his publishing the preface, the Legionnaires triumphed, Mihail Sebastian was discredited after several months of smear campaigns against him. What he did was try to reconcile his own mixed roots as a Romanian and Jew.

To me it seems more urgent and useful to reconcile in my own life the Jewish and Romanian values this life is made of, instead of winning or losing some civil rights. I should like to know what anti-Semitic laws could cancel the irrevocable fact that I was born on the Danube and love this land.¹¹

Regarding Mihail Sebastian's situation, Marta Petreu points out: „Nae Ionescu not only denied Sebastian the right to consider himself Romanian, but also the right to consider himself human, accepting only the immutable attribute “Jewish”: «Are you, Joseph Hechter, a Danube *man* from Brăila? No. You are a Danube Jew from Brăila»“.¹²

Manea often references books and quotes that can help him understand and describe the age he had just been born in. His essential reference point for tracing his own biography is Sebastian, who is a role model for him. Manea sees in him a credible witness, who noticed the Romanian intelligentsia's drift towards extremism.

Some American critics who reviewed Manea's *The Hooligan's Return* after its publication in America, emphasised the analogy between Mihail Sebastian and Norman Manea, both of them having been labelled as “hooligans”. Matei Călinescu, in his Afterword to *The Hooligan's Return*, sums up the way this word overlaps with Norman Manea's evolution in Romania and his American exile.

The author's ironic, sometimes polemic (but without malice, unlike Sebastian), other times melancholic, serene or simply amused gesture of presenting himself as a «hooligan» is

¹⁰ Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal. 1935-1944*, text îngrijit de Gabriela Omăt, prefată și note de Leon Volovici, București, Humanitas, 1996.

¹¹ Mihail Sebastian, *De două mii de ani*, in Mihail Sebastian, *Opere, I. Proză*. Ediție coordonată de Mihaela Constantinescu-Podocea. Text ales și stabilit, note și comentarii și variante Mihaela Constantinescu-Podocea și Oana Safta. Prefată de Eugen Simion, (București: Academia Română. Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2011) 477-478.

¹² Marta Petreu, *Diavolul și ucenicul său: Nae Ionescu – Mihail Sebastian* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2009) 152.

not just a way of internalizing and reacting to the Other's gaze – the gaze that, according to Sartre's famous definition, constructs the Jews – but also a technique which allows him to lay out his own ambiguous and paradoxical condition during his time in his native Romania, but also his last two decades of exile.¹³

Norman Manea is a writer depicting humanity's drifting toward totalitarianism, a writer who feels and even contributes to the disintegration of the center, a writer of the (temporal and spatial) margin dissolving the center. Marginality becomes a center of attraction, a perpetual state, a *modus vivendi*. This marginality is associated with an authentic connection to the past. In fact, Manea is a moralist who truly reflects on the essential questions of modernity. America does not corrupt him with its consumer society, it is him who offers America the founding modern experience. This experience is opposed to superficiality. As Joseph. D. Lewandowski remarked, the great questions can be dissolved into "superficial" answers.

Still, this kind of playful reflexive questioning continually begs other questions (peculiarly modern ones): Once the question of authenticity, foundation, and a "we" has been abandoned in favor of superficiality, what is left? And, what does "superficiality" signify without an awareness of depth?¹⁴

In between prose and memoirs

For a long time, Norman Manea was considered to be a memorialist. This statement is too limiting, even false. Until 1986, when he left Romania, Manea was not a writer who favored recalling. His periphrastic style, rich in reflexive digressions and temporal splits that altered and atomized temporal unity, prevented Manea from being considered a writer who relied on recollection after his first books were published.

In *August the Fool's Apprenticeship Years*, Manea makes the first effort to recover a past age, mainly filtered by a second grade reality – the press as it was in the first decade of the Stalinist era. *August the Fool's Apprenticeship Years* illustrated a secondary reality depicted in that period's media, which did not coincide with actual reality. His fiction later represented some other bits of reality, mainly when depicting his own biography after leaving Suceava, upon finishing high-school, in *Atrium* and *The Days and the Game* (in which the moments corresponding to reality were more visible as experienced by an engineer intern who comes back to his hometown and reconnects with lost loves).

The anamnesis was maintained and extended only up to his own youth, no further than that – to his adolescence and childhood –, through a self-imposed memory block. In his first books, Manea did not descend into his own adolescence and childhood, he did not discuss the Jewish family he was born into, he did not see History as intrinsic to his personal history. His personal experience did not turn into fiction material until *October, Eight O'Clock*, but even in that book the bits of reality (deportation, the return from the concentration camp, the child who discovered reading as the only viable alternative to the masks that glorified communism, becoming an adult, discovering eroticism, the holidays on the seaside) lost their temporal

¹³ Matei Călinescu, „Reflecții despre *Întoarcerea huliganului*“. *Întoarcerea huliganului*. Ediția a II-a (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 372-373.

¹⁴ Joseph D. Lewandowski, "Modernity and Its Vicissitudes". *Cultural Critique*, Winter 1994-95, University of California, 156.

mark. There were plenty of invented stories, and since the writer allowed himself to digress from reality, he was received in ambiguous terms and labeled as a *fiction writer*, not as a *memorialist*.

In Norman Manea's case, biography is loaded with esthetic and narrative elements. Bits of biography are spread all over his book, in all his short stories, but Manea starts writing about the self, about his own experiences only in his essay collection, *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist* and his novel, *The Hooligan's Return*. This uncovering of biography can be first noticed in an essay volume, which is the quintessential space of the confessed and interpreted self. In these books he painstakingly reconstructed the moments of tension in the individual's relationship with the system, the moments when state control and mistrust began to infiltrate the most intimate human relationships. „Control and monitoring, that is the only credible news, control and monitoring.”¹⁵

This ambiguity – when it comes to the relationship between fiction and literary nonfiction – is amplified by his publishing of *The Hooligan's Return* in the United States and, then, in several European countries. The editorial subtitles seem in total opposition to his work, and they go to show that it is actually impossible to find a single label for this book. *The Hooligan's Return* acquired different subtitles: *A Memoir* in English, *Ein Selbstporträt* in German, *Una vita* in Italian, *Novela* – in Spanish. The author considers *The Hooligan's Return* a dialogue between “the documentary sections of the book and speculative fiction”¹⁶.

The difficulty of defining. Exemplifications

I will quote three passages containing this ambiguity, the intermediate state between fiction and literary nonfiction. It is worth pointing out that these passages would not have seen published in a communist system, where the censors were against any depiction of Jews being persecuted during World War Two. These are three short passages containing real time narratives which create the impression that the author was there, at his protagonist's side; there is a double point of view, one in the present and the other in the past.

First, the departure for the concentration camp, by train, a present day train; the recollection of the deportee train starts in the present, in an ordinary train station, and it is from this ordinary train that the narrative leaps to *that* train, which was not used for an ordinary voyage in an ordinary time.

“Everybody in!” the guards had shouted. “Everybody, all of you,” they had screamed, raising their shining bayonets and guns. There was no escape. “Everybody in line, everybody in, everybody.” We were showed into the car from behind, and we huddled together, ever closer, until the car was sealed. Maria was beating with her fists against the wooden slots of our pen, begging to be allowed to go with us, her cries growing weaker. The guards gave the signal for departure and the train's wheels began to turn, clanking rhythmically. The train, a mortuary procession, moved into the dark belly of the night.¹⁷

Remembering his mother while standing at her grave, in Suceava; there are biographical elements, again, but they cannot belong to an ordinary diary.

¹⁵ Norman Manea, *The Hooligan's Return. A Memoir*. Transl. Angela Jianu (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003, 2005) 98.

¹⁶ Norman Manea, *Textul nomad* (București: Hasefer, 2006) 142.

¹⁷ Manea, *The Hooligan's...*, 346-347.

“I hope to be the first to die,” she had said. “Without Marcu, I’d be a burden for you. I’m difficult, not easy to live with. I’ve always been nervous, prone to exaggeration. It would be too hard on you.” Indeed, it would not have been easy. She panicked easily, she was difficult, she certainly had a tendency to exaggerate – yes, it would have been hard. “Someone you love is someone whose absence in the space he or she previously filled is greater than their presence there.” Her prayer was fulfilled, she was the first to die, leaving behind a vacuum even greater than her overflowing presence had been.¹⁸

His sick father, in Jerusalem, lost in “the desert of Alzheimer’s disease”¹⁹. He was looked after by a German young man; the very presence of a German young man looking after a Jewish old man can be seen as an artistic effect, a type of historical antagonism dissolved in the present humanity.

A tall blond young man, with a towel in each hand, was cleaning him up. The young man saw me and smiled. We knew each other from previous visits and had chatted a few times. He was a young German volunteer, working at that old people’s home in Jerusalem.²⁰

This literary device connecting the German young man to his dead mother and his sick father returns a page later, and, by repetition, confers this episode an air of authenticity, the authenticity of reconciliation, transcending the past and two nations set against each other.

I had to give her this last bit of important information before leaving the graveyard of the past, that Father, freed at last from solitude, was now, without any thoughts or worries, in the tender care of a young German seeking to redeem his country’s honor. At last, nine years too late, I had finally showed up for my mother’s funeral, and my motherland’s too.²¹

Unlike Romanian literary nonfiction, which developed after 1990 and consisted of communist prison diaries, the other European writers who wrote about communism did not limit themselves to diary keeping. The European literature on the subject of communism was seen as fiction, and those who wrote about communism were called writers.

«Fictionalizing» and an obviously literary structure undermine the strict notion of autobiographical nonfiction, which is a brutal reduction of the significance of the work. Proust’s fiction or Blecher’s, or Radu Petrescu’s, Schulz’s, Sebastian’s, and so many others’, they all ultimately contain passages and characters that we can recognize from the author’s life.²²

Manea can actually be assigned to an extremely common literary formula, combining different genres. The novel is defined as a work containing more and more formulas. Therefore, I will use a wider concept and definition of the novel: *an invented story*.

¹⁸ *ibid*, 375.

¹⁹ *ibid*, 377.

²⁰ Manea, *The Hooligan’s...*, 378.

²¹ *ibid*, 378-379.

²² Norman Manea, *Curierul de Est. Dialog cu Edward Kanterian* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2010) 151.

Fiction vs. Reality

Manea depicts the reality of those who suffered, were tortured and lost their freedom and life. This reality cannot be simply transcribed. Starting with the 1970s, the ambiguity of defining the connection between reality and fiction is acknowledged by the European literary theorists, who prefer to discuss the *content* of some books in relation to the *truth/authenticity* of the written word, rather than grouping books in a genre or other.

In Manea's case, the *autofiction* concept is neither appropriate, nor adequate; he does not invent events. He does not lend his name to a character in order to invent a story that only appears to be real. Manea does not recreate reality. Memory, which is not very important to the autofiction theorists, in his case is the very matter and stimulus for writing. "*The Hooligan's Return* is a confession indeed, is indeed a testimony, but it is an artist's testimony".²³

Giorgio Agamben discusses the concept of *testimony*, bringing up that which cannot be said, *the lacuna*, which inspires Philippe Forest to theorize *the testimonial pact*. Giorgio Agamben, in *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999), inspired this term, *the testimonial pact*. The author gives a testimony in order to fill up a *lacuna* caused by the exterminated being absent from history.

At a certain point, it became clear that testimony contained at its core an essential lacuna; in other words, the survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to. As a consequence, commenting on survivors' testimony necessarily meant interrogating this lacuna or, more precisely, attempting to listen to it. Listening to something absent did not prove fruitless work for this author. Above all, it made it necessary to clear away almost all the doctrines that, since Auschwitz, have been advanced in the name of ethics.²⁴

There is a whole group of people who do not write, but experience extreme events and are saved from being forgotten by others' writing. "The duty of the writer is to speak for others who are silent."²⁵ Therefore, the writer has a certain responsibility if he agrees to the *testimonial pact*. *Pact* is the key word here, introduced by Philippe Forrest, meaning *alliance*. There is a virtual *moral contract* between the writer inheriting the silent one's history, and the reader who is presented with this testimonial reality the writer is prompted to depict.

Thus, an important element is the writer's responsibility, providing he accepts what Phillipe Forest calls the *testimonial pact*. *Pact* means *alliance*. Practically, there is a moral contract between the one who writes and the silent ones, whose inheritor he is, according to which the writer is entitled to bring a testamentary reality to the attention of his readers. "Testament's first meaning is alliance, an alliance between the testifier (the saved one, that is) and the person being testified about (the drowned)."²⁶ The need to testify²⁷, *the phenomenology of testimonial* (Agamben), the duplication of the testimonial subject, all these conditions are adopted by fiction. Fiction is no longer an invention, a reality the author alters as he wishes, there are no sovereign authors and malleable matter any more.

²³ Mircea Iorgulescu, „Cartea plecării și a întoarcerilor“. *Revista* 22, 7 iulie 2003, 22.

²⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 1999) 14.

²⁵ Forest, *Romanul, realul și alte eseuri*. Traducere și postfață: Ioan Pop Curșeu. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Tact, 2008, 187.

²⁶ *ibid*, 184.

²⁷ *ibid*, 186.

Forest's conclusion does not cancel fiction, only forces one to agree to this *testimonial pact*. The testimonial pact means facing human horror, immersing oneself in the abyss of terror and dehumanization and finding there the power to put them into words. "Tomorrow's snow" Forest writes about is a sort of purification. Fiction is no longer a gratuitous, formal game, but acceptance of reality as a literary given.

The Hooligan's Return has all the premises of a testimonial pact – revisiting a past that can acquire ethic value. Manea considers himself to be "a posterity tourist". *The testimonial pact* is a partial one, not everybody "signs", rejection is a choice for those who do not wish to revisit the past and who consider Manea „un undead creature, a ghost haunting a place I no longer dwell in, no longer needed there, if I ever was... a posterity tourist."²⁸

Postmodernism breaks down the I, the suspended I, cut away from history and the present, no longer exists, there is only this testimonial connection with those whom one testifies for. Manea wavered between this emphasizing of the I as a form of resistance when confronted with totalitarian regimes, that denies and atrophies the human being, and the I who maintains a relationship with other Is, in a sort of subversive – during communism – and manifest – in post-communist democracy – solidarity.

In Manea's fiction, the "photographic copy" is not possible, only digressions that better illustrate the testimonial pact.

Not memoirs, not a copy of reality, as some superficial critics might think. A real life portrait or self-portrait allow for creative, expressive versions far removed and even completely different from the original model, not at all a photographic copy.²⁹

The essence of confession and, derived from it, of the testimonial pact, is to resist, to come back to life, to avoid death and to refuse implacability. There must be somebody to tell what happened, to opt for life. Life is about testimony and the revelation of all the traumas to those who do not know about them.

Consequently, there are three testimonial pacts. The first one, with the Holocaust victims; the second one, with those who lived in a communist system, but, though they were alive, could not talk about the communist horror; the third, with himself, the person who could not speak at the time those events took place and does so retrospectively, through summoning his own memory. A review in *The New York Review* discussed this blend of memory and fiction and the profound I who finds himself again through writing.

The Hooligan's Return is a memoir of a troubled soul. It is a fragmented and somewhat repetitive. Manea keeps digressing, circling around an incident as he tries to make sense of it. He scrambles the chronology as well as his narrative strategies and point of view as he tries to make sense of his life. There are passages of lyrical prose and even magic realism. He is most persuasive when he tells his story straight.³⁰

In other words, in Norman Manea's writing the existence of a three-dimensional testimonial pact is definitely certified, in accordance with Philippe Forest's theory, and in line with Giorgio Agamben. We are talking about a testimonial pact that does not exclude the

²⁸ Norman Manea, *Sertarele exilului. Dialog cu Leon Volovici* (Iași: Polirom, 2008) 152-153.

²⁹ Manea, *Sertarele...*, 171.

³⁰ Charles Simic, "The Golden Age of Hatred". *The New York Review*, October 23, 2003, 43.

autobiographical one, but confirms that there is an Otherness the author takes into account when writing about both Nazism and communism. From this point of view, the testimonial pact enables Norman Manea not only to reflect some tragic situations, but also to render the resonance, the amplitude of these events. With Manea, the focus is not on a general picture of dramatic times, but on individuals experiencing totalitarianism. *The Hooligan's Return* is neither a journal, nor a memoir, but a retracing of an existential route, by resorting to many elements related to prose.

The *Hooligan's Return* is an angry book. Manea carries a deep feeling of injury from all the vicious things his compatriots said about him over the years. At times, he sounds as if twenty-two million Romanians think of nothing else but of his betrayal.³¹

The writer lapses into a sort of dreamland at times – especially after his arrival in Romania – and each of these moments is loaded with questions, doubts, inquiries, attempts to understand a writer's mission in this world, which leads to arborescent writing, a prose rich in intellectual digressions. Behind each page there is a solid historical background, starting with the 1930s in his native Bukovina (little affected by the nationalistic militantism that succumbed to antisemitism), continuing with his deportation at the age of five, with his return to his mother country, with the years of delusion and adherence to communism, with his father's arrest and finally with his years of engineering and writing. This clear Romanian recollection is rounded off on American soil.

The complicated chronology of this memoir, its mixture of passion and lucidity, the brusque alternations of voices, imaginary dialogues, oneiric episodes, and moments of black humor, make *The Hooligan's Return* demanding reading.³²

Conclusion

The American exile possesses all the properties of anamnesis. On the one hand, the author remembers scenes from a *former life*, the threshold he crossed in 1986 representing an existential threshold between two worlds (the exile is equated with leaving all life behind; in *The Hooligan's Return*, the author is presented as a *posthumous tourist*, a *ghost*). On the other hand, this anamnesis contains a trauma, suffering, being torn apart, lost, and stories, writing and confessing are the remedy for all that. Telling stories in order to heal past obsessions – this is Norman Manea's fundamental state of being in America.

The *Hooligan's Return* is a book of memory but also a book against memory. Manea practises what he calls «anamnesis» - which means both «a recollection» and «a history of an illness» - not in order to regain the past but to unmask it, to peel off successive layers of anger, embarrassment, self-denial and perhaps to try to free himself of its detritus.³³

Norman Manea's biography becomes a crucial source of inspiration for his work. His whole literary trajectory during the exile represents a process of memory incitement, of self-

³¹ Simic, "The Golden Age of Hatred", 43.

³² Marguerite Dorian, "Norman Manea. The Hooligan's Return". *World Literature Today*, September-December 2004, 78.

³³ Jaroslaw Anders, "A Romanian Reckoning". *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday, August 8, 2004, 6.

discovery at different ages; by narrating himself, the author bears witness to the violence and destruction caused by both forms of totalitarianism – Nazism and Communism). The American exile prompts him to give his own personal testimony without needing to write his memoirs. American critics noticed a certain trend in the work of exiled writers living in the US: a type of fiction that provides support for memory, perfecting a realist sort of fiction which is highly narrative. In this respect, for Paul Bailey, *The Hooligan's Returns* it is a four-layered book:

The Hooligan's Return functions on several levels – as a first-hand description of the daily absurdist round that was meant to be ordinary life in a police state; as a portrait of the development of a man whose cultural interests refuse to accept the restrictions of patriotism; as an allusive historical study of nation that surrendered too willingly to madness; and as a deeply felt celebration of the enduring qualities of individual fidelity and love.³⁴

Later on, the author himself discussed *The Hooligan's Return* in different interviews and articles, stating that it is impossible to establish which literary genre it belongs to and emphasizing the need to accept this work as a frontier text.

The book is a literary hybrid. I hesitated a lot, not knowing whether to write it or not, I debated a lot with my editor. He wanted a memoir, I had planned to write a novel.

The book has a bit of everything, it depends on how you read it. Writers – and not only writers – saw it mainly as fiction, an epically structured potential novel, even if some sections are strictly biographical, an inevitably approximate memoir. The memoir is different from the diary, which is also a reproduction of reality on the page, but an immediate one.³⁵

Norman Manea – in and thanks to America – rediscovers freedom of choice and, most importantly, the freedom to return to his past, to tell the whole truth, using the raw matter of memory in order to construct his own fiction, combining three fundamental experiences: Nazism (and its dehumanizing corollary – the Holocaust), communism (and the perverse pleasure the White Clown finds in “order and discipline”) and the exile – the defining experience, being dislocated from your native tongue, but also a chance to unify the present and the past, the isolated human being, torn apart by totalitarian ruling and the strong, courageous human being who rediscovers his own face looking in the mirror of past ages.

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³⁴ Paul Bailey, “Back to Dada”. *Times Literary Supplement*, London, March 5, 2004, 7.

³⁵ Manea, *Curierul...*, 151.

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