

NORMAN MANEA'S FORMS OF EXILE

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Abstract: Norman Manea's autobiographical writings translate fictionally different attitudes and gesture of the individual caught between countries, between languages and between identities. A never-ending struggle to gain one or another is what the character seems to be bound to. Thus, the exile can be (motivated or not) a form of being into this world and eventually becomes a form of one's discourse of self-identity. The paper presents the many aspects of exile Norman Manea's characters face and the manner in which these construct a specific typology.

Key Words: exile, communism, identity, history, language.

Exile, generally assumed after an analysis of all the sacrifices deriving from it, implies consequences which cannot be foreseen and which are augmented by time. To rule oneself out of one's own identity, to find oneself in a new country, to express oneself in a language that does not belong to one, all these are factors which lead to a feeling of estrangement from oneself and from others. These are the reasons why Norman Manea postponed his departure. His refusal of leaving Romania is justified by his inability of renouncing the privilege of *inhabiting* the Romanian language. The writer believes that literary identity is determined by the language an author expresses himself in:

For a writer, especially an expatriate, his language is his placenta. More than any «foreigner» in his own country, the language represents for a writer not only a slow and fanciful acquisition, but also recognition, a spiritual home. Through language he feels rooted in, but free; therefore, it is the only way to be connected with any possible interlocutor from anywhere in the world. Language is the true citizenship, the sense of belonging – the writer's home and country. To be exiled from this last and

essential refuge is the most brutal means to scatter the being, the very «burning of everything» (Holokaustos) which reaches the core of creativity itself.¹

Norman Manea belonged to the last Romanian emigrants. When he turned 50, undecided until the end, he resolved on leaving West. The reason was that he could no longer tolerate the incompatibility between himself and the Communist society. Not even the illusion of writing could hold him back: “I was finally leaving! I was refusing to become only a character where I was hoping to become a writer; I was accepting the idea of dying in another place than the place I had been born. In exile what was I to become, other than a character, a Ulysses with no country and no language? I had no more alternatives; the deferrals had reached their limit.” Exile meant losing his identity: “I may have felt it more painful than others, because for me, it meant suddenly losing the identity I had slowly and carefully built, like some sort of armour against the outside world.”²

Similarly to his character, Ben, from the novel *The Days and the Game* (*Zilele si jocul*), Norman Manea is searching for himself; he is looking inwardly. The writer is trying to find himself again, to find his place, because, after all, he was dealing with an identity crisis. He was a “polymorphous self”, having to wander between various geographical borders (Transnistria, Romania, Israel, Germany, America), various cultures and ideologies (Nazism, Communism, Capitalism), his identity is fragile; it is “patched” together.

The author decides to write a book – *The Hooligan’s Return* – through which he wishes to understand “his label”. Throughout the novel, the writer goes back to his already experienced past because he cannot find the solution to his identity issue in the present time: “*The Hooligan’s Return* is an unusually dramatic autobiographic book: a drama which belongs to the Jewish and

¹ Pentru scriitor, un exilat prin excelență, limba este placenta sa. Mai mult decât orice «străin» în propria țară, limba este pentru un scriitor nu doar o lentă și exaltantă cucerire, ci legitimarea, domiciliul spiritual. Prin limbă, se simte înrădăcinat și liber, doar astfel înfrățit cu virtualii săi interlocutori de oriunde. Limba reprezintă adevărata cetățenie, sensul apartenenței – casa și patria scriitorului. A fi exilat și din acest ultim și esențial refugiu înseamnă cu mai brutală descentrare a ființei, acea «ardere de tot» (Holokaustos) care atinge miezul însuși al creativității. (all translations in this article are made by the author M.N.), Norman Manea, *Laptele negru*, Hasefer, București, 2010, p. 420.

² Plecam așadar până la urmă! refuzam să devin doar personaj în locul unde speram să devin scriitor, acceptam să mor în alt loc decât cel unde mă născusem. În exil, ce altceva aveam să devin, de fapt, decât un personaj, Ulise, fără țară și limbă? Nu mai beneficiam însă de alternativă, amânările își epuizaseră limita. [...] L-am simțit poate mai dureros decât alții, pentru că a însemnat pentru mine, brusc, pierderea identității pe care mi-am construit-o lent și cu migdală, ca un fel de carcasă împotriva exteriorului. Norman Manea, *Casa melcului*, Hasefer, București, 1999, p. 57.

Romanian identity alike, a biological and familiar drama, a drama of the heretic's estrangement, who found himself all alone as a consequence of defying his once close friends and his blasphemous attitude."³

In his effort of finding himself, the author is making a confession, thus the narrative draws from the writer's autobiography, while in the same time he is presenting himself as a character in his own story. This piece of writing begins as a purely fictional novel with the description of a character seen from the outside by the narrator. The former is a man on his way out of his home, in the American city of New York. This man, the central character, is followed on his yet unknown route by the narrator who, all knowingly, provides a transcript of his thoughts: "The observer is already slowly examining, though, the sky, the desolate surroundings. [...] Will he become again, this morning, the one he used to be nine years ago? Amazed, the way he was then, by the novelty of life after death?" The unidentified man enters a restaurant where he meets a friend, and "he" becomes "I", because the man is none other than Norman Manea himself: "It wasn't the first time I was discussing the subject with my American friend. As the time for my departure to Bucharest was approaching, Philip insisted to state the nature of my hesitation and anxiety. It couldn't be done, they were ambiguous..." It is easily noticeable how the narrative voice goes from third person singular to first person singular, maintaining the fluctuations of subjective reminiscence.

The subjective time is more powerful than the objective one; it is a time of painful memory. In the first part of the novel Norman Manea, the adult, goes back to the distant past. This journey, then, triggers the stream of involuntary memory which brings to the surface the pain, the suffering and the revulsion. The fact that he remembers everything gives him the chance to probe the past, to examine the dark period he had to face. His confession commences with events previous to his birth (*The beginning before it all began*), followed by a depiction of his childhood years which prepared him for deportation. Further along, the readers are shown images from Transnistria, details from his career as a construction engineer, the beginnings of his literary career, entering the secret police spotlight and defecting to Europe and then America:

³ Întorcerea huliganului este o carte autobiografică de un dramatism puțin obișnuit: o dramă a identității evreiești și românești deopotrivă, o dramă biologică și familiară, o dramă a înstrăinării ereticului rămas singur în urma sfidării foștilor apropiați și a atitudinilor blasfematoare. Paul Cernat, *Dificila întoarcere a scriitorului*, în „Observatorul cultural”, nr. 51, 2006, p. 7.

It was raining, but it wasn't a flood of biblical proportions. Noah's part was only one of refuge in the comedy of the present. In the elegant pavilion of the elegant mansion in the elegant surroundings of New York, the interlocutors didn't seem to notice the gentle light rain. When, where, who could ever say something, the castaway suddenly realized he was talking about Transnistria, Initiation, the war and about Maria, the young peasant woman who had decided to join the Jews on death roll. Then, about the flood after the flood, the Byzantium Communism and its many ambiguities. He could not be stopped, he continued with ample pauses, satirical victory over the past.⁴

In the second part of the book, the twelve-day journey to the Romania of 1997 is depicted. The entire experience is revealed with the help of a calendar-like diary fragmented into days as allowed by the game memory plays: "Norman Manea's first return begins in proto-memory, which is impossible to be stirred by means of stream of consciousness."⁵ After nine years spent in America, the writer hadn't freed himself completely of Romania, therefore the return seemed impossible. Even if he does not feel he is ready for this journey, everything is happening very fast, as the president of Bard College, the conductor Leon Botstein, is coming to Bucharest for a concert and it is his desire that the writer be his guide: "It was not the most favourable time, so I considered myself some sort of tourist of posterity, who comes after his death to visit the places he once inhabited."

On the way to the restaurant where he was to meet his friend, a phantom figure resembling his mother crosses his path. The memory of his late mother was a recurring image in his mind as she had made him promise, before leaving Romania, he would attend her funeral. The writer was unable to make such promise, the closest thing he could utter being "wherever I am, I shall be here". Two years after the author's departure, his mother passes away, but he cannot come to the funeral. "«I want you to promise me you will be there for my funeral. You cannot leave me here alone. Promise you will be there, it is important for me.» I promised

⁴Ploua, dar nu era potopul biblic. Noah deținea doar un rol de refugiu în comedia prezentului. În elegantul pavilion din elegantul conac din împrejurimile elegante ale New Yorkului, interlocutorii nu păreau să observe ploaia subțire și înceată. Când, cum, cine ar mai putea spune, naufragiatul se trezise vorbind despre Transnistria, Inițiere, război și despre Maria, tânăra țărăncă decisă să se alăture evreilor trimiși la moarte. Apoi, despre potopul de după potop, comunismul bizantin și ambiguitățile sale. Apoi despre exil și ambiguitățile sale. Nu se mai putea opri, continuase cu pauze mari, victorie cabotină asupra trecutului. Norman Manea, *Întoarcerea huliganului*, Polirom, Iași, 2008, p. 28.

⁵Prima întoarcere a lui Norman Manea debutează în proto-memorie, imposibilă de stârnit pe calea modernă a fluxului conștiinței. Claudiu Turcuș, *Estetica lui Norman Manea*, Cartea Românească, București, 2012, p. 160.

nothing as I was scared of the burden promises are. Now I am free, nobody promises me and I have no one to promise to. «It makes no difference where I am at that time. Where ever I am, I shall be here», this is how I was trying to soothe her, instead of saying good-bye.” This is the reason he finally accepts to come back to Romania – in order to go to the Jewish cemetery where his mother laid.

He who returns to his country is nothing but a visitor who sees once more places that used to be familiar, places that can only bring about a feeling of permanent estrangement. Even if his American friends encourage him by saying there was nothing to be afraid of, for now he was a successful man, on arrival the writer feels like a stranger, an intruder: “I’m sorry, but you are, dear you, a respectable resident writer... distinguished with awards and a teaching position... In the East-European circus, the clown who returns from America is victorious, he is a star.” On his first evening in Bucharest, celebrating the ritual feast of the Passover Seder together with Leon, the writer remembers the flight from the Egypt of socialist Jormania, thus realizing the “the past seizes the present and returns me to the one I no longer am”. The coming home implies confronting a past marked by abusive categorization: “traitor”, “American agent”, “the midget from Jerusalem”. He is begging to be ignored (although he is invited by Bedros Horasangian to participate in a television show, he amiably refuses the invitation).

He casts himself a merciless glance, with all his confusion, inconsistency and fear. Although ten years had passed since he left Romania, he was still unable to free himself of his past. His confession begins from the time before his birth, followed by the first years of his life which had secretly prepared the first attempt at the protagonist’s removal.

In April of 1945 the nine year old boy freshly returned from the Transnistrian concentration camp discovered food, clothes, school, furniture, books, games, joy. I had made forgotten the horrors of the past, it irritated me: “the ghetto disease”. Cured, or so I thought I was, I decided to share with all my citizens the splendour of the present, which our Communist Country was now serving, canonical and equal, to each of us. The illusion of writing took me, then, under its wing. In the early ’80s its rag full of holes could no longer cover the filth of the circus. The new horror did not replace the old one, but it had taken it in: the old and the new were working together. When I made my discovery public, I suddenly found myself in the arena. The megaphones were shouting repeatedly: stranger, stranger, estranged, anti, impure and anti. I

had proved myself, once again, unworthy of the Country not even my ancestors had been worthy of.

Meditation is meant to bring self-understanding, the settling of space and time into a stable mould. Throughout the novel a gradual introspection occurs, from the outside to the inside, from simulation to confession, the writer finds himself. The places he visits have the purpose of offering, in retrospect, solutions and of shedding light on the feeling of loneliness. Even though all the events that took place in Romania – reuniting with old friends, conversing with Bedros Hosangian, Liviu Petrescu or Ion Vartic, visiting the Jewish community, participating in the reunion of the Cluj Writers' Association, visiting his native Suceava and his mother's grave – generated profound emotions, "I am among affectionate and loyal friends", all these emotions are only temporary. Everything that happened is nothing but short-lived pleasures, because the Romanian society, as well as the writer had suffered irreversible changes. Norman Manea notices that neither Bucharest, nor his friends belong to him anymore; this is why the idea of his return was rendered absurd. The most important aspect that he noted was the fact that nothing was connecting him to Romania, not even his mother's tomb: "The God that spawned Augustus the Fool had been a woman. I could not stand his adoration, neither could I stand his anxieties which I have nothing to replace them with. He went down deep and he came up in the trees and in the ephemeral flowers and in the impenetrable sky. He no longer lived anywhere, not even in the cold stone I am fervently touching."⁶

Nothing remains for the intruder except the futile meditation on his own solitude: "My friends who had stayed in Bucharest were no longer the same, neither was the city, neither was the wanderer I had become." His return is but an occasion for more broken hopes; the journey is considered a failure: "My departure had not set me free, my return had not returned me. I awkwardly inhabit my biography." This journey does not bring the long sought for reconciliation with himself and with the world.

All "these trivialities" could have easily been discovered by Augustus the Fool even "without the parody of return". Norman Manea realizes he is nothing but a stranger not only to Romania, but to America as well. He will not find his place in the world no matter what he does:

⁶*Dumnezeu care l-a născut pe August Prostul fusese femeie. Nu i-am suportat adorația, nici neliniștile nu i le-am suportat și nu am cu ce să le înlocuiesc. A coborât în adânc și s-a ridicat în arborii și florile efemere și în cerul opac. Nu mai era nicăieri, nici măcar în piatra rece pe care o ating, în neștire.* Norman Manea, *Întoarcerea huliganului*, Polirom, Iași, 2008, p. 133.

“Loneliness is soon claiming its rights, the claw traps us again, we recommence the crisis, the fight, the struggle, we start praying again hoping to find an instant of light. Only an instant, one happy moment, nothing more.”⁷ The novelist reaches the conclusion that home is everywhere because for him, no place is truly home. This is why he writes “as if his right place on earth has not been discovered, as if it is anywhere, but each time, somewhere else.”

Although, this time, his departure is permanent, it is not complete, in that the writer withdraws in the Romanian language. Actively writing in Romanian is paralleled with conveying meaning in his native language. The impossibility of living in Romania is atoned through “transcending another dimension, the linguistic one.” In the end, he comes to ask himself why it is necessary to “have a label of any kind”. For the first time he is aware of the illusion of belonging – “if exile begins as soon as we are born, it means that a home cannot be the same as a territory.” After his return from Romania, in 1999, he applies for the American citizenship he postponed for so long: “Even after arriving in America I excessively delayed obtaining my residency [...] I had been though, absurdly enough, paying rent for the small apartment in Bucharest, during the four years I wandered.”⁸

Losing one’s territory has as a consequence the creation of “the language of birds” whose central metaphor is “the snail’s house”: “All I could do was to take my language with me, as if it was my home. The snail’s house. [...] At last I had found my real home. The language not only promises re-birth, but legitimacy as well, real citizenship and real belonging.” Romania is home for himself and it is personified as a snail. The metaphor of the snail is not randomly chosen because the snails are among the very few species which possess the memory of growth. Every time the snail gains a new spiral it chisels it in the shell, as Norman Manea preserves all his Romanian memories (this is also the reason why he cannot forget and find a cure for estrangement, because he carries the memories with him, instead of setting himself free of them).

Thus, the Romanian language acquires outmost importance. It becomes the only real home, the only space where the self feels completely free to be itself. The phrase “the snail’s

⁷ *Singurătatea își reclamă, curând, drepturile, cleștele ne prinde iarăși, reluăm crizele, lupta, zbaterea, rugăciunea în speranța unei clipe de fulger, de instantanee lumină. Instantanee, atât, o clipă fericită.* Norman Manea, *Casa melcului*, Hasefer, București, 1999, p. 109.

⁸ *Dacă exilul începe de îndată ce ne naștem, înseamnă că o casă nu poate fi echivalată cu un anumit teritoriu. [...] Chiar și după ce am ajuns în America am amânat excesiv de mult să obțin rezidența [...] Continuasem, de altfel, să plătesc, absurd, chiria micului apartament din București, în cei patru ani de peregrinare.* Norman Manea, *Întoarcerea huliganului*, Polirom, Iași, 2008, p. 184.

house” stands as more proof to the sensation of alienation, it being a metaphor of emotional imprisonment. The shell is a closed space which excludes any connection with the outside world, it creates the image of self-enclosure, a life which tries to protect itself against any invasion from the outside world. The only form of expression is writing, his creation. He finds healing in writing, but in Romanian.

For Norman Manea, the Romanian language integrates the need of something different, a need he felt from an early stage. In Transnistria, the language survives, but only in pieces; it is broken and “it lives insecurely inside the wound”. The short fiction *Ora exactă* symbolizes the return to normality after being released from the concentration camp. At home, the child discovers phrases that depict things he has not seen before. Retrieving the lost words is almost a phantasmagorical process.

The child has to face the visual and auditory clash between strange names and unknown concepts. He resorts to associations through the magical intervention of imagination; he personifies the recently encountered objects. During a visit to a girl in his class, whose father was a merchant, the boy discovers a strange world in their house. Having to face the unknown he experiences a mix of feelings: fascination and fear, amazement and confusion. Therefore, when he was given to eat a type of pastries he had never seen before – *minciunele* – “the boy was startled and opened his eyes wide and imagined he saw small brown lizards with long green tongues which spat the venom. [...] Hundreds of them were swiftly jumping through the thick high grass, too late for you to defend yourself from their thin cold whistle.”

The marzipan seemed to resemble an animal “which was leaping along the grassland, and whose thick tail was touching the ground every now and again like a third leg.” He had never heard of the velvety skin *truffles* with their wet muzzle or their big teary eyes; he had never seen *raisins*, which were surely flies, disgusting and lazy in the sun; the sound of the *hazelnuts* chirping through the branches was unfamiliar to him as well.” *The radio* was also a trap with “its microscopic musicians, as small as a needle point, with their even smaller instruments, like a pencil tip [...] an invisible orchestra, gathered in a corner of the box, where the mice had shrunk, electrified, doing the waltz”, “and the alarm clock was setting itself in a contract with the radio, showing the right time.”

The child finds comfort in words: “I was alone in the Universe, listening to a voice which was mine, but in the same time it wasn’t. My companion was a book of Romanian fairy tales

written by a master of the language, Ion Creangă. I had been given the book as a present only a few days before, when I had reached the dignified age of nine years old. Then and there, the miracle of words, the magic of literature, began for me.” Words heal or defer the fear of dying, of being alone. By taking it with him in his exile, the Romanian language represents a refuge; it is the language of deep meaning, even when it is charged by “the language of the fortress”. There is a strong opposition between the two languages, Romanian and English; the first stands for the inner substance while the latter for the social identity. The Romanian language is “a home for the self”, the English is impersonal, a global symbol of the new world:

Between the Romanian language in which I can hear my thoughts or I speak with Cella in our Manhattan apartment and the English language of the television, the newspapers, the bank statements, my American friends’ language, the language of the college I teach at, my doctor’s language, is not only a relationship between intimacy and the social scene, between individuality and the uniform of the boarding school that houses you, between inner substance and social identity [...] It is the tension between two radically different environments. [...] English is the language rented for social negotiations by a Robinson Crusoe who is forced to adjust linguistically to the tribe which accommodates him. Separated from its natural environment, your old language remains only yours, whose magic you served during your life before the death by exile and the birth through exile.⁹

However, as time went by, the English language sneaks in and it disturbs the ballance; the relationship between the two languages becomes a tense, yet fertile one: ”Loss and renewal, routine retrieval and unexpected rebirth, all of these occur when contact with the exterior language is made. The newcomer’s rented language is growing richer, while the old one is also paradoxically regenerating, more than once, through confrontation and loans from the new world. The coexistence of the two languages results in creating for the expatriate a partially hybrid linguistic endowment.” This is how the surviving and adjusting idiom comes to life. Reinventing the language means having to reinvent the self. In the end, what emerges is a self-

⁹*Între limba română în care îmi aud gândurile sau vorbesc cu Cella, în apartamentul nostru din Manhattan și limba engleză a televizorului, ziarelor, formularelor de bancă, limba prietenilor americani, a colegiului la care predau, a medicului care mă consultă nu este doar relația dintre intimitate și scena socială între individualitate și uniformă internatului în care ești găzduit, între entitate interioară, versus identitate socială [...] Este tensiunea dintre două medii radical diferite. [...] Engleza este limba închiriată pentru negocierile sociale de un Robinson Crusoe silit să se adapteze lingvistic tribului care îl găzduiește. Separată de mediul ei firesc, de existență, limba veche rămâne acum doar a ta, magia căreia i-ai slujit în viața dinaintea morții prin exil și ale nașterii prin exil. Norman Manea, Laptele negru, Hasefer, București, 2010, p. 436.*

aware cultural hybrid, which is also aware of its own intricacy. Norman Manea had to shape himself up in order to fit the American public's expectations. A good example is the novel *The Black Envelope*, which was re-edited in America because it seemed encrypted to the American public who did not possess the linguistic code. Often asked what language he writes in, he answers that it was the language of the birds he was using: "I said it a long time ago, when I was asked what language I was writing in, that I was writing in the language of the birds."¹⁰

Vizuina [The Lair] (2009), although it is not an autobiographical novel, is a synopsis of the most important aspects of Norman Manea's exile. It is set in the America of the '90s with flashbacks in the Romania before '89. The reader finds the character Augustin Gora to be quite similar to the writer himself. The features that can be found in both of them are self-doubt, identity confusion, taking refuge in books, the torment of remembering, failure to fit in. After arriving in America with a Fulbright scholarship, Augustin Gora immediately proves his abilities and qualities. When the scholarship is completed, The Voice of America hires him and he is soon promoted to head of the department. Although highly qualified, he fails to make himself heard, ability any good leader should possess. Therefore, in the end he has to resign:

He was hired at The Voice of America. His intellectual reputation set him apart from the other contributors, so he was soon in charge of the department that was dealing with his far-away Country. Everyone who worked with him during that time still remembers his good manners and his competence; he lacked any bossy personality traits, he was an open friend. The shared harmony was shattered, though, with the arrival of an arrogant and scheming dissident. [...] Gora's efforts of defusing the conflicts failed, as the newcomer's malice and inconstancy could not be fought with the art of moderation.¹¹

Soon after that, he goes to work in a large university. Apart from this job, as a hobby, he writes the Obituaries column for an exile newspaper (he doesn't write only about deceased people, but also about deceased ideas, books or ideological and religious movements).

¹⁰Am spus mai demult, atunci când eram întrebat în ce limbă scriu, că scriu în limba păsărilor. Rodica Binder, *Identitate și entitate – Interviu cu Norman Manea*, in „Familia”, nr. 7-8, 2004.

¹¹A fost angajat la Vocea Americii. Prestigiul intelectual îl privilegia în comparație cu ceilalți colaboratori, se trezi șeful secției care se ocupa cu îndepărtata Patrie. Cei care au lucrat cu el în acea perioadă vorbesc despre curtoazia și competența sa. Absența oricărui tic de șef, camaraderia luminoasă. Armonia colectivă fu, însă, spulberată odată cu sosirea unui disident arogant și intrigant. [...] Eforturile lui Gora de a tempera conflictele au eșuat, ranchiuna și volatilitatea noului venit nu puteau fi tratate prin pedagogia moderației. Norman Manea, *Vizuina*, Polirom, Iași, 2009, p. 79.

Even though, in the beginning, America seemed a promised land, a land of democracy, of freedom, of all possibilities, in the end he realizes that the people are, here as well, burdened by an overwhelming loneliness. The reason why he came here was to find his wife, Ludmila Serafim, who had left him; she had gone to America with Peter Gaspar, a cousin of hers: “At first, he loved everything. The long practised inhibitions in the Bysantium Socialism were effortlessly disappearing in the thin air. He was rapidly freeing himself of the person he was forced to be in the sealed-in and corrupted society of the mandatory happiness. What fascinated him were the contrasts and the endlessness of America, the joy and the innocence, the simplicity and the disinterested compassion. He was waiting, confidently, for the news that his wife had finally decided to come along.”

Gora is searching his memories in the attempt of understanding his present, “old and new questions were still comforting and poisoning the professor.” He draws a parallel between his personal biography and the collective history; he is making a lucid analysis of his life and the circus of the new world: “Posterity is here all around: booths with words and other merchandise, global consumerism, the inebriated citizen of all the advertisements and the free market’s spectacle.” Gora is trying to forget his past out of the need of creating a new identity.

Abandoned by his wife, disappointed by the academia, the professor starts writing, on the event of the 9/11 attacks, the planet’s obituary, which contains fixed times and dates, from 8:45 until 15:59:

The professor sits himself down again in front of the blazing screen and pulls out the white file. On the cover, in big blood letters: THE PLANET’S OBITUARY. 8:45 in the morning: the Boston air traffic control intercepts a voice in the cockpit of Flight 11. [...] Gora was conscientiously writing down, for posterity, The Cronology of the End. [...] 15:59: Air Force One is heading for Offutt, Nebraska where the Air National Guard base is. The White House announces that the First Lady and the two First Daughters are, thank God, in secure shelters. Professor Gora seems, suddenly, overwhelmed by the presidential news. He breaks, again, the contact with the planet. He feels tired. He is sound asleep; bewildered, he is tossing and turning, he cannot separate himself from the events.¹²

¹²*Profesorul se așează din nou în fața ecranului în flăcări, trage dosarul alb. Pe copertă, mari litere de sânge: NECROLOGUL PLANETEI. Ora 8:45, dimineața: Controlorii de zbor din Boston 45 interceptează o voce în cabina Fligh 11. [...] Gora nota, conștiincios, pentru posteritate, Cronologia Sfârșitului. [...] Ora 15:59: Aeronava Air Force One se îndreaptă spre Offutt, Nebraska, unde se află comandamentul strategic al aviației militare. Casa Albă anunță că Prima Doamnă a Americi și cele două Prime Fiice ale Americii se află, slavă Domnului, în adăposturi securizate. Profesorul Gora pare, brusc, copleșit de știrea prezidențială. Întrerupe, din nou, contactul cu planeta. Se*

The obituary remains the only form of activity, which is gradually replaced with the reality of the books because of all the suffering triggered by the connection with the real world. Gora continues to be a man of books, a man estranged who finds healing in literature. He escapes his own exile only to find refuge between the pages of books: "I keep my books on shelves and my words inside me". All these replace reality and induce the inability to fit in real life. Literature is the only way to free himself from the web of estrangement.

Both Augustin Gora and Norman Manea are fighting for their life. When he finds out he is gravely ill and he needs to undergo an angioplasty (Oxygen is pumped through the obstructed artery, then the artery is cleaned and a stent is inserted), he accepts without hesitation. When Lu asks him if he agrees to be put off life support, he firmly refuses "not because I'm hoping for a miracle that will allow me to live due to some drug which appeared over night or to an implausible natural recovery of my body, but because illness, even in its most extreme form, the unconscious form, is still life." Gora will continue his life with the help of a foreign body, the metal stents which were inserted in his arteries will allow him to live. The surgery is a metaphor for Norman Manea's life in exile. The operation prolongs his life, but his life is now a mixture of bodies, similarly to the way the writer is forging a new identity (a fusion between the Jewish origin, Romanian nationality and American residency).

Norman Manea is, to this day, writing in Romanian, and he has stated that he will never stop doing so because it is his only opportunity of expressing himself creatively. The loner found his cure in the Romanian language (which he uses to create and dream in). This language remains the sole space where the self feels entirely free and which restores his balance and stability.

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simte obosit. Doarme adânc, năucit, se răsuțește pe cearceaf, nu se poate desprinde. Norman Manea, *Vizuina*, Polirom, Iași, 2009, p. 79.

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