

***UNDER THE EFFIGY OF THE MASK: NORMAN MANEA'S CLOWNS VERSUS
HERTA MÜLLER'S MARIONETTES***

Aurica Stan, PhD Student, University of Bucharest

Abstract: The subject of the work I proposed, Under the effigy of the mask: Norman Manea's clowns versus Herta Müller's marionettes, is generous and can be contextualised from a multicultural perspective, considering the identity and cultural affiliation of the two authors. In the context of Ceausescu's totalitarianism, the two 'export' writers of Romanian culture attempt to outwit censorship (Norman Manea) or to express an absurd reality using an expressly chosen typology of characters: clowns and marionettes. The question is predictable: WHY do the aforementioned authors directly or indirectly appeal to these prototypical figures? Incompatible with their forced living environment – communist Romania –, they become messengers of an original world, imposing through their game a set of new rules by ridiculing the given. The clowns and marionettes also represent generic masks of the narrators, based on which the identity hiding-revealing dichotomy is achieved alongside the reconstruction of a page our country's history.

Keywords: clown, marionette, totalitarianism, concentration camp, dictator

The question I started from is predictable: Why do the aforementioned authors appeal directly or indirectly to these prototypical figures? Before everything, I took the hazard of believing that appealing to these character typologies represents no more and no less than a discourse strategy having the capacity to simultaneously express and hide the meaning of the message to be transmitted.

As a research methodology, I used discourse analysis, having as support several novels by Manea and Muller.

In the first case, the subject is, undoubtedly, slippery to the extent where the figure of the clown does not allow itself capture by a single definition, impossible to understand without considering its cultural avatars. The clown, a recurrent character in Manea's literature, appears, as I have mentioned, particularly in the first editions of the essay collections *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool* (1979) and *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist* (1997), being the messenger of an original world, capable of instituting through his game a new set of rules, by deriding the given one.

At the other end, using a minimalist and objective discourse, Muller offers the impression that the grand majority of her characters are nothing more than marionettes, the term being used with its basic dictionary meaning of dummy, straw man and string puppet. Unlike Manea, the German-speaking author's marionettes, subjected to an implacable destiny of living under communist terror, become lost in theorisation without taking action *per se*.

From a diachronic perspective, centred on autochthonous literary theory research, it is observed that the clown figure has not arisen much interest among specialists. On the other hand, most reference titles were published in the USA, the UK and France. Apart from the first cultural area, the preoccupation could have a historical basis in the case of the other two:

both were great monarchies during the times court jesters flourished. With regards to the historical avatars of the clown, the debut is ensured by the Mediaeval fool, become buffoon, then Harlequin in the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*, Pierrot in French literary tradition and autonomous circus character at the beginning of the 19th century.

In his first writing, Manea details the condition of a writer, A.P., during Ceausescu's era, his drama being so significant, that his character gains increasingly more of the personality of a clown. Using the same elementary logic, we can intuit that A.P.'s destiny is that of Manea himself before his departure into exile or that the two overlap as well as up to complete identification¹. The outraged figure of the creator by excellence gains significance under the grotesque mask of the buffoon.

Augustus is defined from as early as the first pages of the book as a 'sort of zany which in figure and buffoon actions comes close to Polichinelle, in contrast with the clown, related instead with Pierrot'². Built on the basis of a paradox, 'Augustus' alludes to a noble genealogy with imperial resonance, which is counterbalanced by the second element, the substantivized adjective with pejorative valence 'the Fool(ish)'. The authenticity of the terms' combination to name Augustus the Fool has an effect both comical and ridiculous.

It is interesting that, unlike the prototypical figure to which it corresponds, Manea's Augustus does not have revenge at the end of the circus act as a defining feature, as the figure of this clown is defined in cultural dictionaries. Thus, the figure of A.P. the writer becomes illustrative for the gradual degradation of the protagonist, similarly to how the portrait of Dorian Gray reflected the interior tribulations of the model it represented. The writer has no access to the normality that even life's 'slackers' during university reached, living inside a surrogate day-by-day existence. Manea insists on the images and scenes in which A.P. is placed among workers in the brimstone pits, party activists, the Javanese and drillers, whom he hinders and in the middle of whom he becomes lost.

In addition, his inadaptability in society is doubled by his personal failures. With Elise, A.P. only has a tumultuous and dysfunctional relationship, his affair with Tia proves painful. Not even his attempts to reconcile with Mona do not succeed, the relationship ending up being as complicated as it is difficult due to the sentimental inconstancy and the distance that the writer places between himself and not only his partner, but the world. 'A knight [...] of social defeat' through his evolution, the protagonist (A.P.) transitions from an apparently dull, nameless individual to 'our friend', then to the designation A.P.. However his tragic condition becomes more clearly outlined and concretised, more palpable one might say, meaning 'real' to the reader,, as it would become in the context of a discussion between two strangers. At this point, the texts gains some orality through the use of a corresponding linguistic registry – somewhat lacing academic considerations – and of a nearly conversational style with specific elements (addressing, rhetoric, first person verbs and pronouns).

In a dialogue published in Robert Escarpit's work, *From the Sociology of Literature to the Theory of Communication*, published one year apart from Manea's book, the American sociologist Armand Lanoux analyses the writer profession from a sociological perspective. Lanoux's observation – "The writer dreams, in fact, to be considered, from a social and professional point of view, equal to the surgeon. [...] He would like to be considered as a writer, and not dispersed, fragmented, atomised by a society that is analytical up to insanity"

¹ In supporting my point of view, I will mention one of the definitions of the character, identified in the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Psychology (p-z)*: "the character as a mask, beneath which the individual seeks to appear in front of others, or seek refuge with relation to himself", in Ursula Şchiopu (coodr.), Vol. III, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, Faculty of History-Philosophy, Department of Psychology, Bucharest, 1979 p. 52.

² Concept defined in the *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo (The Encyclopaedia of the Performance)*, Editrice le Maschere, Rome, 1954, used by Manea in the two editions of the work *On Clowns, the Dictator and the Artist*.

– marks, in relation to the definition offered by Manea, the difference in perception over a profession exercised in two societies: the democratic France and the totalitarian Romania of the '80s.

Many times the character's lack of fulfilment is surprised through powerful images – of an A.P. who, for example, awaits shrivelling in front of the Athenaeum to catch a seat after those with tickets finish entering, being the poor artist, sensible and vulnerable. 'A teenager who reached adulthood', 'the village idiot' or 'someone out of the race' are just some of the labels the author gives to the writer, in direct and indirect relation to the clown's figure.

The similarities between the characters are obvious, both A.P. and Augustus are practically incompatible with the social environment in which they are forced to live, being generic masks of the narrator on the basis of which the dichotomy between *identity hiding and revealing* is achieved. Depending on these two variables, the author chooses to juggle with several identity constructions in a game until A.P. and Augustus the Fool become confounded.

Even if we may have the illusion of identifying or overlapping the character and the mask, this subtlety could mislead an inexperienced reader. The distinction is clarified by the author himself:

“The artist is not a buffoon [...] even when society forces him to the grimaces of paint and antics. But when the pressure of the environment, itself split, twisted [...] disfigures him, the derisory mask that the artist wears is not an acceptance, but a refusal”³ of imposed conventions.

The dissimulation of naivety through tricks and somersaults is not a way of removal from the rules of an absurd society, but an inverted reinterpretation of it. In fact, Bahtin⁴ equates folly to buffoonery, a state inscribed in human nature, as it represents an innate attribute of it, which is reactivated during a celebration or in a rigid context.

Under a discursive aspect, the author theorises one by one the justifications, purpose, benefits of art as a justification towards the self, a moment in which the style becomes interiorised and rigid, distant towards the reader, vaguely academic, marked by quotes or paraphrases of the works of other authors, the impersonal style, argumentation and justification techniques, and erudition.

The decor – totalitarian Romania – is one anchored in absurd and without escape. By proliferating the *metaphor of emptiness*, the writing outlines the escapist character of totalitarianism, defined as ‘an extreme situation whose limits can always be extended, whose malignant potential creates a cancerous social pathology’⁵. Manea uses the same mechanism of decoupling reality perceived by an artistic conscience in the brute material of a drifting world.

‘Eyes aloof and thoughts absent’ becomes the ontological state of the writer in this crisis period (and period of the crisis at the same time). The retreat in the non-secure space of the house is not a solution, but rather a sentencing to a Spartan-like hell. ‘Reaching, finally, your personal cage, you remain lost, mute, staring into nothing for an indefinite time which seems, only this way, the infinity of despair’, *Romania in three (commented) phrases*.

In any case, Manea's clown-characters are built in various ways and by appealing to several textual artifices. Under a discursive aspect, Manea rebuilds his past, but also an entire page of history lived inside the totalitarian state. Besides, the historical reconstruction is

³ Cf. Norman Manea, in Gheorghe Grigurcu, “The Norman Manea Case”, in *Familia*, no. 1, 1981, pp. 6-7.

⁴ Mihail Bahtin, *François Rabelais and popular culture...*, p. 86.

⁵ Cf. Emil Moangă, Mihai Iovănel, in Eugen Simion (coord.), *The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature*, edited under the supervision of the Romanian Academy, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 2005, p.196.

subjectivised and finds a parallel in the personal one. The past is described in fragmentary form, more akin to a slideshow than a film. Repeated transitions take place between the first and third persons and vice versa, as if the author is trying sometimes to detach himself from an inescapable past. The focalisation is combined with ambiguity, like a view through the pinhole of a handmade camera, in which the details (photographs, episodes registered in memory) are imprinted with obscured borders.

As spectators, we witness a pulverisation of the identity, understood in the terminology of Vera Călin as “the process of substituting characters”⁶, a relation between the theme of losing personality and the one symmetrical to it – of seeking a new personality.

The author’s option of placing, even at a discursive level, the leader’s figure at the same level as that of his subject has as an immediate consequence the agglutination of these two instances in the buffoonery magma, thus accomplishing a “taming” of the totalitarian evil. By analogy, we bring to mind the perception of unknown and unpopulated spaces, represented by white surfaces in Middle Age maps.

The hidden place was imagined like a terrifying one, through its enigmatic note itself, of a bestiary. However once explored, it became accessible and freed from the governing of this preconception. In addition, I cannot omit the clown’s function as an expiatory substitute, which has its origin in a ritual past: in the late Roman Empire, the patrons would pay the mountebank troupe to remove, through their presence, the evil in the court. Also interesting is the clown’s function as a “scapegoat”, killed in many instances instead of an old sovereign.

As the name of the essay volume itself indicates, the representation of both characters – the dictator and the artist – ultimately provokes laughter, which denotes their interchangeable, substitutive character. The carnival-like laughter is mocking, liberating of any form of interdiction, power or enclosure. Adopting the mask, a social one, after all, becomes a natural option. Through the clown hypostasis, Manea attempts to cheat reality, to deride totalitarianism, enclosed positions, dogmatism, and to reiterate the attitude of the jester from the times of monarchy. As we know, “the king’s jester represents the ironic conscience, meant to ridicule authority in all its conceit and sufficiency”⁷, in the same way the artist borrows the mask of the clown to parody imposed rules, clown being a generic term, as it is more identifiable as a trickster⁸, a sham by excellence.

Manea is afraid of evil, he amplifies any form of restriction on his own liberty placed in his personal past (totalitarianism perceived as an extension of the concentration camp), this reflection on the past being equivalent to a revival of evil. Because of that, writing becomes in this context the sole form of catharsis for the self and, via extrapolation, for an entire past. And what better mask could he have chosen than a clown (and here not necessarily for strictly aesthetic, literary considerations, but especially for human ones)?

“The White Clown’s figure and that of Augustus the Fool corresponds not only to the history of the game, but to history itself. If we walk along the entire history, we find the damaging artist, or not only the artist, but the damaging outcast and we find the representative of power, of authority, who not just once is an even more grotesque clown than the outcast.”⁹

⁶ Vera Călin, *The Metamorphoses of Comic Masks (Processes, Motives, Modalities)*, Editura pentru Literatură, Bucharest, 1966.

⁷ Ivan Evseev

⁸ “Trickster is a collective shadow figure, a summation of all the character in individuals. And since the individual shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself out it continually”, from *On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure (Despre psihologia figurii tricksterului)*, in C. G. Jung, *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*, R. F. C. Hull, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1972, p. 150.

⁹ Elena Vlădăreanu, “Interview with Norman Manea”, in *Romania libera*, no. 145, 21 April 2008, p. 7.

In addition, alongside this resizing of the dual or, better said, collective link (in the idea that history cannot be limited to a single Augustus, or a single White Clown), the author reconfirms the validity of the interchangeability that we emphasised during this study.

In the case of Manea's aesthetics, we operate with a couple of clowns. The dictator is a clown, thus a boring individual, not a monster: he causes laughter, is comical and grotesque. But the artist is also a clown, and he hides, is submissive to the dictator and also causes laughter. More so, by being a clown like the dictator, he resembles him. We therefore obtain a couple of clowns. If both are buffoons, does that not mean, perhaps, that they could be interchangeable? Here we are, thus, in front of a question as simple at a logical level as it is complex on a philosophical one. We stated this hypothesis, thinking that the status of the clown resides in a mask and that that mask can be changed at any time. Moreover, the clown, through the acceptations he represents (hiding, superficiality, makeup as a surrogate of the face) can be reduced to being considered a simple actor or, better said, interpreter of various roles.

To note the entire network of similitudes between the two, one characterised by the destructive evil he exerts through his absolute power, the other, on the contrary, belonging to a completely opposite pole – art, a creative act by definition, we will pause at the notion of “banality of evil”¹⁰, a concept offering us an overturned perspective on appearances, or a closer view of the essence.

To define it, we will concisely nuance the premises of the apparition of this concept. When Hannah Arendt notices that the Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann, who had a close overlook of the Nazi camps, ensuring their proper functioning, is not a monster:

“It had been comforting to consider him a monster”, says the author, “[but he was] an average person, normal, neither mentally disabled, nor indoctrinated or cynical [...], incapable of defining good or evil”¹¹, an ordinary bureaucrat who exercised his work functions (“he perfectly remembered that he would have had a heavy conscience only if he hadn't done what he was ordered to do”¹²) who, even more, was born in Palestine and a speaker of Hebrew and Yiddish, languages he utilised to communicate with his Jewish friends, but also with his victims, she concludes that any other character would have acted the same way if one had been in his stead.

Through the banality of the described man, subsequently catalogued by psychiatrists as “a man obsessed with the desire to kill”, “a perverted, sadist personality”, the author also emphasizes a certain banality characterising his acts, which doesn't have the genocidal evil at its foundation. In conclusion, the evil is that done onto the other. Why banal? The intentionality of the author is not minimising an atrocity and defining it through a rigid concept, but underlining the fact that the greatest criminals are “awfully normal”, that evil means an activation of inhuman, instinctive potencies that exist inside every individual. In the case of totalitarian systems, this evil is extended onto an entire community, and the executioners are those who have the power over the weak, they do not know or do not feel they provoked the evil onto the others. Like Eichmann, who in front of the judge strongly maintains his innocence:

“I had nothing to do with killing the Jews [...]. I never gave the order for a Jew or a non-Jew to be killed, I simply did not. It happened... that it was never necessary that I do it.”¹³

¹⁰ A concept created and analysed by Hannah Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A report on the banality of evil*, translation by Mariana Net, afterword by Dinu C. Giurescu, Ed. All, Bucharest, 1997.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 34.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

As a consequence, the executioners, themselves victims of a same system, were subjected to a process of destruction and annulment of their moral personalities. In this context, the notions of good and evil lose any reference to reality, they are not opposite any longer, but even become equivalent. In fact, the subtlety of any totalitarian project consists in initially distinguishing the victims from the executioners who, in the end, will homogenise, after the dehumanisation process exercised onto them.

“The exile from five years of age”, writes Manea in the first pages of *The Hooligan's Return*, “because of a dictator and his ideology, was perfected at fifty years, because of another dictator and an apparently opposite ideology”, *Addresses to the past (I)*.

Dehumanised and deprived of liberty, food and affection, the writer's characters acquire automated, mechanical and repetitive gestures. The authority or handler, hidden behind a screen or a hood is not the author, as we might expect, but a leading instance under which we may guess the paternal figure, that of Ceausescu the dictator, a primal unsatisfied need and, by extrapolation, the political system and destiny.

In the novel *The Passport*, 1992, HM approaches the subject of emigration through gradual transformation, intermediated by an increasingly pronounced moral and individual degradation of Miller Windisch's family members into dehumanised, completely isolated beings, driven (and handled) only by the desire of obtaining their emigration documents.

Here, the emigration dream is held back by the hostile state apparatus. The family finds itself in a dire situation, having to choose between maintaining dignity and integrity, and leaving the country, respectively. In the end, the parents choose to offer their daughter, Amalie, to the policeman who could influence their obtaining of necessary papers. The young woman is thus illustrated as a marionette lacking a proper personality or individuality, driven by her parents' hand, themselves driven by the obsession for the documents.

Upon more careful analysis, we can identify a multiplication process of these human relations. Like the relation between children and parents, there is at any level a figure of authority and other, weaker ones, which submit. For example, the entire community obeys the policeman who intermediates departures abroad. As the dying village is abandoned by more and more people, the isolation and dehumanisation in front of implacable destiny become obvious.

Enclosed in a labyrinth of muteness, Müller's characters do not interact, communication is if not absent, then at least inarticulate, and the language is hermetic. In the novel **Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter**¹⁴, not even Clara and Adina, friends initially revealed at an age of innocence, manage to communicate. Like the other characters, in the novel every marionette is lonely, it represents its interior drama, although submission is towards a singular authority: the totalitarian regime. Gathered together – and here illustrative is a family scene in the novel – the characters enter conflict, their inter-relations are abnormal.

“(The woman) says in a low and determined voice, go already, take your belongings and go to hell. The man pulls her hair, his hand hits her face. Then the woman stands and weeps next to a child and the child stays mum looking out the window”, *The Passport*, pp. 22-23.

In **Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter**, 1995, the camera catches disparate sequences from Adina's childhood, in all obviousness a narrative projection of the author in the text. Intending to be a film script, the book keeps many of the artifices specific to cinematography.

¹⁴ Herta Müller, *Încă de pe atunci, vulpea era vânătorul (Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter)*. Translation by Nora Iuga. Foreword and bibliographic note by Gerhardt Csejka, Editura Univers, Bucharest, 1995.

Adina is described through automatisms and repetitive actions: she accompanies her mother to the tailor's, she goes to the barber every week, she talks to her friend Clara, she often receives fruits from the tinsmith, she wears the same dress every summer. In addition, she demonstrates a sadism which she only develops as time passes: from making the ant necklace to measuring with the fabric scraps.

“Strings of ants had invaded the cracks. Adina poured sugar-water into the narrow and transparent tube of a circular knitting needle. She put the needle in the stone's crack. The ants slipped inside one after the other, here a head, there a belly. Adina glued the ends of the tube with the flame of a match and placed the necklace around her neck. She went to the mirror and saw that living necklace, although the ants had died glued in sugar in the very place they had suffocated”, p. 18.

Adina's figure is exponential as a personality for the children in *Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter*. As an adult, she interacts as a teacher with lonely students, who do not know what playing means and who do not distinguish themselves among peers in any way. In the world configured by the author, the environment is not a secure one, but one full of threats: the kittens in the factory's yard are eaten by their mother, the female workers' children are left to wait unsupervised near the porter's hut, smutty with rust. All, without exception, have the same childhood.

“I never saw their children with each other, I only saw them one after the other. Small or big, thin or fat, dark-haired or blond. Girls and boys. When they sit together it is visible that they're all brothers to each other”, *Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter*, p. 75.

Moreover, the characters in the novel, despite being at a young age, are full of vices, they have an uncivilised or bizarre behaviour: Adina wants a fox fur for Christmas and is fascinated by the image of the shot animal, Pavel's girl her spoon against the plate and makes moustaches from pieces of meat, the gypsy child slurps beer remainders from the glass, a stray child steals a gold ring from the hanged tinsmith's neck, the children of the women at the factory exchange the hooks stolen by their mothers for socks, cigarettes or soap, a girl keeps a frog in her pocket despite knowing it will die.

Taken with a truck to a tomato plantation, the children reveal their barbaric, uneducated behaviours, squishing the fruit in their garments. Even when they try to do something specific to childhood, the little ones fail.

The only sequence where the author's intentionality to create an image of childhood can be guessed is when throwing the baby teeth in the grass. After suckling on grass blades, the children throw their fallen teeth over their shoulders, while saying a playful incantation: “Mouse, little mouse, please give me a tooth anew, and I'll give my old one to you”, but the image is not one of candour, as the toothless children have dirty hands, covered in rows of warts, and the new teeth are late to appear.

Reaching adulthood, Adina is haunted by insignificant episodes of her childhood. When she takes the train, she notices a child biting on an apple and remembers the frozen apples her father brought her during childhood. These are the memories of a girl who does not have the notion of good or evil, being allowed to do what she wanted, even if she risked her health.

“(The apples) were so cold, that their skins were misty in the room like glass lenses. Adina would immediately eat an apple. The first bite hurt, it was so cold, that she felt it in the temples before swallowing. And upon the second bite, she felt the cold in her entire head. The bite didn't hurt anymore because the brain itself had frozen”, p. 136.

In *The Hunger Angel* (2010), the overarching theme of hunger is an ample one. A primary need according to Maslow's need pyramid, hunger gains control over the being in the

camp, it controls and subdues all prisoners. The political and social aspects of life in the camp are transcended, in the minds and bodies of those inside, by that of hunger, the master-puppeteer of the concentrationary space.

“In the trap of wanting to be strong at the morning meal, in the trap of the bread exchange at the evening meal, in the trap of the night spent with the saved bread under your head. [...] The hunger angel tells you every morning: Think that the evening will come”¹⁵, *The Hunger Angel*, p.117.

The hunger angel, not the soldiers or the soviet regime, is the one controlling the lives of those incarcerated through a presence so frightening, that Leo Auberg, the central figure of the novel, eventually almost worships it like a deity. Ahead of it, people become lifeless bodies, mechanical entities ‘lacking gender’, neither men nor women, ‘almost like objects’, so that the hunger angels couples with all. Its presence and control are so overwhelming, that Leo Auberg still keeps count, more than 50 years after the release from the camp, of each mouthful.

The other characters are either the soviet authorities – de-individualised and dehumanised figures, predictable (and stereotypical) illustrations of the control-obsessed mechanisms of the soviet totalitarian regime, from the Russian camp commander who always shouts his orders to the officer who commands without having any concrete role beyond this – , or the starving prisoners used as slaves.

If the first represent the automatons of a dubious, formal authority, components of a state control apparatus who have lost their human aspect, the latter are victims and marionettes of hunger at the same time. The originality of the author lies not in exposing impact scenes typical of concentrationary literature (predictable themes include soldier brutality, inhumane working conditions, the physical and psychological degradation to which the prisoners are subjected), but in the way each aspect of life in the camp is viewed through the prism of the omnipresent hunger angel.

In *Traveling on One Leg*, the main character, Irene, is a marionette of destiny, of the obsession for leaving, a recurring preoccupation and motive in the writer’s work.

A dull, sketched character, with ambiguous traits, Irene’s arrival to Germany is marked by a series of almost predestined events through which she meets Franz, his friend Stefan and Thomas, the homosexual driver, having an uncertain and sentimentally complicated relationship with each. The character itself is pale, almost concretised in haste. Her existence appears as an enactment imbued with symbolic elements, from the bird’s flight to stereotypical moments seemingly arranged to illustrate the situation and social context rather than the individual (the interviews for receiving citizenship, the contacts with strangers and the new country’s environment).

Inert, appearing to have moments of lucidity interspersed with a dense delirium marked by her identity search, Irene floats powerless among the events to which she takes part and which form her.

The structure of the entire tome is almost arbitrary, with action lacking major intensity variations. The action is fragmentary and structured in short episodes, attention is focused on the environment and its consequences on Irene, on the way in which context pushes her to decisions and shapes her, absorbing and manipulating her identity to adapt her to new situations. From this perspective, we become the witnesses of a training exercise.

¹⁵ Herta Müller, *Leagănul respirației (The Hunger Angel)*. Translation by Alexandru Al. Șahighian, Editura Humanitas, Bucharest, 2010, p. 117.

The states become theatrical, to illustrate the feeling of loss of control given by the placing in a new, unfamiliar state of the emigrant. Irene always appears one step behind the events confronting her, thus letting herself carried by them on the path of a destiny that becomes increasingly obscure. The political becomes personal, influencing the existence of the stateless wanderer up to the microscopic details.

Irene does not act in her environment, but permanently reacts to the stimuli she receives, demonstrating a passivity and an automatism specific to Muller's works.

By synthesising the observations in the case of each writer, we can affirm that Herta Muller's marionettes are lacking any weight, being deformed, with an interiority marked by fractures, subdued to terror and expectation. It is interesting that the enunciated typology is not minor in the ensemble of her integral work, as all of the author's characters can be perceived as marionettes. To this extent, they are nothing more but string puppets submissive to several handlers: to the paternal figure, then to the one having the authority within a certain space and, last but not least, to the political system which they cannot escape in any way. Not as resigned, however, are the Augusts and clowns of Manea – who interchange, overturn and parody absurd hierarchies.

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