



<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz>

ResearchSpace@Auckland

Copyright Statement

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

This thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of this thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from their thesis.

To request permissions please use the Feedback form on our webpage.

<http://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/feedback>

General copyright and disclaimer

In addition to the above conditions, authors give their consent for the digital copy of their work to be used subject to the conditions specified on the [Library Thesis Consent Form](#) and [Deposit Licence](#).

Note : Masters Theses

The digital copy of a masters thesis is as submitted for examination and contains no corrections. The print copy, usually available in the University Library, may contain corrections made by hand, which have been requested by the supervisor.

Exorcising communism

Three case studies: Czeslaw Milosz, Milan Kundera, Norman Manea

Manuela Cazan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of doctor in philosophy

The University of Auckland, 2012

Abstract

This thesis approaches the literature of Czeslaw Milosz, Milan Kundera and Norman Manea from two angles: the historical, sociological, political background of their works, as illustrated both by the authors' biographies and by their own writings on these topics, and the discussion of literary forms employed in their fiction. The complex role of the East-Central European intellectuals was quite different from that of their Western counterparts. Their writings covered a wide range of aspects and were instrumental in creating an alternative view of life under communism from the official one projected by the communist authorities. In order to do this, they employed various narrative strategies, from autobiographical accounts to fictional creations. On the whole, this study answers three questions regarding the East-Central European intellectuals of the second half of the 20th century: who they were, what they had to say, and how they said it, through their fiction and nonfiction. Altogether, their writing can be seen as an exorcism of the communist trauma: by speaking about communism and convincing their readers in the West of its inherent inhumanity, the three authors also succeeded in making sense of their life experience under communism.

The study offers a structured overview of three indicative oeuvres from the period and region, looking at the ways in which the communist experience, covering more than four decades, has acquired literary expression. The search for literary form is shown to be parallel with the actual unfolding events (viewed from geopolitical, historical and sociological perspectives): the authors' need to emphasize the authenticity of their literature determined their choice of biographical and autobiographical narratives, as well as the structure of those narratives. In their biographies (Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, *Milosz's ABC*), memoirs (Milosz, *Native Realm*; Manea, *The Hooligan's Return*), short stories (Manea, *Variations on a Self-Portrait*) and novels (Kundera, *The Joke*, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*; Manea, *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool*), they create a powerful image of life under communism.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Mike Hanne, Dr. Nina Nola, Dr. Susan Ingram and Dr. Ruth Diver for their continuous help and support, both academically and personally. They made the whole process a not just intellectually satisfying, but also enjoyable experience.

I am deeply indebted to Mr. Norman Manea for his constant, though unobtrusive support during the research and production of this thesis. It provided the much needed reality check to any theoretical flights of fancy.

I am extremely grateful for the University of Auckland International Doctoral Fee Bursary, this thesis would not have existed without it.

Finally, I am grateful to all my friends who took the time to read and comment on my thesis. I am convinced that it benefits from all their opinions and suggestions.

*The concealed structure of reality is
reasonable.*

Czesław Miłosz

Contents

INTRODUCTION	7
1. THE INTELLECTUAL	18
1.1 The role of the intellectual	20
1.2 Specialization	26
1.3 The role of the writer in the communist regimes	30
1.4 Three case studies: Czeslaw Milosz, Milan Kundera, and Norman Manea	33
2. CONTEXT	36
2.1 Geography	39
2.2 History	47
2.3 Politics	57
2.4 Language	70
2.5 Literature	76
2.6 At home	86
2.7 In the West	99
3. TEXT: The Need to Testify	110
3.1 Cultural geography	111
Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe'	111
3.2 The burden of history	118
Czeslaw Milosz, <i>Child of Europe</i>	118
3.3 A wariness of politics	123
Norman Manea, <i>The Eastern Messenger</i>	123
3.4 Language as home	131
Norman Manea, <i>The Snail's House</i>	132
<i>The Nomad Text</i>	135
3.5 Literature as lingua franca	139
Czeslaw Milosz, <i>The Witness of Poetry</i>	139
Milan Kundera, <i>The Art of the Novel</i>	142
<i>Testaments Betrayed</i>	147
<i>The Curtain</i>	151
Norman Manea, <i>Envelopes and Portraits</i>	154
<i>Black Milk</i>	157
3.6 Traps for the writer at home	159
Norman Manea, <i>On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist</i>	160
3.7 Traps for the dissident in the West	166
Czeslaw Milosz, <i>Visions of San Francisco Bay</i>	166

4. TEXT: From memory to fiction and back	172
4.1 Czeslaw Milosz, the self-effacing witness	175
<i>The Captive Mind</i>	178
<i>Native Realm</i>	191
<i>Milosz's ABC</i>	197
4.2 Milan Kundera, the story-teller	203
<i>The Joke</i>	207
<i>The Book of Laughter and Forgetting</i>	213
<i>The Unbearable Lightness of Being</i>	219
4.3 Norman Manea's literature as therapy	226
<i>The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool</i>	228
<i>Variations on a Self-Portrait</i>	232
<i>The Hooligan's Return</i>	238
4.4 The search for authenticity in fiction	243
CONCLUSIONS	245
APPENDIX	252
Czeslaw Milosz	252
Milan Kundera	254
Norman Manea	255
BIBLIOGRAPHY	257

INTRODUCTION

This study is the result of a very personal journey that started early in the 1970's, while I was growing up in the Socialist Republic of Romania. Gradually, as my immediate environment was expanding, I became aware of acute discrepancies between the familial and public spaces, and my adolescent life was spent in continuous negotiations between the two clashing views of reality. After the fall of communism, at the end of the 1980's, there followed a long period of reconciliation between what Ewa Thompson calls "*communal memory*" ("the memory of a group of people who live in a certain neighborhood and who remember what happened in their particular area because they witnessed it themselves") and "*collective memory*" ("acquired not by direct participation in events but by reading or hearing about them")¹, since at that time a flood of written accounts about the events in communist East-Central Europe was becoming available.²

When I first left my home country, in the mid-1990's, I was faced with yet another confusing fact: the 'collective memory' of Western Europeans regarding the former communist states (scarce as it was) bore little resemblance with what I thought had happened. My efforts then were directed towards becoming acquainted with the 'Western' perspective on what I had lived, internalizing a type of discourse that could make me understood by those to whom I was trying to communicate what I believed to be 'my story' of communism. At this stage, the greatest challenge, from my point of view, was the different valorization of sources: I had a deep mistrust of 'official' historical accounts, rooted in my long exposure to the beautified, when not simply fabricated 'history' that had been used as a

¹ Ewa M. Thompson, 'Ways of Remembering: the Case of Poland,' *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 12, (2, 2005), <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/12/thompson12.shtml>, accessed November 12, 2012.

² The various terminologies used for the region are discussed in the section on 'Geography' in Chapter 2.

propagandistic tool for decades,³ and so I tried to complement them with personal (often anecdotal) accounts. However, my Western interlocutors were looking for a more holistic, better structured view of the events, and one where the structure was, hopefully, that with which they were already acquainted. These attempts to communicate were the beginning of what I now see as a very long therapy session, in which I tried to ‘make sense’ of my communist experience by describing it to interested Westerners and, with their help, put it into perspective.

The next stage of this process was represented by my contacts with Western co-workers (Western Europeans and Americans) in Romania, over the better part of the first decade of the 21st century. In this context, the accent shifted from my attempt to communicate my experience in a meaningful manner to their need to understand the post-communist realities they were encountering. My effort to explain these realities to them involved many areas of the social sciences: geography, history, politics, sociology and psychology. At this stage, I was also looking for materials to help me both in my personal endeavor to organize my experience along some generally recognizable lines, and in my task as translator and interpreter not just of the Romanian language, but also of Romanian social customs, traditions, fears, apprehensions, even likes and dislikes.⁴ Specialized texts (on geography, history, sociology etc.), while going into great detail, failed to give a comprehensive view of the reality I was trying to depict for my interlocutors, so I turned to literary texts, in the hope that they would better capture ‘the communist way of life.’

In my search I discovered a series of immigrant authors from East-Central Europe who had for decades been trying to convey the communist experience to their

³ A colleague from a Romanian university informs me that young students now no longer exhibit the same mistrust of sources, with the unfortunate result that ideologically laden older texts (of literary history and criticism, in this case) are taken at face-value and incorporated into their scientific discourse.

⁴ In one instance, at least, as a language instructor for American Peace Corps volunteers, that task was actually part of my job description.

Western audience. The process of transforming the communist life experience into literature in East-Central Europe has been a long and complex one, shaped at the same time by immediate events and by the audience which the authors were addressing at the time or hoped to reach in the future. In a century in which technology and information brought the people of the world more closely together than ever before, their inherent cultural differences also became much more obvious. One of the most drastic cultural differences that emerged in the late 20th century is that between those who experienced totalitarianism and those who did not. This divergence also meant that, in looking for ways of conveying their experience to those who had no direct knowledge of it, the writers who had left their communist countries of origin were forced to reorganize and conceptualize this experience for their new audiences much more than their colleagues continuing to address their original domestic audience (even when publication there was possible). Consequently, this study focuses on Czeslaw Milosz,⁵ Milan Kundera and Norman Manea, exiled writers from the Soviet Bloc who could afford to, but also had been obliged to adopt the necessary distance from the narrated events, and it organizes their work according to criteria I found useful in my position as 'cultural interpreter.' It aims at creating a complex and, at the same time, comprehensible image of that world, and is dedicated, in the basic sense of the word, meaning I hope they will read it and find it useful, to all the people who, over almost two decades, in what was always a two-ways cultural exchange, helped me create that image.

This study sees literature as an excellent tool at the disposal of Western readers for understanding a different culture and society. In order to facilitate this understanding, East-Central European intellectuals who had become familiar with Western culture offered their new readers additional information on their own literature, in newspaper articles, interviews and essays, which can be read as footnotes to their fiction. On the other hand, in

⁵ The name is spelled Miłosz in Polish, but volumes in English use Milosz. Generally, this study avoids the use of diacritics as much as possible.

their fiction proper they kept searching for a narrative structure which would bear the mark of authenticity, and often found it in the proximity of border genres, such as biography, autobiography, memoirs, or diary. The scholarly analysis of these texts, however, cannot afford to focus solely on theoretical aspects. As early as 1983 an American academic realized the inadequacy of his 'tools of the trade' when dealing with such texts:

“[A]cademic discussions of modern art or the contemporary novel rarely touch on moral dilemmas, the problem of evil or the historical background of the work; rather, we deal with technique, style, use of materials, a particular writer's theory of the novel or other aesthetic or theoretical matters. The same may be said of criticism; structuralism in any of its manifestations, reader-response criticism, Freudian or Marxist criticism, all avoid the human problems that plague individuals in their quotidian reality.”⁶

In actuality, however, in the West, most studies written before 1989, the turning moment for the region, focused almost unavoidably on the political aspects of the literary input from these countries, and saw literature mainly as a powerful element in the fight for political rights. In an article published right after the dramatic events of 1989, British-American historian Tony Judt offers a timeline for the evolution of the relationship of Western intellectuals with East-Central Europe. In the post-Stalinist era, he notes,

“with the diminished credibility of the Soviet utopia (notably as a by-product of Khrushchev's revelations at the Twentieth Congress), the intelligentsia of the Left in the West turned away from the region altogether and began instead to project their hopes onto the non-European world. As a consequence, with attention centered on Algeria, Ghana, Cuba, and (eventually) the Far East, the Soviet satellites closer to home became an embarrassing irrelevance -- irrelevant because for all but the most hard-

⁶ Bruce Donahue, 'Viewing the West from the East: Solzhenitsyn, Milosz, and Kundera,' *Comparative Literature Studies* 20 (Fall, 1983), 249.

bitten of Communists they no longer served as prototypes of postrevolutionary societies, embarrassing because they offered disconcertingly proximate reminders of the achievements of real socialism in its European homelands.”⁷

The events of the last decades of communism in East-Central Europe dramatically discredited the tenability of communist ideology, with direct results on the attitude of Western intellectuals towards the area:

“First, in 1956, there came the double blow of Khrushchev’s speech and the attack on Hungary, ending the consubstantiality of Marxism-Party-proletariat. Then, Marxism was exported, with spontaneous peasantries ostensibly replacing organized workers in the driving seat of history. Only when this myth in turn lost its credibility (somewhere between the Cultural Revolution and Pol Pot) did intellectuals return their gaze to Europe, a continent where the Soviet Union had once again, in 1968, contributed to the further undermining of its own foundation myth.”⁸

As reality kept sabotaging the ideological construct, the theoretical means available to Western intellectuals for analyzing its complexities (either from a political or sociological point of view) proved unequal to the task of bridging the cultural divide. Consequently, as Judt notes again,

“the whole subject remains in the hands of the *Zivilisationsliterati*, of East and West alike. This is not such a terrible thing, and it by no means consigns Central Europe to insignificance. After all, the fashion will pass, but it will at the very least leave in paperback translations a library full of works by authors, living and dead, of whom the Western reader was hitherto ignorant.”⁹

Not surprisingly though, as the end of the 20th century brought about the end of communist regimes in the countries of the former Soviet Bloc, the more general studies dedicated in the

⁷ Tony Judt, ‘The Rediscovery of Central Europe,’ *Daedalus* 119 (Winter, 1990), 28-9.

⁸ Judt, 35.

⁹ Judt, 50.

West specifically to the literature of the region after 1989 (like A. B. Wachtel's *Remaining Relevant after Communism*) lament its loss of prominence in a context where it has to compete with a vastly increased entertainment offer and many other claims to public interest, while it is no longer needed as a political weapon.

On the other hand, in most countries of East-Central Europe there have been recent attempts at integrating the literature of exiles into the accepted canon of their national literatures, from which they had been excluded during communism. Whoever left the country had been erased from all records, their books removed from public libraries. While this approach has served the respective national literatures, it has limited the scope of the literature of exiles, who aimed at both worlds, East and West alike. A more integrative approach is used in a recent edited volume on *Literature in Exile of East and Central Europe*,¹⁰ which organizes the articles by theme and geography.

This thesis approaches the subject from two angles: the historical, sociological, political background of the works, as illustrated both by the authors' biographies and by their own writings on these topics, and the discussion of literary forms employed in those works. The complex role of the East-Central European intellectuals was quite different from that of their western counterparts, as their readers expected them to be much more involved in the life of the *polis*. Their writings covered a wide range of aspects and were instrumental in creating an alternative view of life under communism from the official one projected by the communist authorities. In order to do this, they employed various narrative strategies, from autobiographical accounts to fictional creations. This study answers three questions regarding East-Central European intellectuals in the second half of the 20th century: who they were, what they had to say, and finally how they said it, through their fiction and nonfiction.

¹⁰ Agnieszka Gutthy (ed.), *Literature in Exile of East and Central Europe*, Middlebury Studies in Russian Language and Literature Vol. 30 (New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, Oxford, Wien: Thomas R. Beyer, Jr., 2009).

Altogether, the process of transforming this life experience into literature can be seen as an exorcism of the communist trauma, a term which has been used in relation to the actual, material signs of the communist regime: "Much to the chagrin of Russia, former Soviet satellites are erasing the vestiges of communism from their street names, parks, and monuments."¹¹ Psychological trauma is much more complex and difficult to overcome than the removal of street signs and statues, but the process is somehow similar: by speaking about communism and convincing their readers in the West of its inherent inhumanity, Milosz, Kundera and Manea also succeeded in making sense of their life experience under communism, thus freeing themselves from its haunting memories.

The first chapter of the thesis discusses the role of the intellectual, with an emphasis on the 20th century. A distinction is made first between the figure of the intellectual in France -- where, from its beginnings, the term carried much more weight than it did in the rest of Western Europe or in the United States, as it involved a higher degree of militancy - - and in East-Central Europe, where the late formation of nation states in the 19th century was partly the work of intellectuals -- a fact that enhanced their position and gave them a more active political role. Some of the traditional role of the intellectual in the 19th century and pre-war East-Central Europe was transferred to intellectuals in the Soviet Bloc. The first chapter also covers these distinctions between East-Central European intellectuals and their Western counterparts in terms of specialization. The differences become obvious when we analyze the Milosz, Kundera and Manea's parallel reception in the two cultural environments: the Soviet Bloc versus 'the free world.'

The second chapter of this study, on Context, uses methods borrowed from many of the social sciences in order to set out a comprehensive background for the literary works. It sees the work of art -- to quote Stephen Greenblatt -- as "the product of a

¹¹ Weblog comment to Gary Peach, 'Eastern Europe confronts its communist past,' Associated Press, April 22, 2007, <http://gold-platedwitchonwheels.blogspot.com/2007/04/exorcising-communism.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

negotiation between a creator or class of creators equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society.”¹² In its scope, this second chapter is closest to the new historicist approach; it uses the biographies of the three authors to examine the cultural context for their literary works. Thus, it illustrates the condition of the international author in the 20th century when confronted with the national categories imposed on him by the cultural background of previous centuries. If during the Renaissance literary works circulated freely all over Europe (even though to a much smaller audience), and the Enlightenment benefitted from a Republic of Letters, by the 19th century the relevance of the national assignation of an author had become paramount.

The second chapter follows the three biographies along what have been assumed as national lines: geographical movements, historical events, political stands and languages used. The parallelism of the situations affords a better understanding of the regional context in which Milosz, Kundera and Manea produced their work, as well as of the evolution of this context. This evolution is important, since the moments of their defection in the West were separated by more than a decade each, thus covering more than forty years of communist rule: Milosz in 1951, Kundera in 1975 and Manea in 1986. Their choice of language is both indicative of their primary target audience and of the ways in which this audience has gradually extended to a more global one, particularly in Kundera’s case. The three authors’ views on literature (world, national, their own) help delineate the literary context in which the authors themselves have placed their work, as the place of literature and culture in the modern world have been a constant preoccupation with each of them. The last two sections in the second chapter are dedicated to the way their work was acknowledged, first at home and then in the West.

Over more than half a century, the three authors discussed here were constantly under pressure from their diverse audiences to explain the ‘reality’ behind their fiction. This

¹² Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Towards a Poetics of Culture,’ *Southern Review* 20 (March, 1987), 13.

they did in miscellaneous articles, interviews and essays, scattered in newspapers and magazines. The third chapter of the thesis, *The Need to Testify*, uses these texts as testimonials for situations described in the second chapter. When the authors themselves collected some of the interviews or essays in a volume, the present study treats the volume as a whole, since the whole structure clarifies the explanatory process. The discussion of these texts is followed by a fourth chapter that focuses on literary works, on the way in which, “in order to achieve the negotiation, artists need to create a currency that is valid for a meaningful, mutually profitable exchange.”¹³

While the contextual second chapter of the study makes use of the biographical details of the three authors as actualizations of the general model discussed -- the East-Central European intellectual under communism and in the ‘free world’ -- the third chapter focuses on each of the authors’ output on the issue in which he demonstrated the most interest. Kundera’s article on the geography of Central Europe explains his concept of Europe as a cultural entity. Milosz’s poem identifies his view of European history as trauma, a perspective noted by most critics of his work. Manea’s dialogues on the politics of totalitarianism clarify his ethical stand against any type of totalitarian ideology, while his interviews explain his choice of language. The communist social environment is illustrated by Manea’s essays on censorship and on the difficulties of publishing under a communist regime, while Milosz’s essays describe his American experience. All these texts give us a more complete image of the lives and personal experience of the three authors and of their relationship with their audience(s). This image is based on the evidence they themselves have offered -- in the form of articles, essays, interviews and dialogues -- of a constant process of self-definition that covers more than half a century now.

This self-definition can also be seen as the first stage of the therapeutic process: anamnesis, a term used by Manea in his novel *The Hooligan’s Return* as the title of an

¹³ Greenblatt, 13.

autobiographical chapter. The particulars of the trauma are put into words and thus rationally organized for a sympathetic audience, albeit one presupposed to be ignorant of these details.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis is dedicated to the narrative modes employed by Milosz, Kundera and Manea in order to create an image of the intellectual under communism. It covers short stories and novels as complex literary products, a different category from the testimonials in the third chapter. While the texts discussed in the third chapter are selected thematically, the fourth chapter follows, for each author, the chronology of publication. The analysis also benefits from the contrapuntal encounter with other literary works in the series. The study covers only a portion of the prose writings of the three authors, specifically those which use innovative narrative modes to create a portrait of the intellectual under the communist regime in 20th-century East-Central Europe. Once again, due to the time gap between the three and to the different characteristics of the communist regimes in their countries of origin, the study of the literary production of the three authors allows for a comparative approach to that image, its degradation through the decades of communist regime, and its eventual reintegration into the Western world. While this new environment is much freer, it is also less susceptible to the mythology of the intellectual which characterizes East-Central European culture.

This detailed analysis of Milosz's, Kundera's and Manea's life and work goes beyond the simple acquisition of evidence, towards the identification of a new literary persona -- that of the intellectual between two worlds. It traces the way in which post-(traumatic) communist literature moved between giving testimony (as detailed in the third chapter) to translating the experience into authentic literary works, giving it artistic expression. The texts discussed, in their entirety, work as probative material in the overall construction of the study, evidence of the need of these three writers to inform their Western readers on the defining elements of 20th century East-Central Europe.

From the point of view of the content, the movement is from the general context to the particular instances of the three authors' lives, and then to the fictional means they used to transmit their life experience. The first group of texts covers the Self-Portraits of the three authors as revealed in the form of articles, interviews, autobiographical writings. With the second group, the emphasis is on the literary forms chosen by these authors to better portray the intellectual under a communist regime.

Thus, this study offers a balanced input on the authors' biographies and literary productions, as the negotiation process "involves not simply appropriation but exchange, since the existence of art always implies a return, a return normally measured in pleasure and interest."¹⁴ This dual approach avoids the discipline-related challenges faced by the student of literary works produced in East-Central European countries under the communist regime, in both options available for research: on the one hand, the academic world delegates them to the Slavic language departments, which does not properly include Romanian, a romance language; on the other hand, the Marxist brands of literary theory use the tools of a critique of capitalism which are inappropriate when dealing with a self-declared socialist society.

On the whole, the study offers an overview of literary descriptions of life under communism, with a focus on the intellectual as a most useful (because self-reflexive) representative of those who experienced this trauma. It covers two aspects of the literature produced by Milosz, Kundera and Manea: content -- the changing image of the intellectual from the Soviet Bloc in the second half of the 20th century -- and form -- starting with the explanatory articles and personal testimonies, towards more rounded, essayistic writings, then to autobiographical accounts, short stories and finally to novels.

¹⁴ Greenblatt, 13..

1. THE INTELLECTUAL

“The intellectual history of our century might almost be written as a study of what has been achieved by all the imaginative writers, philosophers, social theorists, and scholars violently uprooted from their homelands in Eastern and Central Europe and transplanted, as a rich and exotic new stock, in the West.”¹⁵

What needs to be clarified first is the main character in this study: the intellectual. The concept is undoubtedly an ideological construct. Numerous studies have been dedicated to this concept over the last century, most of them, naturally, from the perspective of the sociology of culture. Alexander Gella’s 1976 edited volume -- *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals. Theory, Method and Case Study* -- gathers together scholarly work on the marked distinctions between the image of the intellectual in East-Central Europe (for whom the term ‘intelligentsia’ is used) and in Western Europe. Another cooperative effort, the volume edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, *Towards a History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe: Theoretical Reflections* (2002) helps to clarify the status of the intellectual in the area, based on historical considerations. Finally, Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu’s study *Intellectuals in the Field of Power. Social Morphologies and Trajectories* (2007)¹⁶ gives a sociological overview of the changing role of the intellectuals in communist Romania and Germany. The importance of the intellectual has been noted by A. B. Wachtel: “[I]n the highly litero-centric societies of Eastern Europe, writers and their fate were generally recognized to be of central symbolic value.”¹⁷ Edward Said also notes the representative

¹⁵ Robert Alter, ‘Milosz: Poetry and Politics,’ *Commentary* 75 (April 1983), 41.

¹⁶ Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, *Intellectualii in cimpul puterii. Morfologii și traiectorii sociale [Intellectuals in the Field of Power. Social Morphologies and Trajectories]* (Iasi: Polirom, 2007).

¹⁷ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant after Communism. The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 156.

character of the intellectual: “[A]ll intellectuals represent something to their audiences, and in so doing represent themselves to themselves.”¹⁸

Chronologically, the figure of the East-Central European intellectual in the second half of the 20th century evolved from the ‘engineer of souls’ of the early years, while the Communist Party was still trying to attract intellectuals and use their works to its advantage, to the dissident of the later years, who was constantly under suspicion from the party and was overwhelmed by an ever-increasing feeling of helplessness. This evolution is visible both in Milosz’s, Kundera’s and Manea’s texts relating their personal experience of life under communism directly (discussed in the third chapter here), and in their fictional creations, often based on biographical and autobiographical accounts, as detailed in the fourth chapter.

This introductory chapter of our study offers an outline of the differences in scope for the term in the region where Milosz, Kundera and Manea built their literary careers. After comparing the different roles assigned to intellectuals in France and East-Central Europe (later to be referred to as ‘the Soviet Bloc’), the study identifies specialization as specific to Western intellectuals, while difficult and sometimes undesirable under communism. This (lack of) specialization has a definite impact on the kind of reception East-Central European writers had at home (where they were expected to offer their input under the guise of ‘fiction’) and in the West. On the whole, this chapter outlines a generic image of the intellectual in East-Central Europe, an image that will be brought into relief in the second chapter of this thesis, with the case studies of the three authors as real, flesh-and-blood instances of the theoretical model.

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), xv.

1.1 The role of the intellectual

Most scholars focus on the end of the 19th century as the moment when the concept of 'intellectual' came to be used consistently (although, as Arthur Koestler notices, the social involvement of the Encyclopedists made them "the first modern intellectuals"¹⁹). From the very beginning, a clear split emerges between the term 'intelligentsia', as used in Russia and Eastern Europe beginning with the 19th century²⁰ and the term 'intellectual' as first used in France during the Dreyfus affair.

In France, the Dreyfus affair triggered both (self)definitions on the part of intellectuals and violent accusations against this newly identified category. In this ideological war, intellectuals were accused of being voices without a mandate, of embodying the death of instinct, in "a reaction against tradition, with its faith in science and progress, and its intellectual cosmopolitanism."²¹ They were also accused of seeing themselves as the new spiritual guides for humanity, or of being the enemies of the national 'soul,' as they insisted on "teaching an 'absolute truth' instead of teaching piously the 'French truth.'"²² From this point on, as Victor Brombert has noticed, "the French concept of the intellectual [...] remains bound up with the notion of a social, political and moral crisis. Better still, it implies *the notion of a permanent state of crisis*. Given this sense of crisis, the intellectual considers it his obligation to intervene,"²³ to be socially involved, and this distinguishes the French intellectual from other intellectuals in the Western world. On the other hand, as Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu observes, an autonomous literary field was created in 19th century France, in

¹⁹ Victor Brombert, 'Toward a Portrait of the French Intellectual,' *Partisan Review* XXVII (Summer 1960), 497.

²⁰ Tibor Huszar, 'Changes in the Concept of Intellectuals,' in *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals. Theory, Method and Case Study*, ed. Aleksander Gella (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1976), 79-110.

²¹ Brombert, 'Toward a Portrait of the French Intellectual,' 487.

²² Brombert, 492.

²³ Brombert, 494.

parallel with the intellectual field,²⁴ a separation that does not characterize East-Central Europe.

The distinction between 'intellectuals' and 'intelligentsia' was also acknowledged once the Soviet Bloc came into being, with intelligentsia defined, along Marxist lines, as not quite a social class of its own, but a *stratum* that "is supposed to be characteristic of societies in which the transformation of the pre-capitalistic social structure took place before the formation of a numerous and strong bourgeoisie (middle class) in a way different from what has happened in Western Europe."²⁵ That is, when a still-unformed bourgeoisie could not take the lead in the creation of a national state, the intelligentsia took up that role, by first endeavoring to create a national culture similar to that of their role models: England, France, or Spain. The image of the intellectual and even, more specifically, of the writer in East-Central Europe is that of "the poet as founder of a culture, a nation"²⁶ -- which is not the case in Western Europe, where the nation state is much older, as "the stage of new national ethnogenesis occurred in the Middle Ages, in the period before the awakening of nations, before the origin of nationally oriented intelligentsias and before the cultural revival of the masses."²⁷

During the first half of the 19th century, many European universities opened departments of modern literatures, and this meant that "the formal study of literature was to provide the histories and textbooks for teaching the modern languages and literatures in schools: the institutionalization of literary studies became part of unwritten but powerful national agendas [...] Literature and literary scholarship acquired a political justification and

²⁴ Gheorghiu, *Intellectualii in cimpul puterii*, 251. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Romanian in this thesis are mine.

²⁵ Zygmunt Komorowski, 'The Class of the Intelligentsia in Africa,' in *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals. Theory, Method and Case Study*, ed. Aleksander Gella, (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1976), 206.

²⁶ Milan Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed. An Essay in Nine Parts*, translated from the French by Linda Asher (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 158

²⁷ Oskar Krejci, *Geopolitics of the Central European Region. The View from Prague and Bratislava* (Bratislava: VEDA Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2005), 263.

social as well as academic prestige by becoming the keeper of the national soul.”²⁸ This institutionalization of literature was more strongly implemented in multinational societies (characteristic of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), “societies that had problematic identities [...] Constructing a national literature was in these areas a major contribution to the struggle for a national language, culture, and political independence. Vernacular literature was often a *prelude* to state formation and even a *precondition* for it.”²⁹ Sometimes, in East-Central Europe “competing national projects” emerged, and the concept of national literature evolved from everything written in any language within the country’s borders to everything written in the national language (the national language being an intrinsic prerequisite to a national spirit and a national state).

According to Ernest Gellner, nationalism “*invents* nations where they do not exist.”³⁰ In East-Central Europe, this invention also involved creating national literatures, that is

“constructing *texts* as well as *institutions*. The text construction consisted of 1) writing dictionaries; 2) reviving the vernacular poetry; 3) (re)constructing the national literary past, by publishing the oral poetry and the medieval and baroque vernacular literature; 4) writing new national epics and historical fiction; 5) canonizing national poets; and, last but not least, 6) writing national literary histories.”³¹

The revival of national languages was often furthered by new journals, something which could be rather divisive, “for a cosmopolitan elite continued to regard itself as part of the hegemonic (more ‘advanced’ and ‘refined’) foreign culture, while the innovators sought to revitalize the vernacular, the local, and the ethnic.”³² The literary

²⁸ Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, *Towards a History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe: Theoretical Reflections* (New York, NY: ACLS 52, 2002), 13.

²⁹ Cornis-Pope, 14.

³⁰ As quoted by Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, 16.

³¹ Cornis-Pope, 16.

³² Cornis-Pope, 18.

models they referred to were usually French or Italian, but the theoretical structures employed were most of the time German, following Herder's works and the German romantic drive to build a national spirit. The whole "creation of a national culture" through the establishment of a national literature and a national language has been seen as a fundamental component in the creation of the Western nation-state. The dynastic states in 19th century East-Central Europe, on the other hand, did not coincide with the national contours, and this fact "effectively eliminated the possibility that the existing monarchies [unlike the British or French empires] would ever combine political rule with cultural ascendancy."³³ This left national cultures at the disposal of the intelligentsia, and that is why, in East-Central European countries, starting with the 19th century, the role of the writer was much more important than that of their counterparts in the West. At that time, most of these countries were trying to create national states for themselves, a process in which, as Wachtel correctly identifies, literature, "far from being a reflection of reality, was very frequently a creator of new identities and new social and political realities."³⁴

What Cornis-Pope calls "the national literature projects" was thus part of the political battle fought by these future states, and this meant a much more prestigious position for writers: "[P]oets in Eastern Europe have played the role ascribed to statesmen and kings in other lands."³⁵ This also explains why, initially, the revolutionary intelligentsia did not seek the autonomy of intellectual work from politics -- engaged literature was their *raison d'être*. As Carl Tighe observes, between 1945-1989 "the Communist Party, for all its opposite intent, preserved the power of the word and the moral and political position of writers at a time when in Western Europe and America writers were no longer taken very

³³ Zygmunt Bauman, 'Intellectuals in East-Central Europe: Continuity and Change,' *East European Politics and Societies* 1 (1987), 168.

³⁴ Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant after Communism*, 12.

³⁵ Wachtel, 24.

seriously as political commentators.”³⁶ But the imposition of social realism as the only form of accepted literature deprived writers of this role. As Czeslaw Milosz notes, “social realism forbids what has in any age been the writer’s essential task -- to look at the world from his own independent viewpoint, to tell the truth as he sees it, and so to keep watch and ward in the interest of society as a whole.”³⁷

The movement towards the emancipation of literature from social realism and propagandistic tasks was marked, in the Soviet Bloc, by the third Congress of Soviet Writers in May 1959. The moment also indicated that writers were “no longer regarded as being so important as they believed,”³⁸ their role now was only to assist the party in the education of the ‘new man.’ From this moment on, the prevailing model of organization for intellectuals interested in having a contribution to the ideological and political shaping of the country was that of independent groups, such as “the Petofi group that played a major part in the Hungarian revolution in 1956, Charta 77 that united Czechoslovakian intellectuals opposed to their country’s occupation by the troops of the Warsaw Pact in 1968, or KOR -- the group of intellectual counselors of Solidarnosc, the Polish movement that defied communism in the 1980’s.”³⁹

In contrast with the two instances of France and East-Central Europe (with its Soviet development), the cultural and political context in Great Britain and the United States has been often seen as quite the opposite -- “uniquely unintellectual -- not to say downright anti-intellectual,”⁴⁰ in that both Great Britain and the United States excluded the intellectuals from any significant role in the formation of a unified culture (a special note is usually made

³⁶ Carl Tighe, *The Politics of Literature: Poland 1945-1989* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), vii.

³⁷ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, translated from the Polish by Jane Zielonko (New York: Vintage Books, 1953), ix.

³⁸ Max Hayward, ‘Soviet Literature in the Doldrums,’ *Partisan Review* XXVII (Winter 1960), 106.

³⁹ Gheorghiu, *Intellectualii in cimpul puterii*, 339.

⁴⁰ Daniel T. Rodgers, Stefan Collini, ‘Anatomy of a Cliché/ Author’s Response,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68 (July 2007), 390.

for Irish intellectuals, which might suggest that there is actually a direct relation between national movements and the status of the intellectual). Russell Jacoby's more nuanced approach sees "a generational move from public intellectuals earlier in the century to university thinkers at its end. Intellectuals have not disappeared, but something has altered in their composition. They have become more professional and insular; at the same time they have lost command of the vernacular, which thinkers from Galileo to Freud had mastered."⁴¹ Intellectuals appear to have lost their independence and breadth of thought, something Richard Posner accounts for with a pragmatic, market-oriented approach. Posner points to "an absence of the quality controls [for the 'public intellectual] that one finds in other markets for goods and services, including the market for academic scholarship."⁴² A similar study of the British scene uses a more traditional, historical approach, only to conclude that "the modern concept of the intellectual represents, in part, an attempt to counter the limiting effects of specialization while drawing on the authority which the process confers."⁴³ The general agreement seems to be that academia has somehow swallowed the (previously independent) intellectual into a safe world of highly specialized intellectual pursuits, and in doing so has effectively cut him (or her) off from the general public whose opinion it was his / her duty to (in)form.

None of these studies, however, pays much attention to what is supposed to be the goal of the work of public intellectuals -- to inform and direct civil society -- a task that has been paramount for East-Central European intellectuals over the last decades. As citizens' civil rights were very limited under the communist regimes and at the discretion of the Party, the main activity of intellectuals in the area was dedicated to informing citizens of their civil rights and helping gather groups of individuals determined enough to claim them.

⁴¹ Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals. American Culture in the Age of Academia* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), xv.

⁴² Richard A. Posner, *Public Intellectuals. A Study of Decline* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2.

⁴³ Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 464.

In view of the way in which civil society in Great Britain and the United States adjusted to the waves of black movements, feminist movements, GLBT movements, and other minority and human rights movements, the work of the British or American 'unknown intellectual' definitely deserves its ode.

1.2 Specialization

From the different historical roles intellectuals played in Western and Eastern Europe, we can see that the most obvious current distinction is then at the level of specialization. Historically, in Western culture with a Greek and Latin tradition, the intellectual would normally cover more than one of what we now call human sciences: philosophy, political sciences, literature etc. (One has just to consider the founding fathers, Plato and Aristotle.) This was true for a long time: we still use the phrase 'a Renaissance man' to name somebody skilled in several of our (quite recent) divisions of culture. With the 'social division of labor' and probably with the values of modernity, more and more emphasis was laid on specialization. As Foucault notes, the 'universal' intellectual was replaced by the 'specific' intellectual."⁴⁴ Faced with the remarkable successes of the natural sciences, humanities began adopting their methodology and systems, together with a high regard for specialization: writers were forced into ready-made categories -- philosophy, sociology, psychology, political science, literature... where literature (in prose) acquired the new and more specific name of fiction -- to further differentiate it from the other branches concerned with depicting and analyzing 'reality.'

In communist states, philosophical thinking was limited to Marxism, political thinking (for all the claims made by the propaganda) was made redundant by the existence

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power,' in *Power / Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 126.

of the all-knowing single Party, and relevant social sciences were banned for fear that the results of their studies would provide evidence against the official theories. In Romania in the 1980s the sociology departments were actually closed down and their students transferred to the -- Marxist -- philosophy departments. Basically, “the Party had assumed the sole right of initiative in the very same areas of social life that were originally the exclusive, very high definitional domain of the intelligentsia.”⁴⁵ Independent thinkers in the field of humanities could not publish anything that would have gone against the party line. This was sometimes true even in the sciences -- innovations coming from the West were received with suspicion and scientists who tried to adopt them in their work risked being accused of cosmopolitanism. As Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu notes, this situation developed into a “specifically Soviet opposition between the *Marxist-Leninist theory* (elevated to the rank of *scientific ideology*) and the *applied sciences*; between *theoreticians* (generalists) and *specialists*.”⁴⁶

Under these circumstances, the only place left for intellectual opposition was in literature or art. Philosophical journalism and aesthetics offered more ways of avoiding censorship than did the scientific branches of intellectual activity, and also posed greater difficulties to the orthodox dogma of the regime. As Milosz once noted, “the most neuralgic points of the doctrine are philosophy, literature, the history of art, and literary criticism. Those are the points where man in his unfortunate complexities enters the equation.”⁴⁷ Consequently, the only form of expression left for an honest intellectual (wanting to be published) was fiction -- be it in the form of literature, film, or theatre -- in which the truth could be clad in a metaphorical dress to get it past censorship. In this regard, there is an obvious irony in the fact that the road opened by ‘socialist realism’ ended with a highly

⁴⁵ Bauman, ‘Intellectuals in East-Central Europe,’ 178.

⁴⁶ Gheorghiu, *Intellectualii in cimpul puterii*, 83.

⁴⁷ Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-definition*, translated from the Polish by Catherine S. Leach (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002), 204.

metaphorical or allegorical art form. Basically, literature could “benefit from the intrinsic ambiguity of discourse.”⁴⁸ And here the terminology as used in the West and in the communist countries begins to diverge. The already larger-than-life figure of the literary writer in a communist country had to fill in for all the other roles which had been banned by the state: it was his / her duty to the readers who were starved for truth -- that is, an image of reality that corresponded to their own lived experience.

This role is by no means confined to the Eastern European states. As Edward Said noted, “In dark times, an intellectual is very often looked to by members of his or her nationality to represent, speak out for and testify to the sufferings of that nationality”⁴⁹ (an observation born out quite remarkably by the recent events in the Middle East, where intellectuals were again called to take a stand against political oppression). Censorship is proof that the state also saw literature as a true image of reality, clashing with the official one. On the other hand, this view of literature as a political tool did not conform to the Western idea of literature, demoting it to ‘propaganda’ or political writing at best, with a view of politics as degrading the lofty ideals of literature.

The actual competency of intellectuals to fulfill those manifold roles in communist countries was put to the test after the fall of communism, when many intellectuals were called to play an active role in the political arena. Vaclav Havel is just one -- maybe the most successful -- of many examples, and it is noteworthy that Timothy Garton Ash described him in 1986 as “a playwright catapulted by circumstances and the dictates of conscience into the role of ‘dissident,’ but not at all by temperament a political activist.”⁵⁰ The election of many East-Central European intellectuals in the newly established parliaments was justified by the general expectation that they were capable of understanding and using the ‘new’ democratic

⁴⁸ Milosz, *Native Realm*, 287.

⁴⁹ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 33.

⁵⁰ Timothy Garton Ash, ‘Does Central Europe Exist?’ *The New York Review of Books*, October 9, 1986, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1986/oct/09/does-central-europe-exist/?pagination=false>, accessed November 12, 2012.

concepts and values introduced from the West. The fact that most of them subsequently retired from politics (usually disgusted and regretting the waste of time and effort which -- many said -- might have been put to better use in the writing of their 'literary' creations) also indicates the rise in the post-communist period of a new type of intellectual, more systematically focused on just one of the specialized fields of politics, sociology, philosophy, literature, etc.

All three writers studied here, Milosz, Kundera and Manea never claimed to be more than authors of literature (making their specialization quite clear throughout their career), although Milosz did lament the separation: "When the description of countries and civilizations had not yet been inhibited by a multitude of taboos arising from the compartmentalized division of knowledge [...] a reporter, a sociologist, and a historian used to coexist within one man. To the mutual detriment of all, they parted ways."⁵¹ On the other hand, unlike many other prominent literary figures in East-Central Europe, all three consistently refused to reach a compromise with the authorities, thus offering three individual instances of resistance against the pressure exercised by the communist authorities on intellectuals.

The movement of all three authors from the communist literary arena, where their output meant so much to so many people into a free world where they had to struggle to make their voices heard and their books read (and sometimes even to prevent themselves from being hijacked into unwanted political stands) creates an excellent opportunity for the comparative study of the position of the intellectual in the 20th century. It is not just a coincidence that both Milosz and Manea found a place for themselves in the United States, in the academic world (Milosz at Berkeley University in the 1960s, Manea at Bard College in the 1990s), while in France Kundera could afford to give up his teaching

⁵¹ Milosz, *Native Realm*, 147.

positions (first at the University of Rennes, then at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris) and be accepted as an 'independent' intellectual.

1.3 The role of the writer in the communist regimes

From its beginnings, the communist system in East-Central Europe recognized the importance of arts in general and literature in particular in its struggle to create a new world order. In its view, literature was required to reflect a sole image of reality, the one which conformed to socialist realism. Socialist realism in itself was an oversimplified view of the world along the lines of class struggle. Anything that lay outside these lines was irrelevant and suspect (as the shift in perspective could have created a competing view of reality). Anything that went against the official theory that class struggle was the driving power of history was considered an act of sabotage against the state and the political system. This resulted in a one-dimensional literature that presented the mythology of the good communist versus the bad reactionary character in countless cliché versions.

The relationship between the communist authorities and writers changed over the years. The authors who were active before and during World War II, who had acquired some fame and the respect of their readers were initially courted by the authorities, who tried to convince them to present 'their side of the story.' Those who did not comply were not published. The option was between not writing or publishing at all and writing or publishing according to the socialist realist code. The regimentation of authors was accomplished through the Writers' Union, an organization that, at the same time, helped the Party control the writers and offered them some privileges in order to better motivate them into being instrumental in the transmission of the official ideology to their readers. The procedure for entering the union clearly illustrates the double allegiance of its members: applicants had to produce a character reference from some collective official body (the Party organization,

Union or youth group) vouching for their political and moral conformity, and a letter of recommendation from two members of the union⁵² confirming their literary skills.

Over the years, both parties became better skilled at the censorship game: the censors learned to identify the potentially 'inflammatory' aspects of a literary text and the authors learned how to disguise their ideas, making them acceptable to the censors, while still meaningful to their readers. This situation actually created a very strong and special relationship between authors and their readers: the author offered an alternate view of reality to the official / propaganda one, in what was almost like second-hand therapy -- the truth you cannot utter is stated by another. From a marketing point of view, the situation made no sense: the books which would have been bestsellers were the most difficult to get published. This fact was acknowledged by the sales-people who, in Romania, would offer packages: the best-selling book by an almost dissident author (open dissidence meant he could not publish) together with some party policy book that no one wanted to read -- like selling the poison with its antidote. As Milosz notes, "in systems where the market is scorned, where language becomes a labyrinth of mutable meaning, where censorship frugally portions out 'facts,' great effort goes into their interpretation,"⁵³ and this creates a very special relationship between the author and his readers.

This strong bond with such a particular audience could only be broken by very strong pressure, but censorship gradually made it impossible for writers to communicate, even in an oblique way with their readers of choice. The writers' struggle against censorship was also complicated by the shift in the official code after Stalin's death and the public admission by communist officials of the 'errors' of the Stalinist period, although, as Milosz points out, "differentiation between the Stalinist and anti-Stalinist left presents

⁵² Gheorghiu, *Intelectualii in cimpul puterii*, 263.

⁵³ Czeslaw Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, translate from the Polish by Richard Lourie (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), 109.

insurmountable difficulties.”⁵⁴ The third Congress of Soviet Writers in May 1959 brought with it a little more freedom for writers, “a certain abdication by the party of its exclusive prerogatives in the control of literature, in favor of the corporate judgment of the writers themselves.”⁵⁵ The party line became blurry again and, for a while, authors were allowed to reveal at least part of the truth. Still, as Norman Manea noted, “in the post-Stalinist decades, self-censorship also became more flexible, more complex, more treacherous -- sometimes, of course, even paradoxical.”⁵⁶ Also, at the time, the only way for an East-Central European writer to gain international recognition was a clear break, in the form of dissidence or exile, from what Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu calls “the total institution represented by socialist literature.”⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the nationalistic tendencies that became manifest in the region after the Stalinist period and became stronger after the fall of communism ended up by imposing another fixed image of ‘reality,’ which again made it impossible for writers to express their views fully. The writer was now a “double exile, from his own country and from his community in exile.”⁵⁸

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, these authors were paradoxically faced with a different type of opposition. After trying to get away from a prescribed way of viewing their world, they discovered that they were being accused by some intellectuals in the West of practicing a different kind of propaganda / anti-propaganda, which was, in the end another facet of the same kind of perversion exercised on the free spirit. Hannah Arendt, for example, noted in 1953 that

“All studies of the Soviet systems, even when prepared by the most reliable experts, suffer from a decisive lack of source material [...] This lack of undisputed documentary evidence has led many scholars to accept Russian government sources and to

⁵⁴ Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, 158.

⁵⁵ Hayward, ‘Soviet Literature in the Doldrums,’ 107.

⁵⁶ Marco Cugno, ‘Interview with Norman Manea,’ *TriQuarterly* 97 (Fall 1996), 33.

⁵⁷ Gheorghiu, *Intellectualii in cimpul puterii*, 311.

⁵⁸ Gheorghiu, 285.

succumb to Bolshevik propaganda simply because it appears to them to be more reputable than the records of personal experience by victims of the regime or the spectacular confessions of former officials.”⁵⁹

The present study of the different responses to Milosz', Kundera's and Manea's work in their homeland and in the West will clarify these different perspectives on communism, following a timeline of the gradual process of Western leftist intellectuals' disenchantment with communism.

1.4 Three case studies: Czeslaw Milosz, Milan Kundera, and Norman Manea

Czeslaw Milosz, Milan Kundera and Norman Manea were chosen for this study as representative literary figures of their time and countries who, at the same time, managed to capture the interest of a large Western audience, thus becoming a kind of cultural interpreters between the two worlds. The fact that all three have consistently placed themselves and their work exclusively in the literary field helps us define their role in the context of intellectual specialization discussed earlier. A study of their work offers the opportunity of a composite image of the communist reality in three countries -- Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania. The temporal perspective moves from the Stalinist beginnings of communist rule in Milosz's writings, to the definitive moment of disillusionment with communist ideals as represented by the crushing of the Prague spring and the work of Milan Kundera, and finally to the denunciation of the communist utopia as nothing but a more ideologically insidious form of totalitarianism, as seen in the 80's and in the writings of Norman Manea. It also permits two distinct but converging approaches: a study of how they presented themselves, as intellectuals, to their audiences in their own country on the one

⁵⁹ Hannah Arendt, 'Understanding Communism,' book review of *An Introduction to Bolshevism*, *Partisan Review* XX (Sept. – Oct. 1953).

hand, and in their adoptive country on the other; and a study of how they presented the experience of life under communism in their works.

The general tendency for the 19th century European reader was to identify and categorize authors according to national criteria. The exacerbation of nationalism that scarred the first half of the 20th century eventually resulted in a blurring of these criteria for a fairly substantial part of the European (particularly East-Central European) population. For them, exile meant a severance of ties with their main identity group, and consequently all three authors under consideration were under constant pressure to redefine their national coordinates and social and cultural environment of their country of birth for the audience in their adoptive countries (an audience which expanded with the translation of their work into foreign languages). Their effort to explain the context for the production of their literary works took various forms which the authors themselves did not classify as 'literature' proper -- articles, interviews, essays, less 'specialized' texts, with the specialization here being in fiction. Some of these texts, which other scholars have treated as incidentals in the overall chronology of the three authors' oeuvre, are included in the third chapter here, as direct testimony of intellectuals, while the fourth chapter discusses their production as specialized authors of literature. The texts in the third chapter are selected thematically: although geographical, historical, political, social, linguistic and literary considerations are unavoidably combined in many of them, each text is discussed in the section which it best illustrates.

The second chapter of this study then offers the background for the literary works discussed in the last two chapters, with sections analyzing the geography, history, politics and languages of the region and the way in which the biographies of the three authors illustrate these circumstances. As Milosz summarizes,

"in Europe, this 'acceleration of history' demonstrated its force in the span of one generation: the First World War broke out; seemingly indestructible powers -- the

Russian Czarist Empire and the Hapsburg monarchy -- fell; the Revolution of 1917 flared up; Nazism and Fascism culminated in the Second World War and Russian marched far beyond its 1914, taking into its orbit little countries which had previously separated themselves from it, as well as nearly all the former Hapsburg domain.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Czeslaw Milosz, 'Speaking of a Mammal' in *To Begin Where I Am. Selected Essays*, edited and with an introduction by Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline G. Levine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 209.

2. CONTEXT

“I do not believe in the possibility of communing outside a shared language, a shared history.”⁶¹

In discussing communism, this study starts from where, when and how it happened. The self-identity based on these elements is naturally shared by an author with his home audience -- they all have a common horizon of expectation created (though not limited) by a common environment, a common background, and common life experience. When writing to a Western audience, though, all three authors have to start from defining those terms, and their efforts (spread over decades) prove very useful for this discussion of life under communism.

A first section of our discussion on context, ‘Geography’ is dedicated to spatial movements of the three authors (where the parallelism is quite obvious), and also to the ways they chose to redefine these geographical terms for their Western readers. The environment is normally defined in geographical terms, and lately there have been quite a number of studies dedicated to the region, which unfortunately did not manage to clarify the terminology (hopefully, though, the distinction between East, West, Central Europe is becoming obsolete, with the accession of most states in the region to the European Union). This study makes use mainly of Oskar Krejci’s comprehensive volume *Geopolitics of the Central European Region. The View from Prague and Bratislava*, as it offers not just the unavoidable political distinctions, but also a more general view, from a local perspective.

A second section of this chapter of our study, ‘History’ identifies the historical events that were formative for the three authors (and their home audiences). While historical developments in the region are often discussed in relation with the ways in which Europe

⁶¹ Milosz, ‘Who Was I?’ in *To Begin Where I Am*, 8.

has been divided and categorized, Robin Okey's book *Eastern Europe, 1740-1980: feudalism to communism* is one of the very few works that offer a comprehensive and integrative view of the region's history from the Enlightenment to the present day. This is the most relevant period for our discussion of Milosz's, Kundera's and Manea's life, as well.

Tightly linked to historical events are the political stands each of the authors took at various moments in their life. The political developments in the Soviet Bloc have been studied extensively. Barbara J. Falk's book *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe* offers a well-documented, articulate view of events spanning over more than four decades, an excellent starting point for the third section, 'Politics,' dedicated to the change in the three authors' political views over the years.

The next section discusses the work of the three authors from the point of view of the language they used. As exiled writers, all three had a choice between continuing to write in their native language and switching to the language of their new country of residence. Milan Kundera is the only one of the three who eventually chose French as the language of his more recent novels. Kundera's previous situation, as an author mostly read in translation, was remarkable enough to make Michelle Woods dedicate an entire book, *Translating Milan Kundera*, to the issues which arose from these particular set of circumstances. Woods looks at Kundera's work mainly from the point of view of translation studies, and offers a very detailed and comprehensive analysis of both Kundera's writing and of the secondary literature it has produced. Her findings can be extrapolated to Milosz and Manea, as the circumstances of their publication in the West were similar.

In their direct dialogue with their readers -- an attempt to go beyond the 'rules of the game' -- their essential instrument is language and its first cousin once removed -- translation. In spite of all frustrations created by its inherent inadequacies, translation remains the only means an author has at his disposal in order to communicate with readers from all parts of the world.

Under these complex circumstances, reading literature in countries under communism was a quite different experience than reading literature in the West. The sixth section details the differences, starting 'At Home' with an analysis of the historical evolution of the role of the intellectual in East-Central European countries, as exemplified in Leon Volovici's volume *The Emergence of the Writer in Romanian Culture*.⁶² The section continues with an analysis of 'the political mission of writers in the "people's democracies,"' based on Lucia Dragomir's study in the collective volume *The Socialist Transformation. Politics of the Communist Regime between Ideology and Administration*,⁶³ in order to identify how and why fiction writers there ended up committing, in Manea's words, "the sin of dilettantism, [...] a remnant of the communist period, when the reader wanted to find in literature what he could not find in history, sociology, psychology, etc. books," which led to the "extension of authority from a specific field to the wide, public one, and to an institutionalization of social prestige."⁶⁴

On the other side of the great divide, 'In the West,' a historical approach to the three authors' reception will help us understand the change in the expectations of their readers there -- as illustrated by the various approaches to literary criticism employed in the West with respect to their work, over the last half of the 20th century and the beginning of the new millennium. This last section of the second chapter starts from Andrew B. Wachtel's *Remaining Relevant after Communism. The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe*, a comparative study of the literature of Eastern European countries after the fall of

⁶² Leon Volovici, *Aparitia scriitorului in cultura romana [The Emergence of the Writer in Romanian Culture]* (Bucuresti: Curtea Veche, 2004).

⁶³ Lucia Dragomir, 'Schimbarea ordinii lumii – misiunea politică a scriitorilor în "democrațiile populare"' ['Changing the world order – the political mission of writers in the "people's democracies"'] in "Transformarea socialistă." *Politici ale regimului comunist între ideologie și administrație [The Socialist Transformation. Politics of the Communist Regime between Ideology and Administration]*, coord. Ruxandra Ivan (Iasi: Polirom, 2009).

⁶⁴ Norman Manea, *Curierul de Est. Dialog cu Edward Kanterian* (Bucuresti: Polirom, 2010), 342.

communism, seen from a Western perspective, and completes it with perspectives presented on the *Postcolonial Europe* website.

The sum of this discussion will then provide us the background for the discussion of the literary works by the three authors, both in general terms and in their own words, as testimony.

2.1 Geography

“Since World War II, for the first time in the history of the region, writers exiled from Eastern Europe have begun to forge a definition of that part of the world that has become comprehensible to the home audience *and* to the audiences of the host countries.”⁶⁵

The opposition between East and West seems to have been a constant presence in the cultural life of the continent, since even the origin of the word ‘Europe’ is assumed to be Assyrian -- ‘ereb,’ meaning sunset, as opposed to ‘asu’ (Asia) meaning sunrise.⁶⁶ But if the home region for classical antiquity was the Mediterranean (the sea in the middle of the ‘civilized’ lands), the concept of Europe as a cultural entity only appeared in the 7th century when, “as a reaction to the first Arab-Islamic expansion [...] the religious specific began to be perceived as a geographical, cultural and also geopolitical difference.”⁶⁷ It was then the religious split of 1054 (the East-West schism) that marked the first separation between the Western Roman Empire (also a cultural unit with Latin as its lingua franca) and the Byzantine Empire of the East (using Greek as its official language). At the end of the 17th

⁶⁵ Ewa M. Thompson, ‘The Writer in Exile: The Good Years,’ *The Slavic and East European Journal* 33 (Winter 1989), 505.

⁶⁶ Krejci, *Geopolitics of the Central European Region*, 31.

⁶⁷ Krejci, 35.

century and beginning of 18th century “*Europe* was born as a secular concept, a unit joined together by certain values and principles” and later on, in mid-19th century, the British historian George Grote further identified these values by suggesting that “the roots of European civilization do not lie in Christianity, but in the democratic experience of the Athenians.”⁶⁸

The region of Europe where Milosz, Kundera and Manea were born has been defined in various ways over the years, using different criteria. In the 18th century the term *Eastern Europe* was introduced, mainly by French philosophers, to describe the new European reality that divided the continent between East and West rather than between (barbarian) north and south -- the separation which had been in place ever since the times of the Roman Empire. As Larry Wolff puts it, “just as the new centers of the Enlightenment superseded the old centers of the Renaissance, the old lands of barbarism and backwardness in the north were correspondingly displaced to the east.”⁶⁹ The distinction acquired new meaning during the Cold War, when the East became synonymous with Soviet political hegemony.

A more nuanced option between East and West was that of *Mitteleuropa*, as proposed, at the beginning of the 20th century by German politician Friedrich Naumann for all the nations in Europe that did not belong either to the British and French Western alliance, or to the Russian Empire in the East. A cultural alternative to Naumann’s political definition of the term was offered by Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal, based on the German-Jewish culture seen as an integrating force for all the various ethnic groups in the region, with the underlying assumption that the integration was to take place in the context of the Austrian Empire (see below the map of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at 1867 -- the

⁶⁸ Quoted by Krejci, *Geopolitics of the Central European Region*, 37-39.

⁶⁹ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: the map of civilization on the mind of the enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 5.

year of creation of the dual monarchy -- indicating former Austrian and Hungarian territories, separated by the river Leitha).



For the people in the area, however, the concept of *Mittleuropa* still carried much appeal, and it was reinterpreted as *Central Europe*, in an obvious attempt to delineate their countries from the Soviet Union (and the origins of communism). As Timothy Garton Ash noticed in 1986, intellectuals in the region “use the terms *Eastern Europe* or *East European* when the context is neutral or negative; when they write *Central* or *East-Central*, the statement is invariably positive, affirmative, or downright sentimental.”⁷⁰

The 20th century, then, records three names for the region: the one used in the West -- *Eastern Europe* (the clear ‘other’); the old 19th century term *Mittleuropa* (but, as Cornis-Pop and Neubauer remark, “a German-oriented *Mittleuropa* concept is applicable in historical studies that stress the German and Yiddish cultures of the region, but the disappearance of these cultures makes a present -- or future -- oriented use of the term

⁷⁰ Garton Ash, ‘Does Central Europe Exist?’

either vacuous or a euphemism for a new German imperialism”⁷¹), and the one used by intellectuals in the area -- *Central Europe*. In the new geopolitical context of the 21st century, as Oskar Krejci notes, the states in the region are all trying “to free themselves from Central European specifics and incorporate themselves into Western Europe and trans-Atlantic institutions.”⁷² And while the term *Central Europe* is no longer a useful political tool, it is still very much in use in the areas of culture and literature.⁷³

As stated above, our three authors were born in that part of Europe that would come to be referred to as ‘the Soviet Bloc.’ However, this name is merely an indication of a political situation over a limited period of time, and it can obscure the distinct details of each particular author’s life. The journeys of their lives are detailed below, followed by a present-day map of Europe showing their movements from East to the West.

Czesław Miłosz was born in 1911 in what was then the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and he counted himself among the last of the Polish Lithuanians. As Robert Alter notes, “he grew up not in a simply demarcated national culture but in a complex interplay of languages, national memories and loyalties, and political power.”⁷⁴ In 1940 he escaped from Soviet-occupied Wilno (present-day Vilnius, capital of the former Soviet Republic of Lithuania, which became independent after the fall of communism) to Nazi-occupied Warsaw. After the Second World War and a short diplomatic career for the new, communist Polish government, in 1951 Miłosz asked the French government for political asylum and he lived in France until 1960, when he moved to the United States to assume the position of lecturer in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of California at

⁷¹ Cornis-Pope, *Towards a History of the Literary Cultures*, 7.

⁷² Cornis-Pope, 459.

⁷³ See, for example, Markus Eberharter, ‘Rethinking Central Europe – a perspective for comparative literature?’ paper presented at the European Studies Centre, Oxford, 24-26 May, 2002, http://users.ox.ac.uk/~oaces/conference/papers/Markus_Eberharter.pdf, accessed November 12, 2012.

⁷⁴ Alter, ‘Miłosz: Poetry and Politics,’ 42.

Berkley. In June of 1981 (after having been awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1980), Milosz returned to Poland for the first time since his exile in 1951, but with the declaration of martial law in Poland in December 1981, the links with his Polish readers were again severed and he continued to live and work in the United States. After the fall of communism, Milosz divided his time between Cracow and Berkeley, and upon his death in 2004, he was buried in Cracow.⁷⁵

Milosz himself was painfully aware of the impossibility of clearly identifying his home for his Western audience, and expressed his frustration in his poems:

“Countries and cities that must remain without name, for how can I explain
why and how many times they changed their banners and emblems?”⁷⁶

When he dedicates a whole chapter of *The Captive Mind* to ‘The Lesson of the Baltics,’ the geographical specifics are underlined by cultural data, just as they will be for Kundera a little later on: “[T]he thinking and reactions of these [Russian] conquerors were just as alien to the conquered as the Arcanum of Catholic theology and the Castilian concept of honor had been to the Aztecs.”⁷⁷ His later attempts at describing his place of birth focus on detailed, concrete descriptions, like in his essay ‘Dictionary of Wilno Streets,’⁷⁸ where he recreates the city from memory and organizes these memories alphabetically, by street names. As Louis Iribarne pointed out, Milosz’s “obsession with place is also seen in the titles of his works, especially in those written after his emigration: *Native Realm*, *The Issa Valley*, *Continents*, *City Without a Name*, *From Where the Sun Rises to Where It Sets*, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, *The Land of Ulro*, *Unattainable Earth*, *Provinces* and *Facing the River*.” The translator and critic goes further, stating that “the real achievement of

⁷⁵ Bogdan Czaykowski, ‘Czeslaw Milosz,’ in *South Slavic and Eastern European Writers*, ed. Vasa D. Mihailovich and Steven Serafin (Detroit: Gale Group, 2000), 408-420.

⁷⁶ Czeslaw Milosz, *Bells in Winter*, translated by the author and Lillian Vallee (New York: Ecco Press, 1978), 9.

⁷⁷ Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, 217.

⁷⁸ Milosz, ‘Dictionary of Wilno Streets,’ in *To Begin Where I Am*, 27-51.

Czeslaw Milosz may lie in his having shown, by the example of his life and work, the role played by place in the very shaping of our being and our sense of the reality we inhabit.”⁷⁹

Milan Kundera's journey to the West was comparatively much shorter. The official biography which accompanies the early English editions of his work consists of only one sentence: “Milan Kundera was born in Czechoslovakia in 1929 and since 1975 has been living in France.” The split of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia following the fall of communism (the last in a long series of such changes) complicates even this simple and desperately unequivocal statement. The subsequent rewriting of this biography for the back cover of his newer English translations reads: “The Franco-Czech novelist Milan Kundera was born in Brno and has lived in France, his second homeland, for almost thirty years.” As Steven Ungar notices, “Kundera’s references to Bohemia as his homeland [...] assert an identification with region at odds with political geography.”⁸⁰ Trying to keep away from geo-political interferences with private life, the geography of the birth place is reduced to a smaller unit, a town, and citizenship is stated as dual. A later version reads “has lived in France since 1975,” thus ensuring that the time unit remains open.

Kundera has shown a constant preoccupation with defining a Central European cultural entity, loosely following the geographical contours of the former Austrian Hapsburg Empire. This seems only natural, considering that, as Oskar Krejci notes, “during the 20th century, the Czechs and Slovaks actually experienced seven or eight different state and regime arrangements.”⁸¹ The move to France involved additional difficulties. As Kundera himself points out in an interview with Jane Kramer in 1984:

⁷⁹ Lois Iribarne, ‘Lost in the “Earth-Garden:” The Exile of Czeslaw Milosz,’ *World Literature Today* 73 (Autumn 1999), 637-638.

⁸⁰ Steven Ungar, ‘Kundera’s Variations: Passing Thoughts on Novel and Nation,’ *South Central Review* 3 (2008), 58.

⁸¹ Krejci, *Geopolitics of the Central European Region*, 12.

“In French, of course, the word ‘home’ doesn’t exist. You have to say ‘*chez moi*’ or ‘*dans ma patrie*’ -- which means that ‘home’ is already politicized, that ‘home’ already includes a politics, a state, a nation. Whereas the word ‘home’ is very beautiful in its exactitude. Losing it, in French, is one of those diabolical problems of translation. You have to ask: What is home? What does it mean to be ‘at home’?”⁸²

Kundera’s preoccupation with the geography of Central Europe can be better understood if we are aware that, while up to the end of the Second World War, the Czech Republic and Slovakia “appeared on atlases on maps of Central Europe [...] during the Cold War geopolitics placed Czechoslovakia in the East. It happened in spite of the fact that Prague is to the west of Vienna, Athens and Istanbul, which belonged to the West. Thus, Cold War Western Europe was more Atlantic than European.”⁸³ It is not surprising, then, that Kundera’s article ‘The Tragedy of Central Europe,’ published in 1984, illustrates exactly this quest for self-definition through the recreation of the map of Europe. As Larry Wolff notes, the issue “hinges on the distinction between intellectual construction and geopolitical reality.”⁸⁴

Norman Manea was born in 1936 in the Bukovina region in Northern Romania.⁸⁵ Bukovina had also been part of the former Austrian Empire and an excellent example of the multiculturalism Kundera identified as one of the defining features of Central Europe, although geographically it would rather belong to Eastern Europe. (Romania on the whole poses a problem with regard to the distinction between Central and Eastern Europe, since Transylvania and Bukovina used to belong to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and would thus

⁸² Jane Kramer, ‘When There Is No Word for Home,’ *New York Times Book Review*, April 29, 1984, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-home.html>. accessed November 12, 2012.

⁸³ Krejci, *Geopolitics of the Central European Region*, 18.

⁸⁴ Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 15.

⁸⁵ Virgil Nemoianu, ‘Norman Manea,’ in *20th-Century Eastern European Writers: Third Series*, ed. and introd. Steven Serafin (Detroit, MI: Thomson Gale, 2001), 251.

fall under the 'Central' category, while the rest of the country seems doomed to the less illustrious labeling of 'Eastern Europe.')

Manea was born into a Jewish family and in 1941, together with all the Jewish population of the region was deported by the Romanian fascist government to a concentration camp in Transnistria -- present day Ukraine. The survivors returned to Romania at the end of the war, but for the following 45 years the communist government of Romania never admitted a Romanian Holocaust on the grounds that it did not happen on Romanian territory -- just one instance of the intricate relationship between borders and politics in this region of Europe. Manea started his literary career in communist Romania and in 1986 went into exile, living first in West Berlin and from 1988 in the United States. In 1997, well after the fall of communism, he visited Romania for the first time since his emigration, but he continues to live and work in the United States.

The present day map of Europe below shows each of the three journeys from east to west. The thin line indicates Milosz's route from Vilnius (present day Lithuania), to Warsaw (Poland), to Paris (France) and then to the United States. The thick line indicates Kundera's journey from Brno to Prague (in the Czech Republic), and then to Paris (France). The medium thick line shows Manea's childhood journey to Ukraine, then the move to Bucharest (Romania), from there to Berlin (Germany), and eventually to the United States.



The difficulties each of the three authors had in the West in identifying their place of origin meant they were constantly trying to define it for the understanding of their new audience. Perhaps the most discussed of these attempts is Milan Kundera's article 'The Tragedy of Central Europe,' which is discussed in the third chapter. Kundera rejects the term 'Eastern Europe' (as it seems to assimilate the whole region to Russia) and proposes 'Central Europe' as its 'civilized' counterpart, a concept based on historical, rather than geographical data.

2.2 History

"The most striking feature of Central European literature is its awareness of history."⁸⁶

This complex relationship between the geographical and historical coordinates of their lives was a constant preoccupation for all three of our authors, but is best observed in the work of

⁸⁶ Czeslaw Milosz, 'Central European Attitudes,' *Cross Currents* 5 (1986), 101.

Czeslaw Milosz, who has been often called ‘a poet of history.’⁸⁷ Generally, possibly as a result of the late formation of the nation states in East-Central Europe, the national history of each country still carries significant weight in the overall cultural mould of its citizens, and the history of the 19th century had considerable bearing on the 20th century developments in the region.

The 19th century brought with it tremendous ideological changes in Europe. The year 1830, with the July Revolution in France, marked an ideological shift from the hereditary right of monarchs to popular sovereignty, which resulted in party and institutional changes in both Britain and France. As Mark Haas explains, these domestic changes “resulted in the division of Europe into two hostile camps, with the two constitutional monarchies on one side and the three absolutist powers [the Austrian, Russian and Turkish empires] on the other.”⁸⁸ As the Enlightenment ideas of equality and individual freedom, which had shaped the American constitution and fuelled the French revolution, were carried by Napoleon’s armies across Europe to the East, the 1848 revolution confronted the thinkers of the region with a new question: who ‘we, the people’ really were since, actually, “the sovereignty of the people merely substitutes the proprietary claims of nations for those of princes, because States are still based on territories and not on ‘sovereign’ hordes.”⁸⁹

The fight for civil rights in East-Central Europe had to start with national rights. As Robin Okey notes, “in ethnically diverse Eastern Europe the call to justice and liberty would be seen pre-eminently as a call to national independence.”⁹⁰ It was the dawn of nationalism which, “at the outset” could be seen as a positive ideological development, or

⁸⁷ Aleksander Fiut, *The Eternal Moment. The Poetry of Czeslaw Milosz*, translated by Theodosia S. Robertson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 2.

⁸⁸ Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics. 1789-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 75.

⁸⁹ L. B. Namier, *1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals*. The Raleigh Lecture on History, British Academy, 1944 (Oxford University Press: 1946), 27.

⁹⁰ Robin Okey, *Eastern Europe, 1740-1980: Feudalism to Communism* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 61.

“an inclusive and liberating force. It broke down the various localisms of region, dialect, custom and clan, and helped to create large and powerful nation-states, with centralized markets and systems of administration, taxation and education. Its appeal was popular and democratic. It attacked feudal practices and oppressive imperial tyrannies and proclaimed the sovereignty of the people and the right of all peoples to determine their own destinies, in states of their own, if that was what they desired. Throughout the 19th and well into the 20th century, nationalism was found wherever native elites fought to overthrow foreign imperial and colonial administrations, so much so that for a time it seemed indistinguishable from popular democracy.”⁹¹

Unfortunately, as Hannah Arendt remarks, nationalism also meant “the transformation of the state from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation.”⁹²

Since the region was divided between three multinational empires (the Austrian, the Russian and the Ottoman) the issue became one of cultural pre-eminence -- as indicated by the fact that the first half of the 19th century saw Greece become independent from the Ottoman empire and Italy independent from the Austrian empire and reunited-- two instances in which the reverence inspired by the two ancient cultures was instrumental in enlisting the help of Western Europe for their cause. This failed to happen in the case of Poland, in spite of the efforts of a very substantial Polish Diaspora in Paris. As Norman Davies notes,

“nationalism also underlined an important distinction between ‘civilization’ and ‘culture.’ Civilization was the sum total of ideas and traditions which had been inherited from the ancient world and from Christianity; it was grafted onto the native cultures of all the people of Europe from the outside, to form the common legacy. Culture (*Kultur* in the German sense), in contrast, grew from the everyday life of the people. It was made up

⁹¹ Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London, GBR: Routledge, 1998), 1.

⁹² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1968 (1951)), 275.

from all that was specific to a particular nation: their native speech, their folklore, their religious deviations, their idiosyncratic practices. In earlier times, civilization had been extolled and culture despised. Nationalism now did the opposite. National cultures were extolled, and common civilization downgraded. The educated, multilingual, cosmopolitan elite of Europe grew weaker; the half-educated national masses, who thought of themselves only as Frenchmen, Germans, English, or Russians, grew stronger.”⁹³

Milosz proposed the same distinction between European civilization and national culture in his article ‘Central European Attitudes.’

The rush was on to assert the importance of each national culture, but the race did not start from positions of equality. As British historian and witness of the Versailles treaty Namier notes, within the Austrian empire “the four master-nations [the Germans, Magyars, Italians, and Poles] taken together formed 52 percent of the population, possessed of a very marked social, economic, and cultural superiority.” A general awareness of this fact contributed to “the Slav renaissance of the Romantic period, harking back to distant common origins,” which Namier explains in historical and linguistic detail:

“The western and southern Slavs, having lost their upper and middle classes in the catastrophes of the preceding three or four centuries, had changed into peasant nations. The advance of the Romantic movement (with its idealization of the past and of the ‘folk’ elements) favored a rebirth of obliterated nations from their roots; and as the Slav languages are close to each other,⁹⁴ and are linked still further, by intermediary formations, the idea was current, especially among the ‘a-historical’ Slav

⁹³ Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 823.

⁹⁴ The name *Slav* is derived from *slov*, which, in all Slav languages, means ‘word’ – they were the ‘worded ones’, who could understand each other, whereas the Germans, who merely mumbled (*mye-mye*), were the *myemtsy*, which changed into *Nyemtsy*, the name common for them with all Slavs [and actually used in the same sense in Romanian – not a Slavic language]; *nyemy* also means ‘dumb’ [mute]. The names of two of the Slav nations – the Slovaks and the Slovenes – are mere variants of the racial cognomen. (Namier’s note).

peoples, that their different tongues were but dialects or variants of one common speech (a linguistic Slav 'Q'), and Slavdom one body; a comparison was drawn with the German Stämme -- Saxons, Bavarians, Suabians, etc. -- whose dialects differ as widely as the various Slav languages. But the missing link of a common literary language caused the difference: and an attempt was made to replace this by a cultural 'Slav reciprocity' -- a literary community and interchangeability transcending 'tribal' divisions. Even among the Poles, Latin Westerners by inclination and vanity, the Romantic period produced a deflexion towards the distant, truly Slav past of their people."⁹⁵

Similarly, Romanians started emphasizing the Latin origin of their language by abandoning the Cyrillic alphabet, which had been until then part and parcel with the Orthodox religion of the majority population, for the Latin one.

It should be mentioned here that the national obsession was by no means unjustified: Hannah Arendt observes in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* the need for nationality as warrant of inalienable individual rights (the same need that ultimately led to the formation of the state of Israel) and notes the reluctance to abandon it for fear of losing these rights:

"More convincing than the complaints of European countries about the difficulties of assimilating refugees are statements from overseas which agree with the former that 'of all classes of European immigrants, the least easy to assimilate are the South, Eastern, and Central Europeans.' (See 'Canada and the Doctrine of Peaceful Changes,' edited by H. F. Angus in *International Studies Conference: Demographic Questions: Peaceful Changes*, 1937, pp. 75-76)"⁹⁶

The continuing legal dilemmas posed by the refugee question well into our millennium bear witness to the importance of national affiliation for the acquisition of 'human rights.'

⁹⁵ Namier, 1848, 102.

⁹⁶ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 283.

The cultural awakening of the small East-Central European nations spanned the second half of the 19th century and it was only by the early 20th century that “the parliamentary democracies, Britain and France, were being drawn into conflict with the semi-autocratic Hohenzollern and Hapsburg empires, making possible that conjunction of Western liberalism and small nation emancipation that East European patriots had vainly hoped for in the mid-nineteenth century.”⁹⁷ At the end of First World War, the fall of the Austrian and Turkish empires led to the creation of several (self-declared) nation-states⁹⁸ -- Poland, Romania, Hungary (without the territories that used to be part of the former Hungarian kingdom, but did not have a majority Hungarian population) -- or federations of nations, as was the case of Czechoslovakia (the union of Czechs and Slovaks) and Yugoslavia (the state of Serbians, Croats and Slovenes), with democratic constitutions adopted early in the 1920s. Eastern European democracy, though, “took a distinctive form; it was above all populist, molded still by the romantic image of the common folk which had first stirred languishing societies a century before. Hence it was also intensely national in tone, bolstering its democratic principles with an almost mythical faith in the sore-tried and now ultimately triumphant Serb, Romanian, Czech as the case may be.”⁹⁹

But, as Robin Okey notes again, over the 1920’s and 1930’s the economies failed to support ideology: “[E]conomic liberalism faltered just when political liberalism appeared to have triumphed [...] Far from becoming independent economic units in their own right the states of the region merely exchanged the tutelage of Austro-German capital for that of Western Europe and America.”¹⁰⁰ The Great Depression that blighted the two very short inter-war decades of independence for the new-born states increased the ambivalence

⁹⁷ Okey, *Eastern Europe*, 147.

⁹⁸ Namier remembers: “When once, [...] in 1919, a Polish diplomat expounded to me the very extensive (and mutually contradictory) territorial claims of his country and I inquired on what principle they were based, he replied with rare frankness: ‘On the historical principle, corrected by the linguistic wherever it works in our favour.’” (1984, 66).

⁹⁹ Okey, *Eastern Europe*, 163.

¹⁰⁰ Okey, 167.

with which they related to the great western powers: respect and emulation on the one hand, but also suspicion and frustration that those great powers would fail to protect them. (Okey also notes that “nothing has so envenomed national relations in the modern world as the conviction of politically weaker nations that they are economically exploited.”¹⁰¹) These suspicions were promptly proved right when, at the end of Second World War, the small nations of East-Central Europe found themselves ‘abandoned’ to the Soviet Union, following a secret meeting between Stalin, Churchill and Truman at Yalta, in a high-handed manner that did not reflect in any way the involvement of each of them in the war: Czechoslovakia and Poland had been invaded by Germany, while Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria had been Germany’s allies. The people of East-Central Europe could now see the two world wars as a historical continuum, where the foreign strings controlling their fate simply changed hands, from one empire to another -- or one form of empire to another, such as in cases like Eastern Poland, Ukraine, Moldova etc., where the Soviet Union simply took over from the Russian empire. This was considered an embarrassing example of the lack of principles in world politics.

These traumatic events marked the lives of all three authors discussed here. Milosz declares “I witnessed a great deal of what Europe prefers to forget.”¹⁰² However, their personal experiences of European history were quite diverse.

As a child, **Czesław Milosz** and his mother accompanied his father, a civil engineer drafted into the Tsar’s army after the outbreak of World War I. They were in the Russian town of Rzhev, on the Volga River, at the outbreak of the 1917 October Revolution. The Milosz family returned to Lithuania in 1918. In 1940, escaping from Soviet-occupied Wilno (in the words of Hannah Arendt, one of those places which “changed hands so many times in the

¹⁰¹ Okey, 143.

¹⁰² Milosz, *Native Realm*, 106.

turmoil of postwar disputes that the nationality of its inhabitants changed from year to year”, so much so that “a French official once termed it *la capitale des apatrides*”¹⁰³), Milosz moved to Warsaw, where he witnessed the horrors of Nazi occupation and the destruction of Warsaw and then of the Polish resistance, caught between the Nazi and the Soviet armies at the end of the war. The events determined his future outlook not just on history, but also on his own art:

“In 1943, I set down my future duties quite clearly: neither the ‘pure poetry’ of Abbé Bremond and its later theoreticians, nor Russian Socialist realism. This experience also anticipated my later reserve towards Western literature. By fusing individual and historical elements in my poetry, I had made an alloy that one seldom encounters in the West.”¹⁰⁴

Still, the West would eventually benefit from it, as he managed to “make the experience of Eastern Europe available to Western sensibility.”¹⁰⁵ Milosz’s work, in all the genres he used, shows a constant preoccupation with “the Being which has taken the place of God in this century, i.e. History.”¹⁰⁶

For a short time after the war, Milosz collaborated with the totalitarian communist regime which eventually drove him to exile in 1951. As Louis Iribarne notes, *The Captive Mind* can also be read as “a kind of justification of his apostasy.”¹⁰⁷ He continues his life and work in the United States as “a newcomer from lands where everyone is burdened with history.”¹⁰⁸ His brief return to Poland in 1981, which was mainly due to his recently acquired fame as a Nobel Prize laureate, was also an opportunity for him to meet with Lech Walesa and other Solidarity leaders, a chance to understand and support the agents of change in

¹⁰³ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 278.

¹⁰⁴ Milosz, *Native Realm*, 248.

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, ‘The Writer in Exile,’ 510.

¹⁰⁶ Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, 29.

¹⁰⁷ Iribarne, ‘Lost in the “Earth-Garden,”’ 638.

¹⁰⁸ Milosz, *Visions of San Francisco Bay*, 93.

the totalitarian system, as part of his duties as he had understood them early in his career: "It [time] taught us [Easterners] the meaning of full commitment and exploded the barriers between the individual and the social, between style and institution, between aesthetics and politics."¹⁰⁹

But the change of the communist system demanded by Solidarity was blocked by the declaration of martial law in Poland at the end of 1981, and Milosz would return to Poland again only after the fall of communism, as a cult figure and a national bard (in spite of the fact that, as Aleksander Fiut observes, "the role of national bard is unpleasant for Milosz"¹¹⁰).

Unlike Milosz, **Milan Kundera** belonged to the generation of young Czechs who had not properly experienced the pre-war democratic Czechoslovak Republic. Their growing up was greatly influenced by the experience of the Second World War and the German occupation and the 20th century marked for them "the moment [...] when [man] began to feel History moving beneath his feet, like a rolling sidewalk."¹¹¹ Kundera matured as a writer in a totalitarian communist regime and, together with many of the intellectual elite saw the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 crush all their hopes of reforming the system into a 'socialism with a human face.' This event marked him for ever: "I know what no Frenchman, no American can know: I know what it is for a man to live through the death of his nation."¹¹² After his exile to France in 1975, Kundera expressed his disillusionment with politics by his refusal to play any part in the cultural or political life of Czechoslovakia -- later to become the

¹⁰⁹ Milosz, *Native Realm*, 300.

¹¹⁰ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 94.

¹¹¹ Milan Kundera, *The Curtain. An Essay in Seven Parts*, translated from the French by Linda Asher (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 55.

¹¹² Kundera, *The Curtain*, 155.

Czech Republic -- even after the fall of communism.¹¹³ Instead, he focuses on “the history of the novel as revenge on history itself,” which he sees as “neither predetermined nor identical with the idea of progress.”¹¹⁴

In his novels, Kundera uses historical events as “a revelatory existential situation” for his characters which “fulfill not only their personal histories, but also the supra-personal history of the European experience.”¹¹⁵ For him, the novel is “interested in history as *a new dimension* of human existence,”¹¹⁶ and his personal interests lie with the “history of values.”¹¹⁷ Thus, European literature becomes for him “a historical context,”¹¹⁸ and “the great miracle of Europe” is “not its art, but its art become history.”¹¹⁹

In the early years of the Second World War, Romania was ruled by the fascist Ion Antonescu and was not a particularly hospitable place for Jews. In 1941, **Norman Manea's** family was sent to a labor camp in Ukraine. When the family returned to Romania, the country had been taken over by communism. Later on, his father was imprisoned and sent to a labor camp for buying meat on credit -- that is, using capitalist methods in a communist country. Norman Manea spent most of his adult life struggling to survive the stifling communist regime with his dignity intact, until he finally left Romania in 1986. (He had kept postponing his exile in spite of the fact that the Romanian communist government, in pursuit of money, international approval, and ethnic purging, allowed the Israeli government to pay for Jews to move there.) After the fall of communism, the resurrection of nationalism in post-

¹¹³ Philip Roth, interview with Milan Kundera, *New York Times Book Review*, November 30, 1980, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-roth.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

¹¹⁴ Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, 14-15.

¹¹⁵ Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, 40.

¹¹⁶ Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, 236.

¹¹⁷ Kundera, *The Curtain*, 16.

¹¹⁸ Kundera, *The Curtain*, 35.

¹¹⁹ Kundera, *The Curtain*, 168.

communist Romania made Norman Manea's return to the country in 1997 a rather tense event.¹²⁰

All three authors discussed here carry a burden of personal connection to the historical events they witnessed that is much heavier than that of their counterparts in the West. Consequently, they feel compelled to share this connection with their readers at home and in exile, to draw attention to the direct impact the 'blows of history' have had on the shaping of personalities and social life in present-day East-Central Europe. Milosz's poem 'Child of Europe,' which we will examine in the third chapter, illustrates this awareness, as well as the sense of immediacy which Milosz retained from his underground poems written in Nazi occupied Warsaw.

2.3 Politics

"They know, and they remind us -- vividly, urgently -- that ideas matter, words matter, have consequences, are not to be used lightly."¹²¹

The new era Milosz announced at the end of 'Child of Europe' was brought to the countries of East-Central Europe from the Soviet Union and many developments there were later reproduced with the new (though unwilling) converts. Hannah Arendt noted soon after the end of Second World War that totalitarian systems were based on a mass society, rather than the class society that had produced the democratic party system. She sees Stalin's slaughter of millions of innocents in the Soviet Union as a deliberate attempt to erase nascent classes: the liquidation of middle and peasant classes, followed by the liquidation of

¹²⁰ Larissa MacFarquhar, 'Shadows and Fog: The Unquiet Times of Norman Manea,' review of *The Hooligan's Return*, by Norman Manea, *New Yorker Book Review*, September 1, 2003, 122-126.

¹²¹ Garton Ash, 'Does Central Europe Exist?'

the bureaucracy which had helped to carry out the previous liquidation measures, followed by the liquidation of the cadres, left only “absolutely atomized elements in a mass society whose completely heterogeneous uniformity is one of the primary conditions for totalitarianism.”¹²²

By the end of Second World War, the citizens of East-Central European countries were well aware of Stalinist atrocities and little inclined towards the communist mythology. However, as a direct result of the Yalta pact,

“within three years of the cease-fire every state in the region had passed under exclusive communist rule. Within three more the assault, which had first been launched against the comparatively recent and fragile growth of liberal capitalism, was being extended to age-old institutions of religious belief and peasant proprietorship, against a background of show trials reproducing the worst features of the Stalinism of the 1930s.”¹²³

Milosz summarizes perfectly the incompatibility between the two concepts of politics: “Either you see the state as an institution to which individuals delegate a part of their power and then exercises control, or you believe in a messianic state, and then, in the face of the greatness of the cause, tears shed over the destruction of some member of the little human machines are truly crocodile tears.”¹²⁴

Okey describes the subsequent attempts to legitimize the new power:

“More or less identical constitutions of 1848 or 1949 (1952 in Romania) reflected the transformation. Behind the nominally sovereign national assemblies, which met only a few days each year, the council of ministers and the Politburo of the Communist Party exercised real power. People’s councils, dominated by their executive committees, took over local government; judges and lay assessors, in theory elected but in practice

¹²² Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 322.

¹²³ Okey, *Eastern Europe*, 188.

¹²⁴ Milosz, ‘Brognart: A Story Told over a Drink,’ in *To Begin Where I Am*, 114.

appointed, assumed control of the judiciary. The division of governmental powers, intended to restrain despotism, was abolished because the people had nothing to fear from themselves. The public prosecutor's task as spokesman for the prosecution was extended to that of 'defender of socialist legality' and could be exercised independent of the courts, thereby nullifying sweeping constitutional provision for personal rights. Only the Communist Party, 'vanguard of the working people,' could nominate candidates to the National Assembly by the single list system."¹²⁵

Labor books and interior passports were used to 'keep stock' of the population and perhaps the longest lasting effect of this practical erasure of civil rights is the permanent guerrilla warfare between the communist state and its citizens. Even after 1989, western visitors were baffled by the evidence of chaos in public administration, in spite of all the instruments of mass control.

The first protest movements in the area were the riots in both East Berlin and Pilsen (Czechoslovakia) in 1953, followed by the Poznan riots in June 1956. They culminated with the Hungarian revolution in 1956, when student protests in Szeged and Budapest led to a mass demonstration on October 23rd and from there to an armed conflict against the Soviet army on Hungarian territory. Barbara Falk is correct in pointing out that "it was specifically anti-Soviet and by no means anti-socialist;"¹²⁶ the battle cry was first of all for national independence. The revolution was crushed, with "a minimum of 2,700 Hungarian losses" followed by

"reprisals after the installation of the Kadar government. From 1956 to 1959 [...] 35,000 were subject to prosecutorial investigation; between 1957 and 1960 13,000 ended up in internment camps. Approximately 350 people in total were executed. The border remained open from the end of October until late November; in less than one

¹²⁵ Okey, *Eastern Europe*, 200.

¹²⁶ Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe* (Budapest – New York: CEU Press, 2003), 427.

month over 180,000 refugees arrived in Austria (more than 200,000 left in total). The emigration after the uprising represented the largest mass exodus and professional 'brain drain' ever experienced by the country."¹²⁷

The Hungarian experience showed that complete independence was not an option, so the next attempt at shaking off Soviet domination, in 1968 in Czechoslovakia, took the form of 'reform communism,' focused primarily on a reform of controlled economy. Again in the words of Barbara Falk, the reform meant an "ideological shift whereby the market was rehabilitated as a distributive mechanism". It

"occurred incrementally with the cautious acceptance of a number of related assumptions: 1) that society was composed of a multiplicity of interests (not simply composed of classes antagonistically at odds with one another); 2) that enterprises and workers require incentives to induce performance; 3) that regardless of the mode of production, consumer demand must be met; and 4) that the commodification of goods and labor would likely continue under centrally-planned socialism."¹²⁸

These changes were initiated by Czechoslovak Communist Party officials, since "political change manipulated from above was seen as a necessary precondition to holding any form of competitive elections; the system would have to be changed by fiat from within."¹²⁹

Moscow's reaction was similar to that in 1956: "On August 20, 1968 as the Presidium was in session, about 250,000 soldiers (approximately 30 divisions) from the WTO nations comprising the Group of Five, crossed the Czechoslovak borders in the north, south, and east."¹³⁰ Reformation was not an option, either: as Haas points out, "adherents to perfectionist ideologies, like Marxism-Leninism, tend to be intolerant of different

¹²⁷ Falk, 428.

¹²⁸ Falk, 413.

¹²⁹ Falk, 74.

¹³⁰ Falk, 79.

interpretations of the same body of thought.”¹³¹ “Authoritarian communism was re-established along its originally rigid and Stalinist line. Power was consolidated in the hands of an old communist guard dogmatically loyal in all respects to the dictates of Moscow, and the party was effectively purged of all traces of attempted reform.”¹³²

These purges bore the name of ‘normalization’ and had staggering results:

“[A]pproximately 327,000 members of the party were expelled; another 150,000 left voluntarily. Membership of the party was cut by one third, although the purge was less intense in Slovakia. About two thirds of Writers’ Union members lost their jobs, 900 university teachers were fired, and 21 academic institutions were closed. A telling result of the depth and breadth of the purges is that in 1971, for the first time since 1821, no literary journals (originally the sponsors of the Czech national revival in the 19th century and long the bastions of critical national Czech culture) were published. Intellectual life was frozen. In the twenty years following 1968, over half a million people emigrated (in a country of just 15 million). According to law, their leaving was a criminal act, and they were forbidden to return.”¹³³

The economy was the main issue, nonetheless. Again as Barbara Falk observes, “because cheap raw materials and economic resources were no longer available by the late 1960s, the USSR and its satellite states had exhausted the possibilities of easy extensive industrialization,” a huge problem for a regime that linked “political legitimacy to economic performance.”¹³⁴ Poverty and a lack of confidence in a system that refused to change triggered the Polish workers’ protests in Gdansk in 1970, and Radom in 1976, culminating with “a wave of strikes in the summer of 1980” that “grew to become a mass movement of over 10 million members, thus constituting the largest sustained challenge to

¹³¹ Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989*, 147.

¹³² Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence*, 80.

¹³³ Falk, 83.

¹³⁴ Falk, 428-9.

authoritarian communism since its beginnings in the Russian Revolution in 1917.”¹³⁵ These placed the communist authorities “in the problematic position of having to deal with workers challenging a state that supposedly privileged their existence.”¹³⁶ Well aware of the Hungarian and Czechoslovakian precedents, the protesters kept their demands to a minimum -- they asked that Solidarity (a trade union independent of the party-state) be declared legal.

Even this small concession (so much in line with the basic tenets of Marxism) was not acceptable to the communist authorities. Their solution was martial law, imposed to “appease the Soviets, provide the necessary discipline to get the country stabilized, and eliminate the possibility of an outright invasion [...] At midnight on December 12, 1980 army tanks and personnel carriers moved out into the streets. Posters tacked up on light posts on street corners announced that a Military Council of National Salvation was now ruling Poland. Overnight virtually the entire Solidarity leadership was rounded up and detained, 78 borders were closed, telephone lines cut, radio and television stations occupied, schools and theatres shut down, all public meetings and gatherings banned, mail censored, and a curfew imposed.”¹³⁷

Martial law was not suspended until 1984.

By now it had become obvious that any change in the political structure of the East-Central European states would have to be initiated by a change in the USSR itself. Since the economic conditions in the Soviet Union were even worse than those in the other communist countries, the new General Secretary of the Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev (elected by the Politburo in 1985), had to find a way forward. In the words of Mark Haas:

¹³⁵ Falk, 45.

¹³⁶ Falk, 48.

¹³⁷ Falk, 52.

“[T]he key change by which Gorbachev unambiguously demonstrated his commitment to replacing the Soviet political system with a much more liberal one came when he publicly laid out in April 1988 his domestic objectives to be voted upon at the upcoming Nineteenth Party Conference scheduled for June. The proposals constituted an institutional and ideological revolution in the Soviet Union. They included the establishment of competitive elections with secret ballots, term limits for elected officials, separation of powers with an independent judiciary, and provisions of freedom of speech, assembly, and the press.”¹³⁸

This was the signal for the events that followed and led to the fall of the communist regimes in the East-Central European countries in 1989.

Each of the three authors discussed here went through a process of freeing themselves of the Marxist dogma and of gaining and communicating important insights, based on the traumatic experience of life under totalitarianism.

The young **Czeslaw Milosz** had strong leftist views, which led to his being dismissed from his position as a literary programmer with the Polish Radio in Wilno in 1937. During the war, his anthology of anti-Nazi poetry was published by underground presses in occupied Warsaw. After the war, although not fooled by what he called “a peculiar Revolution [...] carried out entirely by official decree,”¹³⁹ Milosz became a diplomatic attaché, for the new government of the People's Republic of Poland, but ideologically he remained “an inhabitant of two eras simultaneously, an adherent of two opposing world views.”¹⁴⁰ From 1946 to 1950 he worked in New York and Washington. In 1949 Milosz made a brief trip back to Poland in the summer and he was shocked at the full dimension of the system's totalitarianism. As indicated by Aleksander Fiut, Milosz considers his collaboration with the communist regime

¹³⁸ Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*, 200.

¹³⁹ Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, 159.

¹⁴⁰ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 65.

“a consciously chosen dishonorable activity.”¹⁴¹ Kim Jastrimski summarizes the convoluted trajectory of Milosz’s political career:

“In 1950 he was transferred to Paris, but his family remained in the United States, as it was clear that Milosz was slowly being drawn into a trap by Polish leaders who were becoming less indulgent of his public ambivalence toward communism. In December 1950 he returned, on a holiday, to Warsaw, where the Polish authorities took away his passport, effectively imprisoning him in communist Poland. In January 1951, however, Milosz was inexplicably allowed to return to work in Paris, where on 1 February he sought political asylum, thus beginning his official life in exile.”¹⁴²

Milosz’s *The Captive Mind* (1953) turned most French intellectuals, who embraced communism and Stalin as the hope for Europe's future, against him. In the book's introduction, Milosz describes its subject as "the vulnerability of the twentieth-century mind to seduction by socio-political doctrines and its readiness to accept totalitarian terror for the sake of a hypothetical future."¹⁴³ It is ironic that *The Captive Mind* is perhaps his most famous work in the West for, as Milosz said in an interview in 1983, "to write books on historical tragedies is not my calling. Political action, or any sort of action, was never my calling"¹⁴⁴. Nevertheless, the decade Milosz spent in France was arguably and understandably his most politically vocal period, as he was trying to share the knowledge he had acquired by “observing ideologically planned regimes at close range.”¹⁴⁵ Although, as Carl Tighe observes, “in Poland literature has often been political life conducted by other

¹⁴¹ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 154.

¹⁴² Kim Jastrimski, ‘Home as Other in the Work of Czesław Milosz,’ in *Framing the Polish Home: Postwar Cultural Constructions of Hearth, Nation, and Self*, ed. Bożena Shallcross (Athens, OH: Ohio State UP, 2002), 55.

¹⁴³ Milosz, *The Captive Mind*.

¹⁴⁴ Ewa Czarnecka and Aleksander Fiut, *Conversations with Czesław Milosz*, translated by Richard Lourie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 159.

¹⁴⁵ Milosz, *Visions of San Francisco Bay*, 158.

means,¹⁴⁶ generally speaking Milosz is quite reserved in expressing his political opinions, and when he does, there is usually a reference to religion, too:

“The temporary pilgrimage of the soul on the narrow way amid the snares and abysses was replaced by the march of nations from the Egyptian bondage of capitalism across a desert of (temporary) privation and (temporary) terror, guided by commander-priests, a process otherwise known as the building of socialism.”¹⁴⁷

Still, Milosz manages to make some remarkably visionary observations: “All the truly intelligent people I met during my years in France were European federalists.”¹⁴⁸ On the whole, as Robert Alter notes, Milosz preserved throughout his life “a certain ability to expect the worst and to stand apart skeptically from the intoxications of ideology and the blandishments of power.”¹⁴⁹

Even more than Milosz, **Milan Kundera** was in the first part of his creative career a communist, although from the inception, his fellow-believers considered him to be an unorthodox thinker. Jan Culik notes that “[p]aradoxically, the experience of German totalitarianism instilled in Kundera’s generation a somewhat black-and-white vision of reality. It propelled them towards Marxism and membership of the communist party”¹⁵⁰ and it took decades until they “gradually discovered the limitations of the political system they had helped to build and started rebelling against it.”¹⁵¹ Kundera joined the ruling Czechoslovak communist party in 1948, still in his teens. In 1950 he and another Czech writer, Jan Trefulka, were expelled from the party for “anti-party activities,” and Kundera was only re-

¹⁴⁶ Tighe, *The Politics of Literature*, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Milosz, *Visions of San Francisco Bay*, 211.

¹⁴⁸ Milosz, *Visions of San Francisco Bay*, 201.

¹⁴⁹ Alter, ‘Milosz: Poetry and Politics,’ 42.

¹⁵⁰ Jan Culik, ‘Milan Kundera,’ in *South Slavic and Eastern European Writers*, ed. Vasa D. Mihailovich and Steven Serafin (Detroit: Gale Group, 2000): 248.

¹⁵¹ Jan Culik, ‘Man, a Wide Garden: Milan Kundera as a Young Stalinist,’ *Glasgow ePrints Service*, deposited on 8 November 2007, http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/3806/1/Milan_Kundera.pdf, accessed November 12, 2012, 2.

admitted into the communist party in 1956. Culik summarizes Kundera's political career in Czechoslovakia:

“In the 1950s and the 1960s, he was part of a reform movement within Czech official, communist literature. [...] In the second half of the 1960s, liberal members of the communist party, primarily writers and intellectuals, pushed for freedom in Czechoslovakia against the will of the defensive authoritarian and bureaucratic communist party apparatus. At the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak writers, which took place in June 1967, Czech writers clashed openly with the Communist leadership for the first time. Milan Kundera became a leading figure in the movement for freedom. He gave a major speech at the 1967 Congress of Czechoslovak Writers, setting the scene for the debate that followed.”¹⁵²

Much later, Kundera explained that at least some of the communist statesmen at the time “were guided by a sense of responsibility for an act they had helped to set loose in the world and for which they did not want to deny paternity, still cherishing the hope that they would manage to correct it, modify it, give it back meaning.”¹⁵³

After the Soviet-led invasion of 1968, Kundera was “dismissed from his teaching post at the Prague Film Academy. His books were withdrawn from bookshops and libraries. Along with hundreds of other writers, he was to be erased from Czech cultural history.”¹⁵⁴ In 1970, Kundera was expelled from the party for the second time. In 1975, Milan Kundera and his wife left Czechoslovakia for France. When he settled permanently in France and gained first-hand experience of life in the West, he became able to compare and contrast in his work life in the West with life in the East, and he was critical of both. Still, as Jan Culik points out, he remained “deeply traumatized by the fact that he had been duped as a youngster

¹⁵² Culik, ‘Milan Kundera,’ 252-3.

¹⁵³ Kundera, *The Curtain*, 114.

¹⁵⁴ Culik, ‘Milan Kundera,’ 258.

into believing that a Communist Utopia was possible.”¹⁵⁵ This experience left him deeply distrustful of conviction, which he sees as “a thought that has come to a stop, that has congealed,” and the ‘man of conviction’ as “a man restricted,” in opposition with “experimental thought” that “seeks not to persuade but to inspire; to inspire another thought, to set thought moving.”¹⁵⁶

Kundera has been accused by many of rewriting his biography in an attempt to suppress information about his communist past. On his part, he constantly argued for the right of the individual to evolve and not to be branded for ever based on his early mistakes: “For how long can a man be considered identical to himself?”¹⁵⁷ he asks. In an interview with the British writer Ian McEwan, Kundera claimed: “We constantly re-write our own biographies and continually give matters new meanings. To re-write history in this sense -- indeed, in an Orwellian sense -- is not at all inhuman. On the contrary, it is very human.”¹⁵⁸ Kundera’s personal allegiance is not to the politics, but to the art of the novel that “created the fascinating imaginative realm where no one owns the truth and everyone has the right to be understood,”¹⁵⁹ and against “the reduction of life to politics and of politics to propaganda.”¹⁶⁰ He places his faith in “the power of culture” that “redeems horror by transforming it into existential wisdom.”¹⁶¹ Lately, Western critics have begun to understand this, like Yvon Grenier who notes:

“Milan Kundera’s views on art and politics should be analyzed for what they are: informed and insightful views by a politically conscious writer whose life experience includes living on both sides of the ‘iron curtain.’ For all his uniqueness and creative

¹⁵⁵ Culik, ‘Man, a Wide Garden,’ 4.

¹⁵⁶ Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, 173.

¹⁵⁷ Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, 211.

¹⁵⁸ Ian McEwan, ‘An Interview with Milan Kundera (1984),’ in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (London: Fontana, 1990), 40.

¹⁵⁹ Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, 164.

¹⁶⁰ Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, 223.

¹⁶¹ Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, 232.

imagination, Kundera's vision has been very much shaped by his unique itinerary, by the experience of communism, the hope and disillusionment of 1968's Prague Spring, the persecution, and then his Parisian exile where he found an intellectual scene dominated by the left, by a very different '1968' experience, and by suspicion toward Eastern bloc 'dissidents.' His escape from politics and his seeking refuge in grand culture and eroticism are plausibly the contingent strategies of an 'hédoniste piégé dans un monde politisé à l'extrême.'(a hedonist trapped in an extremely politicized world)¹⁶²

One of the horrors of 20th century Europe was the concentration camp. After his return from Transnistria in 1945, **Norman Manea** would go through various stages of disillusionment: from the initial juvenile enthusiasm with communism to the gradual awareness of the system's lack of humanity, to the survival strategy of pursuing an engineering career that would protect him against the inherent duplicity of the system. As he explains in an interview to Marco Cugno:

"I could not have published anything during the Stalinist period. My debut was in the mid sixties, the years of the Ceausescu 'liberalization.' Although the socialist system had done everything to free us for good from the chains of hope, we had still remained human beings, imperfect and vulnerable to hope. We hoped that with gradual liberalization, opening of frontiers and more sources of information, it would gradually become possible to breathe more naturally, so that each one of us could contribute to the relaxation of everyday life. But there was something fundamentally dishonest in the system, and it was not long before this made itself felt. Even the 'liberalization' seemed no more than a tactical maneuver. You couldn't rely on what would come

¹⁶² Yvon Grenier, 'Milan Kundera on Politics and the Novel,' *History of Intellectual Culture* 6 (No. 1, 2006), 10.

next, given that every structure, beginning with the judicial system, had been corrupted by absolute service to the regime. I may have had an advantage over others, because of the immediate antipathy I felt towards Ceausescu and the moderate skepticism with which I followed developments. I was all the time suspicious of the system, even when Romania kept out of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and when it became the only East European state to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel, and when it played the role of intermediary between the Russians and Chinese, and when our dearly beloved Leader was being lauded by nearly all the Western heads of state, both right and left.”¹⁶³

Manea’s skepticism was neither silent nor unproductive -- one of his favorite modes of communicating ideas was, and still is, through dialogue. To date, he has published four volumes of dialogues / conversations: *Before Parting: Conversation with Saul Bellow* (2008); *The Drawers of Exile: Dialogue with Leon Volovici* (2008); *The Eastern Messenger: Dialogue with Edward Kanterian* (2010) and most recently *Conversations in Exile: Norman Manea and Hannes Stein* (2011).

Their experience of both Nazism and Communism made all three authors deeply suspicious of any kind of extremism and of any ideology that could take totalitarian forms. Norman Manea’s dialogues with his young friend Edward Kanterian in *The Eastern Messenger* cover the ethical issues of the relationship between writers and the communist power, with an emphasis on the importance of native language for a writer who wants to maintain a direct relationship with his readers in his home country.

¹⁶³ Marco Cugno, ‘Character and Confrontation: An Interview with Norman Manea,’ *Salmagundi* 113 (Winter 1997), 123-133.

2.4 Language

“I was childish enough to believe that I did not live in a country, but in a language.”¹⁶⁴

As Milosz points out, “rivalry between two languages is not necessarily typical of literature written in exile. For a couple of centuries in several European countries the literati were bilingual, their vernacular being modified by their Latin and vice versa.”¹⁶⁵ The choice of language an author makes indicates -- besides the natural attachment to one’s native language and the mastery of that language acquired through the years -- an implicit choice of an audience. As the three authors chose, at least for a while, to use their native language (Polish for Czeslaw Milosz, Czech for Milan Kundera and Romanian for Norman Manea) even while publishing in exile, this choice makes their primary target the public of their own language and country, a choice which has a fundamental impact on the content of the literary text, as well.

Michelle Woods notes that “Western expectations of Central Europe writers contributed to translations that were appropriations because they chose to reduce the work to a political level.”¹⁶⁶ Chronologically, this type of political reading would have been the first critical approach to Kundera’s work, after the publishing of *The Joke* in the West, first in French (1968) and then in English (1969). The timing of these translations is extremely important, as the book was almost unavoidably read as a political novel, in the context of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Milosz’s first translation in the West, *The Captive Mind*, was explicitly a political book, directed at a western audience, and his reticence to have his poetry translated may indicate his distrust that ‘proper’ literature can be read in translation. Generally, for writers who had invested so much in finding the perfect

¹⁶⁴ Norman Manea, ‘On Exiled Language,’ *Salmagundi* 141-142 (Winter 2004), 84.

¹⁶⁵ Milosz, ‘Notes on Exile,’ in *To Begin Where I Am*, 9.

¹⁶⁶ Michelle Woods, *Translating Milan Kundera*, Topics in Translation (Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2006), 14.

form for their creation, the first struggle was to impress on their new audience the importance of this form (even in the approximation of translation) for the content it was transmitting.

Woods identifies four types of translation that can be applied to Kundera's work: translation as such (i.e. from one language into another), rewriting (the author himself 'translating' his own work for a different -- actually constantly changing -- audience), writing (translating the original language itself and its mechanisms in a series of 'dictionaries of words misunderstood'), and reception (translating the author for various audiences). The translation process involved, on Kundera's part, a great deal of rewriting, which Michelle Woods sees mainly as a means "to rid his work of overcontextualization"¹⁶⁷ and thus to emphasize the literariness of the text over its political aspects.¹⁶⁸ In what might seem as a step in the opposite direction, after 1989 (when he could have his novels published in the Czech Republic) Kundera also rewrote his Czech 'originals,' ostensibly for a new generation of Czech readers for whom the events depicted in his novels were about as foreign as they had been for the western audience decades ago, or rather, as Woods puts it, so that they match 'the matrix in the drawer,' the ideas that the novel set out to embody in the first place. The results, though, seem to frustrate the diligent reader:

"It is possible, of course, that the decision to retain the historical particulars in the Czech text while eliminating them from the French and English versions implies a sense that while Czech readers may be counted on to remember the precise moods and attitudes of a complicated historical moment, French-and English-language

¹⁶⁷ Woods, 86.

¹⁶⁸ In a similar position, Israeli writer Amos Oz notes that "[t]he fact that critics see everything I write as allegorical is part of the tragi-comedy of living in melodramatic times, in a melodramatic part of the world. When you write about a conflict between father and son in America, well, that's what it is about. If Herman Melville had written *Moby Dick* in South America today, it would instantly be considered a fable about a dictatorship; in South Africa today, *Moby Dick* would be seen as a story about black and white people clashing. Coming from the Middle East, it would become a parable about the Israelis and the Palestinians." (Amos Oz, interviewed by Jay Parini, 'The Land of Oz,' *The New York Times*, April 14, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/14/magazine/the-land-of-oz.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

readers are not likely to be up to the demands of such intimate understanding. But here again, the underlying suggestion is that each audience requires a work in its own image.”¹⁶⁹

Another type of rewriting practiced by Kundera -- that of his own biography -- also stirred many comments, but might in fact be much more common practice than is generally admitted.

According to Michelle Woods, all these types of rewriting stem from Kundera’s view of the novel as poetry, that is as a piece of writing where every word, even the punctuation is part of the author’s style and should not be altered. Indeed, particularly after the fall of communism, as the novels could be freed from the intrusion of politics, the battle for the perfect form in translation was fought on the field of ‘literature,’ where literature is a unique symbiosis between form and content, each supporting and emphasizing the other. Manea’s experience has been quite similar, in that he has also reviewed his writings, first for a western audience, and later on for the readers back home, first trying to recover the original form of his writings, from before they had suffered the rigors of censorship, and then ‘tidying them up’ of oblique references and allusions to facts and ideas that could now be expressed directly.

Kundera’s experience with translation has had a great influence on his subsequent writing: “Kundera writes in a Czech language that is shorn of the potentialities of any cultural shorthand or presumption.”¹⁷⁰ His style has become more precise and he makes ample use of his language awareness, to the point where he started “using the fact that his novel will be read almost wholly in translation as part of his writing strategy,”¹⁷¹ introducing comments on items of vocabulary that are particular to one language, ‘untranslatable,’ in

¹⁶⁹ Allison Stanger, ‘In Search of *The Joke*: An Open Letter to Milan Kundera,’ *New England Review* 18 (Winter, 1997), 98.

¹⁷⁰ Woods, *Translating Milan Kundera*, 105.

¹⁷¹ Woods, 113.

order to underline the dangers of miscommunication. Kundera is the extreme case (and, again, the only one who completed the transition into the new language), but his evolution is definitely indicative of the 'settling in' process of translation undergone by exiled writers. All three writers discussed here saw their primary audience change from those with whom they shared a common language and culture to those who needed to be initiated into that culture by means of language. Their struggles with this new language are quite similar.

Czesław Miłosz calls himself one of the last Polish Lithuanians. He recalls: "We were something else, Lithuanians, but not in the accepted twentieth century sense, which says that to be a Lithuanian you have to speak Lithuanian."¹⁷² He used Polish in his writings -- poetry or prose -- even after leaving Poland in 1951. As Robert Alter observes, "displacement is probably hardest on poets, because of their intimate linguistic attachment to their native sphere, the ultimate untranslatability of what they do, and their consequent dependence on an audience in their own language."¹⁷³ Still, Miłosz's choice of Polish was by no means fortuitous, since he was an excellent translator: in 1973 the Polish P.E.N. Club awarded him its prize for his translations of Polish poetry into English. He also translated into Polish *Selected Works* of Simone Weil from French, *The Book of Job* and *The Book of the Five Megiloth* from Hebrew, *The Gospel according to Mark* and *The Apocalypse* from Greek. Remarkably, as his English translator Louis Iribarne observes, "the exposure to other tongues by this most cosmopolitan of writers has only made his language purer."¹⁷⁴

Miłosz himself was perfectly aware of his language options, as he explains when he discusses the options of an exiled author: "One possibility offered him is to change his language, either literally, by writing in the tongue of the country of his residence, or to use his native tongue in such a manner that what he writes will be understandable and

¹⁷² Czarnecka and Fiut. *Conversations with Czesław Miłosz*, 4.

¹⁷³ Alter, Miłosz, 'Poetry and Politics,' 41.

¹⁷⁴ Lois Iribarne, 'Lost in the "Earth-Garden,"' 637.

acceptable to a new audience [this was Kundera's choice]. Then, however, he ceases to be an exile."¹⁷⁵ Milosz chooses the vantage point of the exile and consequently, while his prose and essays were translated into French and English fairly soon after their publication in Polish in the Diaspora, his first volume of poetry translated into English was published as late as 1973.

Like Milosz, **Milan Kundera** was a mature, well-known writer at the time of his exile from Czechoslovakia in 1975. As an author banned by the communist authorities in his own country, he actually considered abandoning writing -- his novel *Farewell Waltz* was supposed to be his last work and it was originally entitled *Epilogue*. After his move to France, Kundera started his battle for translations, from the initial versions which even skipped passages that were not considered of interest for a western reader, through the subsequent efforts of the author to present his work as literature, and not political writing, thus emphasizing the importance of language and style, to his final acceptance of the French version as original. Woods argues that, in the first stage, language and style were not considered very important, not so much by the translator, as by the editor. With Kundera's rise to fame, his control over the translation process increased and he could demand that translators respect his style and language, even though these were unfamiliar to a western audience. Still, "a translator's command of English was considered more important than their command of Czech,"¹⁷⁶ so gradually Kundera began to identify the French versions as 'originals' for the potential translators (he had most control over the French translations, since French had become his second language) -- a first step towards his actually writing his books in French.

¹⁷⁵ Milosz, 'Notes on Exile,' in *To Begin Where I Am*, 13.

¹⁷⁶ Woods, *Translating Milan Kundera*, 26.

This shift from Czech to French is extremely significant for Kundera. The information on the back cover of his most recent book divides his work precisely along these lines:

“He is the author of the novels *The Joke*, *Life is Elsewhere*, *Farewell Waltz*, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and *Immortality*, and the short story collection *Laughable Loves* -- all originally in Czech. His most recent novels, *Slowness*, *Identity*, and *Ignorance*, as well as his non-fiction works *The Art of the Novel*, *Testaments Betrayed*, *The Curtain* were originally written in French.”¹⁷⁷

Just like Milosz before him, **Norman Manea**'s multilingualism has made him a translator of different languages, but he still writes in his native language, in his case Romanian, even though he recalls: “A year after their return from the [concentration] camp at Transnistria, my parents hired a private German language teacher for me!”¹⁷⁸ Incidentally, as he notices in an interview with Ilan Stavans, “three of us, from the same province, interned in camps, ended up becoming writers in different tongues: Celan, Aharon Appelfeld, who is active in Hebrew, and myself.”¹⁷⁹ The author still remembers his amazement when, in 1971 he saw the anthology containing his first text published abroad, in Israel, under the title *Romanian-Speaking Jewish Writers*, as he had always thought of himself simply as a Romanian writer. His allegiance to the Romanian language resulted in a disinclination to leave the Romanian socialist “penal colony.” Once displaced in the West, Manea continued writing in Romanian but published his writings in other languages, often participating in the translation (an effort reminiscent of Kundera's): “I sometimes find that I no longer write either for myself or for a

¹⁷⁷ Milan Kundera, *The Curtain*.

¹⁷⁸ Edward Kanterian, ‘Trivializing Tragedy: An interview with Norman Manea,’ *Partisan Review* 69 (Spring 2002), 198.

¹⁷⁹ Ilan Stavans, ‘Lies, Disguises, Exile: A Conversation with Norman Manea,’ *Salmagundi* 113 (Winter 1997), 102.

potential reader (whose image in exile becomes ever vaguer) but for a translator, and not even for the best one.”¹⁸⁰

After the fall of communism, in Romania “the most flourishing genre has been the interview, with its ability to capture the immediate reaction to events or probing questions, with its quick, informal, oral-colloquial rhetoric.”¹⁸¹ It was, for Manea, both a way to reconnect with his readers back home and to explain to his western readers the Romanian background of his works and the new developments in the country.

In the end, it is the consistency with which exiled authors continued to write in their native language that allowed them to make a come-back in the literature of their home country. The process can be traced in Norman Manea’s interviews collected in the two volumes, *The Snail’s House* and *Nomad Text*. The interviews also emphasize another important element of the background the three authors share with their home audience: their national literatures.

2.5 Literature

“The past ages we left behind, together with the past moment, deliver ‘the raw material’ which then becomes, through a complex and unpredictable rebirth, something else -- writing: prose, poetry, theatre, some kind of aesthetic recycling. Traumatic experiences, extreme situations have a particular pulsation that usually lasts longer.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Stavans, 92.

¹⁸¹ Matei Calinescu, ‘Romanian Literature: Dealing with the Totalitarian Legacy,’ *World Literature Today* 65 (Spring, 1991), 244.

¹⁸² Manea, ‘The Crises and Convulsions of Creation,’ interview with Ion Simut (2002), in *Textul nomad*, 136.

As shown in the first chapter, national literatures which developed later in the European context tended to have an institutionalized character. Hannah Arendt notes that

“historical consciousness played a great role in the formation of national consciousness. The emancipation of nations from dynastic rule and the overlordship of an international aristocracy was accompanied by the emancipation of literature from the ‘international’ language of the learned (Latin first and later French) and the growth of national languages out of the popular vernacular. It seemed that peoples whose language was fit for literature had reached national maturity *per definitionem*. The liberation movements of Eastern European nationalities, therefore, started with a kind of philological revival (the results were sometimes grotesque and sometimes very fruitful) whose political function it was to prove that the people who possessed a literature and a history of their own, had the right to national sovereignty.”¹⁸³

This section focuses on the way the three authors found their place in their respective national literatures and also in the larger picture of world literature. Not surprisingly, all three authors approached the issue of culture, art, or literature in their work. In this context, it is useful to identify what categories the authors themselves chose for their writings, in parallel with what the western audience understood them to be. This gives us a better idea of how they defined literature and how they situated their work in the larger context of world literature -- a concept that was becoming less and less trendy in academic circles at the time of their move to the West. The very fact that all three authors discussed here tried and managed to reach an international audience indicates their shared belief in a universal potential of literature -- Milosz actually stated that “absolute criteria exist for the creations of the imagination and language.”¹⁸⁴ Their views became more nuanced over the years: Czeslaw Milosz explained his *ars poetica* in his Harvard lectures in 1981-1982,

¹⁸³ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 271.

¹⁸⁴ Milosz, ‘Saligia’ in *To Begin Where I Am*, 296.

collected in the volume *The Witness of Poetry*; Milan Kundera has been for decades reworking his ideas on the world history of the novel and published four volumes of essays on it (*The Art of the Novel*, *Testaments Betrayed*, *The Curtain* and *Encounter*); Norman Manea collected his articles and interviews on Romanian and world literature in two volumes -- *Envelopes and Portraits* and *Black Milk*.

Over more than 20 years Milan Kundera has been trying to bring back to the West what he held to be the quintessential European values, those that defined European culture as he understood it. The importance of individual freedom translates for him into the independence of the work of art, into “the idea of the creation of art as a free act, not tied only to the cultural circumstance but linked much more importantly to the history of the art form itself.”¹⁸⁵ This, for Kundera is the history of the novel and it is marked by compositional developments whose ultimate goal is to achieve the ambiguity that can only be expressed in a novel.

While Kundera has been remarkably consistent in his ideas, his readers and reviewers went through a process of adjustment. If at the publication of his first volume of essays in France, Kundera was still seen as a somehow exotic dissident writer from the Soviet bloc and his novels were read mainly for their political message, by the time he published *Testaments Betrayed*, he had become “the most widely read eastern European author of the second half of the twentieth century” and his novels were seen as relevant on a more generally human level, “for our own lives in the material West, even as they acted as a window on a foreign culture.”¹⁸⁶ Still, his ideas on world (or at least European) literature seemed rather obsolete, in the spirit of an older, more inclusive view which looked beyond national assignments; in the words of Steven Ungar, “binary oppositions between large and

¹⁸⁵ Sarah Rothenberg, ‘Farewell to the Modern Era: Kundera on Culture,’ *World Policy Journal* 2 (1996), 83.

¹⁸⁶ Rothenberg, 81.

small, nearby and far away nations frame a final distinction between small and large contexts in which Kundera situates the work of art.”¹⁸⁷

Two parallel developments can be identified during the two decades in which Kundera created his essay books. On the one hand, the fall of communism in East Central Europe and the subsequent accession to the European Union of some of those countries helped bridge the cultural divide from the West and (re)integrate their literature(s) into a more objective European context. On the other hand, Kundera himself became more aware of an even bigger picture. He started by stating his affiliation to the Central European novel, moved towards the European novel, then he integrated the North American and Israeli novel on grounds of similar value systems, and the South American novel as offering a “peripheral” view similar to that of Central Europe. His comparatist vein shows even more poignantly when he notices that, while “the literature of the small Central European countries is rooted in the culture of romanticism, that of Martinique (and that of all the Antilles) is born (and this amazed me!) of the aesthetic of modern art.”¹⁸⁸ The circle of exclusions and inclusions is closing, and Kundera has become a contributor to “the discipline of comparative literature as a global practice.”¹⁸⁹

This inclusive view of literature by means of comparative techniques is shared by Manea, for whom “the topic for a true debate on the past, present and future literature in Eastern Europe should not be the fact that only few important books were written in the forty years of communist oppression, but the way in which these books communicate with those published in the West during the same period.”¹⁹⁰ His efforts go towards a “literary plea for moral values, for a certain integrity, even under extreme circumstances.”¹⁹¹ One of the recurrent terms used by Manea in his volume *Envelopes and Portraits* ‘est-etica’ (from the

¹⁸⁷ Ungar, ‘Kundera’s Variations,’ 61.

¹⁸⁸ Kundera, *The Curtain*, 158.

¹⁸⁹ Ungar, ‘Kundera’s Variations,’ 64.

¹⁹⁰ Norman Manea, *Textul nomad* (Bucuresti: Hasefer, 2006), 159.

¹⁹¹ Manea, ‘The Hooligan’s Return,’ interview with Emilia Drogoreanu (2004), in *Textul nomad*, 269.

Romanian 'east' and 'ethics' juxtaposed to get 'aesthetics'). This is indicative of what Manea considers to be the highest value in the contorted literary world of that time and place: the ethical expressed in its adequate aesthetic form.

All three authors have constantly tried to bridge the gap between the two views on literature by emphasizing, on the one hand, its general human relevance as carrier of moral value, and on the other hand, its formal developments and diversity that in the end create (with their very essential and unifying ambiguity) that moral value.

For **Milosz**, who saw "art as a values-creating act,"¹⁹² the categories of his work seemed quite clear: his poetry was easily identified as 'literature,' while his essays were customarily termed 'political' or philosophical. Milosz himself spoke about his multifaceted work at a festival dedicated to him in California in 1998: "Perhaps I would prefer to be judged by my poems only. My fate however was to appear successively as a poet, an author of political treaties, a translator, an escapee from political systems, and an immigrant."¹⁹³ The need for a more nuanced classification of Milosz's work led to the production of an *International Bibliography* (where the word 'international' in the title indicates exactly the methodological challenges). It is a complex enterprise that records in technical detail the place and date of publication, and that of their subsequent translations, of books, articles in periodicals, anthologies and separate works, translations into Polish, and translations from Polish, together with their reviews in the respective languages. In itself, this listing becomes, as Stanislaw Baranczak states in his foreword "a solitary and fascinating commentary on the tensions of our times as they are reflected in literature."¹⁹⁴ David Draper Clark's more

¹⁹² Milosz, 'Reflections on T. S. Eliot,' in *To Begin Where I Am*, 388.

¹⁹³ Robert Faggen, 'Czeslaw Milosz,' *Partisan Review Partisan Review* 66 (1, 1999), 147.

¹⁹⁴ Rimma Volynska-Bogert and Wojciech Zalewski, *Czeslaw Milosz. An International Bibliography 1930-1980* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1983), vii.

manageable 'Czeslaw Milosz Selected Bibliography'¹⁹⁵ divides Milosz's work formally into poetry and fiction, on the one hand, and nonfiction. The most recent bibliography was produced in 2011, on the occasion of 'The Milosz Year'¹⁹⁶ (see the appendix on Czeslaw Milosz's bibliography at the end of this study).

Again, as Milosz himself confesses, "I practice many literary genres, so that an undeniably unitary striving underlying my various books is not always clear, even to myself."¹⁹⁷ However, his position as a professor in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of California at Berkeley gave him the opportunity to present his views on literature to his American students, to build for them a coherent image of Slavic and particularly Polish literature on the palimpsest of a history that was rather foreign to them. As one of his students remembers from the same festival, "for Milosz, the role of the writer is inseparable from the larger historical context,"¹⁹⁸ and general history is marked, as it is for Kundera, by developments in the history of literature, in the evolution of literary forms.

Milosz's production of a *History of Polish Literature* came as a logical continuation to his teaching. As Bogdana Carpenter, another of his students, notices, the process of writing a *History of Polish Literature* in the United States "meant overcoming a host of methodological problems. Since the book was written for a foreign audience, it required a different approach than that of a historian of literature writing in Polish." And this approach proves beneficial to both worlds: "[B]y de-Polonizing and objectivizing Polish literature, Milosz not only brings it closer to an American reader, but breaks the magic circle of national and literary taboos."¹⁹⁹ Also, Milosz's *History of Polish Literature* makes a move towards a larger literary context by creating an image of Polish literature that is "more

¹⁹⁵ David Draper Clark, 'Czeslaw Milosz Selected Bibliography,' *World Literature Today* 73 (1999), 621-622.

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.milosz365.eu/en/bibliografia,6.php>, accessed November 12, 2012.

¹⁹⁷ Faggen, 'Czeslaw Milosz,' 147.

¹⁹⁸ Robert Faggen, 'The Teacher and His Students,' *Partisan Review* 66 (1, 1999), 96.

¹⁹⁹ Faggen, 'The Teacher and His Students,' 92.

universal, more European, less provincial, particular and self-referential.”²⁰⁰ (In stronger terms, Manea also recommends “detachment from the paranoid throbs of tribal patriotism.”²⁰¹)

From the history of literature, with the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures (and with his newly acquired authority as Nobel Prize laureate), Milosz moves towards poetics, as he had already confessed to feeling a “perhaps inordinate respect for literature as a code.”²⁰²

Unlike Milosz, who could distinguish quite clearly between his political or philosophical writings and his poetry, the situation was much more complicated for **Kundera**, especially due to the time he started publishing in the West -- at (one of) the height(s) of the cold war. Although he constantly maintained that his novels were entirely literary creations and needed to be read as such, western commentators constantly read and interpreted them as political writings. Ironically, it is the first period of his writing (works that were not translated in the West and that Kundera himself disowned later in life) that could be considered ‘political’ in terms of his commitment to the prevailing socialist propaganda of the period. Kundera now excludes all these works from the canon of his writing, although critics like Jan Culik appreciate his early poetry, for “all its naivety, clumsiness, pathos and banality,” as “a deliberate early attempt to liberalize the Czechoslovak cultural and literary discourse.”²⁰³

An annotated bibliography was produced for Kundera’s works as early as 1988,²⁰⁴ but even now the chronology of publications is still difficult to follow. The presentation page in Kundera’s latest books divides his work into fiction (novels, with one exception), non-fiction (essays), and plays. Quite tellingly, there are no years mentioned for

²⁰⁰ Faggen, ‘The Teacher and His Students,’ 93.

²⁰¹ Manea, ‘Dispossession of Tradition,’ interview with Alexandru Vlad (1993), in *Casa melcului* (Bucuresti: Hasefer 1999), 120.

²⁰² Milosz, *Visions of San Francisco Bay*, 136.

²⁰³ Jan Culik, ‘Man, a Wide Garden,’ 31.

²⁰⁴ Glen Brand, *Milan Kundera: an Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Pub., 1988).

first publication (which one, the Czech original, the translation, which translation?). Michelle Woods dedicates an entire chapter of her *Translating Milan Kundera* to the way Kundera has been trying to decide on 'definitive editions' of his novels, usually in French. Instead of a clear chronology, Kundera recommends to his readers a critical study of his work which meets his approval: *Agnes's Final Afternoon* by Francois Ricard. For a fairly comprehensive and chronological list of Kundera's work, see the appendix on Milan Kundera's bibliography, at the end of this study.

Of the three writers discussed here, Kundera has shown the most constant preoccupation with theoretical aspects of literature. He started writing on literature very early in his career, while he was still a prominent intellectual figure in communist Czechoslovakia. At that time he published articles in various literary magazines and in one of them ('Arguing about our Inheritance') he even argued for the recovery of the avant-garde tradition of Czech and European interwar poetry. This attempt went blatantly against the official stand of communist literary theorists who saw not just the themes, but also the formal novelty of avant-garde poetry as inherently decadent and totally unsuited for true socialist art. As Sarah Rothenberg observes,

"officially, art was necessary only for its message, and it was essential that the message be clear, optimistic and of service to the reigning regime. All other art, even that which was determinedly apolitical [...] was viewed as subversive. Dissident art, in its conscious pursuit of aesthetics outside the official rubric, immediately took on a political aspect; the act of creation could not escape social implications that were beyond, or outside of, the artistic intent."²⁰⁵

Note how here the term 'dissident' applies to artistic means, and not political ideas, quite appropriately in a context where the official level of politics was beyond the reach of anyone

²⁰⁵ Rothenberg, 'Farewell to the Modern Era,' 82.

outside the Party and any form of mass communication was *a priori* suspect of carrying political meaning.

Kundera's first extensive study, *The Art of the Novel: Vladislav Vancura's journey to the great epic* (1960) continues his incursion into the interwar literary tradition, moving on towards what was to be his own medium of choice -- the novel. (In a way, Kundera has tried to negate the existence of this study by publishing a new volume of literary essays under the title *The Art of the Novel* (1986), where some of the ideas first presented in the Vancura study are developed to a much higher degree.) As a member of the communist party, Vancura was the perfect candidate for this theoretical exercise, and Kundera used Vancura's authority to carry out his own defense of experimental modes in fiction. In doing so, he applied the views of Hungarian Marxist theoretician Gyorgy Lukacs on the development of the epic (without naming him, though, since Lukacs had been banned in communist countries), and also defined his own style. As Jan Culik observed:

"While analyzing Vancura's fiction, Kundera realized the importance of an ever-present, subjective narrator, a philosopher, who evaluates and comments upon the story as it develops. He rid himself of lyricism, descriptiveness and psychological analysis and became aware that good fiction must be based on dramatic conflict. He became very close to the poetics of the 18th century novel of enlightenment."²⁰⁶

Ignoring the formal distinctions used in the case of Milosz or Kundera, the writings of **Norman Manea** were easier to place into categories, due again to the time frame: his novels were published in the West after the fall of communism, which meant that the need for a political interpretation of his books was much less acute. So, although his prose had been read in Romania as dissident writing and censored as such, the western audience accepted it as literature much more easily than they had Kundera's twenty years earlier. Not

²⁰⁶ Culik, 'Milan Kundera,' 252.

just chronologically, his work can be grouped into two categories -- before and after the moment of exile (see bibliography). The volume published on the occasion of his 75th birthday though, *The Obsession of Uncertainty*²⁰⁷ offers a very complex list of publications, organized by country and then chronologically, with the titles in translation, so that it ends up creating a juxtaposition of the imprints made by his literature upon various linguistic and literary environments.

Like Milosz and Kundera, Manea also had a constant preoccupation with his literary environment. In 1984 he published a collection of critical essays entitled *Skimming the Edge*. According to the report of the censor (mentioned in *On Clowns. The Dictator and the Artist*), the volume proves him “capable to naturally integrate the books of Romanian literature into the context of world literature.”²⁰⁸ Manea’s vision, like that of Kundera, is for the inclusion of national literatures into the larger structure of world literature. In the West, Manea, too, has been teaching literature to American students, he has been a professor and writer in residence at Bard College, New York for more than 20 years now. Unavoidably, his courses start with “the orientation of the students into the historical and cultural, sometimes even geographical premises of the narratives”²⁰⁹ discussed, and they are structured according to various vectors: geographical (Eastern European writers, Danube -- a literary journey -- yet another attempt to trace some forever elusive contours for East Central Europe), temporal (Contemporary masters), or thematic (Holocaust, exile). He has also produced two volumes of essays dedicated to 20th century literary figures, themes and modes.

²⁰⁷ Cella Manea and George Onofrei, ed., *The Obsession of Uncertainty. In Honorem Norman Manea* (Iasi: Polirom 2011).

²⁰⁸ Ion Ianoși in *Plicuri și portrete* (Iasi: Polirom 2004), 139.

²⁰⁹ Claudio von Trieste in *Plicuri și portrete*, 447.

Each of the authors has made his views on literature explicit in various occasions and contexts, always placing East-Central European literature and culture in the bigger picture of world culture, as he understands it. The importance Milosz, Kundera and Manea placed on the literary modes they employed and on literature as a carrier of most important truths about human nature is illustrated by the wealth of materials all three authors have produced on literature in general, and on East-Central European culture in particular (Milosz's *The Witness of Poetry*; Kundera's *The Art of the Novel*, *Testaments Betrayed* and *The Curtain*; Manea's *Envelopes and Portraits* and *Black Milk*). The reception their literature met differed significantly, though, between East and West.

2.6 At home

in a country where, until very recently, historiography and political philosophy were not allowed to question official ideology, literature often had to perform that function under the cover of its metaphoric indirection.”²¹⁰

As shown in the first chapter, the image of the writer in East-Central European countries carried, from its first instances, much more weight than its counterpart in Western Europe. The authors writing in the many national languages of the area were also agents of the nationalist movements of 1848 and later. As Leon Volovici notes, “writing was seen, first of all, as a duty to the country.”²¹¹ This was actually a two-way street: on the one hand, the concept of a ‘national poet’ appeared after 1821 (the year of the Greek Revolution) in connection with the poet’s “engagement with the movement for national emancipation and

²¹⁰ Calinescu, ‘Romanian Literature,’ 246.

²¹¹ Volovici, *Aparitia scriitorului in cultura romana*, 15.

social changes.”²¹² On the other hand, “the dedication to national and social ideals became, at the time, the highest and most complete form of literary success.”²¹³

This view of the poet was by no means original. It fused the Enlightenment rationalist with the passion of the French revolutionary, the romantic genius and the mythical bards and prophets of antiquity. Nevertheless, it resulted in a myth, “an exemplary image of the writer as symbol of a collective artistic and social ideal.”²¹⁴ It was precisely this overlapping of their social, political and literary preoccupations that made the East-European writer into “a witness of history, a heavy-hearted contemplator of human suffering and, at the same time, a ‘voice’ for his own nation.”²¹⁵ The militant dimension has been inscribed in the making of East-Central European literature from its inception. Logistically, too, far from Western specialization, the 19th century writer here had to fill many roles: journalist, philosopher, historian, publisher, even printer and bookseller.

This legacy carried on into the 20th century when, during the inter-war period, many writers in the region were vocal in their support of the rightist nationalist movements. After the end of the Second World War, there was again no room for nuances, as the emerging communist regimes sought to make use of what Pierre Bourdieu denotes as the “cultural capital”²¹⁶ of already established writers -- basically the only form of capital that could not be (easily) appropriated by the state. As Lucia Dragomir notes, “freed from the market constraints” (though it should be noted that even if the number of books published increased over the years, it remained at all times under the corresponding figures in the main developed countries²¹⁷), “the writers were forced instead to become public servants,” which at the time meant to serve the ‘party propaganda.’ Their new functions were now

²¹² Volovici, 34.

²¹³ Volovici, 63.

²¹⁴ Volovici, 100.

²¹⁵ Volovici, 103.

²¹⁶ Cited in Gheorghiu, *Intellectualii in cimpul puterii*, 27.

²¹⁷ Gheorghiu, 295.

“ideological and political, educational and propagandistic, legitimizing the new political regimes.”²¹⁸

Indeed, in 1948 the Romanian Ministry of Arts and Information went as far as to indicate the six appropriate topics for the new literature: the new stand towards work and public property, the socialist transformation of agriculture (i.e. collectivization), the glorification of the socialist state (i.e. USSR), the glorification of Romania, the fight against mysticism (meaning religion), and the unmasking of imperialism (meaning the West). The Ministry produced a rigid juridical and institutional context allowing complete control over the literary field.²¹⁹ By 1948, out of the 100 publishing houses in existence in 1944, there remained only nine in Romania, all of them belonging to the state. The publishing houses received their editorial list from the Department of Literature of the Ministry, which in turn employed ‘reading committees’ that ensured that everybody kept the party line, “those who wrote about the present were appropriately beautifying the social and political transformations brought about by the change in the regime, while those who turned to the past were forced to translate in their work the vast process of rewriting history started by the communists.”²²⁰

At the same time, the model of the USSR Writers’ Union was copied, after the war, in all East-Central European countries under Soviet influence and the ‘literary’ method of ‘socialist realism’ was stipulated in the first article of the Union’s statutes, which also indicated that the institution functioned under the direct guidance of the Communist Party.²²¹ As Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu observes, “the corporatist character of this Soviet-type union was due to its monopoly over copy-rights, both legal and financial, even in the case of people

²¹⁸ Dragomir, ‘Schimbarea ordinii lumii,’ 192.

²¹⁹ Dragomir, 194.

²²⁰ Dragomir, 197.

²²¹ Dragomir, 200.

who were not members of the union."²²² At this point, there could no longer be any literary practice outside the Writers' Union and, with the apparatus now in place, the party could exercise its censorship over everything published in the people's republics.

Censorship seems to start from the assumption that, as Milosz puts it, "what is not expressed does not exist."²²³ This meant that those in power were now in a position where they could impose their world view on everybody. The problem arose from the fact that, as Matei Calinescu notes in the case of Romania, the cultural policy of the Communist Party changed over the decades of communist rule. It started with a "massive Russification, but little by little, as the Soviet Union itself was de-Stalinizing in the mid-1950s, the Romanian party chief Gheorghiu-Dej instituted a policy of secret re-Stalinization along (pseudo)nationalist lines, which was to be continued by Ceausescu in the form of an increasingly strident (pseudo)national communism combined with a primitive, grotesque cult of personality." Later on,

"in the early 1960s the fundamental duplicity of the party toward the Soviet Union became the basis for a variety of forms of cultural duplicity, some encouraged by the party, some merely tolerated. In this general climate of duplicity and hypocrisy a narrow region of intellectual freedom (a freedom whose price, in moral terms, was not negligible, however) became accessible, particularly between 1964 and 1971 but in certain significant cases even after the so-called minicultural revolution launched by Ceausescu in July 1971"²²⁴

This mini-cultural revolution was inspired by his visit to China.

Generally, as stated in a review of publishing patterns in Central Europe under communism

²²² Gheorghiu, *Intelectualii in cimpul puterii*, 264.

²²³ Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, 206.

²²⁴ Calinescu, 'Romanian Literature,' 245.

“the bounds of tolerance increased erratically as ideology died. By the late seventies the regime was concerned more with the sensitivities of the Kremlin than with the substance of debate in intellectual circles. Those who stepped out of line were dealt with fairly leniently; if sacked they would generally be found other means of making a living, albeit less comfortably. Academics who did not openly challenge the system were virtually guaranteed publication of their books, the quantity determined by their status in the hierarchy. Paid by the word, they could be luxuriantly prolix.”²²⁵

From the point of view of literary forms accepted by the party, beyond its rejection of ‘bourgeois’ aesthetics (individualist art, art for art’s sake, and isolation in an ivory tower), proletcultism could not propose any alternative aesthetics other than the exploitation of content (as detailed above) to the detriment of form. The last two decades of communist rule, however, saw a nationalistic turn even in the field of ‘literary ideologies’ (to use Gheorghiu’s term). It took the form of proto-chronism, a trend that sought to use ethnographic material (a natural move for the heirs of the ‘national bards’ of the previous century) in order to prove Romania’s precedence in a variety of cultural and even scientific movements. A similar trend in Poland triggered a return to legendary Sarmatian ancestors. (Milosz had noted quite early, in his *Native Realm*, that “where nationalism is late in appearing, passionate attempts are made to relate it to a half-legendary heroic past.”²²⁶) The alternative to this extreme nationalistic approach was postmodernism, described by Gheorghiu as “a critique of modernity and a peek to the past”²²⁷ in a context where the official politics pretended to be revolutionary and were in fact deeply reactionary; it could

²²⁵ Richard Davy, ‘Publishing in the Vishegrad Countries in 1994: A Report with suggestions for Western help/Hungary,’ in *Freedom for Publishing, Publishing for Freedom. The Central and East European Publishing Project*, ed. Timothy Garton Ash (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995), 122.

²²⁶ Milosz, *Native Realm*, 23.

²²⁷ Gheorghiu, *Intelectualii in cimpul puterii*, 317.

also be seen as a concession to the general state of mind, a free-pass granted by censorship in order to dilute in irony the critical discourse against the official power.

Consequently, the 'prescribed' world view or the 'appropriate' literary forms were by no means clear, even to those who were supposed to enforce it. This was, paradoxically, further complicated by the fact that, by the end of the 1970's, the rules of censorship had become very blurry. As Matei Calinescu explains,

“officially (but under communism reality itself depends on its official recognition) censorship did not even exist. Since it did not exist, it could not have principles or rules; and when (in spite of its nonexistence) it did reject a manuscript or parts of it, it could not explain why. Its verdicts were incomprehensible, mysterious, unappealable. Editors and authors had to guess the reasons of the invisible, nonexistent censor, make the corresponding changes, and try again.”²²⁸

From the point of view of this study, the whole period is governed by the fact that, as Milosz again notes, “Communism recognizes that rule over men's mind is the key to rule over an entire country, the word is the cornerstone of this system,”²²⁹ which put a lot of pressure on intellectuals. At the beginning of the communist rule, at least, as Edward Taborsky observed as early as 1957, “while all the major components of the population behind the Iron Curtain have been taking part in the stiffening opposition to their rulers, including the 'privileged children' of Marxism-Leninism -- the industrial workers, the main initiative, and the most persistent and challenging demands have come from the ranks of the intellectuals.”²³⁰ And the least censored form of expression available for intellectuals was fiction since, as Cornis-Pope notes,

²²⁸ Calinescu, 'Romanian Literature,' 247.

²²⁹ Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, 154.

²³⁰ Edward Taborsky, 'The Revolt of the Communist Intellectuals,' *The Review of Politics* 19 (3, Jul. 1957), 308.

“Its role was increasingly cast in politico-ethical terms: literary discourse was often described by the writers themselves as a relentless ‘vigil,’ an obstinate ‘hunt’/‘quest’ for alternative forms of expression against the monologic discourse of power.”²³¹

Paradoxically, fiction allowed the writer a much more direct relationship with his reader and, as Manea succinctly puts it, “the writer’s ideal was complicity with his reader.”²³²

Consequently, the writers’ relationship with the communist authorities is very relevant, not only on a personal level, but also as a symbol of the general need and struggle for freedom of expression. However, as Matei Calinescu remarks, “the fear of repression, in a system of total censorship and total control of everyday life by an all-powerful secret police, can hardly be understood in abstract terms.”²³³ Diachronically, Milosz left Poland in the 50’s, Kundera left the Czech Republic in the 70’s and Manea left Romania as late as 1986, their literary careers at home therefore create a clearer view of the evolution of the pressure put by the communist authorities on writers.

Czeslaw Milosz published his first volume of poetry, *Poem in Frozen Time* in 1933, and in 1934 he received an award for his poetry from the Union of Polish Writers. The Union also helped him publish his second volume of poetry, *Three Winters*, in 1936, which proves that from the beginning of his career he was an appreciated literary figure in his native Poland. His activity with the underground press during the Nazi occupation further strengthened his bonds with his Polish readers. In fact, as Flagg Taylor notes, “when the fate of a city or country is at stake, language must return to its most elemental function,”²³⁴ and this is

²³¹ Marcel Cornis-Pope, ‘Critical Theory and the “Glasnost” Phenomenon: Ideological Reconstruction in Romanian Literary and Political Culture,’ *College Literature* 21 (Feb., 1994), 132.

²³² Manea, *Textul nomad*, 173.

²³³ Calinescu, ‘Romanian Literature,’ 246.

²³⁴ Flagg Taylor, ‘Czeslaw Milosz: On the Imagination of Twentieth-Century Man,’ *East European Politics and Societies* 19 (1, 2005), 38.

exactly what Milosz did during the war years, as was proven by his large and passionate audience.

These bonds were not severed after his emigration due to the powerful Polish Diaspora. After leaving Poland, from 1951 to 1953 Milosz lived at the Polish émigré publishing house *Kultura* and many of his books written as an émigré were first published by the Polish-language Literary Institute in Paris. In 1957 Milosz was awarded *Kultura*'s annual literary prize and in 1958 he received the award of the Union of Polish Émigré Writers. His ties with the Polish Diaspora remained strong through the years: in 1967 The Poets' and Painters' Press in London published an extensive selection of his poems in a volume entitled *Poems* and he received the Marian Kister Literary Award in New York (awarded by the publishing house of the Polish émigré Marian Kister). In 1968 he received the Jurzykowski Award from the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in New York. In 1974 the Polish P.E.N. Club awarded him its prize for his translations of Polish poetry into English. His constant preoccupation with translation work into Polish also kept him in touch with his Polish readership, even though his books were banned by the communist regime. In 1979 he received the Zygmunt Hertz Award.

In June of 1981, after being awarded the Nobel Prize and thus becoming a potentially useful figure for the communist authorities, Milosz was allowed to return to Poland for the first time since his exile in 1951. Jastremski records that,

“[s]oon after his return, the Polish presses *Wydawnictwo Literackie* and *Czytelnik* began to publish the first volumes of Milosz's work available in Poland since his writings were banned in the 1950s, making it possible for Poles -- many of whom had never heard of Milosz before the Nobel Prize -- to read their newly-crowned national bard. While in Poland, [...] he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the Catholic University in Lublin. With the declaration of martial law in December 1981, however,

most of Milosz's work was again banned by the government, although some remained available, as previously, in samizdat publications."²³⁵

At this time, though, "his poems became rallying points in the movement for new freedoms."²³⁶

After the fall of communism, Milosz was a constant presence in Polish cultural life, and he was buried in the crypt at the Church of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Stanislaw in Cracow, alongside many other famous Polish cultural figures.²³⁷

Compared with Milosz, **Milan Kundera's** journey to literary maturity was relatively long. According to Jan Culik, all his early works were

"unavowedly Marxist. Nevertheless they were always slightly in advance of the times, although not so much as to make it dangerous for their author. Thus, on the official Czech literary scene of the 1950s and the early 1960s they were regarded as major literary landmarks. They provoked much debate and made an important contribution to the gradual process during which Czech literature freed itself from the yoke of Stalinism."²³⁸

From the middle of the 1950s, Kundera was a celebrity in communist Czechoslovakia. He wrote for a number of literary magazines and his articles were followed with considerable interest. His first *The Art of the Novel* was regarded as an important landmark in the sphere of official Czechoslovak Marxist literary scholarship and was given a special award "to mark the 15th anniversary of the birth of Popular Democratic Czechoslovakia" as well as the 1961 annual prize of the Czechoslovak Writer Publishing House.

²³⁵ Jastremski, 'Home as Other,' 56.

²³⁶ Alter, 'Milosz: Poetry and Politics,' 41.

²³⁷ Jastremski, 'Home as Other,' 58.

²³⁸ Culik, 'Milan Kundera,' 251.

In 1975, Kundera and his wife left Czechoslovakia for France. In subsequent interviews, the author confessed that the departure from the oppressive atmosphere of occupied Czechoslovakia brought him profound relief. Yet, he continued to look at his native country from the new, French, vantage point. A controversy arose among Czech independent intellectuals in the Prague samizdat press and in the émigré publications about Kundera's novels written in the 1980s, some Czech writers criticizing Kundera, once he had left for the West, for styling himself into a role of a dissident writer, as though he had never been a communist.²³⁹ On his part, Kundera claimed that “publishing what the author deleted is the same act of rape as censoring what he decided to retain.”²⁴⁰

Kundera always expressed a strong affection for his native country. Later, he broadened the concept of the culture to which he belonged to the concept of Central Europeanness. In many of his writings and interviews he has argued that Central Europe gave birth to a unique civilization, with great figures such as Freud, Einstein, Mahler, Janacek, Broch, Kafka and Musil. In Kundera's view, this culture was destroyed by Russian subjugation. On the other hand, he rejected “a nation's possessiveness towards its artists' works as a *small-context terrorism*, reducing the whole meaning of a work to the role it plays in the homeland.”²⁴¹

After the fall of communism, Kundera cut almost all his ties with his native land, visiting it rarely. He claims that it is difficult for him simultaneously to follow events in two different countries and since he lives in France, he has adopted France as the place of his home. However, as political fervor was calming down in the Czech Republic, Kundera was awarded the Czech State Literature Prize in 2007 for the Czech edition of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which was published in French in 1984 but not published in Czech -- officially -- until 2006.

²³⁹ Culik, 'Milan Kundera,' 252.

²⁴⁰ Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, 267.

²⁴¹ Kundera, *The Curtain*, 39.

A new controversy arose quite recently (2008), which attracted the attention of Norman Manea, who summarized it as follows:

“In 1950, Kundera, then a 20-year-old Communist, reportedly denounced to the criminal police as a Western spy a man he had never met -- a friend of his friend’s girlfriend. The man was later brutally interrogated in a former Gestapo torture facility and spent 14 years in prison. Kundera’s name was contained in the investigating officer’s report, which was authenticated after a respected historian discovered it in a dusty Prague archive. The reclusive Kundera, who immigrated to Paris in 1975, has declared that ‘it never happened.’ Moreover, Czechoslovakia’s fearsome secret police, who had every interest in silencing or compromising the famous dissident writer, never used the incident to blackmail or expose him.”

Manea concludes: “[U]ntil more information is forthcoming, both from Kundera and from the authorities [which has not happened to date], the case will not be solved ‘beyond reasonable doubt.’”²⁴²

It is disturbing to note the similarity of the incident with a twist in the plot of Kundera’s novel *Life Is Elsewhere*, where the main character reports the brother of his girlfriend (a brother he never met) to the authorities for trying to leave the country illegally. The brother, the girlfriend, probably other people involved in the attempted flight are also imprisoned. The overlap between life and fiction can no longer be dissected by the observer.

In a country where ideological pressure was stifling, **Norman Manea** offers an example of a more sinuous literary career under communism, which is summarized by his literary biographer, Virgil Nemoianu: in an attempt to stay away from the infectious lies of the

²⁴² Norman Manea, ‘A Lasting Poison,’ *Project Syndicate* (November 20, 2008), <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/manea6/English>, accessed November 12, 2012.

communist system (“to protect myself against the political and ideological invasion of society”²⁴³),

“he practiced engineering until 1974, but he started writing soon after graduation, making his prose debut in 1966 in the small avant-garde journal *The Tale of Word*, under the auspices of Miron Radu Paraschivescu, an erratic and heretical Communist poet. His modernistic writing style, as well as the many allusions in his texts critical of the social and political system, slowed down his public recognition. Moreover, his references to Jewish persecution (past and present) irritated the Romanian Communist authorities, who regarded him with suspicion. Nevertheless, after the publication of two volumes of short stories, *Night on the Long Side* (1969) and *First Gates* (1975), and two novels, *Captives* (1970) and *Atrium* (1974), he felt confident enough to dedicate himself exclusively to writing.”

Nemoianu goes on to note that

“[s]ome of Manea's best works of fiction, notably *October*, *Eight O'Clock* (1981) and *The Black Envelope* (1986), appeared in the 1980s, albeit with great difficulty and marred by cuts imposed after long struggles with censors. The passages eliminated were interpreted as satirical allusions to a society shaped by communist totalitarianism. [...] In 1979 he was awarded the Literary Prize of the Association of Bucharest Writers, and in 1984 he won the National Prize of the Romanian Writers' Union for fiction, (only to see the latter promptly withdrawn by the Communist authorities.)”²⁴⁴

Manea himself does not claim much glory for his position of independence from the Party, since “in Romania the deal with the Devil had long ago become poor, even bad business,

²⁴³ Manea, *Textul nomad*, 172.

²⁴⁴ Nemoianu, ‘Norman Manea.’ 251-2.

since the Devil had gradually lost its prerogatives, his resources, and wouldn't even keep his word anymore."²⁴⁵

Manea left Romania in 1986, and his reception back in Romania, right after the fall of communism, was rather tense -- even more so after he published a couple of articles addressing the thorny issue of Romanian anti-Semitism during World War II and later, a sober look at the Romanian "cultural subconscious."²⁴⁶ The visit he made in 1997 (the starting point of his novel *The Hooligan's Return*) proved quite depressing for him, as he found the country in a not very encouraging 'transition' state. After that, he maintained his relationship with friends and publications in Romania, but without actually visiting the country again until 2008, when he was awarded the title of Doctor Honoris Causa by two prestigious Romanian universities: Universitatea Bucuresti and Universitatea 'Babes-Bolyai' in Cluj-Napoca. This second homecoming proved more successful, as it was followed by another visit to Romania in 2010, when the writer was again the centre of interest for both mass media and the academic world.

The experience of writing literature under a communist regime left a deep mark on all three writers discussed here. They are all deeply aware of how this experience endangered their integrity, Manea most of all, since he spent the longest part of his life in Romania. The first new book he produced in the West, *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist*, creates a powerful picture of the social, psychological and cultural context in which his books were written and read -- one of the first American reviews calls it "an eloquent and explicit account of a writer's struggle to hang on to his sanity and honor in Ceausescu's Romania."²⁴⁷ It may

²⁴⁵ Manea, 'Romania's Image in the World,' in *Casa melcului*, 80.

²⁴⁶ Norman Manea, *Plicuri si portrete*, 183.

²⁴⁷ Louis Begley, 'A Matter of Survival,' *The New York Review of Books*, September 24, 1992, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1992/sep/24/a-matter-of-survival/?pagination=false>, accessed November 12, 2012.

explain, at least in part, the Romanian critics' reactions to Manea's career in the West which was, up to a point, similar to that of Czech critics towards Kundera.

2.7 In the West

"The dissident is the first product of the collaboration between the two systems -- communist and capitalist. I think this is the first product USSR ever exported that the West not only absorbed, but even nicely labeled. Dissidence is a creation, a kind of common language of the two systems that has been maintained by both parties. Dissidence is a valid political speech, accepted and used by both parties, but interpreted according to different criteria."²⁴⁸

The most common label for all three writers in the West was that of dissident but, as Manea explains, the term had a different meaning in the East: "I did not think of myself as dissident. Rather as *outsider* [in English in the original; Romania language does not seem to have an equivalent term]."²⁴⁹ This can be said for all three authors discussed here.

Initially, however, in France (where Milosz arrived in 1951), dissident authors from communist countries were denied the quality of witness, since the image their books presented of the reality they had just left contrasted totally with the image presented by the authorities in the Soviet Bloc. Consequently, they were hurting the utopian vision left-wing western intellectuals had about the communist bloc. This utopia was particularly desirable after the atrocities of World War II: it was seen as the only chance for humanity to put some order in the universe, to understand the world according to a meaningful set of values. The attachment of some western intellectuals to Marxist philosophy prevented them from

²⁴⁸ Vasile Ernu, *Nascut in URSS [Born in the USSR]* (Iasi: Polirom, 2006), 191.

²⁴⁹ Manea, 'The Engineer of Human Soul,' interview with Radu Hervian (2006), in *Textul nomad*, 393.

wanting to understand the real situation. The process of persuading them of the failure of the communist system was therefore a lengthy and difficult one, although Milosz considers that “Marxists’ probably do not exist at all, for the term covers very different and often contradictory positions.”²⁵⁰ The difference in perspective between western Marxists and East-Central European dissidents was between an experiment that had gone wrong but could, theoretically, be brought back on track, and a complete rejection of the experiment as not only futile, but criminal, and going against basic human values. As Milosz himself found out, “only at the end of the fifties or, for good measure, only in the sixties was there a lifting of the taboo, that is, a grudging admission that émigré journals are not necessarily the hangouts of scoundrels, fascists and agents.”²⁵¹

With the crushing of the Prague Spring, the dissidents’ perspective on communism became more important in the West, as the situation in communist countries had been exposed as critical. The role of the intellectuals was again paramount. According to Timothy Garton Ash:

“Under the black light of a totalitarian power, most ideas -- and words -- become deformed, appear grotesque, or simply crumble. Only a very few stand the test, remain rocklike under any pressure; and most of these are not new. There are things worth suffering for. There are moral absolutes. Not everything is open to discussion.”²⁵²

Michelle Woods remarks that Kundera’s writings triggered at the time political responses, “a criticism focused on deciphering Kundera -- often at the expense of his work - - in the light of contemporary cultural needs rather than in terms of trying to understand his work.”²⁵³ She identifies two geographically and politically distinct trends: the Czech and the

²⁵⁰ Milosz, *Native Realm*, 288.

²⁵¹ Milosz, ‘Zygmunt Hertz,’ in *To Begin Where I Am*, 171.

²⁵² Garton Ash, ‘Does Central Europe Exist?’

²⁵³ Woods, *Translating Milan Kundera*, 144.

British. While Czech critics see themselves as best equipped to deal with Kundera's work, as they have direct access to what would traditionally have been termed 'originals' and first-hand knowledge of the life experience which contextualizes this work, they often get too involved with the politics of the issue to be able to keep a safe distance and appreciate the work, rather than what is perceived to be the author's stand. On the British side, Kundera's image has evolved from that of a political dissident in the '70s to that of a highly intellectual author in the '80s and then to the rather ambiguous figure of the '90s, when he appeared to fail in his political role as dissident writer (when compared with a Vaclav Havel) and, even worse, started writing in French. Ironically, this type of criticism ignores one of Kundera's trademark themes -- that of the writer's powerlessness in the 'real world.'

Generally, the literary tastes of the two types of audiences were quite different, as western publishers found out when they started publishing dissident authors:

"[Q]uite a few books which were praised to us in glowing terms, by the local critics in the dim cafes, turned out on closer examination, in the brighter, cooler light of a sample translation, to be derivative, self-referential, hopelessly allusive, unbearably prolix, or simply not to work in translation. This applied particularly to books which had been written with the hope of official publication. In order to smuggle their message past the censor, writers often resorted to the 'Aesopian' techniques of concealed allusion, allegory or fable. But what defeated the censor often also defeated the translator, or at least, the Western reader who had to make sense of the translation."²⁵⁴

The reader's fascination with an enciphered message works only within the restrictions of a police state. Once freedom of speech is acquired, the reader prefers more direct modes of expression.

²⁵⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, 'The History of CEEPP,' in *Freedom for Publishing, Publishing for Freedom. The Central and East European Publishing Project*, ed. Timothy Garton Ash (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995), 26.

The discrepancies between the idea of literature in East Central Europe and that in the West were so vast that an author like A. B. Wachtel, writing already in the 21st century had to define the term for his American audience:

“As used here, ‘literature’ when unmodified by any adjectives refers to imaginative literature, to works of serious fiction, poetry, and drama. In an American context it would include the output of writers such as John Updike, Toni Morrison, or T. Coraghessan Boyle. It would not include fiction by Stephen King, Danielle Steel, or Tom Clancy, nor would it include such excellent nonfiction as that produced by authors like John McPhee or Alex Kotlowitz. This choice is not due to academic snobbery. In Eastern Europe, at least until the collapse of communism, popular or pulp literature was for the most part nonexistent, and serious nonfiction was rare. For the most part, then, for the societies in question literature meant serious, highbrow literature. At the same time, both because of the absence of more popular fare and because the educational systems of Eastern Europe were more liter-centric²⁵⁵ than those of Western Europe or the United States, a surprisingly large percentage of the East European public actually read and appreciated literature in the sense it is used here.”²⁵⁶

This reverence for Literature and aesthetic values (although these values have not been clearly defined) is still seen as elitist by both sides. The term, however, has negative connotations for western readers, who reproach East European writers their lack of accessibility, while East European readers take pride in being versed in the finer points of literary hermeneutics.

Things changed dramatically, though, after the fall of communism, when writers were relieved of their role as mouthpiece of the nation since, as Wachtel notes, they “were

²⁵⁵ The school curricula were based first and foremost on texts as the only source of information.

²⁵⁶ Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant after Communism*, 7-8.

no longer needed to define the nation's very right to exist, nor were they needed as the voice of conscience in oppressive regimes."²⁵⁷ Moreover, East European writers also lost their western readership, since "in the post-cold-war world there is no longer a political reason to pay attention to East European literary developments. What is more, as these societies have become more Westernized, they are less exotic, less 'other,' and hence less interesting to Western readers."²⁵⁸

A new critical perspective is now needed for East-Central European literature, and recently scholars (usually of Eastern European extraction, but in academic positions in the West) have turned to postcolonial theories to help them find a place for it in the academic curricula. In the words of Janusz Korek, they started to "carry out new readings of known canons from the perspective of the position of authority (the oppressed : the imperialist) [...] as well as re-evaluate the work of Slavonic and Soviet Studies that was deformed by the atmosphere of the Cold War." The idea seemed controversial to "traditionalists," but Korek claims that "we can, however, accept, generally speaking, the essence of research into imperialism and colonialism, as an attempt to understand how the imperial centre of authority aims in theory and practice to subordinate to itself or dominate the territories (or provinces) desired by itself." Starting from Said's discussion of postcolonialism in the case of Tsarist Russia, he wonders "why should this way of thinking be appropriate when talking about Tsarist Russia and not appropriate when applied to the imperialist procedures of the Soviet Union (or Russia today), whose expansion was/is governed by similar mechanisms?"²⁵⁹

What seems to create confusion among scholars is the fact that, in the East-Central European countries, due to the gradual transfer of power from the Austrian to the

²⁵⁷ Wachtel, 45.

²⁵⁸ Wachtel, 47.

²⁵⁹ Janusz Korek, 'Central and Eastern Europe from a Postcolonial Perspective,' *Postcolonial Europe*, <http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/index.php/en/essays/60--central-and-eastern-europe-from-a-postcolonial-perspective>, accessed November 12, 2012.

Russian empires over the last two centuries, cultural dominance (which is primarily Western) does not coincide with political/ economic/ military dominance (which is Russian / Soviet), in spite of the initial attempts that made Manea identify the “Party activist” as “an ideological colonizer of the present.”²⁶⁰ Turning specifically to literature, Aleksander Fiut (one of the foremost specialists in Milosz’s work) proposes to “look at the problem of cultural dependency from the opposite angle and use postcolonial methodology to analyze the literature of East European nations conquered by Russia or, after the Second World War, by the Soviet Union.”²⁶¹ In other words, the literature produced in East Central Europe under communism can be used as proof that what happened there was colonialism.

The study of the reception Milosz, Kudera and Manea had in the West, at different moments in time will adequately illustrate the gradual shift from communist values towards more individualistic values (seen as reactionary in the ‘50s), such as freedom of thought and of choice.

At the end of World War II, **Milosz** worked as a cultural attaché for the Polish communist government, serving in New York and Washington. Ultimately, feeling that the only way to maintain his own intellectual autonomy was the exile in the West, he left his position with the Polish Foreign Service in 1951 and sought (and received) political asylum in France. Milosz spent ten years in France, and he found himself having difficulty with the strongly pro-socialist and communist intellectual community attracted by “the mental comfort dialectics affords.”²⁶² His most famous book, *The Captive Mind* (1953) was a bitter attack on the manner in which the Communist Party in Poland progressively destroyed the independence of the Polish intelligentsia and also (together with his next novel, *The Seizure of Power*, an

²⁶⁰ Cugno, ‘Interview with Norman Manea,’ 33.

²⁶¹ Aleksander Fiut, ‘In the Shadow of Empires. Postcolonialism in Central and Eastern Europe -- Why not?’ *Postcolonial Europe*, <http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/index.php/en/essays/58--in-the-shadow-of-empires>, accessed November 12, 2012.

²⁶² Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, 105.

“act of self-exorcism”²⁶³). To his regret, though, the book came to be used as Cold War propaganda.²⁶⁴

In 1960 Milosz accepted a position as a visiting lecturer at the University of California at Berkeley and became acquainted with “the polite indoctrination one received at Western European universities.”²⁶⁵ He became a full professor there in 1961, and for the next twenty years combined his writing with teaching courses on subjects ranging from Dostoevsky to Manichaeism. He also had a chance to find out that “in my century [...] the anger of the privileged who are ashamed of their privileges was even louder”²⁶⁶ than that of the underprivileged.

In 1968 *Native Realm* became available in English translation. Then, in 1973, the Seabury Press in New York published the first volume of Milosz's poetry translated into English, *Selected Poems*. According to Kin Jastremski, “this publication sparked the remarkably late beginning of Milosz's renown in the English-speaking world as a poet and not just a political essayist.”²⁶⁷ He was named a Guggenheim Fellow for poetry in 1976, received a honorary degree ‘Doctor of Letters’ from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in 1977, the Neustadt International Literary Prize in 1978, and in the same year the University of California presented him with the Berkeley citation for his literary and academic merits. In 1980 Milosz was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. After that, he held the Charles Eliot Norton professorship at Harvard University for the academic year 1981-82 and published his lectures from that year in *The Witness of Poetry* (1983). In 2011, Milosz's

²⁶³ Iribarne, “Lost in the “Earth-Garden,”” 638.

²⁶⁴ Jerzy R. Krzyzanowski, ‘*The Captive Mind revisited*,’ in *World Literature Today* 73 (Autumn 1999), 658-662.

²⁶⁵ Milosz, ‘Shestov, or the Purity of Despair,’ in *To Begin Where I Am*, 264

²⁶⁶ Milosz, ‘Saligia’ in *To Begin Where I Am*, 304.

²⁶⁷ Jastremski, ‘Home as Other,’ 56.

centenary was celebrated around the world with, according to one witness, “rock star exuberance.”²⁶⁸

If Milosz’s readers could see a formal distinction between his political and literary writings, **Kundera’s** position was much more difficult. Most western critics originally understood *The Joke* as a political novel, a protest against Stalinist totalitarianism. Protest against Stalinism is however only one of many themes in the novel. Kundera rightly objected to such a simplified interpretation. He pointed out that the 1950s in Czechoslovakia attracted him as a scene for the novel only “because this was a time when History made as yet unheard of experiments with Man. Thus it deepened my doubts and enriched my understanding of man and his predicament.”²⁶⁹ For him, “the art of the novel” was precisely the place for “the relativity of human truths.”²⁷⁰

Kundera’s departure from Czechoslovakia was a watershed for him. He had studied French literature and culture during his Prague years, yet only when he settled permanently in France, and gained first-hand experience of life in the West, was he able to properly compare and contrast his life in the West with life in the East. His critical analysis of both societies was scathing. It took him six years to complete his first ‘Western’ book. During his first years in the West, Kundera maintained that he had said all that he had to say and that he would write no more works of fiction. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979) heralded a new stage of Kundera’s career. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1987) is “his most popular work with western readers and critics alike. It was particularly this novel which made Milan Kundera an internationally well-known author, especially after it

²⁶⁸ Cynthia L. Haven, ‘Czeslaw Milosz around the world,’ *Times Literary Supplement* (23 November, 2011).

²⁶⁹ Culik, ‘Milan Kundera,’ 253.

²⁷⁰ Kundera, *The Curtain*, 69.

was turned into a film by director Philip Kaufman in 1988.²⁷¹ With *Slowness* (1995), Kundera started writing his novels in French.

After his move to France, the selection of his themes was for a while primarily determined by Kundera's traumatic experience in Eastern Europe and by the period of his adjustment to life in the West, which made him examine the cultural differences and similarities in both parts of the European continent. Throughout his literary career though, he may be said to have negotiated his work with successive audiences, and in doing so he created for himself a new type of writer-figure, more attuned to the globalizing needs of our world. On this note, it is remarkable to see the similar paths in international recognition, at the level of literary awards. In 1973 Kundera was awarded the Medicis Etranger prize that would also go to Manea in 2006. He won Italian (Mondello, 1978), American (American Commonwealth Award for his complete works, 1981) and European (1982) literary prizes. In 1983 he was named Doctor honoris causa of the University of Michigan, USA, the same title awarded to Milosz in 1977. He received the Jerusalem Prize in 1985, the Nelly-Sachs prize in 1987 (that would also go to Norma Manea in 2011), the Herder prize of the University of Vienna in 2000.

In a similarly cosmopolitan context, when in 1986 **Manea** exiled himself, he went to live first in West Berlin as recipient of the DAAD Berliner-Künstlerprogramm fellowship, and then in the United States, where he was awarded a Fulbright fellowship (1988-1989). Manea's first residence was in Washington, D.C., but in 1989 he moved to New York. He discovered that (in the United States) "the intellectual finds a place only as an individual and a professional, not as a tribune or a paternalistic teacher of the nation."²⁷² Since 1989, Manea has been associated with Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, where he has been an International

²⁷¹ Culik, 'Milan Kundera,' 260.

²⁷² Manea, *Plicuri si portrete*, 325.

Academy fellow (teaching courses on Eastern European writers and on 'Holocaust and Literature'), and writer in residence. In 1996, Manea received an endowed chair at Bard College, the Francis Flourney Professorship in European Studies and Culture. Nemoianu notes that

"Manea's international recognition came without much delay. He obtained an impressive number of prominent awards, perhaps most notably a Guggenheim fellowship in 1992 and the five-year MacArthur Award, also in 1992. He was granted the National Jewish Book Award and the 'Literary Lion' Award of the National Library of New York in 1993. Major literary figures such as Philip Roth and Heinrich Boll, and writers such as Louis Begley and Paul Bayley, have praised Manea as one of the most original voices coming out of Eastern Europe."²⁷³

More recently, he was awarded the Nonino International prize for literature in 2002 in Italy, and the Medicis Etranger prize in 2006; in 2010 he was named 'Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres' by the French government; in 2011 he received the Nelly-Sachs literary award. His works have been translated into many languages and have appeared in many countries, and he fully appreciates his position: "[P]laced as I am, between East and West, I could benefit from comparisons -- ironic training in relativism."²⁷⁴

This position between East and West is common for all three writers discussed here, and it gave them a unique perspective on the western intellectual world. Milosz's collection of essays *Visions from San Francisco Bay* is an expression of the same 'relativistic' position, and Milosz uses his vantage point to change his readers' perspective on what he sees as the essential intellectual debates in the United States at that time.

²⁷³ Nemoianu, 'Norman Manea,' 253.

²⁷⁴ Manea, 'Laughter of Duplicity, Laughter of Hope,' interview with Philip Roth (1992) in *Casa melcului*, 100.

The individual instances of dissidents from the Soviet Bloc have created, over the second half of the 20th century, a new image of the East-Central European intellectual who takes responsibility for the impact of ideas on real life. Their ideas created a geographical entity for East-Central Europe which is close to Western Europe and specifically distinct from Russia, a fact that is borne out in the configuration of the European Union today. Their insistence on the importance of historical events in the collective memory of any nation led to the opening, in East-Central Europe, over the last two decades, of several Holocaust museums and museums of Communism (a project for a Romanian museum of Communism has just been announced). Perhaps their most important stand regards, indeed, Communism: against the trend that saw Communism as a good idea applied badly, they showed that an idea which can only be applied badly is, in logical consequence, a bad idea. Their experience with censorship at home reinforced the fact that freedom of speech is a most important mechanism for the self-regulation of any society. Their position in western society, on the other hand, allowed them to inform the rest of the world on the realities of East-Central Europe in the second half of the 20th century, against the official propaganda of the communist regime. The fact that they used their native language placed their work in the category of national literatures which were not well-known until then, and which they brought to the attention of a wider public. Thus, they were instrumental in changing this status to that of 'emerging literatures,' a position that benefits other recently discovered national literatures which are no longer valued just for their exoticism. On the contrary, the importance of literary texts for the free circulation of ideas in the new millennium is becoming apparent.

3. TEXT: The Need to Testify

“Finding myself in the West, I was obliged to inform people, to tell them about Communism, about what they did not know and did not want to know.”²⁷⁵

It has been often claimed by writers from the Soviet Bloc that literature is probably the most honest document we have at our disposal for studying the image of the intellectual in the Soviet Bloc in the second half of the 20th century. Obviously, none of them had any faith in the ‘scientific’ -- sociological, historical, etc. -- publications of the time, as they were all manipulated to fit the prevailing ideology. Also, the distinction between non-literature and literature carries much more weight in the context of East-Central European culture -- while non-literature emphasizes authenticity, literature reorganizes reality according to aesthetic principles.

The last two chapters of this study are devoted to the way the writers themselves represented the East-Central European communist experience in their works, both non-literary and literary. The third chapter here discusses Milosz’s, Kundera’s and Manea’s direct, ‘non-literary’ testimony in the form of the articles, interviews, essays mentioned in the second chapter. The fourth chapter will cover the ‘literary’ texts, with an emphasis on the way in which all three writers used (sometimes autobiographical) intellectual figures in their work.

The claim to representativeness in a dialogue between East and West was made by all three authors discussed here, as they were familiar with both social environments (East and West), and could therefore ‘translate’ these social realities for each of their two distinct audiences. Each of the three authors has constantly felt the need to explain the background of their writings to readers who did not share it. Apart from their

²⁷⁵ Czeslaw Milosz, *Milosz’s ABC*, translated from the Polish by Madeline G. Levine (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001), 157.

specialized output as writers of literature (which will be discussed in the fourth chapter), they entered into a direct dialogue with their readers, in the form of newspaper articles, interviews and essays, thus creating a meta-literature which offers a series of guidelines for the reading of their literature proper.

3.1 Cultural geography

These guidelines to their literary work cover several aspects of the authors' biographies. The first one is geographic, as Milosz, Kundera and Manea militate for the inclusion of East Central Europe into the 'European family,' based on cultural affinities, where culture is identified in all its lofty characteristics, quite separate from civilization. An article published by Milan Kundera in 1984, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe,' perfectly illustrates this urge to define the region.

Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe'²⁷⁶

Kundera published this article in a newspaper that could reach a wide audience (*The New York Review of Books*) in 1983, almost ten years after his move to France, when he had had enough time to realize just how much of what his novels assumed to be known by their readers was actually not clear to his new audience. The article, structured in eleven parts, is a clear example of testimony offered by Kundera to the Western world. It offers Kundera's definition of Central Europe, but the discourse alternates, with each part, between Eastern and Western European perspectives, as well as between actual, tragic examples of the volatility of national borders in East-Central Europe and theoretical approaches.

²⁷⁶ Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe,' *The New York Review of Books* 31 (April 26, 1984), 33-38. Only parenthetical references are used, from now on, for quotes from the specific text under discussion.

Himself a witness to one of the most tragic moments in the 20th century history of his country, Kundera puts it into perspective, by indicating a pattern of behavior: the previous instance of the Soviet army invading a supposedly independent state. The article opens with the haunting image of the director of the Hungarian News Agency who, in the midst of the Russian invasion following the Hungarian revolt of 1956, ended his broadcast to the world with the words “We are going to die for Hungary and for Europe,” (33) an indirect cry for help from a civilization felt as akin -- ‘Europe’ (“Native Europe,” as in the title of one of Milosz’s books²⁷⁷). Then, Kundera defines ‘Europe’ not as a “phenomenon of geography, but a spiritual notion, synonymous with the word ‘West,’” (33) and identifies the year 1945 as the moment when the border discussed previously between Rome and Byzantium, between Catholicism and Orthodoxy had shifted. Kundera defines “three fundamental situations that developed in Europe after the war: that of Western Europe, that of Eastern Europe and, most complicated, that of the part of Europe situated geographically in the centre -- culturally in the west and politically in the east.”(33) His argument, though, is that the movement of the former border is not merely a political shift, but an attack on the very cultural identity of the West. His plea, coming from a wariness of politics which, in his experience, had not accomplished much, is that it is precisely this culture that is worth saving.

Consequently, he strives to demonstrate that the enemy here is not just communism (as claimed by western intellectuals), but Russian culture and civilization. When describing Soviet bureaucracy as “deeply a-national, antinational, supranational” he indicates his national criteria. Communism is seen here rather as a fulfillment of Russian history, in direct opposition to the Central European tradition of “a family of equal nations” (a reference to the Austrian Empire), “a condensed version of Europe itself in all its cultural variety [...] the greatest variety within the smallest space.” (33) It is all a matter of perspective: the Russians under the communist regime see the differences between it and

²⁷⁷ Translated into English as *Native Realm*.

the Czarist regime, but the nations formerly enslaved by the Czarist regime see the continuity.

According to Kundera, this clash between Russian and Western civilizations dates back several centuries and communism now simply makes obvious. Kundera quotes Milosz's *Captive Mind* and *Native Realm* as "the first close analyses that are not Manichean towards Russian communism and its 'Drang nach West.'" (34) The criteria cover the whole range of existence -- space, time, human emotions: "Russia knows another (greater) dimension of disaster, another image of space (a space so immense entire nations are swallowed up in it), another sense of time (slow and patient), another way of laughing, living and dying." (34) The two ways of life are, according to Kundera, incompatible and the small nations of Central Europe are struggling to "preserve their Westernness." (34)

Inevitably, the distinction between Eastern, Western and Central Europe is founded not just on spatial, but also on historical grounds, and Kundera tries to figure out why and how "Russia's satellite countries" could disappear so easily off "the map of the West." (34) For this, Kundera points to the Austrian Empire's failure to build "a federation of equal nations" by giving in to their Pan-German nationalism. Pan-Slavism, on the other hand, is seen as an ideological construct, nothing more than "a piece of political mystification invented in the 19th century" as a reaction to Pan-German aggressiveness. Pan-Slavism is now used as justification for the present state of affairs, for "the division of Europe after 1945 -- which united this supposed Slavic World (including the poor Hungarians and Romanian whose language is not, of course, Slavic -- but why bother over trifles?)" (34) -- Kundera's resentment over the Western world's abandonment of Central Europe is quite clear here.

He addresses the causes of this abandonment directly. For him, it is through culture that the region not only acquired its unity, but also managed to distinguish itself from Western Europe: "On the map of Europe, baroque Central Europe (characterized by the

predominance of the irrational and the dominant position of the visual arts and especially of music) became the opposite pole of classical France (characterized by the predominance of the rational and the predominant position of literature and philosophy).”(35) This cultural entity made its mark on the 20th century art -- “the structuralists [of the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 1930s] protected avant-garde art against the narrow ideological interpretation that has dogged modern art everywhere” -- and national movements: “[B]y refusing assimilation, Zionism, also born in Central Europe, chose the same path as the other Central European nations.”(35)

Kundera further details the importance of Jewish culture as “the principal cosmopolitan, integrating element in Central Europe.” This Central Europe, geographically “an uncertain zone of small nations between Russia and Germany” boasts its Jewry as “*the* small nation par excellence.”(35) Due in part to the dire experience of its Jewish community, Central European culture can issue a warning of the fate of those from “the wrong side of history” (36) to all of Europe. Its works of literature (Kundera mentions Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, Jaroslav Hasek, Franz Kafka) can be read as “long meditations on the possible end of European humanity.”(36)

This is key to Kundera’s view of culture as the central, unifying element, not just for Central Europe, but for Europe in its entirety. He notes that the disappearance of the cultural home of Central Europe failed to make an impression on Western civilization although, to Kundera, culture is the common element of modern Europe, replacing religion -- the unifying element of the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, his move to Western Europe also meant the realization that “Europe no longer perceives its unity as a cultural unity.”(36) The place of the ‘great poet’ has been taken by the journalist, and he worries that culture will eventually be replaced by mass-media.

This loss, as he points out, is felt only by fellow Central Europeans trapped between what have now become two worlds, like Franz Werfel who “spent the first third of

his life in Prague, the second in Vienna, and the last third as an immigrant, first in France, then in America -- there you have a typical Central European biography.”(36) Central Europeans are the only ones who still need “the protection of culture against the mindlessness of politicization.”(36) This deep mistrust of politics that failed them so many times translates into an idealization of culture as “a realm in which supreme values were enacted.”(36)

Unlike the West, the Soviet regime recognized the power of culture. Kundera identifies the catalyst of the Central Europe revolts (Budapest 1956, Prague 1968, Gdansk 1970) in the “novels, poetry, theatre, cinema, historiography, literary reviews, popular comedy and cabaret, philosophical discussions” (that is, the culture) of the time, not the media “which for the French and Americans, are indistinguishable from whatever the West today is meant to be,” but which in the Soviet Bloc was “completely under state control.”(37) That is why one of the first measures taken by the occupation forces was aimed at destroying this culture: “[F]ive hundred thousand people (especially intellectuals) were pushed out of their jobs. One hundred twenty thousand emigrated.”(37) For Kundera, this equates to the end to the modern era, and he can only deplore the fact that the event remained unnoticed in the West, and worry that this might be just the beginning of the end for the whole of European culture.

In conclusion, he poses the question of whether Central Europe still exists. From the point of view of Western Europe, “by virtue of its political system, Central Europe is in the East; by virtue of its cultural history, it is in the West. But since Europe itself is in the process of losing its own cultural identity, it perceives in Central Europe nothing but a political regime; put another way, it sees in Central Europe only Eastern Europe.” (37) What Central Europe is trying to salvage now is actually the past of Europe, “the past of culture, of the modern era” (38) when the cultural dimension that represents its identity was still

present. The real tragedy of Central Europe, then, is not the clash of civilizations with Russia, but the lack of understanding coming from the West.

In answer to this lack of understanding, Kundera builds a rather fictional geographical concept which he sees as the epitome of European values preserved by the 'small nations' with a common (and tragic) destiny. He takes this concept even further into the cultural realm in 1985 when, in an article on the English translation of his play *Jacques and His Master* he expresses a preference for Diderot over Dostoyevsky and explains it in terms of the opposition Western rationalism/Eastern (Russian) "aggressive sentimentality."²⁷⁸ This triggered a strong response from Russian writer Joseph Brodsky (teaching at an American university at that time), who insisted on the precedence of aesthetics over ideology.²⁷⁹ By the time he published *Testaments Betrayed*, though, Kundera seems to have got over this dichotomy between Western Europe and Russia, when he is able to discuss Stravinsky's musical work as "a way of establishing communication between centuries."²⁸⁰ At the time, however, the debate moved from the newspapers into the pages of specialized journals. In a 1986 article, 'Central European Attitudes,' Czeslaw Milosz warned against the dangers involved in this kind of attitude: "Humiliated national pride usually gives rise to delusions, to self-pity, and mythologies,"²⁸¹ and his warning is reiterated by Hungarian writer Georgy Konrad in the same scholarly journal.²⁸² The Western perspective was offered later that year by Timothy Garton Ash, who pointed out that this is history recast as myth: "Kundera's Central Europe is the mirror image of Solzhenitsyn's Russia. Solzhenitsyn says that communism is to Russia as a disease is to

²⁷⁸ Milan Kundera, 'An Introduction to a Variation,' *New York Times*, January 6, 1985, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-variation.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

²⁷⁹ Joseph Brodsky, 'Why Milan Kundera Is Wrong about Dostoyevsky,' *New York Times*, February 17, 1985, <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/02/17/books/why-milan-kundera-is-wrong-about-dostoyevsky.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

²⁸⁰ Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, 78.

²⁸¹ Milosz, 'Central European Attitudes,' 103.

²⁸² Georgy Konrad, 'Is the Dream of Central Europe Still Alive?' *Cross Currents* 5 (1986), 109-121.

the man afflicted by it. Kundera says that communism is to Central Europe as a disease is to the man afflicted by it -- and the disease is Russia! Kundera's Central European myth is in frontal collision with Solzhenitsyn's Russian myth."²⁸³ Basically, as Larry Wolff notes:

"The advocates of Central Europe today are committed to shattering intellectually the oppressive idea of Eastern Europe, to redeeming the Czech Republic and Hungary, maybe Poland, even perhaps Slovenia. Yet the rubric of Eastern Europe may still be invoked to perpetuate the exclusion of the rest, to preserve the distinction that nourishes our own identity."²⁸⁴

The heated discussions ignited by Kundera's article revealed the fact that his vision of Central Europe was rather exclusive, and based on fairly loose criteria. Consequently, the need became obvious for a more inclusive concept and that was how "*East-Central Europe*, a relatively recent, and geographically somehow vague term, was probably introduced to avoid the undesirable historical connotations of the alternatives."²⁸⁵ For lack of a better term, this is the name used in this study, but the present discussion alone is enough proof of the difficulties all three authors would have had when asked to describe something as apparently innocuous as their birth-place. As E. J. Czerwinski notes, both Milosz and Kundera "would certainly agree with the statement that political boundaries are ephemeral while cultural boundaries are lasting,"²⁸⁶ and their tendency is always towards the most specific detail and consequently the smallest geographical unit -- the city (Wilno for Milosz, Brno for Kundera). In Kundera's own words, theirs is "a Europe conceived not as territory, but as culture."²⁸⁷

²⁸³ Garton Ash, 'Does Central Europe Exist?'

²⁸⁴ Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 15.

²⁸⁵ Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, *Towards a History of the Literary Cultures*, 9.

²⁸⁶ E. J. Czerwinski, 'Czeslaw Milosz: The persistence of existence,' *World Literature Today* 73 (Autumn 1999), 669.

²⁸⁷ Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, translated from the French by Linda Asher (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 157.

3.2 The burden of history

The cultural space is also defined on historical coordinates, with all three authors insisting that the more troubled history of this part of Europe has taught a valuable lesson to its inhabitants. It is a lesson on the fragility of all human things, including apparently stable entities, like countries and their borders. Czeslaw Milosz's poem *Child of Europe*, published right after the end of the Second World War, proves the very personal (almost anecdotal) way in which he tried to relate his experience of history to his western audience.

Czeslaw Milosz, *Child of Europe*²⁸⁸

Milosz wrote *Child of Europe* in New York in 1946, immediately after the war, with its horrors fresh in his mind, but in the comparative safety of the United States democratic environment, far from the Europe he is indicating as his home. Together, the eight parts of the poem represent a manual for survival that gradually covers all aspects of human existence: senses, thoughts, discourse, moral values, and finally actions.

Starting on a personal note, the first section of the poem is a sharp expression of survivor's guilt. The basic enjoyment of life through the senses (smell, sight, taste, touch) is seen as a guilty pleasure, since the victims can no longer partake of it. But the sounds of the horror (hearing is the only sense that cannot be controlled, cannot be prevented) are still haunting, the memory cannot be denied:

“We, from the fiery furnaces, from behind barbed wires
On which the winds of endless autumns howled,
We, who remember battles where the wounded air roared
in paroxysms of pain,
We, saved by our own cunning and knowledge.” (59)

²⁸⁸ Czeslaw Milosz, *Selected Poems*, translated by Jan Darowski (New York: The Echo Press, 1980), 59. All following quotations are from this edition.

The guilt is directly attached to knowledge that, in turn, is the instrument of manipulation. Survival is a matter of choice, so the guilt comes from the choices made, and everything was done with complete awareness that the horror was escalating. With no principles left, the only difference between human and animal is knowledge, which at this point is no longer a good thing. But it is the loss of principles that enabled 'us' to survive, consequently it must be of value.

Milosz does not transfer his guilt to all survivors, though, painfully aware that those who remained in communist countries are still in danger. The poem shifts from 'we' to 'you', the survivor is addressed directly, it is a first step towards a dissociation between him/her and the author. Alexander Fiut calls this "non-direct monologue," the mode through which "the speaker becomes more an exponent of a certain world view, moral attitude, and philosophical choice than a medium for private confidential disclosures."²⁸⁹ Indeed, Milosz places his personal experience against a background of monumental art, subtle philosophy based on the firm belief in the power of reason, the ability to turn a history of death and defeat into something glorious -- the European legacy to be treasured and used to one's advantage:

"You have a clever mind which sees instantly
The good and bad of any situation.
You have an elegant, skeptical mind which enjoys pleasures
Quite unknown to primitive races." (59)

Donald Davie notices that Milosz abandoned "the fixed point of the lyrically meditative 'I'"²⁹⁰ for the "declared necessity of a double perspective [...] Such double perspective or double

²⁸⁹ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 138.

²⁹⁰ Donald Davie, *Czeslaw Milosz and the Insufficiency of Lyric* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 10.

focus need not issue in irony [...] but it is plainly incompatible with the single singing voice of the lyric.”²⁹¹

Milosz proceeds to list those rules, thus offering a survival guide for the age of terror (not unlike the four versions of survival offered later on in *The Captive Mind*). First of all, do not call the oppressor bad names, do not even attempt to use obsolete categories, learn the new ones, learn to dissociate yourself from what is being done, thus better to perform in a world where theory is governing reality, be aware though that this behavior unavoidably leads to your eventual involvement in the perpetration of terror:

“Learn to predict a fire with unerring precision.

Then burn the house down to fulfill the prediction” (60)

Milosz follows the gradation of the totalitarian power’s hold of its subjects with unerring precision: from abandoning ‘the old ways’ to acquiescence and final participation in the new power game.

An elaborate method of survival announces the Ketman doctrine later described in *The Captive Mind*: avow the lie, the truth is too valuable and dangerous to be shared, but it is empowering to the one who knows how to cherish it in private and to make use of it in order to create a more efficient lie. The ‘travelers’ here may well be the ‘fellow-travelers’ of the Communist Party, those destined to be discarded once they are no longer useful. Possession of the truth is still essential, although restricted to the private sphere; dissimulation is key to survival -- in direct logical sequence, three decades later, Vaclav Havel will indicate ‘living in truth’ as the only possible way of resisting totalitarian power; in 1946 Milosz notes that concealed truth does not have long to live:

“We, the last who can still draw joy from cynicism.

We, whose cunning is not unlike despair.” (60)

²⁹¹ Davie, 40.

A generation gap is apparent, manifest in the same loss of the ambiguity of humor that Kundera will lament later on:

“A new, humorless generation is now arising,
It takes in deadly earnest all we received with laughter.” (60)

As Fiut notes, “when faced with such experiences, both the value system based on liberal models and the literary language that transmits those values turn out to be powerless.”²⁹² Milosz then indicates how to make safe use of language against enemies: use ambiguity to your advantage, all the time aware of what the ‘official lexicon’ permits or forbids. The correct tone is exalted, lack of enthusiasm is suspicious (Kundera will note, too, that exaltation is a prerequisite of mass control):

“The voice of passion is better than the voice of reason.
The passionless cannot change history.” (60)

Milosz gives a list of everything that must be dispensed with to ensure survival (like in a sinking boat, these are the things that need to go overboard) -- attachment to any place, memories that can be used against you, any kind of loyalty, any sense of history as glorious:

“Do not gaze into the pools of the past.
Their corroded surface will mirror
A face different from the one you expected.” (61)

History can always be manipulated (Fiut also notes Milosz’s “conviction of the changeableness of history”²⁹³), with no one to protest against this manipulation. On the contrary, the past can be made to mean whatever we want it to mean. In Orwell’s words in *1984*, “he who controls the past controls the future,” and a falsified image of the past can be used to justify present actions:

²⁹² Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 43.

²⁹³ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 165.

“Proud of dominion over people long vanished,
Change the past into your own, better likeness.” (61)

The conclusion of the poem clearly indicates that no relief is available any longer from the all-encompassing totalitarian power -- humor is forbidden, particularly at the expense of those exercising that ultimate power. Self-effacement is the way to ensure survival, and protected by this anonymity, acknowledging only the demands of the most basic human needs, haggard with the constant awareness of danger, the ‘new man’ can safely attempt to enter the new era of unmitigated destruction:

“Tight-lipped, guided by reasons only,
Cautiously let us step into the era of the unchained fire.” (61)

Donald Davies notes that “Milosz has several times asserted, and more often implied, that his experience under totalitarian regimes, before he defected to the West, has furnished him with certain insights, about the relations between poetry and society, such as we in the West cannot afford to ignore.”²⁹⁴ *Child of Europe* is definitely an instance of poetry carrying social value, both for his compatriots in Poland, and for his new readers in the West. One of these was Robert Pinsky who, in 1999, at the international festival dedicated to the life and work of Czesław Miłosz, remarked that

“the poems of Miłosz seem to offer an intellectual and emotional response to historical reality that is grounded somehow in the precious centre of life; history not as the past nor as ingenious academic theories about the past, but as the reality that inheres in the shape of a plant, in the gesture of a family having tea in the midst of a great infernal train station, in the terrifying war for which the train station itself is a blunted memory. This underlying historical reality, equally immanent in that year of the wartime

²⁹⁴ Davie, *Czesław Miłosz*, 19.

railway terminal and in this moment, to learn the art of perceiving this reality -- this is part of why young poets read Milosz."²⁹⁵

While the young American's defamiliarization with the idea of a train station definitely explains some of his fascination with this image, it is nonetheless true that Milosz's poetry succeeds in creating a coherent view of history from the minute and supposedly unrelated details of everyday life. This direct and personal relationship with history, although not a happy one, is shared by all three authors discussed in this study.

3.3 A wariness of politics

Historical events influenced profoundly the political stand of each of Milosz, Kundera and Manea. All three have constantly declared themselves against any kind of simplifying ideology, as explained by Manea in his dialogues in the volume *The Eastern Messenger*. Their stand against extremism has, quite often, placed them at odds with political trends both in the West and in the home country.

Norman Manea, *The Eastern Messenger*²⁹⁶

In 2010 Norman Manea published in Romania a volume of dialogues with Edward Kanterian, a young philosophy lecturer at Oxford, who was born in Romania in 1969 and immigrated with his parents to Germany in 1981. Thus, the young interlocutor had both the personal interest and the necessary distance from the events and ideas under discussion to

²⁹⁵ Faggen, 'Czeslaw Milosz,' 146.

²⁹⁶ Norman Manea, *Curierul de Est. Dialog cu Edward Kanterian* (Bucuresti: Polirom, 2010). While parts of the dialogue were published in German and American journals, as shown further down, the Romanian volume offers the most comprehensive (and structured) version of the dialogue. All following quotations are from this Romanian edition, in my translation.

be able to serve as a catalyst for Manea's dispassionate and very precise review of the main ideological directions of the 20th century and their evolution well into the new millennium.

Their first encounter was on antagonistic positions, triggered by Manea's article in 1991 on the fascist years of Mircea Eliade, one of the few Romanian academic and cultural figures who had managed to achieve prominence in the western academic world as a historian of religions. The article was a review of Eliade's recently published journals and deplored their author's missed opportunity to re-evaluate his political stand: "It would have been a welcome surprise if Eliade, in his later autobiographical writing, had come to contradict his earlier positions, modified in some way his involvement with totalitarian ideology."²⁹⁷ The article seemed quite innocuous to its western readers -- in Manea's own words:

"I did not try to relate Eliade's political-ideological choices to his literary and scientific work. Memories of my own existence in a system that 'politicized' everything did, of course, partly lie behind what may have been too drastic a separation between biography and oeuvre. (A number of American readers have, in fact, reproached me for precisely this.)"²⁹⁸

However, it caused a huge scandal when published in Romania in 1992:

"Although I had strictly limited its objectives and dealt only with facts proven beyond all doubt, the readership it found did not seem at all prepared to accept them. The prevailing confusion, ignorance and frustration, the profound crisis of identity, the revival of old myths of 'national cohesion' as therapy for the present moral, economic and political crisis -- this explains, at least in part, the grotesque reaction to my essay in Romania. It was immediately denounced as a blasphemy against the great values

²⁹⁷ Norman Manea, 'Happy Guilt. Mircea Eliade, fascism and the unhappy fate of Romania,' *The New Republic* 205 (5 August 1991), 28.

²⁹⁸ Cugno, 'Interview with Norman Manea,' 36.

of the national culture. There followed a chain reaction of indignation, with spectacular anti-Semitic outbursts, which has lasted for more than two years.”²⁹⁹

Kanterian's own allegiance to what had become by then already the myth of Mircea Eliade determined him to publish an answer to Manea's article in the German edition of *Lettre Internationale*, to which he received a reply that, by his own admission, “made him think.”³⁰⁰

One can see a similar attitude in Milosz with regard to Dostoevsky, where “Dostoevsky the ideologue has been distinguished from Dostoevsky the writer in order to protect his greatness, which is marred by unfortunate pronouncements.”³⁰¹

The second act in this slow process of rapprochement between the two generations of exiled intellectuals was represented by the publication in Romania, in 1996, of another journal -- that of Mihail Sebastian,³⁰² a Romanian Jewish writer, and a good friend of Eliade's, who kept a detailed record of his daily existence in Romania between 1935-1944, and of the evolution of his relationship with Eliade, in view of the latter's closing ranks with the Romanian fascists during that period. The journal was an eye-opener for Kanterian, who decided to translate it into German, recovering this instance of Jewish and Romanian history for the larger, European context.

The third act happened in New York, where Kanterian asked Manea for an interview, in 1998. The first version of the interview was published, again, in *Lettre Internationale*, in October 2000, then in *Neue Züricher Zeitung* in 2001; an adapted version of the two appeared in *Partisan Review* in 2002³⁰³, focusing on different versions of totalitarianism and the intellectual's responsibilities. As Kanterian remembers, “we decided

²⁹⁹ Cugno, 'Interview with Norman Manea,' 37.

³⁰⁰ Ovidiu Simonca, 'Vad la oameni din generatia mea aceeași dorința de a-si asuma istoria.' Interviu cu Edward KANTERIAN, [I see at people my age the same wish to take responsibility for their history] *Observatorul cultural* 398 (15 November 2007), http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Vad-la-oameni-din-generatia-mea-aceeasi-dorinta-de-a-si-asuma-istoria.-Interviu-cu-Edward-KANTERIAN*articleID_18735-articles_details.html, accessed November 12, 2012.

³⁰¹ Milosz, 'Dostoevsky' in *To Begin Where I Am*, 282.

³⁰² Mihail Sebastian, *Journal 1935-1944. The Fascist Years*, Translator: Patrick Camiller, Introduction: Radu Ioanid, Ivan R. Dee Publisher, Chicago, 2000.

³⁰³ Kanterian, 'Trivializing Tragedy,' 186-205.

to publish the simpler questions in *Aufbau* and to continue the dialogue on the other topics,” ending up with “a text partially published in various journals, but apparently endless.” (361). Basically, the dialogue extended between 1999 and 2001, and the 2010 volume opens with a new version of this two-year-long exchange, organized (for the Romanian readers) along several main topics: literature, the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, and Romania -- past and present. Here Manea confesses: “I was myself a passionate communist, in love with the utopia of equality and a happy future for all [...] I was 12-13 years old! [...] I was completely cured by the time I was 17.” (54) Only he does not see his ‘cure’ as some remarkable achievement, since “the duplicity and poverty and tyranny were obvious; I didn’t even think it possible for anyone living the real socialism to stay truly communist, just in the name of an indefinite future and of that ‘new man,’ not in any way better than the old one.” (55)

The dialogue continues with an overview of the intellectual debates in Romania at that time, with Manea accusing the fashionable, oversimplifying anti-communism rooted “in a narrow and provincial rightist traditionalism of the type common before the Second World War, with acute nationalist pulsations.” (56) The discussion then covers several important figures of Romanian culture -- Sebastian, Cioran -- and culminates with the burning issue on the Romanian cultural agenda at the time: the apparent ‘competition’ between the Holocaust and Gulag, where

“the Gulag recently became [...] a propagandistic excuse and not the subject of an honest analysis of the day-to-day totalitarianism, of the burden of total dependence on the state, and of the multi-layered police state. It was an excuse not only to blame the West, but also to justify the usual moaning and groaning over the fate of the always-so-innocent, injustice-suffering, and ignored homeland.” (72)

Unfortunately, “the Holocaust was not widely discussed in the East during communism. The topic was rather avoided, if not forbidden, in order to protect the memory of a nationalist past and its contribution to the Holocaust, and not to suggest any similarities between the two

totalitarian systems.” (73) Consequently, “the Gulag sometimes substitutes the Holocaust in the public debate over the East’s recent and less recent history.” (74)

On the other hand, Manea is also surprised at “the hesitation of some West-European intellectuals to lucidly and severely analyze the Gulag,” and deplores the fact the Left seems to be missing their “chance to complete a final and clear break with Communism.” For him, “the Left’s assignment now should consist of liberating humanistic ‘mythology’ from tyranny and the illusion of utopia and lend substance again to rationalism and pragmatism, freedom and iconoclasm, and legal and social ideals.” (95) This should start with the admission that “communism is a naive and dangerous simplification of human existence and fatally requires that man must fit himself into dogma, not the other way around.” (98) In an earlier interview, Manea had asked that “socialism, as political doctrine, should present at least two basic items of evidence: a viable, practical, efficient social project and an acceptance of the principle of opposition as an agent for debate, control and change.”³⁰⁴

This discussion takes them to America and to Marxism in the academic world. It continues with Manea’s memories from September 11, and his observation that

“the cult of death is not strictly a Muslim phenomenon. Even before 1945 extremists of the European Right celebrated death and the morbid reactionary and nationalist revolution with the same fervor with which their Left-wing adversaries were preaching and promoting the internationalist utopia of progress. They were all dreaming of the globalization of their doctrine.” (110)

The dialogue concludes with a discussion of what exile had meant for Manea, starting from his first stop, in Berlin, a city seen as “an enclave of multinational dialogue.” (122)

³⁰⁴ Norman Manea, ‘Romania’s Image in the World,’ interview with Gabriela Adamesteanu (1990), in *Casa melcului*, 73.

The next meeting between the two took place in March 2007 and this time the discussion centers on Manea's writings, and the renewed interest for them in Romania, after a series of literary prizes confirmed Manea's recognition as an international author. It starts with *The Hooligan's Return*, the literary product of Manea's first visit to Romania after the fall of communism, and moves on to discuss the new generation, who no longer has the direct experience of communism. From here, the conversation moves to the way identities are built (Manea's examples are always problematic: Paul Celan -- Jewish German and Romanian; Imre Kertesz -- Jewish Hungarian), but Manea embraces the ambiguity of his own identity: "I feel privileged not to have a clear identity, or to have a multifarious and confusing identity, that goes beyond the mythology of a particular social or ethnic or political or linguistic group." (191) On the whole, he is weary of idealized visions and regrets "the ethnocentrism of Eastern Europe" (204) and the fact that political and intellectual figures in contemporary Romania do not seem to embrace liberal ideas, except on a declarative level. In agreement with Kundera, he sees literature as the right place for ambiguity and multiple options, although in the past "everything you wrote was always read through an ideological lens, thus denying the autonomy of the aesthetic, turning it into a pretext for political incriminations." (211) For him, though, "art cannot be reduced to a strictly unitary, ideologically coherent vision, and art, literature have their ambiguities and obscure areas, codes and depth that do not allow such simplification." (212)

The two go on to explore "the relationship between art, creativity and ideology, faith, and political options," (213) and analyze a recent debate in Romanian society over the presence of Christian orthodox symbols in schools, concluding with the necessity of a secularized education system, a need that did not seem to have been understood by most Romanian intellectuals participating in the debate. In the ensuing discussion on the role of the intellectual in the contemporary world, Manea observes that "there is a huge difference, even today, between Europe and the United States regarding the role of the intellectual, In

the US the intellectuals are marginalized, seen only as a professional" (222), while in Romania there were two categories of intellectuals -- the party intellectual, and the intellectuals involved in the so-called 'resistance through culture,' which was an aesthetic stand, as the only type of resistance possible under a totalitarian regime -- something that Milosz identified in his *Captive Mind*. On the whole, though, the literary production of Romanian intellectuals is still tainted, either by the intrusion of ideology or by a too obvious avoidance of it, so much so, that "you cannot take even the commas at face value in the existing documents." (224) On the other side of the Atlantic, echoing Kundera in France, Manea is annoyed with:

"the absence of intellectual debate in the public forum. Debate in the US is sectarian, within small specialized groups, in literary magazines [...] The intellectual as a moral guide for the nation seems to have disappeared. I don't know whether this is good or bad. It's not quite clear who replaced him. The anchor man did not replace him adequately." (226-7)

In this context, Manea is baffled by "the alliance between part of the political Left-wing with Islamic fundamentalism, as a way to fight against capitalism and America." On the whole, though, in its sheltered environment, American academic life is "a hothouse of good intentions based on intellectual candor" (228), that could benefit from the perspective of "those who come from Eastern Europe," who might have a better grasp of the international environment and manage to "dampen utopian solutions." (229) Pragmatically, for example, (extrapolating on the Eastern European experience of nation-formation on a cultural basis) Manea suggests a "linguistic reform" as a starting point towards a modernization of Islam, since "classical Arabic of the Koran is not understood by the population." (235) (It might be worth noting that the recent revolutionary movements in Islamic countries, and the subsequent moves towards democracy bear quite a few similarities with the events of 1989 in East-Central Europe). Still, as Kanterian notes, in the

United States Manea was “confronted with the clichés promoted today in education, in the political debate, in the taboos of the day.” (243)

Their third encounter took place between January and July 2010, summarizing, in Kanterian’s words, “the topics that motivated this dialogue for a decade. That is, old and new extremism, and Romanian literature.” (261) That the two are interconnected, Manea exemplifies with the fact that “Ceausescu’s dictatorship found it easier to reclaim Eliade, in spite of his fascist past, than Eugen Ionesco, the apolitical democrat who had initially leaned towards the Left.” (262) Both extremes are quite similar, although there is one essential distinction:

“the fascist option was free, at a time when there were other political options in Romania. The option for the Romanian Communist Party was free only in the beginning, for a small number of people who had become members of the Communist Party, for others, later on, it was an opportunistic compromise for survival or a career, if not simply an attempt at self-preservation in a totalitarian state that had all control mechanisms -- privileges or destruction -- at its disposal.” (266)

In the new ‘anticommunist bolshevism’ Manea sees “an immense pathology of resentment which coagulates frustrations and utopia, giving them militant and murderous cohesion.” (274) It “trivializes, simplifies and manipulates a barely disappeared reality.” (282)

Manea’s disturbing example is Paul Goma, a Romanian writer who was exiled to France in the 1970’s for his very determined stand against the atrocities of the communist system. Goma’s evolution in France was towards radicalization -- from the premise that because communism is the ultimate evil, any kind of fight against communism (including that of the Romanian extreme right movement) is justified. In Manea’s view, this is an instance where “between combative ‘purity’ and the ‘impurities’ of adjustment, life itself introduces, more than once, troubling, unexpected consequences of the former.” (302) In recent years, Goma has turned against almost all his initial supporters, whom he accuses of collaborating

with the system, and has closed ranks with the extreme right. His autobiography³⁰⁵ reads as a list of enemies and his grievances against each of these enemies, with his literary work quoted as evidence against them. This happened in spite of Manea's hope that "the intellectual in the East had a lot to learn from the history he had lived, from his own biography. He would have enough to communicate on anti-totalitarian thinking." Instead, "we can already see, in the East, a resurgence of nationalism and chauvinism [...] and in the West a reactivation of old leftist tendencies that are both oversimplifying and militant." (311)

Manea's own efforts to place himself at equal distance from all extremes have led to the paradoxical situation where, as Kanterian observes, while critics in the West see Manea as right-wing, the ones in the East consider him left-wing. From this central position, Manea considers that "Communist, Nazi or Islamic totalitarianism have in common *resentment* as the centre of thought and action, with social justifications for Communists, racial justifications for Nazis, and religious justifications for Islamic or any other kind of fundamentalists." (319) His deeply rooted mistrust of extremes is definitely shared by both Kundera and Milosz, who confesses: "I am grateful to my life experiences for my skepticism,"³⁰⁶ and might be considered the political legacy of East-Central Europe, a legacy transmitted by means of language.

3.4 Language as home

In his dialogue with Kanterian, Manea states: "I think an author is defined by the language in which he writes, irrespective of the kind of literature he creates."³⁰⁷ His numerous interviews, collected in two volumes (*The Snail's House* and *The Nomad Text*) are used here as a

³⁰⁵ http://paulgoma.free.fr/paulgoma_pdf/pdf/PAUL_GOMA_BIO_BIBLIOGRAFIE_1909_2007.pdf, accessed November 12, 2012.

³⁰⁶ Milosz, 'From *Notebook*' in *To Begin Where I Am*, 439.

³⁰⁷ Manea, *Curierul de Est*, 341.

commentary on the position of a writer who makes the counterintuitive choice of writing in a language accessible only to a restricted audience.

Norman Manea, *The Snail's House*³⁰⁸

The title of this first volume sets the main theme: language, the home a writer can take with him, like a snail does its shell, wherever he goes. Manea explains this in an interview with Ilan Stavans, included in this collection: "When in actual exile, a writer's tragedy comes in the form of language. Language is home and homeland for a writer. I left everything in Romania but I will never be able to totally abandon -- or be abandoned by -- the Romanian language. I took the language, the home, with me as a snail."³⁰⁹ (170) The volume covers the first decade after the fall of communism, plus a couple of earlier interviews, and represents, in Manea's own words, "a testimony on the times through which the author, together with his interlocutors and their writings have lived." ('Foreword,' p. 10)

The first interview dates back to 1980 and touches on one of the topics that were taboo in Romania at the time -- the Romanian Holocaust -- thus opening the series of (sometimes willful) misunderstandings between Manea and his readers, both in Romania and in the West. The discussion triggers the interviewer's question whether the true power of the writer (in the context of his status) does not work, in the end, outside literature, and this could cause the fascination it holds. The next interview (with Gerrit Bogaard) from before 1989 (Manea himself introduces this distinction in the volume) deals again with the Romanian Holocaust (with Manea protesting 'I am not a Holocaust writer'), this time for a western audience. The interviewers continue to alternate -- Romanians and Westerners -- a clear image of the author oscillating between the two audiences (Gabriela Adamesteanu,

³⁰⁸ Norman Manea, *Casa melcului* (Bucuresti: Hasefer 1999). All following quotations are from this edition.

³⁰⁹ Stavans, 'Lies, Disguises, Exile,' 95.

Leopold Ferdinand...; the volume is organized chronologically). The recurrent theme is always language as “the writer’s home,” while “exile, for a writer, means suicide.” (49)

In a 1992 interview with Philip Roth, Manea claims that “the writer finds refuge in his language -- his homeland and his placenta. One can even, gradually, convince himself that he lives in a language, and not in a country. A writer’s freedom is his writing.” (91) But language itself was not left untouched by ideology: “[A] solemn tone was the tone of the Party. Opposing it in the same manner would have meant using (even involuntarily) something you’re trying to challenge [...] Some books that ‘expose’ communism unfortunately suffer from precisely this lingering effect of totalitarianism.” (97) To his Romanian interlocutor (Marta Petreu) in the same year, he complains of “the despair of a writer dispossessed of his language, plunged into the unknown of a world where he arrives late, already frail and burdened by too sinuous a biography.” (108) To Alexandru Vlad, in 1993, he explains his expectations from a good translation: “[A]n acceptable English version [...] means first of all a fluent text, but also a comprehensible transfer of a human universe to a reader for whom many implicit references are foreign,” particularly since “the main differences between two languages [...] are in the end structural, mental differences.” (116). The result is “a linguistic tension between the two languages that claim me.” (119)

His western readers are aware of Manea’s allegiance to Romanian. Marco Cugno, in an interview taken in 1994 remembers that, as early as 1990 Manea had said: “For me, to write means to write in Romanian. It is therefore not possible to free myself from my past, from my country, from what I consider a ‘spiritual geography.’” Now he adds: “Romania was the formative landscape of my existence [...] For me today, however, Romania is above all the Romanian language.” (160) This interview appeared originally in 1995 in the Italian monthly *Linea d’Ombra*, on the occasion of the publication by Feltrinelli of Norman Manea’s *Un Paradiso Forzato*, published in the U.S. as *Compulsory Happiness*. In English, the interview was split into two parts -- the first, published in 1996 in *TriQuarterly*

focuses on Manea's experience of the Holocaust, the second, published in 1997 in *Salmagundi* explores his fiction.³¹⁰

Oppositely, the next interview in the volume, with the Mexico-born Jewish author Ilan Stavans is only a fragment of the larger piece published in 1997 in *Salmagundi*.³¹¹ As Stavans observes on the stereotypical nature of the Eastern European writer in the West, who "ended up becoming the Platonic universal of the Eastern European thinking creature" (171), Manea avoids repeating himself to his Romanian readers, and offers here only some considerations on language and literature:

"For a Jewish writer even more than for other writers, language may seem a legitimization, a spiritual home. His control of the language is more than an achievement. Through language he feels rich and stable; and when he is in full charge of his wealth, he feels he has gained a citizenship, a sense of belonging." (173)

In the same vein, in the next interview, taken by Claudio Magris in 1998, Manea speaks about "linguistic exile" which, for a writer, is the equivalent of a "burnt offering, his Holocaust." (191)

The interview with Kanterian is only a first draft of what was finally published in 2010 in *The Eastern Messenger*, with Manea emphasizing that "even a writer like Kundera, who managed to separate himself successfully, even on a linguistic level, from his country, still needed more than ten years to redefine himself." (209) Closing the circle, the last interview speaks to his Romanian readers about his first fictional book written in the West -- *Compulsory Happiness*. The return of the author to his home country has begun.

³¹⁰ Cugno, 'Character and Confrontation.'

³¹¹ Stavans, 'Lies, Disguises, Exile.'

The Nomad Text³¹²

If the previous volume featured a more or less (depending on where we place Kanterian) balanced number of Romanian and western interviewers, this second volume definitely inclines towards the Romanian side -- at the start of the millennium, Manea and his 'Nomad text' were finally capturing the attention of the public in his home country. With this title, Manea places now the accent on content -- the 'text' proper, rather than just medium -- language. The collection of interviews traces Manea's intellectual trajectory from after he left Romania, for his Romanian readers, and rewrites it in a more complex (two-way) manner than that which was noted by Michelle Woods with Kundera. One of the first interviews is actually entitled 'There and here' and was published both in an American and a Romanian journal in 1999, as a presentation of the author to both audiences. Another interview was initially published in an Italian journal on the occasion of the publication of Manea's *Black Envelope* in Italian and it works again for both audiences.

Two more installments of the first dialogue with Kanterian are included next, on the writer's obsessions and democracy. The next interview, with a Romanian critic, returns to the metaphor of the language as a snail's shell and nuances it: "[I]f the snail travels around the world, we should pay attention to the chemical ways in which the environment acts upon its shell, as it could macerate it, modify it or change its initial condition. We can see an interaction here which probably should not be neglected." (75) By now, Manea has discovered a common language with his American friends, and it is not Romanian (as in his earlier fantasies).

Starting from the tragedy of 9/11, the interview with Romanian literary critic Rodica Binder presents for the Romanian readers aspects of the American society and the academic discussions there, like globalization (which Manea sees not as "ethnic,

³¹² Norman Manea, *Textul Nomad* (Bucuresti: Hasefer, 2006). All following quotations are from this edition.

ideological, political, national uniformity, but a meta-geographical collaboration, made much easier today, with all its imperfections, its risk, but also with its natural promises” (86)), extremisms (of the same substance, irrespective of ideological justifications: “[E]ven in these extreme circumstances, some stars of the ‘secular’ left do not distance themselves much from their ‘religious’ fundamentalist brothers. They are all victims of the same mind patterns, with old and always new disastrous consequences” (94)), and political correctness. In the next interview Manea talks about Germany, Berlin (his first stop on his way to the West, a turning point), exile. By now, the ‘burnt offering’ of exile (like the searing of farming land) may prove enriching. The critic notes a change even in Manea’s phrasing:

“Rupture as a vein of creation, a theme appears often in your writings; rupture is sometimes reflected even in the structure of the phrase, which is somehow elliptical, like an interior monologue and, at the same time, an attempt to establish communication with the outside world, most of the times metaphorically, sometimes with sarcastic, surrealist tone.” (113)

The essential role of language is highlighted in another interview with a Romanian critic, which tackles Manea’s reception as a Romanian writer in the United States. Manea clarifies his own sense of belonging to Romanian literature (that is, literature written in Romanian language, in itself a controversial issue for Romanian literary critics in the 1990s, when they were faced with the task of integrating writers of the Diaspora -- previously ignored by the communist regime -- into the canon of Romanian literary history):

“A writer can define his allegiance in many ways. In these times of overreaching mutations, when national identity (and even nationalism) appear sometimes to be replaced by allegiance to specific groups, based on ethnicity, political or religious choices, or even on sexual preferences, all sorts of new labels have appeared, even for writers: *black writer, conservative writer, lesbian writer, Catholic writer, Jewish*

writer, woman writer, etc. [in English in the original]. Beyond all these classifications, I think language remains essential in the case of literature.” (133)

Two sections are dedicated to international events (the Italian Nonino prize for literature, being granted honorary citizenship of Jerusalem) that marked the inclusion of Manea’s literature in a world context, as he remarks on a recurring character in his prose:

“the vagrant, the exile, the *outsider*, whom in my most recent and most autobiographical book I called the *hooligan* [in English in the original], as a complex and profoundly contemporary figure. As he is forced to accept marginality and exclusion as an existential and historical dimension, his mobile, extraterritorial living always on the margins allows him to question, to redefine the notion of ‘centre’ [including that of ‘Central Europe,’ maybe]. He finds out that the Centre no longer exists, that today the marginal condition simply coincides with the human condition. The age and society are centrifugal. Still, many insist on looking for one, either old or new. Nostalgia, self-deception. The need to belong -- to a religion, an ethnicity, a nation, an ideology. The exile, the *hooligan* are the true, fluid citizens of the global society.”

And on a more personal note, “For years I believed my centre to be my language. Today, de-centered for me, ambiguous [...] I learned -- from my biography -- to focus on the individual. I try to avoid the clichés of ethnicity, religion, ideologies.” (160-1)

The issues of translation are raised again in an interview with an American translator of Romanian literature, Sean Cotter. Manea confesses: “If I could, I would translate myself. This is the source of a deep and persistent frustration.” (183-4) For him, translation “is not just a more or less successful linguistic transposition, but a rebirth of a certain literary reality (that is, of a certain author) in another cerebral universe and in another social environment.” (187) He sees the many versions of his novel *The Black Envelope* (a first, censored one in Romanian, an English translation and a new Romanian version,

'cleared,' as much as possible, of the intrusion of censorship) as "strange, contorted reiterations of the initial experience, full of tension, but also benefiting from a certain detachment, since rewriting, unlike writing, is no longer innocent, it is 'wise,' informed." (197) Manea distinguishes between the American and the Romanian reader's experience of the novel:

"When the epic, in my prose writing, is localized, the Romanian reader is familiar with the premise [...] The American reader sees, I suspect, the exoticism of the situation, first of all [...] But he too, I hope, can find reasons for a convergence of sensibilities and questions, beyond the differences in social context. Maybe he can see even more acutely, due to his distance and detachment from that context, the essence of those conflicting situations."

Like exile, "translation is also a migration from a place (language) of 'origin' to a destination ('target' language). It is also a process of resurrecting and adapting the text, the Nomad text, to another context." (198)

Another interview enlarges the context to that of Central European literature, or to Romanian literature in exile (either in France or in the United States), even to global literature. Gradually, and mainly due to his international success, Manea is also accepted as a cultural authority in Romania. From this position, he warns: "[O]ur identity is imposed on us by history, by tradition, by our family, etc. The entity of our lucid conscience is formed by confronting this initial assumption." (254) He explains that he considers his critical attitude towards Romania as "profoundly patriotic. That of someone who cares about that place and wants it to be better, more dignified. To be more respectable." On the other hand, he admits that distance has somehow fictionalized the 'real' Romania: "[T]he far away country -- and this might happen in my fiction -- becomes a country of fiction." (264)

In the following interviews, Romanian readers are reacquainted with Manea's literature via his most recent novel, *The Hooligan's Return*, in an effort, from the critics, to

come to terms with its international success. Later interviews come back to Manea's main themes -- exile, Holocaust, communism -- emphasizing his success with the younger generation of literary critics in Romania. Manea's return to the attention of readers and critics in his home country is mirrored by that of Milosz and Kundera, and their success with younger audiences in Poland, the Czech Republic or Romania is partly explained by the fact that they continued to use their native language in their literature.

3.5 Literature as lingua franca

The three authors' own opinions on literature were presented in a succession of volumes: Czeslaw Milosz explained his *ars poetica* in his Harvard lectures in 1981-1982, collected in the volume *The Witness of Poetry*; Milan Kundera has been for decades reworking his ideas on the world history of the novel and published four volumes of essays on it (*The Art of the Novel*, *Testaments Betrayed*, *The Curtain* and *Encounter*); Norman Manea collected his articles and interviews on Romanian and world literature in two volumes -- *Envelopes and Portraits* and *Black Milk*. All these essays create a specific image of East-Central European literature, an image which, on the one hand, relates the national literatures of the region to one another, and on the other hand, integrates East-Central European literature into European literature, as a whole.

Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*³¹³

Milosz's collected Charles Eliot Norton Lectures (delivered at Harvard in 1983) were seen as his *ars poetica*, "both a poet's credo and a kind of supplement to his spiritual autobiography

³¹³ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, Charles Eliot Norton Lectures (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1984). All following references are to this edition.

as an exiled Pole.”³¹⁴ Indeed, the first lecture of the series is ‘Starting from My Europe’ and it begins by pointing out the lack of information western readers have on East-Central Europe: “[T]he literary map of Europe, as it presented itself to the West, contained until recently numerous blank spots.” (7) Milosz, consequently, proceeds to paint these blank spots for his audience, starting from a discussion of the East -- West, North -- South axes dividing Europe (Rome vs. Byzantium) and ending on the “Past -- Future axis” (10). On these coordinates, Milosz notes a change in the general mind pattern of Europe, from vertical to horizontal: “[T]he vertical orientation, when man turned his eyes towards Heaven, has gradually been replaced in Europe during the last few centuries by a horizontal longing: the always spatial human imagination has replaced ‘above’ with ‘ahead’, and that ‘ahead’ is claimed by Marxism.” (15)

Human imagination unites the ‘Poets and the Human Family.’ In Milosz’s view, poetry in the 20th century has become individualistic while, on the contrary, it should be “the act of universalizing personal experiences.” (27) In his personal experience, poetry has been much more important than it is considered in the West: “[W]hen an entire community is struck by misfortune, for instance, the Nazi occupation of Poland, the ‘schism between the poet and the great human family’ disappears and poetry becomes as essential as bread.” (31) On the same Past -- Future axis which organizes human imagination, “the last things -- Salvation and Damnation, Judgment, the Kingdom of God, the Goal of History” connect “the time assigned to one human life with the time of all humanity” (37), and direct individuals towards human essentials.

What stands in the way of an image of the world that transcends the immediate is ‘The Lesson of Biology’ which, Milosz notes, has taught humans to consider themselves simple statistics: “[T]he weakening of the human personality dispossessed of its uniqueness

³¹⁴ Alter, ‘Milosz: Poetry and Politics,’ 42.

by social laws and psychological determinants turned it into an interchangeable statistical unit.” (46) This is also reflected into literature, which has lost its essentialist quality:

“in the repertory of the twentieth century there is no place either for a platonic dualism of soul and body or for eternal fame -- that would not accord with our sensitivity to constantly changing styles and tastes -- nor is there any place for a work-in-itself, that perhaps final attempt at saving some absolute criteria.” (48)

Indeed, in his ‘Quarrel with Classicism,’ Milosz identifies the many changes which have occurred “in the place and function of poetry, especially during the last one hundred years.” (62) For him, “classicism is a paradise lost for it implies a community of belief and feelings which unite poet and audience.” (65) Consequently, “a quarrel exists between classicism and realism” (69) since, “when writing, every poet is making a choice between the dictates of the poetic language [as emphasized by classicism] and his fidelity to the real.” (71) The poet’s “longing for perfect mimesis” though is only answered by “the bitter realization of the inadequacy of language.” (74) Once literature has lost its privileged position as a value in itself, the constant battle in the field of post-classical literature is with the reduced means of language to express an overwhelming reality.

It is again from his own experience that Milosz talks about ‘Ruins and Poetry,’ as he has seen with his own eyes “what happens to modern poetry in certain historical conditions.” (79) As a poet in Poland during the war, he realized that “next to the atrocious facts, the very idea of literature seems indecent” (84) and what was needed was “a most humble art of mimesis” where “reality, as it is remembered, is paramount and dictates the means of expression.” (85) And this is where Milosz locates his *ars poetica*, on the “assumption that once reality surpasses any means of naming it, it can be attacked only in a roundabout way, as it is reflected in somebody’s subjectivity.” (93)

In conclusion, though, Milosz focuses ‘On Hope,’ on the hope brought by literature, by “poetry as something entangled in transformations of mentality.” (101) It is this

mentality, “a reductionist Weltanschauung professed universally today” that Milosz hopes “will be superseded by another vision better adapted to the complexities of the world and of individuals.” In his view, “this will be connected, in one or another way, with a new dimension, entered on by elemental humanity [...] the dimension of the past of our human race” (110), a newly acquired historical consciousness of humanity. The connection of individual human beings to a set of universal human values can be achieved via personal experience as an actualization of history -- as it is expressed in literature.

Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*³¹⁵

Taking his interest in the European novel with him to France, Kundera publishes in 1986 (in French, thus directed primarily to an international, or at least European audience) a new *The Art of the Novel*. This is, as Kundera warns his readers from the very beginning “a practitioner’s confession,” and not a theoretical work. Although he also admits that “every novelist’s work contains an implicit vision of the history of the novel, an idea of what the novel is,” the seven chapters are actually independent (sometimes occasional) pieces of writing put together in order to better illuminate this vision. The work is an obvious reaction to the constant misunderstandings to which Kundera felt his work was subjected and, as noticed by Perry Meisel, “an overt disavowal of any political agenda.”³¹⁶

‘The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes’ identifies this vision as historical: “[T]he path of the novel emerges as a parallel history of the Modern Era.” (9) Its periods, according to the “particular aspect of being on which the novel concentrates,” are adventure for Cervantes, journey for Diderot, the social institutions for Balzac, or the private realm of the

³¹⁵ Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, translated from the French by Linda Asher (New York: Grove Press, 1988). All following references are to this edition.

³¹⁶ Perry Meisel, “Beautifying Lies and Polyphonic Wisdom”, review of *The Art of the Novel*, by Milan Kundera, *The New York Times Book Review* (April 10, 1988), <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-art.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

individual for Flaubert. Kundera goes on to refute modern critics' apprehensions regarding the death of the novel. He first states that the novel still has an important role to play, by discovering "what only the novel can discover" (5) and then points out that formally, the novel has not exhausted all possibilities, there are still roads not taken, opened by the great precursors: play (Sterne, Diderot), dream (Kafka), thought (Musil, Broch), time (Proust).

Exemplifying Kundera's dispute with the critics, 'Dialogue on the Art of the Novel' offers an edited dialogue with Christian Salmon for *The Paris Review*, edited this time so it includes the points the author wants to make, and not just the issues the journalist is interested in. In a later interview with Lois Oppenheim Kundera complains again about the fact that "an author, once quoted by a journalist, is no longer master of his word; he loses the author's right to what he says."³¹⁷ Not surprisingly, here, the main point he wants to make is against the historicity of his novels (and of all novels in his understanding of the term) and for a more general reading, from a human perspective. He insists that historical circumstances in his novels are used with economy and only in order to create "a revelatory existential situation" for his characters, as "a novel examines not reality, but existence. And existence is not what has occurred, existence is the realm of human possibilities." The art of the novelist is to "draw up the map of existence by discovering this or that human possibility." (42)

In the interview with Lois Oppenheim quoted above, Kundera actually identifies within the course of the history of the novel, as he sees it, a "pleiad' of Central Europe's great novelists": Kafka, Broch, Musil, Gombrowicz. The four, in Kundera's opinion, mark a return to the novel's "play essence (so striking in Rabelais, Cervantes, Sterne, Diderot)" and he finds the fact that "these authors are relatively little known in America [...] an intellectual

³¹⁷ Lois Oppenheim, 'Clarifications, Elucidations: An Interview with Milan Kundera,' *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 9.2 (Summer, 1989): 8.

scandal.” He then admits that his constant preoccupation with their work may be his way of finding his own tradition within the European novel, mainly by exclusion:

“‘Slavic literature’ doesn’t exist. If my books were situated in a ‘Slavic’ context, I wouldn’t recognize myself. This is an artificial and false context. The Central European context (which, linguistically, is Germano-Slavo-Hungarian) is, for my books, a more accurate context.”

Later on in the interview, though, Kundera goes back to the point he has been trying to make in all his theoretical writings, that “the only context that can reveal the meaning and value of a novelistic work is the context of the history of European novel.”³¹⁸

Kundera’s personal position within the history of the European novel is explained in ‘Notes inspired by *The Sleepwalkers*.’ Kundera begins by identifying the reason for his fascination with Broch in the fact that, unlike their predecessors who had been using a continuity of action, or characters, they both rely on a continuity of theme. For Broch, the theme is that of a man facing the process of a disintegration of values. Formally, too, they both see in the novel “a tendency to embrace other genres, to absorb philosophical and scientific knowledge” (64), and he deplores the fact that Broch’s work (much like his own) has been “deprived of its natural audience, deprived of contact with a normal literary life” and as such is not part of “establishment modernism.”

Kundera’s own novels and techniques are the more direct focus of ‘Dialogue on the Art of Composition.’ Firstly he defines the novel as “a meditation on existence as seen through the medium of imaginary characters” (83). Then he describes his novels as working on two levels: the level of the story and the level of the themes, where “the themes are worked out steadily within and by the story.” Kundera goes here into more detail, defining some of the techniques he would employ, from counterpoint to digression, motif and down to the theme-words. Unlike so many prescriptive books on creative writing, which go from

³¹⁸ Oppenheim, 9-10.

theory to practice, Milan Kundera works rather the other way round: he identifies his techniques and then he justifies their use in view of his theory of the novel.

In order to clarify his views on literary techniques, 'Somewhere Behind,' comes with another study of a favorite novelist of Kundera's: Franz Kafka. He begins by defining the Kafkaesque as "one fundamental possibility of man and his world, a possibility that is not historically determined and that accompanies man more or less eternally" (106). This possibility, like the Platonic idea, goes beyond actual historical situations: "History does not invent, it discovers. Through new situations, History reveals what man is, what has been in him 'for a long, long time,' what his possibilities are." (116) And again, Kundera uses this study of Kafka to define his own stand against politicizing literature: "The enormous social, political and 'prophetic' import of Kafka's novels lies precisely in their 'nonengagement,' that is to say, in their total autonomy from all political programs, ideological concepts and futurological progress." (116-7)

As an example of the potential misunderstandings involved in a political reading of literature, 'Sixty-three Words' offers a series of definitions of some key words 'according to Kundera,' similar to the "dictionary of words misunderstood" in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* -- another consequence of the cross-cultural encounters Kundera had in translations. Their importance for the author can be seen from the fact that Kundera chose to revisit and expand on the topic in the 1988 article 'Key Words, Problem Words, Words I Love.'³¹⁹ Quite revealingly, most of the terms can be grouped under several categories and these categories underlie the levels of misunderstanding between Central and Western Europe as cultural entities:

- Literary or more broadly artistic / aesthetic issues: aphorism, beauty, comic, definition, excitement, flow, graphomania, ideas, idyll, interview, irony, kitsch, lyric / lyricism,

³¹⁹ Milan Kundera, 'Key Words, Problem Words, Words I Love,' *The New York Times Book Review* (March 6, 1988).

laughter, meditation, message, modern, novel, novelist, opus, repetitions, rewriting, rhythm, ugly, work.

Milosz empathizes with Kundera's abhorrence of kitsch:

"In all languages, *belles lettres* are predominantly kitsch and melodrama; however, the accidents of Polish history decreed that fiction had an exceptionally powerful effect on people's minds, as a language and as a sensibility, so that I suspect there is in the so-called Polish soul an exceptionally thick underpinning of Kitsch."³²⁰

- Ontological: being, fate, forgetting, inexperience, lightness, nonbeing, nonthought, old age, value, youth;
- Moral: betrayal, collaborator, infantocracy, macho, misogynist, obscenity, transparency, vulgarity;
- Geo-political and historical: border, Central Europe, Soviet, *temps modernes* -- here actually the categories overlap, as they do in the last category, that of
- Objects -- theme words of his work: hat, hat stand, letters, uniform.

The volume ends with 'Jerusalem Address: The Novel and Europe,' the speech Kundera made in 1985 upon receiving the Jerusalem Prize: "[T]he closing lines of my reflection on the novel and Europe," a revealing conclusion, a final plea for the European character of the novel and its unlimited possibilities. In that explanatory interview with Lois Oppenheim, Kundera insists: "I say 'European novel;,' but I understand this adjective in the Husserlian sense: not as a geographical term, but a 'spiritual' one which takes in both America and, for example, Israel." The history of the novel takes precedence over geography, and Kundera's definition of the European novel becomes inclusive, rather than exclusive: "What I call the 'European novel' is the history that goes from Cervantes to Faulkner."³²¹

³²⁰ Milosz, 'Dictionary of Wilno Streets,' in *To Begin Where I Am*, 51.

³²¹ Oppenheim, 'Clarifications, Elucidations,' 10.

Testaments Betrayed³²²

We can better understand Kundera's long-lasting frustration at being constantly misunderstood when we see that in 1993 he publishes another 'essay' on literature, again in French, where the very title suggests intentional misreading: *Testaments Betrayed. An Essay in Nine Parts*. Kundera goes back to his favorite themes in what can be termed (as Christopher Lehmann-Haupt puts it in his book review) "improvisational criticism," where he "unpredictably touches down almost everywhere."³²³

The opening section, 'The Day Panurge No Longer Makes People Laugh,' takes the reader even further back in the history of the novel than the previous volume (*The Art of the Novel*) to "the extraordinary moment of the birth of a new genre" (3) -- the novel -- and Kundera identifies its essential mark as humor, which generates ambiguity. From this ambiguity, more specifically from the moral ambiguity the novel affords, Kundera traces the birth of the character, and he goes on to identify various types of characters: those standing for an ideology (Dostoyevsky's), those living according to a borrowed ideology (Tolstoy's), archetypes (Thomas Mann's), and also his own characters in *The Joke* (further discussed in the chapter on Kundera's fiction). Already, Kundera's perspective is no longer focused on the Central European novel, but on the European novel, more generally.

Kundera's overview sees the history of the novel as "revenge on history itself," a history that is "neither predetermined, nor identical with the idea of progress" (15) and that can help us identify an aesthetic value system: "[G]reat works can only be born within the history of their art and as participants in this history." (17) Focusing on the history of the European novel, Kundera sees it as trans-national, moving from Boccaccio's Italy to

³²² Milan Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed. An Essay in Nine Parts*, translated from the French by Linda Asher (New York: Harper Collins, 2001). All subsequent references are to this edition.

³²³ Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, 'On the Autonomy of Art and How It is Betrayed,' review of *Testaments Betrayed*, by Milan Kundera, *The New York Times Books of the Times*, September 21, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/21/books/books-of-the-times-on-the-autonomy-of-art-and-how-it-is-betrayed.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

Cervantes' Spain (and his picaresque novel), to England in the 18th century, France in the 19th century and Russia in late 19th century. For him, the beginning of the 20th century belongs to Central Europe, with Kafka, Musil, Broch and Gombrowicz framing "a common European consciousness." (29) The 20's and 30's bear the mark of North American novelists, and the 60's bring us the novels from Latin America, "from below the thirty-fifth parallel, the novel of the South: a great novelistic culture characterized by an extraordinary sense of the real coupled with an untrammelled imagination that breaks every rule of plausibility," (31) a characteristic strongly reminiscent of Kafka.

'The Castrating Shadow of Saint Garta' returns to Kafka and the way his literary inheritance has been shaped by his literary executor, Max Brod, "a man of ideas" who "knew nothing of the passion for form." (39) Although admitting that without Brod's betrayal of Kafka's testamentary wish that all his (yet unpublished) books be burnt we would never have heard of them, Kundera complains against the way in which their reading turned into hagiography that "systematically dislodges Kafka from the domain of the aesthetic." (51)

Expanding again the cultural horizon, 'Improvisation in Homage to Stravinsky' parallels the history of the novel with that of music, identifying two major periods for each, but with non-concomitant caesuras, which goes to prove another idea dear to Kundera -- the autonomy of art: "[T]his asynchronism shows that the deepest causes governing the rhythm of the history of the arts are not sociological or political, but aesthetic." (57) Of the two periods, he certainly favors the first (both with the novel and music) and rejects the second's emphasis on emotion, on "the need to consider damp eyes better than dry eyes, the hand on the heart better than the hand in the pocket, belief better than skepticism, passion better than serenity, faith better than knowledge." (64) Fortunately, he also sees in modernism a third period that rehabilitates the first, with its eclecticism so well represented by Stravinsky - - an emigrant who made music his home. Himself an emigrant, Kundera insists in part IV, 'A Sentence' on another issue on which he feels deeply: translations, again pleading for the

translator's faithfulness to the translated author's style, rather than what is considered "good French (or good German, good English, etc.)." (106) In his view, the author's style includes repetitions, a specific inner rhythm of the text, and even the typographical appearance that the translator should take care to import into the target language.

On the larger scale of literary methods, 'À la Recherche du Présent Perdu' offers an overview of the ways in which literature has sought to capture the present moment. Kundera sees in prose the "daily, concrete, momentary aspect" of reality, "the opposite of myth," (131) which makes it the perfect choice for the novel: the use of prose over verse in the epic form marks the beginnings of the novel, in the 16th century, while dramatic literature, less preoccupied with this concrete quality, switched from verse to prose much later. This quest for the concreteness of the present moment, Kundera goes on to say, is often misunderstood by literary critics who insist on linking the novelists' books to their biographies and on assigning moral values to a form of art whose strong point, according to Kundera, is precisely the moral ambiguity it creates (from the convergence of various personal perspectives).

The opposite of prose is lyricism, as a mere expression of the author's self (which Milosz rejected, too), so in 'Works and Spiders,' Kundera speaks against it and explains why he chose the novel, a form that "would rule out identification with any politics, any religion, any ideology, any moral doctrine, any group." (156) In the composition of a novel he identifies themes and bridges (fillers for the sake of composition) and he sees modern art as a revolt against the latter, "a revolt against the imitation of reality, in the name of the autonomous laws of art" (158). The composition he proposes (and exemplifies with *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*) is "small scale" and free of "non-thematic passages," (166) very personal for each author, as much a sign of the writer's originality as his/her themes and style.

The focus on composition associates the novel with a musical creation and in 'The Unloved Child of the Family, Kundera discusses again the influence of the author's biography on his work, as exemplified by the life and work of Czech composer Leos Janacek. Still maintaining that the author's biographical details should not influence the way we see a work of art, Kundera admits that the position of an author in the larger perspective of the history of his/her art may limit his freedom of expression (dependant on his/her position of authority, or lack of it) and most often influences his/her reception. Going back to his definition of 'small nations,' Kundera complains against the way in which authors are linked exclusively to the small national context, rather than to the larger context of the history of their art. As Sarah Rothenberg observes, "he is against national characterizations as vehemently as he rejects biographical analysis."³²⁴

From composition, the discussion goes into the details of literary modes, and 'Paths in the Fog' returns to humor and sees satire as "thesis art", while "irony means: none of the assertions found in a novel can be taken by itself, each of them stands in a complex and contradictory juxtaposition with other assertions, other situations, other gestures, other ideas, other events." (201) This is in perfect agreement with Czeslaw Milosz, who says: "[A]rtistic irony, as I understand it, rests first of all on the author's ability to inhabit the skin of various people."³²⁵ This ambiguity also transpires in the development of characters in a novel: Dostoyevsky's are representatives of their ideology, but Tolstoy's (whom Kundera favors) go through successive phases where "no phase of the itinerary is superior to another" (212) and the irony lies precisely in their constant adjustment to the spirit of their time. Unlike Tolstoy's characters, Kundera says, every person in the 20th century is threatened by "the spirit of the trial -- the reduction of everything to morality" (227) and the

³²⁴ Rothenberg, 'Farewell to the Modern Era,' 84.

³²⁵ Milosz, 'A Semi-private Letter about Poetry,' in *To Begin Where I Am*, 343.

role of culture should be to exorcise the “facile moralism of the trial” from 20th century cultural life.

‘You’re Not in Your Own House Here, My Dear Fellow’ offers the reader an overview of the earlier discussions. Kundera returns to the idea that “the value and the meaning of a work can be appreciated only in the greater international context.” (248) He takes Gombrowicz as an example, with his refusal to see himself as part of the smaller, Polish context (political, literary) or even of the modernist movement. Eventually, Kundera argues, this constant interference of the biographical with the artistic comes from “the wish to refuse art its autonomous state,” (268) yet another step in the process of dissolution of the individual witnessed by the 20th century.

The Curtain³²⁶

In 2005 Kundera published his third essay book on basically the same philosophical, historical and especially aesthetical issues: *The Curtain. An Essay in Seven Parts*. The title, as Steven Ungar observes, “refers to assumptions and/or prejudices that occlude perceptions and understandings of reality”³²⁷ and the book serves, together with *The Art of the Novel* and *Testaments Betrayed* before it, as “critical supplements to his fiction,” or attempts at bridging the culture clash between his fiction and his extended audience. Ungar adds that “the vision Kundera upholds throughout *The Curtain* is that of Bohemia/Czech Republic seen from France by a native Bohemian. This vision is diasporic in the sense of a geographic displacement that fails to erase an affective identification that it nonetheless tempers.”³²⁸

³²⁶ Milan Kundera, *The Curtain. An Essay in Seven Parts*, translated from the French by Linda Asher (London: Faber and Faber, 2007). All following references are to this edition.

³²⁷ Ungar, ‘Kundera’s Variations,’ 57.

³²⁸ Ungar, 63.

From this perspective, 'The Consciousness of Continuity' speaks about what Ungar terms "the novel's unique epistemological value" and relates aesthetic value to art history, emphasizing formal transformations as essential throughout the history of the novel. Only this time his views resonate with "revised approaches of the past twenty years to the history of literary modernity in Europe."³²⁹ Literary history and theory has finally caught up with Kundera.

On the level of world literature, 'Die Weltliteratur' identifies cultural diversity as the most important value of Europe, where "all nations are living a common destiny, but each is living it differently, based on its own separate experience." (31) Kundera comes back to his definition of "small nations" (see above the section on History) and he integrates it into the larger context of art history, complaining that "Europe has not managed to view its literature as a historical context", but rather as a simple "juxtaposition of national literatures." (35-6) The lack of aesthetic criteria that could unify this "history of literatures" leads to provincialism. For the "small nations," that means "reducing the whole meaning of a work to the role it plays in the homeland" (39), while for large nations, recent trends in literary theory and criticism go towards a growing specialization and, consequently to another form of provincialism. In a different (or just apparently so) type of categorization, Kundera sees modernism's highest point in Western Europe in poetry, while for Central Europe it was reached in the form of the novel.

Consequently, 'Getting into the Soul of Things' offers another attempt at defining the novel's specificity. Firstly Kundera identifies what it is not: it is not philosophy, or psychological analysis, or the illustration of a particular historical era. After discussing the work of a very diverse series of names (Broch, Kafka, Gombrowicz, Carlos Fuentes), Kundera finally finds his definition in the words of Ernesto Sabato in *The Exterminating Angel*: "[I]n the modern world, abandoned by philosophy and splintered by hundreds of

³²⁹ Ungar, 59.

scientific specialties, the novel remains to us the last observatory from which we can embrace the human life as a whole.” (83)

In logical consequence, Kundera talks about ‘What Is a Novelist?’ and begins by comparing the novelist to the poet. While the poet is exclusively preoccupied with his own soul, the novelist has to separate from the self until “he suddenly sees that self from a distance,” (91) thus obtaining the kind of knowledge that only the novel can offer. Since this knowledge is directly connected to the form of the novel, the novelist should be the exclusive master of his work, so that nobody else can change it in any way. Also, Kundera complains that the useless information on the author’s biography and the books an author rejected take up the readers’ time, which could be better spent in reading the novels he selected for them.

To support this recommendation to read the novels rather than the criticism, ‘Aesthetics and Existence’ carries on the argument in favor of the novel’s particular type of knowledge and goes back to humor as its trade mark: the moment when “a reality is abruptly revealed as ambiguous.” (109) For Kundera, humor is our age’s answer to the tragic, since the unspeakable horrors of the 20th century destroyed “the unavoidable relativism of human truths” (110) that was the main accomplishment of the tragic, and replaced it with the simplistic manichaeism of good and evil.

From this distinction, ‘The Torn Curtain’ sees the novel as “suspicious of tragedy” (123) from its very beginnings (represented by Cervantes). The curtain in the title is, according to reviewer Geoff Dyer, “the curtain of pre-interpretation” which the novel aims to cut through, through humor. Also, the novel is a product of age that “has had experience with the fragility of human certainties” (141) and cannot be trapped by them as easily as youth can (or at all, according to Kundera).

In conclusion, ‘The Novel, Memory, Forgetting’ revisits and summarizes some of Kundera’s favorite themes: “[T]he futility of literary theory” (147), the importance of

composition for the art of the novel, human identity as a result of a series of comparisons. And the conclusion is actually optimistic: “the great miracle of Europe” is “not its art, but its art become history.” (168)

Kundera’s latest volume of essays -- *Encounter* -- is, according to one reviewer, “the opposite of a curtain-raiser, [...] a curtain lowerer or encore: a linked collection of pieces originally written in French, some from 20 years ago, modestly offering themselves as ‘reflections and recollections’ on ‘old themes (existential and aesthetic) and [...] old loves.’”³³⁰ Upon review, Kundera’s tastes reveal themselves as quite cosmopolitan, no longer restricted to the Central European milieu, but embracing culture as a global entity, in all its variety, though still looking for general human values. His trajectory over almost a quarter of a century went from Central Europe to world literature, but his basic options remained the same: prose over lyricism, fiction over biography, ambiguity over moralist certainties.

Norman Manea, *Envelopes and Portraits*³³¹

In his turn, Norman Manea was also interested in European and world literature. The volume *Envelopes and Portraits*, published in 2004, recreates Manea’s literary environment. It talks about books and their authors, whom Manea sees as friends, powerful influences by his own admission, even during communist times, when political stands could determine the acceptance or rejection of various kinds of literature: “[Y]ou find a sibylline language where you can keep alive, in code, at least some of the obsessions and sympathies of the

³³⁰ Geoff Dyer, ‘*Encounter*. Essays by Milan Kundera,’ book review in *The Observer*, 22 August, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/aug/22/encounter-essays-review>, accessed November 12, 2012.

³³¹ Norman Manea, *Plicuri și portrete* (Iasi: Polirom 2004). All following references are to this edition.

predecessors you venerate.”³³² The volume collects literary reviews and portraits scattered in various Romanian magazines before and after 1989 and organizes them according to Manea’s personal chronology -- the moment these people appeared in his life. Like *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool* before it, *Envelopes and Portraits* has a documentary appearance given by the inclusion of personal correspondence (the ‘envelopes’ in the title) between Manea and the subject of the portrait.

The first part is dedicated to the Romanian cultural environment and it begins with a portrait of the poet who published Manea’s first short story in his short-lived literary magazine. The collection of portraits that follows includes not just friends, but also acquaintances, poets, novelists and literary critics of the ‘70s and ‘80s -- various instances of the intellectual trapped by the communist regime. Sometimes, in the cases where Manea is less personally involved, these portraits are reminiscent of Milosz’s in *The Captive Mind*, but by now (twenty years later) the moral dilemmas seem blurred by the overwhelming challenge of surviving and publishing under the communist regime. Every time, though, they are “authentic writers,” as opposed to “cultural employees of the system,” (349) to use Manea’s own distinction. The portraits are often complete with Manea’s comments from after his move to the West, which helped him change perspective: “I see Romanian literature differently from how I saw it in Romania.”³³³

This is the turning point, marked right in the middle of this first part by a chapter dedicated to some ‘Quotes’ -- from Nietzsche, Halldor Laxness, Kafka (identifying the author’s obsessive themes at the time), plus an article from a Romanian newspaper that had been the starting point of his novel *The Black Envelope* -- which Manea had taken with him from Romania to the West. On the other side of the Atlantic, the collection of quotes is completed by a letter of Czeslaw Milosz to the editors of *The New York Times*,

³³² Manea, *Curierul de Est*, 253.

³³³ Manea, ‘Romania’s Image in the World,’ in *Casa melcului* 67.

“complaining of a review of his volume, *Collected Poems*, where he had been presented as obsessed with historical events. The poet was emphasizing that, on the contrary, his ‘struggle as a writer in exile has consisted in liberating my neck from those dead albatrosses.’³³⁴ Aware that Westerners ‘are longing for subjects provided by spasms of historical violent change,’ Milosz states that, as one of the ‘natives of hazy Eastern regions’, he sees History as a curse and prefers ‘to restore to literature its autonomy, dignity, and independence from social pressures.’”

Manea resonates profoundly with Milosz’s need to take literature beyond the point of testimony, to a higher level of understanding of human nature:

“Another passage underlined by the reader I was in 1988 was:

‘What is perhaps one of the most dramatic aspects of the twentieth-century poetry, is a clash between historical experience and the high exigencies of modern or post-modern style, self-imposed by poets. If not for that clash, poets, especially those well mangled by the historical wringer, would remain no more than witnesses.’

Finally, other three underlined lines were re-establishing, somehow, a more direct link with the words of his predecessors, Nietzsche, Laxness, Kafka and so many more: ‘the voice of a poet should be purer and more distinct than the noise (or confused music) of History.’” (113)

Like Milosz before him, Manea takes his obsessions with him to the West and rearranges them into a larger perspective which he also applies to Romanian literature. The second part of the volume includes international authors who participate, beyond geographical and even temporal limits, in a world literature which offers more than a mere comment on history. Some of them are a striking echo of Kundera’s tastes (Musil, Kafka), others share a Romanian (Cioran, Eugen Ionesco) or East-Central European (Danilo Kis,

³³⁴ Czeslaw Milosz, ‘A Poet’s Reply,’ *The New York Review of Books* 35 (July 21, 1988), <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1988/jul/21/a-poets-reply/>, accessed November 12, 2012.

Imre Kertesz) background, or are part of the new, American, cultural environment (Saul Bellow). As exemplified in this volume by the efforts of his first German translator, they are friends who helped Manea in his effort of

“emancipation from the womb.’ That is, the refusal of any symbol-labeling: Jew, German, Romanian, victim, militant, dissident. The refusal of any limitative, constricting identity, be it religious, ethnic, ideological (even sexual lately) [...] Meanwhile, I myself have learned a lot, in the American context, on the voluntary or involuntary heroism of distancing oneself from the mythology of ‘identity’ that is seen today as some magic key to all historical and present ambiguities, contradictions and inequities.” (401)

Black Milk³³⁵

It is not an identity then, but a literary experience that Manea describes in his 2010 volume *Black Milk* (the title is taken from the poem ‘Death Fugue’ of Paul Celan, the German-language Jewish poet born in Romania). This portrayal of the literary world of Jewish writers starts from the assumption that, “if the poet was always seen as a sort of Jew, the Jewish writer, acquainted early in his life with the jokes of fate, could claim for himself the privilege of a double membership.” (11) It traces a history of the literature of Jewish writers, starting from Shalom Aleichem, Bruno Schultz, continuing with the Romanian Mihail Sebastian, with the challenges of writing literature on the Holocaust, with literary analyses of the works of Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, Imre Kertesz, Israeli (Romanian born) writers Aharon Appelfeld and Dan Pagis. The tenor of all these studies is Manea’s conviction that “literature must say more and something else and different from the word of the witnesses or of the prosecution.

³³⁵ Norman Manea, *Laptele Negru* (Bucuresti: Hasefer, 2010). All following references are to this edition.

A basic interrogation of the human in its unpredictable potentialities and between constantly redefined limits.” (239)

From the ‘repertoire’ of Jewish themes, Manea also touches on the relationship between the Jewish writer and the national literary context, illustrated by both Sebastian and his own experience, by Giorgio Bassani and even Kafka. In logical consequence, the next topic is exile (only ‘interior’ at first, and later literal), and this discussion is detailed in the volume *The Drawers of Exile: Dialogue with Leon Volovici*, which contains the correspondence between two Romanian Jewish intellectuals -- Manea and Volovici -- in the dark years of the last decade of communism in Romania. Manea himself indicates the ‘Connections’ between these themes -- Jewishness, Holocaust, Gulag, literature, exile -- in a series of excerpts from his interviews (discussed earlier in this study).

A more structured view, another autobiographical attempt, written for the western audience (‘On Exiled Language’) and now translated for the Romanian one, summarizes these themes using language as the key element:

“Do we eventually grow into the identities that are repeatedly assigned to us? Will I become, in time, an American writer in the Romanian language? Or am I a Jewish-American writer in the Romanian language or an American-Jewish writer in the Romanian language? Or am I a Romanian writer in America? Or simply an exiled writer, as I was even in the exile before exile?” (441)

Beyond his personal experience, Manea offers his notes for a parallel study of two Romanian-born Jewish writers who, one in German -- Paul Celan -- and the other one in French -- Benjamin Fondane -- gave literary expression to those themes, at a time when “the transcendence of the *tremendum* mystery no longer lives in the heaven beyond heaven of faith, but in the daily and nightly word of Poetry, where the earthly unknown, unfulfilled and ineffable took refuge.” (455) The volume concludes then with the poetic expression of

the inexpressible, Manea's poem 'Talking to a Stone' written during the Jerusalem Book Fair in 2003.

On the whole, Manea's views on literature, like Milosz's and Kundera's before him, focus on its unifying quality, beyond the various identities assigned to authors, on its potential to speak to any human being, irrespective of the reader's personal experience. The personal experience of Milosz, Kundera and Manea under the communist regime and later on in the West was that of authors of literature. In that capacity, they can testify to the pressure put on writers both by totalitarian regimes and by a market-oriented cultural environment with its own ideological coordinates, and they can identify the ways this kind of pressure influenced their writings.

3.6 Traps for the writer at home

The social and literary environment in the home countries at the time Milosz, Kundera and Manea started publishing there was quite different from that in the West. Manea's volume *On Clowns. The Dictator and the Artist* summarizes themes Manea shares with Milosz and Kundera on the paradoxical status of the artist in a totalitarian country, between the dangers posed by the regime (including that of collaboration) and the temptations of identifying too closely to his audience, to the point where he can lose his critical perspective. This volume of essays is offered to his western readers as a handbook for the reading of Manea's volume of short stories (written and first published in the home country) *October, Eight O'Clock*.

Norman Manea, *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist*³³⁶

This volume of essays was first published in English, in the author's translation, in 1992, at the same time with Manea's first collection of short stories published in the United States, *October, Eight O'Clock*. In its entirety, the collection of essays looks at Romanian politics, literary ideologies, moral conundrums and cultural trends from a very involved and personal perspective. The author's intention is to clarify for his western readers the fine points of intellectual life under communism since, as Matei Calinescu remarks in his review of the volume, "although Manea's essays are on the subject of Romania, they illustrate issues that are not confined to that country. Many of his observations will interest the student of modern Eastern Europe as well as the student of communism and its institutions."³³⁷

In his introduction to the first edition, Manea explains that his interest was drawn to the image of the writer in a totalitarian society, since "in any political system that uses culture as a weapon (honoring the artist with out-of proportion privileges or punishments), the writer constantly faces traps meant to compromise him and to gradually destroy his integrity and thus his very identity." (9) This makes the writer "an extreme case in an extreme situation, thus becoming a symbol for the deadlock of the whole society." (12) Still, as he mentions in the preface to the German edition, what he offers is first of all his personal experience: "I did not want to speak for any group, just for the strictly personal experience I represent."³³⁸

The volume goes from general to particular. The first essay, 'Romania: Three Lines with Commentary' is addressed firstly to a western audience, as a kind of presentation of Romania as the author knows it and his readers do not. The first approach is political, an

³³⁶ Norman Manea, *Despre clovni: dictatorul si artistul* (Iasi: Polirom 2005). All following quotations are from this edition.

³³⁷ Matei Calinescu, book review of *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist* by Norman Manea, in *World Literature Today* 68 (Winter, 1994), 111-112.

³³⁸ Manea, *Plicuri si portrete*, 328.

attempt to explain the finer points of totalitarian regimes, starting with a distinction between Nazism and Communism:

“Nazism was in agreement with itself when it did what it did; its followers, at least in the first stages, chose it ‘knowingly’ and ‘legally.’ Communism is rather in disagreement with itself, when it comes to a summing-up of the relation between project and reality -- a system imposed by coercion, which forced large masses to follow it. This disagreement between the ideology and the practical necessities of governing, between the proposed ideal and the reality that denies it also produces its relative capacity to redress, to restructure and mystify.” (16)

In this context, Manea claims, the succession of changes in the party’s policy towards writers, as illustrated by ‘personal’ events -- “the raw material of the calendar and of the biography” (19) -- can be very relevant (here, like Milosz and Kundera before him, he acts as a witness in order to win the trust of his readers). And he illustrates his comparison between Communism and Nazism with an episode that demonstrates the insidious and (by the mid-‘80s) already shameless, almost natural anti-Semitism of the authorities, although it went against the claimed internationalism of the communist movement -- a complete break between theory and reality.

In defining his cultural background, Manea moves from considerations on communism and totalitarian systems in general to the more specific cultural concept of Central Europe, from both a geographical and a historical approach. Almost twenty years after Kundera’s article ‘The Tragedy of Central Europe,’ Manea pleads for an inclusive, rather than exclusive use of the term but, focusing in the end on the cultural elements, he has to admit that “‘real socialism’ in Romania in the ‘70s and ‘80s has recorded important changes from the ‘European’ norm.” (32) While culture was considered by many in Romania a form of resistance to political pressure, it also involved many morally ambiguous compromises, both from the point of view of the official ideology and of those who were

supposedly 'resisting' it. The example given here is the exhilaration produced in all circles (including the highest ranks of the Party) at the first publication in Romania, again in the '80s, of Mircea Eliade's *A History of Religious Ideas*. Eliade's position as a highly respected academic in the West seemed to justify the enthusiasm in an officially atheist country that also persisted in ignoring his fascist youth. Elaborating on the moral ambiguity that had become the norm in communist Romania, Manea quotes the testimony of one of his American friends who, after a visit to Romania, expresses his failure to understand how the good and the bad can be collaborating so easily in this country. On his part, and against Kundera's exaltation of culture, Manea exposes "a culture obsessed with the aesthetic, taking an indulgent ironic distance from the summons of the ethic" (46) as a direct result (and support) of this moral ambiguity.

The Post-Scriptum indicates to the western reader at least one reason for which writers have accepted the compromise: "the reader was expecting from literature what he could not find in newspapers, in history or sociology books; he would read between the lines, looking for iconoclastic charades. The writer accepted this distortion as the unavoidable price of his solidarity with his audience." (51) Unfortunately, Manea continues, the ambiguities resulted from reading fiction for information on history or sociology seem to have survived the changes of 1989, with uncomfortable results in the public arena.

The title essay of the volume, 'On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist' takes the western readers from the general considerations on communism, ethics and aesthetics to an actual example of the conundrums of writing truthfully in a communist regime, and as such it can practically be read as an exorcism or as therapy. Manea begins by stating that "In a totalitarian state, the day-to-day details, words and gestures carry warped meaning that can only be deciphered by the local citizens, citizens of the underground. The code seems lunar and fascinating though, to anyone who lives in a normal society." (74) In illustration, he offers us the censor's report on one of his novels (*The Black Envelope*, eventually

published, with many cuts, in 1986), with his own comments, almost like a translation. The fact that he had seen this report is already extraordinary, as officially Romania had no censorship since the end of the '70s. The main point here is duplicity:

“duplicity as recipe for salvation. Duplicity of the author, duplicity of the reader, duplicity of the publisher, duplicity of the censor and of the substitute? Duplicity as a communication relay. The author writing under a totalitarian regime wants the tricks, allusions, encodings, as well as the raw, direct and brutal images he uses to reach his reader. They are addressed to the reader in a kind of sad implicit solidarity. But he also hopes, at the same time, that his message is ignored by the censor. Duplicity rests heavily on the captive writer.” (111)

The finer points of any totalitarian ideology, Manea explains, can become irrelevant for the literature produced under such a regime. The end-result is always an encrypted type of writing, which almost defies the understanding of anyone not personally familiar with the world described in it.

Profoundly aware of the difficulties and even risks involved in writing honestly under communism, Manea's essay, 'Felix Culpa' (the Romanian version of 'Happy Guilt,' mentioned above) focuses on the moral imperative for the intellectual. Observing that “the number of intellectuals who found themselves on the 'wrong' side, on the side of totalitarianism is not at all negligible in our century” (145), he gives the example of Eliade, who had not, to his death, recanted his youthful allegiance to fascism. The article was first published in 1991 and it produced outrage in Romania, as it was seen as an attack against not only one of the rather few internationally acclaimed Romanian intellectuals, but also against what was at the time being turned into a mythical 'golden age' of Romanian culture - the inter-war period (completely ignoring its very strong fascist movement, or interpreting it in positive nationalistic terms). The essay insists on the complexities and differences in doctrine between various types of totalitarianism: fascism, communism, Islamic

fundamentalism; it “illuminates a deeper affinity between the overt and shamelessly candid inhumanity of Nazi-like ultranationalism and the Communist farce of ‘humanist’ and ‘internationalist’ pretences.”³³⁹

Moving from one type of totalitarianism to another, ‘The Story of an Interview’ provides a perfect example of the extreme duplicity of every-day life in communism. One of the author’s friends is under pressure from the secret police to inform on him. He signs a statement that he would do this, and immediately afterwards informs Manea of the fact. A couple of years follow in which the two friends meet regularly and agree on what kind of information the ‘informant’ should offer the secret police. The whole charade ends with the ‘informer’ fleeing the country, leaving Manea to wonder which one of his friends had taken his place.

The interview in the title was published in a literary magazine at the beginning of the ‘80s and it contained some critical remarks from Manea against an anti-Semitic article published in the ‘cultural’ magazine sponsored by the secret police. It caused vehement reactions from those whom Manea calls ‘the commando unit’ -- and here, like Milosz 40 years before him, in *The Captive Mind*, he offers four portraits of perverted intellectuals. And they were, indeed, quite exemplary since, after the fall of communism, Matei Calinescu also gives their names as examples of extreme nationalism:

“These writers -- Eugen Barbu, C. V. Tudor, Ion Lancranjan, Adrian Paunescu are among its leading figures -- have adopted a populist-nationalist, viciously xenophobic program, anti-Hungarian, anti-Semitic, anti-Gypsy, and broadly anti-intellectual. What is more, they have managed to attract a fairly wide following among a disoriented, frustrated, politically illiterate populace.”³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Stanislaw Baranczak, ‘The Gulag Circus,’ *The New Republic* 206 (June 1, 1992), 47.

³⁴⁰ Calinescu, ‘Romanian Literature,’ 247.

The only solution to the overwhelming duplicity required by the system, as all three authors discussed in the present study had come to conclude, is exile. Manea focuses on the multiple meanings of what has become a fairly common reality of our times, and its implicit assumption of an original identity that is getting more and more difficult to define lately. He insists that what has been called 'internal' exile, in one's own country -- a refusal of the intellectual to be an active participant in the system -- is not efficient, but merely alienating: "As the contrast between the ideal and reality was growing sharper, as the interdiction to uncover and discuss this contrast was deepening, the terror and economic bankruptcy, hypocrisy, duplicity were becoming the basic rules of assimilation, that is of alienation." (270) In Manea's view, the late attempts of intellectuals in communist Romania to separate themselves from the system's authority figures do not justify uncensored admiration.

Consequently, the last essay of the volume, entitled 'Blasphemy and Carnival' unmasks "the sanctification of representative cultural personalities," arguing that "the quasi-religious canonization of non-religious value [...] translates an excessive need for myth, illusion, subterfuges." (279) Manea exemplifies with three cases: Andrei Siniavsky's attempt to 'clean up' Pushkin's image of nationalist debris, his own comments on Mircea Eliade's failure to clarify his position towards fascism, and the most famous case of Salman Rushdie's 'unorthodox' references to the Koran. In each of these cases, he argues, "the natural intellectual practice, either under the form of moral interrogation, aesthetic study or epic creation, was granted -- for the simple fact that it was defying the patterns and conventions of spiritual comfort -- the rank of blasphemy." This, to him, is left over from the closed, authoritarian society, where "blasphemy is obsessive, serving the artificial coherence imposed by the regime," (299) and, he fears, this may be noticeable in his literature, when read in the West.

3.7 Traps for the dissident in the West

A complementary image of the social and literary environment in the West is offered in Milosz's collection of essays *Visions from San Francisco Bay*. Of the three authors discussed here, Milosz's exile in the West must have seemed the most definitive, as for such a long time there did not appear to be any end of communism in sight. Consequently, it is not surprising that he tried to position his intellectual stand as a dissident from communism within the essential intellectual debates in the United States, particularly at a time when an enthusiasm for Marxism was extremely visible in American universities (including the one where Milosz was teaching).

Czeslaw Milosz, *Visions of San Francisco Bay*³⁴¹

Although written in Polish (1969) and only subsequently translated into English (1975), the volume is aimed primarily at an American audience, whom Milosz sees as 'happy' in having been spared direct contact with the atrocities of history: "Happy are they who can avoid radical choices."³⁴² It is an attempt on Milosz's part to present his stand within the context of American culture, to identify his otherness and to explain it firstly to his students and his peers with his "reflections on the American landscape and the American condition."³⁴³ He does that by superimposing his acquired knowledge of America on his European foundation, but with a sense of modesty, warning his readers that "perhaps the value of communication depends on the acknowledgement of one's own limits." (4) The book is also proof of "the strenuous attention -- critical, indeed, but also sympathetic -- that Milosz for many years has

³⁴¹ Czeslaw Milosz, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, translated from the Polish by Richard Lourie (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982). All following quotations are from this edition.

³⁴² Milosz, *Native Realm*, 120.

³⁴³ Alter, 'Milosz: Poetry and Politics,' 41.

paid to North American reality, North American society, and North American cultural traditions.”³⁴⁴

Paradoxically though, America to him seems to define a limitless reality (spatially and, consequently linguistically -- as it allows for arbitrary choice of names). Milosz sees this lack of limits as a quintessential difference from the European pattern, where the physical limits define and, at the same time, shelter one’s identity, while in America “the entire collective game of putting oneself above or beneath others falls apart.” (10) The vastness defies classification and this poses a psychological problem to the inhabitants, who suffer from an “ontological anemia.” (40)

He follows the evolution of philosophical trends over the recent centuries, from the Christian spatial division of reality in an “above” and a “below,” with man in the middle, attempting ascension, to the modern belief in movement, “the destroyer of hierarchies.” (33) When he turns to American history, though, he realizes that the rather European belief in a collective evolution (chronologically represented) cannot be applied there, since initiative there is always individual, and no “project” can be identified. As a result of this intrinsic individualism, the American mind turns against the European system of values, as “something nameless is concerned with destroying ideology in him and, thus far, has rewarded him not for possessing ideology but for not possessing any.” (51) Marxism, that is, according to Milosz, the belief that “matter should -- automatically, developing according to its own laws -- lead inevitably to the triumph of the good” is contradicted by the very existence of California, which “grew out of an inferior element, a shameful one, matter not elevated to the heights of spirit.” (55)

Looking for American mind patterns, Milosz reviews the western as a new type of myth-constructing creation. He observes that Walt Whitman’s poetry has been read in Europe as a glorification of the collective, thus missing entirely its American essence. Allen

³⁴⁴ Davie, *Czeslaw Milosz*, xi.

Ginsberg is quoted as taking a stand for the individual who “does not admit to a causal role and he is right [...] It is not he who is responsible, but that other in him who acts as a statistic.” (68) A general mistrust for the collective idea is, according to Milosz, what sets America apart.

From the theological point of view, Milosz sees religion in the twentieth century as a collective means of reinforcing faith and he considers Catholicism as better equipped to do this, since “the decision does not properly concern one’s faith but the submission to or the revolt against authority.” (81) The Christian idea of salvation is, for him, similar to the Marxist promise, to “the claims of modern revolutionaries, who proclaim universal happiness, but always for tomorrow,” but Milosz also rejects Robinson Jeffers’ view of an unchangeable God “requiring nothing but praise for His continued existence.” (91)

The essays on sex and censorship identify the change in attitude over more than a century, and paradoxically Milosz sees underneath American freedom of speech a basic lack of respect for the power of words, “the unspoken assumption that the influence of the written word on institutions and morals is small or nonexistent.” (107) This lack of censorship also leads to a simplification of the means of expression. In America, they are much more direct and to the point, more market-efficient, so unlike (and here Milosz uses his own experience) those used to avoid censorship in other countries. Beyond these differences, Milosz sees how the European dissatisfaction with the current state of the world and its direction -- and the implicit belief in evolution and revolutionary movements -- are permeating American culture. Henry Miller is used as an example, as someone who embraced “the purely personal dimension” (138) as a means of escaping the unwanted intellectual trend towards social revolution. In doing so, Miller uses Nietzsche, but Milosz complains that Miller is not capable of appreciating the subtleties and humor of a European tradition “which only the historical imagination provides.” (139)

At this point, Milosz's implicit target audience becomes clearer: he is writing for his students and fellow intellectuals, warning them that their general dissent and anarchic behavior are not justified and, what is even worse, do not have a clear goal. He uses his historical perspective (that is, his European experience) to warn them against generalizations:

"The collapse of faith in the meaning of history as a result of the revolution which was both victorious and a failure concerns, to be sure, only Europe and North America, but we must have the nerve to admit that we neither can nor very much desire to share the hopes of Asian, Africans, and Latin Americans, for we assume tacitly, and perhaps quite wrongly, that there will be a repetition of a pattern with which we are already familiar." (180)

He identifies one of the intellectual models of the time, Herbert Marcuse, as "one who saw Marxism defeated in Europe in both its revolutionary and its evolutionary form" (185) and consequently denies him the right to try it again on American soil. Milosz is here almost brutal in dismantling the Marxist myth, in exposing its inner contradictions and inevitable results, while expressing the hope that this, too, will pass, that humanity has the resources to, eventually, overcome "stupidity" (even in the "mass student revolt" in America, "which knows what it doesn't want, but doesn't know what it wants" (191)).

The concluding essay of the volume reiterates the author's claim to offer a valuable perspective on America, an appreciation of the democratic values coming from someone who knows what it is not to be able to rely on them. He feels compelled to take this stand in response to what he sees as the prevailing attitude in American intellectual circles: "My seasoning in Europe's nihilistic diversions, and my awareness of their results, does not allow me to sympathize with the conformism of moans and maledictions, obligatory for American intellectuals, who are, on the whole, remarkably well supplied with worldly goods." (214)

Thus the book becomes a means of fulfilling a duty towards his host country and also, as Donald Davie (himself a European immigrant in the United States) notes, “an unusually compelling record of what is involved for a European in making himself American, or ‘Americanized.’ In this way his claim on American readers’ attention is a *human* claim, a plea to be understood with sympathy, and in some degree as a representative case.”³⁴⁵

Each of the three authors has, in turn, been intensely preoccupied with some of aspects of their biographies which proved to be both controversial and liable to misunderstandings, and this study has used their writings to illustrate the specific point of each of the previous sections.

All writings discussed in this third chapter have been treated, as they were meant to be, as testimony; they were produced by the three authors as an explanatory support for their ‘literature’ -- which is discussed next in the last chapter of this thesis -- and for the general public’s better understanding of the situation in communist East-Central Europe. The results of the continuous efforts by Milosz, Kundera and Manea to find a persuasive and efficient literary form for their experience of communism constitute the most important East-Central European contribution to the literature of the second half of the 20th century.

The section on Czeslaw Milosz opens with a study of *The Captive Mind*, as the first portrayal of the intellectual in a communist regime, continues with his autobiographical volume *Native Realm* and concludes with *Milosz’s ABC*, a *Who’s Who* of real and fictitious characters collected in a volume that, at the same time, reuses a typically Polish genre and introduces this innovative structure to his western audience. Literary criticism of Milosz’s work focused mainly on his poetry, but the study of his prose writing benefits from the extrapolation of the recurrent topoi of his poetry, so this chapter makes use of Aleksander

³⁴⁵ Davie, 17.

Fiut's volume *The Eternal Moment. The Poetry of Czeslaw Milosz* and Donald Davie's *Czeslaw Milosz and the Insufficiency of Lyric*.

The section on Milan Kundera deals with fully fledged literary reflections of intellectual life in a totalitarian regime. The discussion of *The Joke*, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* follows the ways in which Kundera looks for and finds the most appropriate literary forms to portray the intellectual and just simply human dilemmas of the second half of the 20th century since, as Yvon Grenier notes, "one is tempted to say that the artist or novelist is in a position similar to a character in a novel as typically defined by Kundera: unique, yet not prevailing; simply adding to the group dynamic."³⁴⁶ A comprehensive critical view of Kundera's work (recommended by the author himself, on the back cover of his books) can be found in Francois Ricard's *Agnes's Final Afternoon. An Essay on the Work of Milan Kundera*.

The section on Norman Manea illustrates yet another formal development of the topic: starting from the documentary novel *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool*, and moving towards a reorganized selection of autobiographical incidents illustrated in the collected short stories in the volume *Variations on a Self-Portrait*, the model reaches internal coherence in *The Hooligan's Return*. The recent volume *The Obsession of Uncertainty. In Honorem Norman Manea* offers very useful critical insights from writers and literary critics from around the world.

³⁴⁶ Grenier, 'Milan Kundera,' 14.

4. TEXT: From memory to fiction and back

This fourth chapter identifies the narrative means employed subsequently by the three authors as they move from the 'bearing witness' stage (described in the first chapter), towards a more personal, autobiographical stage, and eventually reach (or not) a fully fictional form. The study in its entirety thus covers both the information on the communist experience and a variety of literary forms used to transmit it. If the third chapter used 'non-specialized' texts of the three authors to illustrate various aspects of East-Central European reality under communism, here the approach is chronological, and the choice of texts traces the development, in terms of literary forms, of the theme of the role of the intellectual under communism in the three authors' literary production.

This chapter starts again from Stephen Greenblatt's view of "the aesthetic" not as "an alternative realm but a way of intensifying the single realm we all inhabit."³⁴⁷ It follows the way in which each of the three authors organized their 'collective memory' as testimony first and then transformed it into "the magic of literature," in Manea's definition "a deep aspiration towards something else, beyond the banality and triviality of everyday life. Illness and therapy at the same time."³⁴⁸

The therapy process starts from a very uncomfortable position. Milosz identifies the "paradigm: He [the writer] was aware of his task and people were waiting for his words, but he was forbidden to speak. Now where he lives he is free to speak but nobody listens and, moreover, he forgot what he had to say."³⁴⁹ Similarly, Manea explains how, in the home country under communism

"the essential discussions over sex, faith, illness, together with those around socialism, fascism, nationalism, etc. were not allowed. We still had this strange, ambiguous

³⁴⁷ Greenblatt, 'Towards a Poetics of Culture,' 8.

³⁴⁸ Cugno, 'Interview with Norman Manea,' 21.

³⁴⁹ Milosz, 'Notes on Exile,' in *To Begin Where I Am*, 13.

feeling that we managed to say something, to get in some of the things we wanted to say, but a lot was left unsaid. When, finally, we had the chance to say it (upon arrival in the West, for example), there was some kind of paralysis, precisely because there were too many things to be said and they had to be rationalized somehow, organized logically, so they could be understood by someone who had lived in a completely different context.”³⁵⁰

Milosz begins his efforts of rationalization and organization with the sense of urgency created by the beginning of the Cold War. His *Captive Mind* (1953) is a testimony, above everything else. Its author is keeping his distance from the events described, precisely so that he can claim objective detachment in favor of his reliability as a witness. By contrast, “its fictional counterpart, published the same year, *The Seizure of Power*”³⁵¹ had much less impact on his western audience. The fictional guise is attempted again in *The Issa Valley* (1995). After a few years in the West, Milosz could afford to become more personal, and he does that in *Native Realm* (1958), where “the autobiographical fragments are only a pretext,”³⁵² as he takes the brand of literary testimony to a new, more artistically articulate level, that of memoir. In this, it is similar to Kundera’s in ‘The Tragedy of Central Europe,’ or to what he himself produced in *The Captive Mind*). Through all the stages of his creation, though, Milosz’s ‘literary’ perspective is encrypted in his poetry, his prose writing ending up in the fragmentary manner of *Milosz’s ABC* (1997).

By contrast, Kundera’s fiction shows a remarkable consistency of narrative modes, there is much less anxiety of expressing the inexpressible, as “most of his thought on art and politics is the object of literary experimentation in his novels, either in the thematic structure of the novels themselves, or in self-standing reflections and digressions formulated

³⁵⁰ Manea, ‘Dispossession of Tradition,’ 117.

³⁵¹ Alter, ‘Milosz: Poetry and Politics,’ 41.

³⁵² Milosz, *Native Realm*, 299.

by the characters or the narrator.”³⁵³ From the polyphonic structure of *The Joke* (1967), through the ironic perspective on the main character in *Life is Elsewhere* (which Jan Culik sees as “a novel of exorcism” that “Milan Kundera started writing[...] during the liberal Prague Spring of 1968 and completed in 1970, during the first wave of the post-1968 clampdown in Czechoslovakia”³⁵⁴), the crisis culminates with *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1978), a novel where Kundera simply dispenses with plot and keeps only the treatment of themes. Some kind of reconciliation with a potentially reasonable structure of reality is reached in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1982) that “returns to a more traditional narrative storyline,”³⁵⁵ and constitutes to date Kundera’s most publicly acclaimed literary achievement.

Yet another, much more sinuous literary trajectory is that of Norman Manea who (quite naturally) starts his narrative adventure under communism with short stories, not simply evolving towards the novel, but actually vacillating between the short and long forms of fiction, with the “anti-novel”³⁵⁶ *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool* (1979) as a most remarkable hybrid. With *The Black Envelope* (1986), Manea intends a complex panorama of Romanian communist reality (the novel was planned as part of a trilogy), only to see it blurred first by the censors, and then by the lack of a common background with his western audience. Claudiu Turcus identifies “the testimonial pact and a biographic rendering of fiction”³⁵⁷ as the trademarks of Manea’s fiction after his move to the West. Indeed, formally, his adjustment to his new audience meant first a return to shorter forms of fiction (freed here from the cramping effects of censorship) in *Compulsory Happiness* (1993). The

³⁵³ Grenier, ‘Milan Kundera,’ 2.

³⁵⁴ Culik, ‘Milan Kundera.’ 257.

³⁵⁵ Culik, ‘Milan Kundera,’ 260.

³⁵⁶ Claudiu Turcus, *Norman Manea – Alternatives to a Portrait* (PhD diss. ‘Babes-Bolyai’ University Cluj-Napoca, 2011), http://doctorat.ubbcluj.ro/sustinerea_publica/rezumat/2011/filologie/turcus_florin_claudiu_en.pdf, accessed November 12, 2012, 3.

³⁵⁷ Turcus, 3.

(by then) constant effort of selection from earlier short stories for the new audience(s) is shaped by a testimonial pursuit on an autobiographical basis (the first volume published in exile, in 1987 in Germany was entitled *Robot-Biography and Other Stories*) and culminates with “two books of memoirs which combine essays and fiction in a unique collaboration: *The Hooligan’s Return* [2003] and *Variations on a Self-Portrait* [2008].”³⁵⁸ Fiction turns back to its autobiographical origins.

4.1 Czeslaw Milosz, the self-effacing witness

In all his writings on communism, Milosz is trying to preserve an objectivizing distance from the events described, although these writings are a result of his need to testify. As Aleksander Fiut observes, “giving witness, crucial after great historical cataclysms, acquires unusual significance in twentieth-century literature,”³⁵⁹ even more so after the war, when the understanding of communism in Western Europe became quite different from that in East-Central Europe. Milosz himself notes:

“[W]ith the acquiring of direct experience, the problem of Marxism and Communism shifted from the emotional-political sphere to the philosophical, which removed it so far from the naive opinions of Western sympathizers that, for the most part, the possibility of any kind of dialogue with them vanished.”³⁶⁰

Under the circumstances, instead of discussing philosophical and political constructs, Milosz presents actual examples of the results of these constructs in the lives of people he knew, the only way he can find to describe the horror. In the words of Aleksander Fiut:

³⁵⁸ Manea, ‘The Clown as Central Metaphor,’ interview with Claudio Magris (1998), in *Casa melcului*, 193.

³⁵⁹ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 157.

³⁶⁰ Milosz, *Native Realm*, 126.

“[F]aced with the ruins of concepts purporting to explain all human history, concepts like Hegelianism or dialectical materialism, and the threat of bending history to immediate needs or even its falsification, the individual biography seems the sole trustworthy means of reconciling accident with necessity.”³⁶¹

The examples are not personal, though, the distance is kept at all times, even when (as in *Native Realm*) the book is structured around his own autobiography. The writing is not a confession, but an explanatory testimony. Madeline G. Levine comments on

“the prevalence of biographical sketches in his prose: the analytical studies of four Polish writers at the core of *The Captive Mind*, the vivid depictions of friends and colleagues in *Native Realm*, [...] the mini-portraits painted with just a few brush strokes that combine to lend *Milosz’s ABC* the weight of a collective history. Always guarding his privacy, adverse to confessional writings of a personal nature, Milosz has discovered that biography can be a form of, and a surrogate for, autobiography.”³⁶²

The underlying assumption in these writings is the relevance of the fate of the intellectual under a communist regime for the world at large, the fact, as noted by critic Flagg Taylor, that “the topic of Eastern intellectual and Communism is a surface manifestation of larger and deeper philosophical problems -- problems that constitute, in Milosz’s own view, some of his chief themes.”³⁶³ However, Milosz is constantly aware that he is describing fluid social realities, that “social structures are not stable, they display great flexibility, and the place of the artist has not been determined once and for all,”³⁶⁴ consequently he looks for a literary structure that would allow him to portray the intellectual dilemma in all its

³⁶¹ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 158.

³⁶² Madeline G. Levine, ‘Introduction’ to Czeslaw Milosz, *To Begin Where I Am*, xi.

³⁶³ Taylor, ‘Czeslaw Milosz,’ 24.

³⁶⁴ Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, 96.

complexities, taking advantage of the fact that, in the twentieth century, “the neat division between novel, story, poetry, and essay is no longer so clearly maintained.”³⁶⁵

While the structure used in *The Captive Mind* proves highly successful on at least one level -- that of immediate communication of a new and almost incomprehensible reality (as proved, among other things, by the fact that it has been borrowed by others after him), Milosz remains aware that “reality eludes the means of language and is the source of deep traumas.”³⁶⁶ Once the urgency of his initial revelations fades away, as the world settles into the uncomfortable equilibrium of the Cold War, in *Native Realm* Milosz turns to autobiography in the hope of bringing more internal coherence to his account. As Aleksander Fiut notes again, “Milosz attaches such significance to biography as a hypothetical unity, a system of signs that illuminate the meaning of an individual life, and a personal myth because biography legitimizes a personal existential perspective.”³⁶⁷

With the fall of communism, the purpose of communication becomes even more personal and the forms employed less structured -- Milosz is no longer explaining, just remembering. As Madeline G. Levine summarizes, after

“carefully constructed and thematically cohesive projects such as *The Captive Mind*, *Visions of San Francisco Bay* and *The Land of Ulro* Milosz’s prose of the past ten years tends towards shorter and shorter forms; it is often digressive, less concerned with an overall structure, and organized by an arbitrarily adopted order -- chronological in *The Year of the Hunter*, alphabetical in *Milosz’s ABC*.”³⁶⁸

Instead of being a witness, Milosz is now content to being just an observer.

³⁶⁵ Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, 70.

³⁶⁶ Milosz, ‘Ruins and Poetry’ in *To Begin Where I Am*, 356.

³⁶⁷ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 158.

³⁶⁸ Levine, ‘Introduction,’ xv.

The Captive Mind³⁶⁹

Milosz published *The Captive Mind* almost immediately after officially breaking his ties with the Warsaw Communist government. As Robert Alter notes, the book “is still one of the best general accounts of what totalitarianism does to intellectual life.”³⁷⁰ According to Flagg Taylor, Milosz’s “chief concern” here is

“to portray the process by which writers and other intellectuals were transformed by their adoption of Marxist ideology. He characterizes this process neither as a submission to superior argument, nor as a conversion to a new set of beliefs, although there are elements of truth in both analogies. Rather, he presents it as a kind of seduction -- as an inner, moral drama, fraught with powerful human longings that need external confirmation.”³⁷¹

The ‘Preface’ makes it obvious that he is writing firstly for his western audience: he introduces himself to his readers, presenting his credentials for the quality of witness to what he is about to present. He is also trying to explain how the evolution of his political views should be understood by someone not familiar with the recent history of the Eastern bloc. Identifying a need for “extensive reforms” in Eastern Europe immediately after the war, he goes on to describe the way in which the Communist party managed to attract many intellectuals by gradually forcing them into moral compromise, while at the same time making them part of “a new privileged class.” He identifies the point which made him realize that he could no longer accept the compromises: socialist realism denied him his only reason for not leaving the country -- the possibility of reaching his compatriots through his writing -- as it denied him an “independent viewpoint.” In identifying the importance of the native language for a writer, Milosz also underlines the sacrifices he has made for freedom

³⁶⁹ Milosz, Czeslaw, *The Captive Mind*, translated from the Polish by Jane Zielonko (New York: Vintage Books, 1953). All following quotations are from this volume.

³⁷⁰ Alter, ‘Milosz: Poetry and Politics,’ 41.

³⁷¹ Taylor, ‘Czeslaw Milosz,’ 24.

of thought, in an attempt to make himself more credible. He then declares that he refuses to conform to either side (East or West, left or right) and that he intends to present to the western reader “the stages by which the mind gives way to compulsion from without.” (xi)

The motto he uses is a denunciation of any type of fanaticism and dogma, as expressed in a quote from An Old Jew of Galicia:

“When someone is honestly 55% right, that’s very good and there’s no use wrangling. And if someone is 60% right, it is wonderful, it’s great luck, and let him thank God. But what’s to be said about 75% right? Wise people say this is suspicious. Well and what about 100% right? Whoever says he’s 100% right is a fanatic, a thug, and the worst kind of rascal.” (1)

The first chapter, ‘The Pill of Murti-Bing,’ sets the stage, using an image borrowed from a remarkable interwar Polish novel for the process of indoctrination: “the happy pill.” Milosz identifies a spiritual void in people’s lives before World War II, “a lack of a common system of thought” that used to be offered by religion. As Flagg Taylor explains,

“men long for harmony and happiness, and no coherent worldview seemed to make sense of the brutal reality in which they found themselves. Past events had no correspondence to current realities. Intellectuals felt this crisis more acutely than others. Perhaps they demand more coherence from the world around them than others -- they demanded a way out of their internal crisis.”³⁷²

For the intellectuals, Milosz argues, the doctrine of the new man provides an ideal, something to fight for, a reason for living, a sense of being ‘useful’ in the struggle to create this new man. Just like swallowing a pill, people convert to the new doctrine, accepting the reign of necessity, without any debate on methodology, converting actually to a new religion. Their convictions are supported by the fact that the only echoes from the West which are allowed in this isolated world are those of the “*democrats* -- a delicate circumlocution for a

³⁷² Taylor, ‘Czeslaw Milosz,’ 26.

non-pagan.” (15) This confirms the theory that communism opens the road to the future, the only way towards progress, a theory supported by the apparent success of the systems. For writers, the gradual evolution is from “critical realism” (i.e. criticism of capitalism) to “socialist realism” (approval of communism). Through this process, they manage to overcome the guilt produced by the abandonment of traditional, national values. At the same time, they start resenting the western intellectuals who honestly admire the system, failing to see it as what it is, yet another, most fierce type of colonialism. At the end of this process, the writer is left with the conviction that “there is no other way.”

A counterpart of the first, the second chapter, ‘Looking to the West,’ identifies “the attitude of the average person in people’s democracies towards the West: it is despair mixed with a residue of hope.” (24) Milosz sees the main difference in the outlook on life in the fact that westerners (more specifically Americans) have never been in a situation which would prove to them the relativity and precariousness of their “judgments and thinking habits.” (28) Faced everyday with a propaganda claiming the superiority of the communist system, the citizen of the people’s democracies might eventually become convinced that this is the only way towards the future. Milosz starts analyzing the pros and cons of this theory. He notices the unnaturalness of the Communist criminal code, similar to the Nazi one in that “they efface the frontier between penal and non-penal deeds -- the first by defining crime as any act directed against the interests of the German nation; the second, as any act directed against the interests of the dictatorship of the proletariat.” (31) Then he concedes “the superiority of the West in potential production, technology.” (34) He also states that Western art reaches the masses through applied art, while Soviet art is “cut off from its roots, [...] bound to be sterile.” (36) In spite of all these, he sees the Eastern intellectual terrified by the indifference with which the Western world regards their artists and scholars, while in the people’s democracies “the capacity to follow the political line is a selective criterion by which the most mediocre often attains the greatest renown.” (37) Dialectically, Milosz comes to the

conclusion that “the New Faith is incapable of satisfying the spiritual needs of mankind, for its efforts in that direction have with inexorable regularity turned into caricature.” (38) In spite of this conclusion, he also argues that the downfall of the Communist system will not be caused by the West, but by the inherent fault in the Method, which does not encourage an objective search for the truth, but only confirmations of its own statements.

This all-encompassing falsehood is described as ‘Ketman,’ which defines life in the people’s democracies as constant acting. Milosz likens this kind of “conscious mass play” (52) with the concept of Ketman -- namely the attitude of Persian intellectuals (as described by Gobineau) faced with Islam: denial of one’s “true convictions” in order to survive. Milosz identifies several types of Ketman: ‘national Ketman’ (as exemplified by Tito), which translates into inner contempt for everything that is Russian, masked by outward fervent admiration for the same. Another Ketman is the ‘Ketman of revolutionary purity’ (as in the Mayakovski case), which is basically a rejection of Stalin and Stalinism as embodying everything that is wrong with the system. The ‘aesthetic Ketman’ is a retreat into the former ivory tower of art, but this particular dissenter also has to face the suspicion that true art cannot appear in fear, and that all that is left is the creation of the past centuries. ‘Professional Ketman’ seeks protection against the all-reaching lie in the security of a specialized field; but the most at risk here are those active in the humanistic studies. ‘Skeptical Ketman’ is basic distrust of humankind’s capacity to make sense of their lives, to actually use the doctrine rationally. ‘Metaphysical Ketman,’ Milosz says, appears “in countries with a Catholic past,” (68) and it comes to compensate for the fact that, from the point of view of the Party, art should only address social issues directly, thus ignoring the other, more spiritual functions of art. While this type of Ketman “is tolerated in the savages, i.e. those who profess the Christian religion, in the artists who are considered the educators of society, it is severely punished.” (71) ‘Ethical Ketman’ is the respect for the old ethical values, based on the individual, as opposed to the new valorization of the community.

Milosz concludes this chapter with another comparison with the West, where freedom of thought can be seen as a burden, while for Eastern intellectuals the practice of Ketman denotes a general human need for an inner truth.

In order to exemplify this general need, Milosz proceeds to offer “a few portraits of typical Eastern European writers that may serve as concrete examples of what is happening within the Imperium.” (79) ‘Alpha, the Moralist’ focuses on the need for higher values to replace the system of values destroyed by the war. Alpha, the writer starts by embracing Catholic values, but Milosz argues that these are not really Catholic, since they have no connection with the real world and people, they are just a language used to express the need for higher values, for a moral code. During the war, Alpha turns into a moral authority, embracing loyalty as the supreme value, only to realize later on that loyalty was no longer a valid justification for the overwhelming sacrifices and to understand his responsibility, through his literature, for these sacrifices. A gradual conversion to communism follows, from publishing in communist newspapers (welcomed, as he offered them social validation), through choosing an old communist as the hero of his novel, to finally converting to socialist realism, as the only option left if he still wanted to publish, but also as the logical result of all the compromises made on the way. Here Milosz points out the difference between himself and his former friend: while he felt bound to write “the whole truth, not just a part” (104), Alpha accepted the compromise.

‘Beta, the Disappointed Lover’ is no longer a former friend of Milosz’s, but just an acquaintance; the author does not identify with him, he studies him. Beta’s quest is for “a rational basis for his action.” (109) His life experience, including five years in Auschwitz, convinced Beta that civilization is just a fragile crust covering the inherent savagery of human nature, so he turned to Marxism from a belief that “Marxism treats man realistically.” (118) Since there is no inherent good in human nature, the only way to reform man is to “change the social conditions.” (118) The Party, on the other hand valued Beta for the very

rare quality of “true hatred” (120) -- hatred of the complex vision of humanity. His efforts will go towards simplifying this vision in the line of materialism, and thus his writings will turn into mere propaganda. Still, as an intelligent human being, Beta could not fail to perceive the discrepancy between his discourse and the reality around him, and this inner conflict eventually leads him to suicide.

The chapter dedicated to ‘Gamma, the Slave of History’ opens with a presentation of the city of Wilno, where the author had first met Gamma, one of his schoolmates. Milosz uses this opportunity to reiterate the fact that the expansion of communism from Russia is just another form of colonization, in keeping with the tradition of the tsars. This time, it is obvious that the author despises Gamma; the portrait is much more personal and realistic, rather than theoretical, as the previous two were. At the outbreak of war, Milosz notes, radicalism took two forms: one “intensely nationalistic” (137) and the other one leftist. After a nationalistic period, Gamma becomes a Stalinist, which was in itself “a complete revision of one’s concept of nationality.” (140) He manifests total commitment to the cause, in spite of the fact that terror affects him directly, as his own family is deported by the communists. After fleeing Poland from the German army, he returns with the victorious Red Army and becomes part of the new government. Everything Gamma does goes against Milosz’s own values. He is the embodiment of the enemy; the author has no respect for him, as he had had for Alpha and Beta. Gamma is also an image of dictatorship over the intellectuals, and even his literary work is derogatory presented as “one of those ideological exercises called novels in Russia.” (162) Still, Milosz realizes that all these ‘ideological exercises’ did not make Gamma happy and fulfilled, that “he considered himself the servant of the devil, but he did not love his master.” (164)

‘Delta, the Troubadour’ is a gentler, more tender portrait. It gives a very local romantic image of a fascinating poet who can only live a bohemian life. His weakness -- alcoholism -- is out in the open, but Milosz admires his poetry, as it is true to self. Delta’s

conversion to extreme nationalism before the war is explained by Milosz as an attempt to be closer to his audience. The author understands Delta and admires his writings, finds in him a kindred spirit through their common love of life and humanity. In France, immediately after the war, Delta again conforms to his audience's needs and writes anti-Russian poems, but eventually he returns to Poland and to his readers. His conversion to communism is just an empty gesture, since he is not interested in politics, but practices "art for art's sake." (181) This comfortable situation ends when "it was no longer enough to write on prescribed subjects, one had to write in a prescribed manner." (181) Delta cannot accept this mutilation of his art, and we get an insight into the tragedy of writers within the communist bloc which is much clearer than ever before. The only path left for him is translation of safe classical literary texts, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Building on all these examples, the chapter on 'Man, This Enemy,' shows how eventually everyone in a communist regime is suspected of being the enemy of the state. It is a powerful attack against the communist attempt to gain complete control over the human mind. The enemy is identified in several categories: "the propertied class" (183) is the least important one, since it is doomed to extinction by the decree of History. "The petty bourgeoisie" (184) is more threatening, as it carries "the germ of capitalism" (especially as a result of shortages and poor services offered by the system), thus becoming a potential political force. Then there is "the peasant problem," as they have "a middle class mentality" (185) and see collectivization as a return to the former state of bondage their ancestors abhorred. Ironically, even the workers, who are supposed to be the prime beneficiary of the new system, are against it, since "Central and Eastern Europe produce in order to raise the military and economic potential of the Centre and to compensate for the industrial backwardness of Russia." (188) The workers see this, and the only way for the Party to control them is by creating a new leading class from their midst which can be manipulated into adhering to the doctrine.

Milosz sees this attempt at manipulating their minds as similar to that of the Church, a kind of “sorcery” (190) used to enforce the belief in the New Faith. He also identifies the failure of the doctrine in its strict rationalism, in the presumption of being the depository of the whole truth, which leads to an oversimplification of life. Those whom History has condemned as a group, “the class enemy” (193) have no chance of redemption, irrespective of their individual decisions. “The reactionary,” on the other hand is he who refuses to see the great plan of History, who sees the “world as a series of unrelated events,” (194) in the end, though, still an enemy.

From this list of categories of enemies we can notice that actually the whole country is the enemy; even if they do not realize it, “the resistance against the new set of values is, however, emotional.” (193) The Party’s task is to control all these people and to force upon them a new type of consciousness. The arch-enemy is the “heresy,” the interpretation of the doctrine in ways the Party does not condone, so the pressure put on everyone is ideological: “[T]he Party, treating man exclusively as a by-product of social forces, believes that he becomes the type of being he pictures himself to be.” (206) This poses a great stress on literature and the arts, as it requires from them “absolute conformity.” (208) Milosz concludes this chapter with a premonition:

“It is not hard to imagine the day when millions of obedient followers of the New Faith may suddenly turn against it. That day would come the moment the Center lost its material might, not because fear of military force would vanish, but because success is an integral part of this philosophy’s argument. If it lost, it would prove itself wrong by its own definition.” (212)

From ideology, Milosz returns to geo-political and historical realities in ‘The Lesson of the Baltics’ -- again a more personal account. Admitting that Christian civilization was also “built on the blood of the innocent” (214), he argues that the crimes of the present are more important than those of history and that he considered it his moral duty to speak

against them. He goes on to give a lesson in the history and geography of the area, using comparisons with what he expects his western readers to know. He describes the German invasion, the Russian invasion, the man-hunts, the collectivization with their bloody details, insisting that he had been an eye-witness to all these. He also underlines the fact that the perpetrators of all these crimes do not have a sense of responsibility for them, as they see themselves as mere tools for the great force of History. At this point, Milosz enters into a direct dialogue with Pablo Neruda, granting him the quality of witness of the sufferings of his own people in capitalism, but asking for the same kind of open-mindedness when he, in his turn speaks of the sufferings of his own people. His conclusion, drawn from experience, is that communism is not the solution some of the western philosophers seek for their own problems and dilemmas, and he has taken upon himself to bear witness for this. He does not feel completely alone in his undertaking, though, as later he will note that “in our century many writers opted for revolution, but in their writings man has not been presented as deserving transformation.”³⁷³)

The first responses to *The Captive Mind* were book reviews published in political and sociological journals, which is indicative of the area of interest assigned to the book. Jane Degras is extremely positive in her comments on the book; she begins by mentioning the author’s quality of witness to the events he presents, and at the same time she underlines the fact that the volume is not autobiographical, but a clear and dispassionate analysis of “the pressures and temptations to which the intellectual is subject in the totalitarian State.” Anticipating the passionate reactions the book will trigger, she warns her readers: “[T]his book will offer little comfort to the complacent, to those whose world admits no color, but only black and white.”³⁷⁴

³⁷³ Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, 16.

³⁷⁴ Jane Degras, review of *The Captive Mind* by Czeslaw Milosz, *International Affairs* 30 (April 1954), 198.

A more specifically applied reading is done by Daniel Lerner, who starts his brief review by recommending the book to social scientists interested in exploring “uncharted areas” of their subject, “the most challenging current events available for study by the scientist.”³⁷⁵ As he identifies Milosz primarily as a poet, the reviewer highly appreciates his method of “disciplined selection of significant details” and assimilates it to that of an “expert clinician whose cases imply their own context and illustrate their own categories.” Translating the book in the terms of his trade, Lerner observes that “the four cases illustrate major variants in the operational code of behavior whereby mutation to and survival in, the species is accomplished” and then he goes on to present “the general theory of this behavior -- *Ketman*” which, he notices “is in dialectical; opposition to the Western code of martyrology.” Lerner identifies in Milosz “the rare observer who has experienced and comprehended the prevailing life-patterns under both codes,” a special case whose testimony should be studied carefully. The critic exemplifies for his readers (appealing to their empathy) with “professional *Ketman*” and embarks on a theoretical discussion, arguing that this “seems to demonstrate the Stalinist validation of the Marxist postulate that he who controls the means of production controls the whole structure of life -- psychic substructure as well as ideological superstructure.”³⁷⁶ The key question of the book is identified: “Is a social structure which entails such psychosocial arrangements durable?” The reviewer indicates that the methods of studying this social structure are rather contrary to the major tendencies in American sociological studies at that time, requiring scientists “to make rigorous inferences from fragmentary data”. For this, he gives them Milosz’s example.

Another critic, Paul Kecseti begins his very enthusiastic review of *The Captive Mind* by noticing that “even the best informed Westerners in reality know nothing

³⁷⁵ Daniel Lerner, review of *The Captive Mind* by Czeslaw Milosz, *American Sociological Review* 19 (August 1954), 488.

³⁷⁶ Lerner, 489.

about what goes on behind the Iron Curtain.”³⁷⁷ His appraisal of the book is more personal and literary: he uses terms like “poetic metaphor” and “evocative power,” but his main point is that the book offers a unique opportunity for the Western world to try to comprehend what was happening behind the Iron Curtain and thus be more prepared to face their enemy. From our time perspective, we can note that while this kind of humanistic studies was disregarded, if not almost prohibited in the Imperium (to use Milosz’s term), Western society benefited immensely from them and through them acquired an important advantage in the propagandistic battle the two were waging.

The remarkable impact of Milosz’s *Captive Mind* can also be seen in the way in which other authors employed this new form in their work, starting from the title, like Tamas Aczel and Tibor Meray in their *The Revolt of the Mind*.³⁷⁸ Published in the United States in 1959, the book is a personal testimony of the two authors on the events of the Hungarian Revolt in October 1956. As one book reviewer summarizes, “the struggle of the Communist intelligentsia is told here by two leading members of this very group.”³⁷⁹ They were, in their own words, “worse” than Communists: they were Stalinists and the book registers the atmosphere of these years of revolt, when the Hungarian Communist (ex-Communist?) intelligentsia spoke out quite bravely, and wrote in spite of the Party, although they were not necessarily in clear opposition to it.

Like Milosz, the two authors present a number of Hungarian intellectual figures of the time, but unlike Milosz’s essay, their story focuses on the events; it is a competent behind-the-scenes account of what was going on in those years. The ‘Prelude’ identifies the main actors: three categories of communist intellectuals active in the Hungarian cultural life

³⁷⁷ Paul Kecskemeti, ‘Coercion from Within,’ review of *The Captive Mind* by Czeslaw Milosz, *Commentary* 16 (1953), 275.

³⁷⁸ Tamas Aczel and Tibor Meray, *The Revolt of the Mind. A Case Study of Intellectual Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1959).

³⁷⁹ Charles G. Gati, review of *The Revolt of the Mind: A Case History of Intellectual Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain* by Tamas Aczel and Tibor Meray, *The Slavic and East European Journal* 4 (Winter, 1960), 387.

of the time. A first category includes “the Muscovites,” writers who have been trained in Moscow and pledged their allegiance to the Soviet Party first. According to Aczel and Meray, at the time of the revolt they were already disillusioned with communism and in mortal fear of Stalin and his heirs. A second category is that of the “old fighters,” old Hungarian communist writers who have proven their allegiance to the party during the war and who now, to their frustration, see the highest positions in Hungarian literary life being occupied by “the Muscovites.” The authors declare themselves as part of the third group, “the new generation,” which is still enthusiastic about communism and yet unaware of the crimes committed in its name.

Book I of *The Revolt of the Mind*, ‘Directed Inspiration,’ describes Hungarian literary life before the revolt along with some of its main figures, among them the Marxist critic Gyorgy Lukacs -- “an aristocratic communist,” and the minister of culture Jozsef Revai - - “a communist aristocrat.” The readers get a look at the atmosphere in the writer’s association, and the last chapter of the book identifies ‘Our Example: Soviet Literature.’ The following four books, ‘The Earthquake,’ ‘The Purifying Storm,’ ‘Isolation,’ and ‘Until the Statue Falls’ describe in detail the political battles before the revolt. Still, as Stephen Borsody puts it,

“as a study of post-war Hungarian intellectual history, which seemed to be the authors’ aim, the book is of limited value. Neither the ‘purifying storm’ nor exile, following the revolution of 1956, seemed to cure the authors entirely of their narrow Communist views. What is not of Communist coloration does not seem to interest them. In particular, they take no notice of the dispersal of the progressive democratic intellectual forces in post-war Hungary, nor of the recovery of these forces which gave popular support to the Communist writers in their struggle against tyranny. The book

takes, so to speak, a 'new class' view of Hungarian intellectual life and thus it fails to record in full the struggle of progressive intellectuals for a democratic Hungary."³⁸⁰

Unlike Milosz, who managed to free himself of all communist illusions, the two authors remain part of the 'new generation' they described at the beginning of the volume and, for the western reader, at least, the most interesting aspects remain "the dual qualities of mind that characterized the authors and their friends through various stages of development under communism."³⁸¹

The fact that Milosz's influence was long-lasting, and the model was deemed efficient is proven by the title of the journal *Uncaptive Minds* -- a quarterly of information and analysis on Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, published by the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe. Its editors declare it to be

"the only journal *about* the transition from communism in Eastern Europe written *by* those in the region who are bringing about democratic change. Begun in 1988, *Uncaptive Minds* was the first journal to provide a substantive vehicle for a wide range of opposition leaders from throughout the region to voice their views to a Western audience. *Uncaptive Minds* is also a successful cross-border journal for communicating information about events in the post-communist region."³⁸²

Possibly as a result of the normalization of political life in the region, the journal is currently suspended due to insufficient funding.

³⁸⁰ Stephen Borsody, review of *The Revolt of the Mind: A Case History of Intellectual Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain* by Tamas Aczel and Tibor Meray, *Political Science Quarterly* 76 (March 1961), 153.

³⁸¹ Paul E. Zinner, review of *The Revolt of the Mind: A Case History of Intellectual Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain* by Tamas Aczel and Tibor Meray, *Slavic Review* 23 (March 1964), 158.

³⁸² *Uncaptive Minds* website: <http://www.idea.org/um.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

Native Realm³⁸³

It has been observed that “there is a remarkable unity of purpose and continuity of themes across the very distinct works of Milosz’s corpus.”³⁸⁴ After producing the new form of *The Captive Mind*, Milosz reshapes his testimony into the more traditional, autobiographical form of *Native Realm*, although still trying to keep his distance from the events. As Ewa M. Thompson points out, “Milosz achieves universal comprehensibility by adopting the point of view of a newcomer to both civilizations and by demonstrating his awareness of the conflicts reflected in defining the events of the past.”³⁸⁵ The result, in the words of George Gomori, is “an ambitious attempt at an autobiography told as social history.”³⁸⁶

The title of *Native Realm* in the Polish original, *Native Europe*, points towards the author’s need to identify himself as part of that (only partly geographical) region, a need reflected by the English subtitle, *A Search for Self-definition*. Milosz makes this need clear in the ‘Introduction’: “I felt both a native and a foreigner. Undoubtedly I could call Europe my home, but it was a home that refused to acknowledge itself as a whole [...] Even if it is difficult or painful to explain who I am, nevertheless I must try.” (2)

The ‘personal’ history moulds the individual. For Milosz, the ‘Place of Birth’ is determined not only by geography, but by the history of the place (a common memory of history that can be traced further back to the language: “Historical details [...] are necessary [...] if I am to place my native province in a wider framework.” (13) The history of his native province starts in the 14th century with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that had none of the easily identifiable common traits: national, linguistic or religious. It was based, rather, on ‘regional attachments’ -- a term reminiscent of Kundera’s description of Central Europe.

³⁸³ Czeslaw Milosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-definition*, translated from the Polish by Catherine S. Leach (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002). All subsequent references are to this edition.

³⁸⁴ Taylor, ‘Czeslaw Milosz,’ 21.

³⁸⁵ Thompson, ‘The Writer in Exile,’ 506.

³⁸⁶ George Gomori, ‘Notes on Czeslaw Milosz’s life writing,’ *World Literature Today* 73 (Autumn 1999), 672.

Nationalism was a late development in the region, and Milosz notes the extremes to which it went in order to assert itself. Also, Fuit notes, “the fate of the Commonwealth is for him a kind of model for the growth and decline of every civilization,”³⁸⁷ some sort of genetic imprint on his world view.

Thus, Milosz focuses on ‘Ancestry’ as the depositary and transmitter of those nationalistic values that formed the intellectuals in the region:

“for the Eastern European the drive to gain recognition in the sphere of literature, science, or art has all the earmarks of a search for identity formerly conferred by a coat of arms. Nowhere outside of this part of Europe does the artist, writer, or scholar enjoy such exceptional privileges, and this is not the result of transformations brought about by the Communist Party, which understood just enough to make use of such a setup.” (34)

This image of the intellectual will follow Milosz throughout his entire life, in spite of his attempts to cast some doubt on the appropriateness of allotting such a privileged position to people who are still only human (as described in *The Captive Mind*). Also part of his formative years, Milosz’s vision of Russia, as presented in ‘Journey to Asia,’ is far from Kundera’s image of a cultural entity quite distant from the European one. On the contrary, benefiting from his pre-1917 experience, Milosz wonders “how things would look today if the same economic system extended from the Atlantic to Kamchatka.” (39)

The following three chapters cover a series of wars: First World War (‘War’), the Bolshevik Revolution (‘Ten Days that Shook the World’), local battles and the formation of independent Lithuania (‘More Wars’), seen through the eyes of a child wandering with his parents in search for safety. As a result, “history becomes fluid because it is equated with ceaseless wandering.” (41) The same can be said about the great principles that started those wars: “[T]here are many definitions of freedom. One of them proclaims that freedom is

³⁸⁷ Fuit, *The Eternal Moment*, 2.

the ability to drink an unlimited quantity of vodka.” (44) This view of history as, “at the same time, crushing and fluid,” therefore comes from a very early period in his life and explains why “for Milosz, it is the individual, personal biography, in which human nature and culture are refracted in a unique way.”³⁸⁸

The first point of stability after all this wandering is the ‘City of My Youth,’ Wilno. In describing it, Milosz refers us to two sets of characteristics: linguistic (people there spoke Polish, Yiddish, Lithuanian, Byelorussian, Russian) and religious (they identified themselves as Roman Catholics, Jews, Karaites, Protestants, Moslems, Orthodox), only to note in the end (in agreement with Kundera) that cosmopolitanism is a mark of Europe: “[T]he mosaic of contending nationalities is a characteristic of Europe, of the European scene that exasperates, say, an American. The question here is not only one of language, but of cultural belonging.” (56) And this cultural belonging included, for him, an economic aspect: “We belonged to the same economic circuit, although it was only by experiencing the contrast of completely different systems that I was able to understand the fact.” (59)

Attuned at the same time to the culture of Western Europe (and the United States) through movies and books, and to the multitude of cultures in his own back yard, Milosz concludes: “I consider myself a typical Eastern European [...] his *differentia specifica* can be boiled down to a lack of form -- both inner and outer. His good qualities -- intellectual avidity, fervor in discussion, a sense of irony, freshness of feeling, spatial (or geographical) fantasy.” (67) As Aleksander Fiut notes, “the poet is fully aware that whether writing or speaking, he is determined by time and place of birth, milieu, personal experiences, and national culture.”³⁸⁹

An important part of his formation derives from the ‘Catholic Education,’ which for him, as for Kundera, is an intrinsic part of a “European consciousness” (77). On the other

³⁸⁸ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 141.

³⁸⁹ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 164.

hand, Milosz also notices the ways in which “religion was turned into an institution for preserving national identity” (82), and so his next chapter focuses on ‘Nationalities.’ It opens with “the other” par excellence -- the Jew -- and goes on to mention “the mutual impenetrability of each milieu.” (92) As Robert Alter notes, Milosz’s “imaginative relation to history is a repeated analogy of position to the Jewish one.”³⁹⁰ The beginning of the 20th century meant the advent of nationalism in that part of the world, and Milosz would witness it during his school years in Wilno, “a school replacing a many-cultured heritage with national attitudes.” (98) His early multicultural environment made Milosz understand the superficiality of national concepts: “A country or a state should endure longer than an individual [...] Today, however, one is constantly running across survivors of various Atlantises.” (106)

‘Marxism,’ discussed in the next chapter, was no antidote to nationalism. For Milosz, it is, on the one hand, “the inevitable outcome of a nineteenth-century scientific world view carried to its logical conclusion” (113), and also the result of “a need for a simplified outlook on life, which could be contained in a catechism or a brochure” (114) and which seems to be inherent to the human kind. In direct relation to Marxism, the next chapter is dedicated to ‘Russia,’ which Milosz describes as “a reporter, a sociologist and a historian” (147). He makes use here of more than his personal experience, realizing that, as Aleksander Fiut puts it, “the dimension of memory may embrace a considerably broader horizon than an individual biography alone.”³⁹¹ He starts by asserting that “certain characteristics are common to all newly established states: the violence of national emotions; the dominant position of the intelligentsia; the role of the army” (136). He then identifies a typically Russian “conspiracy against the truth,” (142) and ends up by justifying his position against the accusation of nationalism that he received from his French and

³⁹⁰ Alter, ‘Milosz: Poetry and Politics,’ 42.

³⁹¹ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 33.

American friends. What he describes here are the by-products of a culture which he, just as Kundera will later on, cannot but feel as alien and primitive.

In direct opposition, his 'Journey to the West' describes the civilized alternative, and Milosz names Prague "the first Western European capital I saw" (150) -- another indication of the fluidity of these classifications. Ironically, it was right at the border that "France -- our spiritual sister -- welcomed us. The sign prohibited Gypsies, Poles, Romanians and Bulgarians from entering the country." (158) The first contact with what was considered at the time the cultural capital of the world -- Paris -- made an ambivalent impression on the young man. His discoveries are helped, though, by his relative, Oscar Milosz who (in the chapter entitled 'The Young Man and the Mysteries') makes him realize that "the whole Eastern European attitude towards 'centers of culture' is false; it comes from timidity." (181)

The return to Wilno and the time spent working for the local radio station are presented in 'The Publican;' this chapter is followed by 'The Peace Boundary,' an ironic title for a description of the "sudden collapse of the whole structure of collective life." (204) This 'autobiography' offers only incidental personal information on its author; it develops more like a biography of history through anecdotic details aimed at making it understandable for readers not familiar with it. Rather illogically for his contemporaries, and based undoubtedly on some very personal reasons, Milosz decides to go back to Nazi-occupied Warsaw at a moment when Wilno was under Soviet occupation and his leftist views made him an asset for the new power.

The four years during which Milosz, together with many others, "unlearned Western civilization, if what it teaches can be boiled down more or less to respect for money and the feeling that one has some kind of rights" (232) are presented in the next chapter, 'The G. G.' (the Government General, the Nazi name for the Warsaw region). But Milosz also realizes that it was that period that gave the final touch to his formation as a poet:

neither the individualist dedicated to 'pure poetry,' nor the expression of the 'collective soul,' as dictated by Socialist realism or by "indiscriminating Polish patriotism." (248) As Robert Alter notes, "these three grim events -- the destruction of the ghetto, the destruction of the city, the corruption of the nation -- have remained [...] focal points in Milosz's perception of history and in his understanding of the task of poetry under the pressures of history."³⁹²

After an 'Intermezzo' in the countryside that meant "a return to an elementary existence" (252), Milosz's autobiography, which covers about half his life, the formative years, concludes with two chapters dedicated to his friend and mentor, 'Tiger.' A professor of philosophy who chose to go back to Soviet Poland after a brief experience of the life of a Polish émigré in Paris, Tiger seems to be a kind of a counterpart figure for Milosz. He has the same awareness of some "bitter knowledge incommunicable to people in the West" (259), but he loses his intellectual integrity when faced with the terror of the new regime. He thus becomes a warning for Milosz that "terror is not, as Western intellectuals imagine, monumental; it is abject, it has a furtive glance, it destroys the fabric of human society and changes the relationships of millions of individuals into channels for blackmail." (281) After working for a short time for the Soviet regime at the Polish embassy in the United States, Milosz goes back to Poland and, appalled at the new realities, decides to leave the country. In Paris, though, he finds out that "a writer who fled from a country where Tomorrow was being born (if the system is bad, then it is good enough for Eastern barbarians) was guilty of a social blunder." (291) He realizes, though, that "one has a right to escape only if he finds a way to fight" and this conclusion turns *Native Realm*, as E. J. Czerwinski remarks, into "an examination of conscience, as well as an account of one man's journey from light into darkness and his slow return."³⁹³

³⁹² Alter, 'Milosz: Poetry and Politics,' 43.

³⁹³ Czerwinski, 'Czeslaw Milosz: The persistence of existence,' 670.

The quality of reflective witness to historical events is thus used by Milosz as a means of defining himself and his work, of explaining who he is and where he comes from (temporally, rather than, or as well as geographically). As Aleksander Fiut observes, Milosz sees

“biography as a hypothetical myth, a system of signs that illuminates the meaning of an individual life, and a personal myth because biography legitimizes a personal existential perspective. Faced with the ruins of concepts purporting to explain all human history, concepts like Hegelianism or dialectical materialism, and the threat of bending history to immediate needs or even its falsification, the individual biography seems the sole trustworthy means of reconciling accident with necessity.”³⁹⁴

In this process of self-objectivation, “one of his great resources as a witness of horror is a kind of constitutional antipathy toward any kind of melodramatic flourish.”³⁹⁵ The last step in his quest for objectivity is represented by the two volumes of *Milosz’s ABC*.

Milosz’s ABC³⁹⁶

A first volume of *Milosz’s ABC* was published in 1997 and an additional one in 1998, when Milosz’s need to bear witness to a century of horrors felt much less urgent. Consequently, the text is a series of writer’s notes, simply organized alphabetically, in subtle disdain of literary methods (following the loose structure of a typically Polish genre). Milosz himself tries to explain his choice from the very beginning: “[P]erhaps I simply felt mute from an excess of emotion, and that is why I went back to expressing myself indirectly; that is, instead of speaking about myself, I started assembling a registry, as it were, of biographical sketches and events.” (16) The choice is also a rejection of the autobiographical model that

³⁹⁴ Fiut, *The Eternal Moment*, 158.

³⁹⁵ Alter, ‘Milosz: Poetry and Politics,’ 42.

³⁹⁶ Czeslaw Milosz, *Milosz’s ABC*, translated from the Polish by Madeline G. Levine (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001). All following quotations are from this edition.

Milosz had tried before, but now no longer satisfies him: "Obviously, autobiographies are false, not excluding my own." He explains his lack of trust in the biographical model by a deep mistrust of pre-imposed mental structures: "They are false because their individual chapters are linked according to a predetermined scheme, whereas, in fact they were connected differently, only no one knows how. In fact, the same falseness affects autobiographies because whoever writes about his own life would have to share God's viewpoint to understand those connections." So, for this book, he salvages only remnants of the biographical model, to be used in a more general overview of twentieth century intellectual life: "The value of biographies, then, is solely that they allow one to more or less re-create the era in which a given life was lived." (60)

This structure allows him a much more confessional tone, since it makes it apparent that he does not attach any intrinsic value to the actual events of his life. In fact, his effort goes towards a kind of life-like randomness, against the very human need to make sense of each event and build a rational structure out of all of them (or just those which fit that structure, as he specifies here: "[M]emory is constantly juggling and revising the data of experience"). The unstructured collection of entries for people, places, abstract and concrete notions proposes a fragmentary structure that could counterbalance the fact that, "in telling about an event, we ourselves cannot avoid revising it, because our narrative simplifies and composes a whole out of selected components, while omitting others." (147) Going against the grain, however, the reader can identify several threads of discussion interwoven in this non-narrative, which run parallel with the biographical coordinates (geographical, historical, political, linguistic or literary) proposed in the first part of this study, on the same East-West axis.

On those coordinates, the description of places in Eastern and Western Europe and in America, urban, rural, or wild, real or literary builds up a personal geography which, although inclusive, is still at odds with that of Westerners who

“limit their imagination by drawing a line through the centre of Europe and telling themselves that it is not in their interest to be concerned about the little-known peoples who live to the east of them. Yalta had many causes (to pay back an ally), but essentially the determining factor was the notion of empty territories that were of no importance for the progress of civilization.” (273)

The geography is complemented by historical references. The people mentioned in the book (as portraits that could be developed into something like *The Captive Mind*) are school mates (instances of historical types), friends (benchmarks of Milosz’s own life, a life described sequentially, in relation to others), representatives of institutions -- through which Milosz reconstructs an indirect history of his own: “[O]ur collective work, whatever we name it -- our society, civilization, *polis* in Greek -- is constantly changing and displaying itself in various colors, subject to time or history.” (200) Actual historical figures are sometimes used as props for Milosz’s own discussion of the events:

“At the end of the thirties, the German project of being surrounded on the east by states with a similar ideology seemed close to realization. With some obstacles, the Germans could count on Romania, Hungary, Croatia and, after the partition, on Slovakia, while the occupied Czech lands were transformed into one large weapons factory. Stanislaw Piasecki and his comrades, and also the National Radical Camp, which was close to him in orientation, put forward more or less the same program that would soon be adopted in Pavelic’s satellite Croatia; in other words, an alliance with Hitler and a common march against Russia would have been logical. Polish history does not obey the rules of logic, however.” (217-8)

Some figures of intellectuals are the embodiment of a certain attitude towards politics and ideologies in general, like “Winniecka, Dr. Wiktoria” (all entries have dictionary forms), a pediatrician from Lwow whose

“knowledge of the twentieth century was vast and rare; she had known two totalitarian systems and had survived the Holocaust. She travelled all over the world and spoke many languages. Her knowledge was the basis for her world view, in which there was no room for belief in anything or for hope. Marxism would have been a spiritual luxury for her, not to mention religion. She professed a belief in materialism, but not the dialectical variety.” (301)

Others, like the Russian historian “Amalrik, Andrei” who predicted the fall of the Soviet Union, allow Milosz to offer his readers a concise image of life under communism and of the state of mind of people living it:

“Perhaps the most incomprehensible event of the twentieth century was the fall of the state that called itself the USSR, but was referred to by others as the Soviet Union or L’Union Sovietique. The astronomical sums expended on the largest political force in the world allowed it to grow into a mighty organization with millions of informers at its disposal and a network of forced labor camps across the breadth of Eurasia. Its propaganda and espionage activities were also generously financed to ensure that foreigners would not know the truth about the system. The costly terror machine itself and its masking with humanitarian slogans seemed to guarantee the permanence of the imperium. Its victories on the battlefields of World War II and participation in the partition of Europe suggested its internal efficiency and predisposed the populations of the newly conquered countries to a fatalistic acceptance. True, as time passed, cracks appeared in the monolith; however, optimists who observed the signs of disintegration exposed themselves to the rebuke that they were mistaking their desires for reality.”
(19-20)

Figures of American intellectuals occasion personal confessions that are, at the same time, relevant for the whole American intellectual environment: “When the question of granting me tenure was up for consideration, the major objection put forward by someone in the

university was *The Captive Mind*, which was said to have been written in order to justify the Left!" (117)

Oppositely, the entry dedicated to France paints the other side of the coin: "It makes no difference to me that the French intellectuals later confessed to their great political error. The extent of that error is such that I have stopped believing in any subsequent 'isms' if they are of Parisian derivation." (119) Milosz is aware of a process (both personal and more general, in the spirit of the age) of disenchantment with French culture -- the same entry notes France's old glory: "[I]t -- not Germany, not Italy, not England -- was synonymous with the culture of the West" (118). This process is most visible at the level of language:

"I would choose 1938 as the date when everyone in Warsaw began studying English. The era of French, like that of Latin before it, was coming to an end in Europe, after the temporary vacillation or interregnum that began in 1914. It is easier to explain this change as a whim of the *Zeitgeist* than as the military dominance of the Anglo-Saxons, which was still to come." (122)

For himself, though, Milosz declares his allegiance to Polish language (in an entry dedicated to it): "The language is my mother, literally and metaphorically. It is certainly my home, which I carry around the world on my wanderings." (218) The image he uses is eerily similar to that employed by Manea regarding Romanian language.

Not surprisingly, since Milosz's main interest lies there, the geographical, historical, political or linguistic coordinates all converge in literature: fictional places, fictional characters, authors of literature, and literary critics, although Milosz is quick to point out his specialization as author, rather than analyst of literature: "I am not a literary scholar; at most I am a distant cousin to one." (99) However, he is in a position where he can identify trends in literary criticism: "Western Structuralism is derived directly from the Russian Formalist School" (175) and assign symbolism to authors of literature (like "Rimbaud, Arthur"):

“Perhaps human societies require names as abbreviations, names that constitute a kind of shorthand, names as substitutes.” (240) In the last chapter of the book (‘Envoi’), though, Milosz insists that

“I am not concerned with literature alone. My time, my twentieth century, weighs on me as a host of voices and the faces of people whom I once knew, or heard about, and now they no longer exist. Many were famous for something, they are in the encyclopedias, but more of them have been forgotten, and all they can do is make use of me, the rhythm of my blood, my hand holding the pen, in order to return among the living for a brief moment.” (313)

The conclusion explains his choice of this unusual form, which allows the author to use individual biographies to illustrate general themes, a choice similar to that of Kundera:

“Working on this ABC book, I often thought that it would be most appropriate to bore into the core of each individual’s life and destiny, rather than limit myself to external facts. My heroes appear in a flash, often though a not particularly essential detail, but they must rest content with that, because it is better to escape oblivion, if only in that way. Perhaps my ABC’s are instead of: instead of a novel, instead of an essay on the twentieth century, instead of a memoir.” (313)

Milosz’s choice is not fiction, which would have lent too clear a structure to events and issues whose absurdity seems to be the most striking feature, nor autobiography, which would be too personal, and thus limitative in scope, but a mosaic of biographies, which offers a multitude of perspectives creating the relativity Milosz insists is essential to deep understanding.

4.2 Milan Kundera, the story-teller

Going in a completely different direction than Milosz, Kundera constantly stays on the side of fiction and not biography (even less autobiography, in spite of the frequent apparently personal insertions in all his novels). His commitment to the literary form of the novel can be seen as an option for the ultimate literary expression of freedom of thought since, as Grenier notes, “Kundera conceives the novel as intrinsically incompatible with authoritarianism, especially in its most radical form: totalitarianism.”³⁹⁷ Thus his novels focus on real life, rather than political ideas, more specifically -- on the very real effects of abstract ideas, as these effects reveal the complexities of life, as opposed to the oversimplifications of ideology. As Grenier notes again, “the hallmark of Kundera’s approach is to examine politics by focusing on what can be called the meta-political (the foundation — the underpinnings — as opposed to current events, political thought or institutions), and to find roots of the meta-political in psychological dispositions in general,”³⁹⁸ all this with a view to exposing the risks hidden in reductionist theories.

Formally, his novels seek to find a solution to the limitations of the classical novel (what Francois Ricard calls “the exhaustion of the Hegelian novel”), to answer the question “what does the novel become when the epic model is no longer tenable?”³⁹⁹ According to Ricard, Kundera’s Czech novels can be grouped into the epic -- those written in Prague: *Laughable Loves* (1959-1968), *The Joke* (1965), *Life Is Elsewhere* (1969), *The Farewell Waltz* (1971-1972) -- and the musical -- written in Rennes and Paris: *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1978), *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1982), *Immortality* (1988). Between Grenier’s discussion of Kundera’s political insights and Ricard’s complex

³⁹⁷ Grenier, ‘Milan Kundera,’ 6.

³⁹⁸ Grenier, 8.

³⁹⁹ Francois Ricard, *Agnes’s Final Afternoon. An Essay on the Work of Milan Kundera*, translated from the French by Aaron Asher (New York: Harper Collins 2003), 13.

analysis of novelistic forms, the present study identifies a link between the author's confidence in a political system and the coherence of the epic structure of his novels.

As early as the first novels, the epic model is already subverted by Kundera's 'polyphonic' structure which, in *The Joke* (discussed next in this study) brings together four narrative voices (although the structure is not new in the history of the novel, as Kundera himself points out in his essays, it is a courageous break with the requirements of socialist realism). With *Life Is Elsewhere* the structure becomes 'polytemporal,' as Kundera uses the figures of many famous poets (Hugo, Rimbaud, Keats, Shelley, Mayakovski) as references for his own hero, so much so that "by Part Seven of the novel, the poets and Jaromil form a single being with a thousand interchangeable faces, a single Poet over whom neither time nor place has control."⁴⁰⁰ Although Kundera does draw more general conclusions, the focus is still on the poet and intellectual in a communist regime, with scenes that are revelatory of this uncomfortable position, between the demands of the Party and those of the readers, all in the stifling atmosphere created by the regime's insistence on using art as a propagandistic tool:

"Let me recall a historical detail: trade union clubs and Party and Youth Union committees organized evenings to which they invited all sorts of painters, poets, astronomers, or economists; the organizers of these evenings were duly noted and rewarded for their initiatives, for the era required revolutionary activity, which, impossible to exert on the barricades, had to blossom in meetings and discussions. Also, all sorts of painters, poets, astronomers, or economists, readily participated in such evenings, which enabled them to show that they were not narrow specialists but revolutionary specialists with ties to the people.

Thus the poets were quite familiar with the questions audiences posed, they knew that they were repeated with the stupefying regularity of statistical probability.

⁴⁰⁰ Ricard, 116.

They knew that someone was certainly going to ask: Comrade, how did you first start to write? They knew that someone else would ask: How old were you when you wrote your first poem? They also knew that someone would ask who their favorite author was, and that you could also expect someone in the audience anxious to display his Marxist learning pose the question: Comrade, how would you define socialist realism? And they also knew that in addition to questions they would be reminded of their duty to write more poetry about (1) the occupations of the people in the audience, (2) youth, (3) the cruelty of life under capitalism, and (4) love.”⁴⁰¹

Away from this atmosphere, the move to France represents the moment of rupture in the epic structure of Kundera’s novels, in the form of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* -- the second novel discussed in this chapter -- which seems to completely “abandon the novel based on unity of action and dramatic tension.”⁴⁰² Kundera’s declared intention is to produce a “rehabilitation of the episode”⁴⁰³ by rejecting the confines of a novelistic structure based mainly on a story-line. On the contrary, here

“all the signs of an autobiographical account, beginning with the name shared among author, narrator and character lack the essentials of the autobiographical *intention*. Their function is not to illustrate the singularity of his being, or the report on his life [...] but, by the same token as the other fictional or real stories contained in the novel [...] to contribute to exploring the themes that attract him: ‘looking back,’ ‘laughter,’ ‘angels.’”⁴⁰⁴

The book is the result of Kundera’s deeply-rooted suspicion of literary forms which give internal coherence and, consequently, value to events that can only be seen as absurd.

⁴⁰¹ Milan Kundera, *Life Is Elsewhere*, translated from the French by Aaron Asher (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 310.

⁴⁰² Ricard, *Agnes’s Final Afternoon*, 87.

⁴⁰³ Ricard, 154.

⁴⁰⁴ Ricard, 129-130.

However, after Kundera has found “an entirely new way of composing a novel,”⁴⁰⁵ he appears to return to a more classical composition in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, where the themes are structured around four main characters, following a main plot, though not a perfectly chronological narrative line. This return to story line can be seen as the result of Kundera’s rediscovered perspective in France -- ideas are not enough, the story is still a more powerful mode of conveying experience. Francois Ricard remarks precisely this focus on human experience, rather than theoretical constructs. While

“no survey, no work of history or political science ‘conveys’ more precisely and concretely the destiny of Czechoslovakia (and of Communist Europe) in the second half of the twentieth century than the five-panel tableau consisting of *Life Is Elsewhere*, *The Joke*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and *Ignorance* -- which lays out the successive phases of a history that runs from World War II until the return of the émigrés; their intention is not in the least to recount the history of a society or a regime but rather to recount human existence through certain situations exemplified by this society or that regime.”⁴⁰⁶

Indeed, Kundera’s insistence, throughout the years, on fiction -- that is, story-telling -- as the only way of transmitting human experience in all its complexities, does not come from undervaluing the author’s own life experience, but rather from a constant search for the most appropriate form to transmit this experience, without limiting its message:

“I have known all these situations, I have experienced them myself, yet none of them has given rise to the person my curriculum vitae and I represent. The characters in my novels are my own unrealized possibilities. That is why I am equally fond of them all and equally horrified by them. Each one has crossed a border that I myself have circumvented. It is that crossed border (the border beyond which my own ‘I’ ends)

⁴⁰⁵ Ricard, 149.

⁴⁰⁶ Ricard, 121-122.

which attracts me most. For beyond that border begins the secret the novel asks about. The novel is not the author's confession; it is an investigation of human life in the trap the world has become."⁴⁰⁷

The Joke⁴⁰⁸

Kundera finished writing *The Joke* in December 1965. He presented the manuscript to the publisher and, to his utmost surprise (considering that “the spirit of the work was diametrically opposed to the official ideology [...] which no one could question but no one took seriously” (viii)), it was published as such, meaning with no censorship, two years later and one year before the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army. From this time perspective, the novel is a perfect example of the kind of book that was published during ‘the thaw’ of communism in that it exposes the Stalinist ‘mistakes’ in a tone indicative of “a kind of spiritual nausea” (in the words of Irving Howe).⁴⁰⁹ This is exactly how it was read when it was first published in France, in 1971. From then on, Kundera's effort has been constantly directed towards making his readers see the book for what he meant it to be: ‘*merely* a novel.’ But it took a second edition (in a new translation, approved by the author, in 1982) for the novel to be read from a more literary perspective, as “a project with few precedents or parallels in modern literature. He [Kundera] strives to evoke the tone of life in a society corroded by a profound demoralization. Nobody believes what everyone must say and everyone knows that nobody believes.”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁷ Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 221.

⁴⁰⁸ Milan Kundera, *The Joke*, translated from the Czech by Michael Henry Heim (London: Faber and Faber, 1983). All following quotations are from this edition.

⁴⁰⁹ Irving Howe, ‘Red Rulers and Black Humor,’ review of *The Joke*, by Milan Kundera, *New York Times Book Review*, October 24, 1982, <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/24/books/red-rulers-and-black-humor.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed November 12, 2012.

⁴¹⁰ Howe.

In doing so, formally, the book marks a break with the socialist realist narratives of the collective: it is a novel of individuals, even though these individuals can be seen to stand for more general issues. Indeed, in one of the first reviews after publication in the West, Michael Berman noted that they could be considered “types in contemporary Czechoslovak society.”⁴¹¹ This is in keeping with Kundera’s disappointment, and that of his whole generation, with thinking and planning on a large scale, as they recognized the fact that generalization in politics, philosophy and literature is a dehumanizing and ultimately dangerous oversimplification. However, “almost as a bonus” for the western reader, the novel “provides a miniature social history of Czechoslovakia during the past 20 years.”⁴¹² Kundera himself explains this ‘polyphonic’ (his term) structure in his volume of essays *Testaments Betrayed*, where he explains that *The Joke* presents:

“four personal communist universes grafted onto four European pasts: Ludvik: the communism that springs from the caustic Voltairean spirit; Jaroslav: communism as the desire to reconstruct the patriarchal past that is preserved in folklore; Kostka: communist utopia grafted onto the Gospel; Helena: communism as the well-spring of enthusiasm in a *homo sentimentalis*. Each of these personal universes is caught at the moment of its dissolution: four forms of communism’s disintegration; which also means the collapse of four ancient European ventures”⁴¹³

The implication here is that there is no alternative to communism, only variations thereupon. The personal quality of the novel is easy to perceive from the very fact that it is a series of first person narratives -- Kundera’s way of rejecting “the abusive power of the single

⁴¹¹ Michael Berman, ‘To Ludvik, Optimism Was the Opium of the People,’ review of *The Joke*, by Milan Kundera, *New York Times Book Review*, January 11, 1970, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-joke2.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

⁴¹² Berman.

⁴¹³ Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, 13.

narrator”⁴¹⁴ and of indicating the inherently confrontational nature of political options at the same time. The multiple point of view, on the other hand, gives the novel a relativistic perspective which helps avoid oversimplifications, as noted by both Howe (the “interplay of narrating voices [...] allows for complication and relativism of perspective”⁴¹⁵) and Ricard (“the assignment to each of the four monologues of a style, a tone, and even of a content that is unique and that clearly sets it apart from the others” means “the talk of each participant is constantly cut off, disrupted, given nuance, relativized by those of the others.”⁴¹⁶)

The novel opens with Ludvik’s narrative, which sets the tone and background: it is a return to the past, torn between “remorseful nostalgia and remorseless skepticism.” (viii) The setting is a depressing little Moravian town (that should be “home” for Ludvik, but does not feel like it), with its impersonal architecture and uncomfortable hotel rooms, so typical of any Eastern European communist town -- a great future that never happened. This is also the first appearance of Lucie, one of the characters who never speak for themselves, but help to create this “genuinely humane look at inhumanity”⁴¹⁷.

In a contrapuntal switch, part two uses the voice of Helena, the only one who clings to the idea of communism as a way of life, to her youthful beliefs. Readers get the feeling that her consistency is more the result of her fear of change, of her need for lofty ideas to justify her life, than of any inner convictions. She is thus contrasted with her husband, Pavel, who knows exactly what the current trends ask of him, who is attuned to new ideas, although always playing these new ideas his way. This perfectly illustrates how, as Francois Ricard notes, the composition of the novel works as “an ensemble where each

⁴¹⁴ Kundera, *The Curtain*, 166.

⁴¹⁵ Howe, ‘Red Rulers and Black Humor.’

⁴¹⁶ Ricard, *Agnes’s Final Afternoon*, 95.

⁴¹⁷ Berman, ‘To Ludvik, Optimism Was the Opium of the People.’

one, while speaking for himself, is also unwittingly clarifying and completing his companion's remarks."⁴¹⁸

'The joke' from the title is presented only in the third part, again in the voice of Ludvik, whose life it almost ruined. The tragic quality of this joke comes primarily from its being misread as a political stand, while it was just a very personal reaction to a very personal situation. The conflict it reveals is that between the individual and a system which forbids any individualism. All the black insignia soldiers in Ludvik's company had one way or another, through their own acts or by accident found themselves thrown out of the collective entity which represented the accepted standard. Cenek's allegorical painting is a remarkable caricature of the way the stereotypes worked:

"Here we have an allegorical representation of the significance of the Red Army for the struggle currently engaged in by our nation, he declaimed. Here (he pointed to the sergeant), we see the Red Army, and flanking the Red Army (he pointed to the officer's wife) the working class and (he pointed to his schoolmate) the revolutionary month of February. Now, these (he pointed to the other ladies in turn) are symbolic of liberty, victory and equality, and here (he pointed to the officer's wife displaying her hindquarters) we find the bourgeoisie making its exit from the stage of history." (74)

But Ludvik's is not a story of the Gulag: it is a love story (as Kundera insisted it should be read), and in this it is again personal. Lucie gives him back the simplicity of life when nothing else is left, when he has absolutely no control over his own life. Still, the whole experience leaves him with an inherent lack of trust in humanity. From the narrative point of view, as Craig Cravens notes in his study of the Czech original, the constant digressions of Ludvik the narrator indicate precisely that he "seeks sovereignty over his own past." This is in direct

⁴¹⁸ Ricard, *Agnes's Final Afternoon*, 95.

contrast with Helena's narrative: "[U]nlike Ludvik's past, Helena's is alive in her present, narrating self."⁴¹⁹

Yet another perspective is introduced next -- Jaroslav's story, which should be less dramatic, as he chooses to live his life at home, in a traditional frame. It is, as Irving Howe notes, "the only part of *The Joke* in which some sense of human worthiness prevails."⁴²⁰ But the sadness seeps in as he realizes that tradition is being constantly eroded, that the old ways of life are no longer valid and respected, and are ultimately not an answer to the new realities. Traditions have become yet another prop in the communist staging of what is supposed to be their perfect life.

The current plot is further developed in the narrative of what should be Ludvik's revenge on the man on whom he concentrates his anger, whom he sees as the agent of his earlier fall. It is the joke Ludvik tries to play on destiny, only to understand in the end that the joke has always been on him, that instead of taking his woman away from his enemy, he has instead just relieved him from the burden of an unwanted wife. It is remarkable that, while most reviewers in the West understood the symbolism of the characters, some still protested against what they considered the 'sexual misuse' of Helena as an instrument of Ludvik's revenge,⁴²¹ failing to read it as a futile attempt at a symbolic disparagement of the past political affiliation. Somehow, the feminine figure failed to attain full symbolic value for the critics. Pavel is again the winner in this game, as he is the only one who does not bother himself with irrelevant ideals, but constantly adjusts to the changing environment. Interestingly, the 'winner' has no narrative voice in the novel.

Yet another, different perspective on the same reality is revealed next: that of Kostka, apparently a bystander to Ludvik's turmoil. It is a Christian perspective, and

⁴¹⁹ Craig Cravens, 'Faulty Consciousnesses: Milan Kundera's *The Joke*,' *The Slavic and East European Journal* 44 (Spring, 2000), 97.

⁴²⁰ Howe, 'Red Rulers and Black Humor.'

⁴²¹ The issue inspired a full article: Frances L. Restuccia, 'Homo Homini Lupus: Milan Kundera's *The Joke*,' *Contemporary Literature* 31 (Autumn 1990), 281-299.

Kundera identifies here the common traits between communism and religion, beginning with the concept of guilt, used to subdue people, and ending with the same vision of collective salvation: "I know that great deeds on this earth can be accomplished only by a band of infinitely devoted men who humbly yield up their lives to a higher cause." (204) But religion (in the person of Kostka) also fails to make Lucie happy. Also, from a narrative point of view, "Kostka reveals most clearly the pervasive isolation of all the narrators from one another: they all speak, but only to themselves, to an *other* they themselves have created."⁴²²

The conclusion brings together Ludvik, Jaroslav and Helena at the moment when "the story catches up with the narrators."⁴²³ It is the end of the joke, which turns tragically ridiculous for Helena and, implicitly for Ludvik -- "the rectifier of History's wrongs, discovering himself as both victim and instrument of a scheme all the more insane for being without originator, without a reason, and therefore without appeal."⁴²⁴ The end, though, is death for the innocent Jaroslav, just as Ludvik was turning to him (that is, to the old ways and traditions) for support and direction, for reconciliation with life as it is, and not as it was supposed to be. The threat of Jaroslav's death could be a warning that there is no turning back. More generally, "the tragic finale of each character's story in chapter 7 points up the failure of each character's ideological view point to engage successfully the real world in all its complexity."⁴²⁵

This basic lack of faith in the capacity of any one ideology to properly structure the complexities of the real world is the foundation of that withdrawal from politics which all three authors in the present study chose at some point in their life. Still, literature is witness that, as Irving Howe shows, "like his Ludvik, Mr. Kundera is trapped by the time in which he

⁴²² Cravens, 'Faulty Consciousnesses,' 103.

⁴²³ Cravens, 104.

⁴²⁴ Ricard, *Agnes's Final Afternoon*, 176.

⁴²⁵ Cravens, 'Faulty Consciousnesses,' 105.

lives.”⁴²⁶ On the other hand, more recent critical discussions of the novel (like that of Francois Ricard) no longer see it as a simple documentation of historical or social realities, but treat it as literature. Remarkably, Kundera has finally managed to impose his reading grid on his most sophisticated audience. Even from the point of view of content, the complexity of the message is understood: Grenier notes that

“Kundera is clearly suspicious of any shared and emotional hope in a brighter future. Politics, not culture, is shared that way. Crowds are made of individuals but redemption is possible at the individual level, never *a priori* at the collective level. Again, how much of this perspective derived directly from the experience of communism and/or of a failed state is hard to measure. In any case, it is not out of tune with the fatigue of ‘grand narratives’ widely associated with the period and/or idea of ‘post-modernity.’”⁴²⁷

Kundera will take his rejection of ‘grand narratives’ furthest in his *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.

The Book of Laughter and Forgetting ⁴²⁸

The Book of Laughter and Forgetting was Kundera’s first book written in France, published in 1978, three years after he had left Czechoslovakia. The lack of a story line and emphasis on the development of the two themes in the title bear witness to Kundera’s lack of faith in traditional narrative modes. The dual treatment of the central themes is indicated in the titles of the seven parts: ‘Lost Letters’ are a sign of forgetting (either intentionally, in the home country, or unavoidably, in the West) in parts one and four; parts two and five, ‘Mama’ and

⁴²⁶ Howe, ‘Red Rulers and Black Humor.’

⁴²⁷ Grenier, ‘Milan Kundera,’ 15.

⁴²⁸ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, translated from the French by Aaron Asher (London: Faber and Faber, 1996). All following references are to this edition.

'Litost,' deal with the nostalgia of forgetting; parts three and six, 'The Angels,' deal with laughter seen as a sign of the dehumanizing quality of ideology. As Bruce Donahue notes,

“for Kundera, any absolutist view of the world is destructive; he illustrates this by his use of two kinds of laughter in the novel: the laughter of joy in knowing one is right and the laughter of complete skepticism which declares that everything is funny because everything is meaningless. In the context of the novel the first type of laughter is associated with Kundera's native Czechoslovakia where the totalitarian ideology of the government does indeed have the self assurance necessary to justify murder. The second type of laughter Kundera associates with the West where nothing, from a funeral to the act of human love-making, remains sacred.”⁴²⁹

The two views of each theme are separated by 'The Border' in part seven, a border which signifies for Kundera, at this specific moment in his life, a very traumatic break in intellectual patterns.

On the other hand, Ewa M. Thompson explains the development of themes in the novel in a direction determined by an individual chronology: “Kundera’s novel leads us from the incipient loneliness at home (imposed, Kundera insists, on the thinking members of society by Russian tanks) to the final and conclusive loneliness in a West European town,” while speaking “simultaneously to several audiences: the host country audience, the home audience, and the émigré audience.”⁴³⁰ The book clearly reflects the author’s attempt to make sense of and adapt to his new reality, while holding on to the past. The process of forgetting involves the past, and each chapter of the book is dedicated to a different type of detachment / separation / forgetting of a different past, although all these pasts, together, can form the identity of a single person. Francois Ricard remarks on this effect of Kundera’s very personal auctorial voice here: “[A]s if the novelist were throwing off the task of being a

⁴²⁹ Donahue, 'Viewing the West from the East,' 253.

⁴³⁰ Thompson, 'The Writer in Exile,' 511-512.

mere narrator and becoming, for a while, a separate and autonomous participant in the story [...] ceasing to feign a distance and a neutrality that only hide the effective authority he exercises over his novel.”⁴³¹

The book opens with an episode from the obsessive communist past. All through the first part, ‘Lost Letters,’ Mirek refuses to acknowledge his (past) love for Zdena. He retrospectively attributes their relationship to his own arrivism -- as a way to justify it, in spite of the (more recent) realization that “she was ugly.” (15) This relationship parallels that of so many intellectuals with communism, at the end of WW II, as Kundera indicates in the narrator’s voice:

“Yes, say what you will, the Communists were more intelligent. They had an imposing program. A plan for an entirely new world where everyone would find a place. The opponents had no great dream, only some tiresome and threadbare moral principles, with which they tried to patch to torn trousers of the established order. So it’s no surprise that the enthusiasts, the spirited ones, easily won out over the half-hearted and the cautious, and rapidly set about to realize their dream, that idyll of justice for all” (11).

Mirek’s attempts to get back his love letters to Zdena are an expression of his desperate need to deny his youthful allegiance to communism, of which he is so ashamed now. Ironically though, it is his documentation of his revolt against communism that puts him in prison, together with his son and his friends.

The other type of ideological allegiance which tempts East-Central European intellectuals -- that to the national past -- is deconstructed in ‘Mama.’ Here the trend is reversed: the character moves from the initial dislike and resentment for the imposing figure of the mother to the gradual appreciation of her perennial system of values. The image of the mother/country keeps shrinking, from the oppressive figure of a past whose details get

⁴³¹ Ricard, *Agnes’s Final Afternoon*, 126.

foggy and confused to the present day image of: "Mama telling the story. Mama and her world that looked like a huge pear on which a tiny Russian tank had alighted like a ladybird."

(63) National values are stronger than expected, they cannot be obliterated, but they cannot help the people living their lives in the confusing present, either.

Oppositely, 'The Angels,' reflects the separation from a very personal, intellectual past, supposedly shared by intellectuals everywhere. It is also a view across borders, between the innocence of those who were never tested, the (arch)angels Gabrielle, Michelle and Madame Raphael, and the author's own experience (as here Kundera chooses the narrative 'I'): "Angels are partisans not of Good but of divine creation. The devil, on the other hand, is the one who refuses to grant any rational meaning to that divinely created world." (86) The angels, images of Western intellectuals, have a very clear and unsuspecting view of literature / art. They never doubt their oversimplifications, they never question their belonging to "the circle." The author, on the other hand, is torn between the guilt of having been part of "the circle," the constant fear of no longer belonging to the circle, the shame and suspicion of literature / art being no more than an astrology column, the fear of being unmasked for writing nothing more than an astrology column, the sense of responsibility for everybody around him who believed in him, in his art, and who might have to pay for it with their lives.

If the 'Lost Letters' in the first part were a sign of Mirek's attempt to forget the past in the home country, the opposite is true of the 'Lost Letters' in part four, where the letters are seen from across the border. What is lost is the very personal past, its minute details that Tamina tries in vain to recuperate. She tries to get the help of her new friends in the new country for this, but they are just too focused on their own, very individual lives to be able or willing to help. The Western world is too preoccupied with itself to pay any attention to Eastern Europe, and the values of Western individualism are used to justify it. While

Tamina is desperately trying to recuperate what she can from her lost, but very real life, everybody around her is preoccupied with writing the story of their utterly uneventful lives:

“Graphomania (a mania for writing books) inevitably takes on epidemic proportions when a society develops to the point of creating three basic conditions:

- an elevated level of general well-being, which allows people to devote themselves to useless activities;
- a high degree of social atomization and, as a consequence, a general isolation of individuals;
- the absence of dramatic social changes in the nation’s internal life.” (127)

Complementing the personal break with the past, on an intellectual level, ‘Litost’ describes the separation from a communal cultural life in Eastern Europe. It is the mythical, bohemian life of Eastern European writers, so envied by Western intellectuals. Not surprisingly, “the Poets” who enjoy such an elevated social status remind us of Milosz’s intellectuals in *The Captive Mind*. They are revered by their readers, but it is, ironically, this aura of intellectual life that prevents the student from consummating his affair with Kristyna: it all ends up in a more complex form of masturbation. The lofty ideas are a barrier against real life, and Kundera is quite bluntly dismissive of this way of life: “He had failed to have Kristyna’s body because of his own stupidity.” (208)

From Eastern European intellectual life, Kundera turns to the social environment in Western Europe, in the next section, ‘The Angels.’ This is the only time he goes back to one of his characters, Tamina, who finds herself more and more estranged from the people around her by their innocence. If at the beginning she is proud of her “adulthood,” of the life experience which makes her different, she soon realizes she is nothing more than a curiosity, there for their entertainment. At the same time, her being there is a confirmation that their world is “right”: “They want to hurt anyone beyond their world’s border only in order

to exalt their own world and its law.” (255) Tamina is at the same point in her life as Kundera, and that is why she is the most interesting character for him.

That point is identified in the last section of the book: ‘The Border’ -- the border between past and future, the border Jan crosses when he accepts the rules of the new world: Edwige’s uncompromising logic and (finally) the communal love-making, closely directed by Barbara. This acceptance coincides with Jan’s moving on, further west, to the States and it is triggered by a more general understanding of the relativity of all things:

“All of us are prisoners of a rigid conception of what is important and what is not, and so we fasten our anxious gaze on the important, while from a hiding place behind our backs the unimportant wages its guerrilla war, which will end in surreptitiously changing the world and pouncing on us by surprise.” (268)

On the whole, the elaborate fragmentation of the book (a structure Kundera would never use again) is a sign of the intellectually uncomfortable position in which he found himself for a few years after his move to France. John Updike notes it in his review of the book:

“Kundera -- who moved, after all, only a few hundred kilometers west, and who unlike many expatriates had enjoyed considerable artistic success and prestige in his own country -- seems, five years out, in a middling position. He is crossing that border he describes, to the side that men dread, ‘where the language of their tortured nation would sound as meaningless as the twittering of birds.’ A meaning once omnipresent is gone. A habit of vision developed in one context is being broken in another.”⁴³²

⁴³² John Updike, ‘The Most Original Book of the Season,’ review of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, *New York Times Book Review*, November 30, 1980, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-laughter.html>, accessed November 12, 2012.

Kundera's return to a more traditional mode of story-telling in his next novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, may indicate the fact that, by the 1980's, he was feeling more in agreement with his new intellectual environment.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being⁴³³

Starting from the premise that, as Yvon Grenier notes, "ideas in general, and political ideas in particular, are shared constructions that seem unbearably light when examined from the perspective of an individual's life experience,"⁴³⁴ *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (first published in English in 1984) returns to a more cohesive structure of the novel, similar to that used in *The Joke*. The greatest drama of Czechoslovakia under communism -- the Russian invasion of 1968 and the subsequent destruction of Czech intelligentsia -- is presented indirectly, through the lives of those whom it affected. The scale of events is always human, and the perspective is reversed from that of the classical novel: instead of seeing the characters from a historical perspective, here history is seen from the humble perspective of the characters.

Each of the seven parts of the novel offers the perspective of one of the main characters (always in the third person, though, through the auctorial voice), interspaced with the author's comments on various philosophical issues or political events. The opening section, 'Lightness and Weight,' sets the tone with a discussion of the myth of the 'eternal return' -- Kundera argues that the impossibility of going back in one's life to try and do things better makes every human action and decision unbearably light. Under this sign of lightness, Kundera introduces his characters, and the events in this first part are mainly seen through the eyes of Tomas, a neurosurgeon in Prague. He falls in love with Tereza, "a waitress in a hotel restaurant of a provincial town," (7) and they get married, without Tomas abandoning

⁴³³ Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, translated from the Czech by Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row, 1984). All following quotations are from this edition.

⁴³⁴ Grenier, 'Milan Kundera,' 8.

his string of mistresses, though. In Prague, Tereza takes up photography and thus has the 'opportunity' to save in the form of pictures the image of the 1968 invasion. After the invasion, the two emigrate to Zurich, where Tomas finds work in a hospital. Tereza, however, cannot adjust to life in a foreign country (or to Tomas' infidelities) and returns to Czechoslovakia. Tomas follows her back into the occupied country, where he finds that "a terrifying soldier in the black uniform of the armored forces stood at the crossroads directing traffic as if every road in the country belonged to him and him alone." (33)

The counterpart of 'Lightness and Weight,' 'Soul and Body,' offers Teresa's perspective over much of the same events. In fact, the narrative alternates the two perspectives, with Kundera using the titles as main themes, as he has done before in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: 'lightness and weight' for Tomas (parts one and five), 'soul and body' for Tereza (parts two and four). Tereza is presented as an alternative to the classical image of the intellectual:

"A young woman forced to keep drunks supplied with beers and siblings with clean underwear -- instead of being allowed to pursue 'something higher' -- stores up great reserves of vitality, a vitality never dreamed of by university students yawning over their books. Tereza had read a good deal more than they, and learned a good deal more about life, but she would never realize it." (55)

Her counterpart is Sabina, Tomas' mistress and friend. Sabina is a painter and Kundera uses her work to describe art struggling under the dictatorship of socialist realism: "on the surface, an intelligible lie; underneath the unintelligible truth." (63) It is Teresa's photographs, however, that preserve the memory of the Russian invasion, an innovation which exposes historical atrocities like never before:

"All previous crimes of the Russian empire had been committed under the cover of a discreet shadow. The deportation of a million Lithuanians, the murder of hundreds of thousands of Poles, the liquidation of the Crimean Tartars remain in our memory, but

no photographic documentation exist; sooner or later they will therefore be proclaimed as fabrications. Not so the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, of which both still and motion pictures are stored in archives throughout the world.” (67)

Sabina (and her art) is the only one who can accept exile, and her adjustment is recorded under the title ‘Words Misunderstood’ -- another favorite theme of Kundera’s, already used in *The Art of the Novel*. The fundamental misunderstanding between Central and Western European civilizations is illustrated by the misunderstandings between Sabina and her Swiss lover Franz, a university professor in Geneva (whose perspective Kundera will use in the sixth part of the novel), in the form of “a short dictionary” of words misunderstood, interspaced with alternating entries from Sabina’s and Franz’s perspectives. The dictionary includes general terms (“woman,” “music,” “strength”), pairs of opposites (“fidelity and betrayal,” “light and darkness”), a series of realities and incidents with two completely different interpretations (“parades,” “the beauty of New York,” “Sabina’s country,” “cemetery,” “the old church in Amsterdam,” “living in truth”). The most important lesson Sabina takes with her to the West is a mistrust of extremism. For her, “extremes mean borders beyond which life ends, and a passion for extremism, in art and in politics, is a veiled longing for death.” (94) Unfortunately, she does not fit in with the other Czech exiles, either, as they seem to have carried with them to the West the passion to label people as either friends or enemies, a practice quite common in the home country:

“Assessing the populace, checking up on it, is a principal and never-ending social activity in Communist countries. If a painter is to have an exhibition, an ordinary citizen to receive a visa to a country with a sea coast, a soccer player to join the national team, then a vast array of recommendations and reports must be garnered (from the concierge, colleagues, the police, the local Party organization, the pertinent trade union) and added up, weighed, and summarized by special officials. These reports have nothing to do with the artistic talent, kicking ability, or maladies that respond well

to salt sea air; they deal with one thing only: the citizen's political profile (in other words, what the citizen says, what he thinks, how he behaves, how he acquits himself at meetings or May day parades)." (96)

In her solitude in the West, Sabina is informed of Tomas and Teresa's death in the home country, in a car accident -- Kundera chooses to reveal the denouement of the novel before reaching the middle of the narrative, a clear sign that his emphasis is not on plot, but on the themes he is developing.

The 'Soul and Body' theme and Teresa's perspective on the events following their return to Czechoslovakia is then resumed. Her perspective is emotional (as opposed to Tomas' intellectual views in the next part) -- she feels deeply the oppressive quality of the regime. Forced out of her position at the magazine and back behind a bar counter, serving beer to drunkards, a colleague explains to her how the all-powerful 'they' work: "[T]hey need to trap people, [...] to force them to collaborate and set other traps for other people, so that gradually they can turn the whole nation into a single organization of informants." (163) In order to escape this entrapment, both Tomas and Tereza choose to give up their social and professional position. Tomas' devolution from neurosurgeon to general practitioner, to window-washer and his eventual move to the countryside is symbolic of the trajectory of an intellectual involved in the civil society under communism. As Francois Ricard points out, "whether its subject is history and politics [...], personal life [...], or both at once (Ludvik), a character's 'dissidence' always brings on the ruin of everything that had served as a basis for his identity and had given the sequence of his actions, his desires, and his thoughts the appearance of a 'biography,' an order, a logic, and a meaning."⁴³⁵

From Tomas's perspective, the second section entitled 'Lightness and Weight' identifies the moral problem faced by those who were trying to reform communism in 1968:

⁴³⁵ Ricard, *Agnes's Final Afternoon*, 179.

“the criminal regimes were made not by criminals but by enthusiasts convinced they had discovered the only way to paradise. They defended that road so valiantly that they were forced to execute many people. Later it became clear that there was no paradise, that the enthusiasts were therefore murderers.”

Then everyone took to shouting at the Communists: You’re the ones responsible for our country’s misfortunes (it had grown poor and desolate), for its loss of independence (it had fallen into the hands of the Russians), for its judicial murders!”(176)

When he indicates the need for atonement for this involuntary sin (in a letter to the editor of a literary magazine, using a comparison with Oedipus), Tomas finds himself caught between two camps: those who want him to take a clear stand against the regime and those who want him to openly collaborate with the regime. Basically, “everyone was trying to make him sign statements he had not written himself,” (216) to make him declare his allegiance to a cause that was not his own. His only solution is to move to the countryside.

If such a small gesture can have such enormous consequences in a communist country, the next part of the novel, ‘The Grand March,’ shows the lack of weight political stands have in the West. Kundera, though, shifts the emphasis from politics to aesthetics, when he states that “kitsch is the aesthetic ideal of all politicians and all political parties and movements.” (251) This general appeal of kitsch unites all political movements which “rest not so much on rational attitudes as on fantasies, images, words, and archetypes that come together to make up this or that *political kitsch*.” In the West, Kundera explains:

“The fantasy of the Grand March that Franz was so intoxicated by is the political kitsch joining leftists of all times and tendencies. The Grand March is the splendid march on the road to brotherhood, equality, justice, happiness. [...]

What makes a leftist a leftist is not this or that theory but his ability to integrate any theory into the kitsch called the Grand March.” (257)

Franz's own voluntary participation (as opposed to the forced regimentation of people in communist countries) to the Grand March is described with utmost irony. He decides to take part in a humanitarian mission organized by western intellectuals (and an American actress), with the purpose of convincing Cambodian authorities to allow doctors to enter their country and give medical help to the ill and wounded. Kundera offers here a glimpse of the ideological conflicts in the free world, which seem humorous, in view of their lack of weight on the lives of those involved. The ideological issues are easily smoothed over: "When the crimes of the country called the Soviet Union became so scandalous, a leftist had two choices: either to spit on his former life and stop marching or (more or less sheepishly) to reclassify the Soviet Union as an obstacle to the Grand March and march on." (261) What matters is the exhilarating feeling of being involved in something grand and heroic, the fact that 'real' communism has produced terrifying results has no bearing on the convictions of theoretical communists. Franz goes to Cambodia and there finds a completely non-heroic death, at which point he realizes that

"the Grand March was coming to an end. Europe was surrounded by borders of silence and the space where the Grand March was occurring was now no more than a small platform in the middle of the planet. The crowds that had once pressed eagerly up to the platform had long since departed, and the Grand March went on in solitude, without spectators. Yes, said Franz to himself, the Grand March goes on, the world's indifference notwithstanding, but it is growing nervous and hectic: yesterday against the American occupation of Vietnam, today against the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia; yesterday for Israel, today for the Palestinians; yesterday for Cuba, tomorrow against Cuba -- and always against America; at times against massacres and at times in support of other massacres; Europe marches on, and to keep up with events, to leave none of them out, its pace grows faster and faster, until finally the

Grand March is a procession of rushing, galloping people and the platform is shrinking and shrinking until one day it will be reduced to a mere dimensionless dot.” (266-7)

Kundera’s ironical attitude towards demonstrative political stands does not make him a nihilist, however. An American commentator has noted early on that “his life in a totalitarian country has taught him the value in human terms of these abstract concepts [life, love, justice or truth]. Good is worth preserving not because it is a Platonic absolute, but because good and evil do exist and do radically affect our lives.”⁴³⁶ The conclusion of the novel, ‘Karenin’s Smile,’ focuses on real lives and domestic, humble details. Tomas and Teresa’s death, announced as early as the middle of the novel, is now described in their last refuge in the countryside (“the only escape open to them” (281)) and anticipated by the death of their dog, Karenin. Here, they achieve a peace of mind that comes both from a rejection of ideology (“Missions are stupid, Tereza. I have no mission. No one has. And it’s a terrific relief to realize you’re free, free of all missions” (313)) and from the comfort of their shared love. Indeed, Kundera reverses here the typical structure of a ‘political’ novel -- instead of using characters to embody ideas, he nuances ideas by making them stand against the real life of his characters. The emphasis is on life: “Loves are like empires: when the idea they are founded on crumbles, they, too, fade away.” (169)

If in his first novel, *The Joke*, Kundera had already found his specific novelistic structure of alternative perspectives, which he took to the extremes of the epic in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* marks his return to epic cohesion and the implicit acceptance of the possibility of expressing reality in the structured form of a human life.

⁴³⁶ Donahue, ‘Viewing the West from the East,’ 254.

4.3 Norman Manea's literature as therapy

Norman Manea has always structured his literature along the lines of his own biography and, although this biography bears the marks of some of the most catastrophic events of 20th century European history, he managed to reveal it in its very personal details, in its human dimensions: "I was personally confronted with three huge collective experiences -- the Holocaust, communism and exile -- today all three are already present in literature, not just in history, and have become clichés. I have tried to approach these themes from a personal angle."⁴³⁷ This consistency of vision is confirmed by the author himself: "Many of the obsessions and themes in my literary beginnings are, I think, recognizable, even though in a different style and context, in the later books."⁴³⁸

Indeed, as he moved on, in his earlier prose, from short stories to novels described by one critic as "pure observation of a non-eventful reality,"⁴³⁹ the focal point of Norman Manea's writings remained the biographical detail used as a relevant instance of the general. This was necessary since, as he explained, during the last decades of communist Romania, "'true' reality was unfolding beneath the surface, in a confusing state of atomization which constantly ground to dust both great and minor events, and which was ultimately characterized by a persistent absence of epic qualities, by the annihilation of the epic."⁴⁴⁰ Faced with this disintegration of the epic mode, Manea had to find a new form of expression for this crushing reality, and this is how, in 1979, he produced *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool*, a 'documentary novel' -- a new structure discussed next in this study.

⁴³⁷ Manea, *Curierul de Est*, 154.

⁴³⁸ Manea, *Curierul de Est*, 332.

⁴³⁹ Lucian Raicu, 'Norman Manea – prioritatea și fascinatia literarului' [Norman Manea – Priority and Fascination of the Literary], *Observatorul Cultural* 125, July 26 – August 1, 2007, http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Norman-Manea-prioritatea-si-fascinatia-literarului*articleID_18019-articles_details.html, accessed November 12, 2012.

⁴⁴⁰ Cugno, 'Interview with Norman Manea,' 34.

The fragmentary character of the short story, on the other hand, allowed Manea a long process of reorganizing personal experiential instances into a more and more structured construct. Some of his first short stories, published in 1969 (*Night on the Long Side*) and 1975 (*First Gates*) were republished in the 1981 volume *October, Eight O’Clock*. These short stories were also the first pieces of writing Manea published after his move to the West where, as one of his interviewers remarks, he was seen as “both a writer and a witness.” Manea himself agrees that

“this distinction is important. My two recently published books fit, in a way, these two categories. One is a book of fiction (*October, Eight O’Clock*), the other is a collection of essays connected more directly to biographical events (*On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist*). Even when fiction starts from an autobiographical event, as in the case of the former, it is neither a journal, nor memoirs. I find myself in there, in my childhood and adult age; at the same time, it is not me. Many events in the book do not belong to my biography; others, that do, are not included in the book. Even when fiction starts from an autobiographical element, it goes further, deeper. I do not think an author can be content with his status as witness, not even in this diseased century.”⁴⁴¹

Still, biography remains the organizing vector, and the end-result of almost four decades of re-shuffling is the 2008 volume *Variations on a Self-Portrait*, the second instance of Manea’s narrative technique discussed in the present study.

The first pieces of fiction written abroad, however, avoid the biographical angle. In search of objectivity, Manea’s four novellas grouped under the title *Compulsory Happiness* (published first in Germany in 1989, as *A Window on the Working Class*, and then in the United States in 1993-4) “cut through different and complementary sections of the socialist daily life, in its last, paranoid phase of the totalitarian police state.” The author further explains that, although “different in subject, style, narrative structure, [...] the four

⁴⁴¹ Manea, ‘Witness and Writer,’ interview with Peter Sourian (1992-1993), in *Textul nomad*, 14.

novellas try to compose a collective biography of an Eastern European generation which survived, with immense sacrifices and wounds, the ravages of the post-war catastrophe.”⁴⁴² Manea’s first writings in the West bear the mark of the witness but, although he is constantly aware that, “for a writer, the danger of becoming a mere character is not negligible,”⁴⁴³ Manea keeps returning to the autobiographical format. The novel *The Hooligan’s Return* is the clearest example of the structuring potential of the biography, as shown later on in this study.

On the same autobiographical coordinates, Manea’s most recent novel, *The Burrow* resumes, “in a different context, some benchmark situations, it offers a contrapuntal post-scriptum to the initial textual premise.” In the author’s view, it represents “a dialogue between the ‘past’ text and the present product of that past,”⁴⁴⁴ a demonstration that the autobiographical structure can overcome the hiatus of exile.

The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool ⁴⁴⁵

The book was first published in 1979 in communist Romania and the circumstances of its first publication are highly relevant to its approaches to the issue of power -- they had to be oblique and rely on a deeper understanding brought to the book by its informed readers. The theme is a constant preoccupation in Manea’s writings, as Edward Kanterian suggests in an interview: “From your personal experiences in Romania, you construct an interpretive model of the relationship between power and culture.”⁴⁴⁶

The author himself describes this book (in an interview with Marco Cugno) as “a subversive collage of essays, letters, diary entries, and fragments from the socialist press.” It

⁴⁴² Manea, ‘Living and Surviving,’ interview with Marco Cugno (1994), in *Casa melcului*, 167.

⁴⁴³ Manea, ‘The Nomad Text,’ interview with Sean Cotter (2003), in *Textul nomad*, 212.

⁴⁴⁴ Manea, ‘The Crises and Convulsions of Creation,’ 142-3.

⁴⁴⁵ Norman Manea, *Anii de ucenicie ai lui August Prostul* (Iasi: Polirom, 2005). All following quotations are from this edition.

⁴⁴⁶ Kanterian, ‘Trivializing Tragedy,’ 190.

studies the position of the artist and the relationship between writer and readers in the context of a closed society (although some of the answers he offers can be extended to a more general context). Again, as the author himself puts it, “literature was a great chance in the effort to resist degradation and to survive the darkness. [...] In the conditions of the socialist regime, literature increased its chances as a kind of revitalizing dialogue with elevated voices of invisible friends.”⁴⁴⁷ This dialogue that is extremely necessary to Manea: he has published four volumes of dialogues to date.

The structure of the book is quite complex: it includes dictionary and encyclopedia entries on various clown figures, seemingly autobiographical entries (including later comments) plus a parallel biography, press excerpts (presented chronologically), diary entries and personal letters and a ‘biology’ presentation of the life of ants. In spite of its profoundly fragmentary nature (or maybe because of it) the book succeeds in presenting a powerful and accurate image of life under a totalitarian regime, at a very personal level.

The figure of the clown is a recurrent one for Manea: in 1992 in the United States he published a volume of essays entitled *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist*. The clown is the medieval figure of the truth-speaking fool and as such, Augustus the Fool becomes, throughout the book another name for the self-narrating authorial persona. The foolishness or madness of speaking/living the truth in a totalitarian society is being indirectly theorized by means of these dictionary entries and histories of the circus. The book, its author says, “presents history as a circus, the individual as a tragicomic being, human fate as burlesque synthesis.”⁴⁴⁸

The autobiographical entries are paralleled by a “(Comparative) Sketch for an imaginary biography” -- an attempt at turning a very subjective and personal experience into a more objective view of life under communism. The Other has the ‘scientific’ role of a

⁴⁴⁷ Cugno, ‘Interview with Norman Manea,’ 28.

⁴⁴⁸ Kanterian, ‘Trivializing Tragedy,’ 190.

laboratory control sample: "I had the privilege of seeing myself again, and thus maybe of understanding myself better through *the other*." (22) By multiplying personal experiences, Manea gives them a higher meaning, the personal struggle becomes a more general and thus more heroic one: "Among our peers who could possibly justify our calling, this fellow in inner struggles was our very *contemporary*." (22)

Maybe not by accident, the magazine from which Manea takes his press excerpts is titled *Contemporary* -- one of the most appreciated cultural magazines of the time. The historical presentation of quotations, throughout the book (interspersed between "autobiography" and "imaginary biography"), which are sometimes hilarious, cynically demagogical, or even idiotically sincere, and come from some of the most important intellectuals of the time, offers the only clear timeline in the book. This is the historical backbone of the volume, it creates the background for, again, the very intimate experiences of the diary entries and personal letters. "The life of ants (pages found in the neighbors' attic)" offers a different kind of structure -- a sociological construct mirroring the rigid communist society, a birds' eye view of the life (or lives) identified first in their more intimate details, in the diary and letters. However, as Manea himself realizes, time has diminished the potential impact of these details: "What back then seemed scandalous, bits of truth pushing their way towards the reader from the printed page, like tiny explosive projectiles became, *post factum*, anodyne, due to the subsequent seasoning of the truth."⁴⁴⁹

The very fragmentary structure of the book reflects Manea's personal stand for a history of individuals and against the generalizing and depersonalizing interference of the political in everyday life:

"Beyond its many ambiguities, 'real socialism' was essentially a system of 'institutionalized lying'. What were the enclaves in which resistance was possible --

⁴⁴⁹ Manea, 'The Pedagogy of Survival in Exile,' interview with Simona Chitan (2005), in *Textul nomad*, 320.

that is in which truth and individuality could be protected? It was only by finding solutions, even partial ones, involving authenticity, intimacy and personality, that the self could resist the constant external pressures. In other words, it was through reading, friendship, love, belief, sex, everything that could be defended (from state ownership of our thoughts and our soul) as the last, secret, coded expression of personal wealth (and life). As Primo Levi said about the camps, even 'thinking and observing were factors of survival'.⁴⁵⁰

In terms of literary techniques, the book shifts the "focus more on how most people might react to tyranny, rather than on how particular individuals might come to foster it."⁴⁵¹ It avoids the dramatic events (which the period did not lack at all) and makes room for the individual, who had been shunned by the overpowering political figure of the collective. In itself, this is a political stand, although Manea declares:

"I never wished to be a 'political' writer, and I hope I wasn't only that even when I was forced to write about a nightmarish politicized reality. Being in Romania, I once wrote about aesthetics (*estetica*) as East-Ethics (*est-etica*). It wasn't just cross-words. I really believed in this double, complementary integrity: that the writer should remain, in his work, faithful to the artistic criterion and, in his social life, he should keep his moral civic fortitude in confronting the lies directed by the manipulators of public life. This was never and nowhere easy. However, I still think it's quite normal for a writer to be obsessed and to defend the quality of his work at the same time, as a citizen, to express whenever possible an honest opinion about the reality in which he is living."⁴⁵²

This postmodernist approach to totalitarianism can prove quite challenging for the literary critic. In a book recently published in Romania called *Incursions into*

⁴⁵⁰ Cugno, 'Interview with Norman Manea,' 27.

⁴⁵¹ Charles Molesworth, 'Just Tell Me When to Stop Laughing: Norman Manea and Political Liberty,' *Salmagundi* 113 (Winter 1997), 115.

⁴⁵² Stavans. 'Lies, Disguises, Exile,' 104.

Contemporary Literature,⁴⁵³ a young critic, Ion Simut, considers Manea's work in a chapter entitled 'Escapist Literature.' This surprises the western interviewer Marco Cugno, who would rather see it under the category of 'Subversive Literature.' Manea himself contends that these categories are no longer valid for literature produced under communism: "To be fitted into one category would anyway probably have been too simplistic -- and not just in my own case. The post-war decades in Eastern Europe were not uniform, nor was the literature written during them."⁴⁵⁴ But the novel remains as an example of 'speaking the truth' under very dire circumstances. As Virgil Nemoianu describes its author, "in the diverse, challenging and literarily innovative landscape of Eastern European culture in the second half of the 20th century, he [Manea] stands for a specific Romanian mode of opposition to totalitarianism: an aesthetic one, mild, yet tenacious."⁴⁵⁵

Variations on a Self-Portrait⁴⁵⁶

The form of the 'documentary novel,' original and powerful though it was, pushed the limits of the author's pact with his readers a little too far, as it was too enciphered for a reader not familiar with the minute details of the reality it described. Returning to the episodes of his own life, Norman Manea has been reorganizing his short stories for the last forty years. Some of those first published in Romania in 1969 (*Night on the Long Side*) and 1975 (*First Gates*) were republished in the 1981 volume *October, Eight O'Clock*. This volume of short fiction was Manea's first volume translated and published in the west, in 1987 in Germany (under the title *Robot-biography and Other Stories*), in 1990 in Italy (as *October, Eight O'Clock*) and France (as *Proust's Tea*), and in 1992 in the United Kingdom and in the United States (as *October, Eight O'Clock*).

⁴⁵³ Ion Simut, *Incursiuni in literatura actuala* (Oradea: Cogito, 1994).

⁴⁵⁴ Cugno, 'Interview with Norman Manea,' 29.

⁴⁵⁵ Nemoianu, 'Norman Manea,' 251.

⁴⁵⁶ Norman Manea, *Variante la un autoportret* (Iasi: Polirom, 2008). All following quotations are from this edition.

As the German title shows, the idea of reorganizing the short stories according to the chronology of personal events which were at the origin of their creation appeared at the time of Manea's exile: the autobiographical time-line is used to give internal coherence to the volume. Romanian critic Lucian Raicu noted as early as 1989 that the short stories focus on "the crisis points, the benchmarks of a biographic trajectory that covers half a century of convulsive, Romanian and Eastern European history."⁴⁵⁷ Eventually, the earlier short stories plus a few new ones, written in the west, were published in Romania in 2008 in the form of a fragmentary autobiography -- *Variations on a Self-Portrait*. According to the author, this is "a portrait between East and West, past and present, between where I was coming from and where I'm going to."⁴⁵⁸

The author's foreword explains that the shorter and longer stories are "connected by the biographical path of the same narrator, who is the main character and, in many ways, similar to the author himself, without ever being completely identical." (5) The autobiographical journey starts with the traumatic events of Manea's early childhood, in the concentration camp in Transnistria. The details seen by the eyes of the child in 'Tale in Pink,' 'The Sweater,' 'Death,' 'We Might Have Been Four' are not structured by an adult understanding, so that the reader gets glimpses of unadulterated primal fear, together with confusing information on complicated family relations -- on the whole, a nightmarish initiation into life. The next step in this life journey, taken at the age of eight, is the return "to the places from whence we had been banished." (45) The "traumatized little human being"⁴⁵⁹ in 'The Balls of Faded Yarn' or 'Proust's Tea' has first to understand what 'normal' life is, but he finds out early on how tragic memory can be turned into both propaganda and entertainment at 'Weddings,' where the child is required to retell his experience for the guests. His adjustment to the new reality has to take place first at the level of language –

⁴⁵⁷ Raicu, 'Norman Manea.'

⁴⁵⁸ Stavans. 'Lies, Disguises, Exile,' 105.

⁴⁵⁹ Manea, 'The Multi-storeyed Exile,' interview with Rodica Binder (1996), in *Textul nomad*, 115.

'The Exact Hour' offers Manea's own 'dictionary of words misunderstood,' in answer to Kundera's, only here the words are very concrete, describing realities which the child simply did not have a chance to know: "lamp," "radio," "marzipan," "alarm-clock." 'Tale of the Enchanted Pig' takes the process of adjustment from the level of language to that of story: "the first dishes, with their names, the first clothes, with their names. Now, the first book of fairy tales which he entered unwarned." (94) But fairy-tales have a different, more sinister meaning for this child: "[T]he tales were true and they all contained a hidden threat. Anything could turn into anything." (97)

The final return home, in 'The Boots and the Violin,' opens a new chapter of adjustment, in school. 'The Thief' sets the tone of the uncomfortable relationship with the other, 'innocent' classmates, but it is 'The Instructor' who reveals the new conflict in the life of the thirteen-year-old new adult: the conflict between the old and new faith, between Jewish tradition and Communist dogma. A summer camp reveals to the teenager the internal contradictions of the dogma, and 'The Accident' explains the very personal need for the kind of safety a dogma offers: "[T]he past, which everybody else considered gone, was only one step behind them, it could catch up with them and swallow them at any moment." (169) This essential difference between the main character and his colleagues is analyzed in 'Two Beds,' with the constant preoccupation for the revelatory minute psychological detail of everyday life indicating the author's awareness of the dangers of dogma: the more minute the detail, the lesser the risk of incorporating it into a philosophical construct that might prove wrong.

Among these psychological details are the first sexual encounters in 'Summer,' first school exams in 'Portrait of the Yellow Apricot Tree,' first cultural thrills in 'The Premiere,' and first political disappointments in 'The Cat.' The longer story 'The Turning Point' marks the middle of the volume and the switch from the coping strategies of a

Holocaust survivor to those of any inhabitant of a totalitarian country, where everything is prescribed:

“when to go on holiday, how to use electric light and the water closet, what needs can be covered by the average wage, what you are allowed to think during lunch break, and how much you can express at family parties, how to step in line and when you have the right to ask questions, why not to drink not to smoke not to covet, not to not to not to, and what duties, and income, and property, and about the mothers of many children and the tax on sterility, or the weekly quota of meat or the contacts with foreigners or the typewriter license and bearded suspects.” (288)

As one of the first American reviewers notes, “Mr. Manea evokes with powerful and yet delicate brush strokes, as though in water colors, the nightmare of survival.”⁴⁶⁰ Drowning in the totalitarian hopelessness, the hero learns how to swim, but the solutions can only be individual.

On this very individual level, the volume records an encrypted series of adult loves: ‘Vovo’ and the relationship with her mother (representative of a troubling past), a one-night-stand that cannot turn into something more in *Ironing Love* (Manea’s first published short story), the lack of understanding between lovers in ‘The Stroll,’ jealousy in ‘Relative Movement.’ This inventory of loves and misunderstandings culminates with a recent short story (written in the West), ‘A Sentimental Education,’ where various instances of erotic encounters are used to explain how, in the totalitarian society “our private space had become our only treasure.” (358) Married life is approached in ‘The Promise,’ but personal relationships are not enough to save the individual from what, in an interview, the author calls “the pathology of a ‘depersonalization disorder,’ and also the ‘absence of the epic’ in an atomized world of caricature masks, mixtures and malformations.”⁴⁶¹ *The Release* is brought

⁴⁶⁰ Begley, ‘A Matter of Survival.’

⁴⁶¹ Manea, ‘Laughter of Duplicity, Laughter of Hope,’ 98.

about by the doctor's diagnosis, and a possible solution is suggested in 'Premises for Comrade T' -- the suicide of a woman who had been strong enough to survive the Holocaust and help others, but could no longer endure the new reality, made up of

"rising prices, dirty clinics, power shortage, money shortage, character shortage, fear, demagoguery, neurosis, boredom, rumors, terror, the Stammerer and the Bore, the Son and the Holy Family and the relatives and the servants, cold, darkness, luxury meat, demolitions, censorship, newspapers, television speeches." (386-7)

A temporary solution could have been, for the lucky few, a visit to a western country -- 'Kinderland' -- but the first trip abroad is made with "suitcases packed with tinned food, alcohol, cigarettes. The traveler had no right to have money, any kind of money. Where he slept, what he ate was his own business." (401) The narrator also realizes that he is abandoning a sort of comforting complicity: "We were accomplices, we knew so much about each other and about everybody, even when we knew nothing... only we could value the stamps and signatures, only we mastered the code of the underground." (402) The conditioning is already too powerful, and it prevents the traveler from enjoying the new-found world: "The reflexes of gravity are in our blood, have poisoned our blood. Happiness seems frivolous to us, we are not prepared to contemplate its show." (414) The traveler returns home.

Here the details of the same unbearable life fragmented in infinite meaningless gestures are unwillingly shared by neighbors in tiny apartments separated by a very thin 'Partition;' all is "futility and waiting." (426) Even nature, in 'Seascape with Birds,' can no longer provide a safe haven. The only refuge is in companionship, in 'October, Eight O'Clock,' a time of maturity and harvest for two partners who share "the connection of two bizarre orphans, adrift in the wide world, lost in the wilderness, desperately clinging to each other as their only protection... each time the other falls, the other one takes up the burden

for a short time, gathering again all strength, then again the roles are switched, like children showing off.” (455)

The volume concludes with two short stories published first in the west. ‘A Reading in Kinderland’ reuses the motif of the West as a fairy-land for children, where “the traveler comes from the Inferno. What he finds next confuses him. The equation of the two realities is unacceptable.” (466) This is also the moment when he realizes the ‘advantages’ of the world he left behind: “slowness, no great contrasts, passive solidarity of complicity. Artists are born there, too. Does the Devil create them, or just tolerate them? The State watches and buys them. There, people fight for something, against something.” (468) In the ‘Lunar Nights’ in the west, the hero gets “the illness of words,” as a doctor describes “the long insomnias of exile” (473) but, as the whole volume comes to prove, the illness itself becomes an essential part of “my daily therapy.” (480) This volume of short stories can be seen as one result of forty years of therapy through literature. As one of the first American reviewers notes, “it is fiction’s familiar set of devices -- a specific narrative perspective, a personal point of view, a way of centering a story around a symbolic fact or object -- that transforms this autobiographical material into real literature, and endows it with much more power than a memoiristic account could have.”⁴⁶²

The form of a “hypothetical *buildungsroman*”⁴⁶³ (as the author himself calls his latest collection of short stories) is not completely satisfactory, however and, as Manea settled in the west, he felt the need for a more structured narrative to convey his life experience. This he produced in *The Hooligan’s Return* -- a memoir, which he describes as “an attempt to recover an individual destiny from a collective tragedy,”⁴⁶⁴ all the time aware that “individuality is annihilated by totalitarian massification, but it is also, later on lost in the

⁴⁶² Baranczak, ‘The Gulag Circus,’ 48.

⁴⁶³ Manea, *Variante la un autoportret*, 5.

⁴⁶⁴ Manea, ‘The Motherland as Fiction,’ interview with William Totok (2004), in *Textul nomad*, 263

collective memory which considers the tragedy only when it has already turned into a cliché and circulates it to satiety, also in cliché forms."⁴⁶⁵

The Hooligan's Return ⁴⁶⁶

In 2003 Norman Manea published his first novel written in exile, *The Hooligan's Return*. The title is a direct allusion to the book of another Romanian Jewish writer, Mihail Sebastian, entitled *How I Became a Hooligan*, in turn a sequel / consequence of Sebastian's first novel, *For Two Thousand Years*. The latter is a novel written as a personal diary of an assimilated Romanian Jew faced with the more and more rampant Romanian anti-Semitism during his formation period as an architect and intellectual, which includes quite a few autobiographical elements.

In the early 1930's, Sebastian was part of a remarkable group of Romanian intellectuals (including Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran) who are still revered in Romania as representatives of the golden age of the Romanian intelligentsia. Their mentor was the philosophy professor Nae Ionescu, and when Sebastian started writing his novel in 1933, he asked his professor to write a preface for it. By the time Sebastian finished writing *For Two Thousand Years*, in 1934, the group's political views, starting with their professor's, had taken a decisive right turn towards fascism and its Romanian political organization, The Iron Guard, with the additional local color of Christian Orthodox mysticism. This process is mirrored by the rhinoceration of the characters in the play by Eugen Ionesco (*Rhinoceros*). Ionesco was one of the very few of his generation, with the inherent exception of Sebastian, not touched by the fascist bug.

The preface Nae Ionescu wrote in a theologically anti-Semitic key was in fact denying any Jewish writer the possibility of writing Romanian literature, as they had not

⁴⁶⁵ Manea, 'The Motherland as Fiction,' 263.

⁴⁶⁶ Norman Manea, *Intoarceea huliganului* (Iasi: Polirom, 2006). All following quotations are from this volume.

been touched by the “national spirit.” Sebastian’s decision to publish the novel *with* the preface, so as not to commit censorship -- provoked huge controversy on both sides of what was by then the battlefield of anti-Semitism. A year later, Sebastian brought together everything that had been written on the issue -- approximately 200 pages -- and published it with his comments -- a very lucid and dispassionate plea for the Jewish intellectual contribution to Romanian culture -- under the title *How I Became a Hooligan*. “Hooligan” was the term used at the time to refer to political rebels, usually followers of the Iron Guard, and had ambiguous connotations of revolutionary spirit, although Sebastian is using it as an ironic expression of his singular position between the two worlds. (The term “hooligan” was also used in communist Romania to refer to an opponent of the system and “hooliganism” was a crime included in the penal code.)

Sebastian died in a car accident in 1945, immediately after the end of the war. His other two novels of introspection of the feminine psyche and his three comedies were published and staged in communist Romania, but the scandal attached to his first two books was taboo for 45 years. It was the first publication of Sebastian’s personal diary in 1996 that reopened the controversy, fascinatingly along the same lines as in 1935, plus the additional complications created by the need to protect Eliade as national icon (one of the very few left under the rubble of communist collaboration covering half of Romania’s 20th century cultural life) against the ignoble accusation of anti-Semitism.

Manea wrote an article on Sebastian’s *Journal* in *The New Republic*, 28 April 1998 which in its turn caused substantial controversy back home. Like Sebastian before him, he found himself caught between worlds and his novel is an expression of this series of tragic experiences: the Holocaust, life in communist Romania, exile. The process of creation had been long and convoluted -- in a 1997 interview he explains the first stages:

“To write a novel requires commitment for a long period, stability and protracted concentration: it marks an extended confrontation with yourself, a major test of your

creative vitality. I already have a lot of notes and even isolated pages, for a future novel. But at the moment I am writing something else: the second part of a book of memoirs-cum-essays, *Confessions of a Hooligan*. The first part was written in Romania in 1982, when the official press had placed me under siege. A friend managed to get the manuscript out of the country for me. The second part refers to the 'symmetrical' events in 1992, at a distance of ten years. Basically it is an analysis of my relationship with Romania."⁴⁶⁷

The next step in clarifying Manea's personal relationship with Romania was the trip he made home in 1997, an event which prompted his American publisher to urge him to make this the topic of "my new book, the book of my American exile." Structuring all these elements, however, was complicated and painful: "I had many difficulties in writing it; its painful history, I had to choose essential moments from an already long life, it took me a long time to find its narrative structure."⁴⁶⁸ The result is a composite narrative in two main parts, with an introduction and an intermission, which integrates elements of a memoir with those of a diary. On the whole, the novel has become more than an autobiographical novel -- a dialogue (as the author himself explains) "between autobiographical elements and speculative fiction, as you call it."⁴⁶⁹

The *Preliminaries* explain the decision to return. In the "life after death" (11) in New York, friends urge him to take this trip back to Romania, in the hope that it may finally cure him of the "East-European syndrome." (16) The moment triggers the memory of the decision to leave Romania: "My leaving socialist Jormanian,⁴⁷⁰ in 1986, gave birth to a symbolic symmetry: the exile at the age of 5, caused by a dictator and his ideology, was being completed at the age of 50, due to another dictator and an apparently opposite

⁴⁶⁷ Cugno, 'Character and Confrontation,' 132-133.

⁴⁶⁸ Manea, 'The Language Retreat,' interview with Carles Barba (2006), in *Textul nomad*, 321.

⁴⁶⁹ Manea, 'The Crises and Convulsions of Creation,' 142.

⁴⁷⁰ A fictitious and derogatory name for communist Romania, used first by Ioan Petru Culianu.

ideology.” (25) Other memories retrace the journey from Bucharest to Berlin, then Paris and, eventually, to the United States, on a “new calendar” and a new life. The “claw” of the past belongs to the people left behind, particularly the mother, and they determine the decision to return.

The First Return however, is made into “the Past as Fiction,” with the earlier memoirs of Manea’s life in Romania. His notes acquaint the reader with the parents, grandparents and extended family, as instances in the history of Jewish life in Eastern Europe; most of the section, though, covers life under communism, after the return from the concentration camp. The chapter entitled ‘Utopia’ proves Manea perfectly capable of summarizing the events of his own life. It is a succinct example of the ideological evolution of an East-Central European intellectual, but the section in its entirety offers a much more complex view of the period, through other instances of personal biographies illustrating recurring themes. The father’s complex life as a “parent, functionary, Jew” (168) is a terrible example of a completely apolitical man caught under the crushing wheels of a totalitarian system. The option of exile reappears obsessively, with every one of the important people in his life leaving the country, and Manea obstinately refusing to do the same: “Fidelity to a chimera, its fierce selfishness had, once more, proved more powerful. I had built a rhetoric of self-justification: I did not feel like entering the competition of freedom, even less so in a foreign world, I had nothing to offer the free market, the handicap of exile would have annihilated me.” (181) And the real refuge is in the “snail’s house” -- language: “There, I had finally found my true residence. Language promises not just re-birth, but also a passport, the real citizenship and real affiliation.” (195)

The interlude between the past Romanian experience and the new, post-totalitarian country is spent on *The Viennese Couch*, with two therapists, one Romanian and one American, in two sessions of “Anamnesis,” years apart, which reveal, on the one hand, that “the exploitation of man by the State did not prove more attractive than the exploitation

of man by man,” (221) but also that “suffering does not make us better, or heroes. Suffering corrupts, like everything else human, and publicly delivered suffering corrupts irredeemably.” (230) The interlude is, again, motivational for Manea’s *Second Return* to his Romanian “Posterity.”

The 1997 trip is recorded in diary fashion, detailing each of the twelve days and nights. The diary records meetings with old friends or the ghosts of those who died, but also more official occasions, like the Seder dinner organized by the Jewish community, an opportunity for Manea to remember “the ambiguous, mutually advantageous collaboration between the shrewd masters and the even shrewder slaves, serving two or more masters at the same time... in the role of docile citizens, wearing their own faces as masks.” (251) The new world cannot efface the marks of the past, and the traveler keeps wondering “what is it that blocks my contact with the present, but doesn’t protect me from the past?” (285) Some of the official meetings are with foreigners, with an optimist American predicting that “soon, here too, in the East, the nationalistic whims of intellectuals will become irrelevant. [...] Intellectuals will soon become, here, too, just as irrelevant as those in the West. The nationalist debate will also be marginal. Aren’t all intellectual debates like this?” (301) But the real “claw” drawing him back to Romania is his mother’s grave, and it is this very personal note that constitutes the climax of this section.

In alternate entries between the daily notes, the jet-lagged insomnia of the nights produces almost hallucinatory episodes mainly focused on language, as an element of the unconscious and, at the same time, as the surest mark of belonging, of “linguistic citizenship.” (304). During the whole trip, though, the traveler feels “inadequate in the comedy of the Impossible Return” (329) and the intricate style used to describe this permeating feeling of inadequacy is the defining element of the book since, as the author himself explains, “the style, for a writer, proves his autobiography. His writing is the mark of

his essential biography."⁴⁷¹ The subconscious wish to rewrite this biography manifests itself to the end, since the notebook with the diary notes is left on the plane, and the section in the book is a re-creation.

Thus, the series of Manea's narrative experiments, from the "documentary novel" *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool* to the fragmented *bildungsroman* in *Variations on a Self-Portrait*, culminates with this very particular brand of autobiography in *The Hooligan's Return* where, in the author's own words, "the 'fictionalization' and an obviously literary structure undermines the strict notion of memoirs -- too brutal a reduction of the book's meanings."⁴⁷²

4.4 The search for authenticity in fiction

All three authors discussed in this study kept searching for the most adequate narrative form for transmitting to their readers what they knew to be the reality of life under communism, a need that was paramount to them. Milosz's first attempt took the new and very successful form of *The Captive Mind*, a comparative study of four intellectual biographies, against the background of 1940's Poland. As Milosz settled in the west, he realized that the very specific input he had to offer on communism failed to have the desired impact, due to his new readers' unfamiliarity with the area and the events he was presenting. Consequently, in *Native Realm* he turned to the more traditional form of memoirs, with all "the characteristics of a textbook for the western public, which was inclined to throw the entire 'East' into a single bag."⁴⁷³ After the fall of communism, when the urgency of making his western readers understand the dangers posed by this ideology had disappeared, Milosz could afford to personalize the form of memoirs in the dictionary structure of *Milosz's ABC*, thus achieving a

⁴⁷¹ Manea, 'The Language Retreat,' 321.

⁴⁷² Manea, *Curierul de Est*, 151.

⁴⁷³ Milosz, *Milosz's ABC*, 221.

relativity of vision which he considered necessary in order to balance the subjectivity of what might have otherwise been seen as a very personal confession.

Milan Kundera, on the other hand, always insisted on this relativity, which he achieved, from his very first novel, *The Joke*, by alternating the narrative point of view. His move to the west and realization that his new readers were missing on the finer points of his novels, which he had hoped had general appeal, determined a break in the story-line of his next book, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. His focus on the smaller narrative unit of theme can be seen as an attempt to reach a wider audience by offering them unrelated instances of life, thus de-contextualizing his fiction as much as possible. With his next novel, though, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera returns to plot as a more efficient mode of communicating with his readers.

When Manea was writing his books of fiction in Romania, the reality he was describing was already so dreary that the bounds of literature had to be stretched to encompass its complexities: “[T]he situation of Romania in the last few decades was so perverse, degenerate, tarnished and paradoxical that dozens of intricate sociological studies would be required to describe its ‘complexity,’ and tens of years of social therapy to reduce its effects.”⁴⁷⁴ His experimental ‘documentary novel’ *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool* recreates this atmosphere with the help of ‘objective’ examples from Romanian newspapers of the period, counterbalanced by a ‘subjective’ diary. His volume of short stories organized according to an autobiographical chronology, *Variations on a Self-Portrait* uses again personal biography as the backbone of fiction, a technique that reaches its full development in *The Return of the Hooligan*.

⁴⁷⁴ Cugno, ‘Character and Confrontation,’ 125.

CONCLUSIONS

Dissidence and exile are two recurrent themes throughout the 20th century. In the new millennium, however, technological developments and advancements in the field of human rights led to a much freer circulation of people and, even more so, of ideas. In this new, cosmopolitan world, it is extremely necessary, both at an individual level and on a more theoretical level, to bridge cultural divides, and this study focuses on the works of three authors who do precisely that: bridge differences between East-Central Europe, on the one hand, and Western Europe and North America on the other.

The process of writing this thesis gave me the opportunity to experience and reassess one of the main points of my research: that of the double audience Milosz, Kundera and Manea had and still have for their work. Just like them, I had readers who were very familiar with the historical events, the social and cultural environment in East Central Europe during the communist regime. What became clearer for me recently is that even for people who lived through those times, the bigger picture is still rather difficult to grasp. In many instances, people focus on the most familiar and look to scholarly research only to reinforce their already formed ideas on what had happened. Scientific research produced in the countries of East Central Europe after the fall of communism also tends to focus on the local, rather than the general, so that even when scholars agree with each other, the resulting collective volume is a juxtaposition of localist views, rather than a more general assessment of the facts. The more general, comparative research, usually produced by western scholars, tends to focus on only three particular instances: Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. This is true of political and sociological studies produced in the 21st century, and the explanation of this choice seems to be that that was where the most visible revolts against the communist regimes took place, in 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia and 1980 in Poland.

My study attempts a more general view, where local instances (of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania) are seen as elements in the great puzzle that was the communist regime in East Central Europe. My interest is first and foremost the identification of this bigger picture, with the apparent disadvantage that I had to build this picture based only on those elements that were common, thus unavoidably frustrating the expectations of those readers fully versed in the intricacies of one or another particular instance. From this point of view, though, at least the information on the Romanian experience appears to be quite new, even to readers really well informed on the East Central European communist experience. My other category of readers -- mainly westerners -- seems grateful for a comprehensive view of events.

In order to continue the three authors' intellectual project of facilitating understanding between different cultures, I have chosen to look at their literary production, as the most formally free mode of linguistic expression, whose freedom also makes it the most adaptable to different audiences. Limited in scope to the second half of the 20th century, this study covers the communist experience as the most drastically different formative experience for the East-Central European mind-set. Since a discussion of communism inevitably involves ideological constructs, I have drawn on three particular instances of East-Central European intellectuals as case studies for their continuous efforts to bridge the divides.

The first chapter of my study has clarified the specific differences between intellectuals in East-Central Europe and those in the West. Given the totalitarian nature of the Soviet regimes, dissidence was almost a *modus vivendi* for honest intellectuals there. We can say that they were actually forced into this position by the inflexibility of a political system which denied them their role as independent intellectuals -- "that social category which performs the task of making conscious and visible the fundamental notions of a

society.”⁴⁷⁵ Since the communist party was the sole entity allowed to express the ‘official’ and only the ‘official’ ideology, the only solution left for those who did not want to conform to this ideology (and who wanted to express their dissent) was exile. In Western democracies, on the other hand, the role of assessing and adjusting the system was already assigned to the proper democratic agencies represented, among others, by highly specialized intellectuals. Dissidents from the Soviet Bloc were considered useful allies by Western governments in the ideological cold war, but their role as intellectuals was seen as much more limited than it had appeared to their audiences back home. This made the position of the intellectual uniquely reflective of the communist trauma. Czeslaw Milosz, Milan Kundera and Norman Manea are representative of this dual position through their activity as both intellectuals and writers of literature, in East-Central Europe and in the West. Paradoxically, fiction allowed them a much more direct relationship, and even a sort of complicity with their readers, while in the west the testimonial seemed at first a more efficient mode of persuasion.

The difficulties involved in identifying even their place of birth for readers not familiar with the complexities of East-Central Europe’s geopolitical situation in the 20th century revealed to me the need to fill in the cultural gaps with historical, political, social, linguistic and literary information. For the needs of this study, this information was kept at a minimum, without detailing the many intricacies of each discussion, but my interaction with western readers convinced me that information was necessary, even in a study focused on literary productions. I produced this second chapter with a view to offer the background information for the works of Milosz, Kundera and Manea, but this chapter is complemented by a study of their articles and essays which prove that each of the three authors themselves were constantly trying to provide a background for their fictional works. Before

⁴⁷⁵ Ron Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics. Intellectuals in Modern Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 6.

me, these three authors wrote for two very distinct audiences, and consequently their work, and even their biographies provide very useful material for the understanding of the period, going beyond the literary level of the text.

My study of Milosz, Kundera and Manea started from their biographies, which showed several common aspects, beginning with the deceptively very basic notion of place of birth and continuing with the historical events they witnessed and the political stands they adopted. The language each of the three used places their literature in a different position from that of their western counterparts, as proven by their constant need to indicate specific categories and proxy genres for their literary production. This need also arose from the very different literary environment which determined their reception first in their home countries and then in the West.

This study has offered a structured overview of three indicative oeuvres from the period and region, looking at the ways in which the communist experience, covering more than four decades, has acquired literary expression. As stated repeatedly by East-Central European authors, the experience has been deeply traumatic and alienating, and has been expressed in a variety of literary forms which are detailed in and the third part of the present study. The search for literary form is shown to be parallel with the actual unfolding events viewed from geopolitical, historical and sociological perspectives: the authors' need to emphasize the authenticity of their literature determined their choice of biographical and autobiographical narratives, as well as the structure of those narratives.

The direct testimonies of Milosz, Kundera and Manea on the defining elements of East-Central European life, in the form of articles, interviews and essays produced over several decades, which are discussed in the first section of the third part of this study illuminate the elusive geographical contours of the region, such as they are traced in Kundera's article 'The Tragedy of Central Europe,' which gives a cultural identity to the entire region. The prominent role of history in the lives of people in the region is illustrated

by Milosz's poem 'Child of Europe.' Manea's dialogues in *The Eastern Messenger* reveal a harsh lesson on the dangers of political extremism, while his interviews collected in *The Snail's House* and *Nomad Texts* prove the extremely important role of language in the writers' relationship with their different audiences. Literature has been the main preoccupation for Milosz, Kundera and Manea alike, as a most appropriate way of making sense of and transmitting traumatic experiences at a personal level. Milosz's *The Witness of Poetry*, Kundera's volumes of essays *The Art of the Novel*, *Testaments Betrayed* and *The Curtain*, Manea's *Envelopes and Portraits* and *Black Milk*, all speak about the capacity of literature to bring together individuals and cultures, to open a channel of communication between them. In the home country, under the communist regime, the communication had to be coded, as Manea shows in his *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist*. In the West, the writer had to understand and adapt to Western culture, in order to be able to get the attention of this new audience and transmit his message, as Milosz does in *Visions from San Francisco Bay*.

The actual literary forms employed by the three authors to transmit their experience of communism to their readers in different cultures revealed the preference given to biographical and autobiographical genres in order to impress upon the reader the authenticity of the facts presented. On the literary level, my study focuses not on the whole work of Milosz, Kundera or Manea, but on the literary means they used in order to convey a deeply traumatic experience: life under communism. It identifies the narrative means employed subsequently by the three authors as they move from the 'bearing witness' stage towards a more personal, autobiographical stage, and eventually reach (or not) a fully fictional form. The goal of these narrative strategies is the basic need to produce empathy in the reader, where the empathy is directed, in the autobiographical instance, towards the author, while in the fictional form it attaches itself to the characters. For the authors themselves, the transference of personal experience into fiction appears to be therapeutic.

Czeslaw Milosz first introduced the subject to his western readers with his *Captive Mind*, a comparative study of the biographies of four intellectuals under communism. His next attempt, *Native Realm*, took a more personal form, that of a classical memoir, although he was barely halfway into his creative life at the time. In the last years of his life, he returned to his memoirs, this time in the more fragmented form of a dictionary, in *Milosz's ABC*.

Fragmentation as creator of a much needed relativity of vision can be seen in Kundera, too. If in his first novel, *The Joke*, Kundera uses several narrative perspectives in order to achieve this relativity, his most formally innovative book, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* simply dispenses with plot in order to focus on what Kundera considers most important: his themes. This approach also had the advantage of making it easier to communicate to readers, irrespective of their cultural affiliation. Kundera, however, returns to plot and consistent characters in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, as he believes in the capacity of fiction, and the novel in particular, with its inherent ambiguities, to transmit the most important human truths.

Manea, in his turn, aimed for authenticity with his 'documentary novel' *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool*, a double document of private and public life in the last decades of communism, a puzzle made up of newspaper cuts and diary entries. His more personal creation, *Variations on a Self-Portrait* reorganizes short stories, or what used to be separate fictionalized instances of personal episodes of his life along the chronological line of his autobiography. Manea's most complex book on the communist experience, *The Hooligan's Return*, is a combination of memoirs and diary, as it reconciles the traumatic memories of the past with the present-day experience of the author's return to his home country.

As I was researching and writing my thesis, I had the opportunity to compare the different methodological approaches employed in studying the work of Milosz, Kundera or

Manea in their home countries and in the West. Typically, the studies produced in Poland, the Czech Republic or Romania focus primarily on the authors' texts, while westerners use a more comparative approach, which considers the context of their work more closely. My study has benefitted immensely from the recent development of the internet, which allows the scholar ready access to a much wider range of reliable sources than ever before, and facilitates the production of comparative studies.

On the whole, this thesis has offered a complex but comprehensible image of what communism meant for East Central Europeans during the second half of the 20th century and of the literary means used to express it. The study is comparative in more ways than one: apart from looking at three different authors and their corpus of works, methodologically, it combines historical, sociological and geo-political approaches with the study of literary texts themselves. This bigger picture in itself, as it is created of a multitude of small details, is, I think, the most original aspect of my study. My change of perspective has been quite thorough: as I was researching and then writing this thesis in New Zealand, I had the benefit of a non-European point of view, so the thesis assembles information easily available only to those with a personal interest (the local), with a more remote, clearer interpretation (of the West), but from a global and thus less passionate, unbiased perspective which the view from New Zealand affords. This is precisely what this thesis has achieved foremost: an articulate, global perspective on very traumatic events and the literature written to communicate them.

APPENDIX

Even discussing the bibliography of the three authors poses many methodological difficulties, as it involves two vectors that are quite difficult to coordinate: chronology (when a book was written and first published) and language of the first publication (not always the language of the original).

Czesław Miłosz

- Poemat o czasie zastygłym / A Poem on Frozen Time.* Wilno: Kolo Polonistów Sluchaczy Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego, 1933 (verse)
- Trzy zimy / Three Winters.* Wilno: Związek Zawodowy Literatów Polskich, 1936 (verse)
- Wiersze / Poems.* Lwów, 1939 (Clandestine publication under the pseudonym J. Syruć)
- Ocalenie / Rescue.* Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1945 (verse)
- Zniewolony umysł / The Captive Mind.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1953 (essays)
- Światło dzienne / Daylight.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1953 (verse)
- Zdobycie władzy / The Seizure of Power.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1955 (novel)
- Dolina Issy / The Issa Valley.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1955 (novel)
- Traktat poetycki / Treatise on Poetry.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1957 (verse + short prose)
- Kontynenty / Continents.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1958 (essays + translations)
- Rodzinna Europa / Native Realm.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1959 (autobiography / memoir)
- Człowiek wśród skorpionów : studium o Stanisławie Brzozowskim / Man Among Scorpions.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1962 (study on Stanisław Brzozowski)
- Król Popiel i inne wiersze / King Popiel and Other Poems.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1962 (verse)
- Gucio zaczarowany / Bobo's Metamorphosis.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1965 (verse)
- Miasto bez imienia / City Without a Name.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1969 (verse)
- Widzenia nad zatoką San Francisco / Visions from San Francisco Bay.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1969 (essays)
- The History of Polish Literature.* London: Macmillan, 1969
- Prywatne obowiązki / Private Obligations.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1972 (essays)
- Gdzie wschodzi słońce i kędy zapada i inne wiersze / From the Rising of the Sun.* Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1974 (verse)
- Emperor of the Earth.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977 (essays)

Ziemia Ulro / The Land of Ulro. Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1977 (essays)

Ogród nauk / Garden of Knowledge. Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1979 (essays)

Traktat moralny / Treatise on Morality. Paris: Instytut Literacki 1981 (essay in verse)

Alexander Fiut, *Rozmowy z Czesławem Miłoszem / Conversations with Czesław Miłosz*. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1981 (interviews)

Hymn o Perle / Hymn of the Pearl. Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1982 (verse)

Witness of Poetry: Six Lectures on the Grievousness of Our Era. Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1983 (verse + prose)

Ewa Czarnecka, *Podróżny świata / World Traveler*. New York: Bicentennial Publishing Corporation, 1983 (interviews)

Nieobjęta ziemia / Unattainable Earth. Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1984 (verse + translations)

Zaczynając od moich ulic / Beginning with my streets. Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1985 (essays)

Kroniki / Chronicles. Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1987 (verse)

Czesława Miłosza autoportret przekorny / Czesław Miłosz: A Contradictory Self-Portrait. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1988 (interviews)

Rok myśliwego / Year of the Hunter. Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1990 (diary / journal)

Dalsze okolice / Farther Surroundings. Cracow: Znak, 1991 (verse)

Szukanie ojczyzny / In Search of a Homeland. Cracow: Znak, 1992 (essays)

Na brzegu rzeki / Facing the River. Cracow: Znak, 1994 (verse)

Legendy nowoczesności / Modern Legends, War Essays. Cracow: WL, 1996 (essays)

Jakiegoż to gościa mieliśmy. Jakiegoż to gościa mieliśmy. O Annie Świrszczyńskiej/What a Guest we had. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1996 (study on Anna Świrszczyńska)

Abecadło Miłosza / Miłosz ABC's. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997 (short prose)

Piesek przydrożny / Road-side Dog. Cracow: Znak, 1997 (short prose + verse)

Inne abecadło / Another ABC Book. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1998 (short prose)

To / It. Cracow: Znak, 2000 (verse)

Druga przestrzeń / The Second Space. Cracow: Znak, 2002 (verse)

Orfeusz i Eurydyka / Orpheus and Eurydice. Cracow: WL, 2002 (verse)

Spizarnia literacka / A Literary Larder. Cracow: WL, 2004 (essays)

Wiersze ostatnie / Last Poems. Cracow: Znak, 2006 (verse)

Milan Kundera

- Člověk zahrada širá / Man, a Wide Garden.* Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1953
(lyrical poems)
- Poslední máj / The Last May.* Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1955 (poem)
- Monology / Monologues.* Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1957 (a collection of poems)
- Majitelé klíčů / The Owners of the Keys.* Prague: Orbis, 1962 (a play)
- Umění románu: Cesta Vladislava Vančury za velkou epikou / The Art of the Novel: Vladislav Vancura's journey to the great epic.* Československý spisovatel, 1960 (literary study)
- Směšné lásky / Laughable Loves.* Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1963, 1965, 1968
(three volumes of short stories)
Risibles amours. Paris: Gallimard, 1970
- Žert / The Joke.* Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1967 (a novel)
La plaisanterie. Paris: Gallimard, 1968
- Ptákovina / Nonsense.* In *Divadlo*, 1969 (a play)
- Jakub a jeho pán / Jacques and his Master.* Brno: Atlantis, 1992 (a play)
Jacques et son maître. Paris: Gallimard, 1981
- Život je jinde / Life is Elsewhere.* Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1979 (a novel)
La Vie est ailleurs. Paris: Gallimard, 1973
- Valčík na rozloučenou / The Farewell Party.* Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1979 (a novel)
La valse aux adieux. Paris: Gallimard, 1976
- Kniha smíchu a zapomnění / The Book of Laughter and Forgetting.* Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1981
Le livre du rire et de l'oublié. Paris: Gallimard, 1979
- Nesnesitelná lehkost bytí / The Unbearable Lightness of Being.* Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1985 (a novel)
L'insoutenable légèreté de l'être. Paris: Gallimard, 1987
- L'art du roman / The Art of the Novel.* Paris: Gallimard, 1986 (essays)
- Nesmrtelnost / Immortality.* Brno: Atlantis, 1993 (a novel)
L'immortalité. Paris: Gallimard, 1990
- Les testaments trahis / Testaments Betrayed.* Paris: Gallimard, 1993 (essays)
- La lenteur / Slowness.* Paris: Gallimard, 1995 (a novel)
- L'identité / Identity.* Paris: Gallimard, 1997 (a novel)
- L'ignorance / Ignorance.* Paris: Gallimard, 2000 (a novel)
- Le rideau: Essai en sept parties / The Curtain.* Paris: Gallimard, 2005 (essays)
- Une rencontre / Encounter.* Paris: Gallimard, 2009 (essays)

Norman Manea

- Noaptea pe latura lungă / Night on the Long Side*. Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, 1969
(short fiction)
- Captivi / Captives*. Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1970 (novel)
- Atrium / Atrium*. Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1974 (novel)
- Primele porți / First Gates*. Bucharest: Albatros, 1975 (short fiction)
- Cartea Fiului / Book of the Son*. Bucharest: Eminescu, 1976 (novel)
- Zilele și jocul / The Days and the Game*. Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1977 (novel)
- Anii de ucenicie ai lui August Prostul / The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool*
Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1979 (documentary novel)
- Octombrie, ora opt*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1981 (short fiction)
- October, Eight O'Clock*. New York: Grove Press, 1992
- Pe Contur / On the Edge*. Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1984 (essays)
- Plicul negru*. Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1986 (novel)
- The Black Envelope*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995
- Fenster zur Arbeiterklasse / A Window on the Working Class*. Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 1989
(longer short fiction). Later collected in *Compulsory Happiness*.
- Der Trenchcoat / The Trenchcoat*. Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 1990 (a short novel). Later
collected in *Compulsory Happiness*
- Training für's Paradies / Training for Paradise*. Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 1990 (short fiction).
Later collected in *Compulsory Happiness*
- On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist*. New York: Grove Press, 1992, 1993 (essays)
- Despre Clovni: Dictatorul și Artistul*. Cluj-Napoca: Apostrof, 1997.
- Le bonheur obligatoire*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1991 (longer short fiction)
- Compulsory Happiness*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1993
- Fericirea obligatorie*. Cluj-Napoca: Apostrof, 1999.
- Casa melcului / The Snail's House*. Bucharest: Hasefer, 1999. (interviews)
- Întoarcerea huliganului*. Iași: Polirom, 2003
- The Hooligan's Return: A Memoir*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003
- Plicuri și portrete / Envelopes and Portraits*. Iași: Polirom, 2004 (essays)
- Textul nomad / The Nomad Text*. Bucharest: Hasefer, 2006 (interviews)
- La quinta impossibilità*. Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2006 (translated by Marco Cugno)
- The Fifth Impossibility, Essays on Exile and Language*. Yale University Press, 2012
- Vorbind pietrei / Talking to a Stone (poem) -- accompanied by translation into 10 languages:
English, Hebrew, German, Spanish, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Swedish, French,
Italian*. Iași: Polirom, 2008

Înainte de despărțirii. Convorbire cu Saul Bellow / Before Parting: Conversation with Saul Bellow. Iași: Polirom, 2008

Sertarele exilului. Dialog cu Leon Volovici / The Drawers of Exile: Conversations with Leon Volovici. Iași: Polirom, 2008

Variante la un autoportret / Variations on a Self-Portrait. Iași: Polirom, 2008 (short fiction)

Laptele negru / Black Milk. Bucharest: Hasefer, 2010 (essays)

Vizuina. Iași: Polirom, 2009 (novel)

The Lair. Yale University Press, 2012

Curierul de Est / The Eastern Messenger. Iași: Polirom, 2010 (dialogue with Edward Kanterian)

Gesprache im Exil / Conversations in Exile (with Hannes Stein). Berlin: Matthes & Seitz Verlag, 2011

Cuvinte din exil. Iași: Polirom, 2011.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aczel Tamas and Tibor Meray. *The Revolt of the Mind. A Case Study of Intellectual Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1959.
- Alter, Robert. 'Milosz: Poetry and Politics.' *Commentary* 75 (April 1983): 41-47.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Meridian Books, 1968 (1951).
'Understanding Communism,' book review of *An Introduction to Bolshevism*, *Partisan Review* XX (Sept. -- Oct. 1953).
- Baranczak, Stanislaw. 'Foreword' to Rimma Volynska-Bogert and Wojciech Zalewski, *Czeslaw Milosz. An International Bibliography 1930-1980*. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1983.
'The Gulag Circus.' *The New Republic* 206 (June 1, 1992): 44-49.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 'Intellectuals in East-Central Europe: Continuity and Change.' *East European Politics and Societies* 1 (1987): 162-186.
- Begley, Louis. 'A Matter of Survival.' *The New York Review of Books*, September 24, 1992. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1992/sep/24/a-matter-of-survival/?pagination=false>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Berman, Michael. 'To Ludvik, Optimism Was the Opium of the People.' Review of *The Joke*, by Milan Kundera. *New York Times Book Review*, January 11, 1970. Accessed May 18, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-joke2.html>.
- Borsody, Stephen. Review of *The Revolt of the Mind: A Case History of Intellectual Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain* by Tamas Aczel and Tibor Meray. *Political Science Quarterly* 76 (March 1961): 153-154.
- Brand, Glen. *Milan Kundera: an annotated bibliography*. New York: Garland Pub., 1988.
- Brodsky, Joseph. 'Why Milan Kundera Is Wrong about Dostoyevsky.' *New York Times*, February 17, 1985. <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/02/17/books/why-milan-kundera-is-wrong-about-dostoyevsky.html>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Brombert, Victor. 'Toward a Portrait of the French Intellectual.' *Partisan Review* XVII (Summer 1960): 480-502.
- Calinescu, Matei. 'Romanian Literature: Dealing with the Totalitarian Legacy.' *World Literature Today* 65 (Spring, 1991): 244-248.
- Collini, Stefan. *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Cornis-Pope, Marcel. 'Critical Theory and the "Glasnost" Phenomenon: Ideological Reconstruction in Romanian Literary and Political Culture.' *College Literature* 21 (Feb., 1994): 131-155.
- Cornis-Pope, Marcel and John Neubauer. *Towards a History of the Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe: Theoretical Reflections*. New York, NY: ACLS 52, 2002.

- Cravens, Craig. 'Faulty Consciousnesses: Milan Kundera's *The Joke*.' *The Slavic and East European Journal* 44 (Spring, 2000): 92-108.
- Cugno, Marco. 'Character and Confrontation: An Interview with Norman Manea.' *Salmagundi* 113 (Winter 1997): 123-133.
 'Interview with Norman Manea.' *TriQuarterly* 97 (Fall 1996): 21-42.
- Culik, Jan. 'Man, A Wide Garden: Milan Kundera as a Young Stalinist.' *Glasgow ePrints Service*, deposited on 8 November 2007. <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/3806>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
 'Milan Kundera.' In *South Slavic and Eastern European Writers*, ed. Vasa D. Mihailovich and Steven Serafin, 348-364. Detroit: Gale Group, 2000.
- Czarnecka, Ewa and Aleksander Fiut. *Conversations with Czeslaw Milosz*, translated by Richard Lourie. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987.
- Czaykowski, Bogdan. 'Czeslaw Milosz.' In *South Slavic and Eastern European Writers*, ed. Vasa D. Mihailovich and Steven Serafin, 408-420. Detroit: Gale Group, 2000.
- Czerwinski, E. J. 'Czeslaw Milosz: The persistence of existence.' *World Literature Today* 73 (Autumn 1999): 669-671.
- Davie, Donald. *Czeslaw Milosz and the Insufficiency of Lyric*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986.
- Davies, Norman. *Europe: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Davy, Richard. 'Publishing in the Vishegrad Countries in 1994: A Report with suggestions for Western help / Hungary.' In *Freedom for Publishing, Publishing for Freedom. The Central and East European Publishing Project*, edited by Timothy Garton Ash, 99-193. Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995.
- Degras, Jane. Review of *The Captive Mind* by Czeslaw Milosz. *International Affairs* 30 (April 1954): 198-199.
- Donahue, Bruce. 'Viewing the West from the East: Solzhenitsyn, Milosz, and Kundera.' *Comparative Literature Studies* 20 (Fall, 1983): 247-260.
- Dragomir, Lucia. 'Schimbarea ordinii lumii -- misiunea politica a scriitorilor in "democrațiile populare."' In '*Transformarea socialista*.' *Politici ale regimului comunist intre ideologie si administratie*, coordinated by Ruxandra Ivan, 192-213. Iasi: Polirom, 2009.
- Draper Clark, David. 'Czeslaw Milosz Selected Bibliography.' *World Literature Today* 73 (1999): 621-622.
- Dyer, Geoff. 'Encounter: Essays by Milan Kundera,' book review. *The Observer*, 22 August, 2010. Accessed November 21, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/aug/22/encounter-essays-review>.
- Eberharter, Markus. 'Rethinking Central Europe -- a perspective for comparative literature?' Paper presented at the European Studies Centre, Oxford, 24-26 May, 2002.
http://users.ox.ac.uk/~oaces/conference/papers/Markus_Eberharter.pdf. Accessed November 12, 2012.

- Ernu, Vasile. *Nascut in URSS*. Iasi: Polirom, 2006.
- Eyerman, Ron. *Between Culture and Politics. Intellectuals in Modern Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.
- Falk, Barbara J. *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe*. Budapest -- New York: CEU Press, 2003.
- Faggen, Robert. 'Czeslaw Milosz.' *Partisan Review* 1 (1999): 145-152.
 'The Teacher and His Students.' *Partisan Review* 1 (1999): 90-99.
- Fiut, Aleksander. *The Eternal Moment. The Poetry of Czeslaw Milosz*, translated by Theodosia S. Robertson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
 'In the Shadow of Empires. Postcolonialism in Central and Eastern Europe -- Why not?' *Postcolonial Europe*, <http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/index.php/en/essays/58--in-the-shadow-of-empires>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Foucault, Michel. 'Truth and Power.' In *Power / Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, 109-133. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Garton Ash, Timothy. 'The History of CEEPP.' In *Freedom for Publishing, Publishing for Freedom. The Central and East European Publishing Project*, edited by Timothy Garton Ash, 17-48. Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995.
 'Does Central Europe Exist?' *The New York Review of Books*, October 9, 1986. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1986/oct/09/does-central-europe-exist/?pagination=false>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Gati, Charles G. Review of *The Revolt of the Mind: A Case History of Intellectual Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain* by Tamas Aczel and Tibor Meray. *The Slavic and East European Journal* 4 (Winter, 1960): 387-389.
- Gella, Aleksander, ed. *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals. Theory, Method and Case Study*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1976.
- Gheorghiu, Mihai Dinu. *Intelectualii in cimpul puterii. Morfologii si traiectorii sociale*. Iasi: Polirom, 2007.
- Gomori, George. 'Notes on Czeslaw Milosz's life writing.' *World Literature Today* 73 (Autumn 1999): 672-674.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. 'Towards a poetics of culture.' *Southern Review* 20 (March 1987): 3-15.
- Grenier, Yvon. 'Milan Kundera on Politics and the Novel.' *History of Intellectual Culture* 6 (No. 1, 2006): 1-18. <http://www.ucalgary.ca/hic>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Gutthy, Agnieszka (ed.) *Literature in Exile of East and Central Europe*. Middlebury Studies in Russian Language and Literature. Vol. 30. New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, Oxford, Wien: Thomas R. Beyer, Jr., 2009.
- Haas, Mark L. *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics. 1789-1989*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.

- Haven, Cynthia L. 'Czeslaw Milosz around the world.' *Times Literary Supplement* (23 November, 2011).
- Hayward, Max. 'Soviet Literature in the Doldrums.' *Partisan Review* XXVII (Winter 1960).
- Huszar, Tibor. 'Changes in the Concept of Intellectuals.' In *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals. Theory, Method and Case Study*, edited by Aleksander Gella, 79-110. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1976.
- Iribarne, Louis. 'Lost in the "Earth-Garden": The Exile of Czeslaw Milosz.' *World Literature Today* 73 (Autumn 1999): 637-642.
- Jacoby, Russell. *The Last Intellectuals. American Culture in the Age of Academia*. New York: Basic Books, 2000 (1987).
- Jastremski, Kim. 'Home as Other in the Work of Czeslaw Milosz.' In *Framing the Polish Home: Postwar Cultural Constructions of Hearth, Nation, and Self*, edited by Bozena Shallcross, 54-67. Athens, OH: Ohio State UP, 2002.
- Judt, Tony. 'The Rediscovery of Central Europe.' *Daedalus* 119 (Winter, 1990): 23-54.
- Kanterian, Edward. 'Trivializing Tragedy: An interview with Norman Manea.' *Partisan Review* 69 (Spring 2002): 186-205.
- Kecskemeti, Paul. 'Coercion from Within,' review of *The Captive Mind* by Czeslaw Milosz. *Commentary* 16 (1953): 275-278.
- Komorowski, Zygmunt. 'The Class of the Intelligentsia in Africa.' In *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals. Theory, Method and Case Study*, edited by Aleksander Gella, 201-210. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1976.
- Konrad, Georgy 'Is the Dram of Central Europe Still Alive?' *Cross Currents* 5 (1986): 109-121.
- Korek, Janusz. 'Central and Eastern Europe from a Postcolonial Perspective.' *Postcolonial Europe*, <http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/index.php/en/essays/60--central-and-eastern-europe-from-a-postcolonial-perspective>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Kramer, Jane. 'When There Is No Word for Home.' *New York Times Book Review*, April 29, 1984. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-home.html>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Krejci, Oskar. *Geopolitics of the Central European Region. The View from Prague and Bratislava*. Bratislava: VEDA Publishing House of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2005.
- Kundera, Milan. *The Art of the Novel*, translated from the French by Linda Asher. New York: Grove Press, 1988.
- The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, translated from the French by Aaron Asher. London: Faber & Faber, 1996.
- The Curtain. An Essay in Seven Parts*, translated from the French by Linda Asher. London: Faber & Faber, 2007.
- 'An Introduction to a Variation.' *New York Times*, January 6, 1985. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-variation.html>. Accessed November 12, 2012.

- The Joke*, translated from the Czech by Michael Henry Heim. London: Faber and Faber, 1983.
- Life Is Elsewhere*, translated from the French by Aaron Asher. New York: HarperCollins, 2000.
- Testaments Betrayed. An Essay in Nine Parts*, translated from the French by Linda Asher. New York: Harper Collins, 2001.
- 'The Tragedy of Central Europe.' *The New York Review of Books* 31 (April 26, 1984): 33-38.
- The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, translated from the Czech by Michael Henry Heim. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.
- Lehmann-Haupt, Christopher. 'On the Autonomy of Art and How It Is Betrayed.' Review of *Testaments Betrayed*, by Milan Kundera, *The New York Times Books of the Times*, September 21, 1995.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/21/books/books-of-the-times-on-the-autonomy-of-art-and-how-it-is-betrayed.html>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Lerner, Daniel. Review of *The Captive Mind* by Czeslaw Milosz. *American Sociological Review* 19 (August 1954): 488-489.
- Levine, Madeline G. 'Introduction' to Czeslaw Milosz, *To Begin Where I Am. Selected Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.
- MacFarquhar, Larissa. 'Shadows and Fog: The Unquiet Times of Norman Manea,' review of *The Hooligan's Return*, by Norman Manea. *New Yorker Book Review*, September 1, 2003, 122-126.
- Manea, Cella and George Onofrei, ed. *The Obsession of Uncertainty. In Honorem Norman Manea*. Iasi: Polirom, 2011.
- Manea, Norman. 'A Lasting Poison.' *Project Syndicate* (November 20, 2008), <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/manea6/English>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Anii de ucenicie ai lui August Prostul*. Iasi: Polirom, 2005.
- Curierul de Est. Dialog cu Edward Kanterian*. Iasi: Polirom, 2010.
- Despre clovni: dictatorul si artistul*. Iasi: Polirom, 2005.
- 'Happy Guilt. Mircea Eliade, fascism and the unhappy fate of Romania.' *The New Republic* 205, 5 August 1991, 27-36.
- Intoarcerea huliganului*. Iasi: Polirom, 2006.
- Laptele Negru*. Bucuresti: Hasefer, 2010.
- 'On Exiled Language.' *Salmagundi* 141-142 (Winter 2004): 80-95.
- Plicuri si portrete*. Iasi: Polirom, 2004.
- Textul nomad*. Bucuresti: Hasefer, 2006.
- Variante la un autoportret*. Iasi: Polirom, 2008.
- McEwan, Ian. 'An Interview with Milan Kundera (1984).' In *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury, 49-52. London: Fontana, 1990.

- Meisel, Perry. 'Beautifying Lies and Polyphonic Wisdom,' review of *The Art of the Novel*, by Milan Kundera. *The New York Times Book Review*, April 10, 1988. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-art.html>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Milosz, Czeslaw. 'A Poet's Reply.' *The New York Review of Books* 35 (July 21, 1988).
- Bells in Winter*, translated by the author and Lillian Vallee. New York: Ecco Press, 1978.
- The Captive Mind*, translated from the Polish by Jane Zielonko. New York: Vintage Books. 1953.
- 'Central European Attitudes.' *Cross Currents* 5 (1986): 101-108.
- Milosz's ABC*, translated from the Polish by Madeline G. Levine. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001.
- Native Realm: A Search for Self-definition*, translated from the Polish by Catherine S. Leach. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002.
- Selected Poems*. New York: The Echo Press, 1980.
- To Begin Where I Am. Selected Essays*, edited and with an introduction by Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline G. Levine. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.
- Visions from San Francisco Bay*, translated from the Polish by Richard Lourie. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982.
- The Witness of Poetry*. Charles Eliot Norton Lectures. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Molesworth, Charles. 'Just tell me when to stop laughing: Norman Manea and political liberty.' *Salmagundi* 113 (Winter 1997): 106-117.
- Namier, L. B. *1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals*. The Raleigh Lecture on History, British Academy, 1944. Oxford University Press: 1946.
- Nemoianu, Virgil. 'Norman Manea.' In *Twentieth-Century Eastern European Writers: Third Series*, ed. and introd. Steven Serafin, 251-255. Detroit, MI: Thomson Gale, 2001.
- Okey, Robin. *Eastern Europe, 1740-1980: Feudalism to Communism*. London: Hutchinson, 1982.
- Oppenheim, Lois. 'Clarifications, Elucidations: An Interview with Milan Kundera.' *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 9.2 (Summer, 1989): 7-12.
- Posner, Richard A. *Public Intellectuals. A Study of Decline*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003 (2001).
- Raicu, Lucian. 'Norman Manea - prioritatea și fascinatia literarului.' *Observatorul Cultural* 125 (July 26 - August 1, 2007). http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Norman-Manea-prioritatea-si-fascinatia-literarului*articleID_18019-articles_details.html. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Restuccia, Frances L. 'Homo Homini Lupus:' Milan Kundera's *The Joke*. *Contemporary literature* 31 (Autumn, 1990): 281-299.

- Ricard, Francois. *Agnes's Final Afternoon. An Essay on the Work of Milan Kundera*, translated from the French by Aaron Asher. New York: HarperCollins 2003.
- Rodgers, Daniel T. and Stefan Collini. 'Anatomy of a Cliche'/ Author's Response. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68 (July 2007): 389-405.
- Roth, Philip. Interview with Milan Kundera. *New York Times Book Review*, November 30, 1980. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-roth.html>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Rothenberg, Sarah. 'Farewell to the Modern Era: Kundera on Culture.' *World Policy Journal* 2 (1996): 81-86.
- Said, Edward W. *Representations of the Intellectual*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1994.
- Sebastian, Mihail. *Journal 1935-1944. The Fascist Years*, translated by Patrick Camiller, introduction by Radu Ioanid. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000.
- Simonca, Ovidiu. 'Vad la oameni din generatia mea aceeasi dorinta de a-si asuma istoria.' Interviu cu Edward KANTERIAN. *Observatorul cultural* 398 (15 November 2007). http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Vad-la-oameni-din-generatia-mea-aceeasi-dorinta-de-a-si-asuma-istoria.-Interviu-cu-Edward-KANTERIAN*articleID_18735-articles_details.html.
- Simut, Ion. *Incursiuni in literatura actual*. Oradea: Cogito, 1994.
- Smith, Anthony D. *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*. London, GBR: Routledge, 1998.
- Stanger, Allison. 'In Search of *The Joke*: An Open Letter to Milan Kundera.' *New England Review* 18 (Winter, 1997): 93-100.
- Stavans, Ilan. 'Lies, Disguises, Exile: A Conversation with Norman Manea.' *Salmagundi* 113 (Winter 1997): 92-105.
- Taborsky, Edward. 'The Revolt of the Communist Intellectuals.' *The Review of Politics* 19 (3, Jul. 1957): 308-329.
- Taylor, Flagg. 'Czeslaw Milosz: On the Imagination of Twentieth-Century Man.' *East European Politics and Societies* 19 (1, 2005): 21-39.
- Thompson, Ewa M. 'The Writer in Exile: The Good Years.' *The Slavic and East European Journal* 33 (Winter 1989): 499-515.
- 'Ways of Remembering: the Case of Poland.' *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 12 (Spring 2005). <http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/12/thompson12.shtml>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Tighe, Carl. *The Politics of Literature: Poland 1945-1989*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999.
- Turcus, Claudiu. *Norman Manea -- Alternatives to a Portrait*. PhD diss., 'Babes-Bolyai' University Cluj-Napoca, 2011. http://doctorat.ubbcluj.ro/sustinerea_publica/rezumat/2011/filologie/turcus_florin_claudiu_en.pdf. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Ungar, Steven. 'Kundera's Variations: Passing Thoughts on Novel and Nation.' *South Central Review* 3 (2008): 57-67.

- Updike, John. 'The Most Original Book of the Season,' review of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. New York Times Book Review, November 30, 1980. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-laughter.html>. Accessed November 12, 2012.
- Volynska-Bogert, Rimma and Wojciech Zalewski. *Czeslaw Milosz. An International Bibliography 1930-1980*. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1983.
- Volovici, Leon. *Aparitia scriitorului in cultura romana*. Bucuresti: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2004.
- Wachtel, Andrew Baruch. *Remaining Relevant after Communism. The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Wallach, Amei. 'Censorship in the Soviet Bloc.' *Art Journal* 50 (Autumn 1991): 75-83.
- Wolff, Larry. *Inventing Eastern Europe: the map of civilization on the mind of the enlightenment*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Woods, Michelle. *Translating Milan Kundera*. Topics in Translation. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2006.
- Zinner, Paul E. Review of *The Revolt of the Mind: A Case History of Intellectual Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain* by Tamas Aczel and Tibor Meray. *Slavic Review* 23 (March 1964): 157-158.