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Globalisation and minor literatures: on Norman Manea's literature of exile and translation

Globalisation is often understood as accelerated economic progress, low barriers to trade, the facile circulation of goods and people, and multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. In literary production, globalisation is also the circulation of "minor literatures" and their integration into debates about what constitutes the (Western) literary canon. Often, such debates address questions of cultural hegemony and hybridity. Some attention is also given to translation and the work done to make such "minor literatures" available to a language of global circulation. However, less attention is paid to the material conditions in which writers produce work in a language of limited circulation and cultural influence.

As such, my paper will be focusing on the barriers to publishing facing writers in a "minor language", writing for a global audience. In order to illustrate these barriers, I will be focusing on the writings of Norman Manea, whose reflections on exile and translation provide a fruitful starting point. Born in Romania in 1936, Manea's relationship with the Romanian language has always been fraught, even as he refers to it as his "motherland".

The site of both joy and pain, Manea's experience of Romanian is one of exile, at first internal and later made real, as he eventually leaves the country. My paper will therefore analyse the ways in which Manea approaches his exile: as a political dissident in communist Romania, he writes to lay claim on a language deadened by ideology, and to rebuild a self lost to surveillance and dictatorship. As an exile, Manea continues to write in Romanian, to an audience unfamiliar with the language and the culture that denied him, which raises questions about translation and the performance of the self in a globalised society.