

## Adrian Marino and the Idea of Literature from a Hermeneutical Perspective

Florina ILIS  
"Lucian Blaga" Central University Library,  
Cluj-Napoca

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### Abstract

Adrian Marino, trying to impose hermeneutics upon Romanian literary criticism, developed a new methodology of hermeneutics and a real critical system. The study analyses this system, comparing Marino's hermeneutics to the systems of such outstanding hermeneutists as Heidegger or Schleiermacher. Being very well acquainted with the hermeneutical tradition, Adrian Marino elaborated a kind of synthesis of the hermeneutical interpretation methods and techniques, but he also developed a method of hermeneutical analysis for the texts of literary theory, thereby inventing a new discipline, the hermeneutics of the idea of literature.

**E-mail:** [ilis@bcucluj.ro](mailto:ilis@bcucluj.ro)

Already in 1974, when he was publishing *Critica ideilor literare* (The Critique of Literary Ideas), Adrian Marino had formulated a very precise idea about hermeneutics. As a true pioneer of the new method of treating literary texts, he endeavoured to impose this upon Romanian literary criticism, opposing it, as a method of study, to the imprecise, subjective and vague style of the impressionistic criticism, as well as to the historicist style of Positivist criticism. An entire chapter from the *Critica ideilor literare* was dedicated to hermeneutics as a method of understanding and interpreting the literary text. True to his principle of elaborating from the beginning an adequate methodology, that should help him afterwards in enterprising the act of criticism from positions as objective as they could be, Adrian Marino proceeded in the same way with the hermeneutical method as well. Before applying it concretely, he defined it in different studies, developing a "new methodology" able to sustain his theoretical measures: "As far as we are concerned, we intend

to bring back hermeneutics to the centre of literary studies through *the development of a new methodology* (italics mine), radically different from all the methods of the actual Romanian criticism. [...] It should constitute at the same time an attempt of contribution to the general theory of contemporary hermeneutics.”<sup>1</sup> Then, with the pride of a person who is looking upon a well done work, Adrian Marino, far from remaining in this contemplation of the solidity of the science that he has just elaborated, urged others also to try its efficacy and offered, in *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade* (Mircea Eliade’s Hermeneutics), an example of analysis through which “the new method of hermeneutics” functions in conformity with the severest critical demands. But Adrian Marino had already been emphasizing – since the *Critica ideilor literare* – that his new method cannot be applied by anyone and, still less by someone situated outside the critical understanding of the ideas: “Therefore not any critic can study any idea. In the case of the literary ideas he must have – under any form – the vocation of ideas, of ideological imagination, the critic of ideas being a veritable *creator of ideas* (italics mine).”<sup>2</sup> For the critic of ideas or the *creator of ideas* employed in this “adventure of ideas” the interpretative process does not stop when the idea has been experienced or interiorized, but it continues with a complex process of “objectivization”, the act of participation at the life of the idea taking place in the form of a “dialectical process of cognition”, process observable at the level of a well configured theoretical system. Adrian Marino managed to build such a theoretical system, constructed as a “model”, elaborating the methodological principles necessary to any analysis of hermeneutical nature. In spite of the clarity with which he systematically expounded his ideas, the direction, which he had outlined for the criticism of literary ideas, unfortunately did not find a too fertile field in the Romanian literary landscape, already under the critical tradition established by Călinescu. On the other hand, what Adrian Marino succeeded in – and this fact remains incontestable – was the “audacity” with which he managed to draw the attention of the Romanian criticism to Mircea Eliade’s hermeneutics<sup>3</sup>, clearing thus the way for other studies about the Romanian scholar exiled in the Occident. Furthermore, and this was even

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Marino, *Critica ideilor literare*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1974, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> The French translation of *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade* was published at Gallimard in 1981.

more important in those times, he managed to place him in a Romanian philosophical tradition, even if not an explicitly hermeneutical one, but one presenting all the data for such a development. Thus Mircea Eliade was situated, for the first time in the post-war period, in “the family of Romanian spirits”, the same *family* as Lucian Blaga, Constantin Noica and Mircea Vulcănescu.

We shall try to analyze the critical system imposed by Adrian Marino upon the Romanian literary criticism, observing especially in what measure the hermeneutical method, conceived as a *hermeneutics of the literary idea*, expresses in its most authentic sense one of the most profound ways of interpreting and understanding the literary text. The systematic project – its essential directions had already been discernible since the paper *Introducere în critica literară* (Introduction to literary criticism) written in 1968 – elaborated by Adrian Marino, was developed into a real critical system in the course of the following years when one after the other appeared: *Modern, Modernism, Modernitate* (Modern, Modernism, Modernity) (1969), *Dicționarul de idei literare* (The Dictionary of Literary Ideas) (1973), *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade* (Mircea Eliade’s Hermeneutics) (1980) and, in 1987, *Hermeneutica ideii de literatură* (The Hermeneutics of the Idea of Literature). These are only the essential works included in this critical project. The systematic application of the concepts belonging to the criticism of literary ideas developed by Adrian Marino appears most thoroughly expressed in his six-volume work, *Biografia ideii de literatură* (The Biography of the Idea of Literature) (1991–2000).

Insisting upon the idea, that “the hermeneutical method” should not be applied mechanically and in any case, Adrian Marino was aware of the fact, that in order not to fall into the trap of a rigid interpretative frame, external to the analysed literary idea, there is need of an “internal”, “progressive” investigation, that should form a “passage”<sup>1</sup> towards the real essence of the literary ideas. This approach, which presupposes the existence of a centre and a circle of significations constitutive to the idea, derives from a theme well known to philosophical hermeneutics, the theme of the *circle*, a theme expressed first by Schleiermacher and developed, later on, by M. Heidegger. Schleiermacher described – while formulating one of the basic rules of hermeneutics, which presupposed the understanding of the whole from the part and of the part from the

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica ideii de literatură*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1987, p. 11.

whole – a certain need of *identification* on the interpreter's part with the author of the text.<sup>1</sup> Heidegger on the other hand tried, first of all, to consolidate an epistemological foundation for the hermeneutics of poetic interpretation. Defining existence in metaphorical terms, as being necessarily "interpretative", even "hermeneutical", Heidegger assented, that in this philosophical context, art and literature become one of the highest forms of cognition of human life.<sup>2</sup> Schleiermacher's idea that the whole should be recovered from the part and the part from the whole, taken over also by Heidegger, was also defined by Adrian Marino in a kind of programme text of the hermeneutical method, the *Herméneutique et lecture simultanée*, published in *Cahiers roumains d'études littéraires*: "Il est évident que toute lecture systématique va du tout à la parties et de la parties au tout, du niveau historique actuel de la totalité aux éléments historiques composants, ramenés en bloc devant l'esprit investigateur."<sup>3</sup> But with Adrian Marino, the sense of *divination*, which the interpreter of a text must possess in order to be able to reach the author's "internal and external life", did not present a *sine qua non* condition of the interpretation, when there was no difference between the *historic* and the *actual* level. In order to avoid the trap of any kind of metaphysical interpretation, hazardous in that age, Adrian Marino endeavoured to confer an image as "objective" and "scientific" as possible to the hermeneutical method in comparison with other analytical methods of literary ideas and texts. Without neglecting, however, these philosophical perspectives, for the hermeneutics of the idea of literature Adrian Marino devised a specific system of interpretation, which was built into a veritable *hermeneutical model*, whose functioning initially presupposes a *preconception* (*Vorassetzung, présupposé*), a term borrowed from the Heideggerian philosophy. Unless considering beforehand this notion a kind of *central motive of the method*<sup>4</sup> elaborated by Adrian Marino, the theoretical scaffold, upon which the critic of ideas constructs his analysis, loses its whole coherence. Different however from Heidegger's thought,

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<sup>1</sup> F. Mussner, *Histoire de l'herméneutique*, Paris, Les Editions du CERF, 1972, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Felix Martinez Bonati, *Hermeneutics Criticism and the Description of Form, in Interpretation of Narrative*, Edited by Mario J. Valdés and Owen J. Miller, Toronto, Buffalo, London, University of Toronto Press, 1976, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Marino, "Herméneutique et lecture simultanée", in *Cahiers roumains d'études littéraires*, nr. 4, 1977, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica ideii de literatură*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1987, p. 19.

where the cognition of the world is conditioned and substantiated existentially, Adrian Marino's approach, where the *preconception* functions in a logical, ideatic system, conceived the cognition of the world as having a strictly objective sense.

Before undertaking any analysis of Adrian Marino's work method, a specification is necessary: this method of interpretation is not a schematic frame that might be applied mechanically in the case of any literary phenomena. On the contrary, even inside Adrian Marino's thought there is, for example, an essential difference between the *hermeneutics of religious ideas*, practised by Mircea Eliade and the *literary hermeneutics*. These two, dealing with structurally different phenomena, lead to the construction of diverse methodologies of interpretation. Secondly, although the method of hermeneutical interpretation and understanding described by Adrian Marino leads to the idea that the method of investigation itself functions in "circles", in reality this operates simultaneously in directions that presuppose distinct levels in the hermeneutical process. If the *hermeneutics of religious ideas*, promoted by Mircea Eliade presupposes that the impulse to "decipher, discover signs and significations"<sup>1</sup> should also acquire an ontological status, even if "essentially objective, textualized and historicized",<sup>2</sup> then the *hermeneutics of the idea of literature* appears as "the theory, method and practice of correct text interpretation and understanding".<sup>3</sup> In addition the ontological content attenuates for the benefit of some textual practices, which liberate the hermeneutical process from any kind of aprioristic determination.

Aware of the fact that, analysing Mircea Eliade's hermeneutics, the religious phenomenon requires also an approach less favoured in the communist era, Adrian Marino, with a thorough sense of objectivity, tried to define the hermeneutical process practiced by the historian of religions in a "scientific" manner. Thus, Adrian Marino thought – following the direction proposed by Bultmann and Gadamer –, Mircea Eliade regarded the act of interpretation as being more than an "understanding" of the sheer data of the text. He underlined, moreover, the necessity to understand the "inner" significations, by an "ontological" transposal into the "original" state of the text or, in the present case, of the studied

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1980, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica ideii de literatură*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1987, p. 11.

religious phenomenon. Describing this aspect, slightly suspicious of mysticism, Adrian Marino did not hesitate to ask himself the question, in what measure the hermeneutist's "participation" at the "original" state of the text – doubled by the effort of re-creation, as a "creative transposal" – "borders on or is apt to be confused with a kind of spiritual experience"<sup>1</sup>. But the answer, in Mircea Eliade's case, by no means led towards what was considered to be the direction followed by Schleiermacher, Dilthey and, later on, by Paul Ricoeur, for whom the process of understanding the religious phenomenon should be doubled by an act of "mystical" experience. On the contrary, Adrian Marino expressed, here as well, a point of view of his own towards a kind of "intellectual receptive euphoria"; euphoria, which was presupposed by "the vital and existential plenitude of cognition and understanding".<sup>2</sup> For Adrian Marino the explanatory system of Mircea Eliade's hermeneutics was not causal, but "ontological and existential".

If the hermeneutics of religions operates with certain ontological signifiers, literary hermeneutics – having its origin in the older philological tradition of interpreting the sacred texts – remains in a literary area according to Adrian Marino's conception. Being very well acquainted with the hermeneutical tradition, from F. D. E. Schleiermacher to Dilthey, from Heidegger to H. G. Gadamer or from R. Bultmann to Paul Ricoeur, Adrian Marino proposed to himself a kind of synthesis of the hermeneutical interpretation methods and techniques, but developing by the concrete application of these upon the "idea of literature" a methodology which originated from an essentially personal view, totally different from the practice of literary hermeneutics having as a single objective to recognize the author's meaning and intention. Because there was no such method of hermeneutical analysis for the texts of literary theory, Adrian Marino invented one, discovering, in the case of the hermeneutics of the idea of literature "a new reading system". Essentially, this new system of understanding and interpreting the literary ideas aims at "deciphering, clarifying and interpreting the explicit and implicit meanings of the idea of literature in an organized and significant way".<sup>3</sup> The hermeneutics thus elaborated "operates at a double level: terminological and semantic".<sup>4</sup> Therefore, there is no allusion to the ontological sense of the hermeneutics of the idea of literature in this

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade*, op.cit., p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica ideii de literatură*, op.cit., p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

equation. As Adrian Marino conceived it, this “new hermeneutics” creates its own methodology and its own analytical techniques, being situated on a different level of interpretation than literary hermeneutics, a missing level, which had however to be “invented”. “Inventing” a new system of interpretation, Adrian Marino elaborated a new science, a criticism of ideas, which, however, unfortunately, was not adopted by other literary historians and critics in the Romanian area. If interpretation is one of the essential principles on which this hermeneutics is built, the objective of interpretation can only be “the correct understanding of literary ideas”. The notion of “interpretation”, essential in hermeneutics, forms one of the constitutive conditions of the hermeneutics elaborated by Paul Ricoeur. If, however, with Paul Ricoeur the double role of hermeneutics has to manifest itself first as “the reconstitution of the text’s inner dynamics”, and then as “the restitution of the work’s capability to project itself outwards”,<sup>1</sup> the interpretation functioning as a complex ontological process, with Adrian Marino the detachment from the ontological background is more than evident. This is mostly due to the differentiation of the studied object, as it could be seen, Adrian Marino himself differentiating clearly between the study of literature as literature and the study of the idea of literature in formation. In order to succeed in his research, Adrian Marino offered himself the luxury to create, starting from the traditional elements of hermeneutics, a separate discipline whose object of study should be one alone, and inevitably, unique.

Aware of the fact that it is difficult to understand the hermeneutics of the idea of literature without a methodology as explicitly described as possible, Adrian Marino elaborated a detailed “system of interpretation”, formulating accurately the mechanisms of the interpretation and understanding of the idea of literature. In Adrian Marino’s view both interpretation and understanding, as basic functions of the hermeneutics of the idea of literature, implied an “objective sense”, the logical and causal character of the relationship between interpretation and understanding, generating a research method with three phases. The three research phases of the idea of literature unfold related to the double level (*terminological* and *semantic*) in which this kind of hermeneutics operates. If the first phase – “the recuperation of the whole historical tradition” – can be incorporated to the *terminological* level, the other two – “the hermeneutical inductions and deductions”, as well as the last, “the

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Eseuri de hermeneutică* (Essays in Hermeneutics), București, Humanitas, 1995, p. 29.

re-projection of these inductions-deductions upon the analysed meanings of the idea of literature"<sup>1</sup> – appear at the *semantic* level. The interpretative system of the idea of literature presupposes specific interdependent contexts, aided by which Adrian Marino analyzed the idea of literature in the spirit of a *hermeneutical model* that advances circularly through certain cycles of interpretation. This evolves from that which the historian of ideas calls *the original background* – that is from the etymological basis of the idea of literature – *towards the genetic and auto-destructive stratum* – that is towards the inner mechanisms of the production of literature, but also towards the mechanisms which undermine the idea of literature itself. The *strata* or *levels* that form *the hermeneutical model* succeed one another according to the inner logic imposed by the demonstration of the interpretative analysis aimed at the idea of literature: *original stratum, cultural stratum, quantitative stratum, specific stratum, heteronymic stratum, hierarchic stratum* and *genetic and auto-destructive stratum*.

Adrian Marino analyzed the concept of literature according to this model, which functions in successive interpretative *strata*, following the sinuous route of an “ascendant spiral”. Through this analysis he demonstrated the fiability of his interpretative model in a convincing way. Relying on an almost exhaustive documentation of the scientific domain, the critic advanced with an enviable theoretic assurance through a vast domain of investigation that was often hard to analyze in the historical context from which the written testimonies were missing. But the infallibility of his investigation system was verified especially before these obstacles hard to surmount. Defining *oral literature* in relation to the *written* one, as well as *sacred literature* in relation to the *profane* one, was only one of the difficulties. Beyond the rigour and the methodological qualities of the hermeneutical model configured by Adrian Marino, what is really impressive in *Hermeneutica ideii de literatură*, but also, later on, in the massive *Biografie a ideii de literatură*, is the rich documentary and bibliographic material he studied, as well as his extraordinary capacity to synthesize and abstract the analyzed literary processes.

From all these points of view, the volumes on the criticism of the literary ideas, published by Adrian Marino between 1968 and 2000, have three polemic directions. A first polemic direction had already been acknowledged and implicitly assumed by Adrian Marino starting with the

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica ideii de literatură*, op.cit., p. 19.



volume *Introducere în critica literară*, published in 1968. In its preface the critic situated himself on polemic positions with regard to the dilettantism displayed by the criticism of the age: “[...] the present book proposes a resolute way out from improvisation and dilettantism, which does not mean in the least that it issues invitations to pedantry and bookishness”.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, the moderate critical spirit, the distance from any kind of excess characterizes Adrian Marino’s entire opera, constituting the red thread of his criticism. On the other hand, being situated on a polemic position with regard to the dilettante criticism of the age, as well as to the obsolete language of the Romanian critical tradition, from Maiorescu and Gherea to Lovinescu and Călinescu, Adrian Marino took a step of great intellectual courage in 1968. He militated for the renewal of the critical methods of analysis by a re-evaluation of critical concepts, and, implicitly, for the actualization of the critical discourse to the new currents of modern criticism asserted in Western European culture. One could already see at that time too that the Romanian critic intuited: the chance of Romanian literary criticism would be to “get synchronized” with European criticism. He sustained later on as well, that it is necessary to “deprovincialize” Romanian culture. He did this in a period of total intellectual fossilization, in 1987, in the *Preface to Hermenutica ideii de literatură*. True, however, to his principle of originality in aesthetic judgments, Adrian Marino hastened to underline that the analytic instruments of modern European criticism cannot be borrowed mechanically and without being beforehand *assimilated, confronted* and *synthesized* according to the principles of one’s own analytic method.<sup>2</sup>

The second polemic direction of Adrian Marino’s critical work appertains to the methodological idea pursued by him during his entire career. This “ideal” expressed the critic’s conviction, that beyond any subjective mark, literary criticism can become a systematic discipline, based on objective concepts and practices, creating its own analytical and interpretative methods. Moreover – Adrian Marino sustained – in order to consolidate this option for method steps should be taken to constitute an *encyclopaedist* direction in Romanian culture. The conviction, that the essential instruments by which the status of a culture is established are represented by the encyclopaedic or the synthetic and reference works, constituted one of the main lines of thought for Adrian Marino. He

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Marino, *Introducere în critica literară*, op.cit., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

developed the same idea much later in *Politică și cultură* (Politics and Culture), when – the communist censorship having disappeared – he could analyze it from the point of view of the relationship between culture and the complexes that the Romanian culture developed in the course of the years, being unable to surpass them. From this point of view, the last chapter from *Politică și cultură, O nouă cultură română* (A New Romanian Culture) and especially the last subchapter represents a veritable process of conscience of the Romanian culture in its totality. But far from being in accord with the actual spirit of the age, which denounced without trying to find solutions for the problems which were raised, Adrian Marino, in his own usual active and militant spirit, analyzed the complexes of Romanian culture with extraordinary lucidity, also trying, for the first time after 1989, to outline energetically some future directions of development, directions that would allow the Romanian culture to assert itself in the European circuit of values.<sup>1</sup>

Another important aspect of the *programmatic* measures undertaken by Adrian Marino is the fact – already underlined in the *Argument* – that by the problematization of the Romanian culture, not its personality and originality is questioned, for that must be preserved, but mainly the forms in which culture is organized and the ideological motivation of these forms.<sup>2</sup> Thus regarded, the integration of Romanian culture in Europe is no more a problem of essence or content, but one of form, which refers first of all to the cultural organizational structures, and only in the second place to the manifestational expressions of culture that need to be *synchronized* with the similar manifestations from the rest of Europe.

Thirdly, the polemics Adrian Marino was engaged in do not aim at the surface and they are not simple critical exercises that go against the autochthonous wave, but, beyond the firmness with which the critic expresses his principles, these polemics are penetrated with an active, *militant* spirit, a spirit which Marino maintained even in his later books, which analyzed political ideas. Far from having virulent accents, his *militantism* originated from exclusively cultural principles; however it was not situated in the secure domain of theoretical-ideological neutrality.<sup>3</sup> If, however, during the years of the communist period, Adrian

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Marino, *Politică și cultură. Pentru o nouă cultură română* (Politics and Culture. For a New Romanian Culture), Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 1996, p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Marino, *Hermeneutica ideii de literatură*, op.cit., p. 29.

Marino's militantism was rigorously maintained in the cultural sphere, in the period immediately following the year 1989, the critic of ideas manifested himself freely, assuming entirely the militant side of his active spirit, disinhibited, open to dialogues without complexes with the great European cultures.

Adrian Marino's critical work, though elaborated in the course of several decades, presents a thematic and conceptual coherence hard to equal in Romanian literature. Initially, when Adrian Marino engaged himself in the direction of idea criticism, his approach had a purely cultural character, being embedded in the literary sphere. As he advanced in his investigations, deepening the "abstract" character of the ideas, the critic enlarged his sphere of interests, including in it cultural areas complementary to the literary domain, but which, in the theoretical analysis, helped to express a complex perspective upon the studied phenomena. Thus, the hermeneutics of ideas meant for Adrian Marino more than a critical method for evaluating and re-evaluating literary and religious ideas, according to a pre-established methodological program. It allowed him, moreover, to develop a systematic discipline offering interpretative solutions in the most complex situations.

No doubt, Constantin M. Popa was right to affirm in one of the first monographic works dedicated to Adrian Marino, that through the hermeneutical model he conceived, the critic of ideas realized "our third critical system after Mihail Dragomirescu and Mircea Eliade."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Constantin M. Popa, *Hermeneutica lui Adrian Marino* (Adrian Marino's Hermeneutics), Craiova, Aius Publishing House, 1993, p. 56.