

An Autochthon Alternative of Free Culture during Communism

Gábor GYÖRFFY

*PhD Student, Babeş-Bolyai University,
Cluj-Napoca*

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Abstract

The work of Adrian Marino, written mostly during the communist period, sets an example of cultural independence from the political power. It is an individual solution that undermined the anti-intellectualism promoted by the perfidious institutional circles of those times. His ideological works published after 1989 are confessions about the relationship between culture and power in the communist era: they present an alternative approach to the situation of Romanian literature under the totalitarian regime.

E-mail: gyorffygabor@yahoo.com

The relationship between politics and culture, as regards the subjection of cultural life to political interests, entered a specific dimension in 20th Century Europe as a result of the emergence of right and left totalitarian ideologies. Control upon human communication, almost total restriction of freedom of expression, doubled by a propaganda which tended to reshape and uniformize the way of thinking of the entire society – these are the characteristics of the regimes which succeeded to redress the course of history in a significant part of the continent towards giving up on all conceptions regarding individual liberty.

Romania was the scene of both totalitarian experiences, the fascist as well as the communist, in a period when the influences of a professional coercion apparatus had taken on the most aggressive and violent forms. The communist experience, which lasted for more than four decades, was constituted in Romania through a system in which the state party managed to maintain control not only over society, but also over culture until the last minutes of its breakdown. The situation of literature – patronized if promoting the ideology of the political party, tolerated to certain limits and often banned when overstepping the

imposed line – faithfully reflects the condition of the Romanian intellectual in the communist period, as well as the various forms of the relationship between politics and culture.

Adrian Marino belonged to the category of cultured men who rejected any collaboration with the regime and who repudiated any kind of dialogue by way of which he would have recognized the official culture. His cultural-ideological formation made him preserve his spiritual independence, made him search for a modality of cultural survival in the period of communist totalitarianism, when two alternatives seemed to exist: “silence, failure, isolation, stepping out from actuality, thus being definitively sentenced to sterility, to literary suicide”, or the option of accepting compromise and adaptation.¹

In Adrian Marino’s case, the solution of the dilemma manifested in the rejection of the official doctrine, but at the same time also in the desire to create in a world in which basic cultural values were being destroyed, and in the attempt to find those fissures in the system which would facilitate the communication of ideas reflecting the European liberal tradition. Adrian Marino made his debut at eighteen in the *Jurnalul literar* (Literary Journal) magazine; a graduate of the Faculty of Letters from Iași and Bucharest, he obtained his PhD degree in 1946 with the dissertation entitled *Viața lui Alexandru Macedonski* (The Life of Alexandru Macedonski), a work that appeared only in 1965 due to the interdiction of publishing. He was arrested in 1949 for “illegal” activities within the circles of the National Peasant Party University Youth organization and imprisoned for eight years, after which he underwent six more years of house arrest in Lătești village, Bărăgan.

After the traumatizing experience of freedom deprivation and his rehabilitation in 1965, Adrian Marino realized the emergence of a literary life conceived according to the official hierarchal criteria, based on mentality, style, language and a scale of values which were not to his liking. In the period after 1948 socialist realism and party literature had been imposed as the sole models for creation, thus art became totally subordinated to political interests. Despite the given conditions, Marino’s activity reflects a consequent insubordination to the political power, which he achieved to build and preserve throughout the entire communist period, as he recalls: “The most difficult thing in a totalitarian regime is to maintain a permanently normal and equal behavior, to remain as

¹ Adrian Marino, *Politică și cultură* (Politics and Culture), Iași, Polirom, 1996, p. 80.

consequent as possible, not only to revolt once openly [...] There is, however, another type of "heroism" as well: the heroism of insubordination, of protest and of continuous implicit – I would say daily – "resistance", of non-conformism, of exiting the dressage and totalitarian triteness, of breaking and defying the mental and propagandistic clichés. [...] Not to be under any circumstances in the service of power, not to be a literary servant."¹

Adrian Marino had assumed the role of a spokesman of autochthon culture, even if his cultural experiences in the seventies during his travels to the West would have offered the alternative of exile. His ideal of freedom within the system expressed hope for the possibility of taking an alternative itinerary – other than exile or collaboration with the regime –, despite the restriction on the free circulation of ideas, the cultural deadlock and the ideological pressure, which turned the independent act of creation into a gesture of insubordination. This aspiration shall be confirmed in his works, which express independence of spirit and professional freedom in the age of supervised culture.

His conception about literary creation in communist Romania is based on his belief in the existence of a literary alternative, a "third Romanian culture", which is different from the culture of exile and diaspora, as well as from the officially accepted, propagandistic culture serving the political power: "it did exist then, though I cannot prove this fact: an alternative Romanian culture. For me this is something fundamental. It is not true that the entire Romanian culture was leveled out. [...] Indeed, it had mostly been so, but there existed a minimal layer of intellectuals, that was totally different." As a representative of this third power, less known throughout the country, Adrian Marino delimits in his study entitled *Situația culturii române actuale*² (The Situation of the Present Romanian Culture) the essential features of an independent Romanian culture, which is politically uncommitted and creates as freely as possible within the limits imposed by the regime.

At the same time he also mentions the existence of a silent conflict – growing more and more acute in the eighties – between the cultural leadership and the real creators attempting stubbornly to withstand the "plans, hierarchies, mediocrity and arrogance of the cultural black coats of the age."³ The more rigid the system became, the more

¹ Adrian Marino, *Evadări în lumea liberă* (Escapes into the Free World), Iași, European Institute, 1993, pp. 5–6.

² The study was written in 1982, being included in the volume *Politică și cultură*.

³ Adrian Marino, *Politică și cultură* (Politics and Culture), p. 54.

uncertain it grew on the inside; there were whole series of complicities, simulations and tacit tolerances, which reduced the shocks coming from above. Dissociating himself from the official culture and striving to elaborate a parallel structure, Marino had attempted in fact to accomplish a cultural utopia, the keystones of which lay in his external relations. His publications in France, Italy and Japan, his books on literary ideas, hermeneutics, literary theory and comparatistics appeared only due to personal initiatives and relations, without the implication of the state or of any Romanian publishing house.¹

The attempt to draw up a lucid evaluation of the social psychology from the period of dictatorship, based on the distinction between official and alternative culture, returns systematically throughout his works. The chapter dealing with this issue in the volume *Politică și cultură* (Politics and Culture) is an x-ray of the main features that define the two types of culture². The essence of official culture is the firm ranking in a closed circuit of values promoted by the communist regime with the assistance of some typical institutions of the centralized state, all of them placed in pyramidal structure, from the Ministry of Culture, the Romanian Academy, the Writers' Union down to the publicist and editorial system. All these institutions depend on the state budget through a blackmailing mechanism, which in fact was the control-lever upon culture. At the same time, Marino does not hesitate to assert that some control mechanisms were likewise adopted by those rising to political power after 1989 by means of introducing the political decision factor into cultural life.

The ranking system typical to the totalitarian regime brings forth a monopoly of the literary opinion, which regards itself definitive and inexpugnable. In the Romanian communist world, similarly to other communist regimes, the literary-cultural hierarchies were copying – theoretically at least – the political hierarchies. The authoritarian system created its own values, the essence of which was political adherence and fidelity, that came to replace literary value – a factor considered unessential. On the other hand, another phenomenon interfered, i.e. the absence of a valid differentiation of values: those being members of the same creative union and serving the same regime, those who accepted the pact with the regime were all consecrated by the official hierarchy of values. Hence, no delimitation existed between the status of being a

¹ Adrian Marino, *Pentru Europa* (For Europe), 2nd edition, Iași, Polirom, 2005, p. 107.

² See chapter "Official culture, alternative culture", pp. 256–299.

member of the Writers' Union and being simply a "writer", which category would belong to a special radical system of values. Once he entered the circuit, the writer accepted his role of a state clerk, whose advancement on the hierarchic scale depends on the "continuous balancing between public acceptance of the dogma and perception of immediate reality, the ability to assume self-censorship perfectly [...] feigning ideological commitment and loyalty to the party."¹

Consequently, in concordance with his belief in alternative culture, which is the expression of an independent literary conscience, Marino refused to fit in the system: he did not accept the cultural functions ensuing from the status of an "official writer" and avoided subjection to any institutions and ideologies. Therefore he did not benefit from the rewards and personal advantages granted through the "sinister" institution of the Literary Fund that became a means of coagulation of the official literature. He did not accept membership in the Romanian Academy even after 1989, because in his opinion it represented the continuation of the soviet-type institution that was modeled at the end of the forties.

Liberty as a state of spirit, as a personal experience and a confession is reflected in his travel journals with ostentatiously European titles, written after his visits in West European countries.² The explicit ideological meaning in the substratum of the texts expresses constant insubordination to any limits imposed on the freedom of thinking. The system of perception of the free world is radically opposed to the totalitarian homogenizing tendencies, thus the latter are uncovered through implicit comparisons transmitting liberal messages of solidarism with the European values.

However, maintaining his lucidity towards western culture, Adrian Marino rejected the idea of its unconditional superiority, attempting a "permanent undermining of the latent admiration, a continuous demystification of the consecrated masterpieces and values, a lucid refutation from within of the great myths and hierarchies"³. Coming in contact with the so called free cultures, Marino searched in their substance for those universal constant factors embedded in European

¹ Adrian Marino, *Politică și cultură*, p. 272.

² *¡Ole! Espana* (1974); *Carnete europene*, (European Notebooks) (1976); *Prezențe românești și realități europene*, (Romanian Presences and European Realities), (1978); *Evadări în lumea liberă* (Escapes into the Free World), (1993).

³ Adrian Marino, *Carnete europene*. Bucharest, Noul Orfeu Publishing House, 2003, p. 32.

tradition, which are independent from an arbitrary hierarchy. These he interpreted according to an atemporal, generally valid reference system. Consequently, his journals correspond to a cultural program which aims to accumulate essential values in a continuous, systematic, and selective way. During the isolation of the Ceaușescu era Marino endorsed the necessity of encyclopedism, of a totalizing way of thinking, meant to compensate the intellectual unevenness in rapport to a West that had reached the stage of narrow specialization. This cultural program with a large perspective rejected the actual political situation, that of a country under communist dictatorship, and it dispersed the “myth of the irreversible situation” according to which communism would be in power for ever, thus reaffirming the belief in a culture liberated from the constraints of political power.

Unable to express his radical anti-communist and anti-Marxist ideas openly, Adrian Marino found moral salvation by taking refuge in such free forms of creation which were tolerated in that period. Literary criticism, such as comparatism and theory of literature, had actually been disguises of idea criticism, which was itself a means of breaking out from the imposed canons.¹ The historical perspective of *Critica ideilor literare* (The Criticism of Literary Ideas) or *Biografia ideii de literatură* (The Biography of the Idea of Literature) was the only way to connect to the corresponding European ideas: “I practiced comparative literature and theory of literature [...] as a form of intellectual survival – evokes Marino. Do not forget, that I came from where I came and I had to make myself supported and tolerated within the publicistic limits of the age. [...] For me it was a way of coming out of isolation. For me comparatism was a method of breaking the ice, of stepping out into the world, of defying censorship in somewhat semi-legal, semi-illegal ways and, at the same time, it was a method of expressing myself freely.”²

However, not even these works of Marino avoided the attacks of those in control of the literary scene: during the meeting of university professors of philosophy in 1980, Pavel Apostol launched a violent attack against the study *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade* (The Hermeneutics of Mircea Eliade), which appeared the same year and was immediately

¹ See Sorin Alexandrescu, *Un european: Sir Adrian Marino*, (A European: Sir Adrian Marino), in: Idem, *Identitate și ruptură. Mentalități românești postbelice*, (Identity and Rupture. Romanian Post-war Mentalities), Bucharest, Univers Publishing House, 2000, p. 104.

² *Adrian Marino la optzeci de ani* (Adrian Marino at Eighty), *Echinox*, vol. 1, 2001, pp. 243–254.

translated into French at the Gallimard publishing house. He accused the author of betraying Marxist ideas and promoting idealism and mysticism.

The journal *Cahiers roumains d'études littéraires*, published at the Univers publishing house, represented another form of free manifestation and another way of finding a fissure in the system of censorship, of supervised literature, a way of profiting from the favorable conjunctures in order to impose the spirit of free literature. This was the first Romanian journal of literary studies of European standards, edited in a foreign language. It was founded and edited by Adrian Marino between 1973 and 1980, the decade of the communist "cultural revolution", the period when cultural relations with the western world were abruptly broken off. However, being a periodical collection of studies, the magazine was tolerated by the political power in its endeavor of creating a positive image from an international perspective. This operation would not have been successful without the collaboration on different levels of complicity of certain people in decision-making positions. The magazine was practically unknown within the country, being regarded as suspicious by the doctrinaires of official literature, and having therefore a restricted area of circulation. Nevertheless, it was welcomed abroad and it enjoyed great prestige among international comparatists, being the only Romanian magazine at that time which had an individual box at the National Library in Paris.¹

Regarding the forms of pressure that literary creation had been subjected to in the communist era, as well as the methods of rejecting the official propagandistic literature, immediately after the downfall of communism Adrian Marino delineated an analysis of the relationship between power and culture from the perspective of the "literary resistance" – a term which expanded later into the concept "resistance through culture".² Attempting at the same time an examination of personal and collective conscience, Marino proposed a definition grid for the concept of literary resistance, meant to cover the complex realities of the age.

¹ See *Al treilea discurs. Cultură, ideologie și politică în România*. Adrian Marino în dialog cu Sorin Antohi. (The Third Discourse. Culture, Ideology and Politics in Romania. Adrian Marino in Dialogue with Sorin Antohi), Iași, Polirom, 2001, p. 27.

² *Written in 1991, and 1995, both studies were published in the volume Politică și cultură*, (Politics and Culture), (1996), entitled *Rezistența literară*, (Literary Resistance), (pp. 21–27), as well as *Rezistența prin cultură, o problemă deschisă* (Resistance through Culture, An Open Problem), (pp. 28–40).

His typology distinguishes between passive resistance, which is tacit and lacks the assumption of declared political or ideological commitments, and active resistance, which presumes explicit denial of collaboration, of accepting the totalitarian order. Because of the necessity to re-evaluate the concept of literary resistance objectively, Marino drew attention to the tendencies to mythicize and idealize this notion and specified four defining aspects that characterize it: the free critical spirit manifested in the systematic rejection, elusion and impugnement of official norms, dogmas, directives and hierarchies; the usage of an independent critical language other than the "wooden language" of official criticism; the circulation of liberal literary values; the introduction of non-canonic literary themes. Within the frame of the same theme, although without the intention to offer an exhaustive synthesis of the existing manifestations of cultural resistance – impossible to achieve due to the absence of a complete file on these –, Adrian Marino presented a classification of the forms of resistance from literature "written for the drawer" to texts smuggled out of the country and collaboration with publications or radio stations considered dangerous by the regime.

Adrian Marino's ideological works are based on the definition of certain structural antinomies, which developed around particular key concepts. The discussion of the relationship between power and culture recurs in his works on censorship and freedom of expression. The first of these, *Cenzura în România. Schiță istorică introductivă* (Censorship in Romania. An Introductory Historical Sketch), was intended to be a survey on the essential phases and aspects of the evolution of censorship from its beginnings to the 20th century – a study that served as the basic version of the Romanian chapter from the vast encyclopedia entitled *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, edited by Derek Jones in 2001.

The study defines itself as part of the program of idea criticism and it reveals the forms of censorship in Romania, the similarities with the corresponding European practices, as well as the specific particularities. Beginning with the religious censorship of the Middle Ages, the author records the moments which marked the permanent antagonism between the freedom of expression and "captive thinking": the secularized censorship of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, the movement of resistance and the repressions from 1848, the press regime after the unification of Moldova and Wallachia. A historical retrospection on the control of publications in Transylvania is also presented.

The chapter discussing the 20th century deals with the two manifestations of totalitarian censorship: the fascist and the communist

one. Despite the fact that the practice of censorship was born back in the ancient times, nothing equals the severe control based on the Soviet model and the development of its methods after the 23rd of August, 1944. Throughout the course of time the ideological background of the repressive interventions underwent essential modifications, which were often sudden and inopportune, culminating in the official dissolution of the profile institution in 1977, which brought on the instauration of arbitrariness regarding the control of publications and self-censorship. The methods practiced by the communist regime are reflected by the specific relationship of the Romanian authors with the institution of censorship. Eight typical situations are presented and ranked according to what extent the text was meddled with, from taking out a paragraph, a chapter or a title to banning an author's work completely.¹

As a matter of fact, Adrian Marino's own experience is demonstrative in this respect: he was banned and deprived of his right of signature for two decades; consequently, *Viața lui Alexandru Macedonski* (The Life of Alexandru Macedonski), which was announced to be published in 1946, appeared only in 1965; the article *Decadentismul* (Decadentism) from *Dicționarul de idei literare* (The Dictionary of Literary Ideas, 1973) suffered multiple interventions; the chapter entitled *Autonomia literaturii* (The Autonomy of Literature) was taken out from the volume *Hermeneutica ideii de literatură* (The Hermeneutics of the Idea of Literature, 1987), although it appeared in fragments under improvised titles in the magazine *Transilvania*, without mentioning the word "autonomy" – rigorously interdicted in that period. The complete text was published only abroad, in an Italian version.

In the last years of his life, Adrian Marino had preoccupations prevalently related to ideology. The project which began with the sketch about censorship was continued in *Libertate și cenzură în România. Începuturi* (Liberty and Censorship in Romania. Beginnings), which represents in fact an extension of the study over a complementary theme, namely, the history of the liberal ideology within the Romanian domain. Intended as the opening volume of a synthesis about the freedom of thinking, this writing encompasses a period of time from the beginnings to the first decades of the 19th century. The next two volumes, which would have presented the consolidation of the liberal ideology after 1848 and the confrontation between liberalism and the rightist and leftist forms

¹ Adrian Marino, *Cenzura în România* (Censorship in Romania), Craiova, Aius Publishing House, 2000, pp. 70–81.

of totalitarianism, were not finalized due to the author's death in March 2005.

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