

Liberty as a Profession

Doru POP

*Faculty of Political, Administrative and
Communication Sciences,
Department of Journalism,
Babeş-Bolyai University*

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Abstract

A “history of Freedom” in Romanian culture is not possible without a history of understanding the roots of intolerance, dogmatism and aggressive isolationism in our recent past. Adrian Marino managed to give freedom and liberty a consistency far deeper than the mere ideological compatibility. A practitioner of a „liberal profession”, Marino assumed this role of not being employed by the State as an ontological statement, not just as an attitude towards the Communist regime, or as a social ideal. Throughout his entire life Adrian Marino practiced three great Freedoms and dedicated all his intellectual efforts to them: the freedom of conscience, the freedom of expression and the freedom of thinking, all of them more than utopian ideologies, but difficult to realize in a peripheral culture like the Romanian one. For Marino freedom is based on a liberal (read it critical) model for the conscience, opposing any kind of fundamentalism.

E-mail: dorupop@hotmail.com

When I first met Adrian Marino in 1991 I was „a young intellectual rising star”, and I was about to leave Romania for the first time, going to France for a comparative literature scholarship, and I was looking forward to getting from this meeting – with a thirsty desire to broaden my horizon – a professional safe conduct, an academic ointment. But Marino accommodated me in his house, in a somewhat colloquial way – there were the last minutes of the BBC news report at five – and he told me straight away (and I remember I was quite shocked at the time): „he wasn’t, isn’t and never would be on the payroll of any public institution in Romania”. Later, on several occasions (that took place in the same way) when we met, he told me, repeated and confirmed that this

was one of his social gestures that he was most proud of, that of always having been a practitioner of a „liberal profession”. Marino assumed this role of not being employed by the State as an ontological statement, not just as an attitude towards the Communist regime, or as a social ideal.

As for any manifest Enlightenment ideologue, freedom also meant for Marino the liberation from all sources of mysticism, the presupposition of a critical, secular and public rationality, the acquiescence of the most profound consequences of personal liberties. The desire to evade the „canons”, especially religious canons, explains why Marino was so constantly virulent against all the signs of the Romanian „mystical philosophy”. His critique of Noica, Cioran or Nae Ionescu was based on this deep-seated affiliation to a certain kind of freedom, a freedom that despises any proliferation of obedience. For Marino cultural figures like Țuțea or Noica were to blame for their own lack of respect for freedom, liberalism and pluralism and not simply for their cultural value.

Still, in 2005, “one side” of the Romanian cultural press virulently attacked Adrian Marino, an old and sick man, isolated in his home, in his self-assumed exile in Cluj. This furibund attack came from an intellectual group that evolved around some of the disciples of Noica, and the assailment that did not cease even after the death of the renowned comparatist. Remarkably, this was just the tip of the iceberg of a more profound conflict existing in the Romanian culture, before, during and after the Communist period.

This is a continuous war between two main ideological streams that generated two types of intellectuals in modern Romania – one, based on the so called values of the local *Zeitgeist* and one aiming to integrate European values and models. If we were to follow Marino’s position on the topic, the evolution of the Romanian culture is to be understood along two major intellectual lineages. On the one hand there is the group “descending” from a narrow, “localism” oriented perspective, built on a Romanian self-centred standpoint. The other envisions a Romanian culture based on European core standards and principles. In this sense, Nae Ionescu and his latter disciples were merely a product of a long line of intellectuals going back to the prevarications of the “founding fathers” of nationalism. Moreover, it is no secret that Nae Ionescu was “The Cultural Master” for Eliade, Cioran and Noica. And, as shown by Marino, following this intellectual genealogy, Noica was closer to Ceaușescu’s national-communism by praising and using nationalism in his intellectual praxis, than to any European axioms.

It is a historical fact that Noica was the “coach” of Gabriel Liiceanu and Andrei Pleșu, both virulent judges of Marino’s cultural place in the contemporary Romanian literature. Needless to say that since Marino was amongst the few who dared to criticize the Noica model, the public execution of Marino by the “Păltiniș” disciples can be seen as a “witchcraft trial” of unparalleled proportions.

This was just an example of what Marino called “Noica’s negative effect”, but transgressing the biographic dimension of this fact, the consequences of the inheritance of the Romanian “autochthonous bucolic philosophy” are more malignant than this. Marino was inherently against any sort of local pride, of national bias – himself being less of a Romanian, or for that matter a Transylvanian, than a European. His overt cultural purpose being that of open dialogue – not with the local culture, but rather one of cross-cultural relevance – he belongs to the very small group of protesters, of radical cultural eccentrics, of marginals who wanted and succeeded in acquiring “Western culture”, without joining any “spiritual churches” of local resonance.

Marino has transparently explained his rejection of the Noica & Eliade models.¹ Due to the fact that communism has generated a type of intelligentsia that was a “docile instrument for propaganda”, the writers and the intellectuals of that epoch have become “employees, bureaucrats and civil servants” of the regime. Both Noica and Eliade have shown that their willingness to cooperate with the communist regime was deeper than necessary. Marino uses the example of Noica, who proposed to his students to consider him as a “Marxism trainer” and thus has imposed a personal example of a way of “resisting” the communist ideology by means of a personal network, based on double language, dissimulations and, finally, an acceptable “agreement” with the Devil.

Marino’s central objection to Noica’s line of thought comes from interpreting the following dictum of the “last modern philosopher”. Noica is noted to have told his “disciples” that “happiness has many tastes and communism has given me the best of them”.² This, being obviously a double meaning expression, is nonetheless for Marino an example of applying a Marxist perspective on freedom, conceived as a “need of conscience”. For a pedagogue of urban dialogue and civil criticism this was a natural rejection.

¹ Adrian Marino, *Politică și cultură. Pentru o nouă cultură română* (Politics and Culture. For a New Romanian Culture), Iași, Polirom, 1996.

² Quoted by Marino, *ibid.*, p. 86.

For Marino freedom is based on a liberal (meaning critical) model for the conscience, opposing any kind of fundamentalism, superficiality and disdain for the individual. As he himself recounts, after he was released from prison (and later founded *Cahiers roumains d'études littéraires*) he has followed another path of "cultural resistance", one of alternative ideas, that of a literary rebel and of a bizarre cultural specimen. Marino was against all the "Maurice Chevaliers" of local essay writing (albeit of liberal origins), against the journalistic dimension of a "Balkan literature" and against all the manifestations of false "spiritualism", of the "dissimulated orthodoxy" in our culture. The private versus the national, the individual against the institutions supported by the State, freedom opposed to the practices of joining one group or another, globalism as a form of rejecting the pressure of localism, critical attitude towards concepts and ideas, in contrast with all the manifestations of "belletrist criticism" – these were his key concepts.

In this respect, comparatism and literary theory were the acceptable forms of "cultural survival" for him, the main goal of such a standpoint being to follow and achieve an ideal, and finally, to gain European relevance for his works. As he claimed in his criticism of Noica and his followers, the two main shortcomings of their perspective on culture and society were not inherent to their work, but were in fact the fundamental disbelief in democracy and the utterly anti-Western and anti-European side of such approaches. Romanian culture cannot have European relevance if the "West" is blamed for all the defects of Capitalism and if "the Europe of butter" is opposed to a "spiritual Romania". Marino states that this kind of "westwards criticism" has produced only "messianic black coats" like Steinhardt, Țuțea or Noica, and suggests that "we don't need mystical prophets anymore" or "tragic existential feeling", but "durable creations in all the fields of knowledge".¹

So the key concept that Marino has promoted in order to counteract this pernicious trend was "*neo-paşoptism*"; in other terms, a "new culture" based on a systematic approach to social or literary phenomena, more theoretical, with deep roots in critical thinking. This was his personal example – no matter what his subject or his work objective was. Marino postulated for himself a project builder role; he was a careful researcher and a thorough reviewer of cultural phenomena. He was described as the last encyclopaedic, not only for the Romanian

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

“Literary Republic”, but also for the European literature and culture. Obviously, he remains one of the last Illuminists and the absence of any trace of backwardness and of autarchy, the integration of his books and ideas in the global dialogue are proofs of the success of such an effort. But he was also a militant, stating that there is a social need in the Romanian politics of culture for projecting European values in their rightful place and destroying the myth of an “autarchic, prosperous Romania”. Putting the sign of equality between Europe and “foreignness” is the most malignant cultural gesture, which generates the most detrimental after-effects.

Marino was against any form of cultural imposture, and even when he was working with cultural concepts, with the history of ideas or when he was following his latter call, that for political studies, the attitude of the non-affiliated worker remained declared and programmatic for him. Comparative literature as a cultural practice was for Marino, as it is obvious from the standpoint of his study *Etiemble*,¹ a highway for “free cultural exchange”. By 1995 he gave up literature for ideology, and his studies were focusing more and more on one central idea: *freedom*. Needless to say that the overt partisan attitude of the examiner is never counterbalanced by the academic sobriety and the equanimity of intellectual discourse.

In the end Marino transformed his own life into an *institution of freedom*, being a model not just on the cultural level, but also on the level of personal social relevance. Marino was against the “culture of fragment”, that has characterized Romanian intellectuals since the creation of the modern state, he believed that a “delirious, exalting and contradictory” Romania (proposed by Cioran) has to be replaced by a culture dominated by “honesty, morals and order”.

Although the idea of freedom in Romania might seem a paradox in itself, a perfect oxymoron, still Adrian Marino managed to give freedom and liberty a consistency far deeper than the mere ideological compatibility. In his last work² Marino finds ways to explain not only the roots of these concepts, but he discovers something of an oddity, the sources of these concepts in Romanian history of ideas.

Freedom – and this is Marino’s main argument – is closely connected with two strong ideas and ideological concepts: „Europeanism” and „Pașoptism”. Naturally, only a civic culture and a

¹ Idem, *Etiemble ou le comparatisme militant*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982.

² Idem, *Libertatea și cenzură în România. Începuturi* (Freedom and Censorship in Romania. Beginnings), Iași, Polirom, 2005.

civil society can become sources of European integration in his view, for this is the only method to overcome the “nationalist, ethnic and anti-European ideology” which developed in the post World War I Romania. His standpoint? He claimed the priority of the ideological centre.

Marino explains his preference for this “ideological Centre” with the argument that both the Left and the Right “cultures” have had negative consequences in the late 20th Century.¹ The centre is characterized by “axiological balance”, liberalism, pluralism, humanism and Europeanism, based on human rights and civic responsibility, while the other two alternatives are either centralist and homogeneous, or violent and non-ethical.

Marino speaks of three grand Freedoms, those that he has practiced his entire life and those he dedicated all his intellectual efforts to: the freedom of conscience, the freedom of expression and the freedom of thinking, all of them more than utopian ideologies, but difficult to realize in a peripheral culture like the Romanian one. The free thinking he practiced and exercised in his work has its roots in a 1799 formula: „every individual is free to think... as he is able to” („tot insul e slobod a gândi... după cum se pricepe”). At the bitter end of freedom („slobozenie”) there is to be found – for the Transylvanian writers of the 18th Century (and later on for Marino himself) – the moronity („dobitocenía”). How does Marino translate the moronic cultural attitudes – mostly found in the political and social writings of our time? They are to be recognized in the “Miorița” dimension of Romanian writers. The free man is, inherently, the man who does not depend on anything, the man who has discovered the freedom from any forms of constraint (social, political or cultural). The model Marino followed needs to be understood in this respect. The critical posture and the critical spirit must be the necessary and compulsory guarantee for all the freedoms of the individual. Questioning these principles is an utter manifestation of the intolerance for Freedom with a capital letter.

Finally, as he *revealed* in his *brief study on censorship*,² all forms of Censorship and intolerance (self censorship, economic censorship, ideological pressures and so on) are nothing but manifestations of perverting social and cultural realities. A “history of

¹ See idem, *Pentru Europa. Integrarea României. Aspecte ideologice și culturale* (For Europe. The Integration of Romania. Ideological and Cultural Aspects), Iași, Polirom, 1995.

² Idem, *Cenzura în România. Schiță istorică introductivă* (Censorship in Romania. Introductory Historical Sketch), Craiova, Aius, 2000.

Freedom" in Romanian culture is not possible without a history of understanding the roots of intolerance, dogmatism and aggressive isolationism in our recent past. And for such an effort the presence of one personal example may not be enough.