

Adrian Marino and the Existential Library
An Essay

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Abstract

Travel had a double function for Adrian Marino. On the one hand it meant a kind of escape from the abstract world of ideas, a mingling with people and a contemplation of everyday life on the streets of the great European cities. On the other hand it was an intellectual pilgrimage to the famous libraries of these cities, an initiation to some old and venerable spiritual centres where the quasi ritual meeting between man and book took place.

Several works written by the eminent Romanian scholar speak of the experiences he made abroad and describe his geographical and intellectual itineraries and the encounter with books and libraries during these journeys.

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For Adrian Marino travel seemed to answer two imperious commandments: a utilitarian and dominant one, which was the need of documentation for his erudite works, full of references; and a compensating one, almost in contrast with the former, the need to get out from the rarefied, almost abstract universe of ideas and the need to socialize. This escape was all the more relaxed and personal as the exception was rarely practiced, outside his usual routes, as is the case with other travellers who allow themselves in such moments different types of vacations, gastronomic or other. During these diversions from the usual he preferred to penetrate the crowds and to observe directly all kinds of people, his favourite place for such an adventure being the street.

However, beyond the informational bulimia, never entirely satisfied; beyond the need of a system in which the lack of a stone from the building, the lack of information unbalancing harmony and causing

an almost physical suffering; beyond the need to get out from among writing notes in order to rest anonymously in the midst of crowds and of the places frequented by them; beyond all these there is a point – actually a universe – where the two experiences meet and cohabit: the library. For the library is more than a scientific store necessary for any intellectual at least from time to time if not every day. It is the place where entities communicate, the book manifests its humanity and individuals manifest themselves most advantageously, in communion with the condensed spirit, enciphered in a book. This is why the library is the marketplace, the forum of the castle. Here the scholar can become acquainted, better than anywhere else, with the image of the whole, both in the books themselves and in the way in which they are collected, organized and used: “I was used to experience the pulse of great foreign cities in public libraries. I began to find some routine in this direction.”¹

The library, as Marino’s testimonies indicate, is more than the place where the researcher can find the source he is looking for. It is the symbol of all these noble quests, the source, the matrix of cultural activity itself: “These libraries – Adrian Marino speaking about the famous Bodleian Library – ensure the permanence and dignity of culture as they are fundamental forms of creation and spiritual life. Getting to know them is equal to an initiation, a return to the sources, to an act of regeneration.” Elsewhere, in Coimbra, Portugal, the library of the old university, the “renowned library” built by Joao V (“the wealthiest king in Europe in that period”) impresses by its opulence and baroque richness and the visitor wonders with apparent naivety “how is reflection possible in this décor which exalts and humiliates” and whether “it is possible to work today in such an overwhelming environment”. It is in fact the same route which the monumentality and harmony of the complex imprints; the complex where substance becomes spirit, where the abundance of values and art does not degrade the spirit, but elevates the matter to the values of the spirit: “the profound sensation – he told at the end of his visit – is as a real initiation, a ritual penetration into a space of laic sanctity.”²

Visiting libraries is a noble obligation, but at the same time a passion as well, having even morbid accents as any real passion; for the long relationship and its intensity implies a possessive attitude, a texture of relations that can be transferred to the sphere of great loves, which are

¹ Adrian Marino, *Carenete Europene*. (European Notebooks), Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1976, p. 293.

² Adrian Marino, *Prezențe românești și realități europene* (Romanian Presence and European Realities), Bucharest, Albatros, 1978.

real and ideal at the same time. Hence rise the reproaches, suspicions, dissatisfactions that confer another temperature and another attitude in a place where, as nowhere else, Adrian Marino felt "at home", as he said somewhere. Everything is done in the spirit of emotion ("Avidity and impatience. In such moments my inner trepidation is enormous.") and admission to a library, a public space after all, produces emotion. The fact is projected on a cultural scale and acquires initiatory significations: admission to the British Museum acquires the dimensions of "a small event, a genuine moment of my spiritual existence: the long-awaited entrance into some celebrated cultural precincts, solemn and imposing, efficient and hospitable, grave and discrete. Nobody knows me, nobody is concerned with me. Have I been admitted to the library? I feel that I obtained a series of rights all at once".¹ On the strength of these rights, pretensions grow. "The National Library, my great passion in Paris, has exasperating aspects too: a huge, noisy bustle and – first of all – the (at least apparent) chaos of catalogues."² In Lisbon the access is difficult, "reading operations are rather laborious, with all kind of bureaucratic precaution measures, with many signatures and visas. Only three request forms are accepted at a time."³ In Madrid he worked at the National Library and stated that "In a country of approximations and relativity, the card indexes of the library cannot be very precise either... because of an evidently erroneous card I requested a volume at *Investigadores* three times, not without irritation"⁴ etc.

In fact, the background against which this entirely special relationship between author and library evolves had already been defined in the *Carnete europene* with a coherence that indicates a long and mature meditation upon the subject, no doubt existential for the author. The pretext is a book exhibition, but the commentary exceeds the frame: "all vital, material and spiritual acts of humanity had and have a book as their prolongation... Culture and civilization are by definition bookish. Humanity is essentially bookish. It cannot be other for it receives its dimensions and a permanent and transmissible content only from the books." And both the frustrations and the compensations are concentrated in this same universe and they function without fissures – probably – because this universe contains the other: in this domain he projects "all

¹ *Prezențe românești și realități europene*, op.cit., p. 226.

² *Carnete europene*, op. cit., p. 88.

³ *Prezențe românești și realități europene*, op. cit., p. 158.

⁴ Adrian Marino, *Evadări în lumea liberă* (Escapes to the Free World), Iași, European Institute, 1993, p. 27.

my aspirations and repressions, all my nostalgias and enthusiasms. Having been separated from and lacking a certain museum and library for a long time, I make a real orgy, a frenetic and enthusiastic bath... For me this is life, the true way of living." Consequently, he performs the ritualistic gestures of inauguration and, therefore, of taking possession. By these gestures he exorcises and liberates himself of all the suffering and constraint of the years of detention, forced residence, enslaving surveillance. He does not free himself of their physical, material expression, but of their reflection in the infinite world of the spirit whose symbol is, the book, moreover: the periodical, the changing, hesitant, volatile, but preparatory side of the book. Thus, he said in a passage that can be easily psychoanalyzed and in which each of us can recognize himself, "I collect books and periodicals all of which I know very well I would not be able to read, but I cut their pages with regularity. By this symbolic act I pay homage to them, I integrate myself, I try to maintain a permanent connection with my world, with the movement of literary ideas from everywhere, to show solidarity to their destiny." And it is only natural to be so, as "the writer's true and fundamental form of activity and expression is the writing, the text, the work, the library book."¹

This attitude, which surveys the library from an aesthetic perspective and, at the same time, mythicizes it deliberately, and which enciphers its ideals and beliefs in a defining metaphor, does not entirely cover the meanings of the respective object: it is, concomitant with what we have said above, a simple but indispensable space of trial as well. As travel, "the library" (entering the library, deciphering and taming it, taking possession of it etc.) is an ambivalent space, the characteristic place where the fusion of spirits lost in books is realized and also a route of initiation, a formative way, a real propaedeutics to the professions of reader and author. It was not accidental that Adrian Marino made most of his observations and characteristic statements regarding the library in these travel accounts: for him, and not only for him, travel is a book and the two experiences are truly valorized only when they overlap. The bookish aspect of his accounts, assumed with humour by choosing subtitles such as that of the *Carnete europene* from 1976, "notes of my journey" etc., is only a logical consequence of a submission to the object: the travel is a documentary investigation, a turning up of previous readings, even of imaginary ones, while frequenting the library, searching among index cards and covering a subject bibliographically is naturally a

¹ *Carnete europene*, op. cit., p. 26.

periplus full of pitfalls, unknown things and discoveries that configure a new world.