The English version of Adrian Marino's Hermeneutica ideii de literatură appears in a moment of crisis for literature. Therefore, the idea of publishing such a book is salutary, not only because it tries to compensate the decay of literature and the lack of reading, but also because this study explains the roots of this process.

The Biography of the “Idea of Literature” represents an attempt to define the term literature, from a scientific and well-motivated point of view. An outstanding scholar, A. Marino drives his research on literature to the very limits of encyclopaedism and erudition. The term “literature” is discussed from several perspectives, each of them being studied diachronically.

There are some dichotomous groups, though, functioning as bases for the further investigations (oral and written literature, sacred and profane literature and so on). These criteria are used relevant to the developing of the concept of literature at almost all the stages, be they original, cultural, quantitative, specific, heteronomic, hierarchic or self-destructive.

The purpose of the study is to offer a legitimate definition of literature, which would cover all its meanings. The hermeneutic itinerary is circular: starting from an etymological approach (literature is, in fact, letter – gr. grammatiké, lat. littera, that is every written text) – an extremely vast and general definition – noting the fundamental mutation from the cultural perspective to an aesthetic one, A. Marino ends affirming that everything is literature, and nothing is literature anymore. Eventually, the author himself confesses: it is impossible to “imprison” literature in a single and exhaustive definition. The merit of the book is to have demonstrated this through a thorough scientific examination.

The same conclusion is reached in a study published a year later. The approach is different here: the author takes into consideration particular acceptions of the term literature (such as comparative literature, national literature, world literature, theory of literature and so on). The structure of each of these “types” of literature is representative for every literary work and it is therefore open to more and more general classifications, up to the point where we find ourselves in front of the most comprehensive concept: literature.

Placing the two studies (The Biography and Comparatism și teoria literaturii) in an equation, it is to be noticed the symmetry. In the first case, the author


3. Marino, Comparatism și teoria literaturii, p. 189 și urm.
starts from the most general definition of literature, trying to extract features that would particularize and individualize the concept (literature as ars liberalis, as good letters, as belles lettres, literature as social, economic or ideological phenomenon and so on). In the latter, the approach is exactly the opposite: the grounds for the further investigations are found in particular actualizations of the term. Then, the research focuses on the invariants, structures that offer a general view on literature.

Further on, the aspects I would like to focus the discussion on intersect themselves, a feature that represents a leitmotif for A. Marino: circularity. The impossibility of defining literature (due to its too many meanings) tends to coexist with, and even more, generates the dissolution of it.

The evolution of literature in the modern times led – as A. Marino notices⁴ – to a process of revolution against itself. The developing of new literary genre, the tendency to overpass the "official," well established canons and clichés create the conditions for the appearance of the vanguardist trends (representing the last stage of an artistic form, which crosses an innovative period, reaches the apogee of classicism and declines into "baroque"⁵).

Thus, a new concept is introduced: the anti-literature. Born from the rejection of the rules of any kind, of repetition and stereotype, this concept postulates the freedom of mind, spontaneity and the domination of instinct, emotion, and feeling. The ultimate consequence of this "rebellion" is the anti-communication (the abolition of language, replaced by gesticulation and transcription of paranoid language⁶) the literature about nothing.

The circle of literature closes. The various forms of anti-literature, and non-literature become literature themselves. Paradoxically, having no rules means to obey a new rule (that of having no rules), to say nothing means to say everything in the same way the ancient Indian ascetics were murmuring a single word for all things.

At the end of his study, A. Marino offers a double conclusion: there is no definition of literature; there are only definitions of literature, each of them true and justified by certain parameters, yet each of them incomplete. What was considered "the death of literature" represents only its new form of manifestation. There is (and this is the second conclusion) no danger of dissolution for literature, because it will always find a way to re-establish the balance and close the circle.

The problem regarding the "death of literature" is not as simple as it is may seem. What A. Marino affirms is true: there is not an organic destruction in what literature is concerned; literature cannot annihilate itself. Still, what we witness nowadays is a continuous dissipation of literature, a process having exterior causes, but with results no less terrible.

The roots of this phenomenon go back into the past, down to the invention of the phonetic alphabet. This event determined a huge transformation of perception:

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⁴. See Marino, The Biography..., ch. 8: "The Birth and the "Death" of Literature."
⁵. H. Focillon, Viata formelor.
⁶. Marino, Comparatism și teoria literaturii, sub-ch. 4: "Anti-literature."