

*Commentary by Adam J. Sorkin*

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Mariana Marin was considered one of Romania's most important poets at the time she died at the age of forty-seven in 2003. Proverbial born poet of exceptional quality as well as *poète maudit*, Marin was silenced for much of the 1980s by the Ceaușescu dictatorship for the uncompromising dissidence that can be seen in her pained, traumatized poetical style even when she is not directly political, as is the case with many of her later poems. She was a kind of resister to happiness.

Marin published five books of poems. The poems here are from her 1999 book, *The Mutilation of the Artist as a Young Woman*, which won a number of major prizes; in 2002, the Romanian Writers Museum Publishing House (Bucharest) issued a career retrospective, *The Dowry of Gold*, including a handful of new, previously uncollected poems—her last, as it turned out. Ten of her poems appear in *An Anthology of Romanian Women Poets* (1994), which I co-edited, and others have come out in *Field*, *The Portsmouth Review*, *The Kit-Cat Review*, *Kalliope: A Journal of Women's Art*, *The Literary Review*, *Smartish Pace*, *Runes*, *Washington Square*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Cairn*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Subtropics*, *Miranda*, *Basalt and Sirena*, as well as three other anthologies, *Day After Night*, *Romanian Poets of the '80s and '90s*, and *Born in Utopia: An Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Romanian Poetry*. Ugly Duckling Presse, New York, published a selection of Marin's poems, *Paper Children*, in a bilingual edition in fall 2006.

*Amintiri despre vremea când eram din carton.  
Golgota*

Realitatea unei bătrâneți precococe  
se strecoară în aromele ceaiului matinal  
și pustiește senil zilele fără de poezie.  
Realitatea funiei din casa spânzuratului  
și pielea de broască țestoasă  
în care mi-am legat manuscrisele.  
Pentru că, iată, a trebuit să învăț  
în plin sfârșit de secol  
cum se devine o poetă de sertar,  
„o poetă nepublicabilă” – parcă așa silabisea  
apăsat și apos editorul vremurilor noi.  
Sufletul meu pâlpâia atunci  
deasupra unei realități și mai dureroase,  
ceva între prima pneumonie  
și ultima amintire dintr-o mare iubire.  
Silabiseam: „o poetă nepublicabilă, o cruce grea,”  
și tot ceea ce mi se întâmplase până atunci  
devenea o leșie groasă strecurată viclean  
în venele mele amare, mutilate cu grijă,  
în aromele ceaiului matinal.

Da, cât de grea crucea,  
ce fel de munte și-acesta,  
câtă prostime în jur, gură-cască,  
urechi de măgar, nesimțire,  
cât nenoroc.

*Memories of the Cardboard Years.  
Golgotha*

The reality of a precocious old age  
infuses the aroma of my morning tea  
and withers these senile unpoetic days.  
The reality of rope in the hanged man's house  
and the tortoiseshell  
I bound my manuscripts with.  
Because, listen!—near the century's end  
I had to learn  
to become a banned poet,  
“an unpublishable poet”—so an editor for our New Era  
would spell it out, enunciating each syllable with liquid tones.  
Then my soul would flicker  
over a reality even more painful,  
something between a first pneumonia  
and the last remembrance of a great love.  
I enunciated each syllable aloud:  
“an unpublishable poet, a heavy cross,”  
and everything already done to me  
turned viscous lye oozing drop by stealthy drop  
through my bitter veins, cleverly mutilated,  
through the aroma of my morning tea.

Yes, such a heavy cross,  
and some sort of mountain,  
such a mob gaping like idiots,  
dolts with asses' ears, their coarseness,  
such misfortune.

### *Vampirul vegetarian*

Uitase să se mai joace  
Își molfăia egoismul cu grijă,  
să nu-i scape vreo firimitură,  
vreo umbră.  
Sta chirchit în albeața ochiului  
și nu visa decât la următorul imperiu de noapte.  
Până și ghetuța lui de play-boy  
detecta ascuțit dinamita  
(Fii cu smoala-n patru, Satană!)  
care-mpânzește normalul, firescul  
și ceaiul din plante subțire.  
Ce-i drept, nici nu mai avea jucării  
Își demitizase secundă după secundă,  
credea doar în falca necesității imediate  
și a varietăților de mătrăgună  
dimineța, la prânz și la cină.

Trăia fără nici o bătaie de inimă.  
Uitase să se mai joace.

Învățase să reușească.

### *The Vegetarian Vampire*

He'd forgotten how to play.  
He chewed his selfishness,  
careful not to waste a crumb,  
a shadow.  
He curled up in the white of the eye  
and dreamed only of tomorrow night's empire.  
Even his little playboy wingtip  
(Watch where your fork flings pitch, Satan!)  
could keenly detect the dynamite  
woven into the natural, the everyday,  
the watery herb tea.  
True, he no longer had his toys.  
He'd demystified the succession of moments,  
believed only in the jaws of immediate necessity  
and the varieties of nightshade  
for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

He lived without a heartbeat.  
He'd forgotten how to play.

He'd learned to succeed.