

Paradoxology and Paradoxism

Ion Soare

At the beginning of 1980's, a well-known playwright and man of theatre, the Frenchman Jacques Sarthou from Theatre de l'Île de France, receiving from Florentin Smarandache the "Manifeste non-conformiste pour un nouveau mouvement litter ire, le Paradoxisme", was so enthusiastic at the reading of the new movement's programme, that claimed the author "le plus grand poete du xx-eme siecle". "Bravo pour votre genie et votre courage!" ended the Frenchman his letter of answer towards the new founder, with a fair play and frankness that reduced, partly at least, the injustices perpetrated against the Romanians in the previous decades by his fellows countryman and by foreigners regarding the (un)knowledge of some Romanian priorities.

Approximately a decade later, the Romanian Ion Rotaru (well-meaning and friend with the paradoxist from Arizona, otherwise!), was near to eliminate the new literary movement, considering it "a lamentable ariergardism"¹⁾ and its adherents "some polite people, that's all!"²⁾.

Another Romanian writer, the lamented poet Gheorghe Tomozei, estimated the paradoxist programme formed by Smarandache as a "prodigy... a folly in a new edition and, eventually, a whim programme without programmes that, thank God, he does not follow"³⁾. It should retain that Labis's exegete expressed here his distrust only in the paradoxist movement and not in the poetic gift of its founder, whom he really appreciated: "Florentin Smarandache is the name that I write and utter perhaps with the deepest emotion in my mind; after Nichita Stanescu's disappearance only *Levantul* of the brilliant Mircea Cartarescu made me feel that I was in front of an exceptional creator"⁴⁾. As an argument for his opinion Tomozei cited the next fragment from a text of the critic Ion Rotaru: "The freedom of verse released from the tyranny of classical dogma. Antiliterature. The style of non-style. Poems without verses. Poems without poems, non-words..." etc. It is easy to notice that Ion Rotaru (resumed by Gheorghe Tomozei) had stopped merely at the first, general ideas of the manifesto, that, indeed, induced the idea of antiliterature, existing at other avant-gardes too, for "the recovery of the essence (of literature, n.n.) through an absence", as Adrian Marino said⁵⁾.

Between the two extreme opinions there is a series of exegetes of the paradoxist movement and smarandachian works- literary critics and historians, writers and admirers or only sympathizers that - as a rule - have analyzed the new literary current in intrinsic relation with Florentin Smarandache's paradoxist creations. We will not insist on the works written until 1994, which we frequently referred to, sometimes in detail, in our first monography on this subject⁶⁾. The critical "story" about paradoxism and paradox has continued after this date with monographic works, essays, studies, articles etc., from which we will cite or mention further on. The majority of these studies and articles appreciate unreservedly the originality and the validity of the paradoxist movement and implicit the merits as a founder of the American born on Valcea region.

An interesting direction in the approach of the paradoxist literary movement and of Florentin Smarandache himself is followed by a limited number of literary critics which manifest a kind of ambiguity (or even suspicion!) regarding the originality/individuality of the paradoxism and therefore, about the validity of this current. Here we don't refer to those which does not take seriously the efforts as a founder (Ion Rotaru, Gheorghe Tomozei, etc.), but to a category of researchers that we could call "polite disputants". The cause could be not the ill-will, but an insufficient analysis of the smarandachian works, or perhaps a wrong understanding of the paradoxist programme, or - why not! - an organic incapacity of obsolete "classicists" that are not able to surpass the traditional patterns of literature and to understand its evolution, whence the lack of "adherence" to avant-garde movements⁷⁾. (I have recently met, for instance, a

distinguished essay-writer and art critic, member of a few academies, that disagreed “the absurd” of Ionesco and, of course, his receiving in the French Academy! The same prestigious researcher combated and even vehemently condemned the Dadaist movement! However, the democracy of opinions has to be respected. *De gustibus et de ... intellectione...!*)

A third group in the middle category is formed by those who establish a hasty and one-sided relation between paradoxism and paradox. Starting from this partial confusion they cover the reverse way: instead to analyze the paradoxism, they research the paradox and the “paradoxology” (Dumitru Ichim), recreate its (true!) history “from old times” (Ion Rotaru), an erudite and useful work for its author and for ... paradox(ology), but only partly and formally related with Florentin Smarandache and the movement that he founded. In the same way proceeds the erudite scientist and gifted writer, Florin Vasiliu, in “Paradoxism’s main roots”(Phoenix, USA, Xiquan Publishing House, 1994). The author recognizes the literary achievements of Smarandache and his influence in the epoch as well as his merits as a founder of the Paradoxist Literary Movement whose source of ideas he finds in the related great avant-garde literary currents: surrealism, futurism, dadaism etc., being invoked Picasso, Marinetti, Tristan Tzara, Andre Breton, Antonin Artaud, Paul Eluard etc. The author cites poems from Florentin Smarandache’s paradoxist poems books (Non-poems, Formulae for spirit, The sense of non-sense), mentioning that in these ones “are cultivated everywhere the shock of matching, the contrasts, the oxymoron, *the paradoxism* in a poetry of great sensibility⁸). Florin Vasiliu agrees, citing C.M.Popa, that “the series of paradoxist poets: Urmuz, Mihail Cozma, Geo Bogza, Tascu Gheorghe, Gellu Naum, Nichita Stanescu, Marin Sorescu” have existed before⁹). Further on, the erudite critic and literary historian outlines the history of paradox on periods, in a few countries (ancient India, ancient China and Japan) and analyses the paradox in science (especially in mathematics) and in literature. Returning to literature, Florin Vasiliu seems to reveal in one sentence his whole conception about Smarandache’s paradoxism: “The paradoxism is at beginning and if at present there are some new promising voices - the volume of haiku **The Silence’s Bell** of the poet Florentin Smarandache is one of these works - should be kept the lath at a superior level”¹⁰). It is noticed a certain ambiguity or even a contradiction: on the one hand are mentioned “ a series of paradoxist poets “ from Urmuz to Marin Sorescu, but afterwards it is asserted that “the Paradoxism is at beginning”; on the other hand it is cited a book that is not the most significant for paradoxism.

An almost comprehensive knowledge of smarandachian work (written till then) and of paradoxism proves Titu Popescu in his remarkable essay **Paradoxism’s Aesthetics** (TEMPUS, Bucharest, 1995). Here the author, with an elegant, modern and unequivocal style, analyses the aesthetics of the new current with an almost exhaustive documentation, relevant and unforgettable aphoristic assertions. The style of the book, with an elevated and adequate language, used by an aesthetician of the literature, recalls the other paradoxism’s exegete - the literary critic C.M.Popa, who in “**The Paradoxist Literary Movement** (Phoenix, Xiquan Publishing House, 1992) made a subtle and lucid analysis (on the critic way of Adrian Marino) about the existence and the causes of the new movement. Otherwise, Titu Popescu cites him quite often, confronting his ideas to those of the writer from Craiova - unavowed proof that he appreciates the essay. As our purpose, hic et nunc, is not to analyze the above mentioned books - certainly two of the most complex and objective works concerning the paradoxist current and its founder, Florentin Smarandache, - we will just say for the time being that **Paradoxism’s Aesthetics** represents a strong argument of a researcher with a superior aesthetic and literary preparation, for the originality and the validity of the new literary movement.

The authority and the competence of the two writers, C.M.Popa and Titu Popescu, the objectivity and the artistic sense present in their entire work on the literary field, could be taken

as reliable guarantees and “certificates of homologation” for the new movement. The insistence on the recognition / validity of the new movement could seem redundant. Assuming the risk to be accused of didacticism in conception and method, we think that there are necessary certain explanations and shadings about this literary phenomenon appeared at the end of the 20th century and what is prepared to get in the 21st century with a conviction that should disarm, at least partially, the skeptical, negativist and indifferent people.

From a strictly formal point of view, the notion of “paradoxism” recalls, indeed, the “paradox”. Hence a series of studies, many of them substantial and valid, well-intentioned and useful, however centered on the sphere of the term and the notion mentioned. A typical case (certainly, undesirable by authors) in what “we can’t see the wood for the trees”! At an attentive and applied analysis of the theoretical (see “the manifestoes”) and the practical (the paradoxist creations of Smarandache) smarandachian work, as Titu Popescu does, it easily comes out that the paradox represents only one aspect, one of his “figures of speech”, despite the fact that it gave the name of the current. Some literary theorists (A. Marino, M. Cartarescu) noticed that the names of some literary currents (and not only!) don’t always cover the content of the corresponding notions (Where will you find the word/ that express the true?-asked the Poet). We refer to that “incapacity” of words to express complex notions or a wide sphere of action, that determines the “founders” to use only a certain feature of current (process, phenomena etc), unable to reflect the full wealth of the respective field. And what is the following? It will be taken in consideration only certain criteria- more substantial or more expressive, that could be of a chronological (modernism, for instance), expressive (symbolism), formal-sonorous (dadaism) etc. nature.

By researching everyone of Smarandache’s literary manifestoes it can be seen that the mathematician poet (or reverse) referred not only to the paradoxes, at the foundation of his movement, but also to other figures of speech- antithesis, opposite comparisons, repetitions etc.- or hard contradictions, play on words, polysemantic variation etc. The exegetes of paradoxism do not refer (not at all or partly) to the last ones, but especially to paradoxes. As had been afraid of future misunderstandings and wrong interpretations regarding the new literary current, its founder specified in one of his manifestoes :“The paradoxism is not paradox,/The paradox is not paradoxism,/The paradoxism is paradoxism”. It is true that a sense of the word “paradox” is “oddity, enormity, *absurdity*”¹¹⁾, but the expressiveness of the figures of speech and of the other means of expressions does not represent, without fail, paradoxes (however, some of them could enter the sphere of absurd!).

Therefore it is questionable the assimilation of paradoxism- as Florentin Smarandache understood and founded it- with the mere use of paradoxes as figures of speech or as ideas and philosophical life conceptions. If we admit the mentioned understanding, Oscar Wilde would be between the greatest paradoxists ! Useless to say that the paradoxism can’t be extended to the entire artistic(philosophical etc.) phenomenology of the paradox.

Otherwise Smarandache himself finds out - in his play *Antique Tragedy* - paradoxes in the Greek philosophy, without fear or other resentments. The debate among the three great playwrights of Antiquity - Eschyl, Euripide, and Sofocle -¹²⁾ it is an occasion for author- with excellent results through concision, fantasy and artistic intelligence - to demonstrate in a creative way his subtle, generous and unselfish assertion/conclusion - that he is not the founder of the paradoxist movement, but its *discoverer*. In other words, the paradoxist “number one” in the world recognizes that the paradoxes have always existed and the paradoxist virtuosity demonstration of the three sacred monsters in the mentioned play is convincing, because the author/director joins the famous heuristic (Socratic) method with an admirable knowledge of the antique culture and with a paradoxist speech - almost a “twaddle” (in the way of George Anca).

The eleven pages of the play are full of so much poetry that involuntary we remind of Ion Barbu, who concluded, basing himself on scientific and literary creations, that mathematics, as well as the poetry, contribute to the world's order and harmony. The paradoxes are the part of the mathematics that enables the writer Smarandache to achieve this thing.

Another unforgettable moment in the development of the movement was the "discovery" of the paradoxists distichs, when the tireless innovator launched "the fourth paradoxist manifesto", asserting even that "the paradoxism... has been before the paradoxists". "The popular wisdom -he said-, but also a part of the cultured creation, fits perfectly the classic paradoxist stencil". We don't detail now, because we'll return to this new paradoxist species; we wished only to demonstrate once again, that the existence of the paradoxes, of their use in spoken and written language and of their artistic-literary valence, are recognized by Smarandache too, with a fair-play and superior understanding that don't inhibit him to keeping on his original way, where some paradoxist flowers remain behind him while others rise in front of him!

When he urged us to read "our daily paradoxes" Smarandache has not certainly referred to the logical, mathematical or linguistic meaning of the word/notion "paradox", but to the contradictions and oddities of the society in what the rebel "with cause" has been living. Without meaning to emphasize the sociological side of problem, we could assert (in the spirit of movement!) that, in fact, Smarandache ... complied with the doctrine of that age! Did not teach the university (and even secondary school) handbooks of his age about the "unity and struggle of the contraries" out of which would arise the *progress* (phenomenon and notion denied by many contemporary history philosophers)? The strong and flagrant contradiction between what has been taught (however) in schools and the nag with claims of "education of the new man", tenaciously and deliberated straightened to an obvious aim- the spiritual and moral uniformity of people and of the entire life system, was tantamount to an attempt against the most valuable individual's freedoms: freedom of thinking and of expression (oral and written), freedom of manifestation as such. It was inevitably that that tension leading to the creation of another kind of literature " resulted from the clash of opposite semantic fields"(C. M. Popa). Concerning this aspect, at an attentive analysis, *sine ira et studio*, of the smarandachian biography and work, it comes out that the artistic/literary ground is at least as important as the socio-political source of the movement.

It is right that in the beginning was the... mathematician! According to the own confession of the insurgent from Balcesti-Gallup, his protest could not be expressed by means of mathematical formulae or notions and he had to appeal to literature. At the beginning timidly and somehow hidden by a polite literature and traditional metaphors (the words preceded, however, anti-, no- and non-words; they were the substance, the starting point, the pre-text and the pretext) and then the poet began to protest... literally.

Why has he initially appealed to the poetry and not to the other literary genres- prose or drama, that he would approach later? We could explain that through the possibilities of abstraction- virtually, at least-, bigger, in the case of poetry, and its relative concision- superior to other genres, that place it in the proximity of mathematics. In his monographic essay¹³⁾ dedicated to the movement and to its founder, "The aesthetics of the paradoxism"(title that gains in literaturization and ...in aesthetics but lose in generalization, because it somehow limits the aprioric orientation of the reader within the field of reference), Titu Popescu synthesized that period with the inspired syntagma "From action to theory". And back (for all the life long) to... practice, we should add, because this is the complete and "dialectical" way of the paradoxism of Smarandache, within a scheme whose simplicity is only of a methodological nature, and whose further development, unforeseeable and bushy, sends to a baroque postmodernism (or a postmodernist baroque), very original and stimulative. From the moment when *The figures began*

to vibrate until present, the energetic, rebel and gifted poet mathematician, claimed not without pride by the Oltenian Valcea from Romania, has created an amazing work and a style- THE PARADOXISM, theorized and then brilliantly applied to every literary genres- lyrical, epic and dramatic. We will not insist here on the two real phenomena, *founder* and *movement*, because many books and studies have already been written about(see the Bibliography).

One thing is obvious for everyone who read the smarandachian work: the author set himself free from “ the tyranny of classicism”, term understood in a very large sense, as ankylosed conformism, stifling through excess of literaturization. He does not eliminate the literature as an aesthetic product, neither through intention, nor through results, but denying it(with an obsessive “no”, tantamount to the ionescian “NO”), he affirms it, as at him “ everything falls again in literature”(C.M.Popa). Therefore, in any case, Smarandache is not a writer who should like “the death of literature”, an old idea of Paul Valery¹⁴). He is a literary demiurge who does not want “ the death of the sinner”, but his reform through non-literature, that is, in “the sense of non-sense”. This idea is not absolutely new, because as early as 1973 the erudite Adrian Marino made an analogy with the Wolfflin’s pictorial and thought that “it is possible to talk about the existence of the non-literature as an attempt to define and to restore the essence of the literature corrupted through the excess or the absence of literary art”¹⁵).

The excess of literaturization means, in poetry, abuse of lyricism, overbid of metaphorization. The invasion of metaphors met especially at some lyrical poets, Romanian and foreigners alike, brings about after a time a stifling sentiment of saturation, such a large blossom garden exhaling strong smells; in uncounted waves these could arouse disgust and repulsion, extreme sentiments and states, contrary to those anticipated. There are poets, especially in literary circles(and they always come brought by the inertness of the traditionalism promoted in schools by today’s teachers, themselves traditionalists!), who outrun themselves in looking for as original as possible figures of speech, especially metaphors, thinking that the measure of poetry and the talent are proportionally with the number and the ingenuity of metaphors, despite the fact that before them were so many “aces” in domain (the list is too long to mention here even the most important) and that the 20th century(following, thus, the end of the 19th century) is full of poetical new experiences, and of *-isms* representing as many attempts- some of them successful !- to blowing up the classical patterns.

The insufficiency (euphemistically speaking!) of readings and a relatively weak orientation of the youth creators by some literary revues(in many cases led by “classicists” again), perpetuate the non-synchronization with domain’s (post)modernization, in spite of the lessons of some Stanescu, Sorescu, Cartarescu, George Anca, Florentin Smarandache, Justin Panta, N. Coande etc. The democracy of culture (including literature) appeared as an epiphenomenon of the (pro)claimed absolute contemporary freedom, has presently unexpected and unwanted results. Among these – a wrong understanding of the “progress” in art, when the attitude is not a (conscious or unconscious) reaction, at the “postmodernization” with any price of the materialistic and old-fashioned theory concerning the “development in spiral”!

All these things must have been established - lived, more exactly- by the superreasonable and , at the same time, supersensitive Florentin Smarandache. He must early have realized that, generally, the way it was written (at least in our country!) in the first years of his literary age, was old-fashioned and uniform, the exceptions confirming the rule. His literary beginnings, in spite of the fact that they were above the media, don’t proved to be originally enough for the lath raised by the exacting Geo Dumitrescu, who had written “The freedom to shoot”. From their thematic universe and from some images it could guess, however, that soon with the author of those verses “something was going to happen”. At that time Florentin Smarandache has already feverishly but deliberately looking for that “something”. And he will discover the movement that will be

forever bound with his name, because “paradoxism = smarandachism”(Ion Rotaru, Titu Popescu)- current and literary style having its main roots in the two realities analyzed before: politico-social and literary. The same idea met, at Adrian Marino and C. M. Popa is resumed by Titu Popescu when he talks about the self(?)destruction of the traditional work: “A logic of cancellation, a dynamic of breaks, made from the gesture that cancels, the gesture that founds”¹⁶⁾.

The role of the mathematics as the third source of Smarandache’s paradoxism is at least as important as the other ones two. That’s why we will dedicate it a distinct chapter and, as results from the studied bibliography, it was accorded a lesser attention to it; Titu Popescu himself, author of one of the most complete and pertinent smarandachian monography, insists moreover on the aesthetic and philosophico-literary aspects of the matter, even on the metaphysical and ... the physical aspects. “The poets are the physicians of sense”, he said, starting from **The poetical theorems** of Basarab Nicolescu, which are based on the lupascian principle of the third included¹⁷⁾.

We conclude this essay with another assertion of Adrian Marino, the most prestigious modern “chronicler” of literary ideas and currents:” the one who is convinced of the nullity of art, does not write aesthetic manifestoes”¹⁸⁾. But through his entire creation, Florentin Smarandache proves to be an ardent lover and a great servant of the literature. He has passionately desired and succeeded in its renewal, because every epoch has its fashion and models. We warmly believe that at the boundless... end of the paradoxist way, the imaginary world of literature, parallel with the real world, will not meet a fashion, but a model.