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Preface to *Through tunnels of words*

Ovidiu Ghidirmic

Started with the haiku volume *Clopotul tăcerii* (The Bell of Silence), the classicisation process of **paradoxism** is continued in the present volume, **Through tunnels of words** containing **one line poems**, that intends to reply to an older cycle, so ostentatiously advertized as **Poems with no lines**. In the work of Florentin Smarandache we witness a dialectic of negation and internal polemic.

The title of the volume immediately captures attention. **Through tunnels of words**, a metaphore of the last poem of the volume, wants to suggest the unidirectional going of the poetical speech through the tunnels of the words of the one single poem.

The idea of writing one-line poems, may have come to Florentin Smarandache from Ion Pillat, one of the great Romanian poets in the inter-war period, who wrote a volume actually entitled **One Line Poems** in 1936. Ion Pillat was one of the remarkable representatives of Romanian **traditionalism**, a fine and cultivated spirit, of great artistic refinement, a world-range poet. Ion Pillat even provided a sui generis definition of the one-line poem: **A single Pan-flute, but how many echoes in the words**. Yet, Florentin Smarandache detaches himself from his prestigious model, both in conception and in poetic technique. The need for programatic delimitation is demanding, essential with Florentin Smarandache, who is a “reverse”, “à rebours” spirit, only able to manifest itself through negation, opposition, both to others and himself, as we have seen.

In Ion Pillat time, the one-line poem was considered an “**innovation**”, the more interesting when it appeared in a traditional school poet. Today we have a

whole tradition of one-line poetry, including Florentin Smarandache, the “paradoxist”. Ion Pillat’s one-line poems, as all the poems of the celebrated author of the volume *Pe Argeş în sus* (Upstream on the Argeş, 1923) - a memorable date in Romanian Literary History - is remarkable by the impeccable writing of the verse. This is because Ion Pillat was a thorough “calophile”, an adept of “beautiful writing”, while Florentin Smarandache has an obvious “anticalophilic” structure, and is disinclined to pay too much attention to form. Ion Pillat was an “apollinic” temperament: calm, detached, tranquil and balanced, while his modern counterpart, on the contrary, has a “dionisiac” temperament: troubled, eager, anxious, of vitalist frenzy. In their admirable “writing” Ion Pillat’s one-line poems do not count on “paradox”, which is the centerpoint of Florentin Smarandache’s outlook and output.

In our opinion, the one-line poem is the touchstone any real poet, as it relies on synthesis - the major quality of the human spirit - and demand the art of extreme concision, of expressing the most in the fewest words: “*Multum in parvo*” - as the Latin said. The ultimate temptation in poetry is that of including the very essence of the world, of the whole universe, in a single line - a performance only achieved only rarely by poets such as Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe or Eminescu. A single line may make a poet immortal and his work last throughout ages. To give just one exemple at hand, Eminescu, the greatest Romanian poet, he would have been one of the greatest poets of all times even if he had written only the line “For the life of the whole world is but a dream of

eternal death”, the concluding line of the poem **Împărat și proletar** (Emperor and Proletarian). We have to acknowledge that never in world literature has such a line been produced elsewhere. Almost all the great romanticists said that “life is a dream”, but that the life of the whole world he but a dream of death, is a thing only Eminescu said. Looking on the whole life of the world from such a staggering perspective of the void, leaves one speechless, reduces one to... silence. One’s mind is pierced by such logic of the absolute!

One-line poem should strive to become concise and revealing apophthegmatic definitions, of gnomic sententiousness, attained by classical aphorisms. This is why the art of one-line poems is so difficult. No matter how modern in form, one line poems belong to an art that is essentially classical!

Florentin Smarandache’s one-line poems, included in the volume **Through tunnels of words**, contain almost nothing of the paradoxical “innovations”, with the exception of the “paradox” as such, which not even a...”paradoxical” innovation. They are nether “non-literature”, nor “non-poems”, nor “grapho-poems”, nor “picto-poems”, but poems proper. A poet once waging ceaseless battle against the main literary tool is now relatively cozily installed in the “writing”, as he tells us in the beginning, with a some resignation: “I am living in one single word: writing”. No wonder! Only once do irrepressible “paradoxist” longings occur, when, through repetition, he comes to cut one word, indeed, the most troubling of all: **Quietness**, as in the line “**The dogs are barking at the stillness, the stillness is still**” (At the

sheepfold), which signifies a paradoxical lengthening of echoes...of Quietness.

These one-line poems of Florentin Smarandache's are not easy to group because of their thematic diversity and technique. We leave the pleasure of classification to the Romanian or American reader and any reader the world over. We only attempt a very brief guideline. A first category deal with the nostalgia of the native land and Romanian culture. For those who have even a summary knowledge of Romanian culture, the popular ballad *Miorița* is a starting point. Starting from it, Lucian Blaga, one of the greatest Romanian poets and philosophers, established the "stylistic matrix" of Romanian spirituality in his essay, "Spațiul mioritic" (The Mioritic Space, 1936). The Romanians were born in a "mioritic space", a pastoral space, that acts for them as a "matrix", moulding their sensivity. The "*Miorița*" ballad contains a specifically Romanian philosophical outlook, a "mioritic" outlook on death, a Romanian "Weltanschauung". The Romanians, the ballad implies, saw life as a cosmic wedding, a liturgical ritual involving the whole nature. The Romanians' moral force, that of a people at the cross-roads, in the way of all historical winds of change, is that of turning any tragic into a happy event. It is a unique, original vision of life. The "*Miorița*" is a kind of religion for the Romanians. So deeply does Florentin Smarandache believe in Romanian spirituality that he gets to the pre-eminence of artistic creation that itself generates reality: **The shepherds are comind down to the plain directly from the ballad (Ewe), The flight of the Bird in the Egg** is the memorable title of another one-line poem, a title worthy of the father of

modern sculpture, Brâncuși, who captured not only the flight, but...the potential flight. This is the very title conceived in the best paradoxical tradition! The key-words of the Romanian spirituality are “doina” și “dor”. “Doina” is a specific Romanian tune expressing the “dor”, a complex feeling, that has no equivalent in other spirituality and which, the same Lucian Blaga defined as **“the melancholy of a soul, neither too heavy, nor too light, ascending and descending”**. The word does not translate. A Romanian-American writer, Florentin Smarandache is reached by the “dor” even in Phoenix: **“An upside down precipice mountain of longing”** (A thought from Phoenix, USA). The Latin essence of the Romanian people, the Getian-Dacian vestiges of Sarmisegetuza, the village of Bălcești, in his native Oltenia, Eminescu and Bacovia, as cultural landmarks, are all themes for meditation for Florentin Smarandache.

The influence of Bacovia, another great Romanian poet, the best representative of Romanian **“symbolism”**, is visible in there one-line poems. Moreover, Florentin Smarandache was characterised by Romanian criticism as a **“Bacovian”** poet, ever since his debut volume, **“Formulas for the Spirit”**. Many of these one-line poems are modelled on the pictorial Bacovian technique, of synestesy and correspondence, chromatic pastels, indeed: **“The thunder threatens the white earth with a rain of lead”** (Bacovian I); **“The ageing lane blossoms under the grizzled rains”** (Bacovian II).

But even greater in this volume is the influence of Lucian Blaga’s **“expressionism”**. **“Expressionism”** means establishing relationship with the cosmic, the absolute, the

unlimited, and is characterised by a violent imageism, by shocking metaphors. "The stars are seethed in the blue blood of the sky" (Cosmic II); "The light is raising its laps to the girdle" (Birth). "Do not lean out of your time" (E pericoloso spogersi).

Finally, we believe that the force-line of this volume consists of a metaphysical lyricism that places Florentin Smarandache in the contemporary trend of philosophical "pessimism" and "existentialism". Concepts like "anxiety", "concern", "fear", specific to contemporary existential philosophy are widely illustrated in this volume: "An octopus of horror was nestling into my soul" (Comminatio); "The mirror of my face is scratched by the anxiety" (Self Portret); "Brimful with exceptions in the white flour of loneliness" (Patience); "On the blackboard of the despair I am writing a new illusion" (School); "I live alone in the coffin of my body" (Address).

Most of the one-line poems of the volume *Through tunnels of words* are, indeed, memorable. "I beseech you, do not give birth to me again" (Mother) - here is an aphorism that not even the bleakest of the world philosophers, Schopenhauer, would have dared utter!

Florentin Smarandache is also a great poet, that should not be seen merely from the perspective of theory, but this side and beyond "paradoxism".