

EXCELSIOR

Some time ago I wrote about the „Pilgrim Falcon,” Alexandra Titu’s first novel, published after 1990, as about a revelation, by associating the Romanian author with the name of Marguerita Yourcenar, in the integrate and mutual perspective of history as a cosmogony while debating over the same history as a perpetual fairy tale, in which the past, liberated from its myths, is actually our continuous, or the most „fluid” present, since it preserves the perennial memory.

The „Pilgrim Falcon,” the author of the book herself used to say, represents a process of distillation; it narrates a history, one that is certainly as recent and a-temporal as most of the histories with a substance which can be hardly noticed by the most accurate document. The book was completed, submitted for publication and rejected because of ideological reasons in 1985. Its structure, which reminds us of legends, covers only a segment of an analysis of the actual situation – then and now. The option for the seeming simplicity of the fairy tale and the subtle ballad melancholy suggests a more profound degree of liberty – the liberty when speaking both about the reality assumed as a dogma of experience, and the present, the only exterior time, which is not subordinated to our imagination...”

In „The Tree in the Daybreak,” Alexandra Titu’s second novel, published by the same Meta Publishing House (unfortunately with too many and awkward printing mistakes), the disguise veil is brutally removed from the „face” of the narrative, by emphasising the purest but cruelest record of truth regarding the pressure of the communist dictatorship in our country, in its last decade, forerunning the events in December 1989. The book itself is dated „January 1986 – December 1989,” as if substituting an intimate diary yet advancing directly in the flames, with all the truth in the soul and mind of the author (a brilliant mind and a profound soul), even beyond the meanness of the moment lived within the frame of a historical time, exasperated till suffocation. We also wonder where are the „pocket books” of that time which is related in the creations of the „great Romanian writers who are still living,” from Nicolae Breban and Augustin Buzura to Ana Blandiana?! Here we have an example,

even a great one, that they exist and had been writing during that period of time, expressing the straight truth, regardless of the risks, that is the confiscation of manuscripts.

What does the „Tree in the Daybreak” suggest? What the „symbol of the assassinated tree” and its elegy represents within a context in which, as a nice and picturesque character of the book says, „we were vaccinated against hope”.... or „against the shit of hope”, as the „ruffian” Sebastian used to say in a more colourful way... The savant construction of the novel risks while being based on the simplicity of a „scheme” which had become classical, although the novel had already been defined as „post/modern.” The story highlights the Hero, The Great Hero, Armand, „an old survivor of the war and political persecutions;” he attracts, like the Great Magnet, „a cinematographer who did not have any other chance to realize some films, Leo, a writer of books which had never been published, George, an associate, the vaccination against all one’s hopes, Sebastian, an immigrant, Eva, who thought she was invulnerable to nostalgia... a dog, a tree...

The tree! An Axis Mundi since the creation of the world till the attempt to set it free from the last experiments regarding the primitiveness of man, at the highest level of his helplessness and lunacy, the temporary exacerbate power, all that had already been seen or not. It can be seen in larger houses too. Armand, the excellently sketched old man, with his dry and inflexible face, yet a wise, but *resonneur* one, like the one of an old general, in his un hoped relationship with the youth of the new system, in which he was ready to be sacrificed by the war, prison or forced home. The „historical” place, the new place in which he finds his formerly constructed life, dreamt of for longer periods of time, destroyed with a single just recovered remainder, his daughter Ioana, a beautiful rebel and nonconformist researcher in an institute, after she had been raised, as a child, at the orphanage and saw her mother banished from her life by her own grandparents from the country-side. Hatred and archaic revenge living in the human soul. There is a sincere and honest world, still resistant to the ravages of the absurd and the „political” liking, gravitating towards this nucleus. The country-side doctor, Semion, priest Grigore from the same place,

the women gathered from all settings and for all signification; Simona, Armand's wife, the Botticellian green house flower and carrier of sophisticated hats, who fades like a flower, crushed under the pressure of the inept time, unattentive to the values of man, essential through their intimate particularities, Firenze, Aunt Florence, who passes over the solidary modesty and risk, Smaranda, the nostalgic and devoted servant „from the semi-basement,” a character which reminds us of Gabriela Adamesteanu's „Lost Morning”, or, in another plan, Floarea lui Nucu, the mother of the sick child, dead because of birocracy or communist insensitiveness; Floarea lui Nucu in mourning, from the village of the doctor and of the priest, assuming responsibility; and in the plan of a new „efficiency” Cornelia (a Roman name!), ready to go anytime, even against the will of her husband (but there were many who wanted to leave then), and Eva, already mentioned in the text, the lucky and spoiled artist who was to leave and be successful, certainly conquering America! From the secondary plan of the memory Jacob, Ioana's former lover, one of Donna Juana's many lovers, and the last one, but not the very last one, Matei, Ioana's refined colleague, the superior activist son, who has a common cause with her in the most critical moment of the beautiful „immoral's” career, changing solidarity into love etc., etc. Thus we can speak about the birth of a sect, an island, a solidary minority, in the middle of an ocean, socially polluted till the alarm quotations. We know, we have been part of that sect, we lived and still live on that island, and we had been part of that solidary minority of the communist intellectuals, or more precisely of those in the latest decades of communism... These people, the members of this sect are alive, are desperately living the moment, struggle and oppose, defy the beasts and contradict aberations, and their acts highlight the ballad dimension and the legend net so that, you finally wonder today, when communism succumbed, where we can still find those people, where did the star of those who all used to defend each other decline, and people did not give up, not even when the Tree itself fell down, because of the demolishers' axe... the beautiful Mapple Tree in front of the window of Armand and of Ioana's little apartment, shared with her father, after their late and difficult meeting?

Where are those people now? What happened to them in the new marauding setting when garbage had arisen again, the bribed inspectors from local town-halls, not to approve the useless and absurd cutting down of a stately tree, the first secretaries on the lawn, from the party villas, with their bottles of whisky in their perspired hands and the fear of decision, no matter what this would have been, their servants, the fearful institution directors and Matcau institutions; to cut it short, Romania's current parliament, all the staffs of the new parties, „free and democratic,” and all the ministries, appointed or „inheriting” the functions from the previous governments... However, where are the pure, incorruptible and solidary ones around Armand and the Tree which was finally assassinated, the Eternal Maple Tree, glorified and defeated without glory, exactly on the day and at the time when the old Armand fell over the window of the chopped Maple Tree, defeated by a double infarct?! Where are those people, and we repeat the question, no matter how pathetic we might be, perhaps the author will write another new book, about the „heirs of the stately Tree,” the „Relatives of the Tree” and so on. A wonderful and marvellous book, full of emotion and premonition, highlighted from A to Z and beyond Z, with the author's creative intuition, permanently stimulated by the Aleph number! Climbing up, testing, exploring, searching with the restless pressure of an infarct (God forbid!). A book with a thousand of questions which the island, the sect and the solidary minority had subdued, yet „our freedom,” that had unexpectedly occurred, finally offered no answer. A great deal of things, sayings and memorable conclusions in this book of „sister Alexandra”– sharing, even if biologically, the fate of a Jorge Luis Borges, advancing like him and never giving up.

„I like the tree” - the sintagm which opens the book of Alexandra Titu. The tree which, together with all the demented demolitions of the „Golden Epoch,” was to be „extirpated” because of the order from the „space.” Everybody gets mobilized around the Tree within the space of the superb novel of Alexandra Titu. „The Crusade” for the salvation of the Tree has a high symbolical meaning: it could have been the Crusade for the salvation of Romania itself, but it was never meant to be. The tree, an old symbol of love, the Tree of Sacrifice. „Can salvation arise from beyond the

ocean”!? The tree/ for all of us a symbol etc. „The Obsequies of the Tree” in a global America which not all the „insular” Romanians belonging to the former dictatorship thought of in a similar way. While reading this formidable book (we should not be afraid of using superlatives: it is truly a great book) we often thought of Marin Preda’s „Acacia,” the debut of this topic and of this tragical symbol in the Romanian literature. Do you remember the morning when Moromete is cutting down the acacia tree which had been formerly sold to his neighbour, Tudor Balosu, in order to acquit his debt?!

Moreover, „The Tree in the Daybreak” reminds us of all the world history and something more than that; the time which had never vanished from our conscience, or lately the strange rains, the freshets in the regions with decapitated forests, the soil glidings, the bad weather, a simple place, described by a writer within the frames of a memorable novel. What a formidable and pathetic „witness application” in the always delayed „process of communism,” chaotically dealt with by prosecutors certainly employed from the Cotroceni Palace, and certainly from America! There, where, also in the book, as they used to say, they organize the „obsequies of the mioritical Tree” which had finally become a World Museum object.