

Literature of hope or literature of Despair?

BY: ELLI PEONIDOU - Cyprus

My flute is the pole that holds the
black tent in the desert.
I filled it with my green breathing.
My song is the pole that holds the
black tent in the desert.

Dear Colleagues,

First of all allow me to express my gratitude to the union of

Bulgarian writers, for giving us once again the opportunity to be among familiar faces that have gathered from all corners of the world to the green city of Sofia.

I believe that alone these meetings, even if they were without an item on the agenda, are of enormous importance. Further on, I am convinced that it is the corridors and hotel lounges that will be the site of frank personal contacts and exchanges precisely as it is the case with the substance of a good poem - between the lines.

When meeting old friends one feels the absence of beloved personalities that left us for ever. We shall miss the resounding laughter of Billy Saroyian, the witty humor of John Chiver, the gentle and wise smile of the hostess of these meetings, of unforgettable Ludmilla Zivkova. Nevertheless, the spirit of our colleagues that have gone for ever lives among us happy and creative through the works they have left behind.

Literature of hope or literature of Despair? As I was searching for something original and interesting to start my short intervention, I stopped on a phrase by Arthur Miller: "When a writer is a desperate pessimist, he should remain in silence". Whilst trying to analyse this I remembered another phrase by Jean Paul Sartre: "I stopped writing the moment I realised that even my best book isn't worth more than the life of a baby being killed".

So my speech remained loose and unfinished between these two questions. Act then, or silence: Hope or despair?

The recent tragedy of the Palestinians that we have been watching like a macabre serial on the T.V., all those mutilated bodies of children reinforces the desperate appeal of Sartre.

But at the same time we hear the voice of the Palestine itself, answering through the verses of the Palestinian poet Taoufic Zayiant.

"My flute is Palestinian
I filled it with my green breathing.
My song is the pole that holds the
black tent in the desert"

RA: ELLI PEONIDOU - Cyprus/2

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It would be awful if the Palestinians didn't have either the hope of poetry or the poetry of hope. It would also be awful if the Chilians didn't have the Canto General to lullaby them during the endless hours of their fascist darkness.

It would be hell if man didn't have Art to bring balance in this lunacy, that marks our epoch which steps on the dead bodies of human values.

It would be awful if we didn't have our books, your books, their books, the books of all those that lived before us and will live after us. It would be awful if we didn't have the consolation that as long as there are people, a Homer will be born again, a Dante, a Thervandes, a Tolstoy, to cure the injuries of war of death and of misery.

At times we feel frightened of words. It is a fact that as long as the writer has got his verses as his only weapon, he wants them to be pure, clean, original, deep and without any make up.

It is a fact that our greatest torture begins where the sentence, the page or the chapter stops. The rewriting, the rubbing off, the omitting of some words, or the searching of a correct word can puzzle us for months or years since the original inspiration came in mind. For this particular reason, the writers especially, have got an allergy to the words that have been worn out in the streets, in the coffee bars or in the cheap movies.

The word hope is one of those words that have unfortunately been widely used, like the words Peace, Democracy, Love and some others. You must believe me that one does not find it easy to come here and depend in a convincing way this particular word. It would be easier to be furious, to insult, to curse or to make ironical statements or to be just quiet.

The angry poets, the angry actors, painters or singers, are usually the most famous and more sympathetic.

Nevertheless, if we have to analyse the word "hope" in all its span and as we should mean it when using it in the literature or in the Art of our time, then hope is indeed a bit of anger, it is a bit of curse, a bit of crying and irony or even it is a bit of silence as well when needed. It is the literature of hope in contrast to the literature of death. Because during this crucial juncture of human history one can't be neutral. One must be either for life or for death. The literature of Despair is as if it signs a contract with the end of life.

It is as if it stands next to unclear armaments, to cancer, to pollution, side by side to the threats that suffocate our planet.

The literature of hope can and must take all the forms that considers necessary to fight the plagues of humanity.

It must become a song for freedom in the mouth of an enslaved nation, a love song to the ear of the beloved one, militant satire against the dictators, glorious hymn to the dead heroes, everyday food, bread and milk for the new generations. The literature of hope must be a living creature that will accompany man at all moments, especially during the moments of despair.

It is indeed very difficult to defend the word "hope" in a short speech yet, it is ten times more difficult to defend it in a right way and convincingly in a work of Art. Here the talent plays a crucial part, for without talent the writer of hope will turn into a poor and funny preacher that convinces nobody.

Dear colleagues, on the 3rd of October the great thinker, the poet of hope Louis Aragon will be 85 years old. In a recent poem of his dedicated to the huge march of peace that took place in Paris on the 20th of last June, Louis Aragon wrote: "I defy the laughter of death, I defy its laws".

I think that there couldn't exist a more proud and more appropriate answer to the question the Bulgarian colleagues gave us.

Yes one thousand times yes to the literature of hope as long as there is even one living human being on our planet.