



THE BEECH-WOOD OF "EN JORDÀ"

THIS BEECH-WOOD IN THE GARROTXA REGION IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AND MYSTERIOUS PLACES IN CATALONIA. JOAN MARAGALL, A DISTINGUISHED POET OF THE BEGINNING OF THIS CENTURY, IMMORTALIZED IT IN LINES WHICH VISITORS WHO TREAD ITS SILENT PATHS CAN READ AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE WOOD.

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A green and profound place/ like no other to be found in the world:/ green like watery depths, profound and clear:/ the green of La Fageda d'En Jordà. The fresh green of summer in the beech-wood, the melancholic, soulful green Joan Maragall describes so well. But the magic of this poeticized beech-wood isn't restricted just to the summer months, the season when our beloved poet immortalized it. La Fageda d'En Jordà is an eternal clock, a procession of living colour marking all the passing hours of the four seasons of the year and the hours of the day and of the night, and the hours of rain, of wind and snow.

In summer, though, Maragall sings, *The traveller on foot entering this place/ begins to slow his walk:/ counting his steps in the great silence/ he stops and hears nothing, and feels lost./ A sweet oblivion of worldly things comes over him/ in the silence of this profound place/ and he thinks not of leaving, or he thinks in vain:/ he is a captive of La Fageda d'En Jordà,/ a prisoner of the silence and the green./ Oh, company! Oh, liberating prison!*

In winter it's not possible to wade into the watery depths, because the leaves that held the light have fallen and all the greens have been lost, leaving only the puddles in the moss that covers the stones like downy cushions on a bed decked with wilted russet leaves, aged and beautified. The traveller now can no

longer float amongst profound greens, but on sunny days you can walk amongst the slender trunks like naked stalks forming bold stripes against the sky, while their long shadows form stripes against the charred tapestry of colours on the ground. And between the stripes you too are marvellously imprisoned and can meditate on all this peace, surrounded by the birds which now, in the unhampered sunlight and without the gloom of the dense foliage, pluck up courage to come down and peck at the mosses and at the fruits of the beeches –also eaten by children and by those who remember their childhood– or to approach the solitary visitor in search of company.

In spring, before the buds begin to swell (springtime comes late in the beech-wood) and when the only leaves in the forest are the ones that crackle under the walker's feet, a humble undergrowth appears, as delightful as it is short-lived, formed of anemones. Amongst the decaying coppery leaves appear clumps of small, delicate green bushes that are soon covered in white or purplish flowers. The ferns, almost the only undergrowth possible in this green and profound place, also start to put out shoots and then the beeches become covered in fresh green leaves like little crystals. As they grow, they sift the profound, magical light of the green of La Fageda d'En Jordà, a green so emblematic in Maragall's poetry that I don't dare to add to it.

But the year's clock goes on renewing the colours and autumn comes round and all the foliage is ablaze. Coppers and reds festoon the trees and the ground. And all these charred colours take the walker back to remote times, when neither men nor trees were yet in the world and this place was a sea of fire. Our beech-wood has grown up on the lava bed of the Croscat volcano, an incandescent river held back by the el Corb range, and the blackened or charred land has been formed by the scoria poured out by the volcano, rising and falling like the gentle waves of the sea bed.

This moist, porous soil, rich in minerals, has produced this miracle –an unusual forest, not at all Mediterranean, the beech-wood of least altitude so far south, a fairy-tale wood, where the Druids still seem to breath. A wood where in summer you feel as though you were floating through the words of the poet in a green like watery depths, immersed between two bodies of water, the visual water and the water of the mind, amongst lush greens and sparks of buried fire. *Do you know the way to la Fageda d'En Jordà?/ If you make for Olot, above the plain,/ you'll find a green and profound place/ like no other to be found in the world...* Locals and outsiders alike are fascinated by it, and anyone with a love of walking will become enamoured and imprisoned by it. *Oh, company! Oh, liberating prison!* ■