Marco Di Natale

ITAL 400

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Translations

Introduction

Pirandello in this short story portrays his mockery of the blind following industrialization. With that we also see the exaltation of the country over the city and the admiration of nature while man try to take over its world and life. This short story is an example of how trees try to grow in the city, but their mission is compromised by the humans that share the same space as them. From limiting fences, to trying to scare away singing birds that make these sad trees feel rejuvenated, it is clear that Pirandello likes to contrast the life of machines or humans with nature.

Besides the sharing of space between nature and humans, Pirandello also uses the trees as a metaphor for human sadness. He talks about trees in this story, but the real meaning is the migration of people from the country to the cities, and their sadness once they reach destination and don’t accomplish their dreams, and fall into poverty and social abandonment.

Pirandello finds himself looking at the trees that exiled from the countryside to live their dream life in the city. What happens is that the trees find themselves in a worse situation than before and live in constant fear and sadness because of the action of humans to limit their existence.

Urban Trees

What a bore it must be for you, poor trees standing in rows along the avenues of the city and sometimes along the paved streets, here and there on the sidewalks, or solitarily springing among small plants in some vast silent atrium of an ancient building or in some courtyard!

I know of a few, at the end of one of the widest and most populated streets in Rome, that are truly pitiful. They have come up miserable and squalid, and have almost a lost, fearful air, as if they were wondering what they were doing there, among so many busy people, in the midst of the deafening bustling of city life. With which sad wonder, the poor trees see their reflection in the beautiful store windows! And it seems that they are pitying themselves, gently shaking the branches at each puff of wind.

Every time I walk along that street, looking at those little trees, I think of the many unhappy people who, attracted by the mirage of the city, have abandoned their countryside and they came here to find sadness, and to get lost in the maze of a life that is not for them. And imagining the bitter and disconsolate thought of these unfortunates and the remembrance of the distant land, of the simple and better life that they had there one day, before the damn temptation brought them to spite by sparking the luring of another life; I also imagine with what lively and spontaneous joy these poor little trees would be alive in the open air; how their leaves would shine and how their withered and saddened branches would stretch out to greet the pure air.

There: the short circle which the pavement of the street traces around the trunk, is all their country; for it the earth struggles to drink the water of the sky and breathes. This short circle is also sometimes surrounded by an iron grid, for a protection that may even seem cruel: the poor trees then seem to rise from a prison, condemned to stay there; and they sleep and dream sadly, shaking from time to time, almost for a thrill of emotion, at the news that the gentle wind brings them from afar, from the fields already reborn smiling of the new April.

Ah, they also feel it, the poor trees of the city: they too sense something in the fresh and cheerful air. Under the hard, crushing pavement, exiled trees, the earth speaks to you of the renewed love of the sun, and you, trembling, listen to it, blessed in the thought that it has not forgotten of you, so far away, lost in the chaos of the city. Under the countless houses that crush it, under the paving stones continuously trampled by restless people, spring lives, keeps on living, and you feel with your roots the ardor of this new life of hers that cannot keep itself hidden and almost foams from among the paving stones in tenuous blades of grass. Ah, you perhaps, looking at those green small tufts of grass, conceived the crazy hope that the earth wants to avenge you, to invade the cities to free you; and you see in a dream those blades of grass grow, and the street becomes a meadow; the city a countryside!

Yes, but in the meantime, what are those cleaners bent over, scraping the pavement? - You ask this to a sparrow that has come from the rooftops to perch on you; and the garrulous and gossipy sparrow answers you with a sneer:

- And don't you see? They are barbers: they trim the beard of the street.

But even sadder is the fate of other city trees, which must not only escort, in an orderly procession along the sidewalks of the streets, the meaningless and filthy vanities of ours, but which, in a tighter order, merging the various crowns, are forced to form almost a portico of vegetation.

The gardener's shears have evened out the tops of these trees symmetrically and internally have imposed on the branches the curve of a tunnel and, on the sides, the arches of a loggia.

Thus deformed, mutilated with such skillful cruelty, to whom may these trees really seem beautiful and pleasing anymore? I confess that they give me a sense of disgust, as if they offered me a spectacle of perpetual torture. And I feel like shouting: "But build your porticos of stone! These are living beings, who suffer and make people suffer: it is cruel to prevent them from the spontaneous sprouting exuberance of life!"

Don’t you know, gardeners of Italy, that the death penalty is abolished among us? For whoever dares to raise his head beyond the leveling laws, which stand barely above of the mud, protective net of the dwarfs, the executioner is no longer there to cut it off. Now tell me why that poor frond that stands above the line imposed by your scissors must be beheaded?

For these trees, oh gardeners, your profession is still being the executioner!

And I know of a tree that was born, who knows how, in a cramped filthy yard next to an ugly street crowded with old houses. That poor tree had risen straight up on its skeletal cinereal stem, with evident effort, with clear struggle, almost tormented with the desire to see the sun and the clear air, by the fear of not having so much energy to reach beyond the roofs of the surrounded buildings. And it finally reached there!

How happy the top branches, and how much envy they wreaked in those who were down without air, without sun! Even in death, when as they fall from the autumn branches, the leaves up there were happier: they flew away with the wind up above, in the wind, fell on their roofs, and still saw the sky; while the poor leaves down below died trampled in the mud of the streets down below.

In all seasons, at sunset, that tree was filled with a myriad of sparrows, which seemed to gather from all the roofs of the city. Those branches throbbed more for the wings than for the leaves; it seemed that every leaf had a voice, that the whole tree sang happily.

From the windows of the houses the children watched, smiling stunned, at that dense, continuous, deafening aviary. Sometimes, an old man would look out of a window and clap his hands twice: then suddenly, as if by magic, the whole tree would fall silent, lifeless. Shortly afterwards, however, the noise would begin again: each sparrow would with its own sounds and those of the others, and the symphony would gradually become thicker and more deafening than before.

Now it happened that the owner of the house, in whose courtyard the tree had grown, one fine day thought of raising the surrounding walls by adding another floor. And so the tree, which with so much strife had earned the freedom of the sun, of the open air, bent its top discouraged over its trunk.

"Come on, come on!" it seemed that the sparrows that dwelt on that roof were shouting from the gutters, and they were taking flight to incite him to rise up: "Up, up!" And perhaps they also repeated to the old tree those usual phrases, those useless tips, those vain admonishments that dream of giving oneself to the fallen ones, to the discouraged: "Brace yourself! don't be demoralized! gather your strength! Get up!"

But the old tree had no more strength to live. he had made such a hard time coming up to that height: he couldn't go any longer. Better die.

Still thousands and thousands of sparrows gathered on the old tree to sing. But the tree no longer seemed to echo voices anymore. Sparrows lived: the tree was the tree was dead, bent over itself. And in vain, the sparrows with their chirping tried to bring him back to life.