

## ***Trees and our life***

*Where the shadow was, now itself the oak spreads dead,  
Nor more with whirlwinds does it tend.  
People say: now I see, it was great!  
Here and there from the crown the nests of spring hang.  
The people say: now I see, it was good!  
Each one praises, each one cuts.  
In the evening each with his heavy bundle goes.  
In the air, a cry... of a blackcap  
Looking for the nest she will not find.*

*The Fallen Oak, Giovanni Pascoli  
(Early Poems, 1904)*

The felling of every tree reminds me of, *La quercia caduta* (The Fallen Oak), a poem studied in primary schools, when teachers made them learn the texts by heart, environmentalism was still far away and the peasant nature of the images evoked in the poem was still present in the experiences of city children. Today, the tree is removed with machines and no one in the press cares about the lives of the birds in the crown. Who knows if anyone will write a poem like they used to, or a song about these events. The discourse on nature and the meaning of the presence of trees in our lives stimulates some brief considerations.

The comments that cyclically appear in the mass media on such occasions, which increasingly focus on the safety of humans and the upkeep of plants, are a long way from the global vision needed to offer a solution to the problem of suddenly collapsing trees.

The behaviour of plants is, however, very similar to ours under the same living conditions: in urban settings, aged plants have problematic health, like our elderly, young plants grow as stuntedly as our children, and, when living in the countryside, our habit of large concentrations is achieved with plants through monocultures of individuals of the same species, often derived from the same clone. It should come as no surprise that diseases from micro-nutrient deficiencies or dietary imbalances occur among plants, as they do among humans, even in pot plants, which we often treat with abundant fertilisation and infrequent watering.

Don't we wonder how we have forced plants, especially big trees, to live in our cities? We like them so much on postcards and in the photos we post, but then, when they are in situ, we are annoyed by the birds that dwell in them because of the droppings, the branches that spread too far towards the windows, the roots that lift up the pavements and prevent us from walking. And so we start pruning (those root cuts of branches and leaves that we often see, perhaps with

satisfaction), pruning done out of season respecting the bureaucratic process and not the biological cycle of the plants, the elimination of fifty-year-old trees because they are too 'cumbersome' and because they would dirty with leaves and birds. I have told you things I have seen and others told me in the years I spent living in the cities.

Plants are not perceived as living beings, endowed with a life of their own and with which we have to communicate in a language other than speech. They are considered more ecological objects, to be arranged and removed at will. And they are usually not considered in their entirety, but only for the part that emerges from the ground; roots only exist when they are a nuisance, and even in cases of sudden collapse, the newspapers rarely attribute the collapse to the reduced presence of roots. But have you ever seen any team of workers working along roads and around buildings respecting the presence of the root systems of the trees present? Perhaps by submitting a report on the plants 'touched' by the work, by having an engineer carry out a preliminary inspection? And yet, the works are often carried out by large companies that are certified for the sustainability of their interventions and budgets. The newspapers never highlight these possible aspects, which for pine trees, for example, are fundamental: building stone walls and benches in the area around the trunk of a pine tree often involves breaking up the root system, which is superficial in this species, not to mention the installation of the telematic network that in the future will give us lightning connections and allow us to have 'smart' homes with online appliances; along the streets of our cities and in the courtyards of buildings, trees, especially pines, are the first to pay for this 'zero point modernisation'. In the countryside it is no different, as monoculture does not give way to the creation of syncretic agricultural systems, with a mix of plants able to 'help' each other in the presence of stress and catastrophic events.

Talking about safety and maintenance when a tree falls, without taking these aspects into account, is pointless and hypocritical. In the city or in the countryside, a tree is planted to last, to live over a period of time that is often longer than our own, it must be defended and helped to survive when it is in trouble. Instead, for safety and not to run the risk of lawsuits, it is cut down at the slightest problem. But restoring a tree is not easy, nor is restoring the balance of cultivation in the countryside. Those who study agroecology know this well and would like to explain it to others, but remain unheard and little considered in a world running towards precision agriculture that reminds me a lot of 'smart bombs' in this time of global war.

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