

A shelter for fantasy, a house for goblins

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To fully understand the true sense of a park, it is enough to remain quiet. You have to admire the beauty of those green cathedrals, the trees, where majestic rituals of nature are officiated to pay homage to God, whatever may be our idea of Him. You must also appreciate the intricate, mindful and not yet completely understood function of the vegetal laboratory that transforms the air while makes it richer and cleaner.

The Biology professor can speak with wonder about the photosynthesis and the cycles of carbon dioxide. Meanwhile, a student sighs, because she realizes that in the trunk a heart would fit, marked by a knife, to comprise the two precise initials that make sense to her adolescence, that bristle her skin.

Remaining quiet. Forgetting the exterior world little by little. Also, forgetting our job, obligations, sicknesses, and that gnawing anxiety that

we call sorrow. Getting rid of pain, worries and fatigues. Closing the eyes. Opening the interior look. Touring one's body with our thought, feeling privileged just for be alive.

Next, following that stream of consciousness. Feeling the silence, hearing the infinitesimal noises, like the cracking of the tiny branches when they fall to the ground, or the song of the crickets and the caress of the wind in the farthest leaves. Attending the birth of the tender sprouts that come out of the bulbs. Watching the withered small piles of yesterday, reunited with the ones of today, in order to form the legendary humus, similar to the one that will cover us when we die, in another park, with gravestones on the floor. Realizing that life is a whisper, that years pass and children become old persons and we barely notice it.

Parks are places to learn how to live, play, love and feel. Where small children give their first steps and seniors finish their walks. That space suspended in time that has the magic to isolate us from the city architecture. The fairy tale books that become reality.

Bruno Bettelheim, an expert on children behavior, wrote a controversial book on the effect of the universal stories for the young. It is titled *The Uses of Enchantment – The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. A

paragraph says, "For a story fully to hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions; be attuned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him."

So, books have a therapeutic use from this perspective; they are a shelter of fantasy, an escape from reality. And so are parks. Also, sinister characters live in them, to haunt the kids with more abilities for invention. There are ghosts on the air, goblins among the bushes; from one tree to another, elves swing. They are creations from the Scandinavian Peninsula that traveled in yellowish, fragile pages throughout the centuries until reaching all corners of the planet. They wait for us, in the thickness of books, as well as in the shadows of forests.

In the immemorial forest, old legends were born, with girls chased by seductive, perverse wolves. From their refuges, the woodmen came to save small children that were lost in the darkest areas. Or even worse, those left by their parents to be devoured by beasts. For the poor marriage suffered the greatest impotence known by human beings: not

being able to feed their children, who cry without understanding the causes of their hunger.

The forests house nymphs as well. They can be dryads, nereids, even sylphs, fantastic beings that are elemental spirits of air, according to the cabbalists.

That is why parks subjugate us. That is why the Juárez Park becomes the heart of San Miguel, because its branches and soil are the perfect metaphor of poetry, and while walking its paths we guess the thousands of stories it comprises.

The first months of my life, more than four decades ago, passed very near the park. I think that I smelled its aroma while my father carried me, he who loved me so much and still does. A beautiful girl, twenty-one years old, looked at him lovingly, with her blue turquoise eyes, as she still does. Only because of that, for having them close to talk to me about my birth city, and how happy we all lived in San Miguel, I should be grateful to my creator for having been born here. Also, grateful to those who invited me to take place in this homage made of words, ink and paper, paid to that other infinite book: the park.