

Corso Regio Parco

Irene Sorrentino

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Introduction

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This poem is about an Abandoned Tobacco Factory, near my house in Corso Regio Parco, a neighborhood from Turin, Piedmont, Italy. The place once was King Savoy's hunting ground¹, then became a huge Tobacco Factory² during the 18th century, and it is now the property of the University of Turin. I imagine it could become a public space for the community of my neighborhood in 2200s, which today is a very multicultural environment. I imagined all the social conflicts around this place, over the years, ended up transforming the building and its backyard in a common space where to cultivate a garden, rebuilt the forest and the shores of Po River, and become once again house for human and non-human people. You will find timelines overlapping one over the other during the poem.

Structure of the poem

Poetry is imagined as a familial dialogue, where at times a mother and at other times a father narrate to their daughter or son the past and present story of the neighborhood as it transforms over time around the former tobacco factory building.

¹ «The House of Savoy (Italian: Casa Savoia) is an Italian royal house (formally a dynasty) that was established in 1003 in the historical Savoy region. Through gradual expansions the family grew in power, first ruling a small Alpine county northwest of Italy and later gaining absolute rule of the Kingdom of Sicily. During the years 1713 to 1720, they were handed the island of Sardinia and would exercise direct rule from then onward. Through its junior branch of Savoy-Carignano, the House of Savoy led the Italian unification in 1861, and ruled the Kingdom of Italy until 1946», *House of Savoy* – Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Savoy, last viewed on the 29th of November 2024.

² The Tobacco Factory (Regia Manifattura) is among the earliest tobacco processing facilities in Italy and represents one of the largest industrial complexes in Turin. The estate is situated on the northern outskirts of Turin, in an area of significant urban importance. It lies between the historic hamlet of Regio Parco and the Po River, a location noted for its environmental and historical-architectural value. Constructed in the 1700s, the site is protected by the Italian Ministry for Culture and stands as one of the city's oldest industrial landmarks. Spanning an area of 90,000 m², the property comprises industrial warehouses, service buildings, canopies, and multi-story structures ranging from one to four floors. The State Property Office and the Municipality of Turin, joint owners of the estate, have entered into an agreement to restore the site. This restoration will be undertaken as part of an urban redevelopment project, integrating a mix of functions. The plan primarily envisions the creation of university residences and a “University Centre”, along with other compatible uses, such as residential, commercial, and tertiary purposes. See *Turin, Former Tobacco Factory* - ICE - Italian Trade Agency, <https://www.investinitalyrealstate.com/en/property/turin-former-tobacco-factory/#tab-floorplans>, last viewed on the 29th of November 2024.

The text flows like a river through four overlapping temporal lines (1824, 2024, 2124, 2224). The first stanza opens in the present, in 2024, where a mother recounts the story of the tobacco factory and the birth of the Corso Regio Parco neighborhood. The second stanza transports us to 1824, where a woman tobacco worker tells her daughter how, even before 1800, the same building served as the king's hunting lodge. The third stanza projects us into 2224, two hundred years into the future, where a mother tells her son (later introduced as Jamil) the history of the same building: first a royal hunting lodge, then a tobacco factory, and later the campus of the University of Turin, describing how these transformations reshaped the neighborhood. The fourth stanza returns to 2024, where the same mother describes the present, in which the factory is under the control of the University of Turin, left abandoned as plans to transform it into a campus remain on hold.

Finally, a fourth timeline appears in the sixth stanza. Here, we are in 2124, where a father describes to his son the social conflicts experienced in a multi-ethnic neighborhood (Corso Regio Parco) through his own perspective, imbued with racism and class prejudice.

It is not essential—indeed, at times counterproductive—to fully grasp and cognitively contain this historical flow, which is intentionally left blurred. The temporal planes overlap and interpenetrate through translucent and porous walls, much like History itself, which allows elements of the past to resurface and glimpse of an unformed future to emerge within the present.

Corso Regio Parco

Irene Sorrentino

Here, once upon a time
there was a tobacco factory
They ground up the dry leaves
pressed into the tissue

of cigarettes – *spagnolette*³ they called it
“But in the 1700s, what did they smoke?”
The Savoy got into business early.

Who knows who bought it, here, once upon a time
it was the king’s
hunting grounds, Regal Avenue
– *Corso Regio*⁴
they called the street—
“Is that why it’s still called that, Mom?”
Today I make tobacco there,
so big it’s hard to believe, inside.
What was the king doing,
all for hunting,
wasting two hours
just to go to the bathroom on the third floor, northern wing?

Here, once upon a time,
there was a university campus,
very old, you know.
Before that, they say it was a tobacco factory,
and even earlier, think about it,
the king’s hunting grounds!
Anyway, it was full of kids,
older than you.
If they pass the decree this year
for free public universities,
you might attend it as well, someday.
Here, once upon a time,
the University of Turin
bought the whole thing and turned it

³ Plural for “spagnoletta”, an archaic Italian expression for “cigars”, smaller and less formal than traditional cigars, often rolled by hand.

⁴ “Corso Regio Parco”, Italian for “Regal Park Avenue”, is today the name of the street running along the building.

into a university palace.

A student room

down here in our basement

would've cost 450 euros per month, back then.

Here, once upon a time, this was a tobacco factory

opened in the 1700s, where the Savoy hunting grounds stood

It lasted until the 1900s

Now the University of Turin bought it,

but they do nothing with it.

They'll raise the prices of the little houses around here, they say
the neighbors.

Small village houses,

where the women who worked in the factory,

*tabacchine*⁵ they called them, used to live,

surrounded by countryside, woods, and rivers.

They built a bell tower

for praying

The nursery

to leave the women free to work

The elementary school

because with two parents' income

you'd expect a good education.

Then they closed everything down, and it was bought

by the University of Turin,

to house pigeons

and the homeless, for you see a shutter ajar

a torn curtain hanging

off the edge of a small balcony

a hand closing

a door with a broken lock

A small part remains

⁵ Plural for "tabacchina". It is an archaic Italian expression, historically used to indicate women who processed and prepared tobacco, including rolling cigars or cigarettes, considered female roles.

to Radio7, the village band used to play there, Nadia told me.

But now it belongs to the University of Turin they'll make
a student campus, classrooms or maybe

rooms to rent to young folks

gullible scions to rip off

with blackjack and luxury dorms.

The ancient *caffè del borgo* will become a kebab shop,

Families will huddle in Barriera di Milano,

right next door.

“And what about that park, stretching down to the river?”

Drunken students

will bathe in the Po or perhaps

in the Stura, just a bit northern.

Here, once upon a time,

there was a university campus.

Do you know what a university is⁶?

If the decree for free

education passes,

you'll go there one day, Jamil⁷.

They closed it, the University, when

they could no longer contain the terrorists⁸,

third generation of immigrants, you know,

here, once upon a time, filling these nurseries

since they were kids.

Speaking Albanian, the parents at the door,

Persian or a dialect from Nigeria.

⁶ I imagine that in this hypothetical future, the public university system has collapsed, replaced by private education. However, by the 2200s, a process of restoring the free university system is underway. For this reason, the mother, speaking to her son, mentions the possibility that he, too, might one day attend a public university, which still seems almost mythical.

⁷ A kid living in 2224 in the Corso Regio Parco neighborhood.

⁸ We are in 2124. The neighborhood has experienced clashes and uprisings by its residents (third generation of non-European immigrants and new university students) against the institutions and privatization that were making the environment unlivable. In this section, the narrator is a father who witnessed the violence of those conflicts with repulsion, representing the racist and reactionary segment of Italians population.

They did well to close them up inside.
I just regret that they closed the Campus,
that one, oh! it brought prestige.
They had to shut it down because of the chaos
caused by those blacks with some daddy's boy
who thought they were great intellectuals
from the University of Turin.
They closed the neighborhood and kicked everyone out.
The smoke from the barricades could be seen
from over the Mole,
from over Pinerolo,
from Cuneo, even! Gianni told me, but
I think that's not true.
"Dad, why are we out here
if Grandma's house was in there?"
Because of those terrorists,
they threw us all out of Corso Regio.
Grandma went back down to Zarita⁹,
in Abruzzo¹⁰. You never knew her,
Aunt Rita.

After the riots, another 100 years have passed,
here once they built barricades.
Do you know what the *banlieues* are?
Did Felipe¹¹ explain it to you?
Maybe they teach that in the fourth grade.
Here, once upon a time, we made the revolution.
They had closed us all inside, with the wealthy students,

⁹ Dialectal expression from Abruzzo from the contraction of "Zia Rita" (eng. "Aunt Rita").

¹⁰ This man's family comes from southern Italy (Abruzzo) and emigrated to the north (Piedmont). His identity as an immigrant has also been shaped in opposition to those who are "even more foreigners", as the third generation of non-European immigrants living in Corso Regio Parco. This character is the most complex, embodying the contradictions generated by the hostilities that the struggle for justice entails. The struggle is not made up solely of harmonious gestures; it often produces disagreement and fractures.

¹¹ A teacher at Jamil's school in 2224.

but they hadn't thought that studying
opens the doors
of the heart.

"But right here, under the pumpkins?"

Yes, Jamil, not exactly under the pumpkins,
where our garden is. Here, once upon a time,
there was the University and it was occupied
by students and revolutionaries.

They began to cultivate a garden, they planted an olive tree,
and placed keffiyehs among the leaves.

We taught each other every language
of Corso Regio Parco.

Speaking Albanian, while working the land,
Persian or a dialect from Nigeria while
sowing the *aja*¹² which *l'è le spessiàri d'i paisan*¹³,
sewing a flag with our desires,
woven into a tapestry of skins
waving in the wind of revolution – even
Zarita's grand-nephew at 75
Stopped asking *Di chi si lu fije?*¹⁴

Cautiously, the most established
entrepreneurs joined us
Carmela's¹⁵ great-grandfather was already here,
the one who makes chestnut gin
and sells it in Japan.

We gathered here, all the people
from Corso Regio, many were young
many with white or dyed hair,

¹² Dialectal expression from Piedemont region for "garlic".

¹³ Dialectal expression from Piedemont region for "garlic is peasant's pharmacist"

¹⁴ Dialectal expression from Abruzzo region for "Whose son are you?", a typical way to identify one kid's family.

¹⁵ Another member of the 2224 Corso Regio Parco community, a gin seller from family tradition.

and if they had closed us inside,
we had made a home
and locked them out
out of this forest
reborn among squirrels
pigs goats cats wild boars
the brown harrier, the white partridge—
you saw it this winter,
the deer that eat our berries,
*volpoca canapiglia codone mestolone alzavola smergo maggiore*¹⁶
and the badger, legends keeper.
If we can seize the northern bank
of the Stura
maybe the lynx will return,
says Gregorio¹⁷, here in the days
of the Savoy we still had a lot of felines.

Here, now that they've reopened the block
you might study it at public universities
if they pass the decree, one day
That we, from Corso Regio, take care of the stretch of river
that flows down to Valentino.

The golden jackals of the east
hunted, named, and narrated
as foreigners of the *langhe*¹⁸ hills
immigrants on these shores
two hundred years ago
returned home to their Alps
from which progress had exiled them—
they are our banner.

¹⁶ Autochthonous birds of this Italian region, whose names are intentionally not translated.

¹⁷ A fauna expert, member of the 2224 Corso Regio Parco community.

¹⁸ A hilly region located in the Piedmont area of northwest Italy, renowned for its stunning landscapes, vineyards, and historic towns.

Appendix

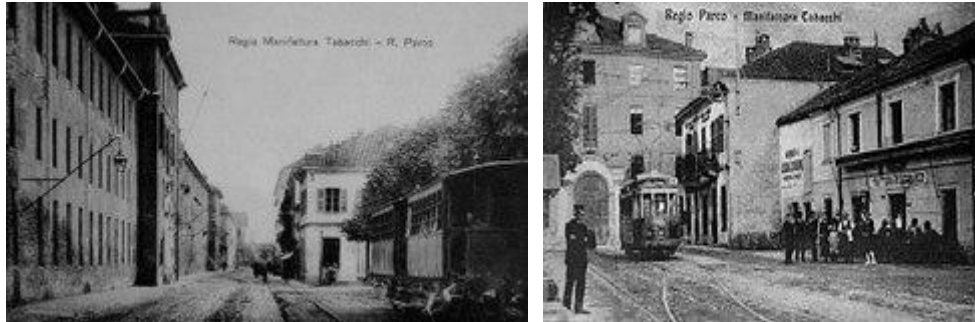


Figure 1 and Figure 2. The Tobacco Factory of Regio Parco in Turin, 1920s, by Unknown author, licensed under the Law for the Protection of Copyright and Neighbouring Rights n.633, 22 April 1941 ([{{PD-1996}}](#))

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Manifattura_tabacchi_Regio_Parco.jpg.

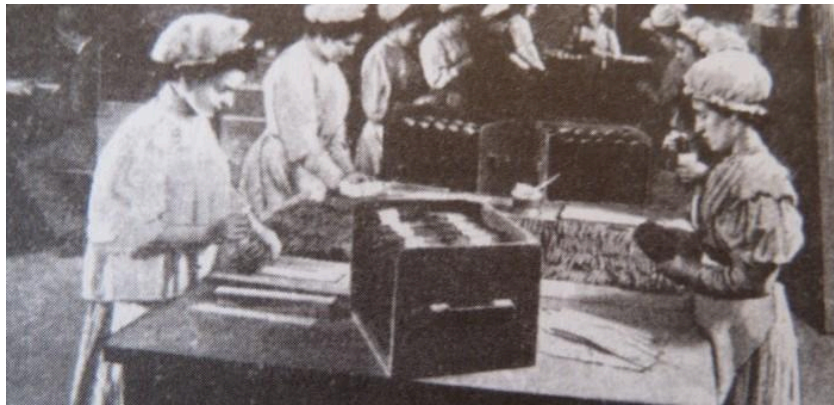


Figure 3. "Tabacchine" cigar makers in the Regio Parco plant, by Unknown author, licensed under the Law for the Protection of Copyright and Neighbouring Rights n.633, 22 April 1941 ([{{PD-1996}}](#)); https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sigaraie_Torino.jpg.

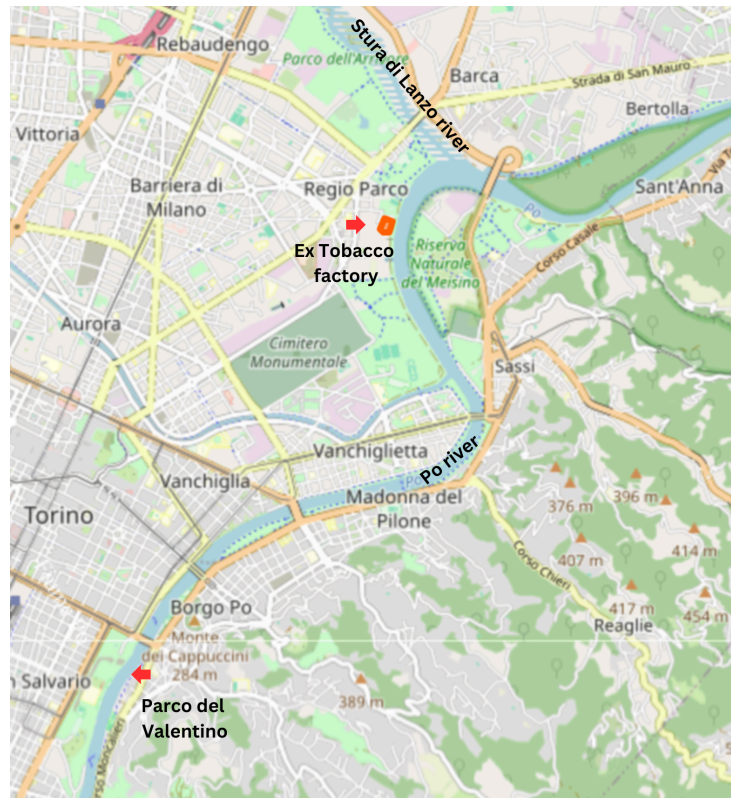


Figure 4. The estate of the tobacco manufactory today on the map of Turin, situated between two rivers: the “Fiume Stura di Lanzo” and “Fiume Po”, by Irene Sorrentino, OpenStreetMap, licensed under [Open Database](#) by [Fondazione OpenStreetMap \(OSMF\)](#), [Copyright e licenza | OpenStreetMap](#).



Figure 5. The industrial chimney of the tobacco factory seen from the Corso Regio Parco neighborhood and figure 6. Nursery from 1880 in Corso Regio Parco (november 2024), by Irene Sorrentino.



Figure 7. Abandoned building and figure 8. Stura river, both seen from the parc (november 2024), by Irene Sorrentino.



Figure 10 and Figure 11. Images generated by AI of a transformed industrial area turned into a wild park with a community garden, by <https://openai.com/chatgpt/overview/>.

Reference list

1. *House of Savoy* – Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Savoy, last viewed on the 29th of November 2024.
2. *Turin, Former Tobacco Factory* - ICE - Italian Trade Agency, <https://www.investitalyrealstate.com/en/property/turin-former-tobacco-factory/#tab-floorplans>, last viewed on the 29th of November 2024.
3. *Manifattura Tabacchi (Torino)* - Wikipedia, [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifattura_Tabacchi_\(Torino\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifattura_Tabacchi_(Torino)), last viewed on the 29th of November 2024.