

SETTANTA VITE IMMORTALI



Olgiate Olona - 26 giugno

June 26, 1959: plane crash

Translation of *La fatalità* (the fate)

article of Dino Buzzati published on *Corriere della sera* newspaper of June 27, 1959

“There isn’t anyone who is not saying: «Have you seen it? Have you read it? What a disaster! What a horror!» or other expressions equally obvious and unnecessary. Yet it is human, it is inevitable, it’s a vent. As indeed these words are a vent. Our soul needs to react at a news like this one. Not only for a feeling of pity for so many unfortunates. Not only for the close proximity that makes the disaster a little bit ours and that almost makes us feel subtly responsible, because it is the fault of a storm of our home, made of our clouds, of Italian lightning and thunder, indeed Lombard ones. Not only for the diabolical quickness of the tragedy that wiped out more than seventy lives¹ with a crash without any warning, so that it appears especially of human nature.

What makes a strange impression in this case, with a shudder of dismay, is a very banal concept: what we commonly call the fate. Almost always in air disasters there is a cause directly or indirectly attributed to human matters, that in principle one could eliminate at least. An engine failure, an incorrect calculation of the route, a wrong appreciation of the altitude, a collision, a reckless landing: all troubles that man, if he had been more clever, more attentive, more trained, more prudent, would have been able to avoid. And our mind has less difficulty to resign, in a certain sense, when there is a human responsibility.

This time everything was in order, very regular, technically perfect instead. Men have nothing to reproach themselves. The airplane was in full working order, the crew was of the first order, and the route was exact. Not even the most apprehensive and fearful of the passengers had any reason to have a shadow of concern. Sure, the sky was black, a storm was discharging over the countryside. But how can a “Superconstellation”, accustomed to big intercontinental storms, be frightened by a small domestic thunderstorm of the Po Valley?

Giving up the take-off from Malpensa or doing an about-face would have been senseless and against any rule. Nevertheless!

Yet a lightning bolt was enough, one of those many bolts so beautiful to look at, those bolts that cross our sky in these afternoons of June, that seem so cheeky but that usually don’t hurt a flea getting lost in midair, or on the shores of rivers, or on the municipal lightning towers. The sky was huge, the four-engine airplane - gigantic when it was on the ground - was a microscopic little dot in the sky. Among the billions of trajectories that lightning could follow, there was only one damned. And the lightning headed right there. What can human knowledge, wisdom, prudence do? Fate was there pending, unknowable, prepared for who knows how long time through a dizzying chain of causes and effects that nobody will ever rebuild. And, the trajectories of seventy-one lives¹ - left

from the most different and distant countries of the world - swooped concentrically against this atom of darkness.

Farmers, people of those beautiful districts are used to see the magnificent flying crafts, so shiny, shimmering, impassive, a symbol of strength and wealth. Every now and then they stop working and look it up: who knows where those lucky people are going? Who knows the town and the beautiful land they are flying to?

Even yesterday, maybe, someone thought while seeing the "Superconstellation" rising progressively over the woods and moorlands: blessed people, those ones, what I'd give to be in their place! Just a few seconds, and the grotesque and improbable, black dead shreds of that envied happiness swooped down from the clouds".

(Original version taken from: Viganò Lorenzo (edited by), the «nera» of Dino Buzzati, vol. 2 (incubi), op. cit., pages 109-113)

⁽¹⁾ Buzzati wrote this article few hours after the plane crash; a wrong number of the victims was reported by many newspapers including *Corriere della sera*.