

‘THE SELF-INDULGENCE OF AN ARTIST’

“Oh, what a happy fate, to sit in the quiet room of an inherited house among nothing but calm, settled things and to hear in the casual light-green garden outside the first tentative notes of the titmouse, and the village clock in the distance. To sit there and look at a warm strip of afternoon sun and to know much about the girls of the past and to be a poet. And to think that I too would have become such a poet if I had been able to live somewhere, anywhere in the world, in one of the many closed-up country houses that no one bothers about. I would only have needed one room (the light room in the gable). I would have lived in it with my old things, the family portraits, the books. And I would have had an easy chair and flowers and dogs, and a sturdy stick for the stony paths. And nothing else.”

– Rainer Maria Rilke, from *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910)

“Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after.”

– Henry David Thoreau, from *Walden* (1854)

In later years I’ve spent about 2 months in seclusion in an old peasant’s house in the Swedish countryside.

It is no easy task getting there. I have to take a train, then a bus, then a countryside service taxi. Lastly a 5 km walk awaits me.

Oh, but how wondrous it is to plunge with open arms into the deafening silence of this deserted place!

Once I’m there I have a somewhat strict routine that I try to abide by.

I’m usually awakened by the sound of grazing sheep outside my window, no later than 8 o’clock.

I get up and immediately I’m on my way to the other end of the house, making sure not to bump my head into the low ceiling joists.

Once safely arrived in the kitchen I make myself a very strong cup of black coffee.

I pour it into my little Japanese pottery cup. It fits perfectly in my hand.

There’s a little dachshund following me around, I take it out for a walk.

Bergman, during his long stays in the countryside, would bring a dog of the exact same breed.

When I return from the morning walk, I grab the cup. I need more coffee to spark the brain.

I’ve put a desk in front of a window looking out over the fields.

There on that table certain demanding books await me. I usually pick a text of no more than 30 pages of philosophy.

I find it is sensible to commence the day with the most demanding intellectual enterprise while the mind is still fierce and febrile after the long night’s rest.

I begin to read, the whole text. There can be no exceptions from this rule.

Only when this is well accomplished it is time for breakfast.

Breakfast is either yoghurt with müsli, or a more massive meal comprised of eggs, pancetta, beans and bread.

Now I locate my slippers, and I put on a sweater for it is cold in the place where I'm about to go next.

I've taken the liberty of furnishing a little nearby guest house into a make shift cinema. I have a long list of films that I have a deep desire to acquaint myself with.

I consult myself with some of the masters of cinema. Many of them made lists of their favorite films. With a satisfied grin I examine these hard to obtain lists of geniuses.

For the morning screening I always choose a potential masterpiece, something renown. I will use the remainder of the day to digest this first film of the day. I would gladly watch another one, but by now the sun has circled midway around the guest house, making it too clear to see anything on the silver screen.

Besides it is nearly time for lunch.

Lunch usually consists of a corn husk. Rye bread, roast beef, horseradish.

To help digestion I embark out on a long afternoon stroll.

Walking stick in hand. Dior hunter's jacket, handmade french rubber boots, a black hat in the style of Antonio Das Mortes. A man should have in his possession the correct attire for such an endeavor.

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In the immense forests I wander.

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They abound with creatures: wild boars, foxes, badgers, porcupines, rabbits.

I have to keep the dog on a tight leash. He is a hunting dog, and there is nothing more he desires than to give way to his instincts. But if I let him go he will run away, and that will be the last I see of him.

I nearly lost him a couple of years ago. I tore my clothes as I went around looking for him. I found him in a pile of snow shivering.

I won't allow that to happen again.

Upon my return to the house I have the habit of enjoying a little glass of spirits.

Either a good glass of sherry or a glass of aged cognac (at least 6 years old), or a glass of port wine (always Portuguese.)

My choice will depend on the mood of the day.

Never more than a single glass, just enough to spark the mood a little notch.

It's also time for doggie to have a little biscuit.

Now everyone has had his little treat. Let us retire to the living room, shall we?

I recline on the divan, I close my eyes momentarily, usually more reading ensues. Now the mind is more weary, therefore it will be exposed to lighter stuff, prose; a book about Caesar perhaps, or a bit of the immortal Stendhal.

I have acquired a habit out there in the wilderness. Sometimes it is as if my hand is possessed by its own will. It crawls up over my stomach, slowly continues up towards my chest, and then pauses before it settles in the gap between two buttons in my shirt. I'm reminded of the great life of a certain General of course. It is a quite comfortable posture let me tell you. I like to keep my hand like that strolling around the estate. Just to check that everything is as it should be. As if I were inspecting my troops.

The whole day immersed in silence. A bumble bee flies by and that's a great event! How miraculous it is! Sometimes I find myself in tears.

As the afternoon comes to an end, the stomach starts rumbling again, I'm driven towards the kitchen. I spend hours preparing the biggest meal of the day. The dog watches me with great anticipation. He knows he will enjoy the leftovers of a potentially majestic meal. Sometimes enchiladas with cilantro, other days Thai food with chilies. A rich peasant diet.

Lady night has clad herself in a black gown. It is time for another film. Again it is time to expose oneself to dreams materialized in the form of moving images. I have discovered that it doesn't work if I watch two masterpieces a day. It will clog the mind. Of course one piece of cake won't suffice, but you have to know how many pieces will do it for you, just before you reach that dreadful state of nausea. So instead I watch something that I expect not to be a completely overwhelming chef d'oeuvre. I still want to leave some space in my mind for the first grand experience that I had earlier. On the other hand if the first film of the day turned out to be a disappointment, I throw myself gladly and without delay into the arms of other more worthy masters. They are all extremely delighted to show me their tricks.

Before I return to the bed chambers of the main house, I usually pause by the balustrades of the little stair.

There for a brief moment I gaze into the infinite forest whilst I listen to the echoes of the deer in heat. The forest acquires mythological quality; it becomes the Beyond. The cries! It sounds like monsters lurking around in there.

Why do I do this? Why the solitude? Why the monotony? Because it allows me to think. To really really think. It does not befit, it does not behoove a gentleman of shall we say a more refined constitution to waste his time on meaningless chores. When you're unconcerned with all the necessary trivialities of a day, you become more affected by and open to more abstract thought. Suddenly but un-strangely the portals open, and you plunge into the Kingdom of Fantasy.

I went there in the search for ideas, but I've soon realized that that sort of thinking won't get me anywhere. They will come of their own accord. I just have to sit and wait. So I sit still and listen until they present themselves.

They will make themselves known in the form of a knocking, sometimes on the door, on other occasions on a window.

There it is. The idea! I stagger to my feet to greet it with a deep bow. I invite it into the salon. We sit together.

They're black with a sort of foggy contour. No face, no clearly defined limbs. They always sit in the same wicker chair. We sit there gazing at each other. Sometimes hours pass. It's almost unnoticeable, but suddenly I realize that the idea has moved away from the chair. Levitating in the air, with the subtlest movement it moves towards me, slowly floating over the coffee table. In order to enter. Usually through my nose, although sometimes through my ears.

As the Western world moves towards a lifestyle of increased acceleration, some of us devote ourselves to presence and slowness.

In August when I return to house I feel restless. I unpack everything. I sit down, only to get up a moment later. But within a couple of days, the restlessness dissipates. I slowly give in, and blessed silence and peace overtakes me.

So I encourage you all, Danish artists, as well as artists of other nationalities!

Look towards the East. Denmark is small and densely populated, whereas Sweden is vast and humans are few. If you, like I, long for solitude and all its blessings, go there!

Houses are plentiful. The prices are affordable.

*This text was written in relation to the work *Der Geist Des Lebens*