

A praia pequena, formando uma baía pequeníssima, excluída do mundo por dois promontórios em miniatura, era, naquelas férias de três dias, o meu retiro de mim mesmo. Descia-se para a praia por uma escada tosca, que começava, em cima, em escada de madeira, e a meio se tornava em recorte de degraus na rocha, com corrimão de ferro ferrugento. E, sempre que eu descia a escada velha, e sobretudo da pedra aos pés para baixo, saía da minha própria existência, encontrando-me.

Dizem os ocultistas, ou alguns deles, que há momentos supremos da alma em que ela recorda, com a emoção ou com parte da memória, um momento, ou um aspecto, ou uma sombra, de uma encarnação anterior. E então, como regressa a um tempo que está mais próximo que o seu presente da origem e do começo das coisas, sente, em certo modo, uma infância e uma libertação.

Dir-se-ia que, descendo aquela escada pouco usada agora, e entrando lentamente na praia pequena sempre deserta, eu empregava um processo mágico para me encontrar mais próximo da mónada possível que sou. Certos modos e feições da minha vida quotidiana – representados no meu ser constante por desejos, repugnâncias, preocupações – sumiam-se de mim como emboscados da ronda, apagavam-se nas sombras até se não perceber o que eram, e eu atingia um estado de distância íntima em que se me tornava difícil lembrar-me de ontem, ou conhecer como meu o ser que em mim está vivo todos os dias. As minhas emoções de constantemente, os meus hábitos regularmente irregulares, as minhas falas com outros, as minhas adaptações à constituição social do mundo – tudo isto me parecia coisas lidas algures, páginas inertes de uma biografia impressa, pormenores de um romance qualquer, naqueles capítulos intervalares que lemos pensando em outra coisa, e o fio da narrativa se esbambeia até cobrear pelo chão.

Então, na praia rumorosa só das ondas próprias, ou do vento que passava alto, como um grande avião inexistente, entregava-me a uma nova espécie de sonhos – coisas informes e suaves, maravilhas da impressão profunda, sem imagens, sem emoções, limpas como o céu e as águas, e soando, como as volutas desrendando-se do mar alçante do fundo de uma grande verdade; tremulamente de um azul oblíquo ao longe, esverdeando na chegada com transparências de outros tons verde-sujos, e, depois de quebrar, chiando, os mil braços desfeitos, e os desalongar em areia amorenada e espuma desbabada, congregando em si todas as ressacas, os regressos à liberdade da origem, as saudades divinas, as memórias, como esta que informemente me não doía, de um estado anterior, ou feliz por bom ou por outro, um corpo de saudade com alma de espuma, o repouso, a morte, o tudo ou nada que cerca como um grande mar a ilha de naufragos que é a vida.

E eu dormia sem sono, desviado já do que via a sentir, crepúsculo de mim mesmo, som de água entre árvores, calma dos grandes rios, frescura das tardes tristes, lento arfar do peito branco do sono de infância da contemplação.

– Fernando Pessoa, *O Livro do Desassossego*

For fourteen successive years the gardens at Bilignin were my joy, working in them during the summers and planning and dreaming of them during the winters. The summers frequently commenced early in April with the planting, and ended late in October with the last gathering of the winter vegetables. Bilignin surrounded by mountains and not far from the French Alps – from higher ground a few miles away Mont Blanc was frequently visibly – made early planting uncertain. One year we lost the first planting of string beans, another year the green peas were caught by late frost. It took me several years to know the climate and quite as many more to know the weather. Experience is never at a bargain price. Then too I obstinately refused to accept the lore of the farmers, judging it, with the prejudice of a townswoman, to be nothing but superstition. They told me never to transplant parsley, and not to plant it on Good Friday. We did it in California, was my weak reply. They said not to plant at the moment of the new or full moon. The seeds would be as indifferent as I was, was my impatient answer to this. But it was not. Before the end of our tenancy of the lovely house and gardens at Bilignin, I had become not only weather-wise but a fairly successful gardener.

In the spring of 1929 we became tenants of what had been the manor of Bilignin. We were enchanted with everything. But after careful examination of the two large vegetable gardens – the lower on a level with the terrace garden in front of the house, and the other on a considerably higher level and a distance from the court and portals – it was to my horror that I discovered the state they were in. Nothing but potatoes had been planted the year before. Poking about with a heavy stick, there seemed to be some resistance in a corner followed by a rippling movement. The rubbish and weeds would have to be cleaned out at once. In six days the seven men we mobilised in the village had accomplished this. In the corner where I had poked, a snake's nest and several snakes had been found. But so were raspberries and strawberries.

(...) The weeds remained a tormenting, backbreaking experience all the summers we spent at Bilignin. After the autumn gathering was over, the topsoil would be renewed. Fortunately there was plenty of water. Only once was there a drought, when the ox carts brought water in barrels from the stream in the valley below. For watering we had bought three hundred feet of hose.

The work in the vegetables – Gertrude Stein was undertaking for the moment the care of the flowers and box hedges – was a full-time job and more. Later it became a joke, Gertrude Stein asked me what I saw when I closed my eyes, and I answered, Weeds. That, she said, was not the answer, and so weeds were changed to strawberries. The small strawberries, called by the French wood strawberries, are not wild but cultivated. It took me an hour to gather a small basket for Gertrude Stein's breakfast. And later when there was a plantation of them in the upper garden our young guests were told that if they cared to eat them they should do the picking themselves.

The first gathering of the garden in May of salads, radishes and herbs made me feel like a mother about her baby – how could anything so beautiful be mine. And this emotion of wonder filled me for each vegetable as it was gathered every year. There is nothing that is comparable to it, as satisfactory or as thrilling, as gathering the vegetables one has grown. (...)

– Alice B. Toklas, *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*

(...) For when we take rational steps to suspend the operation of the rational mind, the inhibition does not result in chaos, but in the apprehension of the Universe by means of a faculty to which the laws of the Reason do not apply; and when, returning to the normal state, we seek to analyse our experience, we find that the description abounds in rational absurdities. (...)

– Aleister Crowley, *Little Essays Towards Truth*