

A Walk in the Netherlands

When I was out on the road yesterday I left the motorway to drive through the countryside. I had just checked out without having breakfast and decided to look for a bakery in one of the villages outside of town. Although I went quite far, I was not successful and so tried all kinds of roads to find my way back.

In one of the villages then I took a wrong turn and soon found myself right out in the fields, in a place that made me stop and get out of the car. The wind was cold but fresh and I could smell the sea although it was still quite far away; I looked around and wondered about the last time I had seen this – a landscape that mainly consisted of sky and of clouds, of wind and this dazzling sunshine; it felt like a hundred years ago that I had seen a place like this.

Beside myself there was a deep ditch full of glistening water, it led far up to the horizon where it might discharge into the sea. Revived by the fresh wind, I started to walk, thinking about the fact that also the water was travelling here and that in the 17th century it had been Dutch experts who had dug such ditches into the moorlands of East Anglia; it was a major beginning of turning it into fertile grounds on which today all kinds of crops are grown. Right here, at this moment, there was no crop visible; the landscape looked quite wintry, but the tired-looking greenish grass promised that it was only asleep and that it would all look different in a few months' time.

For a moment I looked over my shoulder as all my luggage was stored in the car, but there was no need to worry; over here no one would dare to lay his hands on it. So I went on, along the ditch and through the wet and sticky soil that heavily clung to my shoes, and suddenly I felt a click inside myself that I already knew from moments in which I had felt that something was meant to be.

This walk in this landscape now was meant to be, it crossed my mind, like so many things were meant to be on this trip. Like the talkative cat the day before yesterday that had politely and gracefully walked with me through some parts of the village in which I was staying. It was meant to be that I had met a melancholic Italian with Greek and Spanish ancestors who had been such nice company while I was having my pizza. He shook my hand, saying: "You know what? You now have a friend, here in the Netherlands", and he really meant it. The wild geese on their way to the south who knew they would return in spring. It was right to be here, at this time, in this place. Even the tears that had rolled down my cheeks during that concert, even they had been meant to be. My recurrent feeling of being strange, as if I was wearing someone else's dress and makeup. The glass wall and the distance, they too had their reasons for turning up in life like the hare and the hedgehog. But I, too, was meant to be, like the grass that had got through the time of winter and now, pale and ruffled, soaked up the water and the sun, dreaming of the time when it would be vigorously flowering.

I turned round although I would have loved to go on, but my stomach's growl also created a feeling of being alive. So I went back, suddenly thinking about some of the people I might see when I'd come home – neighbours and the cousins of cousins. Some tended to belittle the fact that I, at 36 years of age, travelled that far "just to see a band". They said they had more important things to do and that they were "grown-ups", mature and experienced – hanging on in quiet desperation is *not only* the English way. But still it doesn't seem to be a matter of age, does it? Just to leave one's luggage behind from time to time and go – in order to do something you love, to do something strange, even if it is just a walk like this one; to be who you want to be, or to be who you actually are, which in its ideal form is one and the same. And not to run away but to walk towards oneself, fully aware of where you are going – quite a matter of courage.