190205 (Tu)

1:56 pm

From *In Other Words* by J. Lahiri:

Every day, when I read, I find new words. Something to underline, then transfer to the notebook. It makes me think of a gardener pulling weeds. I know that my work, just like the gardener’s, is ultimately folly. Something desperate. Almost, I would say, a Sisyphean task. It’s impossible for the gardener to control nature perfectly. In the same way it’s impossible for me, no matter how intense my desire, to know every Italian word.

...

I don’t think my project is a waste of time. I know that its beauty lies in the act of gathering, not in the result.

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And so in the morning, while sweeping in the backyard, gathering, often picking up with my bare hands, all the fallen leaves, I think about the "meaning" of this daily task, this perpetual repetitive chore. As long as I'm living, alive and healthy enough, in this house, yes, this will go on and on and on. I think of Lahiri and Alan Watts and the meaning of no meaning. It's play, it's life, it's something you do because you have to, you want to, even though there are no rewards, no money or fame or admiring audience or loyal witness to keep you going. You keep going because it lets you let time pass. You do it because you choose to do it and you choose not to do other things. You do it because it lets you forget yourself, your mind, your loneliness. You do it knowing that tomorrow or even in a few hours your work has been undone again by nature, by time, by life.

Leaves fall again. The order you have restored falls back into disorder. There is no end, as long as you are alive, to all this sweeping and dusting and washing and cooking and maintaining the house and your health. And when you are no longer alive, leaves will keep on falling, scattering, claiming spaces on the ground and in other people's lands and times and thoughts. So, yes, Lahiri and all these other writers know what it means to be alive and to be human. Colm Toibin in *The Master* voices Henry James: "it is our duty to live all we can ... we must be ready for change." And ready for paradox and ambiguity and mystery. Toibin's novel says life is a mystery. We all know it can also be a chore. A Sisyphean task, says Lahiri. But also a game, says Watts. Nothing to be taken too seriously maybe because it is serious enough as it is. Serious and not serious. Like leaves falling. Like me gathering them into the compost corner of the backyard. Letting them rot there and transform into something fine, something useful. Letting them fill my thoughts, my time, for a while. Then letting them slip away, fade back into time and space, into soil and air.

4:37 pm

Oh, and what I was really going to say... while I was sweeping, gathering fallen leaves in the backyard, I was thinking: *Sometimes I feel ok. Sometimes I don't feel ok. And that's ok.*

And one more thing. Pooped after lunch. Almost regular bowel movement. Well- formed, normal-color, sufficient poop. All these kalabasa okra pechay culinary experiments, and generally meat-free diet (almost like I miss pork and beef), are paying off. Yeah, gratitude, peace in the small things. Take in the good. Register the good stuff. So even when I'm not ok, I am still ok. Yes, Kate Braestrup, it isn't enough and it is enough. :)