

DETAILS FROM THE LIFE OF A FIN-DE-SIECLE AUTHOR, TWENTIETH CENTURY

BY TERENCE SELLERS

Such are the conditions of your existence, my daughter: cease your weeping! Where is that intellectual strength when you need it?

You will wish you were dead every day of your life. But it will be revealed to you that suicide is no escape: its secret trick and occult glory is that upon your suicide, you will be instantly returned to the moment of your birth, and be forced to relive every moment of your sorry life and sordid childhood to the letter.

To mention in passing that childhood - your parents will care nothing for you. All your many talents, that you alone will painstakingly cultivate - these people will do everything in their power to blast to cinders. You will be put to work in your own home like a servant, waiting upon a slovenly woman you will be told is your mother. And a man called your father will

come in very late each evening, howl like the animal he is and cause the air to curdle around you. But somehow you will know these are not your real parents - No, not your real parents. For such as you are can have none.

To console you, We will possess you of a sensibility for the refined in materiality, a delicacy of the interior senses, an instinct for lyric and the rhythmic word. Your eye will aspire to all that is spiritual in Art...and for Us to be assured that your tastes shall remain unsullied by materiality, We shall have you stricken with the most abject poverty, so you might possess only those things that have no worldly value.

By the age of seventeen, this freedom from the grossness of things will render your perception of lyric ecstatic: song, color and light will unfurl their limbs for you with an especial abandon.

But by the age of twenty, your heart will contract under the constraint of the lucre. Your sensibility will newly become the source of especial torment. As a fresh buttercup and a priceless topaz will be valued the same for color and magnificence, so will you chafe at the profane hand the topaz adorns...

Possessed with a facility in the Letter, in awe and in love with its power to conquer, transcend and determine, you will design to become an Author. But perversely we have had you born in an age where Noise burgeons... where sentences multiply with a profligacy intolerable to the Ear, as a dozen new machines spew out the waste products of thousands of mediocre minds.

You will be shocked to find 'books' well-suited for the stopping of doors clogging the bookstores, as the vast industrial machinery of the publishing conglomerates work round the clock to nauseate your sensibility, and sicken your pen to silence.

This roiling seethe of so-called literature, of spurious information, the frenzied gabble of market-place data will first confuse, then corrupt your potential audience, already ill-educated to start with. A passel of mawkish, well-fed wordsmiths will be responsible for the emission of this thin stream of mucuous... speckled with bits of pre-fabricated factoid, to sticky the mind and render it unable to exercise itself upon your stricter lyric.

And as twenty-five sources of barking babble will not pre-inform the populace of your existence, your market value, your sex-life or your tailor, these erstwhile readers will not even begin to focus their eyes upon you anyway.

Paranoid, you will brick yourself into an ivory tower, where you might console yourself with the production of small, enamelled icons to the Word - if not to the Letter - hoarding your sentences as one might relics off the corpse of a dead and sainted one - and whereupon, on occasional turns of the moon, glows a drop of strangely tormented blood - except that you are unfortunately not yet dead, and only possibly an Adept.

Concerning your lovers? Cursed with a beauty you will never recognize as your own (so withdrawn are you from externals), pursued by a hundred unworthy paramours, none of whom shall ever really know you, still ever will your passion outstrip that of your lovers. No rain shall ever fall upon the arid hearts of your exploiters.

You will squander your heart upon one who will love you the least of any. Resigned thereafter to that worst experience of love, and you will commit yourself to solitude, inflicting it upon yourself through Art.

So will your devotion will pose upon a blasted landscape, wind-whipped and abandoned. At least you will embrace the worst degradation. Your ability to love, perfected in fire, will be sacrificed to the dregs of a lascivious

underworld. Your need for love will dance naked before their blind eyes. But none of these squalid embraces will defile you, for within your mind will go on burning the exquisite profile of your Ideal Beloved.

In the end, all your existence will be nourished on dreams - and so you will cultivate the art of prolonging them. To speed that apotheosis, you will suffer from a nearly-fatal accident in a modern machines, which will throw your body across just that desert wasteland you traversed so many times... In your narrow, white hospital bed, beneath a clean bandage, your mind will sink into the blessed, slow maelstrom of a prolonged coma. Still, silent, seemingly insensible, your life will at last blossom, unmolested by the vulgar probings of so-called friends. Your life will flourish its frail emblem across a lush landscape, infinitely consoling, and your song will unravel uninterrupted in your deepening mind and caress your soul as never any human hand caressed.

Those who say they love you will wonder at the marble calm of your broken hand upon the counterpane. They might lift your fingers and marvel that a pulse still quickens there - glancing quickly at your sunken face for the marble eyes' opening. That one who loved you will until you are dead linger by your side, as though by an obscure idol... and wonder at the lack of worshippers.