

Janne Risum

The Delicate Touch of Blue Fluted China

Of course I knew that my story was not really real. If it had been so, then why make it up? The adults did not always understand. In this way I learned the power of fiction. I also learned that of the stories of life, and the ways we are willing to face them. In that sense I grew up in a theatre. In my everyday family life as well, facts were never just facts.

One weekend when I was staying with friends, I had to prepare for a lecture. I withdrew for an hour into the silence of a remote room, so as not to make a nuisance of myself. I soon became absorbed. After a while the door opened. In came the small boy of the house, carrying one of his cartoon books. He said nothing, but sat down beside me on the old sofa. Huddling in his corner, he began to study his cartoons. Turning his pages one by one, he carefully watched my progress, and the way in which I turned mine. I am a female theatre scholar, and he had not yet learned to read. Nevertheless we had established a small studio of our own.

In European culture since ancient Greece, the role model for this kind of creative relationship has tended to be the male couple. Yet the *eros* of knowledge has many shapes. Indeed, the sparks between any adult and child, two children, or two adults, indulging in the same pursuit of knowledge independent of their actual age and sex, are just slightly different gestalts of the same pursuit of creativity. The spark exists in the present tense. It has the playful quality of reciprocal and unconditional love. The quality of the spark, and the experience it kindles, is the only essential thing.

Love, in this sense, is the reference point of any professionalism which may make a real difference. In this, an answer may find a question, or a question an answer, perhaps never sought intentionally, uttered maybe decades ago, or never stated before biological time was up. This kind of knowledge not only resides in your head, or in your latest performance, or book. It is manifest throughout your body, and in all your actions. Even in your mistakes, in your mannerisms, and in your idiosyncrasies. No such professional relationship is pure. Nor does it necessarily last. Yet once you have experienced it, you know what it is. And when you miss it, you know what you miss.

In Denmark the weather is constantly changing. Each new day reminds me of the beauty of extremes. I have always thought that the privilege of theatre is that of ever changing space, insatiable and inexhaustible. Some

families stick to one profession. In mine we have all chosen different ones. I am the only one ever to have chosen theatre.

Outside my childhood home two persons particularly influenced my process of formation as a theatre scholar. A woman and a man. They never met. One was family, and the other was not. Both of them are now dead. On the surface, the two of them have only one point in common. That crucial point combines a playful attitude towards life with an appreciation of tradition. It is: knowing the importance of always eating from beautiful china.

The woman was my paternal grandmother. She was fifty-four years older than me. She gave me her full attention and love, until I was twenty-eight, when she died at the age of eighty-three. She taught me that life is only worth living within a tradition, but that you have to find it within yourself.

The man was the Danish pioneer of practical theatre studies on a university level, the gifted and volatile Tage Hind. Tage could do nothing by halves, and consequently frequently did. He was thirty-one years older than me. As a young student of twenty-two, I chose him as my personal master of theatre studies at the University of Copenhagen. Wholeheartedly, in my formative years he left it to me to form my own personal pattern, by choosing among the sparks and the splinters. He knew that there was no other way. This summer he died almost eighty years old, shortly before my own forty-ninth birthday.

I live with them every day. I frequently discuss with them. I will tell you why. I will tell you about myself.

My paternal grandmother grew up in a very poor family of farmers and fishermen in Jutland, who could not support all their children. From the age of nine she served as a maid on a farm. She developed into an ambitious young woman, who went to Copenhagen to work as a housemaid. Here she met a young police constable. At that

point in her story my grandmother always giggled. Patrolling the streets of Copenhagen during their period of courtship, my future grandfather would see her in the window and whistle. They had three children. My father was their youngest son.

I am her fourth grandchild of six. One year after the war my father met my mother at a sports meeting. He was eight years older than her. She came from a working class district. She was the oldest child of a dairyman and his wife, who could not afford to give her an education. Finishing school, she had found work as a secretary. Nineteen years old she became pregnant with me, and they married. I was born in 1947, and my only sister seven years later.

To me, the blessings of bicycles and books are a matter of course. I grew up in a home blessed by having no car and no television set. During our summer vacations we explored the rural parts of Denmark on bike. And all the adults in my family would read aloud to me from whatever source lay to hand, newspapers, weeklies, or books. I listened to stories and plays on the radio, and had bedtime stories. My father preferred the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. We especially enjoyed *The Flowers of Little Ida*. We read it over and over again. Each time we heartily laughed at the stupid philistine bore, who kept trying to spoil the sport of Ida and her playmates by warning against "that silly fantasy!".

Without my knowing it Andersen had already taught me an essential lesson. Real storytelling is seduction and theatricality. A real storyteller is one whom you hear and see with your tongue, because you cannot help it, having been tempted beyond repair to read out loud.

I had many playmates. Most families in our block had one or two kids. I danced and sang in the kindergarten and in the school yard, as well as in the spacious backyard belonging to the suburban block in which we lived. Our backyard was also

occasionally visited by street singers, accordion players, a man with a flea circus, and another man with acrobatic white mice. The mothers watched from the kitchen windows, wrapped up their coins in small pieces of paper, and threw them into the yard. We children picked up the small coin parcels, and handed them to the performers.

Yet neither at school, nor at home, did I like the hen-picking order of the gang life which some of the other children seemed to be taking for granted. Luckily this was one of the things in which I found my parents' full support. They were no admirers of the blind mechanisms of peer group life.

They rather preferred to send me to dance lessons in the dance institute just across the street. It had big mirrors on the walls, and end-of-season dance contests. My legs were long thin sticks, and I tended to stoop. I frequently had to content myself with studying the haircuts of my partners. Yet I still possess an engraved silverplate plaque, testifying to my winning the children's C-team contest in 1958.

My father worked as an assistant engineer. In his leisure time he was a talented amateur photographer, studying books on photographic technique. His photographic laboratory became one of my first practical acquaintances with an artistic process. I loved to visit him there in the dark. I watched him expose the sheets of photo paper under the lens one by one, and plunge them into the developer. Guessing at what the paper might reveal this time, I eagerly waited at the vessel for the first faint shadow to appear.

MY GRANDMOTHER

After the war my paternal grandmother's pension allowed her to escort her six grandchildren to many cultural events and artistic experiences, beginning with annual summer visits to the amusement park of Tivoli, with its concerts and Pantomime Theatre, and winter visits to the famous Circus Schumann with the outstanding

clown Charlie Rivel. Later she fancied Scottish tattoos and screen versions of American musicals. And on the first night of the Copenhagen production of *My Fair Lady*, she lined us all up on the kerb in front of the theatre entrance to watch the arrival of the celebrities. The main event was the arrival of Ingrid Bergman. I managed to catch a short glimpse of her face and elegant evening dress. This was the whole event. After this my grandmother took us home and served dinner. Another theatrical mystery dwelt on the apartment just above my grandmother's. Here a young woman lived with her parents. As I was told, she had been "discovered", and had appeared in avant-garde films. But she looked quite normal to me. She used curlers just like everybody else, and I had not seen the films.

As grandparents tend to be, my grandmother was probably much more liberal with me, than she had ever been with my father. I doted on her and loved visiting her. Her fine blue fluted china was a marvel. It was a small photo laboratory in itself. Bending over my steaming tea cup at the risk of burning my nose, I admired the delicate curves of the china, and enjoyed the smell and the taste of the tea. When I lifted the empty cup against the light of the lamp, the thin china became transparent. From the inside I could see the whole pattern on the outside, and the soft glow of the lamp as well. I also discovered, that I could do the same trick with my hands. Spreading my fingers in front of the light bulb, I could make my skin glow, and reveal the lines of my bones.

From her balcony my grandmother fed the birds. From there she waved to us when we arrived, and from there she waved us goodbye when we left, until she could see us no longer. She grew flowers everywhere. The plant most dear to her, ominously spreading in one of her balcony windows, was an ugly and voluminous succulent, which she addressed with great awe as *The Queen of the Night*. She told me that it

only produces a flower on very rare occasions. The bud does not burst until night has fallen. The flower only opens for a few hours. But during its short bloom it spreads the finest of odours. To herself and my grandfather, that night used to be a very special occasion. They used to stay up to sit and watch the flower together. Occasionally scowling at the choosy *Queen*, I wondered whether I would ever have the chance. One night I arrived, my chance had come. It had the finest of odours.

When I was seven, my sister was born, and I began school. I liked school, and have been reading intensely ever since.

I am hopelessly indebted to the mellow sun of the late afternoon. Shining through the big windows into my parents' drawing room it wrapped the space in laziness and light. This was my time for browsing. The room had a small, but good, bookcase, and reproductions of paintings on the walls. My favourites were Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, and Renoir's dancing couples in *Moulin de la Galette*. I liked to watch the way in which the sunbeams made the sunflowers and the women's bright costumes come to life.

As a schoolgirl I was able to photograph a poem or a passage of homework in my mind's eye, and recite long passages by heart. I dreamed of becoming a writer, but I only wanted to become a good one. And there were so many kinds. Some of my teachers contented themselves with hearing me say my piece. The better ones invited me to speak my mind. I also invented stories, or commented allegorically on new situations, by using examples or phrases from books. I had a strong sense of justice and considered lying a most dishonourable act. Yet sometimes my fantasy got the better of me, or was not appreciated. I was punished. I was terribly ashamed, but also felt the injustice of it. As I explained, my story just came. I was trying to say something.

Of course I knew that my story was not really real. If it had been so, then why

make it up? The adults did not always understand. In this way I learned the power of fiction. I also learned that of the stories of life, and the ways we are willing to face them. In that sense I grew up in a theatre. In my everyday family life as well, facts were never just facts. With so many contending life stories involved, it was no easy job trying to sort them all out.

This was not so very different from occasionally performing a character in a scene during class at school. I also experimented with that. Performing a comical optimist, I got the idea of making him throw money for the other characters to scramble. The coins should fall to the ground, but keep rolling around. That was the effect. I tried out different ways of opening my purse and tossing the coins. This proved to be much more difficult than I had thought. Another comical character had almost no lines at all. I liked that effect. And what was the right way to perform a biblical shepherd? We were not allowed to stay in the classroom during the breaks, but one day I did so on purpose to try this out. I wanted the shepherd to sing. With the pointer in my hand, I lifted my face towards the open skylight, and sang out to different home-made tunes *The Lord is My Shepherd*. When I was at the top of my voice, a teacher suddenly entered to fetch a book. He threw me out. I was embarrassed. His lenient smile suggested to me, that a less operatic way of expressing myself might work better. And so it did.

My mother was still a young woman. When I was twelve, and my sister was five, she decided to change the perspective of her life. She began to study. First she passed two years of upper secondary school, enabling her to go to university. Then she took her degree in medicine. She never bought herself a desk. Each morning she spread out her books on the family dining table, removing them again when she served our supper, and spreading them out again to read in the evening. At that time medicine was still a male high-status profession with a

somewhat rigid patriarchal tradition. As a studying housewife she suffered many humiliations. She was also torn between her family loyalties and her study. I was proud of her. After her degree she began a career in the Copenhagen hospitals, eventually specialising in dermatology and opening her own clinic. By then I had left home many years beforehand.

Due to this process of emancipation the quality of my childhood changed radically when I was twelve. My mother set an example to me as to how far you can go, when you know what you want, and when you accept that there is always a price to be paid. Her absorption set me free to explore the world on my own. Much as I resented my privilege of premature autonomy in the beginning, I also began to discover its advantages.

The small public library nearby became my second home. I was constantly hunting the shelves for new and exciting stories. As soon as I had finished the actual ones, I rushed back on my bike for a new pile of books. Finding nothing more of interest in the section for children, I switched to nosing around in the section for adults, hunting for detective stories, and books on exotic journeys and strange excavations. A book might attract my attention, simply because a ray of sun made the binding shine, revealing as well the fine particles of dust floating around in the air. In this way I bumped into Shakespeare. I was eleven or so, and had no real idea who he was.

It was a series of volumes of Danish translations. I remember taking them down from the shelf, because they looked quaint and thin, and had a nice binding. They also smelled good, a test to which I attached great importance. And still do. The paper inside was of a good quality, thick and a little yellowed by age, and delicately printed in black with red initial letters. Some of the words looked strange and archaic. The librarian was used to my nosing around. She said I could always give it a try.

I read the books as I would read any other, voraciously and selectively. When a passage, or a scene, did not catch my immediate interest, I simply skipped it, and scanned the text until I became absorbed again. I hunted the worlds the plays disclosed, even though I did not understand all the implications of the words. I would read two or three plays in an afternoon. Occasionally I would read passages aloud. I felt sorry for Romeo and Juliet, for Hamlet and Ophelia, and liked Falstaff and his antics. They are the only plays, whose form I distinctly remember being conscious about at that age. The frequent name confusions among the lovers and the kings in the comedies and the chronicle plays were more tiresome - a never ending novel. After all, Shakespeare was just one infatuation among many, on a par with Tutankhamun and the make-up of Nefertiti. This essentially physical and theatrical approach to art has remained with me ever since.

The schools of Copenhagen ran a big school theatre organisation. It was somewhat conservative and highly respected. At a reduced price, it took classes to see performances especially prepared for their age group. In their day, my parents had been introduced to the world of theatre in that way. Now it was my turn. My school mates and I climbed the bus and ended up in the red plush seats of the big theatres of Copenhagen, eating our candies in the stalls, or throwing them from the dress circle at some unsuspecting victim below. In my free compositions at school I began to comment upon what I had seen. I remember an essay, now lost, wondering what it might take to create illusion on stage, since it obviously did not always work.

On my own initiative I also took ballet classes. Chance would have it, that my Danish ballet master had been trained in the Russian system. He primarily trained professionals, and consequently kept correcting me. Now his French ballet terms made my whole body respond to French sounds, while

developing my muscles and my sense of balance. This new body awareness and plasticity was a revelation to me. I studied with him for two years. He taught me the importance of always maintaining a slight muscular tension while dancing, involving my whole body. He also taught me the importance of always anticipating my next movement by moving my focus, and shaping my movement, in my mind's eye, before carrying out the movement itself.

At school parties I indulged in completely different kinds of dance, rock and roll and disco rhythms. With my new knowledge from ballet I discovered that my dancing became much more interesting when I deliberately danced in slow motion, than when I just jumped up and down. But as I found out, this only worked, if I did not do so all the time. Since I was actually rather shy, those new discoveries came in handy.

My boyfriend and I fell in love in the wings, while staging an old-fashioned school comedy under silent protest. The school had hired a retired actress to mount the production, and she had decided the play. She had appointed the two of us to be her assistant directors. It was an ironic job. She liked us, we liked her, and nobody but her liked the play. He and I complied with her wishes and retired into the wings. As soon as we could, we escaped for long walks in the lake district of Northern Copenhagen; reciting poetry and discussing Beckett. We decided to go to university.

Finishing grammar school, I promised myself that I would never drop any of my languages, including that of dance. On the contrary. At the university I would seek to expand my range. As a student I dropped classical ballet in favour of different kinds of actor's training. But I have kept my vow.

I left home when I was nineteen. I emptied the small bank account which my paternal grandmother had once opened in my name to teach me how to save up for my first home, and bought my first pieces of furniture, a good bookcase and an Asian

wickerwork chair which I still have. I have supported myself economically ever since. In the following years she did not like my long hippie hair and my premature student marriage. As so many others in my generation at the time, I revolted against my parents. They did not like it, of course. She did what she had always done: she stood up for me.

At that time she was a tough and crooked old lady of seventy-five, with severely rheumatic hands and feet and a wonderful smile, still getting up at five or six in the morning, and delicately lifting her little finger, while sipping her first cup of coffee, eagerly studying the morning paper. Then she would frequently climb the bus in her hand-made surgical shoes, all dressed up in her hair-net and hat, departing for one of her many mysterious expeditions. When I revolted she resolutely climbed the bus and came to our small flat to eat our Chinese food, and study our strange posters. My young husband adored her. This was after all 1968.

My student years were my educational journey. I studied for ten years, and I would not have missed a single one of them. I could not afford to travel as much as I wished, but each day was so rich, that it somehow did not matter. Those were the activist years, when we students thought that we just had to reach out to the world, and it would respond in a grateful way. I was studying theatre, literature, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, day and night. New theatre groups kept coming into existence. I got involved with them. One day in my third year of study I also met Tage.

TAGE HIND

Tage Hind had opened his new degree course in Dramaturgy at the University of Aarhus in 1959. In 1969 he moved to Copenhagen. Here he would no longer have a university theatre of his own. Yet he was eager to continue this work. We

trained in the classroom. He was a headstrong personality, and a brilliant, but somewhat elliptic, lecturer. He treated his students as equals. When he sensed the right kind of interest, he was always willing to share his vast knowledge of literature and theatre, inviting his students home.

Tage arrived at the right moment. With a fellow student, I was writing my first book on theatre. We wished to follow the staging of a new play, and interview the artistic staff and a large section of the audience. To break the hierarchy from the very beginning, we invited our supervising professors for tea at my home to present our plan. Tage was the only one to show up. Completing the book took two years of intense work. Biking along in the snow with a tape recorder on my carrier, I asked the same questions to scores of spectators in their homes. Each would respond generously for one to three hours. We made the mistake of computerising all this human response. The resulting statistics, converting persons whose faces I remembered into patterns of attitudes and theatre habits, hardly did more than confirm what was already statistically known. This sour experience cured me forever of the illusions of quantification. Luckily, following the performance and interviewing of the actors, I was given a solid introduction to the realities of life inside a theatre. Writing that part, I skipped the models, and followed my nose to uncover the patterns. I wrote it in no time with much greater joy. The price had been two years. There are no short cuts to good work.

I invited my fellow students to help me set up in my home a study group on Brecht's *The Mother*. I wanted to see what Brecht had to offer in the portrayal of women. I wrote to Ruth Berlau. She approvingly sent me some books, but did not comment on my approach. Our group met to analyse Brecht's stage versions and suggest our own. Naturalism was out of the question. Nor did we wish to stop at the worn-out "Brechtian" acting clichés. Using modern

loose clothes and a guitar, we developed a minimalist version for a bare stage. We adopted a basic stance from rhythmical gymnastics, and based our gestures on that. We tried to construct the characters in space, foregrounding inner conflicts as contrasting positions. I built a small stage model, on which we "staged" all the scenes by taking photos of cardboard silhouettes. We rehearsed and presented one scene ourselves, with myself as the Mother. If our more feminist approach showed at all, it was not in the way we thought, but in the way we moved. It was just an experiment. Some of the others later joined professional theatre groups. But that is another story.

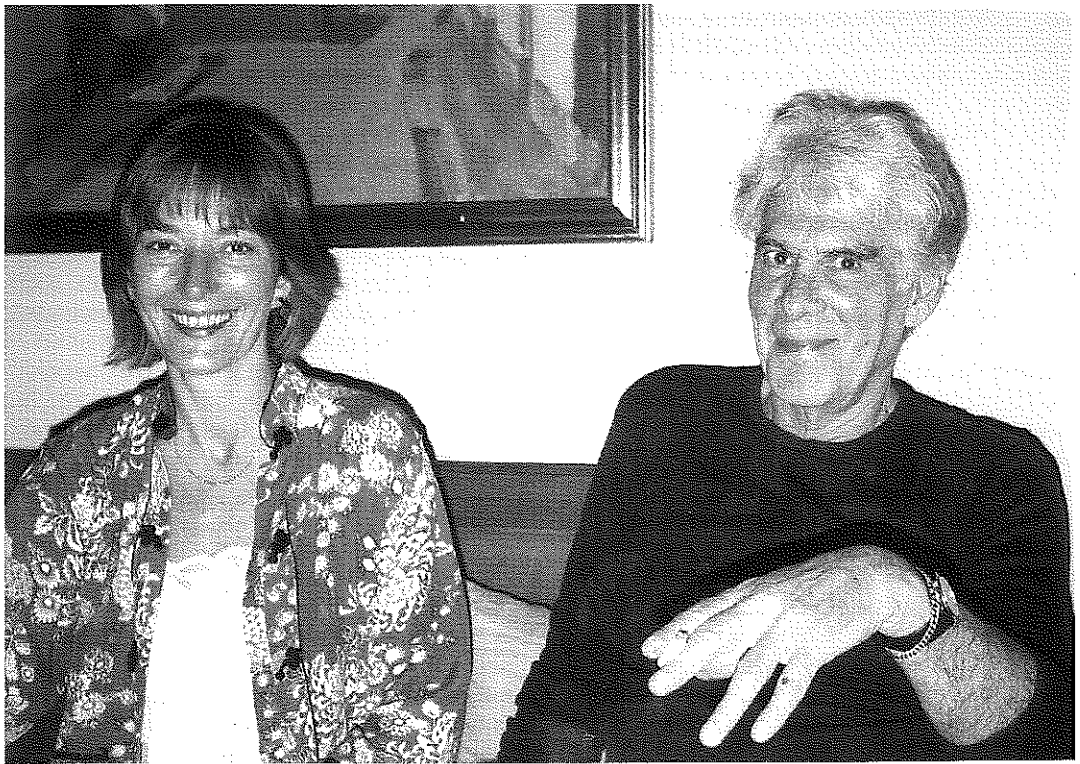
I followed rehearsals at Copenhagen theatres, and occasionally visited my grandmother on my way. She invariably presented me with her special sweet biscuits. She gave me the recipe on condition that I would keep it a family secret. I kept the secret and baked the biscuits. They did not look right. One day I dropped by, I found her preparing to bake them herself. Supervising my every move, she carefully instructed me in how to hold the knife. I should cut wafer thin slices. To do so requires force, reaction velocity, and precision. That was the trick.

Shortly afterwards I divorced. I realised that I was facing the first consequences of the fact that theatre is not a nine to five job. After my divorce I went to live with a group of student friends. For a year we shared an old country house by the sea, beautiful second to none in the summer, and terribly cold in the winter. Then some of us moved to a big attic flat in the Latin Quarter of Copenhagen. Here all the bookshops were just around the corner. Watching the first rays of sun on the roof tiles, after a solid night's work of reading and writing, and hearing the soft morning sounds of the feet on the pedestrian street far below, my feeling of happiness was intense. A constant stream of friends and colleagues kept dropping by, for parties, romances, and academic discussions. Among them were

many anthropologists. Visitors came to stay. One day a theatre group, which I knew from Jutland, might arrive with their sleeping bags and equipment, to perform in Copenhagen. On another a visiting theatre professor from East Germany, who did his best to answer my nosy questions about why a contemporary socialist state had no equivalent of the once so flourishing German tradition of worker's theatre.

I started my university career in my seventh year of study, teaching at the Department of Comparative Literature. For my last lecture before Christmas I decided to make it a tradition to prepare my grand-

mother's biscuits. Doing so alone on one December morning in the big empty flat, after the others had left, I was in a hurry. I started the oven and rushed to take my bath. Smelling that the first biscuits were ready, I ran to the kitchen naked, and set to work. Taking out the last baking sheets, I looked up to see my students entering the kitchen. They had decided to pay me a surprise visit. We burst out laughing. Now we had all turned the world upside down. Soon our procession was walking through the streets in our winter clothes, heading for the lecture room with biscuits and books. That morning has the peculiar flavour of those years.



Janne Risum and Tage Hind.

My paternal grandmother began to suffer from acute osteoporosis. Her brittle bones were giving way. She fell in her home and broke them. Unable to sustain herself, she wound up her estate. She wished to leave to her family whatever she had, while she was still able to decide. She gave me all her blue fluted china, apart from a few cups and plates she would need in her new residential home. I told her that I would use it only on Sundays. She gave me a determined look, and replied that she wished me to use it every day. I have done so ever since.

Tage lived in a nearby street. When he divorced, he began to drop by more frequently. He asked me to live with him. I did so for some years. Entering his beautiful old apartment was like entering a stage set. It faced a central park with a Renaissance castle. He had many visitors. Others could not stand him. His life style, aiming at living the work, primarily differed from my own by a marked eccentricism. For that purpose he had transformed all his spacious rooms into one studio. They had open doors and bookcases stuffed with books. Each room had a desk with work-in-progress spread out on it. In proud imitation of Kierkegaard he also had an old-fashioned reading desk, at which he wrote standing, pacing the room to clear his thoughts. He wrote personal notes in an endlessly growing number of notebooks.

Unlike Kierkegaard, he always had a number of mistresses, most of them young. He never concealed that fact from me. I would have been blind not to know. We never gave up our separate lives. This was from the start a basic agreement between us. The special dynamic of our relationship was a mutual professional attraction. He cleared two big rooms for me. I preferred to have only one desk, and to close my doors, whenever I wished to. Along my walls my bookcases were growing with the speed of mushrooms, and so was my writing.

Tage was no easy personality to live with. For all I know, neither was I. Tage was half-Russian by birth, but had been adopted

as a small child by a Danish vicar and his wife. In some respects he approached life and art as a natural actor, and in a feminine way. I have seen no impersonation of Karen Blixen as convincing and as funny as his.

His own spiritual master had been the outstanding Danish religious historian Vilhelm Grønbech, whose basic trust in him as a student, when he had been just a young nondescript, had marked him for good. Fighting his own tempestuous temper, he wished to pass on that same trust to me.

He was essentially a modernist, introducing me to the worlds of the Russian theatre innovators, and of Asian theatre, and open to anything new. I contradicted him as a matter of course. Some of his mistresses told me they envied me that. I always wondered why they did not do so themselves.

He inspired me, I inspired him. He always respected my work and supported it in any way he could. We spoke our minds, agreed or disagreed, invented or tested new lines of thought, no matter how crazy. We read aloud to each other what we had just written, and literally talked for days. The essence of our relationship still resounds within me. It was an invaluable creative intimacy. Friendship, enthusiasm, playfulness, humour, metaphorical invention, good living, and *joie de vivre* all became one. They became everyday life.

Those were my years of "tuning" myself, as it were, in rehearsal. They definitively formed me professionally. Anyone, who has had the luck to experience an initiation like that, will know that you have forever lost the capacity to settle for anything less. You will also know that one day the journey of initiation will be over. It will be time to move on.

When my grandmother died in 1976, I had just taken my university degree and seriously started my career. I asked the best florist in town, Erik Bering, to compose the spray of flowers which I brought to her funeral. Tage saw me off, and comforted me

when I returned. Later her only daughter, my aunt, brought me the remaining china neatly wrapped up in tissue paper in a box.

Tage and I co-operated with any new theatre experiment which caught our interest. Yet one thing we characteristically never did. Tage had assisted Barba and Odin Teatret when they decided to move from Norway to Denmark, and had supported and followed their work ever since. He went to Opole to participate in Grotowski's para-theatrical activities. He gave me vivid accounts, and wrote about his experiences. But he never once invited me to join him on his visits. We felt alike. We felt in the seventies that too many people uncritically elevated Grotowski and Barba to an unhealthy guru status totally out of proportion. That is, they stopped thinking, reducing as well whatever was offered. We would have none of that. Tage recounted to me how he liked to make Grotowski laugh, by asking him to define the difference between communism and Holy Communion.

I might occasionally provoke Tage myself, by confronting him with his own aspirations to guru status. He might confront me with my blind spots and possibilities. I worked as a dramaturg in different theatre groups, and taught at the Department of Dramaturgy, which he had once initiated in Aarhus. In the end, our actions spoke. It was time to go. One day I left him.

A theatre scholar should have a desk of their own and close ties with the theatre. From my new attic flat, for three years, I travelled back and forth between Copenhagen and Aarhus. In 1984 I packed my things and moved over. As soon as I could, I moved to an attic flat. To explore the cosmopolitan archipelago of theatre and theatre studies, I began to travel as much as I possibly could. Inevitably, I soon became acquainted with Odin Teatret. Demystifying himself, Eugenio Barba stepped forward to meet me as a scholar. Another person at Odin Teatret immediately stepped forward to meet me as a person. It was Julia Varley.

And logically so. As I was to discover immediately, she already knew the approximate phases of my professional biography from her own life.

It is probably quite typical of the luckier ones among our generation of women. We had the luck of being seen. We met masters who thought that we mattered. We had male as well as female masters. We did not choose them primarily along gender lines. We chose the person. We went for the skills. We were after the knowledge which only that person could reveal to us, and was willing to share.

This summer Tage died at the age of eighty. One morning I opened my newspaper and read his obituary. I had not seen him for a very long time. Greedy for life as he was, he proved to have understood both of us to the point of not even telling me that he was dying. That was his last gift to me. I lit two candles for him. Two was the right number. I watched them burn down, and spoke to no one for two days. I did not wish any of our essential choices undone. Knowing their inevitability is a powerful blessing, which needs no words.

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