

Satisfied

To be satisfied is to feel you have done a job well. Sometimes this satisfaction comes with capital letters, and knocks you over. Your novel won the Man Booker prize and you can't sit still! Sometimes, though, satisfaction takes a much quieter form. You wanted to get the old tree limbs cut and the arborist just happened to come by yesterday, and now the yard looks great. Satisfactions can even be private. I am satisfied that I said nothing, when the teen ager on his motorcycle shot past and nearly hit me. I was angry, but I said nothing. Anger changes nothing. Being of a piece with yourself changes everything.

1 Household skills

I am satisfied when I can do something around the house that people consider useful and skillful. I have few house skills, but I know them: a strong wrist for opening jars; an orderly way of removing cleaned dishes from the dishwasher and shelving them; a good eye for setting the table. I feel good when I make these contributions. What matters more to me, than contributing, is that I now desire to contribute. I used to make the beds to surprise my wife. I was like a puppy showing what I achieved. Now I try to be on an even plane with my household society. I do this you do that. I take out the trash without being reminded? That's nothing. A nothing I am not proud of. A nothing that I do. A worker-doer, I want nothing more than that in my writing. You write one thing. You write another.

2 Writing and satisfaction

Satisfaction has its down sides. It pleases me to help you, but the pleasure I get degrades the beauty of my act. I love to be recognized for the competence of my writing, but recognition only distracts from the strict challenge of thinking. Must we then strive to be unknown and unadmired? Can we even say that being respected is helpful? There is danger to the work-act in all these states of public attention. Is it then true satisfaction to work the fragile line where the only applause you hear is your own? When you are there, in the silence you make for your self, you are free of pleasure and honor. You just do what you feel works. But can you judge yourself? Can your satisfaction with yourself be a standard? Can you who wished to be unadmired trust your own admiration?