

Adsum

Because man's worst crime is having been born.

Calderón de la Barca

I

She had wanted to die, not the way a person wants to die when death is a long way off, but by going toward it. Death had not summoned her; she must have simply started out, chosen the path leading in that direction, or maybe she had made a mistake, maybe it was a trap or a mirage—an error. And the price of error is death. That's why dying is inexorable for everyone. Also because no one has ever been totally alive, and no one can be completely alive. When someone imprisoned but eager within us emerges into the light, whatever prompted that emergence can almost never be found. When we emerge, if no one appears, whatever we wanted has vanished, and we find only emptiness, negation. The meaning of NO, any no, is something we understand only after we have gone through this experience of negativity.

We learn that he, it, whatever we had hoped for, is not there, neither nearby nor distant. Then we realize that we live entirely alone. And to live alone is to live halfway, to be secluded, condemned, and also blinded; it means being held in reserve and kept on the defensive.

You can die while you are still alive. Death takes many forms: of certain illnesses; of another's death, perhaps even more, of the death of whatever one loves;

and of the solitude caused by a total lack of understanding, when there is absolutely no possibility of communication, when we cannot tell our story to anyone. That is death, death by judgment. The judgment of a person who should have heard readily and entered the depths of one's life is death. "Living is living with others," Ortega had said, and when living with others is impossible because one person interposes and pronounces judgment on another, on the thing born only when people share, that is death. One dies judged, sentenced to isolation by "the other."

And one calls then on the broad space of divine consciousness. And, as intermediary, on the thought, on the poetry of a few men who managed to open human consciousness so wide that all secrets could take refuge. Those men are the tragic authors: Sophocles, Cervantes. Tragic knowledge has discovered that "life is a dream," which Pindar says even better: "We are shadows of a dream." Shadows of a dream?

Shadows of God's dream. My life is not my dream, and if I dream it, I do so because I who dream am dreamed. God dreams us, therefore we must make His dream as transparent as possible, reduce the shadow to the minimum, attenuate it.

Is God dreaming me? Would it be possible to carry out His dream? Or, on the contrary, to become unborn? In the first instance, I face judgment, His judgment; the plan for my being is submitted to His justice and must withstand it, must stand before it. If all I want is unbirth I can betray Him, I can erase what He wanted me to be.

We are children of dreams, we are born from a dream, from the dream of our parents, from the dream of all nature, from God's dream. The tragedy of Oedipus, his "complex," is not the account of a real event but merely of one essential possibility of the human condition, of the initial tragedy of having been born. And of an initial conflict that always threatens to present itself, the conflict of not knowing the Father.

Being born is the only tragedy. Because to be born is to try to make the dream real. To be born is to carry out or try to carry out our parents' dream—initially God's dream. Maybe God dreamed a creature, his favorite creature, perhaps the Universe dreams us as its complement, and we are already dreamed, pre-dreamed in the flower and in the tree rising tall, in vast matter itself, which is also dreamed, which aspires to reality and can be used to achieve reality. Matter serves tirelessly, like that maid who is the Universe, that slave, the mother who serves until she sees, rising above her, crushing her, the grown man who forgets. Because the *boundless*, God's pure first daydream, a sketch of being, the shadow of being, must continuously become real. And everything that moves beyond the *boundless* shatters it.

To be born is to project oneself into a being that aspires to possess the universe. If there were not this initial taking possession, birth would not be the worst crime, and we would be innocent. The possession already present at the begin-

ning is the crime, the theft. Anaximander understood this clearly when he spoke of the injustice inflicted by Being, a fleeting injustice, because all beings are ephemeral. Except for the final harmony, the equivalent of the *boundless*, of original indeterminacy. And now, since she had not been able to die, she felt as if she had to be born by herself. No one remembers anything about his first birth. There is no consciousness that retains being's shudder as it is flung out, exposed suddenly to the elements, without any handhold. Consciousness, the consciousness that now enveloped her solitude, must have started to form then, at the terrible instant when she had to open her eyes and breathe. How well she and everyone else could measure the difference between the shelter of maternal truth, where no effort was necessary or possible, and the thing that arrives suddenly: motionless, fixed images on a black void—the purely unrecognizable.

An impetus, an eagerness. Living is yearning, and beneath yearning, eagerness, appetite from the depths of one's self, original hunger. Hunger for everything, undifferentiated hunger. Perhaps there are tiny animals, or perhaps there have been, that are born by devouring the body of the mother who harbors them, by devouring their own clothing. Now, that clothing is consciousness, something incorporeal, invisible, where everything that reaches it is reflected and therefore seems to appear at a distance, to surround us. What would the world be like seen from deeper within one's consciousness? But that's not where we look from . . . In order to look, we must become somewhat invisible within, enclosed, and then emerge, toward the surface as far as it is possible to go. This is looking's first impetus; later, we learn to draw back, in order to see better. We discover the inexorable distance that must always separate us from everything, even from ourselves. For the point where we stand—hungry for sight—is an intermediate center between two realities: one's own reality and total reality. Consequently, this center is unreal, a mathematical point that designates an abyss and deepens it. Because looking makes everything grow more and more distant, and "something" glowing within, which would like to emerge so as to be seen, and also to breathe, gradually sinks deeper and deeper, retreating farther into the darkness, perhaps even farther than where it was before it looked. The look pushes back something that would like to become visible, but looking makes it retreat first. When we look, we disregard the deepest part of ourselves, of that nameless someone—of the victim, the one sacrificed to the light.

Is birth a sacrifice to light? That's why, when he realized he had returned to his birth place, Oedipus tore out his eyes, rather than continue to be born and accept the sacrifice of feeling himself sink farther and farther into darkness as he saw more and more clearly.

And each time one is born or reborn, even in the ongoing birth of each day, it is necessary to accept the wound in one's being, the split between the one who looks and can identify with what he looks at—and consequently yearns for it—and the other; the one who feels lost in darkness and silence, in the night of

the senses where none of the senses bears any message. And one must learn to endure this.

Night: she had always waited for it, from the time she was a little girl. She would wake up slowly, laboriously, always with the feeling that she could not cope with the coming day, and some of the efforts awaiting her would enter her brain violently, like knife wounds: she would have to eat, a bowl of soup at noon, and, worst of all, a piece of meat; she would have to tie her shoelaces a thousand times and walk by that hungry little girl she could not invite to her house, and during the afternoon she would have to play with "them," out in a cold wind that rushed, just as bored as she was, through the Plaza de Oriente or in the Plaza de Armería, overwhelmed by the gray stone of its impenetrable, arid palace, where from time to time a handsome coach would race by, bringing the king and queen back from some place or other, and she would almost feel sorry for them because they had to live there. The best thing was school, where she was not cold—it was near the palace, and there was a patio open to the sun where she went with her schoolmates; a small warmth would soften her soul too, and she would look at those girls with none of the hostility she felt for the others, the young ladies she was going to play with. She knew more than they did; they carried books and some of them could even write already, and all this was attractive, glowing. She too would enter that open secret of the alphabet and the mystery of numbers you had to chant. The teacher was pretty, dark-haired, and smiling; she had an encouraging voice. And when school let out, the young mother, who almost always wore a bouquet of violets on her sleeve and a small speckled veil fastened behind her hat, would take her hand, warming her with another hand she could feel despite her mother's smooth gloves. This was how she went walking over the hard asphalt, how she would promenade across the viaduct: the noise from Segovia Street rising from under it, a tree spreading branches she could almost touch, and she would gaze so longingly her eyes would sink into that bluish and, some afternoons, almost white distance bordered by the dark green of the Casa de Campo. The horizon, yes, the horizon, filled with light. She would want to stop, to stand still so she could drink in the light, as if it were the best food, her favorite, which she craved; and she would imbibe an instant. Then a pebble would dig into the sole of her foot through her shoe, something inopportune and wounding, or her shoelace would come untied, or someone would bump her shoulder . . . and she would feel weak again. But she was not alone. And if she did not have to play, in the winter a candy store was waiting with its lights already lit. And the house soon after, with a lighted fire, and outside, the night.

By then the shock of day had disappeared. Night was silence, the thrill of entering a secret place from which at some point we had been awakened abruptly, of escaping from the violence that forced her to be present, there, here, here, in front of everyone, being seen, feeling herself judged. Because everything,

some things especially—certain buildings, the way people scrutinize us, and indifferent glances from the person we wish would look at us and caress us—make us feel the implacable judgment one feels first thing in the light of morning. Every day we awaken to be judged, to confront an unknown law that continues to be unknown no matter how much they spell it out, explain it, and even justify it for us. We know beforehand that at some time we have broken it . . . But there is no use trying to remember that; she could never remember it. Her memories would sink then, into her earliest childhood, where they would struggle to appear against a dark, fluid background. But then, and always, recollection, memory, appears as if it were arising from forgetfulness, from a dark background that offers impregnable resistance. And that is how we are, opaque to ourselves in the first, spontaneous form of knowledge, memory, in which we do not even try to know ourselves. Memory, the first, inescapable revelation of one's person . . . why this presentness of our past life, even though specific recollections disappear? Memory is always there, living; it never rests. And if it were possible that for an instant no recollection would enter our minds, the continual reference to the past would still be there, the impossibility of harboring any event, no matter how longed for, or any person, no matter how much love he might bring us from a clear soul devoid of inscriptions, devoid of footprints, of shadows.

To have lived already; to begin life from something . . . this had always meant sadness for her, grieved her, but now she understood the meaning—a fragment of the meaning—of that nocturnal rendezvous toward which she had run since she was a child and before; because night was pure and so long then. She wanted to undo whatever she had lived, seen, and accumulated during the day, whatever had fallen on her so inopportunistly, like life itself, the fact of having been born, of being there, here.

She was here again, after having separated herself from everyone, from everything, until she saw herself. Alive, we see others seething with images and desires; we engage in constant commerce with reality or with its shadows.

And now, now she knew the desert, the unbounded whiteness. At first climbing up that hill was hard work, but then it was work no longer; there was only something called herownself, I, something that was not, because everything had gradually fallen away—what she thought she was, her “being” . . . now she knew she was not, that what had seemed so important was hardly anything. In the distance, a clarity devoid of any center and unlike any other, stretched before her, limitless; it was not the horizon or perhaps it was only horizon. She had not been able . . . an invisible resistance rejected her.

So now she was here; now and here, resentful, as when she was born. She did know that this was the first thing: resentment at finding oneself here; the mute nakedness of “being,” in which nothing can protect us; a lack of protection, as if we were in life, here, only because we had been sent away and even shackled, rejected because “he,” “it”— who? does not want us.

The horror of birth: Job asking his creator for an explanation. And those other tragic characters in search of their author so he can straighten out their tale, a horror . . . so then, no one is born innocent? To be born without a past, with nothing to refer back to, and then to be able to see it all, to feel it, the way leaves must feel dawn as dew settles; to open your eyes to the light, smiling; to bless the morning, your soul, the life one has received, how beautiful life is! Since we are nothing or almost nothing, why not smile at the universe, at the advancing day, accepting time as a glorious gift, a gift from a God who knows us, who knows our secret, our inanity, and overlooks it, who bears us no malice for not being . . .

And since I am free of that being, which I thought I had, I will live simply, I will let go of the image I had of myself, since it corresponds to nothing, let go of all images, of all the obligations that come from being me, or from wanting to.

I know now that the other, my fellow man, is alone deep down inside, as I am, and just as unable to protect himself. We are all alone; everyone is alone. So I will have no enemies, and I will not believe that anyone loves me in particular, nor will I wish someone did, as I wished before when I was consumed with a desire to be liked, loved. And wasn't that a barrier? Even a trap?

To approach the other with no gestures and no offerings; merely standing firm in the simple truth of being here, knowing yourself to be so insignificant, having seen yourself from your helplessness in the face of "that"—what to call it?—the maximum resistance that involves both life and death; whatever forced us to be born and keeps us here, forcing us to be born as often as necessary, whatever will one day let us die; this happens to everyone, to all of us, brothers in the truth of being here, in this primary reality. It would have been wrong to leave without knowing this, without having accepted it; beyond the joy of living she had sometimes felt, beyond the headiness of hope and pain, beyond all the innumerable feelings, states, and situations, without knowing she was here, without accepting it, simply, as a wisp of being, a speck of dust, eager to enter the light, to receive it in her poverty, to vibrate in harmony even if that meant a long effort of being born for countless days, from the order of everything. She had planned to get rid of her philosophy books, give them away, never see them again, and then she remembered something, then she was alive once more: "*Ordo et conexio rerum idem esse ac ordo et conexio idearum.*" By beginning to live simply, without pretense or plan, that was how she could be—by taking truth as her point of departure, being little more than nothing . . .

Truth as her point of departure, in other words, being poor. Neither expecting anything to wrap us in splendor, nor appearing before anyone for any reason, assigning value only when necessary, without giving it much importance; going directly to the heart of things; addressing her fellow man without fear or pride, because she had seen it then, that's what he was—her fellow man, her brother. Poor and alone, all of them, without knowing it; although some of them

probably knew, they probably knew it before she did. And some, many, of them, not only the ones who were poor in their lack of being, but the ones wounded by poverty, wounded . . . by so many things. Because we have enough being for wounds to open inside it, and until a short time ago wasn't she too nothing but that? A wound. She had cried so much because she wanted something they did not want to give her, because she loved someone who did not love her, because she felt like crying; she had cried since she was a child, reproaching life, implicating everything in her reproach, and she herself was the source of everything, because she was too rich and her parents and other people showered her with tenderness and love; because she had lived in those wonderful gardens but always feeling nostalgic for another, even more magical place, Andalusia perhaps, where she had been born and which she had left behind too soon; because she felt nostalgic for a lost happiness, even though she could only remember its loss, the constant experience of losing that happiness, because she so dreaded being judged. She only felt calm, whether alone in her room or in the garden or among people, when she sensed the presence she could not identify; she felt looked at, watched from on high, in other words, closest to truth, freest from interpretation. Philosophy had given her many things; but the principal thing, the one she could never repay was everything philosophy had taught her to reject, to hold in suspense as if it had no being—even to destroy—all the possibilities in her life. That was what some of the people who loved her the most lamented—she had been able, she would have been able to do any number of things, but why list them, if in the end they were illusory and they formed part of the image, which, like all images people form of themselves, is formed by the “could haves,” the “would haves,” the “if it weren't fors” . . . If it weren't for philosophy, for that foolish ambition—thought some of the people who loved her—she would have been or done this, that, or the other thing, she would at least be married, and that might have been true . . . Yes, that had not depended entirely on her, like doing or being. But . . . it was all right, everything had passed, and now the only thing left was this longing for truth and justice, for a way of life suitable to her inner poverty, for a way to keep from going too far . . . But such a way—truth was bursting in full force—such a way was not hers either, nor was it born now; that way . . . was there. Her father was entering the room, which seemed crystalline in the light of a winter day in a crystalline Madrid winter, a light that seems to come from the snow on the sierra, bringing the scent of pines, of the thyme that is always green, of the poor sierra, naked beneath the blue light . . .

And she sensed then the crime of having gone alone toward that shadowless brilliance, alone and without having been born yet. That's why she could not . . . Because she had not been completely born, that's why they had rejected her. She had seen what she believed to be her self become detached, like opaque veils with pale membranes, from the being that imbued her. And that being was left insignificant, crippled, and impotent in the presence of the light or, rather, in

the presence of an unbounded brilliance, because there was neither an indication of its source nor any type of vibration, and the cold was unmitigated. She had no right, she had not been able. For once, justice, the thing that should happen, was occurring, and this was being accomplished, inexorably and simply, without even a sign that it was occurring; that's how simple it was. Pure simplicity, for those who have really been born, must be their being, but for her, who had escaped from time and patience—also from humility—it was simple negation, the No that is so definite it remains unspoken, because no words are there yet; only boundlessness, desert. She was alive, understood, now . . . she had to recover everything she had not known how to make hers, her nourishment. And she had to get inside, inside the dream that had engendered her. Her father watched her silently, because he knew, knew everything, as he always did. She saw him as he was when she was a child in those images her memory, pure mystery, had hoarded, and she remembered the time when she could not yet know what father is. And that “what” would call her and rouse her from reveries that must have been constant, because every instant she could remember was like this: she was looking at something in the sky, some kind of black signs—the swallows—and, “Look at the swallows!” he told her. In truth she was not looking at swallows, she was not even looking, since she was glued to them, neither close nor distant, it was only that the swallows were still, fixed as she was fixed, and her father's voice and his presence would make her stir within, make her abandon the stillness where she was glued to the image written in the sky. And there was another moment beneath the oblique, late afternoon light, on what must have been the patio in the house in Vélez-Málaga where she was born, as she looked at the branch curved high overhead, and there was a lemon hanging on it, which he cut for her and placed in her hand, although it rolled away from her . . . That was not a gaze, although they always caught her gazing; it was not a gaze but a being glued, caught, as if she were barely separate from what she saw. And her father would call her, peel her away from all that and make her feel separate, feel the strangeness of being something. And there was not only his voice and his words, which she did not always understand, but also him, his face gazing down at her from so high above, it was all terrible, would be about to make her tremble, but suddenly, before she could tremble, he would already be sending her the smile, the gaze that, even before his arms, would lift her from the ground.

The ground, which was her place, there just for her and for the cat, where she walked without quite standing, where she always fell back down again. And he would pick her up, lift her high in the air, and she would find herself beside his head, which she would dare to touch, and from being lifted up and held at the height of his forehead and daring to touch it, she must have gradually learned what that was: Father. And on those journeys from the ground to such a height, she must also have learned distance, and learned what it was like to be above, to see the ground from above—to look from on high at her father's head,

at things, branches, walls that were moving, changing, and so forth—to be attentive to things that change, to see change and to see even while we ourselves are in motion, which is the first lesson in really knowing how to look, of the looking that is life.

And now she was the one lifting herself toward his forehead, laboriously lifting the weak shoulders, which pulled on the inner wound that opened as she breathed. . . . Halfway through her journey she found the forehead that held the secret, the forehead whose dream had engendered her—her point of origin, from which she had fled—and also the law, truth, not only because it was in him, in the father, but because from the beginning he had taught her to love it, to lay everything before it, to look for it even though she knew it was invisible, because everything could be forgiven in those childhood years and overlooked in the adolescence she had just left, everything but lies, deceit: “Are you telling the truth?” And now, because she had found that truth, he was not asking her any questions; he was helping her to lie down, to sink, rather, to remain there, glued to the white bed, motionless, fixed. But she simply told him the truth, the truth she had just discovered: Yes; I am here. “I want to be your daughter, born from your dream!”

She was beginning to realize everything this involved: to enter life. And she entered from a situation in which any living with others was impossible; she was situated on the fringes of life and would be for a long time. The verdict was clear, more than a year of quiet, of “rest”; in regard to everything else, nothing or almost nothing; complete rest and nothing more. “You must choose between three years of rest and three months of life,” she had been told sharply by the now brotherly voice that belonged to Carlos, a boy of her generation who had become part of the family and thus also became her doctor, the inflexible guardian she had met on the battlefield. He was entering the room then, his smile full of life, encouraging her teasingly. “Now you won’t get away from us, they’ve caught you at the corner, you won’t play hookey from ‘school’ again; look, it’s a beautiful morning, you have your whole life.” Yes, her whole life. . . . ; but will I be able? And now, smile, your sister’s coming. Something kept her from saying no, don’t let her come, keep her away forever, she does have her whole life. So full of beauty.

Her whole life. The *boundless* reappeared, eventually she would have to cross it and it would be populated, but not now. Now she would have to slip into the silence of identical days. She had her whole life, but she could not begin to live it; she was here, but “here” was a bare white room, without any books, where visitors and even moving in bed were forbidden; she lay still, looking toward the ceiling or toward the window, tilting her head a little to one side. And what she saw were motionless white clouds, gigantic sky writing by the life that was projecting itself on its own, which everyone projected, and then, seeing it above their heads, bursting over them, they called “destiny” and also history. Madrid’s blue

sky was full of white, bluish, and gold-tinged clouds; suddenly they had turned into figures: horses, ancient kings, armies, monsters in combat, and there below, level with the horizon, a glorious wreath, a promise that seemed to frame everything, to bind heaven and earth, also began to form so as to join its elders and move with them high across the concave heaven. It was the history of Spain awakening at that very hour, set in motion from a heart and a hopeful enigmatic spirit, projecting itself on Madrid's implacably blue sky in 1929. Yes, all life and all history seemed to await her. It gave her time, it would give her time for everything; yes, I am here.

II

She lived toward the future or rather in the future since she had no present. She had been on the verge of falling into the past. But the same painful, fragmentary past rejected her. And she did not exactly have a past; she would have one only when she had already lived some of the future, since that lived future would be the recognizable past, her past. Because everything she had lived was appearing to her and it hurt, like a single wound; she was not disowning what she had lived, but she had no use for it; it would be useful to her later, beginning with this decision she had made now. She had decided to be born, but she would have to continue being born. Actually, she was living a prenatal state in which she inevitably found herself a prisoner of deliriums, and she would traverse dark corridors pushing on half-open doors, her small, motionless being unfurling. She had to hold herself high as she crossed the desert, fainting from time to time, falling into wells of silence, into negation. Living is a task that at some moments seems unperformable, the task of traversing the long procession of moments, of offering a resistance to time, which is the first action required by the state of being alive; then one must learn that "here" is very concrete, very precise, and one finds it unfamiliar. If I knew exactly where I am, I would know what I have to do. But "circumstances" can force one only after one has made a choice. In the prenatal-like state where she found herself, the circumstances resembled the semi-circle of clouds that arose from her bed; depending on how a person looked at them, they meant something or lacked any really definite meaning, as if they were malleable receivers. Only when she had entered deeply into the future and walked around in it would she be forced by circumstances. Now everything was suspended; *here* was very wide, everything she had done forced her to do nothing. No thread held her to the past, even though it was so close, to the life recently taken from her, except for a few companions, who could come to see her only on brief, widely-spaced visits, who brought her less and less news of what people were doing, of what they were doing. What was happening outside? She would know less and less, for what did *happen* have to do with her? The things

reported in newspapers were not really happening; they were the peaceful surface that showed no sign of activity. The things that, like her, were moving in a prenatal state were not reported in the newspapers.

There was nothing left for her to do but go deeper, close herself up in her dream, as if in a cocoon, and allow herself to form. What dream would lead to the formation of her life, the entire life that lay before her? Having no plan, only her poverty, which she did not want to betray—she would build nothing on herself, she would expect nothing from herself, nothing for herself—the dream of Spain seeped into her and she began to live this dream alone. Also the world's dream, Europe's dream—for, like her, Europe seemed to be free of obligations, of commitments, of constrictive circumstances, free to choose—with a whole life . . . You could say that nothing constrained this peaceful Europe.

III

She had emptied herself of herself, and she no longer ached; she had lost her image, and that was a great relief. The image we form without realizing it can be pale, almost imperceptible; and then it's appealing and it produces what people call agility, aura, because it makes a person grow rather distant, which is necessary for getting to the heart of things. But there is also a dense, emotion-laden, almost corporeal self-image, and if its outline becomes at all fixed, the image has begun to develop into a *persona*, more real than and fed off the person himself . . . And as this *persona* grows and takes over of as much vital space as its fellow images will allow, the person sustaining it turns into something like a ghost.

This is how she had discovered it: she wanted to be faithful to the nakedness in which she found herself—her truth. She had begun to feel horror of her image, because the image is a curse, except for the imperceptible image, which makes a person agile and which probably only some very few people have managed to achieve. In spite of having been created at our expense, we find it agreeable. Any humiliation we experience so often stems from the image, since it is what confronts our fellowmen and is what we want them to recognize, although we also fear this. Then there is the image that other people cast upon us—their own shadows, and if they are not cast lovingly

But is love, the image love creates, the real one? Maybe there is a real image, appropriate to the person? Isn't the person that intangible, indestructible thing? . . . whereas all images can be destroyed and are essentially transitory.

Nevertheless there is no love that does not create an image, that is not nourished by it, that does not at the same time offer itself in sacrifice. She knew that well. A schematic image, almost a cipher or a number, a highly abstract image, but an image. Love's nature is revealed in the abstraction love can form. Did the image of Dulcinea have anything at all to do with Dulcinea? This explains why

Cervantes, who must have loved deeply—and whose misfortune may have been so great that his love was reciprocated—made her nonexistent and replaced her with her contradiction or coarsest denial in Aldonza Lorenzo. That was not really necessary; things would have been the same and even more painful if there had been a reciprocal relationship between Dulcinea and don Quijote, as there is between the real being one loves and the image one abstracts from that being. . . . And the fact that Cervantes, the master of subtle restraint, was carried away by this extremism, Cervantes himself, reveals a pain so intense that he allowed himself to take such a fierce revenge—the viciousness that prevented him from showing the more painful and hapless truth. All one has to do is forge the image, transporting it insofar as possible to the *heavenly tropes* of the incorruptible—disembodying it in order to achieve incorruptibility—and the person responsible for the birth of that image in one's soul will contradict it and seem like the most corruptible of people, more fettered by flesh and time than anyone else. All we have to do is love someone deeply, and we will know the extent of our own corruptibility.

Because love seeks identity, creates it . . . and that's why its image, the inevitable image, becomes abstract, like a hieroglyphic, like a sacred sign or an indecipherable cipher; something that now crosses over into the realm of the numerical. Is there anything better than a number for accommodating the two conditions—purity and enigma—the lover finds in the one he loves?

If love is going to be shared, lived, you must endure the life of whatever you love . . . If you don't, everything becomes much easier, as it was at the end for don Quijote, for Dante, for all the great strategists of love who made slaves of themselves although they were really free; in other words, they were able to attain will.

The image of one's self, though, is not usually characterized by purity; only if it came to us from a pure, distant, invisible place, only if it came to us from God, like a barely visible shadow that corrects our errors, our false moves, and serves as a guide, a model we come to see as it becomes actualized within us, and it does not offer one of those obsessive examples that corrects us the way pedagogues correct inept parents as if they were children, in the name of the "model child": God is the supreme educator. And so she rested from her image, which had been filling her with pain. Now she noticed the vague pain that is a sign of absence, a type of void that makes known its presence. It was not so much from her own image as from the other enigmatic image, a cipher of the inaccessible . . . Will everything one loves always have to be like this—a hieroglyphic, a sacred, incomprehensible cipher? Can there be a form of love that does not encounter resistance from the beloved thing, a love in which understanding or a desire to understand increases with love itself until understanding and loving, loving and understanding, become the same thing? Or a love in which the heart does not have to surrender, blind and hungry, hungry for reasons too, because it needs them . . . But when one has wanted to understand the other, the others, the oth-

ers think they are being asked for reasons, for *reason*, and if those reasons are not enough, if they do not even get to the bottom of things at all, what occurs is an accusation of irrationality; when what is being suggested and has been hoped for, what the heart always hopes for without daring to say it, is a light that will illumine it even at the price of being consumed, for what does the heart care if it's consumed? The heart would give anything to see, for an instant, since it awakened from hunger, just like everything else that's born .

But everything you love grows enigmatic, becomes incomprehensible. And you only have to pay attention to something too intently for a kind of mixing to occur, a kind of confusion, as if we were trying to enter things too directly, as if even natural creatures defended themselves from this human interest . . . In nature itself, when you expect to see a landscape and look at it, the landscape turns into something that seems painted, opaque; excessive attention breaks the spontaneous communication, the nonanalytic understanding that flourishes where there is affection. And the landscape seen on waking, and an unfamiliar person when we don't yet know what he brings us, and even we ourselves, our souls when we let them emerge—everything, when we have been freed—takes on a clear spring light and seems weightless, even approaches transparency.

And is the shadow that envelopes everything our own then, is the opaqueness into which things and people withdraw, as if in self-defense, part of us? Is there nothing left but the path of action or the "aprioristic" thought that reveals nothing but itself, its own structure, as Immanuel Kant did in an historic fit of honesty, but also no doubt from a longing to break his chrysalidness. And he discovered will, the good will, which is not to have will . . . what Spinoza already knew.

Laboriously she had attended Ortega's lectures about metaphysics, scarcely missing a single one; their clarity was dazzling . . . he was absolutely clear, but even so she had hardly understood anything. This was particularly true in one course on the *Critique of Pure Reason*. With even greater anguish, she had attended a course about Aristotle's metaphysics given by the young professor Xavier Zubiri. And only now, by having understood those things, understood what had happened to her—and she still didn't quite know how to place this in relation to everything else, to "systematize it"—was she finding that intelligence destroys, by wanting to see from within, within itself. Could this be the Unmoved Mover? The total internal vision of reality, the being that is as it thinks itself, or by thinking its self, and in whose presence nothing could cast a shadow. And if I were to place myself in its light, without having any aspirations for myself, if I "reduced myself" as an individual, faithful to the things I have lived, then perhaps I would turn those things into an *experience*, one of those real experiences that give rise to knowledge, one of those clean experiences Kant prescribed without really describing . . . Because isn't there already something of the Categorical Imperative in the *Critique of Pure Reason*? To obey experience and only

experience, to live according to something definite, would be to legitimize life, the fact of having been born, of accepting it . . . For she believed she had also extracted this from her philosophical labyrinth: the only legitimate knowledge is knowledge that has been assumed, that can account for its origins; in other words, only transparent knowledge, and transparent with a double meaning because it belongs to someone, is knowledge; the rest must be destroyed. She realized that this destruction had occurred for her, it had happened to her, and to the extent that she had contributed to this destruction by burning herself out in a bustle of agitated activities, eager to gulp life greedily, she felt proud . . . Careful! Careful! Because what she would have dared to want if it had been possible for her, what she was trying to do, was base her life on an adaptation to her lack of being, of entity: a way to be small and transparent.

And "loving" was now something she would not do again, not in the sense most often associated with that word. It's not necessary. Since philosophy—which had been her obstinate love—passed her by almost completely, since she barely understood anything . . . So many hours in class had passed before her, gifts of clarity and precision. But what did she know about the Pythagoreans? About the transcendental deduction of categories? The "schemata of being," but this was from Aristotle, and that whole parade of precisions and clarities had left her head filled with so much darkness and confusion. She was small, and she was incapable; when she could finally read, she would not read those books nor her inadequate notes anymore. So he would not suffer, she did not tell her father, since it was not yet the right moment; but it was definite: she would not study philosophy again; well perhaps Spinoza's *Ethics*, a diamond of pure light . . . She loved all that, yes, she did love that destructive clarity.