

*“Coming to Writing”  
and Other Essays*

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*Coming to Writing*

In the beginning, I adored. What I adored was human. Not persons; not totalities, not defined and named beings. But signs. Flashes of being that glanced off me, kindling me. Lightning-like bursts that came to me: Look! I blazed up. And the sign withdrew. Vanished. While I burned on and consumed myself wholly. What had reached me, so powerfully cast from a human body, was Beauty: there was a face, with all the mysteries inscribed and preserved on it; I was before it, I sensed that there was a beyond, to which I did not have access, an unlimited place. The look incited me and also forbade me to enter; I was outside, in a state of animal watchfulness. A desire was seeking its home. I was that desire. I was the question. The question with this strange destiny: to seek, to pursue the answers that will appease it, that will annul it. What prompts it, animates it, makes it want to be asked, is the feeling that the other is there, so close, exists, so far away; the feeling that somewhere, in some part of the world, once it is through the door, there is the face that promises, the answer for which one continues to move onward, because of which one can never rest, for the love of which one holds back from renouncing, from giving in—to death. Yet what misfortune if the question should happen to meet *its* answer! Its end!

I adored the Face. The smile. The countenance of my day and night. The smile awed me, filled me with ecstasy. With terror. The world constructed, illuminated, annihilated by a quiver of this face. This face is not a metaphor. Face, space, structure. Scene of all the faces that give births to me, contain my lives. I read the face, I saw and contemplated it to the point of losing myself in it. How many faces to the face? More than one. Three, four, but always the only one, and the only one always more than one.

I read it: the face signified. And each sign pointed out a new path. To follow, in order to come closer to its meaning. The face whispered something to me, it spoke and called on me to speak, to uncode all the names surrounding it, evoking it, touching on it, making it appear. It made things visible and legible, as if it were understood that even if the light were to fade away, the things it had illuminated would not disappear, what it had fallen on would stay, not cease to be here, to glow, to offer itself up to the act of naming again.

The moment I came into life (I remember with undiminished pain), I trembled: from the fear of separation, the dread of death. I saw death at work and guessed its constancy, the jealousy that wouldn't let anything escape it alive. I watched it wound, disfigure, paralyze, and massacre from the moment my eyes opened to seeing. I discovered that the Face was mortal, and that I would have to snatch it back at every moment from Nothingness. I didn't adore that-which-is-going-to-disappear; love isn't bound up for me in the condition of mortality. No. I loved. I was afraid. I am afraid. Because of my fear I reinforced love, I alerted all the forces of life, I armed love, with soul and words, to keep death from winning. Loving: keeping alive: naming.

The primitive face was my mother's. At will her face could give me sight, life, or take them away from me. In my passion for the first face, I had long awaited death in that corner. With the ferocity of a beast, I kept my mother within my sight. Bad move. On the chessboard, I brooded over the queen; and it was the king who was taken.

Writing: a way of leaving no space for death, of pushing back forgetfulness, of never letting oneself be surprised by the abyss. Of never becoming resigned, consoled; never turning over in bed to face the wall and drift asleep again as if nothing had happened; as if nothing could happen.

Maybe I've always written for no other reason than to win grace from this countenance. Because of disappearance. To confront perpetually the mystery of the there-not-there. The visible and the invisible. To fight against the law that says, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, nor any likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." Against the decree of blindness. I have often lost my sight; and I will never finish fashioning the graven image for myself. My writing watches. Eyes closed.

You want to have. You want everything. But having is forbidden to human beings. Having everything. And for woman, it's even forbidden to hope to have everything a human being can have. There are so many boundaries, and so many walls, and inside the walls, more walls. Bastions in which, one morning, I wake up condemned. Cities where I am isolated, quarantines, cages, "rest" homes. How often I've been there, my tombs, my corporeal dungeons, the earth abounds with places for my confinement. Body in solitary, soul in silence. My prison times: when I'm there, the sentence is of a really unforeseeable type and

duration. But I feel, after all, “at home.” What you can’t have, what you can’t touch, smell, caress, you should at least try to see. I want to see: everything. No Promised Land I won’t reach someday. Seeing what you will (n)ever have. Maybe I have written to see; to have what I never would have had; so that having would be the privilege not of the hand that takes and encloses, of the gullet, of the gut; but of the hand that points out, of fingers that see, that design, from the tips of the fingers that transcribe by the sweet dictates of vision. From the point of view of the soul’s eye: the eye of a womansoul.<sup>1</sup> From the point of view of the Absolute, in the proper sense of the word: separation.

Writing to touch with letters, with lips, with breath, to caress with the tongue, to lick with the soul, to taste the blood of the beloved body, of life in its remoteness; to saturate the distance with desire; in order to keep it from reading you.

Having? A having without limits, without restriction; but without any “deposit,” a having that doesn’t withhold or possess, a having-love that sustains itself with loving; in the blood-rapport. In this way, give yourself what you would want God-if-he-existed to give you.

Who can define what “having” means; where living happens; where pleasure is assured?

It’s all there: where separation doesn’t separate; where absence is animated, taken back from silence and stillness. In the assault of love on nothingness. My voice repels death; my death; your death; my voice is my other. I write and you are not dead. The other is safe if I write.

Writing is good: it’s what never ends. The simplest, most secure other circulates inside me. Like blood: there’s no lack of it. It can become impoverished. But you manufacture it

and replenish it. In me is the word of blood, which will not cease before my end.

At first I really wrote to bar death. Because of a death. The cruelest kind, the kind that doesn’t spare anything, the irreparable. It goes like this: you die in my absence. While Isolde is not there, Tristan turns to the wall and dies. What happens between that body and that wall, what doesn’t happen, pierces me with pain and makes me write. Need for the Face: to get past the wall, to tear up the black sail. To see my loss with my own eyes; to look loss in the eye. I want to see the disappearance with my own eyes. What’s intolerable is that death might not take place, that I may be robbed of it. That I may not be able to live it, take it in my arms, savor a last breath on its lips.

I write the encore. Still here, I write life. Life: what borders on death; right up against which I write my

Letters from the Life-Watch: Who Goes There?

Stating, to lessen it, the fragility of life and the trembling of the thought that dares hope to grasp it; circling around the trap set out by life each time you ask the question death whispers to you, the diabolical question: “Why live? Why me?” As if it were a matter of death trying to understand life. This is the most dangerous question, as it threatens to arise, like a tombstone, only at the moment you have no “reason” to live. Living, being-alive, or rather not being open to death, means not finding yourself in the situation where this question becomes imminent. More specifically: we always live *without* reason; and living is just that, it’s living without-reason, for nothing, at the mercy of time. This is nonreason, true madness, if you think about it. But

we don't think about it. Once "thought" is introduced, once "reason" is brought into proximity with life, you have the makings of madness.

Writing prevents the question that attacks life from coming up. Don't ask yourself, "Why . . . ?" Everything trembles when the question of meaning strikes.

You are born; you live; everyone does it, with an animal force of blindness. Woe unto you if you want the human gaze, if you want to know what's happening to you.

Madwomen: the ones who are compelled to redo acts of birth every day. I think, "Nothing is a given for me." I wasn't born for once and for all. Writing, dreaming, delivering; being my own daughter of each day. The affirmation of an internal force that is capable of looking at life without dying of fear, and above all of looking at itself, as if you were simultaneously the other—indispensable to love—and nothing more nor less than me.

I'm afraid: that life will become foreign. That it will no longer be this nothing that makes immediate sense in my body, but instead, outside me, will surround me and beset me with its question; that it will become the enigma, the irrational, the roll of the die; the final blow.

Terror: life arrest, death sentence:<sup>2</sup> every child's Terror. Perhaps being adult means no longer asking yourself where you come from, where you're going, who to be. Discarding the past, warding off the future? Putting history in place of yourself? Perhaps. But who is the woman spared by questioning? Don't you, you too, ask yourself: who am I, who will I have been, why-me, why-not-me? Don't you tremble with uncertainty? Aren't you, like me, constantly struggling not to fall into the trap? Which means you're in

the trap already, because the fear of doubting is already the doubt that you fear. And why can't the question of why-am-I just leave me in peace? Why does it throw me off balance? What does it have to do with my woman-being? It's the social scene, I think, that constrains you to it; history that condemns you to it. If you want to grow, progress, stretch your soul, take infinite pleasure in your bodies, your goods, how will you position yourself to do so? You are, you too, a Jewoman, trifling, diminutive, mouse among the mouse people, assigned to the fear of the big bad cat. To the diaspora of your desires; to the intimate deserts. And if you grow, your desert likewise grows. If you come out of the hole, the world lets you know that there is no place for your kind in its nations.

"Why did you put me in the world if only for me to be lost in it?"

Determining whom to put this question to is beyond you.

Sometimes I think I began writing in order to make room for the wandering question that haunts my soul and hacks and saws at my body; to give it a place and time; to turn its sharp edge away from my flesh; to give, seek, touch, call, bring into the world a new being who won't restrain me, who won't drive me away, won't perish from very narrowness.

Because of the following dream:

My rejection of sickness as a weapon. There is a self that horrifies me. Isn't she dead yet? Done for. I fear her death. There, on that great bed. Sad, horribly so. Her sickness: cancer. A diseased hand. She herself is the sickness.<sup>3</sup> Will you save her by cutting off the hand? Overcome the atrocious, anguishing disgust, not at death but at the condemn-

nation, the work of sickness. My whole being is convulsed. Tell her what must be said: "You have two hands. If one hand can't live, cut it off. You have tomorrow." <sup>4</sup> When one hand doesn't work, replace it with the other hand. Act. Respond. You've lost the hand that writes? Learn to write with the other hand." And with it-her-self-me-her-hand, I begin to trace on the paper. And now at once there unfurls a perfect calligraphy, as if she had always had this writing in that other hand. If you die, live.

With one hand, suffering, living, putting your finger on pain, loss. But there is the other hand: the one that writes.

### A Girl Is Being Killed<sup>5</sup>

In the beginning, I desired.

"What is it she wants?"

"To live. Just to live. And to hear myself say the name."

"Horror! Cut out her tongue!"

"What's wrong with her?"

"She can't keep herself from flying!"<sup>6</sup>

"In that case, we have special cages."

Who is the Superuncle who hasn't prevented a girl from flying, the flight of the thief, who has not bound her, not bandaged the feet of his little darling, so that they might be exquisitely petite, who hasn't mummified her into pretiness?

### How Would I Have Written?

Wouldn't you first have needed the "right reasons" to write? The reasons, mysterious to me, that give you the "right" to write? But I didn't know them. I had only the

"wrong" reason; it wasn't a reason, it was a passion, something shameful—and disturbing; one of those violent characteristics with which I was afflicted. I didn't "want" to write. How could I have "wanted" to? I hadn't strayed to the point of losing all measure of things. A mouse is not a prophet. I wouldn't have had the cheek to go claim my book from God on Mount Sinai, even if, as a mouse, I had found the energy to scamper up the mountain. No reasons at all. But there was madness. Writing was in the air around me. Always close, intoxicating, invisible, inaccessible. I undergo writing! It came to me abruptly. One day I was tracked down, besieged, taken. It captured me. I was seized. From where? I knew nothing about it. I've never known anything about it. From some bodily region. I don't know where. "Writing" seized me, gripped me, around the diaphragm, between the stomach and the chest, a blasted my lungs and I stopped breathing.

Suddenly I was filled with a turbulence that knocked the wind out of me and inspired me to wild acts. "Write." When I say "writing" seized me, it wasn't a sentence that had managed to seduce me, there was absolutely nothing written, not a letter, not a line. But in the depths of the flesh, the attack. Pushed. Not penetrated. Invested. Set in motion. The attack was imperious: "Write!" Even though I was only a meager anonymous mouse, I knew vividly the awful jolt that galvanizes the prophet, wakened in mid-life by an order from above. It's a force to make you cross oceans. Me, write? But I wasn't a prophet. An urge shook my body, changed my rhythms, tossed madly in my chest, made time unlivable for me. I was stormy. "Burst!" "You may speak!" And besides, whose voice is that? The Urge had the violence of a thunderclap. Who's striking me?

Who's attacking me from behind? And in my body the breath of a giant, but no sentences at all. Who's pushing me? Who's invading? Who's changing me into a monster? Into a mouse wanting to swell to the size of a prophet?

A joyful force. Not a god; it doesn't come from above. But from an inconceivable region, deep down inside me but unknown, as if there might exist somewhere in my body (which, from the outside, and from the point of view of a naturalist, is highly elastic, nervous, lively, thin, not without charm, firm muscles, pointed nose always quivering and damp, vibrating paws) another space, limitless; and there, in those zones which inhabit me and which I don't know how to live in, I feel them, I don't live them, they live me, gushing from the wellsprings of my souls, I don't see them but I feel them, it's incomprehensible but that's how it is. There are sources. That's the enigma. One morning, it all explodes. My body experiences, deep down inside, one of its panicky cosmic adventures. I have volcanoes on my lands. But no lava: what wants to flow is breath. And not just any old way. The breath "wants" a form.<sup>7</sup> "Write me!" One day it begs me, another day it threatens. "Are you going to write me or not?" It could have said: "Paint me." I tried. But the nature of its fury demanded the form that stops the least, that encloses the least, the body without a frame, without skin, without walls, the flesh that doesn't dry, doesn't stiffen, doesn't clot the wild blood that wants to stream through it—forever. "Let me through, or everything goes!"

What blackmail could have made me give in to this breath? Write? Me? Because it was so strong and furious, I loved and feared this breath. To be lifted up one morning, snatched off the ground, swung in the air. To be taken by

surprise. To find in myself the possibility of the unexpected. To fall asleep a mouse and wake up an eagle! What delight! What terror. And I had nothing to do with it, I couldn't help it. And worse, each time the breathing seized me, the same misery was repeated: what began, in spite of myself, in exultation, proceeded, because of myself, in combat, and ended in downfall and desolation. Barely off the ground: "Hey! What are you doing up there? Is that any place for a mouse? For shame!" Shame overcame me. There is no lack on earth, so there was no lack in my personal spaces, of guardians of the law, their pockets filled with the "first stone" to hurl at flying mice. As for my internal guardian—whom I didn't call superego at the time—he was more rapid and accurate than all the others: he threw the stone at me before all the other-relatives, masters, prudent contemporaries, compliant and orderly peers—all the noncrazy and antimouse forces—had the chance to let fire. I was the "fastest gun." Fortunately! My shame settled the score without scandal. I was "saved."

Write? I didn't think of it. I dreamed of it constantly, but with the chagrin and the humility, the resignation and the innocence, of the poor. Writing is God. But it is not your God. Like the Revelation of a cathedral: I was born in a country where culture had returned to nature—had become flesh once again. Ruins that are not ruins, but hymns of luminous memory, Africa sung by the sea night and day. The past wasn't past. Just curled up like the prophet in the bosom of time. At the age of eighteen, I discovered "culture." The monument, its splendor, its menace, its *discourse*. "Admire me. I am the spirit of Christianity. Down on your knees, offspring of the bad race. Transient. I was erected for my followers. Out, little Jewess. Quick, before I baptize

you.” “Glory”: what a word! A name for armies or cathedrals or lofty victories; it wasn’t a word for Jewoman. Glory, stained-glass windows, flags, domes, constructions, masterpieces—how to avoid recognizing your beauty, keep it from reminding me of my foreignness?

One summer I get thrown out of the cathedral of Cologne. It’s true that I had bare arms; or was it a bare head? A priest kicks me out. Naked. I felt naked for being Jewish, Jewish for being naked, naked for being a woman, Jewish for being flesh and joyfull!—So I’ll take all your books. But the cathedrals I’ll leave behind. Their stone is sad and male. The texts I ate, sucked, suckled, kissed. I am the innumerable child of their masses.

But write? With what right? After all, I read them without any right, without permission, without their knowledge.

The way I might have prayed in a cathedral, sending their God an impostor-message.

Write? I was dying of desire for it, of love, dying to give writing what it had given to me. What ambition! What impossible happiness. To nourish my own mother. Give her, in turn, my milk? Wild imprudence.

No need for a severe superego to prevent me from writing: nothing in me made such an act plausible or conceivable. How many workers’ children dream of becoming Mozart or Shakespeare?

Everything in me joined forces to forbid me to write: History, my story, my origin, my sex. Everything that constituted my social and cultural self. To begin with the necessary, which I lacked, the material that writing is formed of and extracted from: language. You want—to Write? In what language? Property, rights, had always po-

liced me: I learned to speak French in a garden from which I was on the verge of expulsion for being a Jew. I was of the race of Paradise-losers. Write French? With what right? Show us your credentials! What’s the password? Cross yourself! Put out your hands, let’s see those paws! What kind of nose is that?

I said “write French.” One writes *in*. Penetration. Door. Knock before entering. Strictly forbidden.

“You are not from here. You are not at home here. Usurper!”

“It’s true. No right. Only love.”

Write? Taking pleasure as the gods who created the books take pleasure and give pleasure, *endlessly*; their bodies of paper and blood; their letters of flesh and rears; they put an end to the end. The human gods, who don’t know what they’ve done; what their visions, their words, do to us. How could I have not wanted to write? When books took me, transported me, pierced me to the entrails, allowed me to feel their disinterested power; when I felt loved by a text that didn’t address itself to me, or to you, but to the other; when I felt pierced through by life itself, which doesn’t judge, or choose, which touches without designating; when I was agitated, torn out of myself, by love? When my being was populated, my body traversed and fertilized, how could I have closed myself up in silence? Come to me, I will come to you. When love makes love to you, how can you keep from murmuring, saying its names, giving thanks for its caresses?

You can desire. You can read, adore, be invaded. But writing is not granted to you. Writing is reserved for the chosen. It surely took place in a realm inaccessible to the small, to the humble, to women. In the intimacy of the



sacred. Writing spoke to its prophets from a burning bush. But it must have been decided that bushes wouldn't dialogue with women.

Didn't experience prove it? I thought it addressed itself not to ordinary men, however, but only to the righteous, to beings fashioned out of separation, for solitude. It asked everything of them, took everything from them, it was merciless and tender, it dispossessed them entirely of all riches, all bonds, it lightened them, stripped them bare; then it granted them passage: toward the most distant, the nameless, the endless. It gave them leave—this was a right and a necessity. They would never arrive. They would never be found by the limit. It would be with them, in the future, like no one.

Thus, for this elite, the gorgeous journey without horizon, beyond everything, the appalling but intoxicating excursion toward the never-yet-said.

But for you, the tales announce a destiny of restriction and oblivion; the brevity, the lightness of a life that steps out of mother's house only to make three little detours that lead you back dazed to the house of your grandmother, for whom you'll amount to no more than a mouthful. For you, little girl, little jug of milk, little pot of honey, little basket, experience reveals it, history promises you this minute alimentary journey that brings you back quickly indeed to the bed of the jealous Wolf, your ever-insatiable grandmother, as if the law ordained that the mother should be constrained to sacrifice her daughter, to expiate the audacity of having relished the good things in life in the form of her pretty red offspring. Vacation of the swallowed up, voyage of the scybalum.

So for the sons of the Book: research, the desert, inex-

haustible space, encouraging, discouraging, the march straying ahead. For the daughters of the housewife: the straying into the forest. Deceived, disappointed, but brimming with curiosity. Instead of the great enigmatic duel with the Sphinx, the dangerous questioning addressed to the body of the Wolf: What is the body for? Myths end up having our hides. Logos opens its great maw, and swallows us whole.

Speaking (crying out, yelling, tearing the air, rage drove me to this endlessly) doesn't leave traces: you can speak—it evaporates, ears are made for not hearing, voices get lost. But writing! Establishing a contract with time. Nothing! Making yourself noticed!!!

"Now *that* is forbidden."

All the reasons I had for believing I didn't have the right to write, the good, the less good, and the really wrong reasons: I had no grounds from which to write. No legitimate place, no land, no fatherland, no history of my own. Nothing falls to me by right—or rather everything does, and no more so to me than to any other.

"I have no roots: from what sources could I take in enough to nourish a text? Diaspora effect.

"I have no legitimate tongue. In German I sing; in English I disguise myself; in French I fly, I thief. On what would I base a text?

"I am already so much the inscription of a divergence that a further divergence is impossible. They teach me the following lesson: you, outsider, fit in. Take the nationality of the country that tolerates you. Be good, return to the ranks, to the ordinary, the imperceptible, the domestic."

Here are your laws: you will not kill, you will be killed,

you will not steal, you will not be a bad recruit, you will not be sick or crazy (this would be a lack of consideration for your hosts), you will not zigzag. You will not write. You will learn to calculate. You will not touch. In whose name would I write?

You, write? But who do you think you are? Could I say: "It's not me, it's the breath!"? "No one." And this was true: I didn't think I was anyone.

This was in fact what most obscurely worried me and pained me: being no one. Everyone was someone, I felt, except me. I was no one. "Being" was reserved for those full, well-defined, scornful people who occupied the world with their assurance, took their places without hesitation, were at home everywhere where I "was"—n't except as an infraction, intruder, little scrap from elsewhere, always on the alert. The untroubled ones. "To be?" What self-confidence! I thought to myself: "I could have not been." And: "I will be." But to say "I am"? I who? Everything that designated me publicly, that I made use of—you don't turn down an oar when you're drifting—was misleading and false. I didn't deceive myself, but, objectively, I deceived the world. My true identification papers were false. I wasn't even a little girl, I was a fearful and wild animal, and I was ferocious (although they may have suspected this). Nationality? "French." Not my fault! *They* put me in the position of imposture. Even now, I sometimes feel pushed to explain myself, to excuse myself, to rectify, like an old reflex. For at least I believed, if not in the truth of being, in a rigor, a purity of language. If a given word turned to the practice of lying, it was because it was being mistreated. Twisted, abused, used idiotically.

"I am": who would dare to speak like God? Not

I . . . *What* I was, if that could be described, was a whirlwind of tensions, a series of fires, ten thousand scenes of violence (history had nourished me on this: I had the "luck" to take my first steps in the blazing hotbed between two holocausts, in the midst, in the very bosom of racism, to be three years old in 1940, to be Jewish, one part of me in the concentration camps, one part of me in the "colonies").

So all my lives are divided between two principal lives, my life up above and my life down below. Down below I claw, I am lacerated, I sob. Up above I pleasure. Down below, carnage, limbs, quarterings, tortured bodies, noises, engines, harrow. Up above, face, mouth, aura, torrent of the silence of the heart.

#### Infantasies

("She first awakens at the touch of love; before this time she is a dream. Two stages, however, can be distinguished in this dream existence: in the first stage love dreams about her, in the second, she dreams about love.")<sup>8</sup>

#### His Mouth

When I was three years old, God was an elegant and maternal young man, whose head, perhaps ceremonially hatted, soared into the clouds, and whose slim legs were sheathed in impeccably pleated pants. Not an athlete. Rather, a refined man with a vague chest, whose musculature was spiritual.

I lived in the left-hand pocket of his coat. Despite my tender age, I was his Pocket-Woman. As such, I didn't resemble myself, I was my opposite, svelte, fairy-like, pe-

tite, red-headed, clothed in a green dress. If I had come upon the idea of seduction, I would have pictured myself up there as seductive. I was, when I was living in the divine pocket, my other. From this position I began to look at the universe. I was happy. No one could reach us. As close as possible to the heart of God, to his middle and his lungs. His light gray suit. Never did I see his hands. I knew that he had a beautiful mouth. The lips of his Word: its pods of flesh with their neatly drawn contours. His mouth detached itself from his face, shone, distinguished itself. Thy mouth is a slice of pomegranate (I corrected the Bible).

Face: I lived it, received it. Primitive figure of a cosmos in which the dominant star, the sun, was the mouth. I didn't think of the eyes. I don't remember ever having seen or imagined the eyes of God. And God didn't flash withering looks: he smiled. He opened up.

And I went in and out of his breast pocket. The body of God was superior. Smile! In I go: mouse.<sup>9</sup>

Later I vaguely made him eyes like mouths. The lids had the engraving of the adored lips. Sometimes the lids fluttered and the eyes took sudden flight.

But the mouth of God advanced slowly, the lips parted and I lost myself in the contemplation of his teeth. Up above, I lived in the humid light of the teeth. His mouth, my hole, my temple: mouse, I go in and out between the teeth of the good lord cat.

My life down below, tumult and rage. As myself, I was a center of passions, fear and trembling, fury and vengeance. No precise form. All I knew of my body was the play of forces, not the play, the firing. Down below it was war. I was war. War and pleasure. Pleasure and despair. Power and feebleness. I watched, I kept vigil, I spied, I

never closed my eyes, I saw the incessant work of death. Me: the lamb. Me: the wolf.

I beat up children. The Enemy's little ones. The little pedigreed French. Well-cut, well-dressed, well-planned, well-effaced, well-scrubbed, -nourished, -rubbed. Little pink and blue sugarplums filled with venom and shit on the inside. Little marionettes with little unmoving eyes carved out of hatred stupidity ferocity. I didn't dare put out their eyes. Or hang them. Too obvious. I was afraid. I committed my murders on the sly. One day in the Officers' Park, I killed a harmless little chick. Her innocence was unparadonable. She was three or four years old, I was five or six. She strolled along hopping and pecking in the flower-lined pathways. In her eyes were the reflections of flowers, mommy, missal, candy. No hate. Not a trace of a beggar, not a shadow of a slave, of an Arab, of wretchedness. Back and forth between the flowers the arms the sweet things. She dared to be unaltered. The ruse came to me. I lured her into a corner. I would play the Snow White trick on her. My weapon: the core of a pear on which I had left a few morsels of flesh. I initiated her: "It's a sweet. You have to swallow it whole." Pure, she would obey me, she would swallow, the core would not go down, she would choke. She was white, I was black.

I killed. I tortured. I struck, cheated, stole. In dreams. Sometimes in reality. Guilty? Yes. Not guilty? Yes. Colonized, I decolonized. Bit, ate, vomited up. And was punished, punished. Spanked. My curls shorn, my eyes put out.

I adored God my mother. Love me! Don't abandon me! He who abandons me is my mother. My father dies: thus father you are my mother. My mother remains. In me

forever the fighting mother, the enemy of death. My father falls. In me, forever, the father is afraid, the mother resists.

Up above, I live in writing. I read to live. I began to read very early: I didn't eat, I read. I always "knew," without knowing it, that I nourished myself with texts. Without knowing it. Or without metaphor. There was little room for metaphor in my existence, a very confined space which I frequently nullified. I had two hungers: a good one and a bad one. Or the same one, suffered differently. Being hungry for books was my joy and my torture. I had almost no books. No money, no book. I gnawed through the municipal library in a year. I nibbled, and at the same time I devoured. As with the Hanukkah cakes: little annual treasure of ten cakes with cinnamon and ginger. How to conserve them while consuming them? Torture: desire and calculation. Economy of torment. Through the mouth I learned the cruelty of each decision, one single bite, the irreversible. Keeping and not enjoying. Enjoying and no longer enjoying. Writing is my father, my mother, my endangered nurse.

I was raised on the milk of words. Languages nourished me. I hated to eat what was on a plate. Dirty carrots, nasty soups, the aggression of forks and spoons. "Open your mouth." "No." I let myself be fed only by voice, by words. A deal was made: I would swallow only if I was given something to hear. Thirst of my ears. Blackmail for delights. While I was eating, incorporating, letting myself be force-fed, my head was enchanted, my thoughts escaped, my body here, my spirit on endless journeys. If I tasted anything, it was the stuff of speech. I remember, from the same period, the last bottle and the first book. I let go of one only for the other.

There is a language that I speak or that speaks (to) me in all tongues. A language at once unique and universal that resounds in each national tongue when a poet speaks it. In each tongue, there flows milk and honey. And this language I know: I don't need to enter it, it surges from me, it flows, it is the milk of love, the honey of my unconscious. The language that women speak when no one is there to correct them.

Perhaps I was able to write only because this language escaped the fate reserved for little red riding hoods. When you don't put your tongue in your pocket, there's always a grammar-r to censure it.

I had this luck, to be the daughter of the voice. Blessing: my writing stems from two languages, at least. In my tongue the "foreign" languages are my sources, my agitations. "Foreign": the music in me from elsewhere; precious warning: don't forget that all is not here, rejoice in being only a particle, a seed of chance, there is no center of the world, arise, behold the innumerable, listen to the untranslatable. Remember that everything is there; everything (which) is beyond everything. Languages pass into my tongue, understand one another, call to one another, touch and alter one another, tenderly, timidly, sensually; blend their personal pronouns together, in the effervescence of differences. Prevent "my language" from taking itself for my own; worry it and enchant it. Necessity, in the bosom of my language, for games and migrations of words, of letters, of sounds; my texts will never adequately tell its boons: the agitation that will not allow any law to impose itself, the opening that lets infinity pour out.

In the language I speak, the mother tongue resonates, tongue of my mother, less language than music, less syntax

than song of words, beautiful *Hochdeutsch*, throaty warmth from the north in the cool speech of the south. Mother German is the body that swims in the current, between my tongue's borders, the maternal loversoul,<sup>10</sup> the wild tongue that gives form to the oldest the youngest of passions, that makes milky night in the French day. Isn't written: traverses me, makes love to me, makes me love, speak, laugh from feeling its air caressing my throat.

My German mother in my mouth, in my larynx, rhythms me.

Horror the late day when I discovered that German can also be written. Learning German as a "second language," as they say. Trying to make the primitive language, the flesh of breath, into an object-tongue. *Ma lalemande!*<sup>11</sup> My nourishment. To suddenly sheath it, corset it, lace it, spell it! I fled, I spit it out, I vomited. I threw myself into *languelait* at the intersection of the other languages, so as not to see how the letters escort, laminate, extort, excoriate, reappropriate the blood of the tongues between their paws, their claws, and their teeth. The mother I speak has never been subjected to the grammar-wolf. In me she sings and muses; my accent is right, but my voice is illiterate. It is she who makes the French language always seem foreign to me. To her, my untamed one, I am indebted for never having had a rapport of mastery, of ownership with any language; for having always been in the wrong, guilty of fraud; for having always wanted to approach every language delicately, never as my own, in order to lick it, to breathe it in, to adore its differences, respect its gifts, its talents, its movements. Above all to keep it in the elsewhere that carries it along, to leave its foreignness intact, not bring it back to here, not deliver it to the blind violence of trans-

lation. If you do not possess a language, you can be possessed by it: let the tongue remain foreign to you. Love it like your fellow creature.

How could sexual difference not be troubled when, in my language, it's my father who is pregnant with my mother?

In French, carving out a pass: the door, the route, wanting to go ahead, to keep exceeding the language of a text; to break with it and to make it a point of departure; to confront culture, meaning, what is acquired; to not be spoken; to spar; to play; to make the repressed ones speak. In my womb, in my lungs, in my throat, the voices of foreign women give me pleasure, and it is the water of another sea-mother that comes to my mouth.

I beat my books: I caressed them. Page after page, O beloved, licked, lacerated. With nail marks all around the printed body. What pain you cause me! I read you, I adore you, I venerate you, I listen to your word, O burning bush, but you consume yourself! You're going to burn out! Stay! Don't abandon me. Blessing of the book: once the cakes were incorporated, I found myself empty, deceived, condemned again. A year to get through! (But a year, I've learned, is too long and is nothing. I learned all the subtleties of time very early, its elasticity in inflexibility, its meanness in compassion, its ability to return.)

The book—I could reread it with the help of memory and forgetting. Could begin again. From another perspective, from another and yet another. Reading, I discovered that writing is endless. Everlasting. Eternal.

Writing or God. God the writing. The writing God. I had only to break in and train my appetites.

I remember, at the age of twelve or thirteen, reading the following sentence: "The flesh is sad, alas, and I have read all the books."<sup>12</sup> I was struck with astonishment mingled with scorn and disgust. As if a tomb had spoken. What a lie! And beyond, what truth: for the flesh is a book. A body "read," finished? A book—a decaying carcass? Stench and falsity. The flesh is writing, and writing is never read: it always remains to be read, studied, sought, invented.

Reading: writing the ten thousand pages of every page, bringing them to light. Grow and multiply and the page will multiply. But that means *reading*: making love to the text. It's the same spiritual exercise.

And against death, to embody tenderness, in its humblest and proudest forms; to be the fidelity of a bird for its other bird, to be the hen the chicks the smile of my mother like the sun saving the earth, to be the force of love, above all: the good force, which doesn't accept the causing of suffering. Oh! I am the army of love—to love, alas, one must first embody the fight; this was my first knowledge: that life is fragile and death holds the power. That life, occupied as it is with loving, hatching, watching, caressing, singing, is threatened by hatred and death, and must defend itself. And I learned my first lesson of pain in this contradiction that reality, itself nothing but division-and contradiction, imposes as its law: love, wanting only to know life and peace, nourishing itself on milk and laughter, is forced to make war on war, to stare death in the face. I have been all the couples between whom abysses opened up, or rather I have been this two-bodied flesh that the jealousy of the world seeks to dismember, against which are pitted the dirty alliances of kings, laws, surly egos, families, accom-

plices, go-betweens, representatives of the Empire of Appropriation, of the worst kind of proprietorship,<sup>13</sup> the mouthpiece of the "you are (what is) Mine," not Adam and Eve who lose only the paradise of the blind, who are banished only from the point of view of the divine, who are born at last, who emerge, who become: I was the couple hacked apart, severed, condemned in its flesh for having found out the secret of pleasure, because in its body Eros marries masculine with feminine, because Juliette is loved in Romeo more than the Law and the fathers, because Isolde enters Tristan as his joy, his femininity, Tristan resists castration in Isolde.

I was the enemy of death, but does that mean "being" someone?

I was this ensemble, buffeted, tormented by the need to act; but where, how? By the need to move ahead? Toward what? Twisted, pushed, projected in opposing directions, divided, hurled, forward—but in what direction? And if there were no forward direction? No other Forward than, ambiguously, that which had taken place before?<sup>14</sup>

Speaking from this space pervaded by restlessness, how could I have said "I am?"

My tumults were at the very most concentrated under a name, and not just any name! Cixous—herself a tumultuous, indocile name. That, a "name"? This bizarre, barbarous word, so poorly borne by the French tongue, this was "my" "name." An impossible name. A name to put outside at night. A name which no one ever knew how to spell and which was me. It still is me. A bad name, I thought when they turned it against me, flaying me by flaying it, one of those foreign, unswallowable, unclassifiable words. I was no one. But I could, in effect, be "Cixous," and the thousand

distortions that ingenuity or hateful malice, conscious or unconscious, never grew tired of finding for it. Thanks to this name, I knew very early that there was a carnal bond between name and body. And that its power is formidable because it manifests itself at the nearest point to the secrets of human life, through the letters.

They could give me a pain in the letter, in my letter. And on the skin of the possessed, they branded a letter. So I was no one; merely a body scored by thunderbolts and letters.

I could have been called Hélène; I would have been beautiful, and unique, the only one. But I was Cixous. As an enraged mouse. I was so far from Hélène, a name which had actually been innocently transmitted to me from a German great-grandmother. With Cixous, imbeciles (some of whom will doubtless recognize themselves) make "sous."<sup>15</sup> And other low-level capital. With such a name, how could one not have been concerned with letters? Not have sharp ears? Not have understood that a body is always a substance for inscription? That the flesh writes and is given to be read; and to be written.

But I was no one. And no one, I said to myself, doesn't write.

If there was at first a time when the Breath's outbursts tormented me less, in my earliest childhood, it was because I didn't as yet feel guilty about being no one, and because I had no need to be someone. I was "*das Kind*," this child that we don't have the wisdom to let circulate in French. For this language swiftly assigns the newborn to one side or the other of gender. Here we are, leaning over the cradle. And asking, "Is it a girl?" No error, please! Pink or blue? Quick, the signs. Are you sure you put your sex on properly this morning? In other languages you are allowed to digress,

and the child remains a kind of neuter, in reprieve from sexual decision. Which doesn't mean that the repression of femininity is less significant where German or English is spoken. It's different, it intervenes in other terms. But there remains something undecided, a space for the hesitation of subjectivity, in these languages. This is not unrelated, I think, to the fact that in these languages it was possible for romantic agitation to flourish, with its way of unnerving the world of Being with its phantoms, its doubles, its wandering Jews, its people without shadows, its unpeopled shadows and the infinite species of its hybrids and other not-selves, somewhat-selves, somewhat different. There must be some *Es* in order for difference, for the not-self, to circulate. As *Es*, when I was still "*das Mädchen*," I must have written without fear. But that wasn't Writing if it was already the crises of Breath.

Who? I: Without-any-right.

I got my period—as late as possible. I would so much have liked to take myself for a "woman."

Was I a woman? I am challenging the entire History of women in reviving this question. A History made up of millions of singular stories, but traversed by the same questions, the same fears, the same uncertainties. The same hopes that only a little while ago harbored nothing but consent, resignation, or despair. Take myself for a woman? How so? Which one? I would have hated to "take" myself "for" a woman, if I had been taken for a woman.

They grab you by the breasts, they pluck your derrière, they stuff you in a pot, they sauté you with sperm, they grab you by the beak, they stick you in a house, they fatten you up on conjugal oil, they shut you up in your cage. And now, lay.

How difficult they make it for us to become women, when becoming poultry is what that really means!

How many deaths to cross, how many deserts, how many regions in flames and regions iced over, in order to give myself the right birth one day! And you, how many times did you die before being able to think, "I am a woman," without having this phrase signify, "Thus I serve?"

I died three or four times. And how many coffins have taken the place of a body for you during how many years of your existence? In how many frozen bodies has your soul shriveled up? You're thirty years old? Have you been born? We're born late sometimes. And what could have been a misfortune is our good luck. Woman is enigmatic, it seems. This is what the masters teach us. She is even, they say, enigma personified.

Enigma? How do you set about being that? Who has the secret? She does. She who? I wasn't Her. Nor a She, nor anyone.

My trial began:

"Do you know how to do what women know how to do?"

What do they know how to do, exactly?

"Knitting." "No—sewing." "No—making pastry." "No—making babies." But I . . . I know how to act like a baby. Does a child make babies? Create order, flatter the tastes, anticipate desires? No. Act like a woman? I don't know how. What does she know that I don't know? But to whom should this question be put?

My mother wasn't a "woman." She was my mother, she was the smile; she was the voice of my mother tongue, which wasn't French; to me she seemed rather like a young

man, or like a young girl; besides, she was foreign; she was my daughter. Woman she was, in that she lacked cunning, spitefulness, money sense, the calculating ferocity of the world of men; in that she was disarmed. She made me wish that I were a man, a just one, like in the Bible—so that I could fight the bad ones, the males, the wily ones, the merchants, the exploiters. I was her knight. But I was sad. Being a man, even a just one, weighed on me. And I couldn't be a "feminine" woman. There are just wars. But how heavy the armor!

Write? But if I wrote "I," who would I be? I could pass for "I" in daily life without knowing anything more about it, but write without *knowing I-Who*, how could I have done that? I had no right. Wasn't writing the realm of the Truth? Isn't the Truth clear, distinct, and one? And I was blurry, several, simultaneous, impure. Give it up!

Aren't you the very demon of multiplicity? All the people I caught myself being instead of me, my un-nameables, my monsters, my hybrids, I exhorted them to silence.

You can't stay put, where do you write from? I frightened myself. My unhappy aptitudes for identification came out in the practice of fiction. In Books I became someone, I was "at home" there, I found my counterparts in poetry (there were some), I entered into alliances with my paper soulmates, I had brothers, equivalents, substitutes, I was myself their brother or their fraternal sister at will. And in reality, I wasn't capable of being a person? Just one, but very much me!

Worse still, I was threatened with metamorphosis. I could change color, events altered me, I grew bigger but more frequently shrank, and even while "growing" I had the impression I was getting smaller.



Now, I believed as one should in the principle of identity, of noncontradiction, of unity. For years I aspired to this divine homogeneity. I was there with my big pair of scissors, and as soon as I saw myself overlapping, snip, I cut, I adjusted, I reduced everything to a personage known as “a proper woman.”

Write? “Yes, but musn’t one write from the point of view of God?” “Alas! So go on, renounce!”

I renounced. It subsided. Let itself be forgotten. My efforts were rewarded. I saw my domestic sanctity glimmering. I regrouped myself. Pollarded myself. I was on the verge of becoming one-self.

But, as I have since come to know, the repressed returns. Was it by chance that my Breath returned at these specific moments of my history, when I experienced death and birth? I never dreamed of it then. If it was chance, it just goes to show that chance does things well. And that there is an unconscious.

I give birth. I enjoy giving births. I enjoyed birthings—my mother is a midwife—I’ve always taken pleasure in watching a woman give birth. Giving birth “well.” Leading her act, her passion, letting herself be led by it, pushing as one thinks, half carried away, half commanding, the contraction, she merges herself with the uncontrollable, which she makes her own. Then, her glorious strength! Giving birth as one swims, exploiting the resistance of the flesh, of the sea, the work of the breath in which the notion of “mastery” is annulled, body after her own body, the woman follows herself, meets herself, marries herself. She is *there*. Entirely. Mobilized, and this is a matter of her own body, of the flesh of her flesh. At last! This time, of all

times, she is hers, and if she wishes, she is not absent, she is not fleeing, she can take and give of herself to herself. It was in watching them *giving birth* (to themselves)<sup>16</sup> that I learned to love women, to sense and desire the power and the resources of femininity; to feel astonishment that such immensity can be reabsorbed, covered up, in the ordinary. It wasn’t the “mother” that I saw. The child is her affair. Not mine. It was the woman at the peak of her flesh, her pleasure, her force at last delivered, manifest. Her secret. And if you could see yourself, how could you help loving yourself? She gives birth. With the force of a lioness. Of a plant. Of a cosmogony. Of a woman. She has her source. She draws deeply. She releases. Laughing. And in the wake of the child, a squall of Breath! A longing for text! Confusion! What’s come over her? A child! Paper! Intoxications! I’m brimming over! My breasts are overflowing! Milk. Ink. Nursing time. And me? I’m hungry, too. The milky taste of ink!

Writing: as if I had the urge to go on enjoying, to feel full, to push, to feel the force of my muscles, and my harmony, to be pregnant and at the same time to give myself the joys of parturition, the joys of both the mother and the child. To give birth to myself and to nurse myself, too. Life summons life. Pleasure seeks renewal. More! I didn’t write. What was the point? The milk went to my head . . .

Another day, I have a child. This child is not a child. It was perhaps a plant, or an animal. I falter. Thus, everything happened as if what I had always imagined were reproduced in reality. Produced reality. At this point I discovered that I didn’t know where the human begins. What is the difference between the human and the nonhuman? Between life

and nonlife? Is there a "limit"? Words were pierced, their meaning fled. A breath is swallowed up. The child dies. Does not die. Impossible to mourn. A longing to write is everywhere. This is certainly perfect timing, I say to myself severely. I bring myself before the judge: "You want to produce a text when you are incapable of producing a child properly? First, you must take your test again."

"As a mother, one could do better. Are you aware of this?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"I'm less and less certain. I give up."

The truth is, I have no "reason" to write. It's all because of this wind of madness.

And there's no help for it, short of violence and constraint. Impossible to forestall. The breath, what misfortune!

Are you going to shut up? They shut me up. Muzzle her. Silence her. Stop up her ears. I shut up. They examine me. There's something wrong with this organism. This beats too fast, that flows too hard. This heart is not normal. I'm sick, punish me.

"So," says the doctor, "we want to write?"

"A bit of a sore throat," I say, hoarse with fright.

He inspects me from head to foot, he cuts me up in little pieces, he finds my thighs too long and my breasts too small.

"Open your mouth, let's take a look."

I open my mouth, I say "Aah," I stick out my tongue. I have three of them. Three tongues? Pardon me. And what's more, he doesn't know that I have one or two that aren't

attached there, or perhaps just one that changes and multiplies, a blood tongue, a night tongue, a tongue that traverses my regions in every direction, that lights their energies, urges them on and makes my secret horizons speak. Don't tell him, don't tell him. He'll cut out your tongues, he'll pluck out your teeth! "Open your eyes, pull in your tongue." I obey. The Master tells me: "Go to the city marketplace, describe it. If you reproduce it well, you will be given a writer's license." I don't get the license.

Every year a Superuncle tells me: "Before taking up the pen, tell me: do you know how to talk like a worker?"

"No."

"Do you really know who I am?"

"Oh yes," I say, "you are a capitalist-realist Superuncle. The Master of Repetition. The Anti-Other in paperwork."

He repeats his hundredth rescene for me: every year, it's the resame. "We think you're here. And you're there. One day we tell ourselves: this time we've got her, it's her for sure. This woman is in the bag. And we haven't finished pulling the purse strings when we see you come in through another door. Now really, who are you? If you're never the same, how do you expect people to recognize you? Besides, what's your principal name? The public wants to know what it's buying. The unknown just doesn't sell. Our customers demand simplicity. You're always full of doubles, we can't count on you, there is otherness in your sameness. Give us a homogeneous Cixous. You are requested to repeat yourself. Nothing unexpected. A minimum of change for us. Halt! At ease. Repetition!"

"As for the future, nobody's interested. Give us the same old reliable past. Above all, don't lead us astray. We've

lived with your kind for five thousand years. Everyone knows what women are. Myself, I've had a wife, for thirty years."<sup>17</sup>

### Confession

I have an animale.<sup>18</sup> It's a nannymale, a species of meowse, a he-or she-bird, i. e., a miss-bird. It lives in me, it makes its nest, it makes my shame in its nest. It's crazy, it's edgy. I'm deeply chagrined to admit it: it gives me the greatest pleasure. Don't tell anyone. It's beastly.—Sometimes it's a dwarf, a very cunning Tom Thumb: seven leagues in one stride, barefoot—that's him. The animale is badly brought up, capricious and cumbersome. She comes when I call. When I don't call, she comes. She gets me into fixes. The Superuncle keeps tabs on me. He sneaks up with Wolf stealth, when I give it something to eat. Giving her pleasure is delicious to me, I don't hear the Wolf gnashing his teeth. The Superuncle howls, I jump in the air, my animale screams. The old Wolf wants to separate us. For our own sake, for the right sake, for cunt's sake? He leans over the cradle, he hurls a curse at us: "If you bring her up, you will become more and more beastly. You will be crazy in the end. Men will have nothing to do with you. You will not become a woman."

What punishment! I am very afraid.

Chase her away! She comes back. She slips in between my thighs.

Her breathing is irresistible. Wild thing or woman?

With one hand she holds her animale pressed between her thighs, she caresses it briskly (as a "wild thing"). While with the other hand she does her utmost to kill it (as a man's

"woman"). Happily, as ill luck would have it, beating it only adds to its joy. And me, my master, what will become of me? Wilder and wilder. Oh! I will never know. The nannymale carries me away, I am lost, ravished, I touch it, what am I?

Don't touch yourself. Run away from yourself. He will cut off your hand! He will chill your marrow. He will make you wear mitts.

### Requiemth Lecture on the Infeminitesimal

Gentlemen-gentlemen, Ladies-gentlemen,<sup>19</sup>

All the while I am preparing to worry you, I am ceaselessly struggling with your internal difficulties, and I feel in advance that I am in the wrong rightly, so to speak.

My writings really have no *raison d'être*. Folly, madness! In fact, I know nothing: I have nothing to write except what I don't know. I am writing to you with my eyes closed. But I know how to read with my eyes closed. To you, who have eyes with which not to read, I have nothing to reveal. Woman is one of the things that you are in no position to understand.

I've done everything possible to stifle it. What I'm saying is more than true. What's the point of sexcusing oneself? You can't just get rid of femininity. Femininity is inevitable. I ask you to take back your part of it. Take your shameful parts in hand. May Her proud parts come back to her.

The overfullness of femininity overwhelms you because you are men. But are you sure you're human?

To prove that I'm rightfully in the wrong, I've invoked all the reasons for the fact that I have no right to write within your Logic: nowhere to write from. No fatherland, no legitimate history. No certainties, no property.

No serious declared language. In German, I weep; in English, I play; in French, I fly, I am a thief. No permanent residence.<sup>20</sup>

No law. No grammar. Spelling, once a month. No knowledge. Above all, no knowledge. Writing diplomas: none. Affiliations: none. Models: zero. The infinite.

And Yet She Writes!

First she dies. Then she loves.

I am dead. There is an abyss. The leap. That *Someone* takes. Then, a gestation of self—in itself, atrocious. When the flesh tears, writhes, rips apart, decomposes, revives, recognizes itself as a newly born woman, there is a suffering that no text is gentle or powerful enough to accompany with a song. Which is why, while she's dying—then being born—silence.

I have nothing to say about my death. It has been too big for me up to now. In a sense, all my texts are "born" of it. Have fled from it. Are its issue. My writing has several origins, several breaths that blow life into it and carry it along.

Without it—my death—I wouldn't have written. Wouldn't have torn the veil from my throat. Wouldn't have uttered the ear-splitting cry, the cry that cleaves walls. What occurs during death is unspeakable. Writing is, in a certain sense (I don't believe I'm mistaken in thinking that there

are certain universal traits in our passage to death), first of all the difference of a last sigh, of a phrase seized with terror; and simultaneously already the headlong flight, the shudder of horror—for in death we know the greatest, the most repellent suffering—and the turning back again, the unspeakable, undisclosable nostalgia of what one has known in this moment of marriage with death. What occurred there is decisive, is absolutely unforgettable, but it remains in a memory that is not our daily memory, a memory that doesn't know, doesn't speak, that is only furrowed scarred flesh; painful proof, but of what . . .

And from this period of death, one retains the greatest fear and the greatest benefit: the desire to remain as close as possible to Her, death, our most powerful mother, the one who gives us the most violent push of desire to cross over, to leap, since one cannot *stay close* to her, she desires and incites desire; and this desire is split, it is simultaneously its own opposite, the desire to approach her close enough to die from it, almost, and to hold oneself extremely far back from her, as far as possible. Because it is before her, against her, right up against her, our most dangerous and generous mother,<sup>21</sup> the one who gives us (although we aren't thinking, there isn't a glimmer of thought in us, only the tumult, the roaring of blood, precosmic, embryonic confusion) the staggering wish to come out, the desire for both extremes to meet, enter into and reverse each other, and day doesn't come after night, but struggles with it, embraces it, wounds it, is wounded by it, and the black blood and the white blood mingle; and in the same way, life emerges crawling from the entrails of death that it has lacerated, that it hates, that it adores, and it never forgets that death doesn't forget it, that it is always there, never leaves it. open the window,

the terrible breast is there, the bed of peace—and this is life's greatest strength, it understands that death loves us as we love it, and that, in a strange way, we can truly count on it. That we move away from and approach Death, our double mother, through writing, because writing is always first a way of not being able to go through with mourning for death.

And I say: you must have been loved by death to be born and move on to writing. The condition on which beginning to write becomes necessary—(and)—possible: *losing everything*, having once lost everything. And this is not a thinkable “condition.” You can't *want* to lose: if you want to, then there is *you* and *wanting*, there is nonloss. Writing—begins, without you, without I, without law, without knowing, without light, without hope, without bonds, without anyone close to you, for if world history goes on, you are not in it, you are “in” “hell,” and hell is where I am not but where what is me, although I have no place, feels itself dying again through all time, where not-me drags me further and further from me, and where what is left of me is nothing more than suffering without myself, suffering uncircumscribed by self, for “me,” left open, constantly feels the sense, the soul, the bodily and spiritual substances of the self streaming away, me empties itself, and yet, heavier and heavier, you sink down, you bottom-out in the abyss of nonrapport.

And so when you have lost everything, no more roads, no direction, no fixed signs, no ground, no thoughts able to resist other thoughts, when you are lost, beside yourself, and you continue getting lost, when you become the panicky movement of getting lost, then, that's when, where you are unwoven weft, flesh that lets strangeness come

through, defenseless being, without resistance, without batten, without skin, inundated with otherness, it's in these breathless times that writings traverse you, songs of an unheard-of purity flow through you, addressed to no one, they well up, surge forth, from the throats of your unknown inhabitants, these are the cries that death and life hurl in their combat.

And this tissue from which your pains tailor this body without any borders, this endless wasteland, this ravaged space, your ruined states, without armies, without mastery, without ramparts—you didn't know that they were the gardens of love. Not demand. You are not jealousy, not calculation and envy, because you are lost. You are not in touch. You are detachment. You do not beg. You lack nothing. You are beyond lack: But you wander stripped down, undefined, at the mercy of the Other. And if Love comes along, it can find in you the unlimited space, the place without end that is necessary and favorable to it. Only when you are lost can love find itself in you without losing its way.

Now if you are a woman, you are always nearer to and farther from loss than a man is. More and less capable of loss. More attracted, more repulsed. More seduced, more forbidden. The same shadowy impulse, divided in direction, and always its own reverse, pushes you, restraining you, to lose.

For “woman,” well imprinted with the sociocultural heritage, has been inculcated with the spirit of “restraint.” She is in fact “restraint” itself, socially. (Or, if you wish, the repressed, the controlled one.)<sup>22</sup> She restrains herself, and is restrained, by a thousand bonds, hitched, conjugated, strings, chains, nets, leash, feeding dish, network of servile,

reassuring dependencies. She is defined by her connections, *wife of*, as she was daughter of, from hand to hand, from bed to niche, from niche to household, woman as the complement-of-a-name has much to do to cut free. They have taught you to be afraid of the abyss, of the infinite, which is nonetheless more familiar to you than it is to man. Don't go near the abyss! If she should discover its (her) force! If she should, suddenly, take pleasure in, profit from its immensity! If she should take the leap! And fall not like a stone, but like a bird. If she should discover herself to be a swimmer of the unlimited!

Let yourself go! Let go of everything! Lose everything! Take to the air. Take to the open sea. Take to letters. Listen: nothing is found. Nothing is lost. Everything remains to be sought. Go, fly, swim, bound, descend, cross, love the unknown, love the uncertain, love what has not yet been seen, love no one, whom you are, whom you will be, leave yourself, shrug off the old lies, *dare what you don't dare*, it is there that you will take pleasure, never make your here anywhere but *there*, and rejoice, rejoice in the terror, follow it where you're afraid to go, go ahead, take the plunge, you're on the right trail! Listen: you owe nothing to the past, you owe nothing to the law. *Gain your freedom: get rid of everything, vomit up everything, give up everything. Give up absolutely everything, do you hear me? All of it!* Give up your goods. Done? Don't keep anything; whatever you value, give it up. Are you with me? Search yourself, seek out the shattered, the multiple I, that you will be still further on, and emerge from one self, shed the old body, shake off the Law. Let it fall with all its weight, and you, take off, don't turn back: it's not worth it, there's nothing behind you, everything is yet to come.

One can emerge from death, I believe, only with an irrepressible burst of laughter. I laughed. I sat down at the top of a ladder whose rungs were covered with stained feathers, vestiges of defeated angels, very high above the rivers of Babylon that twisted between the lips of the Land that is always promised. And I laughed. I was doubled over laughing. I was perfectly alone. And there was nothing around me. Nothing held me, I held on to nothing. I could move on without alighting, there was no road, in my left hand my deaths, in my right hand my possible lives. If there was godliness, I was of it.

I didn't seek: I was the search.

In the beginning, there can be only dying, the abyss, the first laugh.

After that, you don't know. It's life that decides. Its terrible power of invention, which surpasses us. Our life anticipates us. Always ahead of you by a height, a desire, the good abyss, the one that suggests to you: "Leap and pass into infinity." Write! What? Take to the wind, take to writing, form one body with the letters. Live! Risk: those who risk nothing gain nothing, risk and you no longer risk anything.

In the beginning, there is an end. Don't be afraid: it's your death that is dying. Then: all the beginnings.

When you have come to the end, only then can Beginning come to you.

At first I laughed, I cried out, a deep pain dictated my first letters from hell. Fashioned new ears for me for the future, and I heard the cries of the world, the rages and the appeals of the peoples, the bodily songs, the music of tortures and the music of ecstasies. I'm listening.

But if space without bounds hadn't been given to me

then, I wouldn't have written what I can hear. Because I write for, I write from, I start writing from: Love. I write out of love. Writing, loving: inseparable. Writing is a gesture of love. *The Gesture*.

Everyone is nourished and augmented by the other. Just as one is not without the other, so Writing and Loving are lovers and unfold only in each other's embrace, in seeking, in writing, in loving each other. Writing: making love to Love. Writing with love, loving with writing. Love opens up the body without which Writing becomes atrophied. For Love, the words become loved and read flesh, multiplied into all the bodies and texts that love bears and awaits from love. Text: not a detour, but the flesh at work in a labor of love.

Not the operations of sublimation. She doesn't give herself, in the text, derived satisfactions. She doesn't transform her desires into art objects, her solitude and her sorrows into priced products. No reappropriation.

Love can't be exchanged for social adaptation, its life signs have no market equivalents. Nor are the objects of dreams sublime objects. And like texts, they don't fail to affect waking life, they transform it, her life is more than diurnal: it is a life with many lives, all her night lives and all her lives of poetry. Thus, love extends and seeks itself, literally, carnally. If you write as a woman, you know this as I do: you write to give the body its Books of the Future because Love dictates your new geneses to you. Not to fill in the abyss, but to love yourself right to the bottom of your abysses. To know, not to avoid. Not to surmount; to explore, dive down, visit. There, where you write, everything grows, your body unfurls, your skin recounts its hitherto silent legends.

Love made a gesture, two years ago, a fluttering of eyelids and the text rises forth; there is this gesture, the text surges from it. There is this text and the body takes new flight. Read me—lick me, write love to me. She doesn't put herself in the abyss to saturate the feared gapingness; she celebrates her abysses, she wants them wide open, she desires their bottomlessness, their promise: never will you fill us in, you will never lack the good vertigo; for your hunger, our sexes without end, our differences.

The text is always written under the sweet pressure of love. My only torment, my only fear, is of failing to write as high up as the Other, my only chagrin is of failing to write as beautifully as Love. The text always comes to me in connection with the Source. If the source were dammed up, I would not write. And the source is given to me. It is not me. One cannot be one's own source. Source: always there. Always the vividness of the being who gives me the There.<sup>23</sup> Which I can't stop searching for; I seek it furiously with all my forces and with all my senses. Source that gives the meaning and the impulse to all the other sources, illuminates History for me, brings to life all the scenes of the real, and gives me my births every day. It opens the earth for me and I spring forth. It opens my body, and writing springs forth. The beloved, the one who is there, the one who is always there, the one who is never exhausted, the one who never runs out, but whose every phrase calls forth a book—and whose every breath inaugurates a song in my breast, a there that doesn't disappear although I don't "find" it or enclose it, I don't "comprehend" it, a limitlessness, for my limitlessness, the being that gives itself—to be sought out—that prompts and relaunches the movement that makes my heart throb, that makes me take up the ink and

go off again to seek farther, questioning eternity, untriring, insatiable, answer that poses a question, without end.

Love gives me the space and the desire for endlessness. Ten thousand lives don't cover a single page of it. What misfortune! What a blessing! My littleness, what luck! Not knowing the limit! Being in touch with the more-than-me! Gives me the strength to want all the mysteries, to love them, to love the threat in them, the disturbing strangeness. Love reaches me. Its face: its thousands of new faces.

Its look, the same Eternal One, and yet I had never received it before. Its voice, how to hear it, how with my human ears to hear the voice that makes ten thousand voices resound. I am struck. I am touched. Here. Here-There. My body is hit. Agitated. Under the blows of love I catch fire, I take to the air, I burst into letters. It's not that I don't resist. It speaks, and I am what is uttered.

Who makes me write, moan, sing, dare? Who gives me the body that is never afraid of fear? Who writes me? Who makes my life into the carnal field of an uprising of texts? Life in person. For a long time now, the names that are only right for the urge to possess have not been right for naming the being who equals life. All the names of Life suit it, all the names put together don't suffice to designate it. When I have finished writing, when we have returned to the air of the song that we are, the body of texts that we will have made for ourselves will be one of its names among so many others.

Neither father nor mother, nor brother nor man nor sister, but the being that love proposes we should become at that moment because it pleases us or is important to us in this scene, in these arms, on this street, in the heart of this battle, in the hollow of this bed, in this protest, on this

earth, in this space—marked with political and cultural signs, and permeated with signs of love. Often you are my mother as a young man, and I am often your daughter son, your mineral mother, and you my wild father, my animal brother. There are possibilities that have never yet come to light. Others, entirely unforeseen, that have come over us only once. Flowers, animals, engines, grandmothers, trees, rivers, we are traversed, changed, surprised.

Writing: first I am touched, caressed, wounded; then I try to discover the secret of this touch to extend it, celebrate it, and transform it into another caress.

Is day hidden yet? At night, tongues are loosened, books open and reveal themselves; what I can't do, my dreams do for me. For a long time I felt guilty: for having an unconscious. I used to imagine Writing as the result of the work of a scholar, of a master of Lights and measures. And you? Myself, I experienced it by surprise, I didn't move forward, I was pushed. I didn't earn my book by the sweat of my brow, I received it. Worse still: I stole. I was tempted: there was this garden without bars within which bubbled up all the texts, a thousand and one tales a night. The fruits of the Tree of Birth! My mouth watered! The tree of fiction! Don't taste! It's only a dream! He who tastes of the fruit of this tree no longer knows which side to wake up on. Every night, forests of texts, tables laden with fantastic letters. How could you resist? All this forbidden writing?

I stole. Timidly at first: not even a dream, not even a piece of fruit, just its scent, a color, an ache, which I didn't turn over to oblivion, which I retained, and whose vividness like a magnet at dawn, in the shadows of daybreak, enabled me to attract a few fascinated phrases. "How do



they write?" I wondered, and my dreams went to my head. "What do they know, the wise men, the masters, the vanquishers of codes?" And there I was, hounded by dreams, flooded with visions, squelching about in unsubdued languages, I skirted the walls of their French parks with my abundance, my drunken lands, my wild orchards. And I didn't know how to draw a straight line.

On the sly, I stole myself. Don't repeat it!

These pearls, these diamonds, these signifiers that flash with a thousand meanings, I admit it, I have often filched them from my unconscious. The jewelry box. We all know what that is. Every woman has one. But sometimes it's empty. Sometimes she has lost the key. Sometimes it's papamama who has pinched it from her. Sometimes she can't remember where she put it away. Furtively, I arrive, a little break-in, just once, I rummage, ah! the secret! (Note that in Henry James's *Aspern Papers* everything is there in the drawer, *on the condition that*, so that, the letters will be stolen.) I sneak a look, my hand follows suit. It's irresistible.

False signatures you're using there, I told myself not long ago.

"Thief!" "Me, a thief? But who's being 'robbed'?"

What belongs to whom? Whose love-pirate am I?

I listen to and repeat what women tell me at night. One part of the text comes from me. One part is torn from the body of the peoples; one part is anonymous, one part is my brother. Each part is a whole that I desire, a greater life that I envy and admire, that adds its blood to my own blood. In me there is always someone who is greater than I, someone nobler, someone more powerful, who pushes me to grow, whom I love, whom I don't seek to equal, a body, a soul, a

text—human, whom I don't want to restrain, whom I want to let circulate freely, to whom I relish having to give the infinite. Hélène Cixous isn't me but those who are sung in my text, because their lives, their pains, their force, demand that it resound.

At night I gather up my body, I step behind the wheel, I slip between my curtains, I circulate between two bloodstreams, according to what day of night it is I soar up, I descend, cities emerge from me, I travel through them, I leave them behind, all my outings on high. Am I dreaming? No. These are my lives that come to me, all the ones that lead me everywhere, into the regions, lands, countrysides, cities, cultures, nations, where my being has been touched, a single time suffices, to the quick, struck for life—to all the places from which a love letter or poison-pen letter has been mailed and then received so powerfully by my body that it could not not respond. They have led me into almost all the single countries, the compound countries, the decomposed or reconstituted countries—to all the sites where History has fertilized my geography. I travel: where people suffer, where they fight, where they escape, where they enjoy, my body is suddenly there.

Worldwide my unconscious, worldwide my body. What happens outside happens inside. I myself am the earth, everything that happens, the lives that live me in my different forms, the voyage, the voyager, the body of travel and the spirit of travel, and all of this with such suppleness that I go in and out, in and out, I am in my body and my body is in me, I envelop myself and contain myself, we might be afraid of getting lost but it never happens, one of my lives always brings me back to solid body.<sup>24</sup>

The tears I shed at night! The waters of the world flow from my eyes, I wash my peoples in my despair, I bathe them, I lick them with my love, I go to the banks of the Nile to gather back the peoples abandoned in cradles of reeds, for the fate of the living I have the untiring love of a mother, that is why I am everywhere, my cosmic womb, I work on my worldwide unconscious, I throw death out, it comes back, we begin again, I am pregnant with beginnings. Yes, at night love makes me a mother, I've known that a long time, I was already a mother when I had the taste of a last bottle still on my tongue. I was the mother of my mother then, of my brother, my whole family, I took them in my arms, I carried them over the hills, I saved them from the Nazis. Since then I've invented all different kinds of transportation, known and unknown. I've made planes that take off with a beat of the heart, I've laughed while reading da Vinci, one of my oldest young brothers, a feminine plural like me, I've been all the birds, joy of my life, the day it came home to me that my father was a stork. As a mother, I naturally needed wings. Carrier, ravisser, the one who lifts up. What I know today, if I didn't know it yesterday, because I wasn't watching myself, was already there. Flee, protect, escape, fly. Are you being pursued? Is censure is after you? Its chain of cops, pimps, misers, repressed types, editors, ultraprofs, bosses, helmeted phaluses? How would you survive that armed bestiality, Power, if you didn't always have for yourself, with yourself, in yourself, a bit of the mother to remind you that evil doesn't always win out; if there weren't always a bit of the mother to give you peace, to keep a little of the milk of life through the ages and wars, a little of the soul's pleasure that regenerates? A taste of books, a taste of letters, to revive you?

So this is why, how, who, what, I write: milk. Strong nourishment. The gift without return. Writing, too, is milk. I nourish. And like all those who nourish, I am nourished. A smile nourishes me. Mother I am daughter: if you smile at me, you nourish me, I am your daughter. Goodnesses of good exchanges.

Mystery of hatred, of spite: isn't the one who hates devoured alive by hatred? Whoever keeps wealth and nourishment for himself is poisoned. Mystery of the gift: the poison-gift: if you give, you receive. What you don't give, the Antigift, turns back against you and rots you.

The more you give, the more you take pleasure. How could it be that they don't know that?

I write "mother." What is the connection between mother and woman, daughter? I write "woman." What is the difference? This is what my body teaches me: first of all, be wary of names; they are nothing but social tools, rigid concepts, little cages of meaning assigned, as you know, to keep us from getting mixed up with each other, without which the Society of Capitalist Siphoning would collapse. But, my friend, take the time to unname yourself for a moment. Haven't you been the father of your sister? Haven't you, as a wife, been the husband of your spouse, and perhaps the brother of your brother, or hasn't your brother been your big sister? I emerged from names rather late, personally. I believed—up to the day that writing came to my lips—in Father, Husband, Family; and I paid dearly for it in the flesh.<sup>25</sup> Writing and traversing names are the same necessary gesture: as soon as Eurydice calls Orpheus down to the depths where beings change, Orpheus perceives that he is himself (in) Eurydice. As soon as you let yourself be led beyond codes, your body filled with fear and with joy, the words diverge, you are no longer enclosed

in the maps of social constructions, you no longer walk between walls, meanings flow, the world of railways explodes, the air circulates, desires shatter images, passions are no longer chained to genealogies, life is no longer nailed down to generational time, love is no longer shunted off on the course decided upon by the administration of public alliances. And you are returned to your innocences, your possibilities, the abundance of your intensities. Now, listen to what your body hadn't dared let surface.

Mine tells me: I am the daughter of milk and honey. If you give me the breast, I am your child, without ceasing to be mother to those that I nourish, and you are my mother. Metaphor? Yes. No. If everything is metaphor, then nothing is metaphor. A man is your mother. If he is your mother, is he a man? Ask yourself rather: Is there a man who can be my mother? Is a maternal man a woman? Tell yourself rather: He is big enough and plural enough to be capable of maternal goodness.

There are daughters who are nothing but "daughters," childhood, pleasure and misfortune of childhood and dependence. And there are mothers who are not maternal, who are jealous sisters like the three or four mother-sisters of Cinderella.

And woman? Woman, for me, is she who kills no one in herself, she who gives (herself) her own lives: woman is always in a certain way "mother" for herself and for the other.

There is something of the mother in every woman. Unhappy the "woman" who has let herself be shut up in the role of a single degree of kinship! Unhappy she whom old History constrains to let herself be recruited into unjust wars, the ones that anguish and lack of love foment end-

lessly between mothers, daughters, daughters-in-law, sisters. These wars come from men and are profitable to them. Unhappy the daughter who learns from her "mother" to hate the mother!

In woman, mother and daughter rediscover each other, preserve each other, childhood enters into maturity, experience, innocence, the daughter in the woman is the mother-child who never stops growing.

There is something of the mother in you if you love yourself. If you love. If you love, you love yourself as well. This is the woman who belongs to love: the woman who loves all the women inside her. (Not the "beautiful" woman Uncle Freud speaks of, the beauty in the mirror, the beauty who loves herself so much that no one can ever love her enough, not the queen of beauty.) She doesn't watch herself, she doesn't measure herself, she doesn't examine herself, not the image, not the copy. The vibrant flesh, the enchanted womb, the woman pregnant with all the love. Not seduction, not absence, not the abyss adorned with veils. Plenitude, she who doesn't watch herself, doesn't reappropriate all her images reflected in people's faces, is not the devourer of eyes. She who looks with the look that recognizes, that studies, respects, doesn't take, doesn't claw, but attentively, with gentle relentlessness, contemplates and reads, caresses, bathes, makes the other gleam. Brings back to light the life that's been buried, fugitive, made too prudent. Illuminates it and sings it its names.

What moves me to write—is analogous to what moves the mother to write the universe so that the child will grasp it and name it. First I marry, I am married: I don't bar, I don't close up my lands, my senses, the carnal space that spreads out behind my eyes: I let myself be traversed,

impregnated, affected (as much as possible: up to the point where, a little further and I would be lost to myself), infiltrated, invaded, medium my flesh and the immense machine of visions, of signs, that produces in a place I situate vaguely between my head and my lungs. I don't "begin" by "writing": I don't write. Life becomes text starting out from my body. I am already text. History, love, violence, time, work, desire inscribe it in my body, I go where the "fundamental language" is spoken, the body language into which all the tongues of things, acts, and beings translate themselves, in my own breast, the whole of reality worked upon in my flesh, intercepted by my nerves, by my senses, by the labor of all my cells, projected, analyzed, recomposed into a book. Vision: my breast as the Tabernacle. Open. My lungs like the scrolls of the Torah. But a Torah without end whose scrolls are imprinted and unfurled throughout time and, on the same History, all the histories, events, ephemeral changes, and transformations are written, I enter into myself with my eyes closed, and you can read it. This reading is performed here, by the being-who-wants-to-be-born, by an urge, something that wants at all costs to come out, to be exhaled, a music in my throat that wants to resound, a need of the flesh then, that seizes my trachea, a force that contracts the muscles of my womb and stretches my diaphragm as if I were going to give birth through my throat, or come. And it's the same thing.

It is impossible to say in advance what this being of air and flesh in me that has made itself out of thousands of elements of meanings taken from various domains of the real and linked together by my emotions, my rage, my joy, my desire, will be, or what it will resemble; just as there's

no foreseeing the forms that lava will take as it cools. It takes on the form, the literal face, that suits the part of it that wants to be expressed. If the feeling it wants to convey is war, political battles, it flows out in theatrical form. If it's a feeling of mourning, oh! you have abandoned me, its body is sobbing, stifled breath, blanks and crises of the *Inside*.<sup>26</sup> If it wants to explode into orgasm, spill forth, recover, plunge, it becomes entirely *Breaths (Souffles)*.<sup>27</sup>

What slowly develops in me finds its surging inscription in a form I cannot control.

So for each text, another body. But in each the same vibration: the something in me that marks all my books is a reminder that my flesh signs the book, it is *rhythm*. Medium my body, rhythmic my writing.

Two forces work on me at the same time, I am under the cosmic tent, under the canvas of my body and I gaze out, I am the bosom of happenings. And while I gaze, I listen. What happens takes place simultaneously in song. In a certain way, an opera inhabits me. What flows from my hand onto the paper is what I see-hear, my eyes listen, my flesh scans. I am invaded. I am pushed to the limit. A music floods through me, inculcates me with its staves. I am childhood, my mother sings, her alto voice. More! Encore! a lovely tongue licks at my heart, my flesh takes in the German that I can't make out. *O Lied! Lied!* Song and sorrow, blood and song! *Leid! Leid!* Sorrow and body. *Leib! Leib! Leis!* Lay, hymn, milk. *Lieb! Love*. I am loved. Letters love me. *Leise*. Soft and low. I sense that I am loved by writing. How could I help loving it? I am woman, I make love, love makes me, a *Third Body (Troisième Corps)*<sup>28</sup> comes to us, a third sense of sight, and our other ears—between our two bodies our third body surges forth, and

flies up to see the summit of things, and at the summit rises and soars toward the highest things; dives, swims in our waters, descends, explores the depths of the bodies, discovers and consecrates every organ, comes to know the minute and the invisible—but in order for the third body to be written, the exterior must enter and the interior must open out. If you plug my ears, if you close my body to the outer-inner music, if you bar the song, then everything falls silent, love loses its breath, darkens, I can no longer hear myself pleasuring, I am broken, lost. What falls on the paper is what has entered my whole text through my ears.

First of all, the song of the mother the lay of the soul, I will never grow tired of them, enter, my love, feed me, my souls thirst for your voices, now I am overflowing, now the outpouring, I flow out of myself in rivers without banks; then, later on, you emerge from your own sea, you reach a shore. You make the break. Then, if you want to write books, you equip yourself, you trim, you filter, you go back over yourself, severe test, you tread on your own flesh, you no longer fly, you no longer flow, you survey, you garden, you dig, ah, you clean and assemble, this is the hour of man. You wind things up, you pull the strings, you tighten the thread, you execute the dreamwork in a state of vigilance, you cheat, condense, compile, you distill. And now what will you name it?

You dream: "The table is round. I speak louder and louder to drown out the noise, I piss harder and harder, I speak louder and louder, it takes on the force of a waterfall, hide it, I speak more and more firmly, a hydrant gushing great streams, this discourse is philosophical, hide it, what excess, all eyes on me, a pissertation, what will the outcome be?" Dreamed.

Who dreams you? Where do these messengers come from who confide in you, though in tongues that are foreign to you, the secrets of human movements, the news of peoples you've never imagined? Causing famished tribes to perish in your body, giving you infants to love who are born of your flesh but who are not your own, welcoming under your skin the thousands of anonymous enemies who harbor grudges against your life, your liberty, your sex? And from dream to dream you wake up more and more conscious, more and more woman. The more you let yourself dream, the more you let yourself be worked through, the more you let yourself be disturbed, pursued, threatened, loved, the more you write, the more you escape the censor, the more the woman in you is affirmed, discovered, and invented. And they come to you in greater and greater numbers, more exposed, naked, strong, and new. Because there is room for them in you. The more they are loved, the more they grow and expand, come close and reveal themselves as never before, the more they sow and reap femininity.

They lead you into their gardens, they invite you into their forests, they make you explore their regions, they inaugurate their continents. Close your eyes and love them: you are at home in their lands, they visit you and you visit them, their sexes lavish their secrets on you. What you didn't know they teach you, and you teach them what you learn from them. If you love them, each woman adds herself to you, and you become morewoman.

Your feminine singular unconscious: an unconscious, like that of all human beings, constituted transculturally. Cut out of History, observed by your witnesses, your magic book by more than one author, reality writes a part

of it, strikes out, sorts out, cheats on another, national and transnational, millennial and instantaneous, a nutshell, a sex-sewn continent, your hundred origins program the dream-flesh. And this flesh that's been superhistoricized, museumized, reorganized, overworked, is feminine flesh; in it the "woman" projected by the Law, wounded by the same strokes of the censor that tailor an imaginary cut from a pattern—more or less skintight, clinging, incarcerating—for every woman; this little culture-sized "woman" encounters the singular life-sized woman, similar to the general woman. Like her in the movement of her instinctual economy, virtually, superabundance and dispersion, but different as one text is from another.

Write, dream, enjoy, be dreamed, enjoyed, written.

And all women feel, in the dark or the light, what no man can experience in their place, the incisions, the births, the explosions in libido, the ruptures, the losses, the pleasures in our rhythms. My unconscious is in touch with your unconscious.

Ask yourself:

How do you make meaning circulate when what comes forth is the signifier, the scene, the unfurling of hallucinating carnal sounds? Who surges up in your throat, through your muscles?

How what affects me comes into language, comes out fully worded, I don't know. I "feel" it, but it is mystery itself, which language is unlikely to let through.

All that I can say is that this "coming" to language is a fusion, a flowing into fusion; if there is "intervention" on my part, it's in a sort of "position," of activity—passive, as if I were inciting myself: "Let yourself go, let the writing flow, let yourself steep; bathe, relax, become the river, let

everything go, open up, unwind, open the floodgates, let yourself roll . . ." A practice of the greatest passivity. At once a vocation and a technique. This mode of passivity is our way—really an active way—of getting to know things by letting ourselves be known by them. You don't seek to master. To demonstrate, explain, grasp. And then to lock away in a strongbox. To pocket a part of the riches of the world. But rather to transmit: to make things loved by making them known. You, in your turn, want to affect, you want to wake the dead, you want to remind people that they once wept for love, and trembled with desires, and that they were then very close to the life that they claim they've been seeking while constantly moving further away ever since.

Continuity, abundance, drift—are these specifically feminine? I think so. And when a similar wave of writing surges forth from the body of a man, it's because in him femininity is not forbidden. Because he doesn't fantasize his sexuality around a faucet. He isn't afraid of wanting for water, he doesn't arm himself with his Mosaic rod to smite the rock. He says, "I'm thirsty," and writing springs forth.

Sinking into your own night, being in touch with what comes out of my body as with the sea, accepting the anguish of submersion. Being of a body with the river all the way to the rapids rather than with the boat, exposing yourself to this danger—this is a feminine pleasure. Sea you return to the sea, and rhythm to rhythm. And the builder: from dust to dust through his erected monuments.

The femininity of a text can hardly let itself be reined in or corralled. Who will bridle the divagation? Who will put the outside behind walls?

As if I were living in direct contact with writing, without

interruption or relay. In me the song which, from the moment it's uttered, gains instant access to language: a flux immediately text. No break, soundsense, singsound, bloodsong, everything's always already written, all the meanings are cast. Later if I emerge from my waters dripping all over with pleasures, if I go back the length of my banks, if from my shore I observe the revels of my dream-fish, I notice the innumerable figures they create in their dance; isn't the current of our women's waters sufficient to unleash the uncalculated writing of our wild and populous texts? Ourselves in writing like fish in the water, like meanings in our tongues, and the transformation in our unconscious lives.

## 2

Clarice Lispector: *The Approach*

Letting Oneself (be) Read (by) Clarice Lispector

*The Passion According to C.L.*

*Clarice Lispector:* This woman, our contemporary, Brazilian (born in the Ukraine, of Jewish origin), gives us not books but living saved from books, from narratives, repressive constructions. And through her writing-window we enter the awesome beauty of learning to read: going, by way of the body, to the other side of the self. Loving the true of the living, what seems *ingrateful* to narcissus eyes, the nonprestigious, the nonimmediate, loving the origin, interesting oneself personally with the impersonal, with the animal, with the thing.

How to "read" Clarice Lispector: In the passion according to her: according to C.L.: writing-a-woman. What will we call "reading," when a text overflows all books and comes to meet us, giving itself to be lived? *Was heisst lesen?* (What is called reading?)

At the beginning of *The Passion* Clarice cautions us, holds us back if we are on the brink of going ahead, puts us on (her) guard, in these worrying-reassuring terms: