

## Appendix II

### DIOTIMA DE MANTINEA<sup>1</sup> by Maria Zambrano (1987)

---

And now, who will defoliate the rose over me, who will cry and, most importantly, who will raise his hand saying goodbye and pointing my soul forward, undoing the knot that binds even the souls of the recently dead with the air of life? I did it so first, with those of mine. And then, when they came to seek in my hand the power to carry out such actions that would gradually make me feel and know that love has to become law, and that true laws are moments of love. And now, a foreigner and alone with my God who has become unknown to me, I do not see anyone around me who assures me of being helped at the moment of pulling me from this land of which more than daughter I have been, apparently, a guest. A guest who dwelt too long.

I did not realize that nobody was holding me back, that the host's smiles had long since ended, that the host had disappeared and I myself was not at the table with someone else to share my food with.

They had led me to believe that they needed to hear me, that I would communicate to them knowledge that, like water, escapes imperceptibly from my whole self, as they said; she is not a woman, she is a spring. And me....

And now I remember, my memory is becoming law, I myself was turning more and more towards the original well where my knowledge came from, where I had received it drop by drop. Maybe during times and more times I grew almost dry. And someone piously laid over a white stone of the kind that I had always loved, so that the wound in the earth, which is every spring that no longer flows, would not be visible. And that day, I was dead and buried, while I, without realizing it, attended immobile to the distant murmur of the invisible fountain. Gathered within myself, my whole being became a marine snail; an ear, just hearing. And maybe, I thought I was talking, when words sounded just for me, neither inside nor outside; when they were not already said, nor heard, as I had dreamed, they should be the words of truth.

---

<sup>1</sup> Zambrano, *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, 217-35.

I became hearing and when I turned to look, nobody listened to me. Without a sound space I entered the silence, I am its prisoner, and although I had learned to write I could not; as creature of the sound and the voice of the word that arrives in an instant and is going to visit perhaps other nests of silence. I had taken it for granted that writing is the concern of a few men, unless there is a writing from ear to ear. Talking, on the other hand, was natural to me and, like all things that are done according to nature, it had its eclipses, its interruptions. The word itself is discontinuous, but it only becomes sensitive when it has to be formed and then it is no longer a thing of nature, but that which a few men strive to do and which they call thinking.

But I have never thought, one must resolve it. And now, I realize that all my movements have been natural, invisibly drawn like the tides, I know that much, pulled by an invisible sun, by a moon barely denoted, white, the moon born white on a bluish sky continuation of the sea; the navigator lonesome moon, destitute queen who reigns more as a goddess of a lost world. Queen turned goddess of the dead, of those condemned to silence and the cold. Savior of those without a homeland.

Mother of souls..sank into me when they became disembodied. And I suffered their untold sorrows, of those who had had no name. All their non-being and that which they had ceased to feel and had let go outside of themselves. But not all the souls had bear the burden of destiny that weighed on them, nor assembled the pains of the entrails in their care; nor have they been the invisible guide who swiftly summons thought and delivers a verdict on life's secret steps. When separating themselves from their bodies, they fall like a blind man who suddenly restored, without the help of any other senses. And the bodies they left hurt and their history they do not know what to do about, [a history] full of interruptions and parentheses, like a cloth made carelessly. And the pain they did not use up, and the possible love barely glimpsed in an instant of infinite weakness: they roam and flit like birds. Without abode in the country of the dead, too weak to cross its lintel, helpless as at the moment of birth, they came to me. And I did not realize at the beginning, so I had to bear the reproaches of my strange sorrow, not similar to anyone's when someone closed to me or linked to me by some tie died

Strange, irreducible agony neither appeased nor comforted. And while they sang the ritual psalmody in which they enumerated the virtues which oh! not always told a truthful account, the poor anima palpitated blindly, without recognizing herself. And at the most she feels the ambiguous succor of the animal they caress for a moment before being returned to her corner to suffer alone her pain as a beast strange to everything. Those reliefs that the living bestow to stay free on this side of life, warding off the approaching threshold of death, the escorting of the disembodied soul for a few instants even, and in the end lending it a hole—the maternal cave that the earth itself provides. For before death, the living close and

oppose the resistance of their impenetrable time, they become hostile enemies. Thus one day, death will penetrate them also from the outside, and not like the sea that floods and carries us far away.

I have carried them, yes, all my dead over me, feeling their weight, that awkwardness of their new state; I kept them while they could not depart. And I knew the others' sorrows alien to my condition, so much so that sometimes I could not discern what error, what weakness instigated them— or what truth. I sank into myself, making myself dark, filling myself with death and the living fled from my side. And then, I would get up and feel my anonymous soul that sustained those half awakened souls already burning with a light that emanates from the soul and begins to burn in its own fire, which starts to reduce itself to its indestructible life.

I had a dream, I do not know if it was a dream, I think so: a serpent advancing towards me: it was not bad nor did bring maybe a drop of poison. But it was a snake although it was almost white, white and grieving which wanted to live with me and I was afraid that nobody would come to visit me anymore. A man abruptly chopped it in two and I saw his soul, small, weak, whitish, that trembled like someone suddenly naked and sad; nobody was going to come and pick it up. I found myself saying: "soul of the serpent, you are sad without your body, come with me and I will take you in my soul," at the same time, a kind of white disc appeared to me holding many souls, which my soul carried by my heart. And I almost regretted my words, my offer because I feared not being able to deal with these two burdens, even though I was weak and small, and its poison had passed to me and I was bad at times. But compassion was stronger than my fear of turning bad so, without any words, I leaned forward, and it ascended to join the other souls. Awaken, I remembered from time to time and scrutinized my own movements, my thoughts; but I did not notice anything alien.

At that time, I began to regard in a different way from time to time, sometimes asleep, sometimes awake. I saw a tree, it is what first happened to me; a tree that I constantly saw between the columns of the temple: a sea pine, tall, with a divided sloping top, erect and alone among a group of cypresses surrounding it without taking away its protagonist role in such symbolic forest. And I saw it without looking at it, in a distinct medium not the air, but rather a more transparent and fluid milieu; it seemed the proper environs of vision, visibility's locale where things never reveal themselves to us. And the difference was as if I had only seen it in bulk hitherto. It was not more real because of that, it was simply true. It was the only and unique tree, it was real and there; this is the hardest thing to put into words. If I could have thought it, I would have thought about it, but I had to settle for seeing it from time to time. Another night, I saw while asleep, but not in dreams, in that space where things are entirely what they are, in a clarity without any remnant of opacity, [I saw] the pure white moon, self-absorbed; its light did not radiate or have any phosphorescence, it did not shine or sparkle, just the moon

with its soft light. But I am not even putting that into words because I have never been able to think. Repose and movement are relative things, states. And although there is action in movement or at least activity and passivity, things endure their repose and their movement, therefore they are not fully visible. Well, how may one see what is suffering when it is subject of alteration, depleted at rest, and expanded in movement? While in that visibility environs things neither move nor rest, they do not suffer any state, they simply are. They breathe in the light, in a light that does not vibrate, nor it is dead.

That white moon poured its clarity. And a white sphere I do not know of what substance, because matter did not exist, corresponded with it. Then, when I woke up, I looked at the sky and in front of me the moon was in the same position, equally white. But no, no; I had not invented anything. The white sphere was undoubtedly thought, and that of being in permanent unity, which can only be seen when ... but no, I do not know about it, just a nothing.

Then, I saw a human scene that had happened a long time ago and perpetuated by a story in verse. I understood that the poet had envisioned it like that; it was a different way of seeing, because it was a historical event which represents another kind of movement. I saw it as i were under water. And in the water there were areas of different light and density so the real image gave rise to several fragmentary images that vanished. Some were always repeated; others were a matter of an instant. How many strange rhythms!

I always felt faraway things, those which arise in other times and in other spaces. Events that occur in some place different from ours, instants of reality that are consumed here in durations akin to deserts. And so I have crossed several of them, which point out the true times of my life and have been marking my age.

One of those deserts was the one of dreams. One night, the star appeared to me, one I had seen so many times reigning in the sky, alone, before the sunrise. It, the love that puts an end to the night and illuminates its first steps. I knew I was tied to it. And I saw it in the lucidity of certain dreams, under the shadow of the rings of Cronos, obscured by them. So my life, love crossed by time, divided by time. It was my horoscope that I never wanted to be ascertained. And I began to understand: it was not an event of mine alone.

Time covers the things of the earth and of themselves, only love surpasses it. Love crossed by time which crosses it. The solitary star opening the day illuminates the birth of the night as a threshold and a law. The shadow of Cronos' rings divides it, hurts it. Because it is not only a shadow, it is wounded; Time penetrates love and thus love always engenders.

For a while I was locked up. It was the time when I was a statue. Someone called me Aphrodite Hermetica; my beauty, according to him, was not visible to all; it only showed at certain times. And one day they found me naked, drowsy at the edge of the foam, they confused me with her [Aphrodite]; strange thing; but I did not wrap

myself in my violet cloak and when I collected my hair soaked in the thick, bitter water, it was gray.

Did I depend on my soul? No, I did not; now I see that. Very soon it was snatched away from me and taken away. Now that it assists me almost visible, I know.

And now I see myself like that, as I was: an almost pure presence for anyone who came looking for me. Later, I did not understand not being me, myself, the sought after it. But without understanding hardly anything, there continued to sprout from me an inexhaustible and increasingly pure presence. It was something that came out of me, while I was behind and locked in my wounded darkness; such is the spring in which all drink and refresh themselves and become pure and soft. And no one enters into the depth where the hidden spring lymph flows. Hence, it also must be what is behind a voice heard in the distance. Apparently, it had always been so, since I was very young.

The crying girl buried alive. Antigone alive in his impenetrable grave. And her weep is water; a wound's weeping no one notices, over which nobody tends but to drink; life itself in its first manifestation; water.

A wise man, I heard, had said all things are water. I do not think that is so. I do not know about that nor know what things are or if there are any things. In all things there is water, yes. And some of them are injured so that they spring and become mothers of life. Others are undone by fire in water.

For life was sea and then it was abducted; life was stolen and imprisoned first. And there are those who restore it and those who do not.

And it always springs from a wound. It is love. There is a life, love imprisoned in everything, but there are those who hold it: afraid, if alive, of dying.

One day when I was more alone than ever, sunk as I was in my darkness - my clarity rejected - I felt the birth of music, the nascent music. It was the day I began to die, I heard the old song of water within me and I saw the ghost of water in that kind of vision that began then. I began to sing between my teeth to obey in the absolute darkness not known hitherto, the old song of the water not yet born, confused with the moan from which it was born; the moaning of the mother who gives birth again and again to end being born herself, intermingled with the wail of what is born, the parturient life. I felt cradled by this weeping that was also singing so far away and in me, because it was never mine at all. Would I have no owner either?

Music has no owner. Well, those who go to it never have it. They have been first possessed by her, then initiated. I did not know that a person could be like that, like music which possesses while it penetrates and separates from its source, also in a wound. Music is open only in some places unexpectedly, when the soul wanders alone, feels faint without owner. In this loneliness no one appears, as no one appeared either when I settled in my ultimate solitude; not even the beloved without a name. Someone I fell in love with in the night, on a lonely night, on

an unique night, until dawn. He never appeared again. No one else could find me anymore.

And I stayed at the edge of dawn. He, the beloved without a name, led me to it, to the very edge of dawn. And there he was shivering cold. A smell of violets enveloped me; it always followed me as an impalpable trace. It vanished for a long time, but it would come back and even someone noticed it once and approached me, someone approached me when nobody was looking for me any longer. It was as if he recognized me. But he was perfectly opaque to me. This did not matter either. He was a man of earth color and gave me confidence. He had made a war and wanted to wash it off there in the fountain. I left him alone for a long time and then we talked until dawn. I do not remember what I said. And I was left uneasy and this avid man drank, so thirsty in all his pores; he imbibed my words, and seemed to take them with him, because he did not know how to write either.

I did not talk anymore, I think. Then came that child who one day, when he stopped being blond, left. Then only the innocent goat was a friend as an undiscovered constellation.

Assisted by my old soul, by my first soul at last regained, and for so long lost. She, the lost one, finally came back to me. And then I understood that she had been the one in love. I had gone through life just as a transient, far from myself. And from her came the words without an owner which everyone drank without leaving me nothing in return. I was the voice of my old soul. And as she consummated her love, there, where I could not see her, I began to initiate myself through the pain of abandonment. That's why nobody could love me while I was coming out of love. And I did not love myself either. Only one night until dawn. And there I stayed waiting. I would wake with the dawn, if I ever slept. And would think he had arrived, I, she, he....

The sun was rising, and the day was falling like a verdict on me. No, not yet.

I came to breathe in time, I breathed the time until I entered its heart. Insensibly, I entered into its heart the inside of matter. The matter ... I had always felt dust as the residue of time; time stopped to become sensitive. But in the hardest matter, I had felt the hidden beat of time. The time that descends, extends, and quiets without ever disappearing from everything we see. Time only tamed in stone, asleep in marble. Everything breathes.

There is no body, there is no matter completely separate from time. And everything which is destroyed will end up in its heart.

Because matter is only matter because it lacks a heart of its own. And life unwraps where something begins to beat from within itself, to breathe with its own time, where a hole is carved, a temporary cavern created by a small heart, a core. But there is a pulse in everything; the night uncovers it.

They called me the pale one; I hardly felt my body and my gray, green, blue eyes must have seemed blind, especially when I was looking at my hands that always seemed a mystery to me.

I could never hold up my dark hair that weighed so much on me. I was so odd that I passed as invisible.

I chose the darkness as my part. I wanted to be like the shadows which give birth to the clarity that makes obscurity succumb, vanish.

An unbroken absence, the gap from someone, has filled my life more than any other event. A flat absence when I was young and widened in the endless afternoons in which I preferred to sink in some solitary corner, refusing to see or be seen by anyone. Thus, I stayed away from girls of my age, until no one remembered me for the holidays. My youth with no application shrunk, like a river absorbed by the sand. I suddenly had not the right age. I was nobody now.

Then I began to count endlessly and to draw lines in the hope that they would find themselves and form a figure. I noticed the distances, the positions of some stars that I knew while also going through the changes of time and place without wanting to see them. And I began to feel some resentment towards time because it arrived before me, and did not allow me to set those distances, perform those calculations that so slowly began to emerge in my mind. I was shut out of time in and in between realm. Every geometric figure attracted me, and every number, as if they were small visible pieces of a country I could enter. The constant emptiness merged with a sort of whiteness with a subtler air where the accuracy of the numbers revealed itself. And I was not moved by anything of the earth or of myself that I could not relate to that map of the stars and the numbers. I was hoping that mathematics would come to life: the life in which that confusion that is so unacceptable to me were deciphered, that sketch that I found myself to be. And the opacity.

I finally entered into something: cavern, nest, heart. In dreams without images, in wakefulness without conscience. First, there was silence and a vacuum greater than the horizon. The images disappeared in that immobility, as if the image is dependent on a certain kind of movement and a semi-infernal time. As just one more step in this fall of time, presences would be without their image in their pure suffering. This hell of the suffering with neither a face nor a shape and I know it; it is under the stillness and also in the threshold of birth.

And silence further deepened and expanded within. Thus the pure vibrations of the heart of the stars begin to be felt, of the plants and of the beasts and of the sacred heart of matter, which is inert only because it lends itself to being tamed to turn even into non-being to be of service. And also the original time falls and descends rescued from each thing. The sea of life contains vibrations without limit and a primal heart. It is a chalice where each vibration is transformed, and matter is redeemed in its servitude, time is turned into instant, as if that unknown God, they told me about, would claim it irresistibly, an abyss where each vibration, every

beat, become life. Chalice and abyss where a moment stops being just a grain of sand; turning into seed, fire, light. Event which does not pass.

I looked at the sea long afternoons until I realized, because I had stared at it confusedly, that someone was waiting and calling quietly. Someone who would come, a man perhaps, from the depths of the waters. I always got along well with fishermen and with those who had crossed the sea so many times that they felt at home there, and had even forgotten to lay their feet on the land ground. Someone would come over the waters, and when the clarity of the first dawn merged with the sea leaving the earth dark, I came out of my dreams violently believing that someone could come in that silence in which the earth withdraws, erases itself. Before the light of the aurora. Before the dawn I woke up. With the rose color of the dawn the earth rises, the world of blood, of fire, of the dryness of desire and opaque things. The blood already appeared in that barely white light, a few drops of celestial blood diluted in the dawn's light and the day along with history unfolded, for the man from earth son of that celestial wound. While the one who would wake me up would fall from the light, born of the light in the depths of the waters. Just an instant would make the air vibrate. A bird extended its huge wings, stopping for a moment, suspended, an unknown bird that I saw again. But I came out of my dream because of the sound of its wings, before the daybreak and its light.

And I saw it coming from the horizon at last, walking on the waters, on a rough sea which curled up in circles around itself. My seashores sunk into the sand deep like roots while my arms faltered. I went to meet him without being able to let go. At that moment I knew I was chained. I cannot say whether it left, vanished or sank. I found myself in another time and that circle in the sea seemed the imprint of an unattainable future that would be never be for my present with the unique denied and offered clarity that appears in some dreams. And at the same time, that dawn woke me up, the dawn that only visits me in dreams.

And in this way, I lived in the secret background and beyond the door where all the galleries where I descend with my lamp end; then I realize I lost it and I am lost too. A hurtful clarity emerges without my knowing its visible birthing source. Light of a sunrise that appears only when I lost light. And there are crystal rocks in the night, mountains, hidden rivers and air thick like that of a bridal chamber, when an awaited child is born, unknown inside and beyond it. There, no, I do not know where.

One day, one afternoon, after many days without sun, I felt more than I saw on the beach. Like a wide wound, shining in the sun in the middle of a white water, with more life than that of the sea. A water that came from the bottom of the seas. And when I got to where I thought I was, I was not there anymore, and I only found one footprint in the shape of a fish. It was a drawn fish that stayed there a long time, because the water that covered it in the tide, left it with more life. It was my secret, that I never revealed to no one and I distracted visitors so that they

would not visit that part of the seashore. Then, a day of solar eclipse, a strong wind swirled the sand and lifted it to the black sky. And where the fish was, only a few lines remained, perhaps a word, which then the water erased too, leaving a shifting hollow, as if created by an invisible animal.

And so I have been staying in the seashore. Abandoned from the word, crying endlessly as if crying rose from the sea, without no other sign of life than the beating of the heart and the throbbing of time in my temples, in the indestructible night of life. Night myself.

