THE HOUSE INSIDE US



THRESHOLD 7

The House Inside Us

For many years I believed that memory was an archive.

A container.

A kind of inner warehouse in which to store facts, names, dates, faces, and episodes.

It was an orderly vision.

Rational.

Even reassuring.

Then time taught me something different.

Memory does not store.

Memory dwells.

It is not an archive.

It is a place.

And like every place it has rooms.

Corridors.

Doors.

Windows.

Some are opened often.

Others stay closed for years.

Until something, suddenly, reopens them.

It can be a smell.

A street.

A photograph.

A word heard absentmindedly.

Suddenly we are no longer in the present.

We have returned elsewhere.

Not physically.

Inwardly.

And it is surprising how those places keep on existing.

I remember moments I thought I had forgotten.

Insignificant scenes.

A table.

A voice.

A door left ajar.

An ordinary day.

For decades they remain silent.

Then they emerge with an almost unsettling precision.

As if they had stayed waiting.

And perhaps that is exactly how it is.

Perhaps memory does not truly forget.

Perhaps it selects.

It stores.

It waits.

I have lived long enough to see people disappear.

Places transform.

Cities change their face.

Entire worlds dissolve.

And yet something remained.

Memory.

Not as nostalgia.

As continuity.

Nostalgia looks back.

Memory connects.

It is an important difference.

For years I watched people imprisoned by the past.

And others illuminated by the past.

The first tried to return.

The second used what they had lived to better understand the present.

Memory can do both things.

It can become a prison.

Or a library.

It depends on how we use it.

As time passed I began to prefer the second possibility.

I did not want to live in the past.

I wanted to dialogue with it.

Because every experience leaves a trace.

Every encounter leaves a trace.

Every love.

Every mistake.

Every departure.

Every loss.

Every success.

Everything leaves something.

And what it leaves keeps influencing us far more than we imagine.

At times I have asked myself how many people still live inside us.

Not the ones present.

The ones absent.

A father.

A teacher.

A friend.

A loved one.

A colleague.

An occasional presence.

Many left years ago.

And yet they keep speaking through the decisions we make.

Through the values we defend.

Through the principles we choose not to betray.

In this sense memory is populated.

We are never alone within it.

We carry entire invisible communities with us.

During my travels I have visited many places.

Some magnificent.

Some forgettable.

Some impossible to explain.

In time I discovered a curious phenomenon.

Real geography and inner geography rarely coincide.

There are cities in which I lived for years and that I remember little.

And there are places crossed for only a few days that keep living inside me.

Because memory does not measure time.

It measures meaning.

It keeps what transformed us.

It lets fade what left no deep traces.

This is why two people can live the same event and remember it in opposite ways.

They do not keep the fact.

They keep the meaning.

And meaning is always personal.

With age we also learn another lesson.

Memory is not motionless.

It changes together with us.

The same episode takes on different meanings at twenty, forty, sixty, or eighty years old.

The event stays identical.

The observer changes.

And to change the observer means to change the interpretation.

This discovery helped me reconcile with many things.

I understood that I was not obliged to remember everything in the same way.

That I could grant new readings to old experiences.

That I could forgive some things.

Understand others.

Accept still others.

Because memory is not a tribunal.

It is a dialogue.

Sometimes severe.

Sometimes sweet.

But always open.

There are people who spend their lives trying to erase the past.

I do not think it is possible.

And perhaps it would not even be desirable.

Because the past contains the matter from which we are made.

Erasing it would mean erasing ourselves.

Much better to understand it.

Much better to organize it.

Much better to learn to walk together with it.

When I look back today, I do not see a sequence of years.

I see places.

Inner places.

Some luminous.

Some difficult.

Some still mysterious.

But all necessary.

All part of the same construction.

Perhaps this is what time tries to teach us.

Memory does not serve to return.

It serves to understand.

It serves to give continuity to what we have been.

It serves to keep our story from turning into a series of disconnected episodes.

At the end of the road, the memories remain.

But not in the superficial way we often imagine.

They remain as territories.

As inner landscapes.

As places to which we return every time we need to understand who we are.

This is why, after so many years, I no longer consider memory a function of the mind.

I consider it a homeland.

A homeland without borders.

Without flags.

Without an address.

A place that keeps accompanying me wherever I go.

Because memory is not something we possess.

It is the place in which we keep on living, together with everything that made us what we are.

Memory is a place.