

Extracts from *Enfance Marine*. Chapters 1 and 2.

“If I were to consult only my memories, I might say I am almost completely ignorant of where I was born. There is nothing there of my native country, although I was almost four years old when I left. I must have been slow-witted, and really of a different breed to the children of today, who store adult perceptions in their four-year-old brains.

Nevertheless, from the very fact that nothing remains of my early years, that all memories, all images, have faded, I conclude that I was not born in a town. There were no cars around me, no streets, no walls; no cries, no sounds, no smells.

There couldn't have been; my house was surrounded by the sea. And in my memory, the sea crushed the house and washed it away. If I examine my memory, I can just about resurrect the gaping, black hole of the fireplace, the bed curtain which was red and the patch of light that was the window. I have a precise impression of where the fireplace stood and the direction in which the house faced. Its façade was rarely lit by the sun; imprinted on my mind is one summer day when a ray of light from the setting sun fell on it.

I try in vain to recall a vision of the sea. Is it because the house had its back to the sea, and you could only see it from inside at high tide, when the pool below the window was filled up? Did the house act as a screen between myself and the sea?

I will not conclude, however, that it is a matter of indifference to me whether I was born there or somewhere else. I claim this birthplace washed by the waves. My roots are anchored in this sand, this wind, this sea. I was conscious of it. Its external features are not marked by any impression of colour, volume or surface. It has left me with the impression of a vastness resembling emptiness. I myself was a grain of sand trying to lift myself to the height of the thistles and daturas, rolling among the shells, splashed about by the rising tide. The sea, the sand and the wind were lodged in me and were my first provisions at an age when one first seeks nourishment.

It was the sea that suckled my senses. If it is taken away from me with the kind of canvas on which it was laid out, grey or blue for the sky, the vast, flat, bare, dusty fields that extended from it and left no visual image, it is my childhood they're taking away, destroying the impression of the radiant swaddling bands in which I was folded. From a distance you couldn't tell where the sea began and the fields ended; you don't know where a seaside childhood begins.

The house let me leave on my own... It closed up intact on a childhood, like a furrow on a seed. The great light of space fell on me and all the salts of the ocean purified the air.”