



I come from a powerful female clan. All of the women in  
her family divorced their husbands. A very female dominated  
family to be sure.

Mother only read my 1st novel. She kept the others, and told  
her friends about them but I think she was afraid to read h

A strong childhood, <sup>but</sup> was totally & seriously neglected as an adolescent and we were very poor, hungry some of the time.

That was the tragedy in my parents lives and the beginning of their collapse. They both became alcoholics. My father drank himself to death really. After I was about 16, my parents never lived together again. I really didn't know my father as an adult. I was devoted to him and was his favorite which was hard on my siblings, who both became alcoholic also. My total family was alcoholic. I guess I was selected out as an adolescent to take my father's place, to take care of my mother. My brother ultimately committed suicide. (10 year lapse between first version of First Man--mother had stroke, brother killed himself---did very little work--crucial period because first became enthusisatic about work).

Your adolescence was important to you--your books deal *extensively* with that period in your heroines lives--

It was the beginning of a very dramatic period of responsibility for me, that I assumed much earlier than I was able to. It toughened me, but made me extravagantly independent. Much too independent. Resistant. I never had any children and expanded a great deal of maternal energy on my family and became sort of a caretaker. Especially of my mother, who became the main figure in my life, who became my child in a sense. Unconsciously she would refer to me by my father's name, once I heard her refer to me as mother, once when she was on the telephone at my house, I heard her say, oh I have to go, mother says dinner is ready. She was <sup>me</sup> 55 when she said that. In a way, I was lucky to have her put in that position, because it made me independent. I developed an indepedence that was not entirely natural to me. to a degree that interferred with ~~my~~ relationships with men. Although there were many men in my life and a marriage that lasted 13 years, I was far too independent for most emn. I think they felt they couldn't domesticate me. Even though I'm very domestic, it had to be on my terms. ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ <sup>before</sup> that marriage, I came close to marriage with several men, but destroyed the relationshps, I couldn't bear the thought of being manipulated or oppressed. I think I was a strong, unconscious feminist.

Your female characters bear some resemblance/=

Yes, I would say that the most detailed adn careful readings of my work, especially the last novel, came from <sup>my</sup> female students. Young women.

*Up to female deal with the rest of the book. This has to be done.*

I think that a number of things strengthened my generation of women in a peculiar way. One was probably that we did have to take on certain responsibilities, at least experience deprivation in our adolescence, which is a formative time to add strictures to your life, after you've been raised in the 20's. And then the war. Which meant that we parted with an organized, predictable society, in relations to men. And had to protect, commiserate, pity and understand the male on unusual terms, and watch him turn his back on us in vast numbers, ~~and~~ unidentifiable, in uniform. We had to become practical and base our decisions on the fact that the men weren't there...not that they were this



or that kind of man. That was a very crucial thing to my generation.

And the Depression itself, the sense of there being no future, no end to it, nothing happening in the world, terrible for an adolescent. I lived in a boom town in the 20's, Tulsa was extremely active and crazy and nouveau riche, Indian Territory, skyscrapers were being built alongside mud streets, a very wild active time, rough and celebratory. That quality of life before the Depression made me used to hyper action, I was very excitable and excited about life, I had immense uncontrollable energy. And then to go into this big sweeping Depression.

Did you write as a teenager?

No, but I witnessed. My living was a witnessing. My mother was very dramatic about her needs and her pains. and traumas. She drank, she had an hysterical menopause, she was a semi-invalid, she was the youngest of five daughters, and one son, and three of them committed suicide. My mother's family was a family of hysterics, though very interesting crazy people. That was the drama I was witnessing. It had so much more depth and structure than my own life that I began to displace my center of attention from myself to my mother's drama. That is a very powerful influence on me as a writer. I became extremely observant of my mother, wary and cautious, and felt inadequate to help her yet felt a sense that I could. The more dependent she got, the stronger I got and the more convinced I got that I could help her.

I have often wondered, that is up until the last few years, if my own sense of strength is an illusion. I know now that it isn't. Until my mother's death, I wasn't sure.

Did you doubt your person or your art?

No, I always felt I was a good person, and when I began to write seriously, I felt I was a genuine artist. What I doubted was the magnitude of my strength. Because so much was demanded of me, because of the collapsing people around me, I had no model. I kept building this person in myself who could counter everything around me. I had strong grandparents, but that's not an immediate model. There was even a very destructive dynamic between my mother and my older sister. I think I got a great deal of strength from my anger. If the parent isn't a justifiable enemy, then you can't make your anger conscious. But my mother was such a wonderful enemy, such a tragic heroine who I really adored and understood. She was in no way prepared for the life she lived, she totally collapsed and then she brought herself out of it, out of alcoholism. I would say that my dominance over my mother was a stance which allowed me to keep from being dom by an untrusting worthy person. When did you start transforming all this collapse around you?

early on  
I suppose that everything I ever wrote, in some way guarded and metaphoric way, was about it. I wrote poetry, I wrote murders, character sketches.

Did you write as a teenager?

Were you making conscious choices along the way, in terms of what kind of man or life you wanted?

I made very rigorous unconscious choices. The men before my husband took my resistance too literally. The man I married was ten years my junior, I was 36 years old, but he took the initiative and announced that we would be married. This was six weeks after I met him.

What were you doing between Tulsa and the time you married?

~~I finished my ex-ray training in nine months, I got a new pair of shoes and one new dress and went to New York City to live and get with school mate friends there. I had 60 dollars in my pocket and I went. I had a fabulous, mad year. I got a job in the Talon Zipper Company. I did idiot work, calculating the amount of zipper footage we had in stock, and I loved it. It appealed to a part of my mathematical mind. Then I ~~worked at a hospital~~ went to the New York hospital, I was so enthusiastic that they created a job for me. I faked it but did very well. They said I had taken the best mastoid pictures they'd ever seen. But when they wanted to put me on night duty, I said no. The conditions were terrible, unlocked rooms, dangerous, unsavory job. I protested. The board of directors decided I was guilty of insubordination but they wanted to keep me on because they liked my work. On their terms. So I quit. Immediately after I quit, they instituted all the reforms I'd asked for. I was so careless in those days, I didn't give a damn. I was eating lunch in a Japanese restaurant when they announced Pearl Harbor. <sup>When the Navy Resign</sup> I returned to Tulsa and got a job at the Douglas Aircraft. I didn't want an office job, I worked on an outdoor crew on airplanes. I drove a big truck and learned a little mechanics.~~

~~Worked at the Dupont Powder Plant. Then I had a job at Time Magazine in New York in the office. Then I lived in the country in Maryland, ~~worked for a year~~ stayed about six months hunting soft-shelled crabs. Then I accompanied my sister to California. And started working in bookstores. for a long time. In 1944, I tried to go back to school at UCLA. It was too much, working full time also. I got very involved in an exciting life so I gave up school;.~~

Were you writing during this period?

I was working at Brentanos in Beverly Hills when I met an older woman who bought books from me. She became my mentor, she was the first sort of quasi intellectual older person I had contact with. I would say I did the most concentrated reading of my adult life then when I was about 27. I would read all of an author, Woolf, Forester, Yeats... this woman was my studious intellectual friend, she read Pascal, she was excited about philosophy, it was rather nourishing for me. That was a kind of opening for me. And the book business was my education. <sup>was an attorney</sup> I was writing poetry, terrible poetry. I began to write a few

I would write a piece of dialgoue or a description of somebody. Little fragments. I didn't pay attention in school, I was diverted. I was bored, school was never exciting enough and they didn't go fast enough. I was 14 before I realized I could learn something in school. The teacher said something I connected to. Afterwards, I said something to a friend, that I should have listened better, I was going to remember all of it. And my friend said, well, you can have my notes. I said, what? She said my notes. And the whole thing fell into place for me. That the other people sitting there were taking notes on what the teacher was saying. I guess I thought they were doing what I was doing, doodling. I was shocked and embarassed and became very secretive after that. I'd never let anybody see anything I wrote. It was a queer initiation, I became conscious that there was a process, that school was trying to hand me something, that being taught and learning was something. I felt like Helen Keller! Suddenly. I was a very wild kid. Always making the world. I wouldn't submit to structure.

Did you go to college?

I ~~only~~ went for a year and a half, my rich aunt sent me and then couldn't anymore. Then my mother told me I had to start bringing money in. I got a <sup>stupid</sup> job in a department store and wrote a college fashion column for the newspaper. I made up all this crap, if I decided I didn't like dark red lipstick, I would write that it was no longer in style. And I got some clue about some girl that everyone who goes to Smith College had to wear pearls and saddle shoes. And all the girls took my very seriously. Of course, this was Tulsa. I had no concern with validity.

That was your first writing job?

Yes. After a few selling jobs, I got a radiologist in Tulsa to give me x-ray training. ~~It~~ became a technician. It's possible that I became accidnetally sterilized there, I was not properly protected from the equipment.  
What motivated that?

I was interested in medicine. I seriously considered becoming a doctor, but I couldn't possibly organize my life that way, or submit to the structure, but I liked the idea of it. I had been a good spychologist to my mother! by sheer necessity. I had to to survive.

Whendid you marry?

At age 36, but I had lived with several men before. Everyone thought I was very strange.

Did you want to get married before then, ~~during~~?

I wanted to but I wanted ~~ixxax~~the kind of strength in a man that would not allow me to dominate him. It was almost impossible to find. because strong men don't generally want strong women. And I wasn't a weak woman.

...и ...  
...и ...  
...и ...

...и ...

...и ...

...и ...

...и ...

...и ...

...и ...

...и ...

...и ...

...и ...



stories. Then someone came into the store and mentioned a new college that was opening. I said I'd like to work there.

Very confident! Never having worked in colleges!

I was confident, I could get any job I wanted. I worked at the college in public relations. I was carrying on like crazy living it up in LA. I lived in Long Beach briefly and worked in public relations. But I didn't like that life.

*worked in - Industrial Relations Dept of UCLA*

Did you feel that your life, changing jobs, moving around, was antagonistic to what other women your age were doing?

Yes, I was a little envious of the ease with which they seemed to settle down into domestic lives. But I think I thought of myself, from the very beginning, as somebody else. Even as a child.

Your youth was flamboyant?

I was really wild. I was always having affairs and having a great time. I was moral in my relationships, I had many of them, but never two at a time. I was constantly sexually involved, but I think it was half childlike. I think it was very difficult for me to take myself seriously as a mature woman...

And therefore as an artist?

Well, I had a stronger sense of myself as a person. than either a female or an artist. The identification of female, possibly procreative, wife...that was much dimmer to me.

In Drives, ~~you said~~ <sup>the female protagonist says</sup> that the word woman wasn't a word, but a name... as though it were extremely particular for you...

It was a difficult word to use in reference to myself for a long time.

Why did you start taking yourself seriously as a woman?

I'll tell you. I was working full time ~~at~~ UCLA and my mother called me one time and said, I know you've been trying to write, and I know it's difficult with your job. I can't afford to help you here, but would you like to go to Mexico for a year. I would support you. I said sure! My sister was divorced and desperate and so we all went, her two kids, and drove to Mexico. We lived in San Miguel for almost a year. I wrote sporadically, in between a affair with a wonderful Spanish man, who lived at night and came to see me at 11 and left at 4 and it ruined my life but it was wonderful! My mother had just come out of her alcoholism and I was very fixed to her. She had a hell of a lot to do with why I avoided marriage, I guess. She was the moral and emotional subject of my life. At any rate, I was set to go

Italy when I was called and told that my father died. We returned to the states. My father left me an income. That was when I was not only able to stop being employed, but begin to take myself seriously as an independent adult and pursue life on my terms. I was also able to buy a house. That gave me a tremendous sense of grown-upness, I was in my early 30's then. And it also just gave me the time to write.

Was it difficult settling into writing after living such an active and flamboyant life?

Terribly terribly hard. To start writing on those terms, all by myself. I had no discipline, that was the story of my youth! I worked hard at jobs, I did them well and people usually didn't fire me, I left.

Had you ever done any sustained writing before?

Several years before, I started to write a novel. I wrote about four chapters. I went ~~in~~ somewhere on a train and met Hamilton Bassow, drinking a beer, reading the New Yorker. He was awfully friendly and I told him I was trying to be a writer and he ~~said~~ send me something. So I ~~sent~~ him pieces of the work. And he sent it to a man who was just retiring as editor in chief of Viking. He read it and said he greatly admired ~~at~~ as a first attempt but that it wasn't ready yet, that I'd be ~~xxxx~~ an interesting writer.

What ~~luck!~~

was trying

Yes. One of the things I ~~tried~~ to explore in First Man was the metaphysic of luck. The economics of my main character were that if you don't have love, you have luck. My feeling is that luck is an element present in the life of a loved person. I don't think that unloved people are lucky. My character didn't have that clear. He chose to ride on luck because he knew he couldn't get love. But I was terribly lucky in my life. I don't know why, I think it's because I was so utterly available, to the moment, that lots of people just aren't. The bad luck of my life came at times when I really wasn't available.

What did you do with that early piece of literary luck?

Queerly enough, I took it in a rather cool way. I didn't frantically try to write. I half consciously knew I was a writer, I was not in any way surprised when my first novel was published...

Did you feel obsessively ambitious at any time?

No, it wasn't burning. More a desire to do the thing that was natural to me. More that this is what I was and must do. Not that I wanted to get a novel published. Not that I wanted success and fame, but that I had to do this thing. That was what all that undefined energy was about. What was driving me. But I couldn't focus it until I could get hold of my life. I knew that if I got married and some ~~one~~ were supporting me



I might surreptitiously do that, but I couldn't justify someone supporting me to do the thing that I wanted to do instead of what he wanted to do. He would want me to put that particular psychic energy into raising a family <sup>and being his wife</sup> and I knew that if I married him, I would use him to do this other thing I wanted to do. There was no way I could tell any man that. But they all sensed it. They sensed that I wasn't about to be caught for their purposes. If they were going to catch me, they'd have to do it on my own terms.

When did you discover that the natural thing for you to be doing was writing?

I never really discovered it. It was just always true. Although, I was aware that writing was not a new thing, something that was being made conscious. One time I went to a bookstore I had worked in and wanted to open a charge account. The assistant manager told me to fill out a card. I said, well, I'm not doing anything right now but writing, so I'll put writer. And he said, ~~what are you doing~~ and he laughed. And I thought, okay, baby, and two years <sup>on god,</sup> later he was having an autograph party for me.

You started calling yourself a writer when you had an income that allowed you to write?

Yes. Not only did my father dying release me to write, it released me into a whole new sexual relationship with men, an adult relationship. That was dazzling to me. I started going to a woman shrink in LA. That's when I really began to write. I started my first novel. I wrote two or three little stories, nothing important. And I met some women writers who I really liked a lot. A wonderful friendship with three women. All of whom lived in a house together, all writing. Two who were ~~novelists~~ published novelists. One, a poet. They were very very important to me, ~~to my~~ my beginning as a writer. Especially Isabelle Zigler. She influenced lots of writers' lives, a tremendous encouraging woman.

*and he beg of myself thinking of myself as a woman*

Half way through the novel, <sup>who moved into a part of a house I was living in</sup> I met my husband to be. I became involved with great mad people in LA, Renata Drucks, a painter, Anais Nin, Kenneth Anger the filmmaker, Curtis Harrington, at Fox. A wonderful group.

→ Were you wanting to get married?

Suddenly. Yes I think I was. After therapy, after this independence, the reason I thought I could was that I had established myself in writing, it was no longer precarious, I knew that no one could ever interfere with it again. It was after I'd sold some stories, but not the novel. I married, I sold my novel almost immediately through Isabelle Zigler's agent. It was turned down twice and sent to Harper and they bought it.

Your life was on its way.

Деловые дела в том же.

Вопросы, касающиеся...  
...и т.д.

Вопросы, касающиеся...

Вопросы, касающиеся...  
...и т.д.

Вопросы, касающиеся...  
...и т.д.

Вопросы, касающиеся...

Вопросы, касающиеся...  
...и т.д.

Вопросы, касающиеся...

Вопросы, касающиеся...  
...и т.д.

Справка

~~It was a hard time in my marriage.~~ I had more success than my husband, I was older. It was hard on him. We got grants together at Huntington Hartford Foundatin and there I met everybody who recommended me for a Guggenheim.

Was your husband writing as well?

He was trying to write movies and plays. But he wasn't as motivated as I was.

Was your life as a writer hard on your marriage?

Yes. And my marriage was hard on my life as a writer. It didn't interfere with my writing per se, but there were always psychological problems.

How do you feel in general about being an <sup>woman</sup> artist and being married?

I would live with someone, it would be nice to spend my old age with someone. But in general, I think it's almost impossible. I think you can do ten things but you can only be one thing. There are a lot of people writing now who aren't writers, who aren't artists. I do think artists are a different breed of human beings, ~~xxx~~ I think being an artist is a state of being in which one is helplessly what one is, no better or worse than any other state of being, but it is different. I believe that, I experience that every day. I think that's what stands between me and all human beings who aren't artists. And there is nothing between me and human beings who are artists and there is a barrier between me and those who aren't. I have friends who aren't artists and I like them and admire them, and I want them to understand me, but I don't think they can/ I think I can understand them a little better than they can me. Maybe that's a projection, I don't know. But I don't think it's the same world. Therefore, for me, if I lived with another person, they would have to be an artist. But mainly, I think it's ~~impx~~ almost impossible for a woman.

2z Why particularly for a woman?

Forget for a moment the historical demands. I'm much more of a biological determinist than that. I really feel that I have an immense amount of natural desire to nourish, natural domesticity. If there is a person there for whom to make my domestic scene, I do it rather easily, and I take a tremendous amount of steam off the head by doing it. It becomes habitual, we turn into what we do. And also, I think that the timing and rhythm of marriage, I think that marriage is prose and the solitary life is poetry. It has the structure of prose, the rhythm and logic of prose. The novel is an historical phenomenon. I think that marriage is not an anarchistic enough of a state for an artist to live in. It may be that part of what's happening



in the world is that more real artists are flourishing and there are much more serious inroads into styles of marriage. Perhaps artists set up the pattern that others adopt. I don't know.

You did write two novels, and one ~~piece~~ book of non-fiction while you were married.

Yes and the three months of research it took me to do the non-fiction book almost broke up my marriage. My husband couldn't stay alone for three months. Within two years after that book, I left him. I ~~was~~ produced half the number of books I would have had I not been married. And qualified work. Some reviewer wrote that my second novel was in part, an act of will. And for instance, Stanford University, after my first novel came out, asked me to apply to our writers grant, they would have given me a degree and gave me money to do writing. I could have used it, the guidance and education. I turned it down because I was married. I didn't feel I could drag him around for my purposes. It's the opportunity that Tillie Olsen had and took.

What do you think is the alternative to marriage, for an artist in this period of history, ~~for~~ for a woman who wants to use that natural nurturing facility and who wants to make art as well?

I see no possibility but some if men go through the de-compression chamber and out of the patriarchal structure. I see it for some women, who can find the kind of man they want to live with in a more agrarian non structured non patriarchal way, if the man is equally domestic, so that they aren't set up with polarized and therefore force filled vacancies. The woman always rushes into the vacuum of that which the man does not do, and he into the vacuum of what she does not do and that's changing a lot and its helpful. I also think it's got to be possible for artists to live extremely independent, lonely lives with somebody down at the corner or next door. <sup>Somebody whose</sup> Socks you never know, whether his dishes are clean/ If you do not know those things about a man, but know the other more important things, if you don't share domestics, but do share lives, it may be ideal, it may be the only way.

There are a few who've done it. Look at the protection Woolf had. ~~She that was a brilliant like Virginia Woolf was a~~, an outrageous genius, a brilliant, totally devoted husband, she had some money, he became her wife.

Then there's the whole issue of the muse for a woman artist. The muse, in my estimation, of the Western world, is a female. Either you find the muse in yourself, if you're a female, you find the muse in the female aspect of your subject, you find the muse in the female part of your male mate, or you find it in another woman. But I do believe the muse is ~~xxwoman~~ female. It depends on who you are as to which one is possible for you. That has as much to do with the troubles women have as artists as anything else.

*Muse as inspiration, muse as support ?*



Edith Wharton, where was her muse. She had a devoted, mother figure, a servant, who lived with her and nourished her her whole life. And she had a <sup>two</sup> secretaries and hung on the fringes and was changed only once, ~~her secretaries~~ <sup>who between them</sup> ~~back~~ covered 35 years fo Edith's life. She burried, with great sorrow, both of them. Wharton lived in essentially a female household. Double support ~~systems~~ of the feminine in her life. While she sought intellecutal male company, she had close relationships with women. Even her husband wasn't a dominant masculine figure on the domestic scene. I think she was fortified by these servants, who were companion figures. She had an atagonistic relationship with her mother, but found a lot of strength in herself. She was the center of a kind of literary world for a long time. She created the atmosphere, to which all these literary men gravitated, but it was hers, the men didn't live there. She was the center for a radiating group of artists and intellecutals. She woke up in the morning and gave orders to her housekeepers, but she stayed in bed and wrote all morning.

She never bogged herself down with the particulars of domestics.

No! She didn't enter the world of the fixed domestic role. She stayed in her own version of femininity and domesticity. But not to serve anybody. She never served anyone but a guest. The servatnts stood between her and her husband. I think that's really vitally important.

What you're saying is that the female artists has to free herself from the traditional servile role in order to serve herself?

To serve herself and to keep her female core and essence in tact and not to dâsperse it among men and children if she's going to try to draw it back into the art. It has to be a kind of unbroken pod, it's a <sup>form of psychic</sup> ~~practically~~ virginity, I think. I think it's one of the reasons that ~~when~~ the minute I got some start as a writer, I was able to risk living with a man on those terms. I got that thing going to a point where I knew I could keep it away from invasion. ~~Of course~~ I had to slow it down, I've had to compromise it, I've had to deal with my own basic limitations and the limitations of the life I decided to live. ~~I needed to have a steady life when I married, a steady sex life and I needed to stop being a huntress.~~

This issue is terribly serious. You can't take it too seriously. The beauty of your generation is that there's some possibility. Can you imagine me in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the 30's and 40's, trying to take myself serious as an artist? Anybody with any variation on the local bourgeois theme, anybody with any creativity really tried to get out of that town. The freaks, the artists, the crazy people just left. There was no one to look to.

I also think you have to sacrifice. I think you have to decide that you aren't going to have everything. I have to remind myself every every day, that my strength comes from concentration,

from narrowing myself in on what I have chosen, and sacrificing, giving up all kinds of things, giving up diversions, giving up helping people. I still find myself spreading myself too thin, reading a manuscript that somebody says I'm not going to amount to anything, that I don't need or want to read anyway, I have to constantly and ruthlessly cut all that stuff off and it's not in my nature to do it. It's very hard for me to do, I cut some, not all of it off. In other words, be as selfish as a man is, often, around his "career." A man is much more likely to be totally uncompromising. And just take for granted, the world assumes that he's busy.

Does teaching help channel some of that nurturing energy you spoke of?

Yes, but it also interferes. I like to teach very little, by choice. I wasn't really trained to be a teacher. I'm a good teacher, but I don't want to do it full time. I wouldn't even teach half time if I didn't need the money. I've learned a hell of a lot from teaching, though, it forced me to do a lot of mental organization and to structure my life in a certain way. I finished my 3rd novel while teaching almost full time at Bennington, I worked from 8 pm to 1 am, six nights a week to finish the book and it nearly killed me. I worked on the book for a year living on the advance and then I had to teach full time.

Have you ever been able to live off your writing completely?

No, but I've never tried and I refuse to because it means grinding it out. There are arguments in favor of doing that, it might have been good for me, and I did come close when I got the advance on this book, but I couldn't quite bring it off. I separated from my husband, I couldn't quite make the transition. I went to Europe three times though.

Did you actively look for teaching jobs?

No, I made it known to a writer friend that I would like to teach and was offered a job at SF State. Once I was a Yaddo and casually mentioned I was running out of money and would like to teach and ~~wasn't~~ heard about a job at Bennington and wound up teaching there for three years.

Was there ever a time in your literary career that you had to promote yourself?

I've sold ~~everything~~ all the books I've written. I've written many short stories and sold very few of them. But I've sold almost everything I've tried to sell. I would say that I haven't been a success at promoting my work, but I'd also say that I haven't had the proper attention. I haven't hustled. I should have a little. For me, it was always a matter of conserving time, and a certain shyness and lack of conviction about hustling. I feel that I'm only still learning to write



... ..

... ..

... ..

... ..

... ..

... ..

... ..

... ..

... ..

There was a time when women my age were facing death. I'm facing another piece of my life, could be 15 years of a pretty good life. Experience that physically, just the change after menopause.

How do you think it affects your work?  
How do you experience the change?

~~It increases my passivity, thank god,~~ it increases my experience my sense of history. I feel even, much more related naturally to the idea of the study of history. I much more acutely able to appreciate beauty, without there being a demand on me to either be part of it or recreate it. Although, my creative abilities haven't diminished. My energy has a little, though I had so much, I'm almost grateful to get rid of a little of it! It was not easy for me to control it earlier. I have a much more acute visual sense of the world, and that may be because I'm not so urgently in need of making my life. Some of my students were over not long ago, and I was looking at them, and I thought, how weird and maybe senile of me to look at those kids and be able to see nothing wrong with them. Nothing! I cannot find anything wrong with them. Now that's wither that I have removed myself from their field of competition, that I'm old enough as a creature not to compete with them. Or I have been released in a way from the demands of the world, that the world doesn't need me anymore, that I look at them as art objects. I always looked at the human creature as an art object, but now I realize how well they do with what they have, partly as compared to how I did.

I can't believe that you didn't...

h, but what I haven't told you is how many errors I made, how clumsy I was, how much I ran in front of certain kinds of commitments, what an immediate flashy hot temper I had, how ~~xxxxxx~~ impatient I was, often flighty. I had no malice, but I've been ~~xxxx~~ haughty, often scornful. I was a little bit of a snob, at times. And that's a disease. I was sort of raised with some sense of being superior in some way. I don't feel morally superior. I was a very good animal, I lived very close to my body, it carried me through my life. I revered it, I depended on it. That gave me a very good sense of strength and superiority, not a judgment of other people, but I didn't see very many people doing that.

In one of your books, you said something about how getting older, is the ~~xxxx~~ person not being able to live out the promise of the body...

That is a way of saying that the basic tragedy with which a human creature lives is mortality. That's all I meant. If you step off the wheel, if you're not so driven, as an observer, you have a tremendous amount of pleasure <sup>as well as</sup> and fear, and whatever the world is up to is not going to dramatically change your life anymore. And I believe that a large part of it is biological. Whatever nature does to you, it prepares you for your death finally. Marvelously and subtly. I take great pleasure in the fact that I finally know something.

I knew what survivors know, I knew alot, but I know something different now.

What are your greatest stumbling blocks as a writer?

As a fiction writer, getting started, getting the right tone of voice. I wrote my second novel once, completely, then tore it up and wrote it all over again, because the tone waSn't right. I'm working on a short novel now and I've written the opening thirty pages at least seven times, that's more than the length the novel will be.

Dm'n't you get discouraged?

Yes, I do.

You must want to tell that story.

I'm clearly tenacisou, but I don't have very good habits. I work every morning that I can, but I'm too easily distracted. I tend to take on too much. I enjoy life too much, which is fatal. I think that the need and desire to live as been my biggest problem as a writer, but I also think it has fed me. As a poet, you have an advantage, you can complete a work in a given spasm of time, but as a novelist, you can't, a novel is a commitment of a couple of years at the least. My first novel was a six month job, but my second one was ten years.

My lack of education is ~~also~~ ~~my~~ ~~greatest~~ ~~stumbling~~ ~~block~~. I've read a great deal, I've studied randomly, but when you're young, if you have a good education, and have applied that structure to your knowledge, then your entire adult life can draw on what the brain has been asked to do in the way of compartmentalizing and ordering knowledge. And if it has not been applied, and in high school you didn't have to bother to attend to the little you got, then it's a matter of not having laid in that way of processing knowledge. The brain fogs a little and stumbles and resists. doing that not. That's one of the things I get out of structuring a novel, I have it my own creations, but it's quite different from ~~an~~ ~~academic~~ type of structuring. When you're young, to read with guidance, if you have a mentor when you're young, it's invaluable. I' beginning to study medieval history and I would really like to study with a good medieval scholar, someone with peripheral knowledge, someone who knows how to go through that kind of study. I'd also like to do with the 18th century, I'd like to learn 3 or 4 languages, I'd like to beable to read the good literature of other cultures.

*Virginia Woolf of an education - that her but had enjoyed not only formal training but an intellectual advantage as well*

Is that what you need to be able to continue your work?

Not to continue. One of the reasons I have written close to youth, close to metaphor, close to the primitive, American early sources, is that my conscious intellectual life has been neglected compared to the other. For instance, one of the problems I have with my new novel is that I've chosen to make the female protagonist an art historian and there are somany ~~zzz~~

I feel I ought to know, and I don't mean little pieces of knowlege I can go and look up. A mass of experience. I need to know a lot of what this educated, intelligent woman would know about.

I also think I should have read three times the amount of fiction I did. One of the reasons I haven't is that I can't read a novel when I writing one.

Many novelists say that. Why?

Because I hear the rhythm of it ~~and I~~, I hear the music of it, and I fear it will get into mine. While something is emerging from the unconscious, I don't desire to hear someone else's work on the problems I'm dealing with.

You must be aware that you're tapping into a very fragile realm and it's as if you're protecting it.

Yes. ~~xxxxxxx~~ <sup>Just</sup> as why I didn't get married until I had made conscious what I was doing. I think you really have to be conscious of what you're doing before you have any control over it. Otherwise your ~~xxxxx~~ control is primitive, creaturly but not mental. You can be snuck up on if you're not conscious.

Or you can sabotage yourself.

By emotional indulgence. My family was so. I also went to at least one movie a week when I was growing up where a woman like Bette Davis, or Joan Crawford, or Loretta Young was emoting on the screen for all she was worth. I believed that this way the way I should behave! It took me a long time to realize that that was their emotion not mine.

What saved you from the self-destruction of most of your family?

Because they were alcoholics, I couldn't be! I also think I had a powerful sense of self-preservation, and of being totally responsiblity for my own body. It's aboslutely vital to me as a writer. I was very phsycial, as a child, bood in gymanstics, ran track in grade school and beat the boys because I was taller and had longer legs. ,

How have you sabotaged your own efforts?

With love affairs, my preoccupation with them. Partly. the Suffering. Although my talent for happiness usually overrode that. I can't be sad too easily. My family's life was so tzaagic that mere sadness is a waste of time to me. I've experienced greattragic sorrow, but chronic kinds of sadness are shallow to me.

In two of your novels, you portray two male characters, grandfathers who assume paternal roles, who express regreat that they never knew what to give their progeny,

almost a kind of impotency as far as raising their kids. That kind of regret is never voiced by the maternal figures. The one major regret of these two educated, sophisticated wealthy, effective men is that they didn't know what to give their offspring. Not only that, they didn't know what that thing was that they should have given.

In my life, my father stands out as more maternal, more nurturing than my mother, because my mother didn't know how to be that. I, in turn, assumed my father's role.

These men you portray, who don't know how to be nourishing, are they expressing the deficits of their own fathers? Under the increasing pressure on men to assume equal responsibility for child rearing,

These men are isolated by the patriarchy and this isolation makes them impotent. I think that these men gave rise to my generation of women. I don't think that our mothers really gave rise to us as much as the frontier male, and educated farmer.

Those men were not raising their children. Do you mean historically?

They were in fact raising their children, they were alone with their clan, they made huge decisions, they were the wisdom and the tribal chiefs, so to speak. They were their own establishment. It was not the women, who were oppressed themselves, who were going to urge my generation of women on. They may have refined us in certain ways, but they didn't push us through with any kind of sense of aggression and survival. My generation of women falls back on those strange male models. The figure that gave rise to the modern American woman is a man. After all, it has been a patriarchal culture. The early American is a male. There's no culture in the world that has less of the female power in its history than ours. The nature of the frontier created that. In that culture, the woman was as much the man's charge as the children were. A hell of a lot of the westward movement took place in large conclaves of all men, all men isolated from women. For long periods of time. There's a powerful male presence in our origins.

I think it's part of what's happening to us now. We are eschewing patriarchy in a very fierce way that almost doesn't relate to European patriarchy. I think figures like Nixon and Ford rise to the surface in order to cooperate with the forces of history that are eschewing them. Nixon so faithfully cooperated with his own demise, he was bent on some deep understanding of himself as being anachronistic and bent on self-destruction. In some deep way.



What's left for women who have not created the history you're speaking of?

I think that my generation of women is the first influential generation of women. As a generation. Because the women of my mother's generation had to depart from Victorian rearing, that left them almost helpless, then the Depression and Second World War finished the job for them. Those things strengthened me if they didn't kill me. I think our influence as a generation isn't really recorded or tapped and formalized. I think that the reason there are so many strong young women now in their 30's has to do with my generation of women who had to survive the Depression and go to work during the war and receive <sup>home</sup> what was left of the male population after the war. <sup>Get out of the way so the men ~~xxx~~ could have their jobs back. This made us</sup> An adaptable, and compromising. In some psycholgoical way, the men going off to war gave us a lot of freedom. We were released from the old structures. It was also very tragic. For the males more so.

What's in store for the novel ~~as~~ made by a woman?

I don't consider myself an authority on the contemporary novel, so it's hard for me to say. But I can tell you that I think that this whole trend toward diary keeping and autobiographical writing is a temporary period which allows ~~xxxxxxxx~~ writers, and I think that women have stimulated it--to come out thru it. But I don't think it's essentially a literary phenonemon. I think it's a good way to start. There will always be, and it's no new thing, a type of stream of consciousness writing more supported by women than men. It seems a far more natural genre for them, to express certain kindsof innerexperience. I don't think that there's a whole new world of fiction coming through it. I have a sense of their being an attempt to ~~xxxxxx~~ relate the novel to history again, in the way of the great 19th century bourgeois novels, those great still ships that don't move very fast, that are essentially a picture of a social world, and I think there's going to be some kind of recapitulation of American life again. For one thing, we've lost the world of the town and become an urban population. And then there's been a strange move back to the town, on new terms. It seems to me that out of that there's going to come some re-<sup>examination</sup> ~~examination~~ of the town. Which means the family, the culture, the tribe. But also, just regard voice and style, it's quite possible that we will tap many more levels of the cinematic in literature. Because of what is available in terms of a cinematic approach to time. Fo r instance, the film Seven Beauties interests me in its approach to time. It's a series of still in the middle of action. I think that is in some way a feminine phenonemon, related perhaps to the way women see and experience time. The still thing in the middle of the action. The surrounding of stills by motion. I think ~~sohat~~ something to do with altering time perceptions is going to come from women, in all the arts. Or express our



particular time perceptions, alter linear sequencing. I think the linear is essentially male. Take a book like The Golden Notebook, it's like a city inside a womb, as vast stillness. The perception of what time is is therefore the perception of history. This comes as our perceptions of space are changing/. That to me is a really interesting possibility in what will conceptually change in the novel. I don't, you see, anticipate the novel disappearing. But story telling will alter dramatically.

I find that to be true of your last two novels, you give a story but your narration isn't linear, you've broken it up with different points of view and different voices.

I was trying to create layers, a kind of series of fugues. The possibility of breaking up and combining simultaneous utterances.

You told me that your third novel, marked your last fling with your background, that you had been accused of regionalism. Have you been termed regional by critics?

*How have you been treated by the critics?*

I have been, but it hasn't been damaging, except in some odd slight. Alfred Kazin, for instance, thinks that I'm a very good writer but says he isn't interested in what I write. Partly that because Kazin is an urban Jew and he's quite far afield from my settings. There is a certain urban kind of person who believes that work put in a ~~local~~ rural setting isn't relevant. Presuming they were prepared to like my work but didn't care for the region, I think it's that they don't believe that it's real. If you do a Southern setting, the South is far more familiar to the reader than say the middle of the country or the Ozarks or Appalachia. If you take writers like Scott Fitzgerald, and Anderson, and Willa Cather, they have written to and of an era and a place that introduced the reader to regional America. They're not contemporary. Regional America isn't real to most readers. That Wright Morris is little read lies partly in this problem. He's a good writer and no one believes that the plains are real because they don't exist anymore. I feel that my best reviews came from Kansas City, Missouri for Girlie, understanding of the local and the break up of that time in the world. From places where these things were not familiar, the protagonist is dealt with in the review as a modern heroine. The other things I'm saying aren't dealt with. And of course, I don't think that the characters are the whole book. One of the reasons I broke up the voices of the characters is that I'm not personally interested in writing a novel about a 19 year old girl. I'm interested in what era she represents, an American life, I'm interested in sacrificed figures who become ironic who have roles in the next generation of women. I didn't get the attention I wanted or needed on that book, partly because of the tyranny of the New York times which didn't review it.

*from women sec p2*

*Sold the Women's Room  
Her new agent*

Why was that? Because you live on the West Coast? Because of the air tight regionalism of the East?

It was partly the fault of the publishers. They did a pretty good advance notice, and didn't get the response they wanted. Part of it was me, it had been a long time since I published a novel. There are huge spaces between my work, <sup>The thing</sup> that's worked worst against me is the time element <sup>between publications.</sup> Because I get good reviews when I get them. I'm not filling it in with short stories.

Have you felt any sexism in the literary world? It's hard to use that word with you because you seem to have made your way through the obstacles.

Yes, I've felt some. An example was during a party I went to, there was a young writer, a good friend, he had invited editors and other writers. I met my friend's editor and everyone else was introduced as this is Herb Gold, the novelist, this is Leo Litwag, the novelist. This is Jo Carson. Period. I spent the evening at the party, and talked at length with the editor, who didn't know I was a writer until he asked me for a ride to his hotel. We got in the car and suddenly discovered that he was from Texas and I from Oklahoma and we had a lot in common. We talked about the Civil Rights movement and I told him I was trying to get an advance on a book about the Southern Negro woman and he <sup>my god, I didn't know you were a writer</sup> said any voice that's been ~~untapped~~ that untapped has got a hell of a lot to say, there's something very powerful she's got to say. And I said, I think she's going to talk plenty and I want to find out what she has to say. And so he said, well, write me up a prospectus on it and send it to me. And I did. And Delacorte gave me an advance to go to the South.

Another one of your accidents. The first novel in a train, and then in a car!

But I wasn't going to lay myself on him and say I am a novelist and I am so and so. And I didn't. But it came out. And oddly fortuitous. Because my male host was negligent.

*Do you feel you've invented yourself, that given up background you could have lived a dif life?*

The more you manufacture and fictionize as an artist, the less easy it is to say what your life is about. I don't make strong distinctions between the life of my imagination and my actual experience. It's almost impossible to tell anything straight anyway. And for a fiction writer, it's doubly impossible. because we invent as we open our mouths. I think that the very deep things like my preoccupation with the necessary ~~prx~~ tragedy of my mother's life is so old and profound, that only now that she's dead, able to define how I've used my life in writing. I think that my life, as I could quickly make it available, is a counter-construction over a life that I couldn't afford to live. Over the life I might have lived if it hadn't been for the tragedy of my family. Who I was I'm not sure I know now.

*in the making*



It's like someone who's had surgery and developed thousands of alternate muscle systems. I've developed a very complex, very chameleon like, very solid in certain ways, other self. I have found many alternate routes that I've made deep because of the facts of my mother's life. I think it fed my creative life. There's no difference between my life and my writing life, no easy demarcation.

Did you ever want there to be?

wistful

No, but I have had desires, a great nostalgia for giving it up. Giving up writing for the sake of living with all my talent for enjoying life. I do it anyway. I was taught to be a great player. But I have a lot of secret, driven ambition. I have only the ambition to be recognized for what I do best, when I do it. I have no ambition for an abstract position, for fame. I have ambition to be recognized for what I do.

Then you begin to do what you do, you can't go back...

Yes, you move toward your choices. When I first started writing, I couldn't sit down still at a desk, I had to have a desk built for me a stand up height and I sat on the edge of a high stool so that I was the same height as when I was walking, so I could pace around the room. I couldn't have done it otherwise.

Do you have the feeling, did you that you were missing out on something?

Yes, you are when you choose to be an artist. But it may not be of much value! You have to be sure of what your gaining. It's so abstract in a way, that's what has to be built all the time, so that it becomes a culture, a world that you can't resist any longer, so familiar to you that finally you not only can't resist it but that you're used to it. That's why you have to do it regularly.

What makes an artist?

Some fear of death in the childhood of the artist. Some deeply qualified enemy figure? Not a classic straight enemy, but one you can't treat as an enemy, someone who takes the role of the antagonist. Someone you mythicize, symbolize forever, once a partial villain, ambiguous, then you begin to make the fictive world around that extreme. The imagination of a child can drive such figure into myth. You either become eccentric under terrible stress or with freedom.

*Get out of here*