Unfinished as a person: the first twenty years of a seventy-five year life history/

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Unfinished as a Person: The First Twenty Years of a Seventy-Five Year Life History

A Thesis Presented

By

Alexander R. James, Jr.

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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Department of Psychology
Unfinished as a Person: The First Twenty Years of a Seventy-Five Year Life History

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**Introduction**

Intimate familiarity with the concrete particulars of human experience is the touchstone for much of what we may consider psychological knowledge. It is the starting point of meaningful inquiry into human phenomena, perhaps the stimulus for many psychologists' careers, and a powerful but regretfully underemployed test for significance of psychological findings. It is the main ingredient in the complex process of "understanding" another person. Reconstruction of the concrete details of a life into a sequentially ordered presentation of the person's significant life experience, alternatively termed biographical case study or life history research, offers a number of benefits to the student of human nature.

This biographical approach is particularly valuable, and has a long history of service, in rendering the more complex features of human experience, especially the processes of development and disorder, accessible to understanding. In terms of the study of disease, Henderson (1968) dates the advent of historical case study to the fifth century B.C. and the Hippocratic school of medicine. He sees the main element of the Hippocratic method as a pursuit of "intimate familiarity with a single case", a matter of proceeding from "bare, single observations" of the person's experience to a reconstruction of the salient features of his particular history, as the preliminary to any systematic conceptual work or medical "knowledge" (1968, p. 236). Hill (1971, p. 2) emphasizes the biographical nature of this early approach to investigating human disorder: "[In the Hippocratic method] symptoms were themselves meaningless; they could only be understood in the light of the history; the future of the patient depended as much upon his past as his present state".
In terms of the study of human development, Rousseau's case study of a child (Emile, 1762) was the first work to significantly promote the notion that childhood experience is meaningful and integrally related to adult functioning. A century later, Darwin's presentation of his observations of one child's development (Descent of Man, 1871) advanced human development as a subject worthy of serious consideration by the scientific community, much in the way Rousseau's Emile had for the culture at large. Darwin's presentation of the child as a natural laboratory of human evolution, particularly in its influence on Préyer's Mind of the Child, was seminal in establishing developmental psychology as a field of study.

In the more recent past, Jaspers observation that, despite outwardly apparent, "objectives", similarities among schizophrenic patients, there were marked differences in the course of the disease, led him to seek an "inward understanding" of the patients' experience. The approach he chose was to attempt a "living into the patient's experience" through careful analysis of his self report, especially spoken and written autobiography, directed toward reconstructing the person's "inner experience" (see, for example, Herr Klug). Jasper's efforts did much to dispel some of the more pernicious aspects of Kraeplin's influence on abnormal psychology and psychiatric treatment, e.g., the dehumanizing objectification of the schizophrenic person in "descriptive psychology" and the notion that schizophrenic process is, by definition, irreversible. His case history approach developed into the primary investigative method of the existential school of psychology currently prevalent in Europe.

Finally, the most influential proponent of biographical investigation into individual life experience is, of course, Freud. Psychoanalysis, simultaneously Freud's primary approach to therapy and method of inquiry,
evolved out of Freud's choice of the content of a person's mental life as his focus of observation; Freud refined psychoanalysis into a systematic attempt at understanding this inner content through interpretation of its meaning, largely in terms of the person's past experience—what Hill (1971, p. 6) calls "a second order of observation". In advancing psychoanalysis, and somewhat apart from his objective of developing a science of the mechanics of inner experience along the lines of a steam boiler, Freud championed the joint notion that the process of understanding the concrete events of a person's past could be both a powerful agent for affecting the person's future and a significant basis for a psychological science. The influence of Freud's approach, especially his attention to the significance of a person's past experience in his present functioning, extends well beyond the field of psychology and into the general culture. Direct expression of Freud's impact on the general culture, e.g., his awareness of the significance of instinctual life and his contributions to the language of inner experience, can be seen, for example, at a number of points in my subject's recollection of her past; subtle features of the influence of psychoanalysis, e.g., attention to childhood experience and license to explore the intricacies of the parent-child relationship, permeate the entire account.

I mention this twenty-five century history of the use of biographical case study simply to point out that careful study of the course of single lives over time has had profound impact on the medical and social sciences. During the early part of this century the potentials of life history study passed through a period of enthusiastic exploration by a number of social scientists. The enthusiasm is well expressed by Thomas and Zaniecki (1918, in 1927, p. 183f):
We are safe in saying that personal life—records, as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material, and that if social science has to use other material at all it is only because of the practical difficulty of obtaining...a sufficient number of such records to cover the totality of problems, and of the enormous amount of work demanded... Although Thomas and Zaniecki have proven extravagant in their estimate of safety, i.e., the social sciences have come to rely almost exclusively on other types of material, the value which they see as potential to biographical material has not been diminished by sparse exploitation. A sense of this value, including the aura of "ideal data" which Thomas and Zaniecki evoke, is what attracted me to the work of reconstructing an elderly woman's life experience.

While the value, i.e., the numerous benefits potential in life history material, can be variously construed; Sullivan (1927, cited from 1962) defines it as an imperative in psychological research:

A fundamental characteristic of the living is found in the effect of previous experience...It is necessary for understanding a phenomenon that we not only have our objective observations and the subject's reported experience at the time, but also a complete as possible genetic background [Sullivan's emphasis], the cogent material of the subject's life-experience as experienced — i.e., what he actually lived or underwent... (p. 145)

...May I conclude with the plea that little be taken for granted of the traditions, speculations, and theories which have sprung up in the field of abnormal psychology and psychiatry, and that we seek whenever opportunity is afforded for data which are exact and comprehensive — data which carry their history and their context so that they are facts to the best of our limitations (p. 156).

It is with these sentiments, especially the joint objectives of:

a) presenting an exact as possible description of my subject's experience of the significant events of her life, and b) reconstructing as comprehensively as possible, the developmental context of my subject's experience, that I am presenting the first twenty years of Hilda Kroner's life history.
My Approach to Hilda Kroner's Account

When Sullivan (1927) speaks of "data which carry their context", he means, in part, a description of the involvement of the observer with his subject. I share Sullivan's perception of the importance of context in this sense. In particular, I make no pretense of being in any way aloof from either the material or the person of my subject; I see my reconstruction of her life as a product of the relationship we developed over the course of our summer of interviewing. In attempting to understand certain points of Hilda's past, I have had to rely extensively on my ability to identify with her experience. Over the course of both our interviews and my reconstruction of Hilda's biographical material I have made a concerted effort to engage Hilda; in this process I have developed a sympathetic, and perhaps somewhat partisan, view of her. I see this involvement as a main strength of the life history I am presenting, i.e. whatever aspects of my respect and involvement which were communicated to Hilda largely account for the high level of intimate detail in the personal history which she entrusted to me.

While a substantial benefit of my engagement with Hilda's biographical material comes in the form of confidence that my presentation of her history reflects an intimate familiarity with and understanding of her experience, a significant problem lies in the fact that it is impossible to determine exactly where understanding leaves off and my personal fancy intrudes. This is a problem inherent in interpersonal knowledge, i.e., so long as the process of understanding another person is reliant on communication, interpersonal knowledge will be a matter of judgment. In order to enable the reader to form his/her own judgments on the accuracy of my reconstruction of Hilda's history, I am devoting the remainder of this introduction to
an outline of its context, that is, to a brief description of: the background of our contact, Hilda, her chronology, the autobiographical materials she presents, our working relationship, and my approach to organizing all of the foregoing into a reconstruction of the first twenty years of her life-situation.

Our Initial Contact

I was first introduced to Hilda through a piece of her writing, a one hundred page unpublished manuscript describing her experience of a ten year period of psychosis and hospitalization. The introduction was arranged by Barbara Tinker, a friend and fellow graduate student who had come in contact with Hilda's manuscript in the process of a literature search on first-person accounts of schizophrenia. Hilda's manuscript is an exceptionally well written and detailed contribution to this literature. Because I share Barbara's interest in first-person accounts as data for research on schizophrenia, she obtained Hilda's consent to give me a copy of the manuscript.

Following roughly a year's living with Hilda's manuscript, i.e., a long period of alternately picking it up as a remarkably descriptive account of schizophrenia and putting it down as an unmanageably complex basis for research, I wrote to Hilda informing her that I saw her manuscript as an important work, that I was interested in using it for research, and that my conception of the research would involve a number of interviews on the background of the material in her manuscript. We subsequently arranged a meeting.

Hilda had originally written the manuscript in hope of overcoming a need she felt to recount her psychotic experience to co-workers and
acquaintances. In addition to her purpose of achieving a better personal understanding of her period of psychosis, her intentions in writing were to make the experience available to the understanding of her family and the outside world. Over the twenty years prior to Barbara Tinker's interest, the manuscript had more or less languished in these latter purposes. Consequently, Hilda was highly receptive to my proposed project.

In our first day's meeting, I explained that her manuscript would be the focal point, but by no means the exclusive concern of my envisioned project; that I was interested in both gathering more details on her psychotic experience and in constructing a more complete picture of her history. Following a clarification of issues of confidentiality and possible publication, we made a commitment to work together. The time frame of our work was left open-ended, but the possibility of our interviews extending over the course of the upcoming summer was raised.

During the remainder of the day, Hilda outlined the general contours of her past, focusing mainly on the time immediately preceding her psychotic break, during which she lived in a bohemian artist's community. She showed me several photographs from this period, including one in which she appeared as a long haired, barefooted, young woman in a peasant dress - easily mistaken as a contemporary figure - and another in which she was the nude model for a strikingly beautiful full-canvas portrait done by her lover. At the end of our first interview Hilda let me know that she had written another autobiographical book on her adolescence, which she allowed me to depart with.

Much later, Hilda informed me that my project had coincided with her plans to write a semi-autobiographical book summarizing her early family experience and, as I understood it, integrating this with the childhood
experience of her parents, offspring, and a significant lover. She saw our work as achieving a comparable purpose and deferred her own project for the summer. Her motivation for this life summary, together with her original intention in writing the manuscript, accounts for much of the energy she devoted to recounting her past to me.

**Hilda Kroner**

Hilda is a short, sturdily built woman, presently seventy-five years old. A red complexion and high level of activity give her an appearance of health. Her mental acuity and stamina seem little impaired by age. She has considerable nervous energy; during our interviews she would often bounce one knee slightly and rhythmically swing her hand. Her customary facial expression is serious, suggesting intent preoccupation or musing. It is equally characteristic, however, for her to break this expression with a very full smile, striking both in its abruptness and in how much it gives her the look of a happy young girl.

Hilda spends time in the summer gardening and occasionally writing or painting. She watches more television than she approves of; she follows one soap opera daily and particularly enjoys Masterpiece Theatre and a two-hour evening news program. Until recently, Hilda was in the habit of taking long walks, especially to the nearest grocery store, over a mile away. A stroke suffered on one of these walks left her with a slight limp and caused her to curtail her activity somewhat.

Hilda has a number of attributes which make her an ideal subject for my project. The main one of these is that she is a highly self-reflective person. She has devoted a considerable portion of her life energy to what she generally terms "figuring out" her past experience and relationships
with others. She is gifted with an acute mind, which she applies to this
task, and she can be remarkably - though often idiosyncratically -
expressive in describing her inner states and interpersonal experience.
Hilda has also had an unusual amount of time and other life circumstances
which dictate a need for reflection.

Hilda's Chronology

Hilda was born in Coldwater, Minnesota, in 1901. She was the first
daughter and second born of eight children (only seven of which survived
infancy) of Emily and Jacob Mendahl* (see attached genogram for details).
Her father was a Ph.D. chemist who, through perfecting a formula for an
industrial process, was able to abandon his academic career for a position
in industry during Hilda's early childhood. Although once "a student of
language", her mother devoted herself largely to running the household.

Hilda's early years were a series of moves across the northeast, as
the family followed her father's progress in the business world. In the
course of this progress, the marks of the family's social class, such as
the size of their house and the number of servants in the household, were
also upgraded. An insane sister of Hilda's mother, Aunt Eleanor, was an
occasional and frightening visitor. A sister, little Eleanor, was born
and shortly died. And a second sister, Isabel, was born and survived to
become a lasting object of jealousy for Hilda. The family finally settled
in Hudson, New York.

The period of Hilda's middle to late childhood was marked by

*All names of people and places, excepting large cities and certain features
identifying Hilda, e.g., the title of her books, are fictitious. Where
possible, the pseudonyms I employ are those Hilda uses in her own writing,
including "Hilda Kroner".
"continual unhappiness", particularly in relationship to her mother. Hilda had pervasive feelings of being "bad" and not "worth it", thoughts of suicide, and apprehensions of frightful "bogies". The discovery of a childhood friend, Teressa, provides the sole bright spot in Hilda's memory of this time. She developed a very close intimacy with Teressa which remained constant until early adolescence.

At some point over the time from late childhood to mid-adolescence, Hilda embarked on a thoroughly engaging, but ultimately unsatisfying, pursuit of religious experience and salvation in Christ.

During adolescence, she became infatuated with an older, homosexual woman, Diana Beale, and for a time, was a peripheral, but important, member of a small circle of women lovers, "the Presbyterian Girls".

Hilda had a brief dating experience with several men late in her high school career and became engaged to a classmate, Richard, just prior to leaving for college.

Her first year of college at the University of California at Berkeley was a jolting experience for her. She was beset by fears that she would be forced into a homosexual relationship, and the humiliating experience of initiation into a sorority precipitated her first breakdown, a recurring experience of intense and uncontrollable screaming.

She finished her freshman year and returned home to live in a New York City apartment with her father and greatly admired older brother, James. This brief but happy arrangement was punctuated by her marriage to Richard in mid winter - which also marks the end of the period covered in my presentation of her life history.

Hilda and Richard lived together for six years, moving between his parent's home near Hudson to apartments in New Jersey and back several times.
During this time Hilda had a miscarriage and two successful deliveries, both sons, by Richard. With the addition of children, Richard's failure to provide financial or emotional support weighed increasingly heavy on Hilda. During the last year or so of this period Hilda wrote her first book, *Fire of Spring*. The final strain of Richard's unfaithfulness pericpidated their separation.

Hilda moved into the home of a friend in Altamont, an artist's community near Hudson, and worked as a servant in exchange for room and board. Around this time, her mother went insane, became physically dangerous, particularly toward Hilda, and had to be kept in close custody by the family. This event prompted Hilda to write her second book, *Beauty, I Wonder*; which was an attempt at "rectifying the image of [her] mother in [her] mind", through the process of reconstructing her own and her mother's experience of childhood through marriage in the character of a single protagonist.

Hilda became the mistress of Phillip, who, with his wife Carrie, shared ownership of the house and property of her friend in Altamont. Over the following six years, Hilda lived with Phillip and Carrie, worked as a cook and teacher in a progressive school which they jointly ran, and had a daughter, Anne, by Phillip. During this period, her family moved to New Jersey where her mother was kept in close confinements. Mrs. Mendahl eventually committed suicide, and Mr. Mendahl lost his substantial investments in the stock market crash shortly thereafter.

The end of her six years in Altamont appears to have been a period of rapidly downward adjustment for Hilda. She wrote a third book, *Esther*, which, in contrast to the explicitly personal content of her previous
two works, was a synthesis of Persian and Judaic mythical themes of femininity and fertility. Initial difficulties in negotiations for publication upset her and she angrily withdrew the book from consideration. The birth of a second child by Phillip, Peter, was experienced as a severe trauma to Hilda. Shortly following Peter's birth, she had her first full psychotic break, attempted to drown her daughter Ann by "baptizing" her in the brook which runs through the Altamont property, and was removed, the same day, to Boxborough State Hospital.

Hilda spent the next year and a half at Boxborough, immersed in vivid sensory hallucinations, delusions of world catastrophe, rituals of birth-giving and salvation through dancing and string unravelling, and in the constant company of inner voices. Peter died early in this period and Hilda had little contact with either her family or the outside world in general. Following a near fatal affliction of erysipelas*, Hilda enjoyed a rapid remission and release from the hospital.

After an unsuccessful attempt to continue living at Altamont, Hilda was reluctantly accepted in her family's home in New Jersey. A very unhappy year followed in which she became increasingly withdrawn, eventually attempted suicide, and suffered the reoccurrence of experiencing herself in what she calls "the land of the dead".

She returned, with some relief, to the hospital and spent the next seven years on a ward for chronically psychotic women. This ward was administered under a rigid "rule of silence", i.e. the patients were not allowed to talk. Signs of hallucination or listening to voices were

*A streptococcus infection of the skin and tissues beneath the skin, accompanied by high fever and a marked toxic reaction.
punished by beating; Hilda remembers being beaten often.

Because Hilda was at a higher level of functioning than the other women, she was given considerable responsibility for cleaning and housekeeping duties on the ward. At the end of this period a change in administrative personnel brought her to the attention of a new psychiatrist, who eventually assisted in her obtaining a discharge.

By now Hilda was in her early forties. She had been effectively removed from society for a decade, had missed the depression and most of World War II, and felt lost with regard to such relatively simple matters as appropriate dress. She did not wish to return to Richard, her family would not take her back, and she saw no place to go. Her dilemma was ultimately resolved by the decision to remain at the hospital as a member of the ward staff. Mental hospitals at this time were more thoroughly enclosed, self-sufficient communities than today; Hilda was able to live in a nurses' dormitory and resume contact with the outside world at her own pace.

For the next twenty years Hilda continued to work at Boxborough State Hospital. She slowly advanced from the position of attendant to practical nurse and, eventually, to being given extensive responsibility in administering a ward. Hilda's income was meager, but her expenses were commensurately minor; she carefully saved enough money over these years so that she could give each of her three children the equivalent of the current cost of four years of college. She also bought, together with her daughter Ruth, a portion of the Altamont property.

Phillip went insane in this period, became a patient at Boxborough, and died. After twenty six years of legal marriage, Richard obtained a divorce from Hilda. Fifteen years after her discharge, Hilda wrote the
manuscript on her psychotic years and several years afterward started
Journal at Sixty, a description of her feelings of isolation in approaching
old age.

A period of serious illness, including an operation for cancer, followed. On reading Hilda's journal, her daughter Ruth insisted that it was time for her to retire and move back to the Altamont property.

Since retirement, Hilda has been living in a studio adjoining Ruth's house. Until recently, Carrie, Phillip's wife, also maintained her house on the property. Richard died a short time before the summer of our interviews.

Her Current Setting

Hilda's life contains a number of compact symmetries, not the least of which is her return in retirement to the setting of the most mercurial period of her life.

Altamont is in an exceptionally attractive area of the Helderburg mountains of Upstate New York. The town has a history as the center of a community of artistic activity, which reached its peak around the late nineteenth and first several decades of this century. It generated what is coming to be considered a distinct school of painting, and continues to maintain a reputation for general bohemianism.

Hilda's property, the central portion of the former site of Phillip and Carrie's community and school, is part of what has become an island of woodland bordered by a highway and subdivisions. A brook - the one in which she attempted to "baptize" Ruth - runs behind her studio; wetland and hardwood forest surround the three buildings.

The buildings consist of a large, run-down, farm house, Phillip and
Carrie's old house, a medium sized house of more recent construction, Ruth's family's home, and Hilda's studio, which abuts Ruth's home. A circular garden of intermixed flowers and vegetables makes up Hilda's yard, an overgrown bed of day lilies surrounds the front of her studio, and a shaded lawn running down to the brook borders the remaining two sides. Taken together, her immediate surroundings form a somewhat incongruous pocket in the assortment of cars, a camping trailer, swimming pool, and occasional motorcycles encircling Ruth's house.

The studio, which was built for Hilda, is well suited to her needs. The downstairs consist of a small, dark bedroom and a very small kitchen and bathroom; all outfitted with Spartan simplicity. Several bowls of catfood are a fixture of the bathroom floor, a Talouse-Latrec poster covers the bathroom door, and the cold water faucet leaks slowly into the bathtub - Hilda takes pleasure in the fact that the leak is at the perfect rate to provide her with a cold bath twice a day.

The upstairs is a single room, Hilda's main living area. One wall, facing the old farm house, is window. The decoration of the room is sparse and tasteful: bare floors; a small collection of paintings, books, and plants; a few chairs, small tables, and a dresser; and a portable television in one corner. Books line the stairwell down to the kitchen.

Our interviews took place in the studio/living room.

Hilda's Social Network

The main figures in Hilda's current social network are Ruth and Ruth's family, particularly her three teen-aged daughters. Hilda keeps in contact with her own sons, Carroll, in a nearby state, and Harry, often in Iran. During the summer of our interviews, both sons visited her frequently, due
in part to the necessity of disposing of their late father's nearby property. Within her family of origin, Isabel, Hilda's next oldest sister, is her most regular contact. Ruth brings Isabel from her nursing home for a visit once a week. Hilda joins the remaining siblings and their families for holiday dinners once or twice a year.

Hilda has kept in regular contact with Carrie, but since Carrie's move from the main house she sees much less of her. She has a close friend from work, now living in California. They maintain correspondence, but Hilda does not expect to see her again. She spends time with a neighboring summer resident with whom she shares a birthday and several interests. In the winter, Hilda belongs to a Unitarian church group which meets regularly for discussions.

The Material of Hilda's Life History

Her Writing

The two books I will use in reconstructing this early portion of Hilda's life history are Fire of Spring (1928) and Beauty, I Wonder (1929).

Fire of Spring develops the experience of an early teenage girl, Alma, on a summer's visit to her father's midwestern relatives. Alma becomes intensely engaged in the evangelical religious practices of the area, falls into a romance with her own direct vision of Christ, and ultimately rejects Christ for her first human lover.

Beauty, I Wonder, follows the experience of a young woman, Emily, from mid-childhood to early adulthood. Significant experience in Emily's development are: her occasionally painful relationship with her mother, a close friendship with another young girl, an emotionally barren marriage, and her eventual involvement in a triangular love relationship.
Both books contain numerous sub-plots in the form of chapters on the experience of secondary characters, developed in counterpoint with the protagonist's. These sub-plots occasionally integrate with the main plot, e.g., a secondary character will share an emotional experience with the protagonist, but are more often developed in distant parallel to the main plot, i.e., one character's experience of a situation will either be in sharp contrast with or entirely unrelated to that of the others.

It is difficult to give a precise characterization of Hilda's writing. In terms of style, it is somewhat advanced for the period; the content is very definitely the inner experience of her characters, at a time when the treatment of subjective experience was a relatively new development in literature. Hilda, and one of her dust covers, describes her style as "stream of consciousness". While this may be a roughly accurate label, it should not imply that these first two books lack a distinct narrative line - or rather, lines. There is a certain amount of character development, dramatic complications occur, come to climax, and have their denouncement. What distinguishes Hilda's writing from more conventional fiction is the extent to which these dramas occur within her characters, i.e., the significant action in her books is more internal to her characters, rather than between or around them.

As to the more pertinent question of how Hilda's writing relates to her life experience, these first two books must be considered "autobiographical fiction". The life situations and experiences of Alma and Emily generally parallel Hilda's, the secondary characters are closely based on Hilda's significant others, and the external events of the book are almost always those which have occurred in the real people's lives. But all of the material has undergone a very thorough reprocessing. Hilda describes this reprocessing in some detail during one of our interviews:
Was the "burning bush" vision at the beginning of Beauty an actual event?

"No - excepting that I could do that almost at any time - I could look out and see some beautiful spot in nature, which I could think was there as a sign that I was called by God to do something important."

"And even - even after I had become a writer, I could do it; I could go out - when I was living here with Phillip and Carrie, I could take a walk and get out there in the woods, and just wait, just wondering, if you know, and I could see something that was so terribly beautiful, in nature - so excitingly beautiful - that I knew, you know, that if I could see it, I would express - and I had been told it, and there it was, you see.

"Of course, I was sort of - at that time I interpreted also as being a person who had been sought out by - with this overall intelligence to produce as an artist, you see. And I could - I sometimes would think that, and I would do it, there it was to express - and I had been told it, and there it was.

"But then I would use this - this is what my brother, Harry, was like, he said: 'You go out and you look at something outdoors, and then that would start your chapter, and then you go on with the story.' And I said, 'Well it did to me. Because I go out and find this,

'And I said, 'Well it did to me. Because I go out and find this, and then that would start your chapter, and then you go on with the story.'
and then my story would evolve when I found it.'

"...He thought that was a form of manipulation. It wasn't... 'honest'.

But it was as honest as I could be, really.

[Interviewer: Do you remember when you started, the beginning of seeing, ah...]

"Feeling this way about writing?"

[Interviewer: No, of seeing signs in nature.]

"Well, I don't think I began to observe nature until after I had come to live here, but when I tried to use my memory - when I was living with Richard and wrote Fire of Spring, I was using my memory then. And when I did a preliminary piece of work I was using my memory then. But when I would remember I would try to see it as a...a design, you see. A meaningful design...a situation - with the color of the light, the way the chairs were set, the way the people faced each other, the expression on the face as the person entered the room, the reaction of the person who was delivering...the remark to all of this.

[Interviewer: As an integrated...design?]

"mngh mnh. A moment, you see, these were all isolated moments... which were very meaningful to me in my memory and my memory would bring them to me, you see. And ah... it wasn't a gossipy thing, it was sort of a real point.

"Oh and I read Aldons Huxley, you know - did you ever read Point Counterpoint? I was very affected by that...piece of writing.

[Interviewer: It's true that your style has a lot of that...]

"Has it?

[Interviewer: has a counterpoint]

"mngh mnh."
Interviewer: You build on, ah... "And I thought on that is a wonderful way of approaching writing - he was one person I very much admired. "...That was the best thing he wrote wasn't it?

Interviewer: I think so. I like his things in general, he was my favorite writer at one point. We briefly discuss Huxley.

Interviewer: As they are described, it is never quite clear, for instance, with this "burning bush", exactly what it is that's being described.

"Well, that I was singled out in someway - "

Interviewer: But I'm wondering if you're describing an actual - well say in the story, if you're describing an actual, visual...

"Yes, I saw a bush when I decided to write that chapter.

Interviewer: Umgh hmgh.

"I did.

Interviewer: So that's where the image came from?

"Yes, I did. And it made me - and these are the words of the story of the burning bush, and Moses received the Word that was God, God the Light' - God's entity, in fact, was there and spoke to him. That's the way the story went, I always liked that story, but then I saw this bush you know. "

Interviewer: That was on - that appeared on fire?

"Yes, it was on fire...and...tremulous, you know. This thing that was, this sort of, ah, halo thing of it.

Interviewer: It had a halo-like...?

"A brilliant halo to it that was sort of...tremulous, as if you could - if you touched it you could feel it almost like flesh or light or something.
Interviewer: It wouldn't scare you?

"No."

Interviewer: Would it be a passing...image?

"It didn't last too long, no. I think in my story I had it go out, almost.

Interviewer: In your story I think you just refer back to it.

"Oh, I thought I had it - in fact, I can remember it stopping after a little while.

Interviewer: You have it as really a central piece of Emily's identity, repeatedly refer back to it.

"Yes. Well, when I first started writing this book, that was the thing that really started me, seeing this thing, this lighted beautiful thing, you know. And all of a sudden this whole book began coming to me.

Interviewer: How did - what made you think of bringing that into your mother? Do you remember that process, the thought process?

"Having it my mother's story? Well, expecting that I was very desirous at that time to write about my mother. So I decided that this was the person who was seeing it, you see? I decided to write about my mother but I was being my mother, really. Or my mother - you know, that was very important."

Hilda's first two books are neither as impressionistic nor as eliptical as her description of her writing process might imply; she tells a very clear story in each book. But the story is not her own in the entirely literal sense; rather what she does in her writing is take the conflicts and themes of her own experience, the sources of pain and pleasure in her past, and represent them in a dramatically idealized form. She then works at achieving a resolution of the conflicts, or a reintegration of the themes
of past experience in relation to herself or others. Hilda variously terms this process: the "straightening out" of her relationships, "clarification" of her thinking, or "rectification" of her images.

As can be judged from her description above, this process of expressing and rectifying her significant memories is a very compelling one for her. A prospective publisher once said to her: "you're always writing the same stuff, that's what it is, the same thing. Can't you get out of that adolescent thing?" This, i.e., the degree of her investment in using her writing to express and integrate idealizations with a highly personal meaning, together with the disconnectedness which her brother Harry comments on, is the mean weakness of the first two books as literary productions. But for the purposes of reconstructing her past experience, this level of personal meaning is exactly what makes her books an invaluable source of biographical material. They are remarkably clear and articulate expressions of the themes of significant past experience. I draw on them at a number of points in my presentation of her history in order to introduce either her "clarification" of a complicated life situation or the dramatization of experiences which might otherwise be obscure. Whenever I do so, I am careful to make it explicit that I am turning to her writing and frequently develop relevant points of the construction of it which I have summarized here.

The interview passage above, in which Hilda describes her writing process, introduces the remaining two data bases for my reconstruction of her history: Hilda's memories and our relationship, as they both evolved in the process of our interviews.
The Interviews

I met with Hilda over the summer of 1976, for a total of seven days of interviewing. Because I had to travel some distance to meet with her, we followed a fairly demanding schedule - and despite our half century age difference, I was more often the one to show fatigue in this process. We would start on my arrival in the morning, take a break for lunch, continue interviewing for the remainder of the afternoon and end at early evening, usually with a walk around her garden. The cumulative product of these interactions was thirty-nine hours of formal interview, twenty seven* of which were tape recorded and transcribed, and twelve to fifteen hours of informal conversation.

Kluchhomm (1945) draws a distinction between an "active" and a "passive" approach to biographical interviewing. An "active" approach entails following a predetermined format in order to ensure either comprehensive coverage of the subject's life or an adequate focus on the interviewer's areas of special interest; a "passive" approach involves the interviewer restraining himself from imposing structure on his subject's account so that the subject's own view of the significance and interrelationship of events can emerge. Questionnaire interviewing and psychoanalysis are respective examples of the two extremes.

My original intention had been to effect a compromise between allowing Hilda to develop her own story and ensuring a complete history; operationally, my plan for the interview period was to start by gathering an overall chronology, allow a long period for Hilda to describe what she saw as significant, and conclude by returning to areas which I felt to be significant.

*The difference results from one day of relying on notes and a mechanical failure.
or incomplete. By the end of the first day's attempt at a chronology, I
was impressed by how academic the distinction between "activity" and
"passitivity" is, at least with respect to Hilda. In particular, I came
to realize that "permission" for her story to emerge was not mine to give,
or rather, that it did not consist of simply sitting back and listening;
nor was insurance of a comprehensive picture as simple as asking the right
questions. Hilda very definitely presented her story to me, i.e. she was
always aware of and paid close attention to my presence, but Hilda's
process in developing her story was, in many respects, independent of me.
For example, Hilda, more often than not, addresses my questions before I
finish asking them. My questions interact with her presentation, and
occasionally change its course, but, not infrequently, bear a fairly
remote relationship to what she says next.

The preceding excerpt on the "vision" in her writing is a good
representation of this feature of our interviews. We talk, as it were, in
counterpoints. I, as researcher, was interested in the question of the
onset of psychopathological experience in her life; I tried to date her
first hallucinatory experience and understand the nature and personal meaning
of her visions. Hilda was absorbed in reflecting on the complicated process
of expressing her vision in her writing. She tried hard to communicate
the emotional experience of her perceptions, to make these very personally
meaningful internal events concrete for me. In doing so, she remained
focused on the point in her life when she undertook Beauty, I Wonder, her
early adulthood, and the issue, her use of metaphor in expressing inner
experience, which is relevant to this time. I started with her mid-
childhood, the period of Emily's vision, and focused on the issue of visual
perception. I briefly engaged her presentation of her writing process,
made several partially direct efforts at redirecting her to childhood and sensory perception, joined her in sharing a mutual appreciation for Huxley, and ultimately re-entered her presentation through joining in discussion of the imagery of her book.

We emerge from this interaction with little clarification on whether the "vision of the burning bush" is a metaphorical concretization of an intense emotional experience or a concrete visual perception; nor do we know whether it is an experience which occurred exclusively in early adulthood or in childhood, as well. What we have instead is a valuable description of her writing process, and the understanding that, to whatever extent it is metaphorical, the "burning bush" is intimately connected to Hilda's relationship with her mother.

A second respect in which this excerpt is typical of our interviews is procedural; we used pieces of her writing as the format for the majority of the interviews. I would read a given piece between sessions and come prepared with a list of points I wished clarified, i.e., questions on how a point related to her actual experience. This format was initially adopted as a measure to counter the agoraphobia of confronting an entire life-space, i.e., as an expedient approach to avoiding the mutual discomfort of embarking on a totally unstructured exploration of Hilda's past. It provided us with a concrete representation of her past, an object "out there", which we could join in focusing on. Hilda could determine how far and where she wished to move from the text, and I felt somehow freer to probe the young-Hilda-as-represented-through-Alma or the Hilda at the time of writing, as opposed to the person sitting across from me. This worked well with the book she gave me at our first meeting, Fire of Spring, and we maintained the format for most of the following meetings.
This format, of course, influenced the content of our interviews; perhaps considerably, and in generally desireable ways. The most general effect was to weight Hilda's story in the direction of significant past emotional experience, conflictual relationships, and youthful strivings. Fire of Spring introduced a focus on religious experience and extended family, Beauty, I Wonder on her mother and early childhood, and the third unpublished manuscript on her adult situation, psychotic experience, and family at that time. It is probable that the format also introduced subtle elements of distortion present in writing. These could be called "literary falsifications" of experience, e.g., a tendency to present an overly integrated picture, underplay contradictions, omit incongruous experiences, and, generally, to introduce an artificial rationality to past events in order to achieve a completed story. The format also introduced a certain amount of confusion as to the relationship between imagery and actual events and the location of events in time - as can be seen in the previous excerpt.

But, "introduced" is used above in a limited sense; Hilda is very faithful to her memories. The main effect of our format was to provide her with a specific starting point for reconstructing her past experience. Being reintroduced to her description of Aunt Jen, for example, could serve as a staging point for, and excursion into, her memories of the births and illnesses in the early family. The format also provided me with a returning point when, after perhaps half an hour, Hilda had completed a sequence of memories.

My questions to her during these excursions were generally of two sorts: requests for her to date and order events in time or, more often, requests for further elaboration, clarification of meaning, and feelings associated with events - interviewing habits I have developed in the course of learning
to do therapy.

This was a process which gathered its own momentum, i.e. the excursions gradually came to occupy virtually the entire interview time. In our later interviews, Hilda would occasionally introduce memories which had occurred over the week; she became quite free in interrupting her own train of thought. As she put it, "One could talk interminably, you know. You could come up with another memory and say 'Oh look! I haven't thought of that in awhile'". At one point I commented on the fact that we seemed to cover her past in series of overlapping loops; Hilda pointed out, "That's the way the memory works, you know".

Hilda's Memory

Because Hilda's memories are the raw material of my reconstruction of her life, I wish to briefly define how I do see the memory working, i.e., to state my position regarding the questions of accuracy, completeness, and meaning of what someone can recall from their significant past experience. The construction of memory I am adopting is essentially that developed by Schachtel in his paper on childhood amnesia (1947). Schachtel points out that these questions on the nature of memory are ancient ones: "Greek mythology celebrates Mnemosyne, the Goddess of memory, as mother of all art. She bore the nine muses to Zeus" (p. 205); but he cites an ancient perception of conflict, represented by Ulysses' struggle with the Sirens who tempted him - "for see, we know the whole tale of the trevail" - from his return to an active life in rule of Ithaca, between pursuit of the significant past and purposeful activity in the world. Schachtel further notes that Plato, in apparent recognition of this antagonism between pursuit of memory and active participation in the life of society, banned poetry, the child
of memory, as too "idle and seductive" for his purposeful Republic.

There is no question as to the abundance of detail of Hilda's memories. Her reconstruction of the past is often vivid and immediate. For example, she cites the figures of financial transactions occurring fifty or sixty years ago and often reproduces the dialogue from interactions with people long since dead. She often seems to recapture much of the emotion of past situations in her reconstruction of events. Her own sense is of being highly intimate with the great majority of her significant past:

[Interviewer:] Do you feel far removed from (your pre-psychotic time). Do you feel that that's something past and done?

"No, I think it's all very much part of me. I think all of life is a part of you right to the bitter end; that you accumulate, you don't lose any of it. I never felt that I lost any of my life; you know, it's all part of my life, right?...I will say that I lost my memories of Richard, and all of that, when I went insane. That part of my life I lost—was lost."

We can accept the vividness of her recollections, but the question is can the present Hilda really reconstruct an accurate and complete picture of the young Hilda's significant experience? That is, are the concrete moments and emotional experiences of a distant past—especially those of an internally damaging nature, which would be valuable in understanding her adult suffering—really available to the present person whose interests, needs, fears, and general capacity for experience and emotion have changed considerably? Allport (1942, p. 80) would answer that "the present contains the past in the only fashion in which the past has any functional significance at all". But this neat resolution tends to obscure what Schachtel shows to
be a problem of antiquity: along with the celebration of Mnemosyne, "Hesiod tells us that Lethe (Forgotten) is the daughter of Eris (Strife)...
Lethe is the stream which constantly flows and never retains" (op.cit. p. 226). Modern depth psychology has applied this understanding to the view that most significant early experience, especially of conflict, lies buried in the unconscious.

Proust broadens this perception of conflict to an appreciation of the difficulty of recovering any true picture of past experience. As Schachtel paraphrases him, he describes a process of recall which - despite the presence of a divine external agent in Hilda's passage on her writing - is strikingly similar to Hilda's description of her approach to her work: "If one believes Proust, life after childhood is not remembered either, save for the elusive flashes of a vision given only to the most sensitive and differentiated mind as the rare grace of a fortunate moment, which then the poet, with passionate devotion and patient labor, may try to transcribe and communicate" (ibid, pp. 209-210). Proust attributes the difficulty of this process to a basic antagonism between active participation in the present, including society, and the "Remembrance of Things Past".

While Freud shares Proust's appreciation for the difficulty of reviving significant past experience, and his sense of the importance of society in the process, he is considerably more specific in his explanation of the problem. Freud sees conflict between the impulses of the child, especially sexual and aggressive, and the dictates of the society, manifested in the socializing agents, as resulting in the repression of early experience from conscious awareness.

What Schachtel does is considerably refine Proust's notion of general antagonism between participation in the present and recovery of the time past
and integrate it with Freud's concept of repression, a concept which Schachtel substantially expands to include forces he sees as inherent in organizing and communicating any experience, particularly experience of any emotional intensity:

"Both Freud and Proust speak of the autobiographical memory, and it is only with regard to this memory that the striking phenomenon of childhood amnesia and the less obvious difficulty of recovering any past experience may be observed... It is not merely the repression of a specific content, such as early sexual experiences, that accounts for the general childhood amnesia; the biologically, culturally, and socially influenced process of memory organization results in the formation of categories (schemata) of memory which are not suitable vehicles to receive and reproduce experiences of the quality and intensity typical of early childhood... Even the most 'exciting' events are remembered as milestones rather than as moments filled with the concrete abundance of life... Thus the memories of the majority of people come to resemble increasingly the stereotyped answers to a questionnaire... the average traveler through life remembers chiefly what the road map or guide book says... Perception and experience themselves develop increasingly into the rubber stamps of conventional cliches. The capacity to see and feel what is there gives way to the tendency to see and feel what one expects to see and feel, which in turn is what one is expected to see and feel because everybody else does" (ibid, pp. 208-211).

Schachtel sees language acquisition, "in its articulating and obscuring functions", as fundamental to the development of childhood amnesia, and that... "the adult, too, encounters the problem of the incompatibility of experience with language and the consequent forgetting of experience or its disorientation by the cliche of language". He reintroduces his highway imagery to describe the linguistic limitations on memory as well:

"... The endeavor to articulate, express, and communicate an experience can never succeed completely. It consists of an approach, step by step, toward that distant vantage point, that bend of the road from which one hopes to see the real experience in its entirety and from where it will become visible to others."

Schachtel sees two areas of experience as particularly suffering from schematic repression: non-visual sensory perception - "English vocabulary..."
is conspicuously poor in words for the description of smells and tastes..."; and dreaming - "The stringent rules of logic and reason subside - rules which during waking life are geared to useful, rational, adaptive, conventional control of behavior and thought...it seems obvious that the experience and memory schemata developed and formed by man's life in his society are much less suitable to preserve the fantastic world of the dream..." Presumably Schachtel would agree that these limitations apply equally to a third area, psychopathological experience, which is especially characterized by bizarre sensory perceptions and deviation from the convention of rules of logic and reason into its own fantastic world.

Schachtel returns to Proust to observe that the concept of schematic distortion accounts for both the hidden quality of the memories Proust seeks to revive and their impact once found: "...the very fact that the experience, past time, has been forgotten and thus remained isolated...gives it an incomparable air of freshness and aliveness when it is recovered, because it has not been able to form any link with the present [Schachtel's emphasis]." And he returns to Freud to conclude that there are two forms of repression: "the dynamism of the taboo and of repression of individually or culturally tabooed experience..." which he compares to the "nightstick of the policeman"; and a second, more subtle process which "leaves the culturally unacceptable or unusable experience, and the memory there of, to starvation by the expedient of providing no linguistic, conceptual, and memory schemata for them and by channeling later experience into the experience schemata of the culture" (ibid, pp. 211-225).

As I have mentioned, I subscribe to Schachtel's view of the difficulty of reviving and articulating one's significant past in anything approximating its original form. It is likely that there is a good deal of "individually
or culturally tabooed" past experience which was unavailable to Hilda, and certainly to our interviews. The second form of repression, as Schachtel describes it, is universal, e.g., it is a rare person, indeed, who remembers more than a few apparently meaningless fragments from his earliest years. What is remembered from childhood is repatterned in later years, elaborated on and abbreviated into the convention of one's "happy childhood" or, in Hilda's case, the "continually unhappy person in the family" - in either instance, something of a fiction.

The difficulties of communicating, and perhaps of reconstructing altogether, uncommon and highly personal experiences, such as Hilda's "burning bush" vision, have already been introduced to the reader. These forces of repression are very real limitations on the accuracy and completeness of the history which I construct from Hilda's memories; it is an imperfect representation of her significant past, with the imperfections occurring even at the level of the raw material. But I have summarized Schachtel at such length not so much to qualify Hilda's recollections as to comment on her exceptional degree of freedom, point by point, from the forces Schachtel cites.

Hilda is a person who has vigorously applied herself to mastery of her past experience; this is something of a life-work for her. When she says "That you accumulate, you don't lose any of it..." she is not referring to a merely passive process. She "uses her memory" very actively in her writing; her books are the formal expression of a process which was undoubtedly active in her life for some time prior to her sitting down to write. She currently speaks of herself as "unfinished as a person" and it is my understanding that she looks neither to her present nor future experience for completion.
In addition to her uncommon motivation, Hilda has had unusual opportunity for remaining intimate with the personal significance of her past experience. To put yet more traffic on Schachtel's metaphor, she has, in many ways, travelled her own road; i.e., passed few of the conventional milestones, had limited access to the standard maps and guide books, has had difficulty with the common standards for measuring speed (e.g. professional achievement, prestige, conventional success), and, for considerable stretches, passed through a highly private and internal landscape.

The account of her youth which follows this introduction describes a child isolated within her family and a family cut off from its community. Her adolescence was an uncertain, traumatic, and, as this portion of the account leaves off, only marginally successful entrance into adult society. What followed was: an increasingly difficult experience of being a "wife" and "mother"; a period of stabilization as an outsider, a "mistress" and "bohemian"; a decade of officially imposed status as an outsider, i.e., a mental patient - seven years of which were under a "rule of silence"; and her remaining years of active participation in society as a member of a cloistered and intentionally isolated institution. Her brief and difficult travel on the public highway is symbolized by her devoting the majority of her work-life and savings to return to her closest approximation of home, Altamont, a few miles of where she grew up.

The expressions of her exceptionally free access to past experience appear at a number of points in her reconstruction of her youth. Not surprisingly, several of these are expressed exactly as Schachtel's theory of the memory process would suggest. For example, there is frequent mention of sensory perceptions, especially olfactory, in her descriptions of early situations. When she describes the situation of an aunt's baby left in her
mother's care, she mentions, with visible recoil, that "she did not smell like one of ours". The descriptions of sensory perceptions are a striking detail in her reconstruction of intensely engaging past events, to be seen, for example, in the sections on her religious pursuits and her relationship with "Diana Beale and the Presbyterian Girls". These vivid references to sensory experiences, again particularly smells, become abundant in the descriptions of her psychotic period. In addition, they tend to strain the descriptive language, that is, she draws on multiple categories of sensory descriptions to describe a single perception, e.g. "the perfumed odor of a bright light, fluttering like the molten wings of a moth".

Although it does not come across directly in either the interview transcriptions or my reconstruction, an additional correspondence between Schachtel's construction and these points of rich sensory description in Hilda's recollections is what he refers to as "the incomparable air of freshness and aliveness". This occurred especially in her recollection of pleasureable, emotionally entagled events; my experience was of sitting across from someone engrossed in description but no longer in conversation with me.

The main evidence of Hilda's uncommonly intimate relationship with her past is the degree to which she brings the temporally remote interpersonal situations of her experience to life within the interviews. As mentioned above, she frequently reproduces long sections of dialogue in her description of past events. She can introduce considerable emotion to these exchanges; anger, contempt, and bewilderment, as well as the more subtle expressions or irony and skepticism, will enter one or the other of the voices. Again, this is a feature of her recollection which bears correspondence to Schachtel's picture of the workings of memory. Hilda questions that she may be someone who has courted the dream like states of insanity and it was
during her years of insanity that these internally real people became external entities to her. Her years of silence in the hospital were spent in daily interaction with personally real voices. She could often see these figures -- which she once referred to as her "dollhouse" of inner characters -- many of whom were people prominent in her past, e.g., a lover, her siblings, her father, and, particularly, her mother. She describes having a vision of the family's move into Hudson (at age six) return to her, complete with the smell of the wood of her early home.

In order to obtain discharge from being a patient, Hilda had to make a concerted effort to suppress her voices. In a remarkable actualization of the antagonism Proust perceives between active participation in the present and contact with significant memory, Hilda describes living dangerously close to this part of herself:

"...Even now, I bet you, if I tried I could (inaudible) - you know, I can almost -- that voice -- that voice thing. I can almost bring it back, if I, al...

[Interviewer: Has it happened much since (your discharge from the hospital)?]

"No, not exactly. But you know there was a thing which I heard all the time while I was insane and that was like a ringing of the ears, very strong ringing...you know. And once in a great while, when I am very tired or something, even now if I try I can hear a ringing...And that was one of the first signs of that sound that I could get going.

[Interviewer: And that was something that you could build up yourself?]

"I almost -- I wouldn't try it now. My brother said, "I think that was very interesting that you had an 'ego' in there that was talking and being all these people" -- my younger brother -- and he said, 'Why don't
you decide that that young -- that that 'ego' is going to write a book for you? And just sit down, take a pencil and run through it...That person is talking all the time' -- I don't know. I mumbles -- I wouldn't dare do it.

A section follows in which Hilda resumes her description of the time of hospitalization..."talking to all these people, and hearing my mother, who was dead you know, and I could see them too, at times. I could never see God, but I could see...my mother and my youngest sister -- and sometimes I think, "I'm lonely for so and so, I'll bring him to me" -- I'd do that. I could see them and hear them -- and the voices were exactly inaudible, every sound, and their remarks were exactly what they would say.

"And I would call the doctor. I said 'My mother is dead but I can hear her; she is talking to me?' and he said to me, 'Don't you worry about it, very many people who are insane have this same thing happen to them.' And I said, 'Oh', and I was a bit disappointed because I thought I was really unusual, you know. And I said, 'Dr. Strong, you tell me please, is this going forever, these voices, because I can't get in -- if I get out in the world and they keep talking to me and I keep talking to them. I don't know...I can't get better until they stop.' 'Well,' he said, 'You can stop them.' And I said, 'Well how does one stop them?' 'Well', he said, 'Can't you just pay no attention to them?'... I could not 'not pay attention to them'. I had to sort of grit my teeth and close my mind, you know...and still they would get in there."

And in speaking of her current situation, Hilda observes that this internal conversation is on a continuum with more normal phenomena:

"I wouldn't want to begin hearing voices again, no. Of course I talk out loud, all the time when I am with myself. I go about -- and this is
something I do a great deal, I mean I'll say, 'Well that's a terribly good piece of color there', or something, you know, looking at this beautiful thing -- and I get a lot out of the way that way, because when you just look and think 'God, that's exciting' -- you can't go on experiencing all the time. And so I'll do quite a lot of talking, and I say, 'Well now, at this point there's this, that, and the other thing... to be done, well I'll first do this.'

Hilda describes her son chiding her on talking to herself And I'll hear him out there, you know, look out and see him talking. I'd say, 'You know Harry you are too'. 'I know that,' he said, 'Of course I talk a lot when I am working.'

I said, 'Well then, I do too.'

Interviewer: Is this a recent...?

"Of myself? Yes, quite recent.

Interviewer: How do you feel about it?"

"Well I don't mind it, I hope it's not the wrong thing to do. I don't know if I, ah, need to stop doing it or if I can allow myself -- It's sort of a luxury -- Yes, I -- it's a luxury to me -- I remember when Carrie began doing it, I'd hear her talking, you know, and I'd go and there she would be going on... at quite a rate, you know. And I'd go back down and say, 'You know, Carrie talks to herself.' 'I don't think she's talking to herself' [my daughter] Ruth would say, 'She's talking, not necessarily to herself.' I said, 'Well maybe that's right, that that's not the right way of putting it.'"

Although the immediacy of such voices in Hilda's experience, and the fact of their overwhelming emergence in her insanity, gives Hilda access to
an uncommonly vivid and detailed reconstruction of her past experience, particularly that of significant others, it is important not to confuse this reconstruction with the actual events and people. This may seem an obvious point, but the confusion between the reality of her memory and the actuality of the person or event remembered is an easy one to make — and one which I have repeatedly fallen into in the writing of her history. What Hilda describes is the subjective reality of her experience, the people and events of her past, as she experienced them. There is no reason to assume that her memory of her mother for example, bears anything other than a highly indirect relationship to the actual person of Mrs. Mendahl; what Hilda's memory records is the internal impact of this figure in her experience. Her mother is a good example in that Hilda remained in active conversation with her long after the actual person's death. It must be assumed that years of interacting with an other — even in the person's absence — continue to add to one's experience, to shape one's memory of the person.

The internal nature of Hilda's experience of others can be seen in the simple fact that in the dialogue she reproduces they all use her turns of phrase and figures of speech. Recognition of the fact that what she describes is her inner perception and restructuring of events in no way detracts from the accuracy of her memories of the significant past; in fact, it enables one to achieve the "suspension of disbelief" essential to developing an appreciation of the inner significance of the events described in her life history.

One final way in which Hilda's memories are less subject than most to what Schachtel calls "schematic repression" is that they are embedded in a rather unconventional use of English. The language of Hilda's description is, of course, a thoroughly pervasive feature of her reconstruction of the
past. As such, it is impossible to do it justice in a brief characterization. Because it is a rich use of language, however, and because it suggests that Hilda's "schematization" of her past - the receptacles into which she organizes experience and the vehicles through which she expresses it - is more personal than most, it deserves a brief introduction of its own.

Hilda's Idiom

On her discharge from the hospital, a doctor advised Hilda that she might find it permanently difficult to resume fluent conversation with other people. She reports that this has proven true, that she does have problems in finding words and, occasionally, in speaking without a stutter. This problem in fluency is not outwardly observable, except for a few subtle signs, such as points where she pauses briefly before choosing a word to express a significant meaning or instances in which she very suddenly reverses the structure of a sentence, perhaps to avoid an awkward construction or having to use a particular word - a sort of "covert stutter". Otherwise, Hilda's speech is delivered fairly rapidly and with a graceful rhythmic structure, qualities which are regrettably lost in transcription.

What can be seen in the interview excerpts, her use of language, is quite articulate. Her descriptions have a compact, sometimes elliptical, elegance. They are, however, often phrased within a distinctly personal idiom. She makes frequent use of correct but non-standard meanings of particular words and consistently relies on idiosyncratic figures of speech in order to describe certain classes of situation or action. Her language can be, alternately, beautifully expressive and rather obscure.

Rather than try to adequately characterize her idiom in passing, I will simply introduce a few of its more prominent qualities and expressions here.
The process of intellect, will, and achievement are especially prominent in Hilda's descriptions of events. Actions of thought and speech often substitute for states of feeling or being. "Approach" is a frequently used term: when Hilda's father compared her interests and temperament to those of her interminently insane aunt, "he likened me to my Aunt Eleanor's esoteric approach". "Expression" and "achieve" are also prominent: had circumstances been different, her family "might have achieved a more fulfilling expression"; shortcomings in education, nurturance, and emotional support at home were a form of "withheld expression". A reflection is generally a "remark": this can be internal, as with the quality she seeks to describe in her writing, "the reaction of the person who was internally delivering the remark to all of this"; or external, "But if in any way you didn't make the grade, that was a sorry remark".

Several figures of speech are applied with particular consistency to interpersonal processes. The process of becoming familiar with a person or his thoughts is characterized by intellectual work, with ascending levels of intensity: one might "study", "investigate", or "examine" another; this could lead to "pinning me down" or "nailing me to the truth". Relationships develop in terms of a balance of esteem, a sort of ledger of interpersonal worth: one "figures" an other's action out, "holds it against" him or "gives him credit" for it; a person is "held above" oneself or seen as "falling short"; the most damning outcome is not being considered "worth it". Willful intention can modify actions in especially harmful ways, e.g.: "deliberately falling in love", "deliberately behaving myself"; or engaging in a "deliberate deceit".

The fact that Hilda's language has a rich idiosyncracy, suggested in the few examples above, does not mean that her memories are any less, as
Schachtel would put it, "channeled into linguistic categories for organizing and communicating experience" than the average person's. What it does mean is that her categories are somewhat less effected by the linguistic conventions of experience, which tend to wash out the unique experience of the average person. Her reconstruction of past action deviates slightly from the uniformity we expect in descriptions of experience, therefore it is both more difficult and potentially more rewarding to understand. It contains, for example, idiosyncratic concepts and ways of viewing things which have been preserved, at least as she experienced and isolated them, as artifacts of her early experience of home, family and socialization. So far as possible, I have attempted to preserve those artifacts for the reader in my presentation of Hilda's past.

Our Relationship

"It wasn't too long after an incident at home during the remission in Hilda's insanity that I got out on a job, was it? Yah, I had some hope when I got out on my job, but then not too much either, because of the situation, the actual following up of people in your life when you're - when you've just been mentally ill, and ah, their hesitation and their... lack of actual friendship, and you can't expect people to be...a friend to you.

Interviewer: Do you think you were especially attuned to those kind of things, at that time?

What do you mean?

Interviewer: People's hesitances, sort of their lack of friendship?

Perhaps. Yes, probably so.
Interviewer: Do you think you in general - that you're more attuned, more sensitive than most?

"I don't know. I know that I react very badly to situations, and I feel as though it's an improper way of behaving.

Interviewer: The way you react?

"...

Interviewer: How so?

"Well, because I'll say to Ruth - now, I was in this situation - for instance, about the only social life I have now is among the unitarians - 'and so-and-so said this and I made this remark in return'. And then she would say 'Granny if you m-' Hilda or Gran or whatever she called me, she calls me Granny mostly - 'if you would only give up on...thinking that people are...examining you in this way - and you examine them in that way!'

"And I said, 'But I think it's true that you feel these things in people, and that they feel things in you. I think its true. You tell me that I'm misreading you, but I don't believe I really am.'

"'Oh, yes you are', she'll say - she insists I misread her a great deal...though I've seen that in her.

"And I said, 'some day if I ever have I shall write a book about you, Ruth - and I don't know how many people you are but at times I see you as at least ten people'...really...in loyalties, in choices, in taste, and even vocal...behavior - I hear her so differently at different moments...

"And I think that everyone is this way, you see, to some extent...many more than one person.

"And we have the idea, we were raised with the idea that you meet so-and-so and right off see who that person is...a full...design - 'there it is.
See it? That's it. That's the way it's going to be -' And it isn't like that and it never remains that way and it...changes, and contorts, and elaborates, and becomes refined and disseminated, you know, the whole thing - falls apart and comes back again - it goes on forever.

[Interviewer: Is that the way you experience yourself?]

"...I don't know. I don't -

[Interviewer: or do you see yourself more as -]

"I don't think of myself, in this way. I - this book [of mine], I'll have to show you that - I don't think of myself as a whole person. But when I react to people, I think I am - well I do think of myself as an entity, that way - well I find myself in the morning, and feel myself when I go to sleep, and so forth - I don't analyze myself exactly. I analyze my reactions to other people, and their's to me...it's like an inter-play that's very dangerous, and very hard to manage, and sometimes very delightful...

[Long pause]

[Interviewer: (shuffling pages) We'll have to get back to talking about that sometime.]

"We aren't born to get up in the morning and eat breakfast...and eat lunch, and say hello and goodbye and goodnight, that isn't really being alive, you know..."

[Interviewer: ...Let's see, the next thing I (continues questioning on time of remission)"

The life history which I present in the following pages is what Allport (1942) terms a "two person personal document", the product of a working relationship. Hilda's and mine was a highly collaborative relationship;
we have each invested considerable time and energy, as well as some of the more abstract properties of self, into the work of reconstructing her past. The document is the ground to the field of our relationship. While the strands of our mutual and respective contributions to this reconstruction appear throughout the document, I would like here to abstract several of the more salient qualities of our work together - or, rather, to elaborate on what Hilda abstracts above.

The preceding excerpt shows one of the more productive and simultaneously problematic passages in our hours of interview work together. Hilda gives a beautiful description of her experience of coming to know and be known and be known by another. She describes a continuum from substantial delight to powerful danger - a range of experience, which those of us fortunate to be not so afflicted by a sensitivity to the complications of intimacy can appreciate by extrapolation. At the same time, she offers me a communication, albeit indirectly, on the process of our investigation and identifies the main tension in our work together.

From the distance of retrospect, I can recognize that Hilda describes a feature of my own experience of this investigation, i.e. I interact with her as an "entity", but as I work at integrating her "loyalties", "choices", and even her "vocal behavior" into the "full design" which animates her life history, it remains elusive: it "changes and contorts", "elaborates and becomes refined", and is "disseminated". This is a process which involves my own perceptions and reactions extensively. Although not without its "delights", there has been a substantial tension in it, what Hilda refers to as the "very dangerous interplay" - but this is an awareness I have developed in the process of writing her history. Hilda speaks of something much more immediate. I respond to this tension within the
interview situation. In the excerpt above, for example, I fail to offer recognition of either the beauty of her description or the fact that it is a communication to me; I do what I can to move on from this invitation to understand her experience of interplay. It is only in reflection that I have come to appreciate that I share, far down along the continuum perhaps to a much lesser extent, but within the moment of the interview situation, in her experience of this complication in interpersonal relationship.

One aspect of this sense of risk in being known to another relates specifically to our work. Hilda was, in fact, being "examined" by me. Over the course of our interviews, she offered several, largely inadvertant, comments on the risk involved in being the object of investigation. These cautionary notes were of two sorts. One expression of caution was the experience she related of being able to say things which, when repeated to her, she could not recognize as having come from her. This seems to be particularly with regard to statements tinged with anger and occurring mainly when she has an occasional glass of wine with Ruth and her family.

The second expression of concern was more directly related to our investigation. Hilda had been approached twice before with regard to being interviewed on her past history and mental illness. She related considerable misgivings over having consented. These focused on a fear that she may have over exposed herself, especially that the investigators may have formed a distorted or potentially harmful picture of her. Neither case resulted in written feedback, and I think also that Hilda felt that she had had something taken without knowing exactly what.

At one point, late in our interviews, Hilda described her experience of me as investigator. This arose in the context of discussing whether she could feel enjoyed by another. The attraction she identifies in me is to
her mental acuity and the several interpretations she makes of my activity focus on exposing her, "seeing through" her, and determining where she went so wrong as to become mentally ill:

-Interviewer: ...what you are saying about - that you've never been able to see your...see yourself as somebody that would be enjoyed - 

"No, I never do think of myself that way.

-Interviewer: That must make it difficult to understand what I'm doing with all this.

"No, because I think of you as a student, you know, of mental illness...And you're finding out from me all of the things that occurred to me, and in my life, and, ah...in my education, and in my home life, and my marriage, and...all the things - and you can probably see through it...'At that point there - something else should have happened' or 'at this point something else should have happened' or 'this should have been developed further here' or 'she took the wrong attitude there' - something like that.

"...See, I think psychology is a very marvelous thing, and, and probably today they've gone far in it - then again I can think of you also as this kind of investigator...ah, my case of insanity is peculiarly interesting because I can remember quite well - clearly...also my memory is quite clear about my former prejudices and intuitions and what I thought I expected from life and what I thought I should, should...how I should be acting - for certain things like that.

-Interviewer: Of course you are exceptionally clear on those things...

And, ah, it is, in part, as a student that I do this...what I get out of it - but it's very interesting to me, you are interesting to talk to.

"Yes...well, good - I think almost anybody could be who had, ah, ah, enough gift of gab, and being willing to expose themselves in this way -
but I feel I should be exposed, see? I think it's a mistake to have mental illness a forgotten...ah, expression...for this something passed, somehow, and no one figured it out - and I feel it can be figured out. I don't know whether it's going to be done physically, mentally, emotionally...I don't know how...or perhaps that we aren't living on the right plan (as I've said before); if we were higher intelligence, you know; perhaps all this would be perfectly easy to see and, ah, understand and, and...could be re-educated. Maybe one - you said something about the fact that one re-educated himself through his mental illness - or his mental illness re-educated him."

There is, of course, a considerable degree of accuracy in Hilda's interpretations of my interest in her. My purposes in undertaking this project extend beyond Hilda and there is an element of objectification in my focus on her sanity, i.e., our relationship is not entirely free of the natural tension between the subject and object of an investigation. My affection for her, which I have directed toward an effort at accuracy in my use of her memories, has been helpful in resolving my side of this tension.

A more considerable strain, specifically relating to my reconstruction of her past, is the personal significance of the task she has entrusted me with. As mentioned previously, Hilda's memories are an especially well preserved and valued personal property. Her life work has been directed toward reconstructing, "straightening out" and "clarifying" significant portions of her past experience. I am, largely through hazard, in the position of "summing up" and providing "objectivity" to this work. Again, this is a tension which I have only come to fully appreciate in reflection; the responsibility has at points been inhibiting in the process of my writing. And, again, this particular tension, the requirements of trust on her part,
must have been much more immediate, and at points inhibiting, to Hilda during the interviews.

Despite their significance, however, these tensions specific to the circumstances of our investigation were a distant subsidiary to the main tension of our relationship. What Hilda refers to as engaging in a "dangerous interplay" is something much more general, and central to her experience of relationship with significant others. The meaning of this tension in our work, the danger Hilda refers to, will become gradually more apparent as one proceeds through her life history. It can be stated briefly here:

-Interviewer: When you say (inaudible), are you commenting on, ah... not being aware of your impact on your family?

"Ah, I think I was talking about when we move together as people, as minds, and so forth, give of ourselves as much as we do as people, as (inaudible), with sensitive reactions, etc., interpretations, and so forth, we do a great deal...and perhaps without any - without realizing - just as they do too."

Hilda feels a potential for grave damage in this "moving together as minds". Hilda's concepts of being "seen", having "the slate wiped clean", "remarks that cut", and having her "own insights taken away" will presently make the significance of this damage more appreciable. It is represented in her description of life on the mental ward:

"As a matter of fact, you see, if you, ah, allowed yourself to overstep your ah...your desire and allow it to be seen, really, I'd allowed it to develop even - had I been able to allow it to develop, this I am not certain of...you are disciplined so severely in these places that you are almost lost, you know...and sometimes you wonder if it's the discipline that is
making you insane or if it is your insanity that is making you insane, right?"

And this danger in moving together is expressed directly, in terms relevant to our work together:

"...And somehow it was the fact that she could see what I was doing I suppose, that I was in some way thinking I was getting this over well, whatever it was I was saying or thinking. And her criticism was usually very acute, very apt... but it would throw me into an awful despondency -

Now my sisters tell me that I'm exactly that same kind of person, that no one in the family is likely to do that as many times and as... happily and carefreely as I will - that I can put my finger on certain things about them, and just go right along in the midst of my speech, mention it, hurt their feelings deeply - and I don't even know.

"Because after all we do want to be known don't we? Isn't it clever for someone to know us to that extent? You see?

[Interviewer: To the extent of...?]

"Oh breaking us up a bit, mmm hmn...yes. Probably it's finding us. Probably there's something there that doesn't want to be found... you know."

Awareness of this sense of danger in the process of knowing another, of my coming to "see" Hilda, is not something developed entirely in reflection. The risks of our intimacy were subtly communicated to me throughout the interviews, the tension in our "interplay" was shared. While this tension pervades the entire work of this project, as a global substratum to my reconstruction of Hilda's experience, it was repeatedly and directly played out in the concrete moments of our interviews.
As related to the product of our interviews, the content of Hilda's story, this tension in our interplay had two main implications. Both manifestations of the tension in "being seen" are closely related. The first is that Hilda paid very close attention to my presence as the interviewer. She was sensitive to fairly minute expressions of my internal state, e.g., signs of fatigue, inattention, discomfort, and the direction of my interest. There are, for example, only two spots in the interviews (both somewhat lengthy and rapt descriptions of the graduation and wedding dresses which Hilda made) where she did not become immediately aware of having lost my attention. Although I made an effort to avoid directing her presentation, Hilda's close awareness of the focus of my attention can be assumed to have had a thorough going impact on the focus of her own reconstruction of the past.

While it is impossible to separate my focus from hers with any precision, the general contours of my attention were friendly to details of family experience and experiences of interpersonal estrangement and relationship. Although I seldom asked directly, I looked for the psychological damage which might make the internal suffering in her later years more understandable. My attention particularly favored problems in the mother-child relationship and interpretations of complex interrelationships as a schematic whole, such as the meaning of a "family unit" or one's "concept of one's self" as an "entity". It disfavored attribution of human agency to "Higher Design" and was particularly unfriendly to talk of "continual consciousness" or living on a "higher plane". I become uncomfortable during detailed descriptions of sexual experience.

Hilda's ability to follow my differential attention to areas of her experience had mixed effects on the content of her reconstruction. It
accounted for much of the richness of detail on family experience and self perception - my understanding is that we converged in focusing on the significance of her mother and in viewing her "concepts" of ownself as a primary feature of experience. It also accounted, for example, for the absence of details on higher meaning or cosmic integrations - questions on which our ability to attend seems to diverge rather sharply.

The second implication of this tension in our interviews is more specific; the concrete details of Hilda's past experience became, at points, negotiable. The process of this negotiation could be conveniently abbreviated as the playing out of Hilda's "ambivalence in being know". It occurred around content of special significance to Hilda, features of her experience which were important for her to make known to me. My understanding of the process is that it was initiated when the possibility of misunderstanding or distortion intruded on Hilda, through either my obtuseness or her negative past experience. Hilda retreated, at these points, whatever metaphor she was using. Within the reality of her metaphor, the facts of her experience became, almost intentially, obscured; as if the concrete details of her experience might be taken to disconfirm the reality she is attempting to communicate through her metaphor.

This was, by no means, a simple mechanical processes or mere act of hiding on Hilda's part. Her ambivalence at making her experience clearly understandable, aided by her close attention to my presence, interacted with whatever effort I made toward understanding to produce a sequence of clarification and obfuscation which is often subtle and occasionally prolonged over the course of several interviews.

While this interplay was usually a subtle occurrence in our interviews, it could also be quite evident. The process of our interaction around the
"burning bush vision" (in the first excerpt presented) is worth briefly reviewing in this context:

The excerpt opens with a question from me on whether the vision of a "burning bush" was an "actual event" in her life.

Hilda responds "no, excepting that I could do that almost at any time..."; probably meaning, no she did not have visual hallucinations as a child but the ecstatic experience represented by her image of a "burning bush" was something very real to her.

I attempt to clarify this confusing answer by focusing on her childhood.

Hilda responds by bringing the question back to her metaphor - "And even after I became a writer I could do it..." - and focusing on the process of communication - "...there it was to express, and I had been told it, and there it was.

I ask if she is telling me about how she approached her work, i.e., I try to enter her metaphor in order to clarify our conversation.

This show of willingness to try to understand what she is communicating in her metaphor frees her to express her apprehension of a distorted interpretation of her "burning bush" experience: "But then I would use this". She describes her brother Harry trying to take the experience away - "...'nature has nothing to do with the real story'. I said, 'Well it did to me, because I would go out and find this' ...he thought that was a form of manipulation, that wasn't honest, somehow. But it was as honest as I could be, really."

Uncomfortable with working in her metaphor, I return to trying to date the onset of her "seeing signs in nature" - a compromise use of her metaphor aimed at determining the "actual" experience.

She cuts me off, "[you mean?] feeling this way about writing?..."

I finish, "no, of seeing signs in nature".

She dates this, to me, concrete event to the time of undertaking her first book - what I suspect to be an act of cavalier freedom with the concrete referents of her metaphor in service of her attempt to communicate an important, abstract experience, perhaps surrendering the "facts" so as not to lose the story.

She goes on to distinguish memory from vision and describes applying her vision to her memories - "but when I would
remember I would try to see it as a...meaningful design, you see."

I reenter the metaphor, "As an integrated...design?"

She proceeds to tell me: "A moment, you see in these were all isolated moments...which were very meaningful to me in my memory and my memory would bring them to me, you...it, it wasn't a gossipy thing you know, it was sort of a real point." That is, that the "burning bush" resides in the concrete events of her memory.

We step back from the strain of our interplay to share a discussion of Huxley.

Refreshed, I return to pressing her whether the burning bush was an "actual, visual...?".

She gives me my facts: "Yes, I saw a bursh when I decided to write that chapter..." And proceeds to tell me how real the biblical story of the "burning bush" was: "God's entity, in fact, was there..."; and the fact that it is a story: "that's the way the story went, I always liked that story - but then I saw this bush you know."

I have been given a definitive statement on my question of the "actuality" of the event. If I wish to pursue this, and the questions of occurrence in childhood and sensory parameters of the experience, I have no choice but to explore the metaphor: "It had a...halo light?"

Finally, and with only minor negotiation from this point on, we are able to proceed to an understanding of the, to Hilda, more meaningful interpersonal parameters of this "burning bush" vision: "so I decided that my mother was the person who was seeing it."

It should be clear that this tension, what I am referring to as "ambivalence in the knowing process", was to a considerable extent shared.

In reviewing the tapes of this and other interviews, I have been struck by the virtual absence of communications on the process of our communication, e.g., in the above passage, I expressed confusion, but stop short of pointing out that we are proceeding on separate tracks. Within the interviews, this dance around "being found" contributed much to the general level of interest, as well as some of the more comfortable moments
in our investigation. It has, however, resulted in adding a substantial dimension of difficulty to the process of reconstructing and presenting Hilda's past experience. A certain amount of the content of our interviews has been omitted from her life history simply because I could not translate her metaphor into a description of events with any degree of confidence.

Finally, it should also be apparent in the above passage, and throughout our interview excerpts, that the main direction of Hilda's activity is toward making her experience clear to me. The richness and detail of the memories contained in the life history is the best comment on the success of our collaboration in the effort. While Hilda's fear of being "known" contributed the main source of energy in the tension of our work, her wish to be known was the working force of our collaboration. In the following excerpt, taken from the concluding half hour of our interviews, Hilda describes the level of her investment of energy in, and preparation for, the work of our project. She also offers what, had our goals been those of psychotherapy, would be a gratifying account of outcome:

"I have just finished reading a short paper Hilda had given me, a presentation on death which she wrote for her Unitarian group.) One - one thing I am curious about here is what you mean when you say... 'but even the few family deaths I have had, I experienced only objectively.' What do you mean by that?"

"I mean I didn't allow myself to get involved in this thinking about them... I've missed them later on, but as far as seeing it as death, you know, and experiencing it as death in my thinking, I didn't allow that... Any more than I'm going to allow it to happen when I did, from my family. I don't want them to see me or experience it as death... really. They can see me when I'm dead, you know, and I'll be taken away, and, you know,"
they won't...argh, as far as mother's death is concerned, that was almost -
that almost happened, but, ah, I don't think I allowed it to.

[Interviewer: I remember you descr-]

"Yah!

[Interviewer: It was something you all worked -]

"We worked together on, right.

[Interviewer: ...Do you feel there is anything I haven't covered that's important?]

"Awh! I can't imagine - no really...I, ah, I was trying to think of
anything at all...you haven't covered - as well as you should, considering
the script you had to go on - No one could talk interminably, you know
that...And come up with another memory and say, 'Oh look! I haven't
thought of that in awhile.' Right?

[Interviewer: mnh. I'm - yah - I'm really asking if there's some...
if there's some piece of - say if I were just to go out and describe you,
whether there's something missing that you would consider important, or
that...?]

"What can I say? Yah, how would you describe a person like this? at
this age, who would feel that important? and so on...Who thinks she's that
important that she would sit and talk to Cartney this long...Well I hang
my head [laughs].

"I saw someone on television hang her head the other night - She did so
well until she hung her head. She was an important figure too, I can't
remember what she was trying to... But then I thought 'well had she
stared into the camera that long, it might have been...a mistake, over
much.'

[Interviewer: You belittle yourself.]
"Do I?"

[Interviewer: Quite often.]

"...Well perhaps I'm partially oriental; don't they always say, 'miserable me and honorable you?' and all that. [laughs.]"

[Interviewer: Yah, well, what I mean is you often say I must not be - I must be getting bored, or -]

"Oh yes. Well, really now, if you had done it for any while...All through the longest hours of, ah, you having me do it - having me do it with you, I certainly would feel - I think I've held up very well. And you know the way I've done is - has been that I've cleared the decks each week. And I've decided not to read, or think, or take seriously anything...so that I won't be prejudiced in any way, shape, or manner, so that when we do this together, this is it. Because in the same way it's almost as creative an effort as writing you know. I do that with my writing: I clear the decks...and that's what I am doing."

[Interviewer: Perhaps that's why you've always been.]

"Able to."

[Interviewer: Able to, and you always seem to answer the questions before I ask them.]

"Yes! Because I have, I have done this, every week, every time I've known you were coming - of course, if you're not coming for two weeks, I might give myself a lapse...and do a little more visiting, and a little more reading, and...thinking in other directions. But, I'll give myself a week ahead of when I know you're coming...to do that same thing...I'm sure it works - makes it work better."

[Interviewer: You've been, ah - far exceeded my expectations.]

"Well, good - But, you see, I think a person who decides to deal with
any subject, you know, and has dealt with subject matter which is more or less personal - and who can say whoever else is going to be interested in it? - has to take some track to go on, and that's the way I used to do it in my writing - the way I still do in my writing...

"And meanwhile, one very forcive thing, you know, Cartney, is that the family is not in the least bit interested - well Ruth is a little bit... ah, she'll say 'Well, you seem so much better since Cartney has come. I'm sure he's done a great deal for you.' And I - she said, 'Don't you think unburdening yourself has done a great deal?'

"And I said, 'Well I don't know if I did unburden, but certainly I talked steady - oh, I know you can do that!' she said.

"So then - but she said, 'Your painting is so much better than it's been, for years - or ever, as far as I know.' Well -

[Interviewer: Do you think so?]?

"She thinks so - what? I think it has improved - 'Well,' she said, 'I think it has done a great deal for you.'

'Well', I said 'Who knows?' - I never was psychoanalyzed and perhaps this is almost a form of it, you know.

[Interviewer: I think there's some - I think any telling of one's story - ?]

"Right, yah, it's true.

[Interviewer: There's...I think that's a lot of the power - it's like therapy.]

"Probably.

[Interviewer: sitting down and telling...your story, and having somebody else try to understand it.]

"Yes, and not really being directive, particularly - you were very good
that way, you didn't direct me along this line or that line...intensely or not - I was very grateful.

-Interviewer: I wanted it to be your story, not - not a combination of both of our's...or not my own...ah, interpretation.

"interpretation, yes - if you have one, you do...another...line.

-Interviewer: Well I try - try not to think about interpretation at this point.

"Well you have to probably see the whole thing together before you can, really..."

My Presentation of Hilda's Life History

My objective in organizing the sources of material on Hilda's past into a presentation of the events of the first twenty years of her life situation is at once simple and complex: to reconstruct the events of her early development in an as close as possible an approximation of the way in which she experienced them. The reader accustomed to the use of case material in service of explicating theory or demonstrating technique may find my presentation of Hilda's past lacking in psychological commentary. I do not present Hilda's life history in illustration of a general theoretical viewpoint or approach to psychology; in fact, I have tried, in reconstructing Hilda's past, to follow Sullivan's "plea that little be taken for granted of the traditions, speculations, and theories which have sprung up in the field of abnormal psychology". My hope in avoiding a theoretical construction of Hilda's development is that this would enable me to focus on the concrete details of the life-situation particular to Hilda and to represent the details of Hilda's experience of her life-situation as, to return to Sullivan's phrase, "data which carry their history and their
context so that they are facts to the best of our limitations" (1962, p. 156).

The approach I have adopted in this endeavor is to integrate excerpts from Hilda's interview description of her experience of a person or event within my own summary description of the period in her life. Organizing the exact sequence of events in her experience has been a particular problem in this approach. As I have previously mentioned, and as can be seen in the several interview excerpts already shown, the distinctions between Hilda's distant past, near past, and present did, at times, become quite blurred in our interview format. I have encountered an even more significant problem in the matter of dealing with the occasionally substantial lacunae in Hilda's account of the past. Such gaps are inevitable and exist for numerous reasons, but become problematic when they occur in her reconstruction of points of particularly personal significance in her development, e.g., her early religious experience or her introduction to heterosexual intimacy. I have addressed this latter problem with, sometimes extensive, descriptive elaboration on what content Hilda does offer. With the former problem, the sequence of events, I have simply made do with what indications were available, and accepted a certain degree of vagueness in temporal order. In confronting both problems, I frequently draw on Hilda's writing for clarification and rely heavily on personal judgment, occasionally on speculations. Where I do so, I make an effort to be explicit in describing the level of judgment and fastidious in outlining the material on which I base it.

The chief limitation in this whole endeavor - as well as the main tool - is language. I have already discussed, in the terms of Schachtel's (1947) thesis on memory, the "obscuring function" of language in Hilda's reconstruction
of her past. A second order of potential distortion through articulation enters at the point of my reconstruction of Hilda's experience. So long as words require an interpretation of meaning, this potential for distortion cannot be entirely eliminated, i.e., they remain an imperfect medium for representing experience. Schachtel (ibid, p. 215) gives an eloquent summary of the task one confronts in seeking an accurate description of experience:

"One might well say that the greatest problem...is the temptation of language. At every step a word beckons, it seems so convenient, so suitable, one has heard or read it so often in a similar context, it sounds so well, it makes the phrase flow so smoothly. If he follows the temptation of this word, he will perhaps describe something that many people will recognize at once, that they already know, that follows a familiar pattern; but he will have missed the nuance that distinguishes the experience from others. If he wants to communicate that elusive nuance which in some way...will be his contribution a widening or opening of the scope of articulate human experience...he has to fight constantly against the easy flow of words that offer themselves."

Although the bulk of my work in this project has been not so much a matter of refining nuance in assault of the ineffable as the more prosaic task of clarifying and interpreting ambiguities for the purpose of accurate description - and without making any claim on the outcome - I can assure the reader that I have engaged in the "constant fight" Schachtel recommends. I have worked to avoid, in particular, descriptive use of words which imply a specific theoretical explanation, e.g., "repression", "catharsis", "fusion", "conditioning", or other popular reifications of internal phenomena. Where such terms appear, they are generally introduced by Hilda and accompanied by some form of contextual or explicit definition. In general, I have made an effort to use the terms of Hilda's description of her experience. Those parts of her "personal idiom" which I understand sufficiently to employ in reconstructing and, occasionally, elaborating on her experience have
been of significant aid in my "fight" for the words which might permit access to the unaccounted space of her story.

In concluding this introduction, I would like to offer several suggestions on the reader's interaction with the material of Hilda's past. While the potential uses of such material are numerous and attractive in a variety of ways, the risks of distorting Hilda's experience do not end with my writing. It is my feeling that several of the considerations I have applied in my writing should be brought to the reading as well, i.e., careful attention to the meaning of Hilda's terms for her experience and a willingness to attempt a temporary suspension of any tendency to apply a pre-existing framework to her experience - a process the phenomenologists refer to as "bracketing preconceptions".

The main personal preconception which I have altered over the course of this project is the notion that my reconstruction of Hilda's early development is primarily a presentation of the events of life in the process of becoming psychopathological. My present conception of Hilda's life history is somewhere to the obverse, i.e., that the psychopathological events of her development highlight and focus processes which are common to human development. This is the sense of Sullivan's "one-genus postulate", e.g.:

"We have found in the most disorganized group of people...a continuation of very much that is simply human" (1962, p. 224), or, "Preliminary investigations have impressed us with the probability that schizophrenic"

*It should be noted that I apply this (very broadly descriptive) term in a broadly descriptive sense, rather than a strictly diagnostic sense to Hilda's psychosis. The label she prefers, and the one given her by her doctors, is manic-depressive. However, my sense of the reason for choosing this latter term is that she recovered from her psychosis at a time when the medical profession considered schizophrenia permanent.
phenomenology requires for its complete exposition nothing different in essential quality from the elements of commonplace human life' (ibid, p. 200).

Sullivan outlines a view of the schizophrenic life-situation as representing - "in almost laboratory simplicity" - an extreme elaboration of the basic processes of integrating life experience into a stable personality structure, processes which are obscured in the success of more normal integrations.

Over the course of my work with Hilda's past, I have moved from a casual acceptance of the sentiments of this "one-genus postulate" to an active appreciation of its truth. Hilda is in a position to describe experiences which are common to those of us not so distinguished by psychological disorder, but which can be only fleetingly encountered in, for example: moments of panic, distant intrusions of internal voices, transient perceptions, elusive memories, and sleep. I see a similar appreciation on the part of the reader as the most helpful ingredient in developing an understanding of the life-history presented in the following pages.

A Note on the Mechanics of My Presentation

As discussed, interview excerpts and passages of Hilda's writing are interspersed throughout the text of my reconstruction of her life history. The interview excerpts and my own writing appear in the same type, excerpts from Hilda's books appear in single space type.

Interpretation, and with it a potential for misrepresentation, can insinuate itself very subtly in the form of punctuation and the grammatical structure I have applied to the spoken passages. I have tried to represent the structure of the spoken passages as it appears in our interview tapes. When I use a brief excerpt as part of a paragraph of my writing, I follow standard rules for punctuating quotations, e.g., ellipsis periods ("...")
indicates an omission. Within the numerous verbatim excerpts, however, I have, for purposes of clarity and accuracy of representation, improvised the following system of punctuation:

- A dash appears at the beginning of each excerpt and is used along with a short space between excerpts to distinguish between excerpts drawn from separate interviews presented as a group.

- Within an excerpt, a hyphen ( - ) indicates an abrupt change or interruption of speech. It is only coincidental when it represents a parenthetical comment.

[ ] Brackets enclose the interviewer's questions, comments, and clarifications.

" " The beginning of each paragraph of an excerpt passage is introduced by quotation marks but only the conclusion of an excerpt ends with quotation marks.

' ' Dialogue, and occasionally thought, described by Hilda is punctuated with single quotation marks.

...Ellipsis periods indicate a pause in speech; they do not represent an omission of content. Omissions of content are indicated by \[\text{omission}\]

Hilda frequently gives strong emphasis to particular words in a passage. When she does so, this is indicated by underlining. The underlinings are meant purely to communicate her emphasis, but this last point is slightly problematic, i.e., my discriminations of emphasis are not entirely reliable, and must frequently reflect my own focus of attention.
Hilda's Story

I. Early childhood and illness

Hilda was born at the turn of the century in Cold Water, Minnesota. She was the second of seven children and eldest daughter of Emily and Jacob Mendahl. Her first four years were spent in Minnesota, her father's home state. During this time her father taught chemical engineering at a state university. Her mother, who had been "a student of language", never held employment.

Hilda's earliest memories are almost entirely of discomfort and pain. Her early childhood was apparently a succession of prolonged and severe illness, starting in early infancy. Her knowledge of this period was supplied by her mother, whom she describes telling her:

-"'We almost didn't bring you back several times, Hilda...you were a very sick child. We were unable to get food that you could digest. We finally found something you could eat, oatmeal which Hilda continues to eat regularly. We had just gotten you well when you had something happen which could have been called an appendicitis; you ate some grapes and were prostrated with pain. Then we almost got you well, again, and you came down with a whooping cough. You were so violently ill with that that you forgot how to walk.'"

Hilda's own memories of her time in Minnesota are dim. Her only distinct recollection is of "sitting on a curb, vomiting into the curb," probably in conjunction with the whooping cough.

When Hilda was four her father discovered a catalytic agent which perfected a new formula for steel. This success enabled him to move east and enter the business world; he was given stock and a job in a growing
steel company.

Newcastle, Pennsylvania, was the first of a series of temporary homes for the family. Hilda remembers her two years there as a period of "almost constant discomfort". A particularly vivid memory is of cutting her head in a fall down stairs and being comforted by her mother — "Oh this is wonderful, being held by mother, bleeding into her shirtwaist." Another vivid memory is of "being frightened by Aunt Eleanor [her mother's periodically insane sister] in the halls of that house...being whipped by her," and having her fright intensified through sharing it with James, her older brother — "When James was frightened I thought, 'That's the end; there's really something to be frightened about.'"

The births, illness, and death within the family during this period left a strong impact on Hilda. She recalls the near death of her next sister, Isabel, from a case of diptheria, the birth of her brother, Harry, and, in particular detail, the birth and brief life of a sister, "little Eleanor:

"She was between Isabel and Harry...I think Harry was born after... Eleanor.

[Interviewer: That had an ef - you were aware of Eleanor's death?]

"Oh, yes, I was.

[Interviewer: You would have been how old, four?]

"Around in there - I can remember going with the casket to the cemetary, in a little cab you know...Now I may have invented this memory of Eleanor's corpse, but I saw the casket for certain, because I remember sitting in the cab with father, and the casket was sort of across, ah, my lap and James' and father's. We went in this cab to the cemetary.

[Interviewer: How do you remember that - with what feelings do you
remember it?

"That it was a rainy day...and that there was this dead infant in the box, and that father said she never would have survived anyway, you know, 'Better that she died' - that sort of thing.

Interviewer: How did you feel then, can you remember?

"Oh...I think I was feeling for my mother, almost, more than myself - I felt very sorry for my mother, because I can remember, somehow, a distant weeping thing happening in the house - although I don't know if I actually remember seeing mother weeping about it."

Mrs. Mendahl's pregnancy with Eleanor brought the arrival of her husband's sister, Aunt Jen, the family's self-styled nurse - "always there to bring them in or see them out." Aunt Jen was an austere figure to Hilda, a "major domo, figuring the whole thing out, sending us this way and that." Hilda remembers "having to eat potatoes I didn't want to...some kind of servant there, didn't want to be in her presence, not being allowed to see mother and all." Eleanor, who turned out to be "a bleeder," survived only a few weeks. The ride in a black cab to the cemetary "with father and James and the casket across our knees" is remembered as a "lovely moment, exciting and beautiful to me."

Age five brought Hilda's first regular experience outside the family, Kindergarten. She remembers this as unhappy, "because Isabel and I were taken away from the home...cold spots and funny little women, and these funny, vacant rooms." Hilda, who cried a great deal, was told by a teacher "every tear is a pearl."

Kindergarten was also the scene for a return of illness to her. It rained on a may dance; the children were in paper dresses and Hilda contracted a cold and ear infection. Her ear became abscessed, which persisted through her sixth birthday - "pain, pain, pain."

A final memory of Pennsylvania is of a servant catching smallpox, being
taken away in a sheet on one of those 'pest wagons' — all of this seemed like so much illness.'

The family's move to Hudson, New York, is remembered as a time of expanding promise. Although the family, including Hilda, was shortly afflicted with a recurrence of diphtheria, she remembers great pleasure at discovering her new home. In contrast to the dark, industrial atmosphere of Newcastle, Hudson was full of "growth, skies, hills, woods — all this beautiful out of doors."

There was a sense in the family of having arrived socially and financially. A second servant was added to the household, the family had intentions of buying their house for the first time, Mr. Mendahl took an apartment and started working in New York. This is the period to which Hilda's vision, of the family happily climbing the hill to their house, returns during the onset of her psychosis.

II. The early family circle

Hilda's impressions of her early family life continue to be very active for her. She presents this material with an immediacy in which one can forget that sixty to seventy years have intervened, young parents are long since dead, and intrusive infants are presently white-haired grandmothers.

Her reconstruction of the early family atmosphere is one of unestablished connections, e.g., between the family and outside, within the parents' relationship, and between Hilda and her parents, and insufficiency, e.g., of food, money, love, and attention. Her affect in recounting details of family life varies from active resentment to more characteristic flat statements of fact — "this is the way it was."

A particular effort Hilda makes in her recollection of this early
period is toward "achieving objectivity", i.e., toward integrating feelings of respect and love for family members, her understanding, both childhood and adult, of parental limitations, with her early experience of the home as a bleak and hostile environment. In recent years she has used family gatherings toward this end, as an opportunity to compare her impressions with her siblings. Her next oldest sister, Isabel, confirms them, the younger siblings vehemently contradict them. Her resolution of this situation is that there were "two families": James, Hilda, and Isabel, who suffered from parental inexperience, on the one hand; and Harry, Candice, Marion, and Verna, who benefitted from early errors, on the other. The account here is, of course, a description of the "first family" unit.

The Mendahl family was not, for Hilda a unit comfortably integrated into any broader network of extended family or community. Two broad areas of difficulty were: money, with its attendant issues of social status, upward mobility, culture, and appearance; and religion, with its attendant issues of group membership and orientation to shared values and ultimate purpose.

Money

The issue of money subsumes a broad area of difficulty for the Mendahl family's conflicts of social mobility, in particular, extends into Hilda's grandparents' generation on either side.

Jacob's parents, Ruth and Isaac, were midwestern farmers of Scottish German origins, fundamental Baptists, and believers in "hard work and the farmers' experience." They were a "close-knit" family, from which Jacob separated himself, initially through education and eventually through change of values, financial status, and geography. He was the only of five siblings
to do so and, on visits west, Hilda would be exposed to the others' resentment, e.g., from one uncle with a stutter - "It's too b-b-bad about Jacob, he just got too b-b-big for his b-b-b-britches." Jacob had ambitions to finance his youngest brother Will's education, perhaps in hope that he too could escape a farming life, and was deeply affected when Will died as a youth from a colonic stoppage.

Jacob's separation from his background is a subtheme in Hilda's first two books. In one she portrays covert envy behind the family's resentment and in the other she deals at length with Jacob's dedications to and sacrifice in self-betterment.

The issue of money and mobility in Emily's family of origin is somewhat more amorphous. There is a suggestion of southern affluence in her mother, Susan Hamilton's background; of having entered indeterminate but embarrassing financial straits under John's, her father's, phlegmatic direction. The actual wealth of the family resided with Henry B. Simpson, an illegitimate half-brother of John and self-made industrialist. John was given a $15/week position for life with Henry B. Simpson, an impression of much more, and a resentment over the difference which Hilda feels "soured him permanently."

"Henry B." was a remote figure to the family but his wife, "Cousin Isabel" an important background personality and occasional benefactress to both Emily and her children. The suggestion that money was seen as a coveted but potentially destructive force in Emily's family is reinforced by her brother Frank's suicide, which the family attributes to guilt over cheating on the disposition of their father's estate.

The themes of tenacious financial self-betterment and insubstantial, wrongly denied social status mixed poorly in Hilda's own family. Reflecting on the eventual course of her family's origin, Hilda says:
--"There really isn't any family unit...the whole thing is just not a unit (as when) you read old Russian novels and think of a family as a group thing with a piece of property...established properties and established relationships. It seems we never did get that done..."

"I believe if we'd had the money father expected...we might have had one very interesting life among some of the better minds who were young people in that day and age, a more fulfilling expression. This is where I lost out."

While Hilda is speaking here of more than simply money, she summarizes her experience of a family system in which money assumed mythical proportions, both in the sense of an entrance to a distant higher life of security, community, and cultural achievement and in the fact that it never materialized as cash:

- "We were more or less determining our future on the fact that we would be so well off. Father used to repeat again and again, 'You're never going to have to work for a living' and many of the family, Isabel, James, Henry, possibly the little girls, all believed the day would come with time on their hands and choices to make."

Hilda's perception of an incongruity occurred very early. She remembers her parents, on moving into Hudson, coming home with complete automobile outfits, "veils and goggles, but no car - that's the way they were."

Living in a future of expanding financial promise was not without its daily sacrifices. Mrs. Mendahl was given $25/week on which to run the household - "a meager sum even in those days." Hilda describes in great detail her mother's attempts at economy with food: buying the year's eggs...
in spring and preserving them in water glass solution; serving milk diluted with half water; oleo ("long before it was the proper thing"); cream sauce of "water and flour with a little milk thrown in"; and "lots of potatoes fried in fat that was never too fresh". Hilda's husband later commented, "the problem with you Mendahl's is that you were all under-nourished."

It is not clear whether the family's financial privation were a matter of unrealistic spending elsewhere, such as employing servants, or simply of withheld money. Alongside of a sense of being viewed as upperclass, "grand people by servants' children for a weekend in New York as "being shown how the other half lived". In any case, her father gave them repeated lectures on the necessity of investing "every cent" in the stockmarket.

While for Hilda's father money was apparently the intangibles of stock certificates, for her mother it seems to have been more the intangibles of style, manners, and social position:

- "Mother had a very strong concept of style. She was certain it was important to be stylishly dressed, went to great lengths to have very good dressmakers to plan, cut, and fit our clothing. We were dressed in great detail, much more so than most of the children in Hudson. For the most part materials were passed on from Cousin Isabel: satin, velvet, lace, things not really in style. Mother was very creative that way."

Each child was assigned two colors at birth, from which point on they were dressed in their colors; in Hilda's case, until late high school.

As a child, Hilda perceived, through the eyes of the "hired girls", a dissonance between her mother's manners and the family means:
"All a bit ridiculous, the politeness, insisting on certain things being done – I never heard them questioning her authority – but they must have thought 'What is all this going to amount to in the end; she wants you to become a person in her own status!' – whatever that was. They were poor, we didn't have much better..."

She goes on to describe a maid standing in attendance, crumbing the table, serving: "...a platter of corned beef and toast. 'You can bring on the platter of beans now.' I thought the manners were ridiculous too."

Mrs. Mendahl's concern with the appearance of social status was the source of one of the few instances of open conflict Hilda remembers between her parents. The occasion was Mr. Mendahl's parents' visit to Hudson, when Hilda was 10 or 11. She describes the scene in dialogue:

- "Mother wept. 'You know how funny your mother dresses, her funny little hat and so on...'

  'Why Emily, that's Mother's way of dressing.'

  'But your father wears that funny mustache and that hat and cane.'

  'But that's my father!'

  'The people of the church won't understand.'

  "Father's feelings were quite hurt. In fact, grandfather was the most social person ever, got to know everyone...would talk of his civil war days, Sherman's march...Quite successful, except Mother never agreed to Grandmother's dress, 'How would she explain it to the wash lady?''"

Hilda apologized to her grandmother, who explained, "Your mother thinks she's a lady, that's all."
Hilda's eventual understanding of her family's social position was supplied to her by her brother, James, who explained his view of the family as "declasse". This came as an insight to her, that they did have a status, albeit outside the order.

Issues of financial well-being and providing for loved ones remain an important background theme in her story. Issues of class continue into the present to be vaguely troublesome and incompletely resolved. On the one hand she feels it a shortcoming of her upbringing that she was not exposed to a broader spectrum of social and ethnic groups and on the other she finds herself reacting to class-related aspects of people, so much so that her daughter, Ruth, accuses her of being a "very serious snob."

While Hilda's current thinking rejects the notion of "a stratified class situation" she does believe:

- "It is good to reach a spot no one can criticize, a high enough level to consort with kings and queens...you should wish way up there...take no other person seriously unless you admire him in some way much more than yourself."

**Family Religion**

Hilda's family's orientation to religion is less easily summarized. The reasons for this difficulty are numerous, among them: the fact that religion means many things, from how a family group integrates into a community to its value-system and beliefs; that for the Mendahl family there is a sense of the integration into a church community remaining somewhat marginal; beliefs within the family were diverse, conflicting, and not always open to discussion; and that from very early in Hilda's life religious orientation has remained an important, but highly personal and
not clearly articulated issue. During our interviews, Hilda maintained a certain reserve and vagueness in speaking of religion in relation to her family.

In a turn-of-the-century, small, northeastern city religious practice was, of course, closely related to questions of social class. As with money and social class, it seems that, for Hilda, the issue of her early family's religious practice was persistently confusing, especially in that it showed a divergence between form, i.e., church attendance and ritual observation, and content, i.e. beliefs. It was, however, clearly an issue. A significant memory of the move to Hudson is of her parents choosing to attend the Presbyterian church. Hilda had an understanding that her grandparents were Baptists, and that therefore her own family should be, much in the way children of Irishmen, for example, are Irish. On bringing it up she would be told, "'Baptists are rather backwards, farm people' - I never did get it straight in my mind." Later, Jacob's parents' visit occasioned a violent argument between Jacob and his father over Isaac's adherence to fundamentalist beliefs. The next day, while Jacob was taking the children and Isaac to buy an expensive watch in a gesture of reparation, Hilda apologized to her grandfather. When he assured her that it was "just an argument", she responded, "'No, it was more than that' - I was capable of occasional wise remarks like that, even back then."

The family attended church every Sunday; Mr. Mendahl taught Sunday school. While their motivation was at least in part social integration, Hilda feels this was never accomplished, "we had a life very separate from any of the people in the community or church..." Nor was the weekly negotiation a comfortable one; Hilda recalls embarrassment at her father's frequent arguments with the minister over points of doctrine and his
Her father's overhead Sunday school classes were also a source of discomfort for her:

- "He was a regular little cock rooster in his Sunday school class. She describes the structure of the class: 15-20 women, weekly topics for which her father would carefully prepare. He enjoyed tearing down all the Christian discussion, reevaluating all the people's Christian thoughts. I could hear him very loud, intimidating the poor women...They were always wrong - I thought it was cruel treatment."

Hilda's mother communicated a strong sense of the importance of "Christian virtues" and becoming a "Christian woman". While the importance of these qualities was clear to Hilda, the meaning remained elusive:

"Mother always insisted we be 'Christians'. I would look at her like she was talking a foreign language...I tried to believe, everything I was told, that a Christian declared Christ to be the greatest individual given us..."

Between the lines of Hilda's account there is a suggestion that how she 'was told' was somewhat confusing, that statement and action were dissonant. For example, in a separate interview, Hilda describes the family practice of each member bringing a book to Church and reading through the service. As can be seen shortly, resolving the dissonance for herself, i.e., understanding the statement and reconciling her own action to it, became a pressing need in her preadolescent years.
Other family values and practices

Hilda's family placed a strong emphasis on achievement, educational achievement in particular. Mr. Mendahl subscribed to a number of newspapers and literary journals for the family; Mrs. Mendahl had meetings of a women's literary club in her house. Performance in school was important, "we had to get ninety percent or better." Intelligence was a highly valued attribute. Seniority, in that it related to intelligence, was a determinant of status among the children - "The older ones were supposed to be more intelligent because they had lived longer...but if in any way you didn't make the grade, that was a sorry remark...you had to be idolized [as an older sibling]."

Sex was also an important determinant of status in the family. Hilda feels that the girls were expected to do a great deal of the work of the house, whereas "nothing was expected of the boys." Between the parents, Mr. Mendahl was clearly the head of the family. During those meals at which he was present, no one was allowed to talk except Mrs. Mendahl or James, who was considered "the bright mind", and then only to Mr. Mendahl. When Hilda hit her siblings it was considered "naughtiness", whereas when one of the boys did it, it was called "disciplining". Hilda feels she was "disciplined" a great deal.

The family's educational goals have continued into the present to be important values for Hilda. She regrets not completing college and shows concern over her grandchildren's education - so much so that her daughter, Ruth, chides her on being overconcerned. She takes pride in her ability to recognize which among her grandchildren is and isn't "college material". Many of her positive descriptions of people include a comment on their intelligence; being a college graduate is an important distinction.
Although she considers her family's preferential treatment of males unjust, she is very sensitive to injustice in the expectations placed by society on men, for example:

- "I feel terribly sorry for them in this marriage situation, where they're supposed to support and support and support...I think women abuse that idea."

III. Mid-childhood: Unhappiness, Mother, and a friend.

"This sounds like such a sad story - 'fun on the farm.'"

From the time of her arrival in Hudson to early adolescence was, indeed, an unhappy period for Hilda. A constant sense of being unable to "do right" in her mother's eyes, thoughts of suicide, religious searching, and frightenly real "boogies" predominate her memory of this time.

At the same time, however, a picture of a playful, creative, and intensely inquisitive child emerges, generally from between the lines, of Hilda's account. She discovered books very early, and found in them an attractively "idealized picture of things". She became so absorbed by pursuing this "idealization" that her parents imposed a limit of six books a week. She became acquainted with and developed great respect for a nearby artist, whom she was able to convince her parents to pay for tutoring. She developed a strong and lasting attachment to her older brother, James, and she found friendship outside the home:

- "As far as companionship, I was allowed a great deal in that a lot of boys lived near...we loved playing...would have great evenings of hide and seek, blind man's bluff, and so on...we had these little books of favorites, favorite color, favorite flower, so forth, when it came to choosing my favorite boyfriend I had two or three."
Of this period of Hilda's life, her relationship with Teressa was by far the brightest spot. Their meeting stands out as a distinct and cherished memory, almost as two lovers:

- "I was taking a walk in Hudson and I was very lonely. I saw this child swinging in a lilac bush - a very romantic setting. In those days everyone wore rompers when they were little, here she was an eight year old child in rompers, pink... She explains that rompers, with a seat for toileting training, were worn until 6, and then replaced by skirts... and that was exciting to me because I had never seen a pair of pink rompers... she had pink hair ribbon and curls and enormous... She spoke to me first. I was so delighted. Behind her I could see the studio window and I wondered what that great big window was, 'Mother's an artist, she paints there.'"

The girls agreed to become friends and, after Hilda's mother had been interviewed by Teressa's, were allowed to do so. Over "long, long walks", painting and reading together, and mutual assistance with homework they developed a close bond; a "pact against reality" in which each could share secrets of growing up and find company in denying the inevitability of adolescence, boys, and "the physiology of marriage and birth."

Teressa was a child with a highly protective mother, a "Baby Beweena" guarded from an outside world Hilda felt drawn to explore with her:

- "I felt her mother was so domineering she didn't allow her to be the full fledged person she might have been. But she couldn't stop her from reading... I had a feeling of her being a very poetic person, with insights she had accomplished alone and would share with me, a lot of it. She describes Teressa reading passages of poetry to her and slowly
convincing her of their beauty. And we were competitive in drawing. She did better than I, invariably. We drew a great deal of the time."

While Teressa opened up the pleasures of her cloistered life to Hilda, Hilda worked to expose Teressa to the outside. She was instrumental in pressuring Teressa's parents to transfer her from private to public school. As they grew to be allowed more independence, she enlisted her in exploring Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches "to study the beautiful images of Christ - something very exciting about those images of Christ." They developed a somewhat morbid fascination with death:

- "We also used to study the dead. In those days you could. Just go into the houses with the dead...I don't know how many young people do that but we did...I had an idea the images of the dead Christ and the dead were very similar. I loved looking at them."

The analogy with a young lover's relationship is repeated in another interview:

- "We would kiss each other, didn't know what it meant except as a sign of affection...she always smelled wonderful. The nearer I got the more excited I would get, as if Teressa were some wonderful glowing thing."

It seems that a significant feature of Hilda's attraction to Teressa, much of the brightness the relationship introduced to her life, was a reflection of Teressa's home and mother. Teressa's household excelled in several of the areas in which Hilda's fell short: the furnishings were opulent and tasteful; meals well prepared and ample, - "chocolate cakes, and fresh foods and spinach - oh, it was wonderful". Teressa's family was securely positioned in "high society", and her mother was, in Hilda's eyes, an established artist and woman of the world. Although Hilda was
condemning of Teressa's mother's overprotectiveness, it also seems that a main point of the reflected brightness was their bond:

- "I could see a lot of that, so-called real love, between mother and daughter. Teressa's mother loved her immensely. I was jealous."

Unhappiness

Apart from her relationship with Teressa, Hilda remembers this as a period of almost continual emotional pain and self doubt. Her account of it is a string of anecdotes, nearly all unpleasant experiences, some nightmarish. As with memories from a dream, pieces surface almost randomly throughout our interviews. And, as with dream events, there is a sense that they elude her efforts to gain a final perspective on or synthesis of the period. She occasionally questions that her sense of being continually subjected to unjust punishment might be as distorted as the family's myth that she was a thoroughly unmanageable child. In correspondence to her theory of "two families", her younger siblings assure her that, "As you know, Hilda, you were a terribly naughty child" and Isabel that "of course you weren't".

Isabel was a main target of whatever "naughtiness" Hilda exhibited. She felt strong jealousy toward Isabel and resentment of what she saw as Isabel's favored position in their parents' affections. She remembers confronting her parents on this:

- "'You don't love me' - and they would explain that Isabel has 'double the love' because little Eleanor died after her."

She also remembers her father comparing her to Isabel:

- "'Hilda, you have such an unpleasant expression.' He had a picture he would show me with Isabel with a 'charming little girl look' and me with a 'gloomy expression'... I felt their disapproval a great deal of the time..."
As I remember, I was the only one to ever get spanked... It seems like I was punished every weekend when father got home. The problem was always that I had been 'bad' - no explanation from him or me - I'm not sure he never knew exactly. I could always remember back to teasing Isabel... but I was sure she had started it. She must have gone to mother and mother to father and father to me...

- "No matter how hard I tried to do the various things she asked me to do, even though I was lax at the moment of her remark, I never could satisfy mother... 'Gee, I never will be a satisfactory person as far as she is concerned.'"

Equally disturbing as the unfavorable uncomparisons of Hilda with Isabel - but in a quite different way - were her father's frequent comparisons of Hilda to her aunt Eleanor. Hilda remembers these occurring "from a very early age":

- "If father didn't like my remark or look he would liken it to Aunt Eleanor's 'esoteric approach' - she was very interested in religions. Very often I would come out with something suggestive of spirituality. He would say just like Eleanor - as if that were a very sad thing. I would ask, 'What's wrong with being like Aunt Eleanor?' and he would respond, 'Well, she went insane' - maybe he gave me the idea."

Aunt Eleanor was a distressing model to be identified with. In and out of the family home and a nearby sanitorium throughout Hilda's childhood, she was the source of a number of frightening memories for the older children, of being menaced in hallways and corners by this frightening woman whom Hilda feels "was herself extremely frightened." She was also
the object of several positive identifications. In addition to sharing with Hilda an intense involvement with religious ideas, she was a "very artistic person". Hilda admired Eleanor's carefully executed copies of Gibson's popular drawings of stylish young women, "the Gibson girls," and felt herself heir to Eleanor's talents.

Particularly disturbing memories surround Aunt Eleanor's performance as a mother. Eleanor had "managed to find a husband somewhere along the line...and even dared have a child or two, although she lost several." One was a daughter, Isabel (named after "cousin Isabel", as was Hilda's sister).

At one point, Eleanor appeared at the Mendahl house:

- "Suddenly, with all her trunks and little Isabel...the reason she appeared that time was she had tried to murder Isabel, tried throwing her out a window."

Hilda has recollections from this stay of Eleanor standing over her infant child, reading long passages from Annie Bessant to her..."Rubinda and Tacor, I believe. She would recite passages at great length." At a later point Eleanor's daughter was deposited with the family by "Cousin Isabel" as a not entirely welcomed addition to the nursery - "Her smell was very odd, I remember thinking, 'not at all one of ours.'"

By age eleven there were, in fact, a number of signs that Hilda's adjustment was on a downward spiral. Age ten to eleven is remembered as a year of unremitting headache.

Hilda's sleep was often disturbed by instances of sleep walking. She often spoke in her sleep. James would take advantage of the fact that she could carry on a conversation while sleeping to get secrets from Hilda, such as where she had hidden his stamp collection.
A "terrible fear of the darkness" set in on Hilda..."I could make a sound and these creatures would come out - I would call them boogies." These were quite real figures to Hilda, "I could see them...black with horrible faces...they came toward me like a frightening insane woman in Hudson Hilda was in the habit of taunting and running from in fear."

Hilda seems to have felt some deep connection with abberation in her community; - Sammy Rivers, "a great big birth defective boy" in town became another object of Hilda's fascination and model for her boogies. - I just felt life had awful things in it."

Thoughts of suicide began to preoccupy Hilda. Her estimates of their frequency vary from "at least once a month all my childhood" to two or three times. In any case, they were a significant piece of her pre-adolescent experience. She describes her reasons:

- "It was really a form of discouragement. Many times in my life I've thought, 'What is the use? I don't try hard enough, I'm not that bright, I'm not that fullfledged a person.' A lot of my childhood I was terribly, terribly bored at home - if only I had gotten away - the same food, the same bed, same fights, same talk..."

She also describes two frequent plans:

- "Father used to have muriatic acid around. He thought it aided his digestion. I would try a little now and then...Once I took enough to have my stomach feel as if it were rusting inside...I wanted to throw myself on the railroad tracks...I would lie in bed at night and hear the train...would wish to either get on and go or to stand in the middle of the tracks."
Hilda's train-death fantasy had, in her mind, an upsetting outcome. Johnie Polski, their housekeeper's retarded son, did get run over by a train —"My God, I better not say that anymore!' I did wonder...my continual thinking of standing in the tracks...the possibility of Mary going home and reporting that I was thinking of it, giving Johnie the idea."

Hilda describes her periods of suicidal thoughts as "like having a dream, it would come and then it would be suddenly over." She speculates that given their regularity of occurrence and the fact that they reached a peak around the time of menarche, the "depressions may have had some connection to my period." She feels that her mother's customary advice, "Just wait a while and maybe you will stop wanting to kill yourself," may have been based on an intuitive understanding of this connection. However, at other points she maintains resentment towards both her parents for what she saw as dismissing too lightly her childhood anguish.

Hilda's periods of childhood depression and flirtation with suicide were closely connected with her mother. In fact, she sees the whole of her unhappiness during this period as embedded in their relationship.

- "These things were usually triggered by a remark of some kind from mother. Feelings would be hurt, anger aroused - I've told you my anger has betrayed me many times into very unhappy outcomes."

- "My mother was a clever woman...she could see you, make remarks that were acute, that cut. I would think I was getting something over - now my sisters tell me I'm exactly that kind of person...I'll go through and hurt their feelings so happily and carelessly and not know what I said...’You don't know how you can understand and hurt people'...Ruth
"Hilda's daughter" is like that too."

- "I have a vague remembrance of relating things about my friends... many things I would decide, sort of insights, I would give to mother. She was very patient, but every now and then she could disagree so totally it wiped the slate clean... she could take away my own concept."

- "I think I decided I hated mother" Hilda goes on to describe, in detail, being shut in the guest room by her father for saying so and her defiance on being let out - "Do you think you accomplished anything with that!") These moments are peculiar in my memory... I think I had a lot of hate for Mother, all bound up with jealousy, anger, all that. I was really jealous of her attention to others in the family."

During this stage of her life, Hilda began to develop high ambitions, a strong wish to become something transcendent. She would bring these ambitions to her mother. One direction they took was cultural, to excel at creative production:

- "I want to paint!... to become a great painter, or writer. To really be somebody."

"Well go ahead, Hilda, do it."

A second and especially intense course her transcendent ambitions took was toward becoming a Christian.

Young Hilda and Religion

The difficulty brought up in the context of summarizing Hilda's family's orientation to religion becomes acute in portraying her own religious experience. Discussion of such experience necessarily employs symbols of
a high degree of abstraction. It would be a mistake to automatically assume that the symbols have shared meaning, that the "images of the dead Christ" mean the same thing to Hilda, the Greek Orthodoxs, and an outsider. In fact, it is clear that this particular symbol, as with most Hilda uses, means something quite personal and specific to her.

It is likewise difficult to assume that one knows what another means when he speaks of "having a vision of Christ" or "knowing God", e.g., how direct the knowledge is or what form the vision takes. During our interviews I attempted to help Hilda clarify her descriptions of religious experiences, what Hilda might call "pinning her down", through such mundane questions as what senses were involved. The following condensation of her descriptions reflects a, perhaps inevitably, partial success at the endeavor.

Hilda speaks of "never really believing in God, as an entity [sho] could cope with [until her psychosis]." Yet it is clear that a personal metaphysics, or at least a striving for relationship to some cosmic order, was in force at a young age. This striving has already been suggested in her exploration of "images of Christ" and the dead, and alluded to in her father's attribution of Aunt Eleanor's "esoteric approach" to Hilda. That questions of ultimate order took on personal relevance in her childhood is further indicated by the disturbing impact the concept of predestination had on her. She was introduced to predestination in questioning her parents on their choice of the Presbyterian Church:

"Mother said that 'Presbyterians believe in Predestination...that long before you were ever here, the plan was laid. No matter what you do it's all been made, you cannot change it.' That was a very serious remark to me. I dwelt with it, and I didn't like it, and I didn't want to believe it, yet I wondered if it were so..."
One strong influence on Hilda's precocious concern with cosmic order was very probably to her brother, James. James, himself a highly precocious child, was "idolized" by Hilda. From her several descriptions of taking problems of existence to him, it seems that James had inherited their father's attitude of determined questioning of conventional values and beliefs. He acted as a sort of overbearing devil's advocate/mentor to Hilda:

- "I said to James - even though I was very young - 'this predestination business has really got me floored. Because no matter what you do it has already been decided.'"

"'Oh, Tommyrot!' James said, 'Don't believe any of that stuff.'"

"This is the way he nailed me to the truth quite a bit...He was very scientific, 'Why should I believe in God when I am myself?' - he seemed to think he had an actual decision about everything, 'How can you prove that you aren't just dreaming about me and that I'm not about you?' - He said these things all the time."

At age eleven, Hilda's pursuit of a secure relationship to some religious system began to be active, i.e., she embarked on a conflicted striving for "conversion" which spanned into her adolescent years. While the influences on this search were likely numerous, e.g., her upset over her parents' rejection of her grandparents' Baptist background, it is identified in Hilda's mind as an outgrowth of her troubled relationship to her mother.

- "...I had been a continually unpleasant person in the home, not at all the pleasant individual I was supposed to be...[Mother] reported me every week...I said, 'I don't know what to do about this, no matter
what I do I am not good. Do you suppose if I joined the church?

"'Well, you want to become a Christian?'

"'No, I don't understand that at all, but I want to be good!

'I got up in church and repeated the Apostle's Creed...James took me into the backyard and wailed me for being a liar. Somehow I've wondered if my insanity and the resurrection [a theme in her psychosis] and all that didn't go back much further - the fact that he wailed me so on that remark."

"I tried to believe, everything I was told...but I couldn't believe in the resurrection...it was to try to conform to what 'good' was, but then some of it did penetrate...the fact that I had dared the Apostle's Creed with my own remark made James dislike me terribly."

Although Hilda does not present her interactions with religious groups as a directed search, nor her several experiences of going through the form of conversion confirmation as particularly connected, her account of these and her adolescent years shows, generally inadvertently, a studied familiarity with the services of a number of churches, particularly evangelical. Her introduction, on a summer visit to relatives in Minnesota, to Baptist revival meetings left a strong impact on her. Her first book, Fire of Spring, can be seen as an attempt to master, or at least express, the conflicts aroused by that summer's experience, e.g., attraction to and recoil from the abandon of the service, the congregation, and her own wish for direct union with Christ.

She remembers being "saved" at least once, either during that summer or at a Tabernacle she went to in Hudson. Part of her exploration of the "images of Christ" with Teressa involved attending Catholic masses. And,
she mentions her experiences with religious services as one of the few pleasurable memories, apart from those surrounding Teressa, from this period.

Hilda's interaction with organized religion is unquestionably complex. For example, what is described as pleasurable in her experience of church are the sensory perceptions, the smells, sounds, and sights of the service - which seem an accurate memory of a child's perceptions. But, these seemingly simple pleasures are intense and guilty ones for Hilda. Mixed in with her description of her intense sensory experience of the service is a notion of honesty, in some absolute terms, along which to evaluate it, as well as a sense of Hilda as extremely distant from the situation - almost as an anthropologist in some foreign culture - throughout:

- "Hilda has been describing her enjoyment of Teressa's home and is asked what else she remembers enjoying? I enjoyed choir a lot...And I enjoyed the enthusiasm of tabernacle singing, although I felt guilty about it. There was something exciting about it, the fact that it stimulated the congregation so. I worked myself up into thinking it was a kind of a beat, which could control everyone.

- [Interviewer: Guilty?]

"It wasn't truthful...I felt you shouldn't use religion in this way, it wasn't finished enough, full out - and it wasn't really savage enough either. When I saw the blacks as an eight-year-old in a mining camp go through their exhortations, and sing and be baptized, that was very real. I could sense that it was true, their Bible reading and their droning and their prayers...but when white people deliberately threw themselves into a frenzy...It didn't seem honest - I could sense Catholics being very honest in their rituals and singing, and I enjoyed their sound, awfully, and
the smell of their meeting house. I didn't see how they accomplished it. I couldn't understand how they could do that, read those Latin words, and those prayers, respond to the altar and all that. But I thought it was real."

This was Hilda's experience of the outer show of religion, the assembled people, the rituals, objects, and practices. Something she was drawn to:

- "Just as to a sideshow or a circus, in fact there was something similar \underline{about the revival meeting} with the kerosene lights, the sawdust on the floor, the service, everybody carrying on for dear life singing and praying."

But it was also a sideshow which posed a deadly serious question for Hilda, whether it was "honest and real" or "phony and deliberate", "\underline{there was} something phony about it:

- "I tried to imagine how they attained Christ in this set up. You could see it happen; even if it was deliberate, they were prostrated with emotion."

And, real or not, it was a side show which excited in her a powerful urge for union, "to love Christ as much as those people loved Christ, but as my concept of him not theirs."

What Hilda's inner religious experience was, what her "concept of Christ" was and how it connected to the rest of her life as a young girl, is difficult to say. As Hilda points out in speaking of her current religious experience, "This is not something you speak of often...something too important about it as any intimate disclosure is." Although apparently a major preoccupation of her youth, this is not a topic she brought up
spontaneously.

Both of her published works which are more or less reconstructions of youthful experiences, are seeped in references to visionary experiences. Fire of Spring describes numerous visions of Christ, Beauty, I Wonder opens with and refers back to a secret, intense "burning bush experience". In order to offer a description of her inner religious experience as a child, we had several discussions of these two books. The discussion focused on sorting out imaginative production from autobiography. This was complicated by the fact that the books were written at the time of crisis in her life (ages 26-29) and the writing was strongly motivated by a need to resynthesize her past into a more manageable, fulfilling form.

Of writing Beauty, I Wonder Hilda says:

- "At that time I interpreted that I had been sought out by this overall intelligence to produce as an artist...using my memory /to try to see past experiences/ as a design, meaningful...I saw this bush, a halo thing, brilliant, tremulous.../which meant/ I was singled out in some way...I could see...the whole book unfolding."

And of Fire of Spring, - "As I wrote it I became so involved, seeing Christ, hearing Christ, it was almost as if I had. It was very real to me.../When/ I wrote it I had a great desire to see Him."

In other words, Hilda's memories of her childhood visionary experiences could be seen as having passed through some form of early adult reprocessing; as having passed through the stressed, ecstatic vision of a later period, which left them with a heavy overlay of the needs and desires of that time. Due to this "reprocessing", when we turn to her writing for elaboration on her early religious experience, we are looking at it through the eyes of an older Hilda, a vision further clouded by whatever current needs or
For example, Hilda refers above to it being "almost as if I had seen Christ." She also says: "When I wrote the book I had a sense of how definite Christ was to me then... I didn't see Him as a child but I felt that was a good thing to say, 'Christ appeared to me'... 'But, in a later interview, she says:

"I really did conjure up Christ in my thinking. I conjured Him, I saw Him in the body, His flesh, every night [that summer]... I could almost see him up here [waves in front of forehead]."

- Interviewer: Almost? Was it like an hallucination, you were really seeing something?

"It was not like a miracle, miraculous vision of Christ, not like a dream with Christ appearing. No, I decided I really wanted to see Christ and I could see Him. I could feel His sorrow and thought, 'Now how did Christ suffer when he was crucified?' and it seemed to me when I thought this I could see Him suffer... [I used to wonder] how could they say that because Christ was crucified, murdered, that He is repaying the debt which we created, died for our sins. How could this be true?' I did my best to realize this and I just about did. But I worked to do it, it was a deliberate attempt... I was trying to realize Him, as a wonderful Godhead... Once I could see it, and feel it, and conjure it and imagine it, with the singing and the exhaustion of the audience. I really believed it because I wanted to, I think.

- Interviewer: What did he look like?

"Oh, larger than life, and beautiful, as the paintings and sculpture of him are... In the flesh, white fleshed, and you would see him with - his eyes were opened, he wasn't dead."
"Sorrow and a sort of beseeching, and sometimes I would see him with his arms out, and so on."

Exactly what Hilda is describing above, i.e., whether this is fantasy, concretized description of mental visualization, visual hallucination, or "miraculous vision", is an unanswerable question - perhaps, even for Hilda. In another spot Hilda says, "When I decided to become a Christian, because I wanted to be 'good', I began having tentacles out to this idea, feeling for the idea of Christ, trying to envision Him as the Godhead He apparently was to other people." What the parameters of Hilda's "tenacles" are, i.e., whatever sensory or cognitive processes are involved in her "envisioning", remains persistently unclear. Wish merges with experience into an inseparable conglomeration.

What is quite clear, however, is the strength and pervasiveness of the wish for relationship with some supernatural being or force during this period of her life:

- "I was very interested in Joan of Arc. I read the book over many times, Mark Twain's version. When she heard voices and became a leader, I simply adored her. I would weep over it...a marvelous miraculous happening. I wanted to be her."

What is also clear is that, despite - and possibly because of - the ecstatic, transported quality of Hilda's wishful "envisioning", the experience is associated with a strong sense of guilt, as if the seeking were a form of betrayal. In speaking of being "saved" in a Hudson Tabernacle she says:
"This was an attempt, a deliberate - a deceit in a way... I think it was a deceit even in Minnesota. I don't believe I actually - you know how you can make yourself faint or suffer if you decide to? I think I allowed myself an hysterical reaction to it... I sort of wanted it to be like that. I had a self-despise about it."

Hilda had company in negative feelings about her spiritual involvement. Fire of Spring is written through the eyes of the various characters. Both Aunt Jen and Isabel, who accompanied her older sister on the Minnesota visit, have condemning reactions to Hilda. Isabel has constant thoughts of how "naughty" Hilda is and considers writing home to mother. Aunt Jen, initially flushed with pleasure at the opportunity Hilda, as a fashionable easterner and "child of Christ", provides for advancing herself in the community, comes to turn on Hilda by the end of the book. This is dramatized, but basically similar version to Hilda's memory of the situation:

"Aunt Jen was interested in the fact that I actually showed interest in the thought of Christianity - I didn't let anyone realize that I was bringing up this vision of Christ, this was my own... I think it surprised her. Meanwhile Isabel could care less about any of it, she thought it was peculiar, not at all in keeping with our life... I was being overemotional, deliberately misbehaving."

Although in Fire of Spring Hilda has her antagonist respond to Isabel and Jen's disapproval by remaining, outwardly, defiantly oblivious and inwardly disdainful, and in her memory of the period she kept her "envisioning" highly secret, like a preciously guarded first love.
At the opening of one discussion of the experience she reminds me that its context is in her relationship with her mother:

- "I don't really understand myself about becoming involved with Christ at that early age, except that I had always wanted to see Him. Mother had always admonished me that I must become a Christian and learn to love Christ. [This remark from her was in there somewhere."

During the same Minnesota summer Hilda's love took on a more earthly object as well, in the form of her adult cousin, Phillip:

"I know he was really attracted to me, and I was physically, emotionally, and mentally attracted to him. I lived for the sight of him...I would lie and let my hair fall over the edge of the bed, I was very attractive to him - of course it never culminated as in the book."

"...I could see cousin Phillip as a very beautiful result of my father's family's country living - he accomplished life in a very peculiarly beautiful way."

- "I had a great desire for love. I wanted to love Christ and him to love me and to love Phillip and Phillip to love me."

- [Interviewer: they were connected?]

"Yes, very closely.

Again, this was a yearning not without conflict; subtle and internal where yearning for human love and divine interacted:

- "I would study my cousin Phillip...perhaps he knew how to find Christ, and this sort of thing...he was quietly religious. It was because of Phillip I really decided to investigate the thing; he had respect for it. But he did not have respect for the fact that I really wanted to become a lover of Christ, as such...I never really said this in
so many words to him, this was a mental thing."

And painfully external where human and human interacted: "I really would have been happy if I could have made Minna [Phillip's wife] jealous...I never did. But my Aunt Jen was angered by my behavior. She wrote home (I found the letter) that I'd been a badly behaved child, whereas Isabel had been an 'angel.' She thought I had the makings of a 'bad person' in me."

Elsewhere Hilda describes pondering what this letter was referring to: "I suppose flaunting my sex as much as possible."

It can be seen that Hilda's preoccupation with religious ideation, although infused with strong feelings of good and bad, honesty and deceit, was not a matter of becoming obsessed with conformity to a personalized system of moral or ethical codes; although very much centered in her "own concept of Christ", nor had evolved into the system of personal cosmology suggested in her early concern with predestination. As she moves into adolescence, it becomes apparent that her religious striving was primarily Hilda's own "esoteric approach" to loving, and being loved by another — in spite of the other worldly flight of her attention, real people are seldom far behind. Evaluations of the "honesty" and "reality" of the emotional involvement of the congregation in their religious services are, as Hilda is quick to see Isabel pointing out, based on her family's standards of decorum and emotional display, their "way of life". Notions of her own "goodness", "badness", and chance of redemption in seeking relationship, although deeply basic and obscure for Hilda, are clearly identified as arbitrated through her mother. While Hilda encounters her conflicts on a higher plan, e.g. between Baptism and Presbyterianism,
determination and free will, belief and nonbelief, human love and divine, she experiences them between people, e.g. her parents and grandparents, her father and the church women, Christ, and Cousin Phillip, James, Isabel, Jen, her mother and herself. Finally, sex, in the sense of a consumption so purely divorced from the physical that an early adolescent is capable of envisioning, has entered Hilda's system of yearning.

It is sad to note how the introduction of sex highlights in what short supply love is in this system. In spite of her intense investigation of the Christian "set up", her effort to "realize" and embrace, to love and be loved by the "greatest individual given us", Hilda encounters feelings of "deliberate deceit", a "self despise". For her, the connection between loving Christ and loving cousin Phillip is something which interferes, reduces rather than enhances Phillip's respect for her. She returns home from her first experience of romantic love for a man having been unsuccessful in taking anything from his wife, Minna; and with a letter confirming Isabel's position as a deeply envied "angel" and her "makings of an unmentionably" bad person.

Before following Hilda further into adolescence, it is worth developing a more detailed picture of her view of the home she returns to.

Hilda and her Parents

The Parental Relationship

Hilda had relatively little experience of her parents as a couple. From the time of the family's move to Hudson, Hilda's father spent only weekends at home.

Mr. Mendahl spent the week in New York City, where he rented an apartment for himself. It seems that his lives in Hudson and New York mixed little,
Hilda's trip with James and Isabel, where Mr. Mendahl introduced them to the life of "the other half", of which he was presumably part, is her only reference to the family interacting with his life in New York, prior to her late adolescence.

The structure of her parents' time together followed a very fixed, regular pattern:

- "When father was there, of course, nothing was said at all at the table... It was very different. The house was always cleaned beforehand. We all dressed for dinner, then went to church and Sunday school. Then mother always had a terrible headache. Father would say 'all of us must leave mother alone to sleep this afternoon'. This was peculiar, mother never slept in the afternoon except after these Saturday nights. Hilda goes on to describe her father taking the children for a walk every Sunday."

At a number of points in our interviews, Hilda offers brief reflections on her view of the connection between her parents. She has especially strong feelings on the connection referred to in her mother's notion of "the wife's serious obligation":

- "Probably father felt the same way, that it was her obligation... these things were based on rather peculiar fundamental practices in those days: going to bed once a week, giving birth to a child every year or two - what did it amount to as a relationship?"

- "I objected to my father having intercourse with my mother... It was an unfeeling gesture, his satisfaction and nobody else's."

- "Also, there was no emotional interplay. When I began reading about love in poetry and literature I would say to mother, 'You and father don't"
know a thing about that'. They were so hidden, gave so little of themselves, otherwise we could have been more understanding...In those days it was not polite".

Hilda does show efforts at understanding, at appreciating each parent's position in what emotional connection they did have. These efforts, as with much of what she has to say of her parents, show mixed feelings. For example, shortly after describing her feeling that her father was hurting her mother through unfeeling sex, she rises to defend his position, that he was never appreciated as a full person by his wife. As Hilda elaborates on this understanding, she moves in and out of blame and criticism for her father in relation to his wife.

- "Almost entirely, mother did not appreciate father for the person he was, as a mind and student, a hard working person getting up there in the business world...through his own error and attempt...She lists several substantial business accomplishments and he was even in Who's Who one year. I remember the year he got in, so stuck on himself for that She lists several substantial business accomplishments and he was even in Who's Who one year. I remember the year he got in, so stuck on himself for that She lists several substantial business accomplishments and he was even in Who's Who one year. I remember the year he got in, so stuck on himself for that I mentions a few details of his ultimately disastrous investment history. He would always talk about money and stocks. Mother couldn't believe any of it, it meant nothing to her..."

- "He admired her, he used to say, 'Your mother is a beautiful little person'."

- "Perhaps I got used to the idea of coping without a male protection. If there had been a loving relationship between my parents my later experience with men might have been different."

The composite picture Hilda develops of her parents relationship can be characterized as one of dearth: ritualized, obligatory contact; absent
of love (in the sense Hilda encountered in her readings); and failure to recognize or appreciate the other as a full person. Where admiration was shown, her father's of her mother, it was seen as poignantly disconnected from its object ("Your mother is a beautiful little person" - mothers are seldom experienced as little people, beautiful or otherwise). As can be seen in the preceding excerpts, Hilda uses these perceptions, her understanding of what each sacrificed or missed in the relationship, as well as her appreciation of the culturally imposed limitations of the time, to soften her anger over the area in which she did sense a strong connection, her parent's sex life.

While the circumstances of their connection in sex, e.g., whatever occurred behind their door on Saturday night, were mysterious to her, the results painfully apparent, e.g., her mother's debilitating headaches on Sunday afternoon. By no means the least distressing of these results were her mother's frequent pregnancies. This seems to have been felt as an especially confusing and painful consequence by Hilda, a constant but uncontrollable process of family inflation:

- "I think I held my parents prolific reproduction in disdain. James called me aside once and said, 'Now this has got to stop. Mother and father are doing this all the time and having children all the time! Something has got to be done!' Hilda laughs - I thought it was awfully bad too."

- Interviewer: Who do you think wanted the children?

"I don't know. Maybe they thought God did - if they attempted birth control, it was in such a poor way that it did not work. Mother did rid herself through ergot induced abortions of quite a number of pregnancies."
Hilda elaborates little on her response to her mother's succession of pregnancies, births, and miscarriages, beyond saying that she saw it as "awfully bad". She agrees with suggestions from the interviewer that she saw her mother as oppressed by this near chronic condition, that she resented her collusion in the oppression, and that she felt the already overtaxed resources of the family further burdened - but these are not elaborations which she offers spontaneously. It is, however, reasonable to assume that the impact was substantial and that whatever her experience of the effects of her mother's pregnancies, it bore in it the outlines of a template for her own experience, years later, of pregnancy and its after effects. She feels that her own difficulties in child bearing had a significant part in her later insanity, and, at one point, describes comparing her mother's hardships to her own:

- "I think all insanity, most insanity - Margaret Sanger would have said 'Well Hilda, I told you...' had she lived to see me...go insane through my problems of intimacy, marriage, love, and child birth and all that...losing children every year, so to speak...The doctors said to my sister Marion7 when I was first brought in to the hospital, 'How many times was this woman pregnant?' My sister said 'Well about every year, I believe, through the twelve year marriage experience'. 'Well', they said, 'No wonder she is insane!'...I don't know if this is physically true or not. But the doctors actually asked Marion this question.

- "When a woman becomes pregnant your motherhood develops fast, in perhaps six or seven weeks. You lose it and your motherhood is still there."

- Interviewer: Could you describe what you mean by 'motherhood'?7

"Oh, you feel it, you are a mother, this is a soul, a child, it's there. Then you lose it, deliberately or otherwise you feel as if you
have lost a child...grief. Loss...I was concerned that I had never told you this part of my insanity; I think a lot of it had to do with that I was not a clever woman in that way, in controlling pregnancies.

- "I compared myself to mother and she suffered more in her relationship with father and child bearing than I did in mine. Even though I was not well adjusted to marriage, I think mother was less adjusted."

Hilda and her Father

"I think I never found in father the person I hoped I might, a companion, someone who would understand me. I used to think if we would see more of him he would know us and we would know him. Somehow this never happened."

There is a sense in Hilda's descriptions of her father that, perhaps in part because her actual experience of him was sparse, she made maximum use of what information she had in developing a full picture of him. This quality can be seen in two main features of what she has to say about him: she has a well developed conception of his background, displaying an elaborate exploration of and strong personal involvement in her father's position in his family of origin; and the impression she gives in her descriptions of her direct experience of him as that of a distinct, but rather two dimensional, "character".

A number of examples of Hilda's involvement in issues of her father and his family have already appeared: her early concern over the meaning of her parent's decision not to be Baptists, her involvement in her father's argument with his father over religious values, her sensitivity to conflicting issues of values, and "way of life" in relation to her
father's background, and the prominent position her father origins occupies in her writings, both in terms of setting and content. These points are worth expanding on.

The latter, Hilda's exploration of her father's background, is by no means a remote intellectual endeavor; she shows an ambivalence on the issue of his separation from family and background which suggests having grown with a strong sense of personal involvement in it. On the one hand, she respects her father as a "mind and student, a hard working person getting up there in the business world...through his own attempt..." She admires his independence and is sensitive to his lack of recognition both from her mother and within her own father's own family. An acute sense of the injustice in this failure to credit her father with his accomplishments comes through in her description of his family group:

"Our relatives were farm people; they believed in a Baptist life, a farmers experience...they discussed crops, drought, the church, the lives and deaths of the community...very understanding of each other...a close knit group...\text{omission}...My father was a renegade. He left the place; he dared to get out and become educated. They held this against him...felt he was 'too big for his britches'...and that my mother considered herself 'a lady from Boston'. They set themselves apart from us, entirely. They were willing to look at us, to get to know us, but they held quite a disdain for us. Our values were not the actual values of country living - they believed country living values were the ones life should be determined on."

On the other hand, Hilda herself had a real respect for "the values of country living", and a measure of disdain for her father's "attempt
and error", his becoming "so stuck on himself" for making Who's Who. Her first love was her cousin Phillip, in part because he was seen as "a very beautiful result of country living..." She talks of her grandfather - "an imagining person" - and her grandmother - "a dynamic little person, the best aristocrat we had in the family" - with great fondness. This love was shared by her brother, James, who, as a teenager, was willed his grandparents' love letters. James painstakingly copied the entire correspondence, which Hilda has preserved and passed on to Carroll, her eldest son.

Hilda saw her grandparents as "a model of happy union, a truly attached couple", a "happy unit". The incident of her grandparents' visit to Hudson and her father's attack of her grandfather's religious values is a particularly significant memory to Hilda because it was her last meeting with them. Not long after their return to Minnesota both died within five days of each other.

The setting of Hilda's first book, Fire of Spring, is her Aunt and Uncle's farm in Minnesota. The tension between the two cultures, Alma and Isabel's (Hilda and her sister's) fashionable life in the east and the staunchly religious western farming community of their relatives, is a frequently resurfacing undercurrent throughout the story of their summer's visit. The women in particular, and especially Aunt Jen, are shown as envious of the young girls' stylish clothes and manners; they devote considerable energy toward exploiting the reflected splendor which their young relatives afford them in the eyes of their community.

In her second book, Beauty, I Wonder, her father's youth through college and marriage runs as a parallel sub-plot to the main theme of her mother's early development. The character that is developed in the sections
on her father is a figure reminiscent of Jack London's Martin Eden; a fiercely independent, idealistic young man, haunted by an early love who remains beyond his reach and serves to fuel his relentless and unaided effort to attain an education and self-betterment. In addition to unrequited love, the character is fired by a zealous idealism, which manifests itself in his organizing a society of "Christian Young Men" in opposition of drinking and vice, and directs his efforts toward the eventual goal of delivering a gifted younger brother from the farm into an education. As in Martin Eden, the final attainment is a somewhat hollow anti-climax to the harse self-denial of the struggle. The Christian young men's attack on alcohol dissipates on their first contact with a bar, the younger brother dies in childhood, and, having overcome the obstacles of poverty and indifference, the young man accepts a wife other than his lost love and settles into a junior faculty position at a state university.

Unlike Martin Eden, the character representing Hilda's father is free of bitterness over, or even apparent awareness of, the emptiness of his attainment. He suddenly becomes a peripheral figure in the plot who lives an, at best, parallel married life to his pregnant young wife, oblivious of the fact that her mind and affections are elsewhere and unaware that she experiences the marriage and pregnancy as if locked in a bleak cage. He is shown as taking satisfaction in the pleasant spring weather, the thought that his pregnant wife and her house follow the form of a conventionally happy home, and the practice of timing - to the second - his bicycle ride to and from his teaching job.

The impression of Hilda's father which emerges from her account of her memories of him is quite similar to his appearance in her literary productions. This similarity encompasses both the content of life circumstances, e.g.,
the struggle to rise up, through hard work and education, from humble origins, estrangement from family background, and settling into a marriage void of "emotional interplay", and the qualities of character, e.g., a man of forceful presence, fixed habits, obsessive concern for achievement and, most particularly, indomitable will. As with the character of her book, on a different level, her account of her father largely fails to develop whatever forces, other than sheer will, move him. He appears, in places willfully, uncomprehending of others and incomprehensible in his connection with them - as if any explanation beyond "that's just the way he was" were gratuitions.

Whereas in Hilda's writing Mr. Mendahl could gracefully fade from the foreground, in her life he consistently reappeared. This regular contact eliminated the possibility, available in her writing, of constructing the father of her memory as an idealized, will-driven character. Both anger over what remained hidden and withheld in her father and resentful disappointment over shortcomings gradually perceived by Hilda, contribute to a quality of character in her descriptions of her actual father.

This quality of character in Hilda's reconstruction of her father should not, in the least, obscure the fact of his importance to her. His importance is apparent in her involvement with his family background, her pride in his accomplishments - which were introduced in our first hour of interviewing - and her deep respect for many of the values he adhered to, e.g., hard work, saving, education, and cleanliness. Were it not apparent, the preceding would be a top heavy introduction to the few passages of description, transcribed in near entirety, of Hilda's father in her account of her youth:

- "He was small, about 5'4 I would say, bald, mustached, goateed,
always dressed very neatly, clean shirts and business suits; a stalwart little guy, stood straight, spoke loud and clear. He laughed quite readily at the children...he loved Isabel terrifically. He had her on his lap most of the time when he was home. He was always polite to mother...

- "Father was very clean."
- "He had always been a little monster of a man, full of it."

In describing how her father related to the family, Hilda repeats the image of a little rooster from her description of him in his Sunday school class: "He was very proud he produced all these kids, like a little rooster, proud of us as results, of himself."

Her father's pride in his children was seen by Hilda neither as unconditionally distributed among the children nor as particularly personally directed. From another interview:

- "He chose his people always in conversation...very seldom the females in the family...of course he was always disappointed, always wanted boys instead of girls...rather disappointed with the children that were born into the family...He used to say, 'I'm very proud of you, each one', give us an overall subject remark in that way. But then he would also say, 'You know I have to educate each one of you. You know if I did not have to send you to college we could have an automobile. Do you realize that?''"

Apart from his distant appreciation of his wife ("a beautiful little person") and his terrific but, from Hilda's point of view capriciously unreasonable love for Isabel ("double the love" due to Eleanor's early death), Hilda describes only one affectionate bond in his life:

- "Father did have a younger brother who died. He had wanted to
to educate him... He was very attached to him, said he was a very bright boy... He told us very sadly about his death, how he threw himself on a sled and caused a colonic blockage. Today it could be treated by a simple operation... He always felt it was a useless death."

Hilda's respect for her father centered on his professional accomplishments, e.g. the discovery of several alloys and industrial chemical processes, and his dedication to pursuing culture through constant reading. While undoubtedly a far off mysterious thing to her, there is a sense in Hilda's account that this latter area, her father's intellectual interests, was the one in which she attempted connection with him:

- "He spent a great deal of time in his office getting his bills figured out and reading his German and so on. It seemed that most of the scientific journals of the time were in German... I used to say, 'Do you really understand that?'

- "I found him one day with this green volumen, and he said 'I'm reading a new writer... Freud. 'What does he write about?', I said. He looked out of the side of his eyes and said, 'a dirty word'. 'What? 'S-E-X'... I think he was like this because he thought he should be, more or less, as a parent. Because he was always reading really quite advanced people, Freud for instance, and he read some of the great old Greek people (many were quite advanced people)... and Walt Whitman... When I began buying books, I bought him Perigorio and Madame Bovary, and some of the Russians I liked. He accused me of buying him very sexy stuff." [Hilda goes on to describe him counting the number of times she mentions breasts in one of her books.]
There is a further sense that Hilda's respect for her father, although large, was not built on a substantial foundation. This is suggested in her disbelief that he actually understood the German he devoted his time to reading. Elsewhere, she speculates that his general reticence on her writing may have been due to a lack of confidence in his own ability to judge literature. Much as the character in *Beauty, I Wonder*, who has little reality outside the assertion of his will, Hilda's view of her father evolved into that of an empty pretense of a man. In describing his activity at a much later period, she puts this quite directly:

- "He called himself a doctor later on. He prepared and sold an elixir called 'Dr. Mendahl's Oratone' - 'My goodness father, you should not do that'. 'Well, I'm a Ph.D., after all' - he did it sort of under the counter. These were his feeble little attempts to be Mr. Somebody and telling a lie to do it."

**Hilda and her Mother**

Where Hilda's connection with her father, constructed as it was of a sparsity of what she terms "the actual events of living" could be seen as a negotiation of distance, her connection with her mother could be seen as in many respects the opposite, a problem in negotiating closeness. This is not to say that theirs was a relationship of free exchange of intimacies or even, for Hilda, secure attachment and belonging, but simply that the connection was one in which the impact of their potential bond was felt by Hilda to be extreme: a distressingly intertwined existence. Points where the bond was experienced by Hilda as an unrealized potential are the source of memories of strong, amorphous yearning; Points where it was perceived as inescapable, the source of memories of great frustration, anger, and equally amorphous threat. In contrast to the situation with her father where the
problem in depicting their relationship is a matter of extrapolating lines of connection from a few shared events, Hilda's relationship with her mother is too broad and pervasive to render an account of any completeness feasible, and the problem in depicting her youthful experience of her mother one of interpolating concrete events along multiple and tangled lines of interconnection.

While in both cases the resulting reconstruction of the parent is similar in form, i.e. a set of sharp images with the lines of integration into a resulting picture of a full, human scale person vague or absent, the product of Hilda's efforts at getting her mother "straight in her mind" is of a wholly different quality from the caricature-like representation of her father. The "straightness" of the picture and the motivation and direction of the effort have an immediacy of personal meaning - past and current - which is barely approximated in her reconstruction of her father.

The two main features, mentioned above, of Hilda's inner experience of connection with her mother, intense, but amorphous, yearning and vague, but real, threat, received a near consuming press for Hilda from the event of her mother's onset of insanity. Hilda was around age 26 at the time, and herself experiencing difficulties in accommodating her life circumstances. It can be assumed that the vision of her mother percipitously disappearing into insanity was felt by Hilda to add the intensity of impending permanance to the areas of yearned for but unrealized connection in their relationship and to introduce the spectre of disintegration in the areas of strongly perceived but unwanted and threatening connection. In addition, the loss of her mother into insanity effectively removed from Hilda the possibility of responding to the threat in their relationship - in the ways which had become habitual for her, e.g., anger, defiance, and frustrated contempt,
persistent anger in the absence of an external object can become a corrosively unmanageable emotion (as Hilda describes below).

As with Hilda's memory of her childhood religious experiences, her experience of herself in relation to her mother underwent a period of highly stressed "reprocessing". In other words, Hilda experienced, at around age 26, a strong need to reinterpret, "straighten", "clarify", or in any way render more manageable her relationship with her mother. This need achieved a concrete expression in her writing of Beauty, I Wonder.

At one point in our interviews Hilda makes an aside comment that her recounting of the past feels at times as if she were describing something she had read in a book. The point of this preamble to describing her memories of her mother is to introduce the context of their "writing", i.e., to take account of the circumstances in which Hilda integrated her experience of the relationship into a "straight" picture of "mother". While this process of integrating memories of significant others into a stable, full representation of the person is perhaps never fully completed - and in the case of Hilda and her mother clearly extends into Hilda's years of insanity - it can have its periods of peak activity. For Hilda and her mother, this period was precipitated by and, in more than one sense, encompasses her mother's several years of insanity and eventual suicide. The book Hilda wrote during this period, Beauty, I Wonder, is a very literal symbol, a graphic artifact, of her process of integrating or "writing" her memory of her mother. As such, it is worth exploration.

The main plot line of Beauty, I Wonder follows the subjective experience of "Emily", Hilda's mother, through childhood and into marriage and early adulthood. The main events and situations of the book, e.g., the structure and atmosphere of the nuclear family, the prominence and quality of Emily's relationship with her mother, a suggestion of childhood mystical experience,
an intense same-sex childhood friendship, and the character of the marriage and eventual involvement in a triangular relationship, parallels the circumstances of Hilda's life so closely that a reader familiar with her past would assume it to be autobiographical - as did this one. Hilda acknowledges that, despite her intention of creating the book as a portrait of her mother's experience, from the beginning, characters may have doubled in representing the people of her own life, and that by the end "Emily's" circumstances had become those of Hilda's life at the time of writing.

Of the writing Hilda says:

- "I wrote my second book about mother... I tried to remember her, to sort of reconstruct her in my thinking..."

- "The whole book seemed to me a kind of mystique of a myth. In fact, it came out so readily and entirely that I do not know that I did much thinking about. It just seemed there to put out.

- "I wanted to have her in my mind, you know. This book clarifies her for me, for some reason. Even though it is all mixed up in characters, first it is myself, then it is herself... Nevertheless, I can remember her when I read it, and I really did it with that in mind. I was so afraid I might forget her, because I had such an antagonism for her, all my growing years... If I could not see her relatively as, bolatedly as a good, interesting human, you know, I really would have slain her myself - let alone the fact she slew herself.

[Interviewer: slain her?]

- "Because I had deliberately done this in my relationship with her as a youngster: not being understanding enough, not giving her credit for who she was or what she was enduring, and all of that. When you are cruel to anyone - and I was, I guess, cruel to her, and I guess she was to me, in
her own peculiar way - you kill yourself and your people and your relationships, in that way. Cruelty is a thing which destroys, totally. I had to pull myself up and say, 'Now that is enough of this, we have to get this straightened out'.

- [Interviewer:] Did you feel guilty about how she ended up? 
- "No. No, I did not blame myself at all...something had to be straightened out, rectified in our relationship...had to get that straightened out.

- "And then I was so happy when I was insane and she came to me. There she was, the same good, interesting little mother she had been at her best. Day after day I was with her, after I went insane."

The images Hilda evokes in accounting her youthful experience of her mother are such a mix of jealousy, contempt, frustration, and love that the effort of reconstruction represented in her book provides, in addition to personal "clarification" for Hilda, a useful framework for one attempting an understanding of the relationship. The overriding quality of the subjective experience of the characters of the book (which is the entire frame of the story) is that of unfulfilled longing. This quality of longing is a suffusive backdrop to the action of the book. Each character is feverishly propelled by his own longing, has moments of fulfillment, cherished in their passing, but remains basically disconnected from the others, isolated in his own seeking. The nonspecific and unrationalized nature of the longing is the book's main shortcoming as a piece of literature; one emerges from reading it wondering why, and even what the characters are longing for.

Hilda remembers her publisher questioning her on what the characters were all striving for. Her answer was: "Beauty...each one had his own concept of
beauty, which made each restless, seeking, probing, wanting to discover." Her publisher's response was a skeptical "I wonder", therefore the title.

In speaking of writing the book, Hilda is quite clear in identifying what it was she was trying to realize in her own relationship with her mother: the "so called real love between mother and daughter", which she could see in her friend Teressa's relationship with her mother and, most particularly, in her mother's description of her own mother:

- "I imagined her loving her mother very much. I wished I could have had the same terrific love she claimed she had..."

- "Mother intimated that she and her mother were on these terms. She admired her for being a lady and beautiful - did not question the fact that she was a woman who never did the work of running the house."

- "I had never met my grandmother, only through my mother's mind. She thought of her as a saint, although she never worked...a very lackadasical southern woman."

The mother-daughter relationship Hilda creates in her book is one of great love, but the love is not located between Emily and her mother. Rather, it is something which comes from Emily, in the form of longing gazes, wishful thoughts of closeness, and a highly idealized esthetic, almost erotic, appreciation of the mother. The interactions portrayed between mother and Emily are few and, by and large, painful for Emily. For example, the book opens with Emily returning from a trip west, flushed with excitement over a vision of "a burning bush". She ends up waiting in a crowded train station for several hours. When her mother finally appears she is relieved and joyful, but decides she cannot share her vision for fear that it will be "taken away".
The second interaction which stands out is one in which the mother crops Emily's beautiful long hair because she feels it is "sapping her strength". Emily is deeply hurt by this and feels humiliation over her loss of beauty. This was based on an actual incident in Hilda's mother's childhood, of which Hilda says:

- "Her mother thought she was going to be too pretty so she deliberately had her head cut [Hilda laughs] - I am saying horrible things, I've very Freudian today. I'll have to watch it - [It was] one of the things she could not understand about her mother, a real blow to her... She did not realize there was terrific jealousy there, although I did immediately. I am sure I never mentioned it."

In the book, the daughter's idealized appreciation of her mother remains intact. She feels the pain of her mother's neglect and cruelty, but does recognize it as such. She feels little anger or bitterness.

It seems that Hilda, the writer, was feeling the anger and bitterness for her mother, i.e. that a main feature of the process of Hilda "rectifying her relationship" with her mother involves Hilda stepping into her mother's experience, feeling and understanding how she was sinned against. Perhaps in doing so Hilda could gain, in her own mind, both the distance of understanding, of viewing her relationship with her mother through the perspective of her mother and grandmother's relationship, and the closeness of symbolically joining her mother in the experience of a cruel and neglectful mother on the joint character of "Emily".

A second aspect of Hilda's "rectifying her relationship" with her mother through her writing involves Hilda's recreation of the idealized and longingful appreciation of a saint-like mother which characterizes the relationship of the daughter of the book and her mother. This union
in yearning for a beautiful mother is a complex aspect of Hilda's creation of a joint "Emily" character. It is impossible to say exactly what the yearning consists of. That is exists at all, let alone as a prominent feature of Hilda's experience of her mother, is known only indirectly, e.g., through its prominence in Beauty, I Wonder, the importance to her of the act of writing the book, and at isolated points in her recollections of her youth, such as the strength of her frustrated wish to be accepted as "good" by her mother.

Hilda identifies the object of the yearning she writes of as beauty. But, with her publisher, one must wonder. Hilda's inability to offer further definition than "beauty" to the nature of the yearning she was working to reconstruct, like to global quality of the "good" she wished to become in her mother's eyes, suggests that the memories she was working with were very early ones, from a period not particularly accessible to reconstruction in the terms of adult language and experience. In any case, the one example Hilda offers of being happily in the presence of her mother she puts at age 3 or 4:

- "I remember falling down stairs and cutting my head open and mother...holding me - and I thought 'oh this is wonderful, being held by mother', you know. Bleeding into her white shirt-waist."

Apart from this single memory of happy contact (itself associated with pain), whatever Hilda yearned for seems to be something she knows only in its absence, evident only in her acute and pervasive sense of something important being withheld, denied, or otherwise missing. She summarizes this experience, with a compendiousness equally eloquent and lacunar:
- "When you are born into a family - and mother and father had figured out to spend so much money and no more, and mother had her day figured out in hours and minutes, how these were to be spent in just this way and no other way...At the same time I believe that families should be related in factual events in order that the mind of the child develop as a sustained factor. How else does a plant grow? And how else can a child become?

[Interviewer: Factual events? What do you mean?]

- "How can you become a fact if you are not in some way nourished, from all sides? Because certain things are necessary to be a...human. We aren't born free and clear of sustenance; you need it from so many directions. Meanwhile, mother was, as I say, frugal and withheld and all of that - just enough to keep us barely alive and inquisitive and with poor judgment here and there, and dissatisfied..."

- "This is something that (my daughter) Ruth will say to, 'Didn't your mother ever embrace you?' No, we were not demonstrative. This is what mother always said: 'No demonstration is necessary'. But I was terribly jealous of the fact that she would demonstrate with Isabel, and she would demonstrate with Harry and she would demonstrate even a hello and good-bye kiss to father..."

Although a source of great jealousy and remembered pain for Hilda, the failure to embrace in their relationship was not simply a matter of her mother's withholding. There is a sense in Hilda's descriptions of their relationship that the possibility of intimacy between mother and daughter entailed deep threat for her. Like the "good" Hilda wished to become and the "beauty" she yearned for in their relationship, the
mechanics of her sense of threat in their intimacy are not well defined. The threat itself, however, is quite specific: a fear of being "seen" by her mother.

Hilda, like Emily of Beauty, I Wonder, felt a power on the part of her mother to "take away" whatever intimate details of her experience she might share with her mother. Further, intimacy with her mother had a particular danger for Hilda, the possibility that the other, in knowing her, could render Hilda somehow invalid or worthless; a process Hilda refers to as the other "wiping the slate clean". Hilda's awareness of this danger in particular, and the destructive potential of intimacy in general, remains a persistent and reoccurring feature of her experience of significant others:

- "My mother and I did not communicate inner experiences, very definitely - that I never could tell her the things that I could perhaps have had I been more sure of she would have accepted the, whether they were 'worth it'!"

- "Mother would do it in the same way Ruth can do it to me. Many things I decide, sort of insights, I give to Ruth and she will disagree so totally that it wipes the slate clean for a long time...before I can get it back. She can take away my own concepts, very often".

- "My childhood depressions were usually triggered by a remark... usually my mother hurt my feelings. She was a clever woman - she could see you, make remarks that cut, acutely. I would think I was getting something over - now my sisters tell me I am exactly that same kind of person: no one in the family is likely to do that as happily and carefreely as I can. I will go through and hurt their feelings and not know what I said. Ruth does that too...it is clever to know someone to that extent."
Asked if the image "cold mockery", which appears several times in Beauty, I Wonder, has a particular meaning to Hilda, she responds:

- "Yes...it is what I mean when I say that I do not feel that I really get into people, that they see me the way I really am. Instead, they are just sort of saying, 'Oh well, you. That's just you saying that. That has nothing to do with the real situation. Why don't you cope with the really important characteristics of living?'. Probably it's a form of realizing that my mother was similar because she did not cope with the realists' idea either. She had a frame and a pattern she lived by, and within, and I don't think she copes".

This last reflection of Hilda's, on her mother's coping, introduces what could be regarded as Hilda's day to day experience of her mother, i.e. while of deep and lasting significance in her memory of her mother, it would likely be a misconception to regard the drama of threat and yearning her recollections evoke as other than a substratum, perhaps well buried in the bulk of less charged, daily interactions is clear, e.g. Hilda says that her mother once told her the first sentence she uttered was "I won't". But between the lines of her account, and amidst the bitter memories of deprivation and antagonism, there is an impression of a closely involved, sisterly quality to their relationship.

This is not a picture of the relationship Hilda develops directly. It is implicit in, for instance, the frequent examples of dialogue Hilda gives between her mother and herself. Although often of a critical, advice giving nature, this dialogue shows a caring involvement. Hilda recognizes this in her response to a comment from the interviewer that she seemed to have advised her mother a great deal:
- "We were almost like sisters in a way. I did not take her advice readily, but I would talk along with her. Much more than I realized until afterwards, now, talking to you."

In addition to "talking along with" her mother, Hilda paid very close attention to her; she was a careful and perceptive observer of her mother's inner states and action in the world. Again, this quality of their relationship is not brought up directly by Hilda. Rather, it is apparent in both the wealth of detail in Hilda's descriptions of her mother and in her sense of having known the person behind the details. Hilda shows a certain understanding of her mother, not without sympathy or compassion, in her detailed relating of her perceptions of her mother's inability to cope, those things Hilda refers to as her "refusal" to give her credit for who she was and what she was enduring:

- "If she was angry, I think she was so well behaved that it was well covered. She could be crying, really, actually you'd think mother is weeping, and laughing very loudly. But you felt mother was weeping. We would aggravate mother, suddenly decide to race around the table, catch each other by the hair...make one awful shambles of the dining room...She would say, 'Children, children, children' and we just would go further and further into - and then she would get to laughing so hard you knew she was really weeping. It was almost more than she could cope with... she did not understand why her children acted so full of the very devil..."

- "I was very unsympathetic with her as a hard working woman until after her death. I have talked about it with my sister Verna, 'Mother worked awfully hard, didn't she Verna?'

'Why Hilda, can you imagine how hard she worked?"
'No, despite all my jobs and the work I have done, I can't imagine working that hard for one family, one unit. And I said, 'She got very little actual credit from father'. 'Oh, I wouldn't say that', Verna said. 'You look at that entirely differently'... The rest see mother as a hard working, happy, willing, loving mother. And I see her as a hard working, distressed, anguished, infuriated woman.'

As well as her sense of connection with her mother's otherwise unrecognized anguish, Hilda felt herself in sympathy with another hidden side of her mother's emotional life, what Hilda perceived as a need for romantic love. When asked why it is that she has characters in both her books yearning for a secret, unrequited love, she responds:

- "I haven't the foggiest...except that I feel they needed a lover. Today they would have had one, if they were that sort of person."

- Interviewer: "Was there any model for this situation in your childhood?"

- "Well, I would watch my mother and Teressa's mother - that was about them a lot. I would see my mother get quite excited when certain romantic, intelligent males spoke to her. I would think, 'Why couldn't she have known him instead of father?' Right there I could see an excited thing in her, and in him also."

While this compassion for her mother's anguish and sympathetic wish for her happiness is implicit in Hilda's close observation of her mother functioning as a mother and woman in the world, the preponderance of her account conveys a deep sense of frustration over her perception of her mother's limited coping. It seems that at a number of points in her youth Hilda felt compelled to intervene in her mother's management of her family and self. For example, she describes, with at least a trace of indignation,
how she introduced spinach and greens, from her experience in Teressa's home, to the family diet; would exhort her mother to shampoo more often, convincing her that she lacked the "manual dexterity" to put her hair up properly; and made attempts at convincing her mother to stop having so many children.

At other points, Hilda was herself the object of her mother's inability to cope as a mother, as in this example from her early teen age:

- "I liked to tease Harry, a great deal...it was kind of a motherhood thing in me, thinking [the younger children] were cute, fun to annoy, and so on. I was very fond of Harry...Harry would chase me out of the third story window [Hilda describes the layout of a large, slate roofed building] and around the house, lickety-cut, with just this gutter to control me from falling down three stories - and I was a fat child, quite...and the neighbors would call mother and say 'Harry is chasing Hilda around the gutters on the third floor again'. And mother would say [with resignation], 'I know it, I know it...''

As Hilda gained experience of the outside world, her sense of her mother's failure to cope came to focus on her performance as a social being. In observing her mother and in comparing her with her adult community, Hilda perceived her as failing to meet some criterion of fully functioning adulthood; that despite her mother's accomplishments and position, she lacked, for Hilda, some essential quality of being a person in the world:

- "I would like at other people and think, they know how to have dinner parties, meet together, be friendly, and be on the surface and still be loyal at the same time. There is a kind of surface conversation people are able to employ. I was never able to do it, mother and father were never able, none of us were."
"Mother would never accept a social engagement. We had a life very separate from any of the community, any of the church women. When mother had her literary society there, it was all very quiet. Mother had prepared a paper that she had to read, some of the other women had papers. It was just like a little school group, each gave there little literary remark. And then we had a person in the kitchen who would prepare these wonderful sandwiches - mother hadn't the confidence in her cooking...to do a thing like that. She didn't have the courage of her convictions as a social woman. I would say to her, 'Why don't you get to know the ladies of the church, mother?'

'Hilda, I dislike gossip'.

And I said, 'Now I bet you don't. I hear you talking to Mary in the kitchen, about all kinds of private, personal matters, only you know it won't be carried further.'

'That's exactly what gossip is', she said, 'it's carried further'.

[Interviewer: She never had any group of friends?]

"None. Well, she was president of the Parent-Teachers Association... considered a very smart woman in that way, she prepared papers for them, she went into educational study. And some of these women would come to her and give her their problems with their youngsters. The teachers all had a great deal of respect for mother. They thought of her as a very intelligent woman, educationally. - She did not have personal relations with any of these people. She never had telephone conversations. She never attended any of their group meetings, or card playing, and teas; all those things that women did in those days."

One final area of short-coming Hilda perceived was with respect to her mother as a sexual person:
"She did not agree that there was such a thing as a relationship between the sexes that was important. She did not expect it except in a very conventional way: meet boy, kiss boy, be engaged, get married...and the father and mother approve of the arrangement, and so forth. That was it. That was all it amounted to."

That her mother's view of "the relationship between the sexes", or at least that portion communicated to Hilda, omitted the inevitability of sex was a final frugality to be increasingly resented by Hilda with the approach of her own sexual relationships. This area of Hilda's account will be developed at some depth in the following section.
Hilda in Adolescence

The period between Hilda's early teens and marriage encompasses a number of pleasant memories, e.g., high school dances, early infatuations, anticipation of marriage, and the gratifying aspects of growing independence and separation from home, as well as its full share of recollections of turbulent and painful experiences, e.g., confusion over sexuality, separation from Teressa, a first breakdown, and feelings of distress and failure in separating from home. In comparison with the periods of Hilda's childhood and married life which bracket it, however, Hilda's account of this period is less fully developed. Where her descriptions of the significant events and relationships of the two surrounding periods employ a wealth of detail, those of her adolescence tend more to be concise and sketchy. Where the emotional tone of Hilda's recollections of the preceding period runs a broad range, between recalled yearning for what might have been and hurt and anger over what was, the tone of her account of this period remains more within a range of wistfulness over promising experiences too briefly developed and regret over circumstances or courses taken which precluded their further development.

The difference between Hilda's accounting of this time of transition and the periods surrounding it is not gross. Rather, it is to be perceived in a comparison of the relative space afforded this time in her account and a consideration of the fact it encompasses a number of substantial changes in her life circumstances, i.e., adolescence in her story is a brief interlude in which significant events and relationships are described with characteristic skill and care of expression, but in a relatively precis form.

This situation is, in part, a result of the fact that relatively few
experiences are identified and presented by Hilda as a part of her teenaged years. For example, her striving for conversion and religious experience, clearly an involvement extending well into her adolescent years and likely influencing her experience of them, is for Hilda a memory of childhood, reconstructed in relationship to the people and situations of that time. While such experiences of adolescence tend to be appropriated by her memory of childhood on the one hand, they are abruptly foreshortened by the event of her marriage on the other.

The brevity of her reconstruction of her experiences in adolescence is also in part a product of the experiences, i.e., a number of the more significant events and relationships are either discontinuous with the events of the rest of her life or otherwise difficult to integrate with patterns and themes of experience which go into her identity. This refers to fond memories, such as dancing with others or speaking as class eloquitionist at graduation, as well as confusing or distressing memories, such as her experience of being "hazed" in college, her first breakdown, or her attraction to a homosexual relationship.

All of which is to say that the designation and grouping of a set of Hilda's memories under the category adolescence - or teenaged years, transition from childhood, whatever - is an expediency of organization employed more in my retelling than her original telling of the story.

As with other points in Hilda's account where summary of the recollections she presents is problematic, either through scarcity of details, as in the case of her experience of her father, or complexity and difficulty in integrating the experience she describes, as in the case of her relationship with her mother, it is helpful in summarizing this period to introduce her writing as a symbolic statement of several significant themes in her
adolescence.

Hilda's first book, *Fire of Spring*, is in a number of ways a book of her adolescence. Although written on the far side of adolescence, at age twenty-six, the point in her life which the book reconstructs is the experiences of a summer during her early or pre-teenage years. The main theme of *Fire of Spring* is the impact of the first experiences of romantic love, and concomittant turmoil and reorientation of identity, in the central character, Alma (Hilda's *roman a clef* counterpart).

Alma's experiences of first love deviate from those of a typical adolescent only in the direction of excess. That is, she encounters conflict in her first romantic attachments, but the conflict is between the forces of life and death, respectively embodied in the highly idealized forms of Christ, on the one hand, and her cousin Phillip, on the other. Both figures pull her toward a reorientation of her world view; Christ toward a submergent union in suffering and atonement and cousin Phillip toward a transcendant union in sunlight, joy, and general appreciation of nature. This competition between heavenly and earthly objects in the development of Alma's first romance, and the promixity of issues of transcendent and submersion, can be seen in the following excerpts from *Fire of Spring*:

Christ, to bring him to her. For as yet she stood alone and lonesome, longing for her heart to be filled with that sweet love experienced by her those several times before... (p. 89).

*Precise dating of the time she writes of in *Fire of Spring* is difficult. Alma (Hilda's protagonist) celebrates her fourteenth birthday in the story. Hilda remembers the actual events as occurring when she was eleven. However, she also remembers insisting, over her publishers objection that the events of Alma's story were unrealistically mature for a fourteen year old, on keeping Alma's age the same as her own at the time of her trip west.*
Alma had permitted her reason to drag her from point to point and the gulf at last reached by her was, if you love Christ, you, too, are on the cross.

She had been looking at the willows, at the water, at the sky. She had thought you have no right to be lovely, nor have you, nor you, nor you, and she had mentally noted each symmetrical bit, each perfect design and every spot of color which had before caused that bliss to surge higher, higher, higher in her breast. But now she delighted in this mournful march of reason which brought her to this gulf. It was as if she cried with wide gesture, Farewell, Life!... (p. 90).

She understood now, she decided, the black garbed nuns who walked into the glaring beauty of the world with their faces mutely blind to all about them, their black mitted hands clasped before the, their eyes downcast and their cheeks colorless. Oh, she understood them now... (p. 91).

Hush! Here he comes! Lord, Lord, she breathed, O Lord, you have never been so lovely. For he was as majestic as a Prince... The Prince of Heaven, smiling gravely at her from beneath his ruby crown, his flesh as hard as pale ivory against the yet sterner glow of gems... Are you then to be my little Queen? he questioned with those curved lips as red as the gems. She longed to have him kiss her, to be enfolded within his arms, to be comforted by him. (p. 94).

As the story progresses, Alma's involvement with Christ becomes a consuming preoccupation. Alma's orientation to her Christ moves, without distinct shifts, between being absorbed in romantic love and becoming swallowed up in an abstract suffering and death:

Strange! wondered Alma, that I dream like that! It was strange, for she had never been kissed by a boy nor kissed one. And yet, and yet now that she loved Christ, had determined to love him, each night he came to her to wrap her warmly in his love. It was even exhausting to lie swathed in his kisses, which given so calmly left her as weak as one overtired with swimming.

The nearest that she had ever come to kissing a man had been that afternoon in front of the fountain, how many years ago?

A scene in which Alma, as a child, encountered a derelict on a park bench is described... she had very nearly kissed that stranger who had for one moment wrapped her round warmly with his gaze, just as Christ wrapped her at night in
his embraces. And just as Christ's wounds had torn from her sorrow which forced the longing to love him, to heal him, that ache of outstretched hands, her hands which could soothe him, comfort him. Her hands which would draw his great head to her little breasts, There! rest now, Dear Jesus (oh, she liked him better needing tendernesses, for as a prince, ivory hard and jewel studded, he was far too commanding, far too awful) - just so had that stranger looked into her reckless, careless, child-face, that just so had his haggard countenance against the background of a million spraying fountain jewels, called out to her arms, which cried suddenly to let her hold him, and to comfort him (p. 119-120).

...It was difficult, most difficult to be true to him...She was bound that she would not caress him comfortingly one moment and run from him the next as she had done years before to that stranger...Christ was her lover; Christ was suffering. With him, she, too, must suffer. There was to be no happiness, no happiness while he hung forlorn in his death tree.

But what have you done, Alma, inquired her curious common-sense, that interfering friend, what have you possibly done to make Jesus die? Be still! her heart answered...Hasn't it been proven to you enough that you've done something? You can't know everything at once! (p. 122).

A subplot of Fire of Spring, developed in counterpoint with Alma's relationships to Christ and Phillip, is the fate of Lizzie, a pathetic figure whose moment of joy is a secret affair with a neighboring young farmer, which results in her pregnancy. Lizzie becomes consumed with shame, dresses in black, and wanders across the countryside as a frightened waif:

...her head hung down and only her great eyes moved frightenedly, black with their terror of what was in store for her. She was wearing mourning then for her perished virginity? (p. 98).

With public discovery of Lizzie's indiscretion, probably through taking Alma's Aunt Jen into her confidence, she becomes the object of great anger and scorn within her community and the focus of a concerted effort by her parents, revival meeting "leader", and the congregation to "bring her before Jesus", to have her publicly renounce her sins and be saved. A long scene describes the "leader" working the congregation to a frenzy of emotion, directing them in a punishing barrage of hymns, and finally
receiving a broken and humiliated Lizzie at the altar:

The leader was sweating at the collar and, with the tears streaming down his face, was pleading for...Lizzie's soul. Immediately he saw that this did not work, he commenced threatening hell, fire and eternal damnation. Then he changed his method again and beckoned for soft singing... If the men would allow their faces to turn white and drawn with their beliefs and the women would assume the expressions of shocked madonnas, then the leader knew that he might, through this wretched pretended sympathy, break down the strongest will.

He was afraid of the blood in the faces of the people. He was not anxious for murder. And so he changed the wind... The choir on the platform fairly melted with its sadness... Song after song without an interval of rest was carried along the weary air. Sometimes the melody was only a whisper and then it rose higher, mournfully, weepingly, "Come, come lay your sins on Jesus." "Why not now?" "Jesus is tenderly calling to-day." "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

Lizzie's head drooped lower and lower...she thought, Oh, will my baby grow to hate me too. Will he think I'm a sinner too?

...She felt a sudden rush of nausea caused by the child within her...She cried wimperly, "Momma, momma!" to the woman on her left.

And before she knew it, she had been helped out into the aisle and up to the platform with her mother on one hand and with her father on the other supporting her. She felt dreadfully ill and she kept saying, "Oh, Momma! Momma!" (pp. 157-159).

Lizzie's story acts as a sort of dark underside of trauma and degradation to the main plot of Alma's breathless and ecstatic experience of involvement with Christ and Phillip -- "as though a wilted dark flower in Alma's bouquet of moments." Although Alma remains essentially a distant observer of Lizzie's drama, their stories intersect at several turning points in the development of Alma's love relationship. Alma's original conversion, for which she receives the adulation of Aunt Jen and the community as "an innocent who has come before Christ", is an inadvertent response to the emotion manufactured in an initial attempt at "bringing
Lizzie up". Alma's observation of and sympathy for Lizzie in her degrading "salvation" triggers her first steps in turning from Christ to Cousin Phillip.

During the night following Lizzie's being "brought before Christ" Alma receives her most directly engaging visitation from the deity. A long conversation ensues in which they debate her attachment to him and which is punctuated by a particularly intense and disturbing sexuality:

...Alma lay beside her younger sister Ethel with her body straight and with the sheet pulled up to her thighs...She let her nightgown remain unfastened. In the midst of her pity for Lizzie she saw Christ coming toward her, walking from the moon straight over the tops of the wheat fields and standing at last at her window.

"Why do you think of that girl, child?" he asked.

"Who could help it, dear Christ?" she answered. "See how she was hurt to-night!"

"But she wronged me, child," he went on with a melancholy voice... "You have wronged me too, and once promised me, you are proving faithless."

"...Look!" he said, and before her he thrust his long pale hands. She saw the raw wounds at the center of his palms. "Listen!" he cried with his face nobly bearing the pain and she could see two drops splash down upon the sheet which covered her body... She wanted to tell him that she had begun to find truths in her heart. She wanted to say, I know about babies now, Christ. But even as she thought of the sentence she felt shame mount her breast and clothe her in burning blushes...

"...Kiss me, little wife," he said, transfigured now into the jewel crowned prince.

"I don't want to, thank you, if you please," she said fretfully, turning away from him and holding it against him that she experienced that miserable unaccountable shame.

"You are faithless then. You do not love me!" he accused her.

"...Sweet Lord...I can't help loving you when you are hurt." And then she felt his lips upon hers, cool, steady, then growing warmer and warmer until she felt her mouth scorched and at the same time she was aware of her gown open at the neck exposing her small rounded breasts...Oh! It wasn't fair...
to make her feel so horrid and shameful...

...And when, after a long breathless silence during which time she longed for another kiss, at the same time feeling repulsed by the desire, she knew that he had gone.

...Heavens! how detestable to feel this way! It made everything smutty and undesirable (pp. 164-167).

Alma's final turning from Christ is precipitated by another kiss, her first actual eroticized contact with a peer. This occurs during a "post-office" game at a party given for her:

How little she felt and how frightened! But she did not want them all to know that she was afraid and so she whispered the words, "What are you doing?"

"...Come on." The boy's mouth was so near to hers that she swallowed his warm breath which his words made. "It's fun to be naughty, little angel-face, ain't you found that out yet?" Without waiting for her to reply, he placed his lips upon hers and kissed her as she had never imagined kissing could be done. She felt utterly naked again and she believed that she was unclean, never again to be cleansed...She saw his eyes enjoying the wickedness of his lips.

Alma runs from the party into the darkness...She resolved she would not be dragged down into that pit of hopeless darkness... she would not cry either. "Let's see. Just let's see," she whispered savagely to the stars. "Let's figure this out." And just as she nearly caught the truth and was going to see it clear and perfect before her, that kiss would come back to her again, flinging her into the pit of vileness and disgust.

Then she saw Christ next to her.

"You see?" he asked, wagging his long finger at her, "Naughty, naughty, it's in us all."

She suddenly hated this Christ...

After some deliberation Alma comes to a "miraculous vision of understanding"...deciding to make an act wicked, it is made so. That was all...This then was the burden which they carried to their Christ.

Christ was gone now not to return. She saw in this moment of clear understanding that he had been of the community's manufacture. Just as the artist had painted the pictures of the baby Christ and the Christ walking upon the waters as he had wanted Jesus to look. No one, thought Alma, knows what
poor Christ was really like. And for her part, she was willing to forget him for a while, his ill-conceived shadow had caused her so much unnecessary misery (pp. 187-189).

Alma's rejection of Christ left no vacuum in her emotional life. From early on in the course of her relationship with Christ, Alma had been experiencing an equally consuming, but diametrically opposed and competing attraction to her cousin Phillip. Again, this pull for a union in love works to transform Alma's perception of her self and world and, again, a kiss, in this case from Phillip, serves to precipitously reorient her thinking:

...Within five minutes a new world had unfolded itself before the girl. She had been so wound about with the dark, tear-stained thinking that to be magically bared to the sun's warming gave her new life. She could see now, she felt, what she had never before been able to see. Who would have believed that light and shadow in a wood would be as harmonious as music?...how perfumed the odor of tree mold mingled with the fragrance of the shrinking hidden blossoms was?...so magical, unfolding her soul like a flower (p. 149).

...Could she have analyzed the sudden rebirth of her heart's life after her decision against Christ, Alma would have heard it beat out its gratitude in this way; I was blinded in Christ, but I am open-eyed with Phillip for my love...[with Christ] I could see nothing else, surrounding him was sorrow and evil, mockery and tears!...But with Phillip to love I see life about him. Rather than look into his eyes I see through them, with my sight added to him...with Christ I was diseased and perishing. In Phillip I am becoming, ever becoming...Christ is death but Phillip is life.

...She had forgotten Jesus and her recent initiation into morbid pleasure. She was, in truth, too normal and wholesome to endure the nurturing which warped minds would have forced upon her.

...The bent stem of her life which might so easily have been twisted and broken stood upright again...She was growing up.

Alma sighed deeply, laid her palms carressingly against her warm cheek, tasted her lips again, smiled and slept more heavily than before (pp. 205-207).

Other significant characters and themes developed in Fire of Spring including: Aunt Jen, a shrivelled, austere matriarch whose central concern
is maintaining the public appearance of upright behavior and advancing her own social standing; Minna, Cousin Phillip's beautiful wife, who is absorbed in her own mindlessly languorous appreciation of and care for her body and who largely neglects Sherman, her infant son; Ethel, Alma's younger sister, who poisons; and nearly kills, Sherman through constant surreptitious feeding of sweets, and otherwise occupies herself with a mixed envy and condemnation of Alma's "naughtiness"; and Uncle Steve, Jen's husband, who has devoted his life to hard work toward the remote goal of regaining Emma, a lost love, distilled rather than dissipated by passage of time from his youth, whom he sees reflected in Alma and whom by unrecognized coincidence, happens to be her mother.

Although written in the format of alternating passages describing the subjective experience and reverie of each of a set of related characters, the inner experiences of the characters of Fire of Spring are distinctly separate, the only point of integration being in their relationship to Alma. In the case of the female figures this relationship is characterized by actual or potential hostility: envy, ranging from petty to deep, e.g., as with Ethel and Lizzie; distant but substantial threat, e.g., as that dimly perceived by Minna; or attraction to Alma where she is perceived as serving personal ends and angered disapproval where she proves inimical to them, e.g., in the case of Aunt Jen.

For the men, both idealized figures with an aura of strength and fresh aid and predilection for crusading for an undefined "free thinking", Alma is the object of distant but intense romantic attachment, a bond which remains basically platonic but is suffused with a tantalizingly erotic attraction. This attraction awakens in Alma a strong and, at points erotic, appreciation for her own body. This development in her relationship to herself - a central
quality of Alma's subjective experience - can be seen as suggested in the last excerpt above, implied in Alma's sense of "seeing through" Cousin Phillip's eyes, and repeated throughout the book, e.g.:

"Phillip would still recall her vividly...this child-woman with her impulsive excited gestures, her slim body, her oval face with its full purplish lips and deep wide-open eyes, and the saucy swing to her braid of hair...But Alma was dreaming as he was...she drew her hand from his and felt of her lips in her sleep" (p. 244).

The story climaxes in a set of events which include: Alma and Phillip platonically consummating their love in sharing a night together in the woods; Lizzie, on her way to drown herself, stumbling across the lovers and making the spiteful decision to prolong her life in order to make public Alma's affair; and Uncle Steve's rising to the occasion of the community converging on Lizzie's lover's farm to prevent their burning it down.

"...for the moment he felt young and strong...I'll do this for Alma" (p. 262). Steve averts the community's destructive intentions but, in the process, alienates their sentiments and thus sacrifices the likelihood, cherished by Jon, of winning an upcoming election for county manager. Lizzie, in gratitude to Steve, preserves the secret of her discovery. And Alma and Phillip part, Phillip to become preoccupied with his son's brush with death and Alma into excited yearning to "grow up" and pleasureable anticipation of returning home.

Although Hilda's stated intention in writing Fire of Spring was to recapture and express the intensity of her experience of becoming a woman, and while the events and characters of the book, with the exception of the sub-plot of Lizzie, are modelled directly on those of her own experience,
it is worth reemphasizing that the story cannot be taken as a literal chronicle of her transition into adulthood. Rather, the importance of *Fire of Spring* in understanding this period of Hilda's life derives from the fact that it presents a highly condensed and clearly dramatized expression of salient themes from this period, while preserving a sense of the complex and undoubtably confusing quality of the actual experience. In particular, *Fire of Spring* is a valuable symbolic account of Hilda's inner experience of approaching adult sexual relationship, a value which is increased by the fact that one must rely heavily on inference from the events described in her interview account in order to achieve an understanding of her inner experience of this period of transition to womanhood. This is especially true of the pleasurable aspects of the reorientation involved in approaching adult sexual relationship - what the jacket notes of her book refer to as "that breathless urge" - e.g., the sense of ecstatic flowering of new life and transcendence or submersion of self in an other, and the awakening of self-love in "seeing through" the other's eyes; but it applies, as well, to the powerful and threatening aspects, e.g., the "dark flower" of mortal transgression represented in the malevolence visited upon Lizzie for her passion, the sense of union with suffering and death in Alma's first love relationship, the humiliating and repellent experience of Alma's first kiss from an actual boy, and the bubbling pot of jealousy and hostility represented in the women of *Fire of Spring*. These opposing themes of new life and death, rapt appreciation and attack, in approaching adult intimacy and sex are what Hilda chooses as central to a symbolic account of her adolescence.

As for Hilda's literal, i.e., interview, account of this period, she presents several brief anecdotes which show her as, at least momentarily, occupying a comfortably broad line between "breathless urge" and confusing pain in growing up, freely engaging in some of the more standard pleasures
of preparing for adulthood. These anecdotes provide passing glimpses of a teenager of more than average talent and success in several of these areas of activity. For example, Hilda mentions in passing that she "had to give a speech" at her high school graduation, i.e., was chosen as "class eloquitionist" because she "always had a talent in drama". The speech was evidently a success; she remembers being awarded a ten-dollar gold piece as a prize. In preparation for her graduation she was allowed to put aside the narrow color choice in clothing dictated for her since early childhood by her mother - "deep red or light blue...and later on I was allowed to wear lavender, which I never liked" - and design her own dress. She describes the finished product, the first of several elaborately elegant dresses she designed, in fond detail, including fine points of color combination and tailoring. She remembers taking great pleasure, apparent in the description, in the "taste and execution of my design - now and then I really expressed myself in clothing."

Hilda also refers several times to how much she enjoyed dancing "every afternoon" during her high school years. She is proud of discovering and bringing attention to the fact that a frequent partner at these dances, a boy who had repeated a number of grades in school, was suffering from apparently unrecognized deafness.

Along side of glimpses of a stylishly self-dressed class eloquitionist and a cheerfully engaged dancer, Hilda introduces the not unusual picture of a teenager experiencing herself as an outsider to some free exchange and cohesion, known only through observation, of established peer groups - "Of course there were cliques in high school. I never could get in with them." This perception of her self remains with her, e.g. she mentions currently watching party scenes on television and reading the dialogue in
Aldous Huxley novels, imagining some ideal of social fluidity which continues to be remote to her - "I don't know why I'm disappointed."

A final point brought up by Hilda, suggestive of another area of satisfying engagement in social activity, is that she enjoyed singing a great deal. She was a regular member of a church choir and several church groups. It was through her involvement in one of these groups that Hilda met what she refers to as "the Presbyterian girls" and, in particular, Diana Beale, the object of one of her first and most deeply confusing experiences of adult sexualized love.

Diana Beale and the Presbyterian Girls

The subject of her relationship with Diana Beale is not one on which Hilda speaks easily. It was apparent when she first introduced it to our interviews that she did so more out of a sense of obligation to presenting a complete account of her youth than from a readiness to discuss this early romance. As the level of familiarity and trust increased between us over the course of our interviews, Hilda returned to her relationship with Diana and the Presbyterian women several times.

The experience of this relationship is not one which is neatly summarized in Hilda's own mind, at least not in any way she can readily communicate. What she does communicate about it is approached by her with a delicacy and wariness of categorization which should be born in the reading.

Diana Beale was a woman about ten years Hilda's senior, the lover of a woman named Rachel, and the central figure in an intimate group of seven women known collectively to Hilda as the "Presbyterian Girls". One indication of the enduring significance in Hilda's life of her relationship with Diana
Beale and the "Presbyterian Girls" is the fact that she has a photo album displaying an oval studio portrait of each. Despite her discomfort in discussing this part of her past, and the painful confusion it occasioned at the time, the album is an obviously cherished item within her relatively small collection of memorabilia. Large portraits of Diana and Rachel occupy facing pages, and somewhat smaller pictures of the other women the remainder. The latter show a group of uniformly attractive women in stylish Victorian dress and pose; Diana's shows a handsome woman of well-proportioned embonpoint and military bearing.

The experience of her relationship with Diana had a forcefulness which defies analysis for Hilda. At one point she makes it quite clear that the bond between them, and her attraction to Diana, should be understood as a "mental and emotional experience", rather than physical. Throughout her descriptions of Diana and their relationship, however, it is equally clear that Hilda's emotional experience of Diana encompassed strong feelings of attraction to her physical attributes, such that her appearance, smell, voice, and touch were exciting to Hilda, and that it generalized to the people and circumstances of Diana's life, so that Diana's friends, habitual activities, and place in the world - including her sexual orientation - held a powerful draw for Hilda. In other words, it seems apparent that Hilda's bond with Diana had the urgent wish for investing one's self in the other, and the sexualized energy, of an adolescent infatuation in full bloom - what Hilda refers to as "my second forceful sexual experience."

Much like the experience of love presented in *Fire of Spring*, there is a fearsome side to the bond Hilda describes with Diana, a powerfully "dark flower" in the bloom of her infatuation. This sense of a dark side to the relationship applies to feelings on Hilda's part, suggested at
several points in her account, of wrong doing in her attraction to Diana, as well as to an aura of drug addiction, tortuous sexual control, and disease, which is evoked in conjunction with her recollections of Diana. Hilda's perception of Diana as engaged with sinister forces and of her self as bad or sick in her attachment to her older friend does not seem to have acted as a counter force to her attraction so much as a, perhaps tantalizing, undercurrent within it. What is meant here by "a, perhaps tantalizing, undercurrent" is difficult to specify, but the quality it refers to in Hilda's relationship with Diana - a strange mixture of intense apprehension and fascinated attraction - is clearly represented in the following description:

[Interviewer: "That is one thing I haven't been clear on, how sexual your attraction was to Diana."

"Yah...well, she is a very handsome woman. She had a beautiful voice. She drove her uncle's car - he was a doctor. And I am sure she was addicted to some drug. Because so much of the time she seemed to be in a peculiar frame of consciousness. I was so sure she was under the influence of drugs. Once she showed me this hypodermic thing...she said, 'Now do you understand?' I said 'why is this?' because sometimes I would go down to her uncle's office after choir practice - he lived downtown in lower Hudson, a poor section of town - and I would think that her car was down there and I would have kind of an ESP sense of the fact that she would be there in his office. It was a very dark hallway...and I would climb this dark hall, stairway, and stand outside of his apartment, which was a poor, poor spot. I would listen at the door, listen and listen and hear her groaning and groaning, and then his voice and then groaning and groaning. And sometimes I would stand there, it would seem to me about an
hour, and I would think, 'well she's in no condition to drive her car.' And then she would come out of his apartment and she would be half conscious, as if she were drunk. And she would say, 'well, little brother, can you steer if I determine the amount of gas?' And I would steer her all the way up town...then walk home, which was about another mile or two. And this went on often.

"She explained to me...that she had been raped as a child, therefore she had never had a period, therefore she was in - she had some awful disease, which proved to be a cancerous condition. And she, I think, was under the influence of her uncle, I think, who was - had made her an addict, sometime.

"But I would see her in her own home, which was her aunt's home, really; she was sort of lodged by her aunts in a very elegant house, beautiful furniture and lace curtains. She had her own rooms and own bath, and she would rel...she would call me up and say, 'little brother, can you come up and read poetry to me or stay with me for a while?' And she would be lying on the bed...beautiful, white pulsing flesh, it seemed - it always seemed to me I could just imagine it, this pulsing. Because she was so beautiful, had such a lovely fragrance - well now that fragrance might have been the addiction, but she did smoke too, and I hadn't known many women who did, and she had a lovely fragrance of tobacco, too.

"I would say, 'Are you in pain?' and I would kneel beside her. I would touch her.

"And she would say, 'Well, may I kiss you?'

And I said, 'You don't want to kiss me.'

'Yes I do,' she said, 'I'll pretend you're Rachel.'

And she would give me this great big beautiful, full, lovely, lip - soft
lovely, beautiful kiss...

"I would think, 'Oh, Rachel, aren't you lucky? To have that mouth kiss as much - kiss you as much as you want.

"That's as much as it amounted to."

There are distinct limits on what can be pieced together - with any clarity from Hilda's description of this early "forceful sexual experience" into a representation of the larger impact it had on her life at the time. That is, the experience of her relationship with Diana seems to have been one of a "forcefulness" and immediacy which has allowed little latitude for reflection or self-interpretation, either at the time or over the fifty some years intervening.

Her memories of Diana stand intact and vivid as the photographs of her album, but isolated, not well incorporated in the narrative flow of her story. They have a quality of being "alive" which, at least in part, derives from the fact that they are encapsulated.

This combined quality of being "alive" and encapsulated is evident in the rich drama of Hilda's description of the relationship above - between the brackets of "Yah..." and, "That's as much as it amounted to..." her voice varies from being musingly subdued in relating the sinister aspects to becoming momentarily exultant in the beautiful. At the risk of making much over a small point of construction, note that she starts her description of Diana in the present tense.

Another example of the way in which Hilda's description of her relationship with Diana is presented in terms of memories both "alive" and immediate, i.e., invested with neither, the apparent distance achieved in "objective" interpretation nor the sense of perspective following from placing the
experience in the context of other significant events of her life, can be seen in her response to a suggestion from the interviewer that the experience must have had a "tremendous impact" on her. Hilda's description of the impact has a concrete immediacy in both the level on which she chooses to respond, a particular example, and in the content of her example, Diana bursting through the door of her house:

"Ohh [it did]... Sometimes... I would get home from choir practice and I would get to bed, suddenly I'd hear... the front door wildly, wide-open - because mother had no way of locking the door, half the time - and here she was, prone on the floor, face down [Hilda thumps her hand] and mother said, "What is it, Hilda?" I said, "Diana's sick. Diana's sick. I'm going to have to help her drive home" - here I didn't know how to drive other than steer, I could steer the car.

"But she was big; she was a large person. I should say she weighed about one hundred eighty. I was quite small; I weighed about one hundred twenty-five in those days.

-Interviewer: Were you frightened, by the, ah...

"Well I thought [Hilda lowers voice, musing: "Now this (inaudible) going to be written down"] I thought he was abusing her. I could picture him sexually abusing her - and I think probably he did have some kind of a... ugh... of a feeling of terribly deep love for her, as a woman and he a man. But he was - he looked like the kind of person that you would picture - who was the person who controlled Trilby? I thought of Trilby and - don't you know? that Trilby was that great, beautiful woman who was controlled through hypnosis?

-Interviewer: That sounds familiar but I don't...

"... he was a Jewish person, with a long mean face... I felt as if [the uncle] were similar."
The way in which the memories Hilda presents in her descriptions of the impact of Diana are so concrete and immediate to her—she rarely qualiﬁes and in no way disowns the studied fascination, rapturous attraction, or love of her experience of Diana—is particularly striking in contrast to her description of her second encounter with the prospect of homosexuality during her ﬁrst year of college. Hilda's description of this event, to be related shortly, is presented in completely different terms: the details she gives are vague and abstract, she gives a clear summary label to her experience, i.e., feeling threatened by the repellant possibility of a homosexual encounter; she explicitly identiﬁes the impact of the experience on the events of her life at the time, i.e., that her fear of homosexuality was a main precipitating factor in her ﬁrst breakdown—clearly a well-interpreted, remote experience to her. She does not in any way connect her love of Diana and fear of homosexuality in college.

The fact of the contrast between Hilda's description of these two events in her life does not mean that her relationship with Diana was experienced as less than profoundly unsettling, perhaps dangerous, to her life at the time. There is strong, albeit largely indirect, evidence that the impact which Hilda describes in such immediate, concrete terms above, was of a deep and lastingly disturbing nature not readily available to abstraction. In addition to the general aura of addiction, sexual control, disease, and death surrounding Diana, and the speciﬁc imagery of a small Hilda steering the car while a large and semiconscious Diana "determines the gas", the way in which the memories themselves are vivid but encapsulated events, unrelated to the rest of her life, suggests the unmanageability of experiences of great danger. That is, they are not memories particularly accessible to being "objectively" understood, subjectively integrated with
the rest of her experience, or otherwise put away by choice. The act of trust in Hilda's gradual presentation of this part of her past was an intimacy beyond that of simply sharing a cherished set of memories.

Hilda does make one direct assessment of a disturbing impact in her "falling for" a woman at this point in her life. This is the single point in her account of this period in which she relates the experience of Diana to more general internal events of her youth; one of the rare instances of interpretive reflection on or qualification of her love for Diana. The tone of this brief reflection is different from much of the rest of her account of the period; she speaks of Diana as one of "these women" and brings her up in the, more personally remote, terms of her youthful "maladjustment" rather than her "sexual experience" or love.

Although the terms in which she describes the disturbing impact of her "falling for" Diana are themselves vague and distant - a "more or less" feeling that things weren't the way they should be - the context in which she brings it up, the terrifying figures which peopled her inner experience of youth, is quite concrete.

Hilda has been describing being visited by bogies in the night, her horrified fascination with Sammy Machis, the birth defective boy, and being terrified by Aunt Eleanor:7

- "These I consider bad maladjustments.

- Interviewer: back then? as a child?7

"No, I just felt life had awful things in it.

- Interviewer: When did you begin to see yourself as maladjusted?7

"Well, you see father would say, 'She's just like Aunt Eleanor.'

When I was very young. I suspected his confidence in me back then. And also, I thought of a person as being maladjusted if they didn't want to live any more.
Interviewer: So perhaps this was - well when would you say that was?

"I...the thing gets sort of...ah...complicated, complicated, you see, because a lot of it had to do with the fact that I was falling for these women. Diana - and there was a Justine D'Ascoin who was a contralto who sang for us in church. She trained me in voice and she was a marvellous singer. And she was great, beautiful, woman, you know. And I would be able to feast my mind and eyes on these women. I more or less felt that was not the way it should be, and yet I was enjoying it, plenty. They're very attractive to me, those two women - I don't know that I can remember any more..."

The complications that "falling for" a woman introduced to Hilda's life, stated but vaguely developed in her description above and implicit but vividly represented in the overtones of danger and turmoil present in her memories of Diana, are reflected, as well, in her descriptions of attempts at talking about the experience with significant others. At different points, Hilda describes conversations with her mother, father, Teressa, and the "Presbyterian Girls". Although the descriptions are brief, the tone and content of what she describes conveys a sense of the importance she placed on these communications at the time. They suggest a varying mix of needs, serious and often conflicting, in relation to those close to her: to make them recognize the disruptive and reorienting impact of her new love, and to join in denying it; to seek approval and sanction of her relationship with Diana, and to bring intervention in and rescue from it; to make the relationship fully understood and appreciated by those around her, and to keep it ultimately secret.
In the case of her interaction with the "Presbyterian Girls", the conflict between enjoying the recognition of her "initiation", i.e., her new place in the world as a lover, and seeking to deny and keep private her new relationship is most prominent. The picture she gives of the "Presbyterian Girls" is of a closed network of young women, engaged in an exchange, through shared letters, observations, and internal gossip, of their private associations. The picture Hilda gives of herself in relation to the group is of being encircled by an envious chorus, teasingly accusing her of being "The One," Diana's lover - a complicated and not entirely welcomed offer to fulfill Hilda's wish for a place within some clique:

- "You see, this was all connected with the fact that Rachel was a Presbyterian, I was a Presbyterian, and I had gotten to know Rachel because some of these Presbyterian girls probably had told her about Rachel, or something, that they knew that this beautiful little Rachel was a Presbyterian. And when she saw her - she said, 'Once I saw Rachel I knew that there was no one else, as marvellous as Rachel was'. Rachel was The One. All of those other Presbyterian girls... said to me, 'Well, we understand you've been initiated.'

- "And I said, 'What do you mean?'

- 'We understand that you know Rachel now, and that you know Diana now, and that you understand why we all are in love with Diana.'

- "You know, it took me by surprise because I hadn't expected this and I don't know how they heard it either. Well I acted as if that was alright; that's the way it was. And I said, 'Well, no, I think Rachel is the one who is in love with Diana,' and Diana is and all this.

- "'Oh no, no, no! We even know what you call each other - I said,
'What's that?'

-"'Little brother' and 'big brother,' they said, 'see, we know.'

- 'Now,' they said, 'now Hilda, we all write love letters to Diana, she writes love letters to us. Now will you let us see your love letters?'

I said, 'Why of course I won't!'

-"'But we spent a lot of time with each other, as a group. And they meanwhile had young men, and they were very much older than me, about ten years my senior..."

In the case of her childhood friend, Teressa, Hilda's sense of the serious implications of her new love for their friendship, and frustration over Teressa's failure to recognize them, are what stand out. Hilda's attachment to Diana signalled, for Hilda, the conclusion of what had been a gradual drift apart, begun at the time of Teressa's mother's death and her move to New York City, and accelerated by the advent of boyfriends. Angered frustration over Teressa's failure to address the redefinition of their relationship is evident in the tone of the dialogue Hilda recreates:

- "That was really my first break from Teressa, when I began falling in love with Diana, Rachel, that group; having a real urge, sexually, with these women. I would say to Teressa, 'Do you understand my relationship with these women?' 'Why Hildie, I'm sure, I think Diana is a very lovely woman.' I'm sure Teressa had already broken from my loyalty. The only one and one relationship, and Carlo [her eventual husband] was probably in the picture already."

Finally, it was with her parents that Hilda felt the strongest, and most conflicting, needs to communicate about her love. She had a strong
desire for them to understand what she was experiencing in her relationship with Diana, to know the depth and nature of her new love; probably at the time, and certainly in retrospect, she also felt a need for their intervention in the relationship, for them to protect her from it. What she got instead was a reinterpretation of the relationship, an explanation of her experience in terms of "hero worship" and "platonic affection", which, for her, failed to appreciate the true nature and impact of it and served to frustrate any hope for parental intervention. In conjunction with this frustrating dance around understanding, it seems there was a considerable risk for Hilda, i.e., that if her parents, and particularly her mother, were really to know what Hilda's experience was they could take it away, "wipe it out". In fact, the strength of her need to protect her experience of this significant relationship from being "wiped out" may have precluded any real chance of making her parents understand, and help her in it:

[Interviewer: Your parents didn't intervene?]

"Not at all. They were clever that way about certain things...I would say to mother, 'Well I don't know how this - why this is.'

'Well,' she would say, 'Hilda, it's natural,' mother would say, 'it's called hero worship...'

[Interviewer: I should think she would be afraid of Diana's influence on you.]

"No, she didn't seem to. And father would talk to me at length about Plato, about the days when there was such a thing."

'Platonic affection,' he said, 'that's what it is, platonic.'

"I said, 'Platonic? I think it's more than that?'

'No,' he said - and he would try to go into it, the days when Greek boys loved Greek boys, and their masters and all that. And he would say,
'She has an influence over you. She has you under her spell.'

"I said, 'Well you can say that again.'"

[Interviewer: But there was no attempt to, ah....]

"No..."

[Interviewer: Do you think that they should have?]

"Aghn...I think I should have had a lot of education in there in all directions. I think that they could have - Hilda interrupts herself to discuss her son's practice of restricting his children's social life until they finish high school...made me realize that there are other things in life than just...Oh...falling for the first attraction that I have, in that way; that I should have - they should have made it possible for me to meet, if there were any way. I don't know how they could have, because parents didn't do that with their youngsters, at least my parents never found out who we know in school, or who...ah...whom we could have had as friends at home, and so on..."

In discussing her sense of her mother as being able to "take away my own concepts," "wipe the slate clean", Hilda is asked if she could give an example:

- "Well, I just have a vague rememberance of relating certain things to her about my friends, about Diana and Rachel - you remember my telling you about those two who were lovers, Diana and Rachel? And mother was very patient with me about Diana. But I think every now and then she would wipe that clean, too. So that I became more secretive about it. And I also had a belief that Diana had a terrible illness...and that she was being protected by her uncle who was a doctor, through drugs. It proved to be true that she did have some kind of cancer, that killed her, at an early age."
But I used to tell mother these things, that Diana was really a very ill person, physically - which she thought I was elaborating on, merely because I had made Diana my romantic hero, you know."

**Approaching Intimate Relationships with Males**

Within the overall process of transition from childhood to adulthood, this particular task, establishing an intimate heterosexual relationship, can be seen as a matter of transferring the locus of one's primary interpersonal attachment from family members to an outsider; or, as Hilda puts it, "finding a protector in the male". It is a complex task. In addition to being the first, experimental step toward establishing one's own family unit, it is perhaps the single most important opportunity for defining oneself as an autonomous adult, functioning in a social world outside of the family and capable of the risks and satisfactions of forming a mutual identity and sexual intimacy with an other. In the process of this, in Hilda's terms "desirous development", the numerous cultural prescriptions on sex and intimacy, largely as mediated through the family converge with the more subtle features of one's experience of one's own body, personal worth, and interpersonal impact, to become increasingly focused and defined in relation to one significant other. In other words, Hilda brought to her first serious meeting with "the male" both her accumulated understanding of what it meant to be a woman and sexual partner in general and the product of her particular experience of significant interpersonal attachment; the unmet yearnings, too fully realized fears, and emotional uncertainties of her childhood.

The accomplishment of a comfortably satisfying intimacy, a slow and uneven process in most lives, proved torturous and elusive in Hilda's.
Her difficulty in this area remains a central issue in her reflections on her life, and something she presents as a main feature of the context of her several psychotic episodes. She summarizes this difficulty as a matter of being "sexually repressed":

[Interviewer:] The first time we talked about [your youth] you referred to yourself as "sexually repressed"...what did you mean by that?

"Well, I don't believe I had a normal relationship with anyone, that is, I never had a protector in the male - and most women expect to be married, don't they? They expect to have someone with them every night, right?

[Interviewer:] I suppose...yuh.

"And this never happened to me, you see; it never happened to me... I never had such a thing.

"And, therefore, I think...cgh - [my daughter] Ruth believes this, and I think she's right: Ruth believes that sex has to be learned. Even if you aren't - that it isn't a magic happening...exactly; that it is a desirous development, and you can accomplish it like dancing, or good food, good singing, good culture - of any type - it can be accomplished...And that was something which I never accomplished..."

I am in agreement with Hilda that what she condenses into this term, "sexual repression", is something central to her difficulties in living. In order to give it its due centrality, I will attempt to develop, as fully as possible, the context of her entry into sexual intimacy. In doing so, I will explore what I see as the differing levels of meaning implicit in her multipart definition of sexual intimacy:..."That it is something which has to be learned...that it isn't a magic happening...exactly. That it is
a desirous development." I will progress from an initial presentation of the relevant components of the learning environment afforded by Hilda's culture and home, through an examination of her experience of herself and others in intimate - including sexual - relationship, and, ultimately, ventured into the qualities of the inner matrix of loyalties, prohibitions, and significant relationships in which Hilda's experience of intimacy is embedded - and which, in its association with forces neither clearly discernable nor apparently controllable, more closely resembles a not so benevolent "magic".

Hilda presents a number of background conditions for "sexual repression", i.e. her reconstruction of her youthful environment contains numerous features which might render heterosexual relationship a highly problematic task of learning. Many of these missing or faulty components in her learning environment have already been encountered. They range from the restrictive patterns for sexual relationship she experienced in the culture, through the impoverished and faulty model she perceived in her parents, to a lack of guidance and limited opportunities for experiment at the actual time of her introduction to dating and courtship.

At the level of the culture, it should be remembered that Hilda was coming of age during the wane of the Victorian era*. She occasionally contrasts her daughters' and granddaughters' dress, language, and attitudes toward sex with the practices of her own time; although she could by no means be said to subscribe to Victorian values, she is frequently taken aback by their freedom of expression. In an initial interview she points out that the standards of propriety regarding physical contact were

*Hilda was born on the year of Queen Victoria's death, 1901
considerably more restrictive in her youth; that, for example, a woman could be seen as compromising herself if she were to kiss a man she was not seriously involved with. She feels that an equation she made between being attractive to men and a "scarlet woman" was a prejudice of the time. And, it can be recalled that part of the "rectification" of her mother in Beauty, I Wonder involved giving her a romantic lover such as Hilda encountered in her reading and which, given a different era, she felt her mother would have been allowed.

Hilda's parents' communications to her around sexual relationship had a more direct and handicapping influence on her development as a sexual person. These include the occasional direct communication, such as her father's comment on Freud as a "nasty perverted thing", the more frequent, indirect message, such as the omission of sex from her mother's "very conventional view of the relationship between the sexes", as well as the inferences she drew from observing her parents' relationship. As has been seen, the model of sexual intimacy she constructed from all of this was one in which sexual intercourse was: devoid of love - "no emotional interplay"; an opportunity for exploitation by the male - "an unfeeling gesture, his satisfaction and nobody else's"; and an act with potentially harmful consequences, such as her mother's Sunday afternoon incapacitation and the, to Hilda, distressingly uncontrolled succession of pregnancies and abortions. Hilda almost invariably tempers her still active resentment over these, to her, central shortcomings in her parent's performance by developing an appreciation for their social and historical context, by pointing out the limitations imposed on them by their culture:

"Probably father felt the same way, that it was her obligation..."
days: going to bed once a week, giving birth to a child every year or two - what did it amount to as a relationship?"

The most explicit failure in her parents' performance during this period of Hilda's transition into sexual adulthood lay in their failure to offer any form of assistance. Part of this failure was quite concrete, a matter of neglecting to help make young men available. Once again, this is a shortcoming which can be mitigated by citing her parents' social context; they were not, themselves, part of any well integrated network of friends or social connections. In Beauty, I Wonder, Hilda has a Cinderellaesque vignette in which Emily is invited, along with her brother and sister, to her childhood friend Teressa's glamorous debutante ball. In life, Hilda was not invited to Teressa's debutante party. She is surprised by the interviewers' questioning why - the Mendahls were not members of Hudson's apparently restrictive, upper circle, nor were they part of any alternative circle. One implication of the family circumstances of distance from origins, social aspirations, and uncertain wealth - what James labelled as being declasse - may well have been that the young man who was both available and suitable to the family was not a real entity.

A second, less concrete aspect of the parental failure Hilda experienced during this period lies in what she sees as their inability to make themselves available, i.e. to share in and help her understand her experience of a rather peripatetic entry into sexual relationship. They failed to communicate both information on the physiological details of the process and the more abstract qualities of emotional support and basic acceptance of what Hilda was venturing into. While her expectations for support, and therefore her disappointment, were strongest with her mother, her sense of
grave shortcoming applies to both parents.

In the following two interview passages, Hilda describes her experience of parental shortcoming in her preparation for sexual intimacy. Her effort at fairness to her parents, and care in appreciating their own limiting circumstances - even biological - are apparent. It is also apparent in Hilda's description of her interaction with her mother concerning a wife's "one responsibility to her husband" that the family difficulty in interaction on sexual experience was entirely interactional, i.e. that Hilda shared in cutting off communications about sexual intimacy:

"No, she never explained anything to me about sex until after I became engaged, until in fact, a week or two before I was to be married. By then I already knew about it because Richard and I had always had a - already had a night or two together. But she didn't realize that. And anyway, her way of explaining it was, you know [Somber voice], 'I have to tell you, Hilda, that there is one responsibility the wife has for' - I said, 'listen mother, please don't say another word! I know what you're going to say and I don't want to hear it.'

"Well", she said - and she was really quite taken aback, you know, she turned red as fire...

...'I know', I said - I knew what she was going to say. But I said... Augh, 'why are you telling me this? I should think you would allow me to find this out some other way' - This was my feeling, that she shouldn't have told me.

[Interviewer: She shouldn't have?]
"No. Because she didn't know anything about it herself; and I could see it. And I said, "I hope", now I said, "I hope that this - if this is the case, if this is 'woman's duty', as you call it, that it happens no more than once a year." Because I had that already straight in my mind. I knew what it was, but I hoped it was no more than once a year - there were some of us Sunday school girls who had pecked in on our parents enough, you know, through the door, crack in the door, Saturday nights. We had more or less caught on to it, a bit. But we all believed that this was an obligation that we should not be called upon to perform, perhaps excepting in the case of wanting a child, you see? And I believed that.

[Interviewer: So it seemed something very unpleasant.]

"Totally. Painful, difficult - very bad.

"And I agreed that it probably was, from her - in fact my own experience was not too good up to that point you know. And I believed that it was probably one of the most sorrowful points about marriage, the fact that that was expected of one.

"But I did believe, then, that I cared enough for Richard, that inspite of that I would go along with the idea of marriage.

"But now when Richard and I dated, he came all from Mount Marion, which is eight miles out of Hudson. He'd come in by bicycle. And he'd get there around eight in the evening; after supper he'd drive in on bicycle. And mother would sit with us, darning socks, in the living room, while he and I had a bit a peparte until ten o'clock. Then she's say, 'Now Richard, it's bed time. You must go and Hilda has to go to bed' - That was my dating with Richard. Mind you!

[Interviewer: and that was at your mother's insistence?]

"Umgh? Yes. That was mother's way of coping with the problem of... having a date."
The second excerpt comes from an interview in which Hilda had been describing her mother and her "strong concept of style". Hilda had described an incident in which she exhorted her mother to refrain from putting her hair up because, "she did not have the dexterity to do it properly."

[Interviewer:] It sounds... between the lines, like you had a sense that she could be embarrassing.

"Well she was embarrassing in that she didn't agree that there was such a thing as...hha...a relationship between the sexes that was important - and she didn't expect it to happen, excepting in a very conventional way: meet a boy, kiss a boy, be engaged, get married, and the father and the mother approve of the arrangement, and so forth. That was it. That was all it amounted to.

[omission]

"As far as dating was concerned, one didn't start dating until way along in those days...highschool. Now - and there's where we fell short, where mother fell short, in bringing us up.

[Interviewer:] How do you mean?

"Well she never encouraged dating, and she never arranged that we would have a social life with boys, in our home - and she had five girls, you know. And she never arranged that the boys would meet girls. For instance, when James and that one girl, ah...Eileen O'Donovan, out in Massachusetts, that he wanted to marry - a lovely little girl - because she is a Catholic: 'thumbs down', you know.

"And that's the thing that broke Jim's spirit, as far as happy relationship with the female is concerned; because from then on he just chose women who admired him for his mentality and who wanted him as a...kind of guiding light in their lives, not necessarily a sexual, happy thing."
"And that's where mother and father fell very short...

"But I...I don't think it was necessarily their fault. I believe that they didn't understand the importance of life in that - from that angle.

"Father was working at it a little bit, you know, reading Freud and thinking that was a nasty, perverted, ah...thing.

"Mother, meanwhile, thought that all of the sexual life really - was really the motherhood of it, I guess. That was as much as her energy could cope with.

"A lot of it had to do with energy.

[Interviewer: Do you think she was somebody...of limited energy?]

"Well there was so much expected of people in those days, in one day's stand. [She goes on to list the various chores of running a household.]

While the preceding excerpts amply develop the deficits in Hilda's environment - lack of direct information on sex, an impoverished parental model, lack of encouragement and provision for men in the home - which would interfere with "learning the desirous development" of sexual relationship in Hilda's life, they also give an impression that the interference she experienced was something more than a matter of insufficient parental guidance and involvement. Despite her appreciation of her parents' limitations, Hilda's statement, "And that's where mother and father fell very short..." is not simply an assessment of parental shortcomings, it has more of the force of an indictment. She remains angry over this short-fall in her upbringing, and with an anger that suggests that, if experienced as neglect, the neglect was felt to be something quite other than benign.

This is quite clear in the example she gives of her parents' interaction.
with James' development. She moves directly from commenting on her mother's failure to "arrange that we would have a social life with boys" to describing her parents' cutting off James' involvement with Eileen O'Donovan, more a process of active severing - what she terms "thumbs down" - than a failure to include. As Hilda presents it, the severance is one of considerable consequence. Whatever went into the act of "thumbs down", she sees it as capable of producing lasting internal impact - "the thing that broke Jim's spirit, as far as happy relationship with the female is concerned" - and pervasive external consequences - "from then on he just chose women who admired him for his mentality..."

The sense of an intrusive, potentially destructive parental involvement is less explicit, but equally present, in Hilda's descriptions of her own interaction with her parents around sex and dating. This transition was a significant event in the mother/daughter relationship, something of a crisis. Hilda's memory of the aborted "woman's duty" lecture - the mother turning "red as fire", confronted by a daughter angrily cutting off her belated attempt at sex education - suggests that the situation was attended by emotions stronger than embarrassment over an awkward subject matter. Her mother's approach to "coping with the problem" of Hilda's dating, constant surveillance, and the quiet outrage in Hilda's description - "and that was my dating with Richard. Mind you!" - show that the problematic implications for the mother/daughter relationship were mutually perceived and that, despite Hilda's grouping of "the problem" with the household chores, it taxed her mother's energy in an especially significant way.

The latter of the two interview passages above was excerpted from an interview in which Hilda was outlining her mother's general difficulties in coping; both passages develop the theme of parental limitations, what they
neglected and where they "fell short". There is an apparent contradiction between this theme of shortcoming and her sense of outrage over their efforts at involvement, e.g., the force with which Hilda guarded herself against hearing her mother on sex, her anger with regard to her mother's own sexual adjustment, and her bitterness over her mother's constant presence during dating Richard.

Much of this sense of contradiction can be resolved by focusing on what seems to be Hilda's point of strongest outrage: that her mother "did not know anything about [sexual relationship] herself". It is helpful, also, to make reference to Hilda's concept of "wiping the slate clean", i.e., that she saw her mother as having the ability to "take away my own concepts" through not accepting them as "worth it", the same power her daughter, Ruth, currently has to "disagree so totally that it wipes the slate clean for a long time."

Hilda's mother's ignorance of sexual intimacy seems to be deliberate in the sense Hilda often uses the word, i.e., a willful ignoring. She can be said to have deliberately failed to..."understand the importance of life from that angle". When Hilda says..."she didn't agree there was such a thing as a relationship between the sexes that was important - and she didn't expect it to happen", she can be taken to be defining one side of a very important argument, a battle, in her life. It was a battle because features of her own experience of the complex of emotions and events which go into heterosexual intimacy - including sex - were in conflict with her mother's "very conventional" view of what should be: it was important, possibly because Hilda feared that the validity, worth, or reality of her own experience could be denied her, probably because questions of her autonomy, personal worth, and ability to form a loving relationship were
at issue, and certainly because a significant part of Hilda shared the view she identified in her mother.

In other words, these questions of the integrity of Hilda's experience and her own acceptability in relationship with a significant other were issues with a substantial history and questions she had come to apply to herself. Her emergence into adulthood, with the possibility of physical and emotional union with a male significant other — an event which, judging from the themes of deliverance and damnation in *Fire of Spring*, she had been wishing on herself for a number of years — made these questions especially salient. Doubts about the "goodness" of her emotions and questions of profound unacceptability in interpersonal attachment were presumeably brought to focus in her sexual impulses and concretized in the sex act — itself an unmentionable, and at best, illicit event. Hilda's recent infatuation with Diana Beale and the "Presbyterian Girls" cast additional doubt on her viability as a heterosexual being, and lent an element of urgency to her striving for "a protector in the male". All of which rendered a loss in the argument over what it meant for her to seek heterosexual intimacy a particularly devastating possibility, and some form of resolution or, at least, separation of her own view and the view she saw in her mother a vital developmental task.

To speak of the conflict Hilda experienced in approaching sexual intimacy as an argument with her mother is not, of course, to imply that the battle was fought at anything other than a symbolic level. If Hilda's memory is accurate, the exchange she describes over "woman's duty" is the closest the argument came, as it focused on sex, to verbal confrontation.

In Hilda's presentation of the interaction, she decisively cuts off her mother's pronouncement on sex. What might appear to be a strong
offensive move has, however, on closer examination, more the quality of a desperate defense. It is as if simply hearing her mother's statement of "woman's duty" could take away Hilda's freedom to learn from her own experience - "Why are you telling me this? I should think you would allow me to find this out some other way."

What one should take as Hilda's own view vis a vis what she identifies as her mother's position on this particular point of the argument, i.e., the woman's experience of sex, is thoroughly confusing. What she communicates to the interviewer, at the time of the interview, is her anger over being given an explanation of sex which she know to be distorted. But, if Hilda's description of what she "already had straight in her mind" differs from the picture she refused to let her mother give her, it would seem to be only on the detail of frequency, and with Hilda in the more extreme position - "I hoped it was no more than once a year". Although Hilda communicates contempt for her mother's somber introduction to the "one responsibility a wife has..." and the hollowness of her view "that all the sexual life was...really the motherhood of it", she describes seeing it herself as an..."obligation that we should not be called upon to perform, perhaps excepting in the case of wanting a child..."

The most ambiguous point follows immediately after the above statement:

[Interviewer: So it seemed something very unpleasant?]

"Totally. Painful, difficulty - very bad."

"And I agreed it probably was, from her - in fact my own experience was not too good up to that point, you know. And I believed it was probably one of the most sorrowful points about marriage."
The passage which preceded the interviewer's question had begun with Hilda stating that her mother should not have tried to tell her about sex..."because she didn't know anything about it herself; and I could see it." The content was an outline of the view of sex Hilda had developed independently of her mother. The interviewer's question - which he feels was clear - was meant to apply to this view. Hilda, however, apparently interprets the question as relating to her mother's view, states that she agreed with the negative view, ambiguously adds "from her", and introduces her own experience as a parenthetical comment.

The confusion of viewpoint is unusual in Hilda's generally well organized self presentation. While part of it may be attributed to confusion between the viewpoint of the mature interviewee and the adolescent Hilda, it suggests that the problem of permanently separating mother and daughter's viewpoint is one Hilda has had to leave in a state of partial resolution.

As to Hilda's own experience of sexual contact to this point, she makes it quite clear that her introduction to intercourse was distressing. She describes her one other physical involvement to this point, "an intense kissing thing" with the thirty year old student, as likewise confusing; she suggests that she felt some excitement at engaging in such a mildly illicit, adult behavior, and shock at the intrusiveness of the contact, and a general sense of being out of her depth. How these and the multiple other events involved in her nascent heterosexual relationships were incorporated into a personal definition of process, i.e., how she experienced herself in sexual relationship, is not something she directly describes - it would be very difficult to do so. However, a picture of several of the main elements of what sexual relationship meant to her can be
readily constructed.

The themes of *Fire of Spring*, already introduced to the reader, dramatize several of the main themes in Hilda's presentation of her actual experience. To review them briefly, the main dynamic of the story is a conflict between Alma's "breathless urge" to engage fully in a love relationship and the confusing pain she experiences, and destruction she observes in sexual relationship. This conflict is symbolically represented in her competing attractions to cousin Phillip in life and Christ in death. Her original devotion to Christ in his suffering progresses through a period of mixed longing and repulsion in their increasingly sexualized contact to an ultimate renouncement of her vision as a false creation. The problem of potential destruction attends much of the course of her romantic attachments. Her romance with Cousin Phillip "unfolds like a flower" but comes a hair's breath from disastrous scandal, before the two are finally separated by circumstances. A mature uncle sees a life long unrequited love, by unrecognized coincidence Alma's mother, reflected in Alma. Her experience of the kissing game at a teenager's party casts Alma into "a pit of hopeless darkness" and shame, and the story of Lizzie's degradation and near destruction is developed in counterpoint with Alma's new found passion for life.

Hilda gives a few fragments of experiences from this time which suggest a toned-down parallel to the ecstatic emotions in *Fire of Spring*. These center on Richard. She describes sitting with him at his death bed, occasionally being able to recapture the "glowing" vision of him as the highschool student she fell in love with. A reunion, several years ago, between Richard, Teressa, and Hilda reawakened a memory of her early attraction for Richard, as well as reminding her of the experience of
jealous possessiveness and the final separation from her close friend — and, perhaps, the attraction gained from seeing another woman value Richard — associated with her early romance:

[Interviewer: Do you think that was reciprocal, do you think Teressa was jealous of you?]

"I don't know, she used to like Richard a lot.

"Even recently, we, Richard and I, went to see her when she was in this country, and she put her arms around Richard and looked in his face, and she said, 'You always were such a handsome person'. And he leaned over her, and he kissed her on the forehead. And I though, 'E Gods, Richard!' You know, this is the way I [laughs] you know — see I'm very possesive in my way too."

[Interviewer: This would have been not too long ago?]

"No, a couple of years before his death." [omission]

[Interviewer: You still felt possessive of Richard, back then, a few years ago?]

"Well, you see, here is what would happen with Richard, in certain situations: I could see ourselves as these high school kids, you see. Because Teressa, Richard, and I all went to high school at the same time, went with the same group. So it kind of went, kind of resulted again; it was sort of reborn, that sort of a... high school frenzy... of... whatever it was, that first excited me with Richard.

"And when I first told her about Richard, she said, 'Oh, but he is so handsome — and then I've lost you'. And I said, 'well... not necessarily, because you'll find someone' — and that's when I first went to college. I was engaged to Richard, and I told her once.

"And as far as I knew, I didn't know about [Teressa's eventual husband]..."
at that time. He might have been in her life at that time. Because she had to go to...study art when she was fifteen, you see, she went to New York City at that early age.

[Interviewer: When her mother died?]

"Yes...and he might have been in her life and she not been - very secretive, because she could be very secretive. And she easily could have done that, just to be gracious and say, 'I will miss you so, now that you've found Richard'.

"I think she tried to inaudible...put on a little act. So that I wouldn't discover that she was involved with Carlos.

[Interviewer: So that was a strain on your relationship, men?]

"Yes, it was.

"It broke us, ah, broke us apart...Totally really, I mean our childhood was over then, really - excepting, as I say, when we would meet for brief moments. It seemed - even today, if she came up, I could go through the whole thing, we could; drink wine and laugh, like crazy and remember things that made us think that life was too interesting for words. We could go through that whole deal."

But these are difficult memories for Hilda to call up. Apart from the fragmentary glimpses of an adolescent "glow" recaptured at Richard's deathbed and the highschool "frenzy" recalled in the friends' reunion, Hilda does not present any details of emotional experience approximating the rapturous fascination or transported self awakening of Fire of Spring. It is apparent in the above excerpt that her experience of the implications of her love for Richard in relation to her other significant attachments, e.g. jealousy, separation, and shifting loyalty, is much more readily available to her than her memory of the love itself.
During an interview sequence in which Hilda is describing her relationship to her past experience, how she sees "all of life a part of you, right to the bitter end", she comments on this difficulty in remembering her first love of Richard:

- "I will say that I lost my memories of Richard, and all of that, when I went insane; that part of my life I lost - was lost.

- Interviewer: But you regained it?

"Some of it I began to regain, yah. But if I try to remember Richard, it's a very difficult thing. I sometimes can remember him in Carroll or Harry, or sometimes those photographs I have of him...make me remember him...a little.

"I told you, told you at the last time - looking at me while he was dying, I could remember him.

"...But the memory isn't exactly intimate. It isn't even as intimate as my relationship, say, with Teressa, and with my sisters, and with my mother - it's disconnected. And ah...It's as though I were intruding on his life.

- Interviewer: What do you mean by "disconnected"?

"Now and then I could try to remember my life with Richard and I could remember some of it, and then my mind would let it go. You know, it wouldn't go consecutively on in my thinking...as much of my memories do go right consecutively on, from one to the other - you know this."

The fact that Hilda is not intimate with her memories of falling in love with Richard may be, to a large extent, a reflection of her original experience of the relationship. In the following excerpt she describes her love for him during the first years of their marriage. She labels her
attachment "entirely mental" and identifies what was lacking in terms of a "real sexual response". But there is an altogether remote quality in the bond she briefly describes, i.e., a diffuse sense of lack of mutuality in the relationship which extends well beyond difficulty in sexual intercourse. She locates her pleasure in "observing him", "talking to", rather than with him, and, with the exception of sleep, being "near", rather than together. While this may be making much of small points of construction, the following is the most detailed description she presents of her love for Richard:

- "Anyway, when I lost my first child, father decided that that was no life for me. He came out and said to [Richard's father] Mr. Kroner, 'I don't want Hilda in this situation, and I think it would be better if she and Richard separated at this point'.

  "And I didn't want this because I really loved Richard - oh, it was entirely mental, I'm sure, my love for Richard - I loved to watch him and look at him, you know, see and [inaudible] - and be near him and sleeping with him, and so forth. But as far as the sexual life was concerned, I knew nothing about what sexual life was with Richard. He was not the type of person - in fact, I can't understand how anyone ever understood him in that way.

  "Everything he did, you know; when I watched him move or talk to him, I got a great deal of pleasure out of it. But I had no real sexual response to him - on the other hand, I did want this child, and was sorry I had lost it."

In terms of the darker themes of Fire of Spring, Hilda can draw several parallels between the book and her life experience, especially with respect
to the elements of courting destruction, group condemnation, and potential humiliation through sexual intimacy. The story of Lizzy is a particularly meaningful one to her. She uses it to express her understanding of the cruelty a group is capable of in handling a female member's transgression of sexual standards, sometimes which she is sensitive to as a basic human problem:

[Interviewer: What about the story of Lizzy (was it modeled on an actual situation)?]

"Oh, yes that happens, that happened... mmm hmn, that was quite, err, you know, that was really exciting, and interesting.

[Interviewer: It must have had quite an impact on you.]

"Yes it did.

"And then, you know [my brother] James really made me feel there was a lot of truth in it, you know, the fact that she could really be absorbed in this, ah - let me see, Lizzie was... ah, pregnant, wasn't she? They were really... ah, holding it against her? Yes.

[Interviewer: They wanted her to "renounce her sins".]

"Right... mmm hmn.

[Interviewer: Did it get as far as... in Fire of Spring they go to burn down her lover's house...?]

"No. I don't think so, but I think I went that far in the story.

[Interviewer: Was there that atmosphere of...]

"Yes, there was.

[Interviewer: - condemnation?]

"There was, actually... that much.

"You see these people were sort of - what do you call it? Ambivalent... Divided loyalties? They want to be Christians and yet they could be that
cruel to a person who...who's in their midst, you see.

"But a lot of that goes back to the old stories in the Bible, you know, of the scarlet, ah - Magdelin? Was she the one? And, ah...I think it would come to their minds in that way also. They weren't going to forgive her immediately; they'd take their time at it, you know...somewhat. She had to be persecuted a bit before they decided.

"I think you see that sort of thing in Christian groups a great deal, don't you?

[Interviewer mumbles equivocation]

"Perhaps this situation always attracted me in stories, you know...there was the Scarlet Letter, and ah - I could never quite figure out why women who really became whole-heartedly females, you know, passionate women, why they were destroyed. That always made me - I wondered about it. And it was a...ah...a tease to me; I thought, well it would be fun to be a passionate woman and be destroyed - I really think that occurred to me, quite often.

[Interviewer: There was something even in the destruction that was attractive to you?]

"Yes. Which is what I, what happened to me, say, up here [years later] - as near as I could come to being a passionate woman and being destroyed. It happened."

If the destruction Hilda refers to above, i.e. group persecution, condemnation, and ostracism, can be taken as the external damage associated in Fire of Spring with becoming "whole-heartedly female", shame is the inner harm. The harm in shame can be experienced as deeper and more central to the person. While the romantic destruction Hilda cites has the cleanliness...
of a well used literary theme, shame is a profoundly unclean experience, something more private. Whereas destruction through passion allows its object a certain tragic dignity, an ultimate rightness in daring passion, humiliation has no dignity; shame is an experience of being deeply wrong in one's own eyes. Whereas the destruction is visited on Lizzie, Alma's battle is with shame, with being..."dragged down into that pit of hopeless darkness". The kiss forced on her at her party's "post-office" game caused her to feel "utterly naked...unclean, never to be cleansed again...that kiss would come back to her again, flinging her into the pit of vileness and disgust" (p. 188).

Two similar events occurred in Hilda's adolescence, each a sort of initiation ritual. The first was a hazing she received in college which involved being paraded in a bathing suit in front of men's dormitories. She felt naked and ugly; the experience left her with a sense of humiliation. The second, described below, is what is known as a charivari, what Webster's defines as: "a noisy mock serenade to a newly married couple" - it was much more than this in Hilda's experience.

The group involvement in these two initiations, and in the "post office" game of Fire of Spring, forms an interesting contrast to the group she discusses in connection with "scarlet women". While both are situations in which the group intrudes on a member's intimacy, in the latter the intrusion is one which invokes higher meaning to punish the act of violating sexual rules and in the former an intrusion which debases the meaning of the act in order to delight in the violation. Lovers are pulled apart by one and pushed together by the other - perhaps an enactment of the ambivalence Hilda refers to. To the extent that this was Hilda's own ambivalence, debasement was the deeper intrusion, and being pushed toward
the object of her ambivalence the more dangerous process.

Hilda's description of the Charivari is taken from the interview in which she was presenting her interaction with her mother around "a wife's one responsibility". The excerpt below follows directly from her description of her mother's approach to "coping with the problem" of her dating. She introduces Richard's mother by way of contrast:

- "Now his mother was totally different. You see, she would invite all of us up there, a bunch of high school kids, maybe sixteen of us, on the farm. And they had six living rooms, three or four of them on the first floor. And she would divide them - she had a boarder system so they had lots of cots, and the girls would be in one living room, and the boys in another, you know, and she'd feed us, and we'd play out in the woods - oh boy it was great...

- Interviewer: In Fire of Spring, you have that party scene where there's a kissing game.

"Yes - oh and I disliked that terribly.

- Interviewer: That was a real incident?

"Yes, and then when I was first married to Richard, we were out there, they had the Chiravi? I think that's the name of it - skimmerton? Do you know that, what that means?

- Interviewer: No.

"Well in this part of the country it's a Dutch thing that they do...to married couples.

"And Mrs. Kroner told us - I don't know how many nights we had been married, but it was in the middle of the winter - and Mrs. Kroner said, 'Now Hilda, if I were you I wouldn't get totally undressed tonight'.

I said, 'why? She said, 'Well there's going to be a thing happen tonight.'
"What is it', I said.

'Well', she said, 'They call it a Skimmerton. I'm not supposed to tell you, but it would be much easier for you to get into your clothes suddenly when they come to haul you off'.

I said, 'Haul us off!?'

'Yes', she said, 'They're going to haul you off, over the fields, over to the church hall. And they're going to make sport of you.'

I said, 'well, why?'

'Well, because you're married' she said.

'What!?', I said.

"And I took great exception to this. Because I - it was something like being, ah, initiated, you see.

"And I knew none of these young people up there in that country, where Richard lived. I guess Richard had heard of Skimmertons. He more or less - he didn't get upset at all, you know, he was kind of red in the face and awkward - but boy, I took it very hard.

"Oh, they tried to make jokes that meant nothing to me; it didn't penetrate, you know. I didn't know enough about dirty jokes to understand them in any case.

--Interviewer: What did happen?--

"Well they got us out of bed...and pounded on the doors, and hauled us out of bed, and took us over to the church hall. And I don't know - they had food for us, but they kind of pushed us against other boys and other girls, you know, and talked about sex in such a way that was supposed to be very embarrassing. But I don't remember it, definitely I couldn't tell you.

--Interviewer: Other than that it was unpleasant.--

"It was kind of gross, yes - very repulsive."
When Hilda says, "Oh boy... I took it very hard", she shudders slightly. It is sad to see a cultural practice intrude so painfully in a member's development - it makes the cultural ambivalence Hilda alludes to seem sadistic in its inconsistency. The experience repelled, and threatened to humiliate Hilda; but, as an extreme circumstance which highlights the emotional experience possibly obscured in the less dramatic events of her sexual initiation, the charivari is helpful to us in appreciating the quality of her difficulty in establishing sexual relationships - what she means when she speaks of being "sexually repressed".

In Fire of Spring, the sequence initiated by the kiss forced on Alma is the climax of the conflict in her story, the turning point between her bond in suffering with the dead Christ and her competing affection for bright and life-filled cousin Phillip. As an idealization of her approach to a very similar developmental problem, the sequence is worth reviewing in detail.

The kiss is an attack, "...she saw his eyes enjoying the wickedness of his lips". What she does to defend herself from being "dragged down into that pit of hopeless darkness" is to apply her full mental force to "figuring out" the experience:

"...Let's see. Just let's see," she whispered savagely to the stars. And just as she nearly caught the truth and was going to see it clear and perfect before her that kiss would come back to her again, flinging her into the pit of wileness and disgust. Then she saw Christ next to her. "You see?" he asked, wagging a long finger at her, "Naughty, naughty, it's in us all." She suddenly hated this Christ. (She comes to a "miraculous vision of understanding")...deciding to make an act wicked, it is made so. That was all...

Christ was gone now not to return. She saw in this moment of clear understanding that he had been of the community's manufacture...And for her part, she was willing to forget him for awhile, his ill-conceived shadow had caused her so much unnecessary misery (pp. 187-189).
The next time Alma is kissed, in this case by Cousin Phillip, the experience is different on the order of night to day:

...She had been so worried about all the dark, tear-stained thinking that to be magically bared to the Sun's warning gave her new life...she could see now, she felt, what she had never been able to see before...

...Could she have analyzed the sudden rebirth of her heart's life after her decision against Christ, Alma would have heard it beat out its gratitude this way: I was blinded in Christ, but I am opened eyed with Phillip for my love...

[With Christ] I could see nothing else, surrounding him was sorrow and evil, mockery and tears!...But with Phillip to love I see life about him. Rather than look into his eyes I see through them, with my sight added to him...with Christ I was diseased and perishing. In Phillip I am becoming, ever becoming... Christ is death but Phillip is life.

...She had forgotten Jesus and her recent initiation into morbid pleasure. She was, in truth, too normal and wholesome to endure the nurturing which warped minds would have forced upon her.

...The bent stem of her life which might so easily have been twisted and broken stood upright again...She was growing up. (pp. 205-207).

From this point in the book, Alma's story is a relatively untroubled denouncement of growing attachment to Phillip. She comes to see herself, "through his eyes", as beautiful. They join in joyfully appreciating nature, constructing an imaginary home, and finally, in spending a night outdoors in platonic consumption of their affair, prior to a wistful separation. The concluding sentence of the book is:

"...And mamma would murmur looking at her two daughters and kissing them each on the foreheads, 'How you have grown'..."

The reader should by now appreciate the extent of what she terms "rectification" of her "images" involved in Hilda's writing. She applies her creative gifts to "straightening out in [her] mind" deeply problematic life events, much in the way Alma applies herself to "figuring out" the shame of her first kiss. No such resolution occurred in Hilda's life; the
"miraculous vision of understanding", which permitted the unfolding of Alma's intimacy with Phillip, remained inaccessible to Hilda.

Much of the intransigence of the difficulty Hilda experienced in sexual relationship lies in the notion of ambivalence she introduces. In Hilda's writing, Alma's conflicts center on distinctly separate events and objects. She has the near mystical bliss of her experience of Phillip's kiss to contrast with her repulsion and shame in the boy's forced kiss; she has a clear choice between suffering and death in bondage to her Christ and love and growth with Phillip. Because ambivalence, by definition, involves experiencing feelings of attraction and repulsion, need and danger, in one and the same object or relationship, it never affords such clarity of choice.

This rule of confusion, i.e., that sharply differentiated emotions can occur in one situation, can be seen as applying to even very basic levels of physical experience. If, for example, one is predisposed to experience a kiss as disgusting, there will be an element of disgust potential in any kiss. If there is a potential for experiencing sexual intercourse as a sadistic intrusion, there is an attack in any sex act. While hostile circumstances will considerably heighten the experience of repulsion and attack, no situation can be so benevolent as to be free of the potential.

The rule applies, as well, to one's experience of one's own body and self in sexual interaction. When you harbor doubts as to your basic acceptability, feelings of being deeply unclean or ugly, there is an element of shame in any nakedness; loving eyes can greatly reduce the element of humiliation, but - unlike Alma - one never sees entirely through another's eyes. If sex is seen as, in any way, an act of inflicting pain, one's own
sexual impulses will be felt as surrender to or wish for attack—potentially wicked impulses.

I introduce these physical elements of ambivalence in the abstract because they are difficult to concretize in describing one's own experience, and largely absent in Hilda's account. Nonetheless, they may have been significant elements of her first experience of sexual intimacy. Her childhood provides ample reason for believing they would be. The picture of sex which she had constructed—"through the cracks in her parents' door", as it were—was an especially exploitative and painful bond, devoid of "emotional interplay". She had not grown up experiencing the male partner as a supportive presence in sexual relationship. She had failed to see in her father "a protector in the male", and she understood her parents sex as ...

"an unfeeling gesture, his satisfaction and nobody else".

Perhaps most damagingly, Hilda had grown up with a sense of profound unworthiness. She had developed a deep fear of being "seen" by a significant other, and had come to see the possibility of being "known" to another as a potentially aggressive, destructive process—a threat which it is reasonable to see as inherent to the concrete physical act as well as to the abstract process. Hilda continues, into the present, to see it as a process carrying concealed, interpersonal weapons:

-"...[my mother] was a clever woman. [omission] She could make remarks which would really cut you. She could see you, you know; you'd be behaving in a certain way, and she could see you, and she would make a remark. And somehow it was the fact that she could see what I was doing, I suppose, that I was in someway thinking I was getting this over, well whatever it was I was saying or thinking. And her criticism was usually very acute, very apt...but it would throw me into an awful despondency."
"And later on I made a decision in my life that I was never going to be involved with those cutting remarks again, no matter who made them.

"And I 've done pretty well that way; I haven't...lived with them very long...Because after all we do want to be known don't we? Isn't it clever for someone to know us to that extent? You see?

[Interviewer: To the extent of...?]

"Of breaking us up a bit, mmm hmn...yes. Probably it's finding us. Probably there's something there that doesn't want to be found...you know."

Hilda's wish to be known was, of course, the other side of her ambivalence in sexual relationship. It must have been a powerful wish: fueled by the early and unmet needs for confirmation of self worth which had propelled her religious fervor; refined in the romantic literature she read; and intensified both by her increasingly acute awareness of what was lacking for her in her home and by the confusing nature of her first foray into sexualized relationship. Her yearning for a relationship such as Alma's with Phillip, through which..."the bent stern of her life...could stand upright again... growing up," was sufficiently intense for her to venture the risks described above. Unlike Alma, however, who had the luxury of dealing with the opposing sides of her experience of intimate relationship in separate objects, Hilda's had to focus in one.

But, this problem of the multiple needs and dangers of past interpersonal experience being brought to bear on one relationship is universal in entering sexual intimacy. While the dangers for Hilda were more prevalent than for most, her problems of ambivalence, as sketched above, are on a continuum with those which most people gradually outgrow or otherwise work around.
In order to understand what separates Hilda's experience of establishing intimacy from the more commonplace crises of intimacy it is necessary to develop the notion of ambivalence at greater depth.

Ambivalence is a term too often squandered on describing minor states of emotional uncertainty and acts of vacillation. As Hilda casually defines it, "divided loyalties" , it means something of far greater depth and, in a way, simplicity. The understanding this concept adds to her dilemma in intimacy is that, at this point in her life, Hilda was precluded from establishing any workable, vitally needed, intimacy unless she were to sever a bond of such basic significance that the separation would be experienced as a form of self destruction. Put more simply, Hilda could neither survive at home nor thrive outside it.

The implication of Hilda's mother in this situation must be apparent. It should be fully recognized that the bondage being referred to, her "loyalties", can be taken to be entirely a matter of inner experience, only tangentially related to any real or once living person. When Hilda's introduction to sexual relationship was described above as developing in the context of an argument with her mother, the fact that the issue was only once verbalized to her mother emphasizes the internal nature of this highly damaging figure in Hilda's interpersonal life. The figure could be visualized as a template Hilda applies to the experience of her self in relation to significant others; the argument a process of re-experiencing long unresolved and painful issues of identity, which increase in intensity with the level of intimacy in the relationship. Alternately, the figure could be seen as a separate part of Hilda, a companion to her entire experience of self with others, and one which becomes increasingly threatening and dictatorial with the level of depth of Hilda's engagement. In either case,
the argument is a highly lop-sided antagonism, one in which Hilda is subject to experiencing a level of vulnerability known only in the early years of development - and suggested in "my mother could take away my own concepts". Hilda is in interaction with an antagonist who can "know" her in such a way as to both dictate issues of self worth and to "wipe out" her own experience. In other words, she is constrained from "out growing" or otherwise leaving behind this malignant part of her self because it is in a position to redefine or negate the requisite growth experiences.

Here again, Hilda's writing, in its lucid presentation of the "rectification" of her experience, is helpful to us in understanding her life problems. Beauty, I Wonder was, in fact, a direct effort at "rectifying" this figure in her experience:

- "That whole book seemed to me a mystique of a myth. In fact, it came out so readily and entirely that I do not know that I did much thinking about it. It just seemed there to put out."

- "I wanted to have her in my mind, you know. This book clarifies her for me, for some reason. Even though it is all mixed up in characters, first it is myself, then it is herself...Nevertheless, I can remember her when I read it, and I really did it with that in mind. I was so afraid I might forget her, because I had such an antagonism for her, all my growing years...If I could not see her relatively as, belatedly as a good, interesting human, you know, I really would have slain her myself - let alone the fact she slew herself."

In Fire of Spring, the book directed at the problems of this period of approaching intimacy, Alma's infatuation with her vision of Christ gradually turns to a deep bond in suffering; she prepares to become a bride to the dead Christ. As this unwholesome bond deepens, part of her - her "common
sense" - sporadically rebels, but is unable to prevail until Christ's complicity in the degradation of her first kiss becomes clear through her "miraculous vision of understanding": "'you see?", he asked, wagging a long finger at her, 'Naughty, naughty, it's in us all'. She suddenly hated this Christ." Alma's understanding enables her to direct her full anger at the agent of her oppression. Through this act, she becomes free to: see her oppressor as external to herself - "she saw in this moment of clear understanding that he had been of the community's manufacture; "reject his dictates - deciding to make an act wicked, it is made so. That was all..."; and, ultimately, to renounce the figure - "his ill-conceived shadow had caused her so much unnecessary misery". This process then frees her to join Phillip in life and growth.

Apart from final resolution, the intrusion of Christ in Alma's development bears striking resemblance to the intrusion in Hilda's sexual experience represented by her mother's concept of a woman's "serious responsibility". Hilda resisted having her sex-life defined to her as a form of debasement and bondage in suffering; she felt outrage at not being "allowed" to experience it for herself. Hilda particularly rebelled against what she seemed to see as being pushed toward sex by her mother - "If this is woman's duty as you call it I hope that it happens no more than once a year". The apparent contradiction noted in this reaction, is somewhat clarified by seeing Hilda's perception of pressure from her mother as analogous to Christ's insinuated support of Alma's traumatic contact...
"wagging a long finger at her, 'Naughty, naughty, it's in us all'...That is, both figures appear to encourage sex so long as it remains a bond of suffering and shame with them - "one serious responsibility".

The powers of "understanding", and the freedom to renounce, which she could bestow on Alma were unavailable to Hilda herself. To appreciate the
distinction between Hilda and her "rectified" image, considered the two
closely related features which differentiate the pair: Alma had "a
protector in the male" to whom she could attach herself and the attachment
was totally free of ambivalence, that is, her love for Phillip did not
compromise any existing loyalties. This had not been the case in Hilda's
life, from the time of her first attempt at establishing a secure, loving
relationship outside of the family, i.e., her childhood pursuit of
redemption in Christ.

As a young girl, Hilda had been moved, through her distressing awareness
of the notion of predestination, to seek a bond with Christ. It may be
recalled that the meaning of this move on Hilda's part derived largely in
relationship to her mother:

"Mother said that 'Presbyterians believe in predestination...that long
before you were here the plan was laid. No matter what you do its all been
made. You cannot change it: That was a very serious remark to me...."

The seriousness lay in the fact that Hilda saw herself through her
mother's eyes as "...a continually unpleasant person in the home...I said,
'I don't know what to do about this, no matter what I do I am not good!"

Through a sad irony, Hilda's first attempt at redemption in a relation-
ship outside the home was itself predestined to failure because it was
primarily an effort at becoming good in her mother's eyes..."Do you suppose
if I joined the church?..." In reviewing Hilda's description of the strain
she experienced surrounding a symbolic act of union with Christ, being "saved",
otice the depth of her feeling that her seeking out the experience was an
act of betrayal:
"This was an attempt, a deliberate - a deceit in a way. I think it was a deceit even in Minnesota. I don't believe I actually - you know how you can make yourself faint or suffer if you decide to? I think I allowed myself an hysterical reaction to it...I sort of wanted it to be like that. I had a self despise about it."

In the absence of the confusion introduced by a concrete partner, it can be clearly seen how the experience of shame is something Hilda brings to significant relationship, i.e., that the act of finding a new significant other involves betraying a deep, inner loyalty. A second form of inner damage, which can be seen in the preceding description of Hilda's attempt at relationship in the abstract, is the loss of reality suggested in her labelling her seeking a "deceit" and her emotions "an hysterical reaction". This is the risk she explicitly describes in terms of her mother's ability to "see" her or "know" her behavior. This loss of reality can be regarded as an insidious danger in Hilda's experience of herself in intimacy, capable in its extreme form of levels of estrangement and inner disorientation which are difficult to imagine.

Taken together, these dangers of shame and disconfirmation must have been a powerful constraint against the separation required of Hilda in order to resolve the ambivalence which plagued her efforts at establishing intimacy. But, they are not sufficient to understand why she was unable to perform the act of renunciation which gave Alma such freedom. Loyalty, of the quality being described here, is not a bond maintained solely by threat; and Hilda had at least equally compelling loyalties to her own needs and experience.

In discussing the theme of destruction of the "scarlet woman", Hilda
operationalizes ambivalence in terms of Christians being "cruel to someone in their midst". In explanation of why she felt it necessary to direct Beauty, I Wonder toward "clarifying" her mother in her mind, Hilda says:

- "Nevertheless, I can remember her when I read it and I really did it with that in mind. I was so afraid I might forget her because I had such an antagonism for her, all my growing years. If I could not see her as relatively belatedly as a good, interesting human, you know, I really would have slain her.

[Interviewer: Slain her?]

"Because I had deliberately done this in my relationship with her as a youngster: not being understanding enough, not giving her credit for who she was or what she was enduring, and all of that.

"When you are cruel to anyone - and I was, I guess, cruel to her; and I guess she was to me, in her own peculiar way - you kill yourself and your people and your relationships, in that way. Cruelty is a thing which destroys, totally."

An essential step in Alma's separation of herself from her ill-conceived shadow of Christ came when she was able to direct her full anger toward him; her moment of clear hatred enabled her to "forget" her self-distorting bond in him. The prohibition against a similar resolution of the ambivalence in Hilda's life was simple but absolute: the renunciation would be experienced as a destruction of both her self and her significant interpersonal world. Hilda undoubtably had the experience of intense anger, possibly permitted considerable expression of it (which, as she presents it, is entirely a matter of withholding; e.g. "understanding", "credit for who she was", and affection) but the fact that she experienced herself as deeply in "the midst"
her "people" made unambiguous anger an emotion of unacceptable "cruelty", and separation an act of total - including self - "destruction".

When applied to Hilda and her family, her expression, "being in their midst", describes a depth of interdependence difficult to appreciate. Hilda and her mother, in particular, had passed through a stage when they were, in fact, one biological unit, followed by a long period in which Hilda's mother was her primary source of nurturance, support, and protection in what Hilda remembers as a basically unfriendly environment. As Hilda's dependence on her mother for sustenance became less concrete, she had moved into a long period in which her mother was preeminent in maintaining her connection to an interpersonal world, a time where she defined - for better or worse - both Hilda's "concept of her self" and the significance of her relationship to others. Despite - and, in fact, because of - the numerous ways in which this complex relationship fell short of meeting Hilda's needs, she was unable to perform the act of putting it behind her requisite to finding sustenance in a less constricting relationship. As Hilda describes the process in the interview passage concluding this section, she had experienced essential ingredients of nurturance as absent or withheld, to the extent of curtailing her becoming what she alternately terms, "a sustained factor", an "entity", "a full fledged person", and "finished as a person". At the point of her entry into sexual relationship, Hilda was in the paradoxical position of both needing this sense of being a separate "entity" in order to establish intimacy and of experiencing the anger involved in separating as a form of self destruction.

But, it should be kept in mind that the destruction Hilda refers to is more total than self destruction, it encompasses her "people and relationship". Her attachment with her people was not simply a matter of Hilda's dependence, i.e. it existed in a state of true interdependency. Just as her mother...
define Hilda's state as a person, Hilda was in a position to contribute powerfully to Mrs. Mendahl's identity as a mother. There is evidence that Mrs. Mendahl's sense of motherhood was especially important to her, e.g., the size of her family, her view of sexual relationship as entirely the motherhood of it, and the fact that she went insane and killed herself during the time of "the first family's" separations. Whatever part the actual woman, as distinct from Hilda's internal figure, played in fostering Hilda's binding loyalty can be seen as deriving from this need. The widespread fragility implicit in Hilda's notion of total destruction, indicates that her mother's need, and the insecurity upon which it is based, were deeply perceived by Hilda. Her loyalty was highly protective, with a strength of feeling best described as love, not to be discounted in understanding her failure at separation.

There is an element of compassionate awareness of her mother's inner condition present in much of Hilda's presentation of the relationship. Her explanation of having "slain" her mother implies, albeit in terms of her sense of its destructive power in being withheld, a deeply sympathetic inner connection with her mother - "Because I had deliberately done this in my relationship with her as a youngster: not being understanding enough, not giving her credit for who she was or what she was enduring, and all of that". You cannot, of course, refuse to give what you do not already in some way have. Moreover, Hilda's use of the word "cruelty" implies a strong identification with the object of her anger. While she may have "deliberately" failed to give her mother "credit", i.e., failed to express her sympathetic understanding, she is inaccurate in implying that she could willfully eliminate her inner perceptions. Her description of two such poignant, acute perceptions may be recalled from her account of childhood:
"We would aggravate her, suddenly decide to race around the table, catch each other by the hair... make one awful shambles of the dining room. She would say, 'children, children, children' and we would just go further and further into - and then she would get to laughing so hard you knew she was really weeping."

Hilda even has a sense of specialness, something which distinguishes her from her siblings, in her perception of her mother's hidden pain:

- "I have talked about [her] mother's oppression with my sister Verna, 'Mother worked awfully hard didn't she, Verna?' 'Why Hilda, can you imagine how hard she worked?' No despite all my jobs and the work I have done, I can't imagine working that hard for one family, one unit - and I said 'She got very little actual credit from father'. 'Oh I wouldn't say that, Verna said, 'You look at that entirely differently'.

- "[The others] see mother as a hard working, happy, willing, loving mother. And I see her as a hard working, distressed, anguished, infuriated woman."

Hilda's writing of Beauty, I Wonder was in several ways an act of compassion. She had recently lost the actual person, through insanity and, by the conclusion of her writing, suicide. As she describes it, the book was an effort at saving her... "I wanted to have her in my mind... I was so afraid I might forget her." Hilda directs her effort at "reconstructing my mother in my thinking" toward "clarifying" the "good, interesting person" whom she had been denied in her experience. Hilda accomplishes this "reconstruction" through the creation of a joint Hilda/mother character - from the perspective of one who is in sympathy with her need for separation,
a deeply misguided act. Hilda then accompanies her protagonist through the pains of: unrequited love for a narcissistic, neglectful mother; a traumatic incident in which the mother visciously crops her daughter's beautiful hair; exclusion from childhood groups; and the cold entrapment of a marriage devoid of emotional interplay.

Hilda is extremely generous in this process of living in to her mother's experience. In addition to sharing in the pain of her mother's experience, Hilda gives her own most cherished experiences: an early religious vision; a loving relationship with her childhood friend, Teressa; the lover which Hilda had at the time of the writing, and felt her mother had always deserved; and, by the conclusion of the book, Hilda's own life situation at the time of writing.

Although Hilda feels that the book did enable her to "remember" her mother in the way she had hoped for, it was only in her own insanity that this effort achieved full expression:

- "...And then I was so happy when I was insane and she came to me. There she was, the same good, interesting little mother she had been at her best. Day after day I was with her after she went insane."

The difficulties Hilda first experienced in approaching sexual intimacy extend well beyond this area and period of her life. They touch, at some level, her entire experience of self and others in interaction. For example, when Hilda says of marriage "...and this never happened to me", she is speaking quite figuratively -- she was actually married for much of her adult-life.

In concluding this section of Hilda's account, I would like to let Hilda present a description of the way in which the difficulties in intimate relationship expand, perhaps in a highly attenuated form, throughout her
her interpersonal experience, and extend into her present situation.

The following is the longest interview passage I have presented. It is taken from a day near the end of our summer of interviews, and - I hope at this point that I have not exhausted my superlatives on the reader - it is a truly remarkable piece of description. In it, Hilda summarizes much of what has been discussed in this section of her account; parts of it will be familiar from earlier sections. It opens with a description of her dating experience in college and Hilda's perception of herself in heterosexual relationship. She moves from there into describing an undercurrent of estrangement, an inner argument, in her current interpersonal experience and proceeds - with a certain amount of direction from the interview - to outline; her perceptions of herself in relation to the interviewer, her most recent heterosexual involvement, her sense of being "unfinished as a person", and, finally, her experience, both early and present, of nurturance in her family. Throughout this progression, Hilda makes of what has been presented above in abstract, and perhaps remote, terms eloquently concrete and immediate:

- Interviewer: Where we left off, you were talking about dating, when you were in California.

"Oh, in college, oh yes... there was Rob Breton and Dan - Dan Rawson wasn't a college man, he was an, um... an ex-military, who had developed TB, and he was sort of recuperating in California. But he and his friend, ah... John Montaigne, also... ah - dated my friend Blanche and me together. We had a foursome; we'd go four quite a bit.

"But as I say, I was very exact with him. I told him... told him I ah... really neck with him - that was the word in those days, I think.

"I gave myself all kinds of credit, you know, for sticking to guns on
these points. And I don't know, probably if I had allowed these men to make advances I...would have broken off with them in no time. Probably the fact that I held them away from me made it just that much of a tease, you know, that attract - I was attractive to them and they to me.

"Because who can say, just as the fact that I was so gone on Richard - wrote him a letter every day, and he wrote me a letter every day. And yet physically when we tried to...make a go of it, it didn't work out...

-Interviewer: ...did you ever, ah...well, how did you see yourself in terms of being attractive or not, in those days?

"I don't think I saw myself as being attractive. I thought - attractive - I've told people before this that I was very interested in loving someone. And I...I don't know that I expected anyone to love me...you see?

-Interviewer: Did you think that you were unattractive?

"...well, in those days, a woman who was attractive was almost classed with a scarlet woman, you see?

-Interviewer: umh ha

"And I had that prejudice in my thinking. But I thought that it was very important to like people: emotionally and, ah...intellectually, and...imaginatively, you know. To agree with him in most decisions that life gives us to make - and so on; these were things I thought were very important...To have a good time, I enjoyed having a good time with anyone - you know, what that person would choose to do, or say, or look at.

"A great deal as girls are when they're together. They choose almost the same subject matter to be interested in. This was very important to me.

-Interviewer: A sort of...idea of a soul mate?

"Kind of an alter-ego thing, yuh, sort of that kind of a thing.
Interviewer: But you, ah... didn't expect somebody to see that in you - or find that in you?

"I don't think I ever really thought of it in that way. I was really enjoying, just as when I enjoy when I eat ice cream or look at something that I like looking at. I wasn't thinking of being enjoyed... really. I don't think I ever did feel that way about it - I didn't exactly that of myself.

"... That's my mistake - Ruth says, 'that's your mistake... You should make up your mind that you're going to be enjoyed and you should learn it... become a person who is enjoyed, 'work at it'. - she still admonishes me that way.

"And I say to her, 'I can't see myself Ruth'. And she says, 'well, you could if you wanted to' - No, this is not true though. ... Just as the - pardon me?

Interviewer: Yah, could you say a bit more about that?

"Just as in the same way I can't even believe this is happening, see - I can't honestly believe I'm sitting here alive, talking to you. And I've never been able to accomplish that, readily.

Interviewer: How do you mean? In what way can't you believe it, in what way have you been - has it been hard to accomplish?

"I say well, ah... this is actually happening: I'm here; Cartney's there; this is here; I live here; that's Ruth, my daughter... 'Now', now I say to myself, 'now you're kidding'. 'No that's really true, that's really happening'.

Interviewer: As we sit here?

"Uhm ha, any time I stop, you know, to figure it out... I usually have to give up and just go on and - appreciating or looking or thinking or wondering what the next thought will be.
"I don't know how other people are located in that way?

-Interviewer: But when you step back and sort of look at the scene, you can step so far back that it doesn't seem real?

"Well, I, I have to - I have to insist to myself that it is real.

-Interviewer: Otherwise you an sort of feel...?

"Otherwise I... It doesn't come to me as real, 'it can't be - it can't be that I'm alive'... see? This is the way it seems to me all of the time, has always been that way.

-Interviewer: This, ah...?

"Do other people do that?

-Interviewer: That's awfully hard to say, because I'm not quite sure what - what you mean that you do. I think everybody gets distant, and looks at themselves as in some way or another unreal, at some point.?

"Yah - of course I think when you become very ill, very hungry, very tired, then you accept yourself because you need these things, see? Or if you're a very passionate person, you've been having a whole lot of sex and you're used to a certain amount every so often - it's these hungers, this id thing, you know... that has to be satisfied.

"I think the id is an easy thing to accept as real. It's this other stuff, which is, ah, what, you know, psychologically you call the ego and the superego and all that... continual consciousness, you know. I sometimes thought if I could only discover how to set down - continual consciousness, you know inaudible anywhere. That would be the greatest ever.

-Interviewer: Yuh, in suppressing the symptoms...?

"For the most part that's what these medications are anyway. But that isn't self-imposing your control. And I think another way I am an interesting person is because I more or less did insist, right?
Interviewer: That you could do it? Hmm... Is there anybody that you have felt enjoyed by - anybody, you've been aware of, particularly interested in you?

"An exciting person.

Interviewer: Interested in you. Not exciting you, but interested in you - I'm going back to Ruth's comment.

"What was that?

Interviewer: You having to... work at...

"Oh, to work at it.

Interviewer: -people enjoying you.

"Hmm.

"Well I had a few sort of, ah... meager attempts.

"There was a, ah... gentleman, an older gentleman in the Unitarian group, who was really something for the books - I don't know what he was. He admitted later that he was heterosexual, you know - allowed in meeting.

"But on the other hand very exact cultural response to paintings, to writing, to politics - he was a Catholic by the way, raised Catholic - and French. And I had - see he's a smart little character. And he, he went to one of the universities in California, but I believe it was a southern university - that's how we got to know one another.

"He used to come out here and sit and talk, much as you would imagine, in the old days the poets or the very cultured, ah... partially creative men, you know, would be. To me he never - I said, 'Actu - really? Were you really married?' 'Three times', he said. I said, 'yes, but you never fathered anyone, did you?' 'Many', he said, 'they all died' - and I felt like saying to him, Gene, you know, the thought that comes to me.

"But meanwhile, there was something that would click when I was with..."
him...a response. For instance he would phone, sometimes in the middle of the night - he was quite keen on me - I don't know why, but he liked to express himself? Probably. But I got a big charge out of what he said... And I got a big charge out of the fact that I thought he liked saying it to me. Now that's about as close as it comes.

"Finally, he played out, and decided he didn't like me a bit when he found out that Richard was dying in the hospital, that I was going there every day, that the boys were coming here to figure out the property. He held it against me, terribly.

[Interviewer: Why?]"I don't know?

"He told me he hadn't time for me anymore - and he has a beautiful house, I understand; I've never been in it. And he'd decided that I would be a hostess to one of his evenings, you know. But he gave it up. 'No', changed his mind.

"I'm glad he did. I would have to have been a hostess to one of his evenings there. He...he'd decide in precious voice 'Now I think, Hilda, I'm going to have just one, delightful...piece de resistance. Besides that a few well selected wines' - He'd go into this, you know, over the phone. You know, really, that girlish manner.

"But see? This is something that I hold against myself, that I attract that type. I had another effeminate boy, man, whatever...that enjoyed me at the mental hospital. And he was a sensitive fellow, worked there, very interested in archaeology, and, ah, finding semiprecious stones, and some of his stuff was exhibited in Britain and some here, and some there, you know - clever at those things. And those are things that attract me...in people.
And I am pleased when they – when I am attracted to them... when I mean when they are attracted by me, or whatever.

"I do. I do, I've always thought that.

"Who's to say?

"Or underdeveloped, undeveloped men. Immature men, you know, perhaps. I don't know.

"I don't know what a mature man – you know what a mature man is like in my vision? It's a man, you know, grown, full grown, strong enough to lift a boulder, big enough... to go through starvation and misery and get there anyway, you know... you know, a real male type... That type I don't think I could endure. And yet there is something very ma - admirable about him.

"How do you mean 'not endure'?

"Well, having him around, seeing the size of him, and the smell of him, and when he wanted to go to bed he'd say, 'Come now, here we are, here's the sheet, lie down and zip zap, you know, this kind of thing.

"Have you ever known anyone who fits that ideal?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe I've seen them on stage, or seen them about, you know, with other... females or something like that – and Ruth says I'm always saying male and female. Well, I do quite a bit, because at the hospital, you know, we had the male wards and the female wards. She thinks that's a terrible expression.

"male and female?"

"Mmn hm, using them.

"She sees me, you know, as very sort of, ah... unfinished as a person. And I know I am, I, I, I know I must be...
Interviewer: Where would you say you are 'unfinished as a person'? 

Well I think my experiences stopped at the wrong time. My experiences stopped when I was a child... because of our, ah... with old expression at home, and, ah... I didn't have enough education, ah... as James would say, "class-wise"; I wasn't investigating other classes of thinking people, I wasn't investigating the Jewish, the Negroes, the Catholics, as I should have— the Polish, the Italians. We all were a bit snobbish in those days, you see...

Mr. America was a person who had a certain salary and lived a certain life— and these other people were almost classed as 'the immigrant group'. And that was a very bad thing, for my education.

Interviewer: That you accepted that?

Well I think I was— I don't know if I accepted it, but I think I was affected by it.

And then when Aunt Eleanor said she was working among the poor, she was really working among who— those whom I class as the immigrants.

Then when Richard went out to Shumway, New Jersey with this job for father, these people were all Polish, I believe. And I thought, 'Oh, Polish', you know. And then when I was down in Yorktown, this baby died, I told you that I saw? And it was a Polish family, and I thought, 'Polish'.

Ruth says she can feel that in me very, very much. Well, I, I'd say to her now, 'What nationality is that person?'— Well Richard and I were alike in that way. I'd say to Richard, 'That's an Italian'. 'Oh, no,' he'd say, 'that person has Spanish in him.'

And I'd say, 'That person is Greek'.

'No', he'd say, 'That person has African in him.' He'd go on like this at great length.
"Now there is something wrong with people who do that... a lot. That should not be... There's not time for that kind of thing, you know.

"To live fully, you should be able to get up in the morning and look at what happens every day, and go out and meet a few people somehow - I don't know how. Go up and down the road and knock on houses - we know no one on this road, mind you.

[Interviewer]: Well these are GE people on this road.]

[Inaudible] all these 'GEers'.

'I have one old Presbyterian Sunday friend up the line here. She studied dietetics and her birthday falls on the same day as mine. And she comes back from California and we chew the fat with each other and read books together and...read our horoscope together and all that silly stuff.

'We have somewhat the same taste - but, in all events, a very... frugal experience, you see?

[Interviewer]: You said 'withheld expression at home', could you give me an example of that?

'Well, when you are born into a family, and mother and father have figured out how to spend just so much money and no more. And mother had her day figured out in hours and minutes; how these are to be spent in just this way and no other way...

"...That's one thing that, thank God, Ruth wasn't diligent in attaining. She's diligent in attaining totally the opposite results: if she feels like sleeping all day, she will; if she feels like cooking a meal, she will - and I give her credit for being that free a spirit, you know. [Laugh] I really do - although at the same time I believe that families should be related in factual events in order that the mind of the child develop as a sort of a sustained factor -- how else could a plant grow and how else can
a child become, you know.

[Interviewer: factual events? What do you mean by that?]"Well how can you become a fact if you aren't in some way nourished, you see, from all sides...And the way - because certain things are necessary to be a human. We aren't born free and clear, you know...of sustenance. You need it from so many directions.

"And meanwhile, mother, as I say, was frugal and withheld and all of that...and just enough to keep us barely alive and at the same time inquisitive... and with poor judgment here and there...and dissatisfied - I feel we were very dissatisfied...Although I can look back on it and be with my family, brothers and sisters, over the usual Thanksgiving dinner - same darned thing, I can hardly swallow it...

"But I go every Thanksgiving...

"And we can have an uproariously gay time, you know...remembering the old family. So there's something that binds us as people - But all of that isn't correct, I don't think.

[Interviewer: all of?]"All of that kind of, ah, reaction to the past, the fact that the past was like that, the fact that we get together over a thanksgiving meal every year, every year, you know.

"And meantime, isn't invited, isn't invited, James wouldn't have been invited, were he alive...at these meetings, you see...

[Interviewer: And I guess you were left out, during the years]"I was left out a long time, yes."
Hilda's College Experience, First Breakdown, and Wedding Engagement

This final section on Hilda's youth covers a period of significant transitions and disruptions, both for Hilda and within her surroundings. Over the course of the several years covered in this section, Hilda left her family to start college in California, became engaged to her future husband, Richard, suffered her first breakdown, and returned to New York to attend Columbia and live with her father and brother, James. During the same time, Hilda formally "lost" her close friend Teressa in the latter's elopement and marriage with Carlo - an event in which Hilda figured prominently, as a third party. Within her family, two closely related deaths occurred, her grandfather Hamilton's and her uncle Frank's suicide; and her brother James graduated from Yale to become the first, and apparently most promising candidate to realize the parents' ambitions for their children. Finally, at the level of the society, this was the period of the first world war.

World War I does not appear to have had a major impact on Hilda's life. The Kendahl's seem to have felt that it should not be something which involved their own family, and Hilda was caught up in more personal disruptions. The war did, however, leave several distinct impressions on Hilda's memory, especially of how it excited her brother James' imagination and enlisted his support.

Mention of any political or national occurrence is rare in Hilda's account of her past; she gives the impression that world affairs were experienced as quite peripheral to her life. The few events which do stand out in her memory are quite selective, and therefore, of interest. The first world war, and James's involvement with it, is the most prominent of these. The first of the two excerpts below is from an interview in which Hilda had been discussing the need for perspective on death and the risks of experiencing
another's death too "subjectively". The story she refers to is a paper on her outlook on death which she recently prepared for her Unitarian church group.

Interviewer: What about deaths outside your family?

"No, I don't think I, I just - in my little story there...about the way I attacked death in my thinking, on the outside of my life. I think I was able not to overly personalize it."

"But as I say in there when it came to my work on the mental wards, every now and then it would really get to me...or when I saw all the boys going down...the street, you know, in Khaki - that really felt terrible."

Interviewer: How so?

"Well I just felt they were - 'here's a sacrifice' - We used to see the street full of sheep, you know, and cows on their way down to slaughter house. And when the boys filled the streets with the Khaki uniforms, it just seemed like the same thing to me...

"Hilda is listing the publications her family had in the home. We had the Literary Digest, the ah, Atlantic Monthly...Times newspaper - New York Times - and the Sunday Times - and at one time I think we had a Herald also, two papers.

And, ah, mother used to read the Atlantic Monthly a good deal - and then the town paper, the Examiner - but, I would say to mother, 'well what do you think of the news' - you know, because I never really got down to reading the news - so we had to have news reports in school, and it always was a total bore to me - excepting when the big things happened like the Lusitania or the first world war or the Titanic or...or the shooting of - which president was it now? Way back in the beginning - was Garfield shot?"
Early in nineteen hundred?

[Interviewer: I'm not sure when he was.]

"I remember a big passock coming down the streets of Hudson, and we all went down to the ferry and saw an inaudible on the ferry, and father said, 'that's the president's body'. That's my memory now I might not have it right; I think it was brought down by railroad from somewhere - maybe I'm remembering it incorrectly.

"But I used to say to father, 'Well who is Teddy Roosevelt?' and he'd show me the picture of Teddy Roosevelt - big teeth, you know.

"'He's a rough rider,' he'd say.

"'I'd say, 'Well that - he's a president isn't he?'

"'Yes'.

"'Well, those two don't go together,' I'd say.

"'Oh yes!' he said, 'yes they do'.

"I said, 'Well what's good about him.' And I wouldn't get an answer, that penetrated.

"So then I'd ask him what was the difference between Republicans and Democrats.

"And he would say 'Democrats...don't mind how high taxes go. Republicans...do something about the tariff' - well now I don't know what it was, Republicans were supposed to control the tariff?

[The interviewer and Hilda speculate on which way it is.]

"And I don't think mother was for James or Harry going to war, you know. And James was determined to get into the service, and he got in even though

*1881, McKinley was assassinated in 1901, the year of her birth. She may be thinking of Harding, who died of natural causes in 1923 and whose body was transported from San Francisco to Washington.*
he was so young. And the way he did it was to go to ROTC at Yale, you know, and become a sort of, ah, leading lieutenant, or something, in the ROTC, and eventually got into service - they didn't get overseas."

"Now this comes through in the family, because none of my sisters' sons went into service...excepting Candice's one son, I believe. Could have been one of them who was in service in this country, but not overseas, not really a military man.

"And I had a different attitude [as a mother], I felt that my - it was better for my boys to go into service. The reason being that Richard was so against this...and I didn't trust his attitude toward the military or the wars...or, ah, issues of war or national issues in any way, shape, or manner. And I thought that while my sons are alive, and there was such a thing as a war, they should in some way get into it to figure it out. This was my attitude.

"My sisters didn't agree with me...and I think that was coming down from my mother's feeling about it.

-Interviewer: What was her feeling exactly?

"They thought it was a sacrifice - there was no reason to interfere with a boy's study, you know, to get into war, a boy's progress in the business world, and so on. I felt that if they didn't understand the situation that that - that they would be hampered later.

-Interviewer: So her objection to war wasn't moral or, ah -

"I don't think so.

-Interviewer: -the risks, so much as -

"It, no -

-Interviewer: -the interruption"

"The interruption of their lives as, ah, people who were progressing,
you know, intellectually, intelligently, business-wise, and so on - I felt that it really would - was an interruption necessary for their business attitude.

-Interviewer: Do you remember the first world war?

"Oh, yes.

-Interviewer: You would have been what, sixteen, seventeen?

"I was fourteen or so, I believe.

-Interviewer: How did it affect your family and you?

"Well, I didn't know what my family thought of it, but I told you, I think, that James was very intelligent about war. He was considered the bright light of Hudson. He read every newspaper - he saved every newspaper. Read all - everything that was being done in battle...and the entire thing, you know. And he had maps made of the world, and where all the armies were, where all the, ah, battles were. And he headed them with pins, you know. And it was considered the most remarkable thing, because he could actually decide what the next thing would be, and what would happen; he seemed able to foresee. And, ah, Miss Lawson, who was the smartest historian in town, lauded him to the skies, you know."

Hilda was more directly affected by the death and disruption within her extended family during this period. It may be recalled from earlier sections that the relationship between her parents and their respective families of origin had been a source of tension throughout Hilda's childhood. On her mother's side, the main area of conflict had been wealth, in particular, Hilda's grandfather Hamilton's sense of being slighted by his rich half-brother, Henry B. Simpson, and Hilda's mother's combined envy and gratitude over the beneficence of Henry B.'s wife, cousin Isabel. On Mr. Hendahl's
side, the strain centered on her father's separation from his background, the perceived rejection by her parents of the social status, values, and emotional ties of Mr. Mendahl's mid-western farming family. In both cases, a succession of deaths among the principals served to highlight, and perhaps finalize, these conflicts.

The following excerpt comes from the end of Hilda's description of her father's heated argument with her grandfather over religious values. This passage is another example of Hilda's sympathetic observation of James' interaction with events. Hilda had just finished describing her father ceremoniously taking the whole family to the jeweler's to buy his father an expensive watch in reparation. She quotes her grandfather as confiding in her:

- "...And my grandfather leaned over and he said to me, 'Hilda, I know why Jacob did this.' And I thought to myself yes, that I know too. A decision - 'well that isn't going to make up for the fact that he...decided to disagree with me and my thinking'. And I said, 'Well if it were only a disagreement, I wouldn't mind it so much'. I said something like that like - I had a few wise things in my head at that time.

[Interviewer: You and your grandfather were confidantes?]

"Oh, I was very, very fond of him. I had all the respect in the world for those two people. They were great.

[Interviewer: Despite your mother's attitude toward them?]

"Augh! My mother's attitude was so silly. She was so childish, you know, so wrong. Very, very wrong.

[Interviewer: How old were you then?]

"Well, I can't remember if this was before or after our trip to Minnesota, you see. But I think it was after - because I think it was after
because I think it was after this, that it wasn't too long after this that grandpa and grandma both passed away within five days of each other... Yah...
They were very devoted you know.

Interviewer: Was that hard on your father, the deaths?

"Well, I'm sure it was, I'm sure it was - especially because of that argument, you know.

"And mother and father went out to Grandpa's funeral... he was chopping wood and he fell dead of a heart attack. Aunt Jen, good old Aunt Jen - you know, in the story Fire of Spring - got him all laid away, and they attended the funeral... and then they came back - and they weren't back one day, I think, but that Grandma - that they heard word that grandma had had a stroke and that she passed away. And they just didn't feel that they could afford another trip... But Aunt Jen wrote a very long letter about the beautiful funeral that grandma... And I thought, thank God they went so close together... life wouldn't have been easy for either alone, without each other...

"And my grandfather and grandmother thought that James was the greatest boy on earth. Right to the... very end; they always did. They would have Jim out there summer after summer. Because grandpa wanted to tell Jim every single thing about his experience in the Civil War. And then he gave Jim his letters, you know, that he had written to my grandmother? And her letters to him, while he was in that four year trek, in the war. And... when Jim died, and no one in the family would agree that Jim was worth two cents, so I said, 'Well, I would like those letters'. And they said, 'Well you can have them.' You know, I said, 'Well'.

"They were beautiful letters, I've read them all several times - and Jim read them all several times - and Jim copied them all by hand when he was quite young."
The death of Hilda's grandfather Hamilton was also, and more traumatically associated with a second death, that of Hilda's uncle Frank.

Neither John Hamilton, her mother's father, nor Uncle Frank, his only son, were particularly familiar to Hilda; but both stand out as strikingly odd figures in her memory. In the following passages, excerpted from separate interviews, Hilda describes the tension in her mother's family around money and social status, her grandfather Hamilton's death, and its mysterious, but potentially disastrous, effect on his children Frank and Emily:

- Interviewer: John (Hamilton) in *Beauty, I Wonder* has a very mean spirit, a very small, narrow...spirit (was your grandfather similar?)

Well his feelings were so badly hurt by his half brother, you see. Because he...all his dreams were shattered, and I don't think he really...enjoyed his family at all.

"I, I later knew about grandfather John; he used to come to our house frequently after, ah, he was a bachelor - I mean a widower, living in that house in Philadelphia. And he had a housekeeper, a miss - Mrs.? or miss Swift, a tall white haired woman, very handsome. And she took care of his linen, and his suits, and trimmed his mustache, no doubt, and his eyebrows and...Mother said, 'Now I' - Grandpa Hamilton would send us each a dollar for Christmas; that was what we got from his. 'Now', she said, 'When Grandpa Hamilton visits, you are not to comment...any of you...in any way. Be polite, and do not comment, and do not speak unless spoken to.'

"So he did - he was a very silent, taciturn gentleman, you know. He sat at table, always well dressed - impeccable, you know - and put salt and pepper on everything - this was the thing mother was afraid we might comment on - he put it in his tea, he put it on his cereal...he put on his bread - he put it on everything that he ate; salt and pepper. And you know
we couldn't help but have our eyes wobble at this... Funny?

-Interviewer: So he was a sort of eccentric person?

"In a way, perhaps - and I don't ever remember a single remark, I don't remember a single thing he ever said - Even though we visited in his home in Philadelphia. Mrs. Swift was the one who brought us in, and showed us the garden, showed us the house, showed us his bedroom, what a neat housekeeper she was, and so on - served us something to eat in the kitchen. And I don't remember my grandfather saying a word to us.

"He died suddenly... while he was shaving one day. Fell dead of apoplexy in the bathtub... And when they tried to remove his body, he was so enormous that they had to out of the [inaudible] window - heavy man.

-Interviewer: Do you remember how old you were when he died?

"...Well I know how old I was, that was almost within the same age of seventeen. Between seven - I lost three grandparents right along in there.

-Interviewer: That must have been a hard time for your family?

"I don't - mother and father - father did - was unhappy when his parents went. And mother was sad that Grandpa and Grandma Mendahl died, but I didn't notice any sorrow, at all, about Grandpa Hamilton going.

"And, ah, there was just this discussion of the will, you know. And mother was supposed to be left the house, I think. Whether she was or not I don't know."

- "...And so as soon as Uncle Frank had gone back to the sanitarium with Aunt Freda (his wife), I pinned mother down, I said, 'Now you're going to tell me why Uncle Frank is crying.' And she said [somber voice], "Well, Hilda, it's too bad that Frank is dishonest about my father's will, and he took more than his share. And he's guilty - feeling guilty - and
he's conscience striken.'

"Well I said, 'Why can't he give it back to you?!', you know [Hilda laughs].

'Oh no', she said, 'You don't understand.'

[Interviewer: How old were you then?]

"Let's see, I must have been almost ready for college. I think it was that summer...I don't know if it was while he was still at the sanitarium...well anyway...And the amusing thing is he shot himself on August the tenth. Well maybe it was [inaudible], because mother committed suicide on August the tenth also - now don't you think that is odd?

[omission]

[Interviewer: What do you make of (the coincidence)?]

"Maybe it had no significance at all...but mother might have thought about that much more than she ever told us, felt badly about it.

[omission]

[Interviewer: Do you remember your uncle's death having (inaudible)?]

"On whom?

[Interviewer: On your mother.]

"Well...You know, I think mother sort of laughed when she told about him...as I remember. [inaudible]

[Interviewer: How did you feel about him?]

"Well he was a very odd person; he was not intellectual like mother, at all - learning didn't mean much to him. Uncle Frank was always a problem, he hung around the street corners of Philadelphia. Uncle Henry [B. Simpson] would have given him a job, but he didn't want to work - I don't know what kind of work he finally did take up. But he married somewhat - you know in those days people took an attitude toward, ah...status in society quite
seriously - he didn't marry within his own status, so to speak. He married a little, ah...German/Dutch person, whose English wasn't very well delivered, and she had a sort of /inaudible/...a good little housekeeper, but she was unimaginative. And mother and Aunt Eleanor.../inaudible/ she could judge people, and they both felt that, 'There, you see what Frank did, he married that little snit.' And they held him in their disfavor.

"That's another thing that affected my mother, you know the wealth of Uncle Henry B. Simpson...he was a millionaire...And there was envy there, terrible covetousness...that amount of money, in the family, which none of us would ever have - why should we? After all, I mean Uncle Henry had /developed his product/. Why should mother have expected it?"

Elsewhere, Hilda offers further speculation on her mother's reaction to her brother Frank's suicide:

"He shot himself on the same date she killed herself only seven years ahead - before, previously. He shot himself because the money was not divided equally, he took more than his share of my grandfather's estate. So anyway, it -

[Interviewer: Do you think there was a connection?]
"I've always thought so. I've always thought so..."

[Interviewer: Were they close?]
"Well, I think mother always felt badly about both her sister and her brother, because I believe she felt they weren't as successful as they should have been, and she might have held it against herself that they weren't - you know, I think the brighter people in the family sometimes feel badly when there are those who are...kind of a...the poorer result,
you know. I think she thought of them as not as good as she...mentally, physically, educationally, and so forth. She was able to go on...with family and property - not her own, but still, a semblance of property - we never owned the house in Hudson, my father would not buy a house.

-Interviewer: Why was that?

"We didn't want to be bound to anything; he didn't want to be bound to material stuff. If necessary, he would like to pick up and go...any moment... yah."

While the world and her extended family were undergoing significant transition, the most important change for Hilda during this period was her own picking up and going, i.e., her leaving home for college. Although Hilda does not introduce the family's values on educational achievement in the context of her college years, it is reasonable to expect that concern for achievement as well as being conscious of the financial burden, introduced themselves in her experience of college career. This, her first significant movement out into the world, was also her first opportunity for independently testing her ability to function successfully in it; presumably, the standards she applied and the concerns she brought to the task were extensively those supplied by her home.

The high value the Mendahl's placed on educational achievement has already been discussed, as well as the fact that this is one of Hilda's own fundamental values - "I give us a lot of credit for believing an education is more important than most anything else; even if it's done poorly it's important...the all important effect." Here it is sufficient simply to point out that, as Hilda saw them, the standards for measuring effectiveness were very high and the consequences for falling short rather severe:
...Just as we were always very grade conscious in school; unless we
received a grade of ninety or over, we were not considered...aw...hardly
worth the family group, you know. We were suppose to get high grades -
not that we particularly cared for school, you see, but that was expected.
"In my family the one who was tops got the credit..."

Hilda's awareness of the financial burden involved in sending a child to
college, something which she once refers to as her father's "very serious"
responsibility, is not to be ignored in considering the external sources of
stress which weighed on her experience of college. This too is something
which she has come to take very seriously in her adult life; over the course
of her working years at the mental hospital, she managed to save $25,000, the
amount she figured her father would have spent on educating each child, for
her own three children - another of the compact symmetries of her life
mentioned in the introduction.

One other factor - it is not clear whether this was more of a stress or
a support - in Hilda's experience of college was her engagement to Richard,
just prior to her leaving home. She says very little about this decision;
it may not have been formal at this point. Apart from "two or three dates"
and a "goodbye kiss", their involvement had been more a matter of romantic
feelings than intimate contact up to this time. It seems likely that part
of her motivation for the last minute engagement was to have a further
investment of her feelings at home. In any case, the feelings were strong
enough to sustain the daily correspondence Hilda described in the previous
section.

Although going to college was very important to Hilda, the choice of
institution and the field of study were left up to James and Mr. Hendahl,
respectively. James chose Berkeley, because "he decided it was cheap and wanted me to go to a radical school". Her father decided that she would become a dietician, for reasons that were never entirely clear to Hilda:

[Interviewer: (We had been talking about Hilda’s father’s absence)]

Did you feel a lack of protection from him - what I am asking is was he somebody who would come through in a time of crisis or...ah, was he somebody who really couldn’t be counted on?

"Well, I don’t think we very often presented him with our crises. But if there was something very serious, like when I asked him if I could - if he would agree to my leaving Richard, he was very good...When I asked him if I might go to college out in California because Jim decided that was a good school to go to, he said, 'Alright' - but he wanted to decide what courses I would take; he decided I was to be a dietician - which Heaven Forbid, I didn’t care to be - but in as much as he was willing to pay my way, I said, 'okay, I’ll take the courses'.

"He said, 'You know, you love to cook. You can be a dietician'.

[Interviewer: Why did he pick dietician when you didn’t want to do it?]

"You’ve got me...I guess he thought I was smart enough to cope with the science - and matter of fact, I did pass all the science courses - But you know you have nothing but science, all of the ‘ologies that there are, almost. And you never see a cookbook...until you’ve been there five or six years, I guess, before you really get into menus and cooking - I’m just as glad I didn’t.

"I filled up all of my terms with - all the, ah...English I could, you know, and poetry - and decided I liked writing...I enjoyed that; that’s what I really wanted, the most...I don’t really know what I would have become, had I become anything...I wasn’t serious about it, I guess."
There is counter evidence, however, that Hilda did take at least her writing seriously, and that it was taken seriously by someone else, a "Dr. Porter from Hills College", who encouraged her to become a writer. And another part of her college experience, dormitory life, had a very serious impact on Hilda.

Hilda's experience of hazing, her sense of humiliation at being paraded, clad in a bathing suit, past men's fraternities, has already been mentioned. What she saw herself being initiated to was, equally distressing to her; she found a "very full lesbian expression" at college and feared that she might be pulled into it:

- "Then when I was in college, of course, there were a great many girls, it just was taken as a matter of course...that you found a mate, slept with a mate, and went ahead having really a sexual experience with a mate in college - which I did not do; I was dead set against it then. And I guess that I told her - the doctor, I told the doctor this was a problem for me, about having had an experience with Diana - a mental, emotional experience with Diana - And I was terribly afraid that these women in college were going to insist - in fact, I woke up once or twice with some of them more or less attacking me, you know, and 'God! I can't do this and study', you know. And I was engaged to Richard anyway. And that's when Dr. Robin said to me, 'How much have you had to do with men? You should really begin having relations with men, in some way' - And I thought that was a very peculiar, ah...diagnosis. But still I should have - probably she was very right, you see. She was ahead of herself, in that day.

"But she told me that my nervous breakdown had to do with this, the fact that I had not had relations with men. And I said, 'How do you go about that?' You know...because I could see no way of going about that - it didn't come to my mind how to go about it, you see."
Each of the several times Hilda brings up what she has called her "serious tailspin of a nervous breakdown in college", she mentions Dr. Robin's and her colleagues' interpretation of the experience as related to a problem in "sexual expression". She is conscientious in presenting their understanding, but is equally conscientious in crediting it to them; she never quite adopts it as her own. Dr. Robin's advice on sexual relations with men - today at least, a rather badly worn prescription - is particularly remote to her.

She offers very little elaboration on the experience itself. It was an intense attack of "screaming", set off by her initiation experience, occurring first in the college library, then, following several weeks treatment in Dr. Robin's home, reoccurring on entering a large lecture hall. Hilda finished out the year and returned home. Apart from this sequence, which was reconstructed over the course of several interviews, the experience is relatively unconnected with any other internal or external events during the several weeks bracketed by her screaming attacks. This is in marked contrast with her later psychotic breaks, which have an elaborately developed internal context. Her college screaming attacks are just there, but very dramatically there.

In the excerpt below, she offers a striking description of the experience. This, by far her most detailed mention of the experience, was brought up in comparison with a similar screaming attack she experienced shortly after her mother's death:

[Interviewer: How long did it last?]

"The screaming? Well that lasted a long time. [My lover] Phillip came over and held me down on the bed, you know, and I thrashed around and screamed quite a while. I don't know."
"In college when it happened, it lasted about, oh...over an hour. That was when I was initiated, the first time I screamed, and then the next day I went into the library [inaudible]. I was telling a very close friend of mine about the initiation...and I suddenly had this smothering sensation again - they always started with that horrible smothering sensation. And I threw myself back - right there in the library, you know, in the university and I began to scream, you know, then. And I was carried out, and, ah...screamed and screamed - and my eyes were shut during this; I was able to open my eyes.

[Interviewer: Do you remember what you thought about, what would be going through your mind?]

"...Just that I wanted to - I wanted to empty everything I had in me. I just wanted to open my eyes and scream...until all of me was gone... - And I almost felt as if that were happening.

[Interviewer: as if...?]

"As if all of me, my personality, my self, were gone - were forgotten."

Hilda's college breakdown brought with it her introduction to psychiatric treatment. She was taken in by Dr. Robin and spent several weeks in her home, under what appears to be a regimen of silence and solitaire. Although Hilda is grateful for the doctor's concern and generosity, she continues to be mystified by the treatment. The breakdown was also Hilda's first direct experience of her family's pattern of responding to mental disorder with in one of its members. Although the reasons for their responses are, in some respects, equally mysterious to Hilda, the response itself was very clear and painfully felt: "they would turn their backs on you."

The following excerpt is from an interview in which we were going through the manuscript on her psychotic experience and hospitalization. In it Hilda
describes both the doctor's and her family's approach to treating her first breakdown:

[Interviewer:] When you say, uh...as a sort of aside, you say about your family, that they really had no sense of what had happened to you: "outside of the fact that the family had a history of mental illness, it, instead of facilitating their awareness, blocked their conception of it. It had become a reversal of the 'family unit', family conformity. A naughtiness not to be easily forgiven..." What did you mean by "a reversal of the 'family unit'...?"

"...Several times in our lives we had nervous breakdowns - Is that what you wanted me to speak of?

[Interviewer:] Yuh.

"And, ah...the first one I believe I, augh, experienced when I was in college...And, ah, I told you - mng - I would - mng, so...be awake, but still in a faint, with my eyes shut, and screaming? ...This happened in college, two or three times during the nervous breakdown. And when I asked my father for, augh - money to pay the doctor, who had been an awfully good doctor in this case. She took me to her home -

[Interviewer:] the woman?

"Yes, Dr. Anne Robin. And, ah...allowed me not to speak for the entire visit. I had to bathe, and dress and appear at meals. She would order me about setting the table. She gave me a, ah...a job of learning to play solitaire - I had never played cards at all...until now - I was to occupy myself in this continually. Which I did. Everything she told me to I did - it was almost as though I had been hypnotized by her. And so -

[Interviewer:] was that helpful?

"Well, I can't say, one way or the other - I just know that she said I was to receive no telephone calls, I was not to attempt telephoning back to
the house, where I lived, and finally after two or three weeks, she said that, ah, 'Now today you can get in your college clothes and walk over to the campus, and then go to the class that you would be attending at this hour.'

"And I knew that it would take about a half hour walk over to Berkeley, to the University, and the class was chemistry. And it was an enormous room, with thousands in it. And I remembered my seat - I surprised myself in that, this way, that I had found my seat, thought of my seat - But, when I saw these thousands of students, I began screaming again. But instead of fainting or falling, I ran to the infirmary and beat on the door - or the windows, were shut at the moment - and said that I had to come in I was having a nervous breakdown. And I was put to bed there.

"And I don't know how many weeks of...college I missed, but quite a few in that...bit - My father was totally uninterested in it; he said that it was a deliberate attempt at calling attention to myself, and he refused to pay the bill - Well he sent twenty five dollars, I think, to Dr. Anne Robin.

-Interviewer: Which wasn't the whole bill?

"I don't know what it was - she said, 'I won't charge you because your one of my" - she had belonged to the same house that I did. You see, she was an alumnus of that house - but she said 'I have a children's...unit' - I think it was an orphanage, some such - 'in Berkeley, and if you would like to - your father and you together can contribute to that.' So I felt very ashamed that he only sent her a twenty five dollar check, you see.

-Interviewer: And he was really very unsympathetic?

"In every case. Other members of the family had, ah...breakdowns. My sister Isabel had one in college also. And he seemed to feel it was a deliberate as I said, 'naughtiness'.

-Interviewer: umh humh. What do you mean by "a reversal of the family unit?"
"...Well, I suppose I meant - I can't exactly remember what I was thinking when I wrote that - but I have an idea I meant that instead of... becoming closer because of any problem, this separated us... very much, a problem of insanity - made us strangers instead of, ah... closer - some families, perhaps, would agree that you could be close. - I'm not certain of that now, since all of my work with mental illness, whether it's possible or not. I think it's perhaps a very difficult thing... to accept an insane person - or one who's been insane - in the same way as you would a person who has not, in the family unit.

[Interviewer: In your family, in general, does adversity tend to bring you closer or ah, apart?]

"No, I think it separated us. Because when we had hardships of any variety, that is, when I left Richard, or when my sister had a difficult time, ah, without her husband supporting her, egh... they would turn their backs on this, you see, as though you were not behaving as you should, you know, you weren't living up to what was expected of you, having these things occur... Just as we always were very grade conscious in school..."

The interviewer was quite taken with this idea of "reversal of the family unit". In the following passage, Hilda's response to the same question during another day's interview, she develops a more detailed picture of the family reaction to mental disorder. She makes it clear that the family, especially her father, "insisted" on viewing insanity as an act of defiance, a willful nonconformity with the values, expectations, and even the bonds of kinship which held the family together as a "unit". As Hilda presents it, the family response ranged from punishing the act as a form of moral delinquency, equivalent, in Isabel's case, to being an unwanted mother, to viewing the trans-
gression as so unacceptable that it brought on disownment. With Hilda, at this point in her life, only the experience was disowned - "you should have enough of me in you that it doesn't have to happen..."; whereas with James - whose apparent transgression was simply a failure to embrace the right career, values, and people - defiant nonconformity led to becoming a persona non grata. James, it should be remembered, was very dear to Hilda, the "guiding light" of her youth. His disownment, a gradual and apparently mutual process, must have been especially painful to her; his loss from the family is one of her few life regrets.

The tape of this interview is possessed with a particularly loud distortion and, unfortunately, a number of points where Hilda's voice drops are lost. The interviewer's question was the same as that opening the preceding excerpt."

"...Any peculiar mental.../disclosure? that occurred in life, it was a mental dismeano..."

[Interviewer asks an inaudible question.]

"The fact that I had a nervous breakdown in college. Father insisted I hadn't one...And when Isabel had a nervous breakdown in college, he was very unremitting about it."

[Interviewer: How was he unremitting?]

"Well they put her in a very difficult spot. She was majoring in music at Swarthmore, and she dropped out of school, and ah...she was put in a girls' school on Long Island, a reform school, unwed mothers - tough people. They were tough in those days because the world was so down on them, you know."

[Interviewer: Was she an unwed mother?]

"Who, Isabel? No, she was just a, ah, person who had majored in music."

[Interviewer: Why did they send her there?]
"They decided that - to give her a job there, teaching music. She was
supposed to teach singing and [inaudible] and the whole works. And she was
just a tiny - I am a small woman, but she's a much smaller woman - These
great big...creatures were there, and she did get them under control, she
got them to do some [inaudible]. But not only that, she was supposed to, ah...
never do any menial work herself, they were supposed to do it. She was to
give them orders. She had to give them orders to stoke the furnace...and to
empty the ashes...and to go out and shovel snow, all this, cleaning and so on.
And they would get her out on the [inaudible] and ah...step on her.

"So at this time I was married to Richard, we had our first boy, Carroll...
and Isabel would spend weekends with us - Because mother and one of Isabel's
old highschool, ah...teachers had decided that Isabel would go to this place
and work her 'naughtiness' out of her, you know, mental [inaudible] - And
Isabel was so frightened and so upset and I said to Richard, 'No more!
We'll keep her here'. [Hilda goes on to describe finding Isabel a job as a
nurse at a nearby hospital.]

[Interviewer: That seems quite cruel of your family to do to her.]

"Well this is the way - This is their 'discipline', you know.

[Interviewer: It's almost as if they wanted to force insanity out of
her.]

"Right, right. Make them conform; if you conform it won't happen;
something like that... 'It's your own lack of...ah, discipline that's
making it happen'.

[Interviewer: Did you accept that view?]

"Oh, no! I thought father was ridiculous. And, ah, he had read Freud,
and he thought Freud was nonsense. And I said, 'Well, maybe he is nonsense,
but on the other hand there is such a thing as nervous...disorders'. And ah,
Father said, 'Not on my side of the family!...only on your mother's...
You should have enough of me in you that it doesn't have to happen'. He
was quite serious that way.

-Interviewer is inaudible.

"No mental illness on his side of the family? No..."

"Well in those days parents were oddballs, anyway. [Hilda laughs]
...He was probably scared out of his wits about mental illness, you know.

-Interviewer: How about the others, did they accept his view?"

"I don't know, it seemed to me that Marion and Verna believed that father's
word was God's word. And mother's word was God's word. It seemed to me
that they were so obedient they were absurd. And Harry was a favorite son,
of mother, so he would never...argue against mother - or father either. Those
three were closely...knit with their parents, somehow.

-Interviewer: What about James?"

"James, you know, [inaudible] and when he left Yale [two or three inaudible
sentences about James at Yale and joining the military in World War I] - But
because everything failed, all the way along the line - he met a girl from
New Haven and [several words inaudible] he wanted very much to have her for his
wife - and when mother knew she was an Irish Catholic, and father, it was
'thumbs down!', you know. And this was the first time that Jim had really
had a girl, you know, and this ruined his attitude toward mother and father.
So he decided to rebel - at that age - he wasn't too old, really. He was only
about, in his early twenties...But, ah, he decided to get from father all he
could. He demanded a thirty dollar a week allowance - and father gave it
to him! - which was quite a bit, you know, considering there were all the
others still to go.

-Interviewer: He was the one most favored wasn't he?"
"Up to a point. I don't know, I guess that they didn't like his choice of girls, or something - something went awry in there.

[Interviewer: only up to a certain age then?]

"Yes...mnh, mnh.

[Inaudible exchange between interviewer and Hilda.]

"But he failed father, because I think father expected him to get out of college and land a great big job, you know...way up there in engineering or... I don't know what they [inaudible].

"And then he left, finally, and he went into art, to be an artist...and bummed his way around, and never had a job again [inaudible sentence] - and his friends lauded him as a very intelligent, smart artist. And they said, 'How come you turned your back on James?'

"'I really don't know', I said, 'I really don't.' And I said, 'It would take too long to tell you.' [Inaudible sentence, followed by a partially audible description of going to exhibits and museums with James and his friends] And he did beautiful paintings.

"He did marry an awfully nice Jewish girl. She was a sensitive artist - they hadn't known he was married. I said, 'This is Esther, his wife, and they have a fine daughter.' - they hadn't realized that - James was very secretive.

[Interviewer: Your parents you mean?]

"No, his friends. [Two sentences inaudible] - and she still think's James...is the greatest.

[Interviewer: You said once that he became a bum on the bowery?]

"Pardon?

[Interviewer: You said he was on the bowery, once?]

"Well he was just about, yes.
"He lived sleeping in hotel lobbies and... I don't know, I don't know how
he was living, I shouldn't say - He lived rather a... poor life [inaudible
sentence]. But I don't hold it against Jim. Because if I were a man and had
to [inaudible] and earn my way and still be a person, you know, and not have
a job because of the [inaudible].

"He got into radical groups, you know... And Margaret Sanger was one of
our friends, and [partially audible exchange about radical figures in New York]
and Jim wanted to go to Russia - and even in that day it was more or less,
almost a communist thing. I believe, wasn't it?

[Interviewer: That would have been when?]

"19...20.

[Interviewer: Yah, that was just after the revolution... What about
your parents, what were their politics?]

"Oh, they were Republican. [inaudible]

[Interviewer inaudible]

"No... There was some kind of - 'James is the black sheep and we're not
going to discuss him'."

The reader may have noticed that Hilda attributed her father's "unremitting"
stance toward mental disorder in his children to fear - "he was probably
scared out of his wits about mental illness, you know." She often introduces
this understanding in describing her family's treatment of her during her
insanity, for example:

[Interviewer: Do you think that your presence in the house (years
later, during a period of remission in Hilda's insanity) changed the family?]

"Oh, I am certain that it did.

[Interviewer: How would you say?]


They must have felt very insecure, and very worried, and very unhappy about the fact that one of their members was like this... and, ah -

[Interviewer: Would that be more worried for you or for themselves?]

"Well, I think, probably... feared of the fact that such a thing could be. Just as when there's a dead person in the house, you're fearful of such a thing as death...[long pause] - and that's why I think they accused me of doing it deliberately, too. Because they probably had an idea I was deliberately trying to make them unhappy; all the time of my insanity, that I was calling attention to myself.

[omission]

"But I think that the hospital attendants also used much the same approach, in those days; they would beat you if your insanity exhibited itself and... they felt that there was no sense to it, either, you know - or that, if you were so far gone that you couldn't control yourself, then you didn't have the sense to suffer cold, heat, hunger - and to some extent, that was true.

But this understanding that the family reacted out of fear, cannot be taken as a feature of her original experience. It is an interpretation developed over years of retrospection, and used to soften the impact of her memory of their "unremitting" rejection. Hilda was considerably helped in this process by her doctor at the time of her release from the mental hospital - and over twenty years later than her first breakdown. They explained her family's failure to visit her during the ten years of her hospitalization in terms of fear of contagion:

- "And he - the doctor - said, 'Now Hilda, you have to try to understand that the outside world is not a [inaudible], and you have to realize that
the outside world is frightened of insanity. They almost think of it as a contagion' - you know, a thing that is contagious."

Hilda's original experience, that is, her experience from the time of her first breakdown and the feeling that remains associated with her family's reaction, was of the condemnation in their eyes:

-"In my own case, I think that - find that living in a day and age when my grandchildren do this and that and the other - and there are moments when I fear terribly for their future - you know, that they've dabbled in drugs, or they've done something wrong, or they're attempting a life, you know, a sexual life - and I worry about them - but I don't condemn them, I am fearful for them. And if it had only been fear that I felt, and if I could only have sensed it as such, it would have been different...rather than moral condemnation, you know."

In James' case the condemnation was absolute, i.e., the effect of "thumbs down" on James was to sever the bond that made him a person to the family; he became "nobody". Notice in the following excerpt both the strength of bond Hilda sees in her early "family unit" - that her father could "delegate the idea" of condemnation to the other members - and the fact that Hilda can see the pain of the loss of James for her father, as if it were something beyond his control, an actual death:

- "And I am really grateful that he didn't live to see Isabel mentally ill and Verna, and as many as were - I am grateful that he went on ahead of all of that...because it would have been a terrible disobedience, I'm sure...

"Of course his reaction to James always upset me. Because I felt that James had more brilliance than father would admit. And when father decided
that James was not a brilliant person, and, ah... thumbs down on him as a man, politically, and, ah, intellectually, and, ah... [long pause]... person - personably, you know - I felt very sad, you know, because, after all, father had given of himself so strenuously to James, all of those years, all through Yale... and to suddenly decide that James was just... a nobody - and to in fact... delegate the same idea to all of the others in the family - So I would start talking about James on some of these dinner occasions - as I was telling you [about the current family gatherings] - we would begin rehearsing the old fun - and they would say 'Oh, no! Not James... Let's not mention James.' And they still do it... and this... is very disappointing.

[Interviewer: It becomes prohibited to talk about James?]

"Yes, it has - It still is - Sometimes I force my remark on it... to my nephews. I say, 'Now here's a photograph of James. Now let me tell you about him. Now here's some reproductions of some of his paintings, now look at them.' Because after all, he's part of their heritage; he's a very great mind in their heritage, you know.

"You know, this is very... very wrong in families, it really is - sorting people out, and deciding actually - well, I do a certain amount of it myself, because, you see, I objected to my father - and he probably had every right to be the way he was - and I'm not saying this from Christian good heartedness either, I'm just trying to be fair and square."

When Hilda applies the image of "a dead person in the house" to her experience of insanity vis a vis her family, she is being just barely figurative. That is, when directed fully at her, the family condemnation was experienced as a very real sort of death. The time she describes below
is the period of remission during her psychotic years. She had been released from the hospital and, with nowhere else to go, had been reluctantly taken in by her family. During this period, she came close to leaving them by suicide, but what she describes is in some ways worse, a sort of living death "in their midst":

- Interviewer:  Okay... a little bit later you refer (in your manuscript) to... "becoming a submerged entity..."?

"Is this before I took carbolic acid?

- Interviewer:  mnhg mnhgh.

"This is when I had begun giving up, I believe.

- Interviewer:  Yuh, it was particularly defining, or expanding a bit on "submerged entity", what you meant by that. (Interviewer reads over portion of manuscript)... "a deceit of attempting normal behavior".

"Oh, yes I did, I had done that at the hospital too, remember?

- Interviewer:  You felt it as a deceit?

"Yes, mnhgh, mnhgh...

- Interviewer:  mnhgh...And then the paragraph immediately before it is (reads), and then you say... "she was fast becoming a submerged entity". Could you say a bit more about that, what you mean by "she was fast becoming a submerged entity"?

"Well, I imagine that, ah, ahead of all of this I was... augh... hoping, probably... hoping that in some way... that - either I would be more normal toward them or they would be more normal toward me. And never occurred... In fact, it really fast became worse. It's why I had to... myself - Be, as you, ah, see, ah, a person who did not even in any way allow himself to be seen - herself to be seen.
Interviewer: Were you losing a sense of, of who you were?

"Only that I was willing to give up and not be anyone...and die instead of live - In there, that's when this was beginning.

Interviewer: So it was submerged in the sense of just kind of sinking...sinking down towards...

"Not even finding myself any more, either, really - as a person. And, ah...not willing to...see them as people who I really knew or cared for.

But, at this point in her life, Hilda was still very much alive to herself. In fact, we conclude this account of her youth at one of the brighter points in her life. Only her experience of the breakdown, and not Hilda, had been dismissed from the family. James was still a "person" in the family embrace; Teressa had not quite passed out of Hilda's life; and Richard continued to be her fiancee. As mentioned above, Hilda finished out her year at Berkeley and returned home to enroll in Columbia, move into an apartment in New York City with James and her father, and embark on a half year period of magically expanding promise, an ephemeral respite in the gradually intensifying succession of crises in her life.

She has especially fond memories of living with James and her father in the city. They shared an apartment in Greenwich Village, in which Hilda managed the housekeeping, and returned together to Hudson on weekends. Hilda maintained her daily correspondence with Richard, and Mr. Mendahl paid his return fare to Schenectady, where Richard was a student at Union College, for occasional weekend visits. Their apartment was a sort of meeting place for a circle of intellectual friends and "advanced thinkers" and Hilda remembers evenings of dancing, drinking tea from a samovar, and generally "passing time" among an exciting company.
Perhaps the most exciting feature of this period was the chance for close association with James and partial admission to his world. Hilda dates a considerable amount of James' advice on living, much of which she continues to hold as good, to this time; for example:

- "He used to say, 'Now you have to learn to live, no matter what situation you find yourself in - I'm going to bring you to New York, and show you how you can buy furniture...ah, furnish a flat...cook, on a very little bit of money, and find the most beautiful and interesting things in New York.' And he said, 'I'll show you how that can be done - and you can do it anywhere in the world if you decide to.'

"And so, when we went to New York, sure enough, father gave me fifteen dollars a week to run the apartment we lived in. And Jim would say, 'We don't need that much, I'll take seven and a half; and you may have seven and a half. I need seven and a half for spending money' - Father was down on Jim at this time, not willing to do all he wanted - so on seven and a half dollars, I fed the three of us - excepting that they would have lunches elsewhere, you know...Now you can imagine.

"Father paid the rent. The rent was seventy-five dollars a month. Oh, it was down on [gives address] in Helen Todd's apartment house. She was one of the exciting, ah...revolutionists of the time. You know Cartney, I have photographs of most of these people..."

[Interviewer: James would give you advice - more instruction really - at crucial points in your...]

"Yes, he did, always.

"Another point he said, 'I don't want to ever find that you have chosen a rel- a friend - any relationship with anyone, unless that person is someone whom you really admire deeply... And never let me see you go along
with anyone whom you do not admire.'

"'Oh', I said, 'Well I thought the Christian act was to know all people.'

"'Oh no', he said 'always choose people whom you admire deeply.'

"You know I lived up to that in my thinking, I really did. I never chose a close friend unless there was something about that person whom I set beyond myself, you know, in some way - some characteristic. He could be either poor or rich, educated or uneducated, but there was some characteristic in this person who to me - it was an invaluable thing, you know, like an invaluable...a remarkable, ah...point about him as a person - oh and I was thankful to Jim for that one. And I passed that on to my grandchildren, you know.

[omission]

"He felt, you see, that Richard was an unusual person. He agreed that Richard was worth it - worth a try, as a friend and a companion, you know - although he didn't think that marriage was worth it.

-[interviewer: He was against marriage?]

"He didn't want us to be married at all. He didn't think it should be called marriage, you know - should be a 'relationship'. It would be just a good thing, you know, good experience.

-[interviewer: Did he actively oppose your marrying Richard?]

"Well I think everyone in the family did - Richard's family, my family, all opposed it. And my father, and Richard's father, wanted it to be a, ah...form of expression, you know, a 'trial marriage' - is what they wanted.

James had higher ambitions for Hilda than becoming simply a wife:

- "Oh, and another thing he said, 'you know, you're never going to get anywhere being a good...housekeeper or an excellent family...person, because
our family amounts to nothing'.

"I said, 'what do you mean?'

"He said, 'We are not of the upper class or the lower class, or -'

"'Well what are we?', I said.

"He said, 'we are declassé.'

"I said, 'What does that mean?'

"'Of no class!' he said. 'We will never...amount to anything in society, as people.'

"He - you know he convinced me of this. I thought about it, I thought, 'why that's the truth: mother has no friends, father has no friends, we only have childhood friends...it's a fact, we have no situation in the community', you know.

"'In this case,' he said, 'the only way you can obtain a...personal relationship with the community and your country is to become an important person.'

"'How?' I said.

"'Be a writer. Be a painter...''

Although Hilda faced an undercurrent of family opposition to her plans for marriage to Richard, the point of highest drama in this brief period of her life concerned not Hilda's but her friend, Teressa's marriage. Hilda engineered Teressa's wedding to Carlo, successfully circumvented parental opposition, and joined the couple in their elopement. Her description of this adventure is taken from an interview in which we were discussing Beauty, I Wonder:

- "...I put quite a lot of that 'high society' stuff in there because I felt it a lot in my own life, where Teressa was concerned.
"Was that a conflict in your friendship, a strain?"

"Yes! And I was working with her against that; I beat her down on that point, and won in the end.

"How do you mean, "beat her down"?"

"Well, her family wanted her to marry a wealthy southerner - that is, a boy of name, himself.

"At the same time, when I came back from college, I found that Teressa had been having an affair with this Italian - I think I mentioned it to you - and they had been living together, and they were both artists at the Museum School. And when Teressa told me this, I was very upset. I said, 'Well then you're going to have to marry Carlo.'"

"And she said, 'Why?'

"I said, 'Well, because you've been living with him.'"

"And I set out at that point - this was around when I was 18, 19 - just before I went to Columbia - I set out to see to it she and Carlo really... got married.

"But she was living in Hudson again at this moment, for the summer at least. And she was receiving letters from Carlo in general delivery, addressed to Barbara White. And all of it was a secret from her family that she and Carlo DeStafano were lovers.

"Well I thought I better break down and talk to mother about it. I told her that I knew that Teressa was in love with this Italian and I knew that probably she should marry him, because she was in love with him.

"And mother said, 'How calm down, I'll show you how we'll cope with this.' I told her that I knew that Teressa was in love with this Italian and I knew that probably she should marry him, because she was in love with him.

"And mother said, 'I'll have him over here,' and she invited Carlo for the weekend, to our home. Because she felt she would investigate Carlo herself.
"And, ah, meanwhile she had Teressa over for supper. And mother approved of Carlo. She thought he was a very interesting, intelligent... artist - although he was quite a bit older than Teressa.

"Anyway, by the time I got down to Columbia, living in Greenwich Village, Teressa's father had found out about Carlo - in fact I think it was my own blurt ing out the fact, saying that Teressa had a friend whom she liked. Because he had arranged this dance - which I told you - invited this southern boy up - it was thrown in his honor - and I think I blurted out to her father that this wasn't the right thing for Teressa, that she really did love someone else.

"So he was furious at both of us. And he took Teressa under his wing, had her in the apartment in New York City, and did not even allow her any social life at all.

"By the time I got to New York, I decided I decided I would have to find out what was going on, because Carlo was visiting me and he said, 'I'm going to either kill Mr. O'Neill or kill myself - I'm an Italian, you know, this can't go on! She's my sweetheart and I must have her.'

"And I was frightened - I believed him. And so I said, 'Well let me think - let me see, what can I do?' And well I said, 'Let's go up to her apartment, where she's living with her father and her aunts' - her mother was dead, you know, been dead since she was fifteen - 'and, ah, knock on the door' - 'I'll go up alone. You can stay down on the curb outside the apartment house'.

"So I knocked on the door, and told Miss Beatrice and Miss Betsy - we called them Miss Beatric and Miss Betsy - then - and they said 'Yes Hilda', and they were very down on me at this point, because they knew that I was sort of in league with Teressa concerning Carlo.
Hilda describes convincing the aunts she only wants to talk to Teressa about her courses at Columbia. And so we got down to the street, and here was Carlo! And we got into a cab and rode all over New York City. And he tried to make her promise she would marry him, and she would say 'Yes!' 'No. 'Yes, no, no...'

Interviewer: and you were...

'I was there - yes - 'And like I say, you love him and he loves you - Now what does that mean? That means you should be married.'

'So finally she agreed, and he took us to an Italian restaurant, way down in the village end. And we had a wonderful meal and he bought red roses for both of us, and he said, 'Now we must get married tonight!'

'So we went to the editor of a, ah, magazine, the Mentor - did you ever hear of the Mentor magazine? He was a very close friend of Carlo's, Guy Jones. And, ah, Guy answered the door - he's a very charming person, he liked me and my writing - that's why he's charming - So he opened the door and said 'What's this Carlo?'

'Carlo said, 'I'm getting married?'

'Guy said 'To which one? 'I was very pleased that he said that - although I wouldn't have wanted marriage with Carlo - but I had a very soft spot in my heart for him.

'Anyway, Guy said, 'Don't you realize you can't get married tonight.'

So we stayed the night at Guy's, and the next - and I said to Teressa, 'Now you cannot sleep with Carlo. You and I will have the bed and Carlo can go in there with Guy and his mistress, in that room' - Here was I being very proper, you know.

'So, the next morning, bright and - we didn't sleep all night, you know -
bright and early we got to city hall and Teressa was married.

"And I just took the - I don't know how I got back to the apartment. And when I came to the apartment, Jim was there. He said 'Where have you been' - I said, 'why?' - He said, 'Father's been telephoning the police and Teressa's father's been telephoning the police - we want to know where you've been.'

"'Oh', I said, 'I eloped with Teressa.'

"...So then it was thumbs down for me [from Teressa's family] the rest of my life with Teressa, until - even Carlo, finally, it was thumbs down, because he knew I lived this free life here [omission]. He didn't want Teressa to know me either - and I think that there's a lot of jealousy there, because Teressa and I were so thick you know."

Finally, this bright period in Hilda's life ends just prior to marriage with Richard; we leave her whole heartedly engaged in preparation for the wedding:

[Interviewer: So you were allowed (to deviate from the two colors in clothing assigned by your mother) when you graduated from highschool?]

"That was the first time - then I was allowed, ah, ah, when I told her - mother - I was going to get married, she said, 'Then you can get a job and earn the money for your announcements and your wedding dress. Because you have no dowry.'

"I said, 'Well that's alright.'

"So I took a job in the plant - Brewster's Powder Mill - one summer... earning about twenty dollars a week, which was darned good pay in those days... And I put that money aside, because I was already engaged to Richard...and I was seventeen, I think this was before I went to college. I put that money in
the bank so I would have it.

"I had enough saved to, ah, pay for my announcements and I had them made at Tiffany's - mind you! And, ah... [laughs] I said to Jim, 'Where is a good place to have those wedding announcements made?'

"He said, 'Come sister Hilda, I'll show you. We'll walk up Fifth Avenue to Tiffany's and you [laughs].

[Recording ends.]

"...So it was made on a totally new idea... I developed a skirt made of petals, petals from the waist - at that time they went just below the knee. It was the charleston time, almost, I think, you know when women had those short dresses? ... just below the knee - and then they came to the waist and they sort of lapped over. So they had to be corner to corner because as you [twirled] a little bit, you know, you - as Ruth wears a slit skirt you know at [her cocktail hostess job] and she will twirl like this you know, and you'll see her leg all the way to her hip. This is the way she dresses every [laughs] night... very, very... and so I'll say, 'for God's sake Ruth!' - she looks pretty [smart] though when she's in this gown that she wears [omission] - So then I had to have pretty darned good underwear for that, you know, and that was another point, buying decent underwear. And I also chose black silk stockings, which at that time were four dollars a pair. And, ah... black satin slippers, which were quite expensive. And they - I had them decorated in steel cut beads, you know - you've seen steel beads? Well they're beautiful you know, the design on the toe of the slipper in steel.

"And then I wanted that dress to have a certain sleeve, I bought this shoulder piece around like this - I always wanted the neck line to be interesting too - the shoulder piece went all the way around, as if you wound a piece of cloth right around your shoulders, [tight] you know. But
that was the top of the dress, and also the top of the sleeve, see? With a tiny puff under there - It was a handsomely designed gown.

"And then I had a flower that I wore - wonderful blue, marvelous blue... velvet, poppy. And I thought it was outstanding and wonderful.

"That was how - what I was married in.

"So now and then, you see, I really expressed myself in clothing."

"Of course when Richard married into the family - when Richard and I were married, we didn't think of insanity at all, at that moment. 'No one had been insane at all, really, yet...to our knowledge...excepting Aunt Eleanor, as I told you, way back then...

[Interviewer: ...You say at the bottom of page 41, you say, '...that was it, she must not expect [her family] to understand, to understand, to know at all, to have even an inkling...'] About your experiences, how different they are?

"Hmph h Humph.

[Interviewer: How did you feel about that?]

"Well, I think that isolated me very much...and that I finally decided, you see, that, ah... - I do this a great deal of the time, even today, if I feel - if my feelings are hurt, so to speak...if I feel I've been slighted or someone's not paying enough attention or what I say doesn't hold enough weight in the general conversation, what's going on and so on, but of course - when you have lived alone a great deal, and you could do your own reading and thinking and deciding, and, ah, without very many friends - after all what do you expect, you know, you like yourself and you like what you're doing, what you're thinking - and why should you expect other people to?

"This is a thing I have to bring myself to continually - always have had to, decide that I like what I think and I like what I read...and I like...
own taste, and...

[Interviewer: By your own force of will?]

"Yes. And in - and in - when I was working at the state hospital, later on, beyond this time, I learned to never mention the fact that I had been in college, that I read good books, that I enjoyed good movies - any of this, you know - that I read poetry, I'd been a writer - any of that. Never mentioned it, you see.

[omission]

"From the age of sixty on, I wrote a journal about my feeling of loneliness.

[Interviewer: You've really been prolific.]

"Hilda laughs Well, I don't know, I write about myself a lot... It's a way of not being lonely, I'm sure - figuring a thing out.

[Interviewer: Probably anybody's writing is, really -

"Pardon?

[Interviewer: Probably anybody's writing is to some extent about their - from their experience.

"Yes... But don't you think it's surprising the way the world turns out, the way life turns out - you can be a person in the world and you can be so totally alone... And I think that's very peculiar, that's one thing I've never straightened out in my thinking - how it is that we all are so absolutely alone...

"Once in a while you might have a, ah... so called 'soul mate' or 'close friend', with whom you can talk about certain things - But for the most part you're awfully alone, you know.

[Interviewer: What about in your family, can you say a bit more about how, when you have that realization... that there was some point where you just gave up on any expectation of their understanding?]
"Well, I did, and I have ever since, really...and ah, I now can enjoy them as people but I don’t expect to discuss myself and my inner...soul, so to speak, to any of them. But I have been very jolly friends since I... retired - especially when we have got togethers, family parties now, in groups... And they always say to me, 'Now Hilda, you remember better than any of us, things which occurred way back in Minnesota, all the things that happened at home, when we were children. Now tell us this and tell us that!' - And I've become a great storyteller...sort of. And I don't - I tell it as I remember it. They get a great charge out of it, you know. This - we're very happy to be together at big dinners, you know, big Thanksgivings, and Christmasses, and Easters, and so on...

[Interviewer: So in some ways you've become the one that knows the family best.]

"Yes I do - Ruth says I do too. Because I don't - there's no - there's nothing that ever happened in any case, to any one of us, that would keep me from being with them, in some way, you know - and having the others realize who this person is, you know. And I have really kept up with all of them that way...and more or less let the others realize this, that this is a very distinct person, you know - 'Don't miss it!', you know."
Saint Augustine and some concluding comments

It should be apparent that this history of Hilda's life is a work in progress. I have ended her account of her early years with Hilda's statement of purpose in becoming the "storyteller" within her family - "having the others realize who this person is...that this is a very distinct person" - because it expresses my own goal in this project: I was originally attracted to reconstructing Hilda's past by the things which make her distinct, and I have spent months of listening to tapes, coding and reshuffling transcripts, and ruminating over meanings in an attempt at integrating these elements of distinction into a full design, such that others may "realize who this person is". I have encountered substantial problems in this attempt; numerous questions have emerged, some remain troublesome. I would like to conclude this presentation of the first stage of my work by sharing a few of the latter with the reader.

Neither my goal in this project nor the problems I have come to perceive in it are my own discovery; rather, they are ancient and date to the first significant autobiographical work, Augustine's Confessions (ca. 420) - an amazing personal document. In Book Ten of his Confessions Augustine notes that people are "a race curious to know the lives of others" and describes "what fruit" can come of his account of his own life:

But what I now am, at the very time of making those confessions, divers desire to know, who have or have not known me... but their ear is not at my heart, where I am, whatever I am. They wish then to hear me confess what I am within; whether neither their eye, nor ear...can reach.

He goes on to say where he finds these things, "removed as it were to some inner place, which is yet no place":

Those things do I within, in that vast court of my memory...Out of the same store do I myself with the past continually combine fresh and fresh likenesses of things
which I have experienced, or, from what I have experienced, have believed; and thence again infer future actions, events and hopes, and all these again I reflect on, as present...Great is this force of memory, excessive great, O my God; a large and boundless chamber!

But accepting Augustine's exultant view of the knowledge to be found in a person's self-recollection - "what I am within" - presents a problem for me. It would suggest that this exploration of the "boundless chamber" of memory should best be left uninterrupted, i.e., it raises the question of what, apart from gathering and recording the reflections, a second party has to do with the process. In my introduction to Hilda's story, I described the circumstances of gathering, our relationship and the interview process, and elaborated a view of the nature and limitations of memory. While these are useful clarifications, they fall short of answering where, exactly, I fit in to the reconstruction of her past.

Augustine himself points toward an answer: "although no 'man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man which is in him', yet is there something of a man which neither 'the spirit of the man that is in him' itself knoweth." In other words, he points toward areas of darkness, most likely at the center of the person, which are not available to self reflection. For Augustine, these areas of darkness come to light through divine revelation: "I know not of myself, so long as I know it, not, until my 'darkness be made as the noon-day' in thy countenance."

Whereas Augustine has God, Hilda, so far as this project is concerned, is stuck with me. In reconstructing her life history, it was just where I perceived such areas of darkness, e.g., in her early religious strivings, her first encounters with sexual intimacy, and her problematic identification with her mother, that I chose to project into her experience. Because this involved going beyond what she had to say of herself, I did so reluctantly.
My reluctance - and, perhaps, a partial awareness of the demands of the role I was assuming - contributed to an overall tentativeness in my description of these unspoken experiences. Up to this point in her history, the negative effects of this tentatively-joint approach have been limited to awkwardness in the presentation: an uneven level of interpretation and occasionally vague and confusing passages of description. Very shortly, however, with the onset of her psychosis, "darkness" erupts in such a way that a tentative line between her description and my interpretation becomes impossible. This is a powerful set of events in her past, but an experience of which she has little understanding; not coincidentally, it is the most striking feature which distinguishes her life. In order to deal with it, I will have to make a choice between becoming more aggressive and explicit in articulating my understanding of her experience or better disciplined in accepting the limitations of what she can say of herself. Questions of the level of explanation, style, format, and even size of the eventual document rest on this decision.

Augustine's effort at finding his "darkness made...as the noon-day" is guided by the scriptures and rules of his faith. In my similar task with Hilda, I have an array of scientific method and theory to draw on. This is, of course, a considerable resource, but one which brings its own problems. Most social scientists who undertake life history study show signs of ambivalence. These appear, for example, in overly rationalized or apologetic introductions to the work, grandiose assertions of its value, or the researcher showing himself, if at all, in footnotes to his subject's document. The conflict seems to be between the fascination with - perhaps even awe of - individual personality which attracts the researcher in the first place and the professional commitment to generating social science
theory and general laws which informs his work - risking irreverence of scientific method on the one hand, and the crime of dissecting a butterfly with a hammer on the other.

The personal loyalty which develops between the investigator and his subject adds another dimension to this conflict; my own involvement in Hilda's life history has given me ample experience of it. As Cottle (1973, p. 355) concludes from his work with ghetto families..."when one is implicated in the lives of those one observes or 'studies', then abstract analysis becomes a more difficult...chore. Distancing oneself becomes an impossible strategy, an implausible experience, and using these people's words as grist for one's intellectual machinery, an ugly if not incongruous experience."

Most discussions of the tension between life history study and the requirements of scientific method are in less personal terms than Cottle's; contradistinctions, between subjective vs. objective, organismic vs. mechanistic, holistic vs. atomistic, understanding vs. explanatory, and soft vs. hard inquiry*, are often raised. Allport, who has devoted considerable energy toward resolving this conflict (e.g. 1942, 1968), summarizes the view of objective - atomistic - mechanistic - explanatory - hard side:

Now the question arises as to whether understanding the single case can be fitted to the requirements of scientific method. Many psychologists would say No. Individual cases, they argue, are quite out of place in science unless they can be combined and generalized into types from which general laws can be derived. **Scientia non est individuorum.**

These scientists would relegate understanding the individual to literature, but even in a literary treatment of autobiography, Roy Pascal (1960, p. 181) arrives at: "**individuum est ineffabile.**"

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*In the case of outright divorce, custody of the life history is, of course, automatically granted to the female side of these polarities.
Pascal's caution can be accepted as in some ultimate sense true, but not practically meaningful; the wealth of insights into personality in fiction and biography show that there is a vast territory this side of the unexpressable. But writers have considerably greater latitude in pushing this limit; they can pursue their curiosity - they can even call it wonder - with the inner workings of individual as far as their imaginative powers take them. Whereas proximity to what Bausch (1965) calls "the warm glow of the ineffable" is distinctly uncomfortable for the social scientist. It is tempting to say that a science which cannot reconcile itself to dealing with individual lives has no business calling itself social, but many of the problems associated with life study are complex, and some real. Cottle (1973, p. 355), in the sentence following his critique of "using these people's words as grist for one's intellectual machinery", depressingly states that: "When, finally, I go back and analyze, in the typical sense, I negate the encounters and deny the truths of the subjective inquiry."

Because some of the problems with fitting the study of single lives and concrete experience to the requirements of science are real, I am suspicious of attempts at neat resolution of the conflict. This practice of dividing inquiry into distinct camps, with its plea for separate but equal consideration, seems to be especially obscuring. The work, however, cannot be effectively undertaken until the research comes to some, at least internally, meaningful resolution of this antagonism. The lack of such clarity on my part has been especially inhibiting in my efforts at presenting this first stage of Hilda's life history.

The partial understanding of this situation, which I have gradually arrived at over the course of the project, is that the goal of such work is,
at heart, descriptive, and therefore the problems linguistic. I approached the write up of Hilda's story with a version of this understanding, i.e., that the point was to keep my descriptive language as concrete and free of implicit theory as possible. I outline this objective in my introduction and go through a number of perhaps obscure, but elaborate contortions in trying to meet it in the various sections of the history. Even if such an atheoretical language were possible, I am no longer sure it would be entirely desireable. As Gergen (1973, p. 317) points out: "One major shortcoming of much applied research is that the terms used to describe and explain are often relatively concrete and specific to the case at hand. While the behavioral acts studied by academic psychologists are often more trivial, the explanatory language is highly general and thus more broadly heuristic."

But the route to integrating concrete experience with discursive knowledge is not simply a matter of adopting an abstract, general language of description. Early attempts at legitimizing life history study in psychology show the problems with this approach. Dollard (1935), in his highly ambitious Criteria for the Life History, developed an elaborate evaluative model which boils down to one standard: a thorough presentation of the history in the terms of psychoanalytic theory (Freud's study of "little Hans" is the only work to rate positively in every category). Once the drift of Dollard's criteria is perceived, his model could only be acceptable - and at the same time superfluous - to a psychologist already firmly committed to psychoanalytic theory. Despite its pioneering ambitions, and although it incidentally contains some valuable thoughts on culture and personality, it served, if anything, to further isolate life study from general psychology.
Within the main stream tradition of psychology, a number of early attempts were made at quantifying either the themes, word usage, and events of personal documents (Baldwin 1940 is the best known of these) or the interpretations and predictions of the reader (e.g., Cartwright and French (1939). The hope in these efforts was that statistical operations could then be applied - like some modern day philosopher's stone - to transform the dirt of concrete experience and clinical impressions into the gold of objective facts. The equivocal gain in precision from this translation of verbal description into numbers is bought with a significant loss in meaning; the efforts did little to counter the "scientia non est individuorum" objection and constitute a headlong retreat from the "individuum est ineffabile" problem.

Numbers are, however, valuable in enabling one to look at information on large accumulations of individual lives, and the main body of current life history research is of this sort. These focus on questions for which discrete "events" can be circumscribed, such as the individual's "use of time" (Szalai, 1972), and are largely restricted to contemporaneous records of the individual's life situation, such as those used in prospective, longitudinal research in psychopathology (e.g. Roff and Ricks, 1970). Occassional statistical treatments of retrospection are addressed at confirming (Lieberman and Falk, 1971) or discrediting (Yarrow, et. al, 1970) the "accuracy" of recollection (both groups find support in their respective data), and questions of personality organization and internal meaning of "events" - "what I am within; whether neither their eye, nor ear can reach" - have been sensibly ignored by quantifiers.*

*In a comprehensive survey of the articles published over a years time in two leading personality journals, Carlson (1971) notes that not one investigated any issue of personality organization.
But reflecting on the obscuring functions of language does not lead directly to finding descriptive terms adequate to scientific study of life history. Once again, Augustine gets to the heart of the matter:

The memory containeth also reasons and laws innumerable of numbers and dimensions, none of which hath any bodily sense impressed...I have heard the sounds of the words whereby when discussed they are denoted; but the sounds are other than the things. For the sounds are other in Greek than in Latin; but the things are neither Greek, nor Latin, nor any other language.

I see in this a caution against reification, but also, accepting that "the sounds" will always be "other than the things", license to draw on the refinements of descriptive language derived from existing theoretical models of personality. While I may have been overly modest in sharing my understanding of Hilda's life thus far, I have been presumptuous in assuming that seeking to avoid theoretical construction was a service to either the data of Hilda's experience or the goal of understanding it. For example, the section on Hilda's difficulty in establishing heterosexual intimacy would go much further in Erikson's terms of "identity crisis" and the pain in her relationship with her mother could be described with much greater precision in the language of object relations. Remaining faithful to the "things" themselves is a formidable task in this process. In addition, it is not entirely in the control of the writer; its success depends to some extent, on the reader's ability to avoid misplacing concreteness — and this is where interview transcripts are valuable. But the undertaking is important; it's where I see the possibilities for reconciling the intimate with the scientific.

Other significant questions remain, even within the example of Augustine's Confessions. The main point he makes about memory is that past events "must again, as if new, be thought out thence...must be drawn
together again, that they may be known." He refers to this process as "re-collection", something distinct from a straightforward collecting. This is an awareness which must have developed out of his experience of conversion and renunciation of his earlier life. On one level, it is the understanding which a perceptive biographer brings to his work, i.e., that the task is a matter of the relationship, rather than simply the accumulation, of the facts of a person's life. On another level, it is a fairly radical statement, i.e., it implies that there are no "real" past events outside of their recreation in the present person. I am not sure what acceptance of this perspective means for the life history researcher - I bring it up in the spirit of the inventory of confusion mentioned in the beginning. At the least, it says that the events of a person's story cannot be considered apart the storyteller; this is the rationale behind my discussions of Hilda's motivation in telling her story and speculations on her relationship to and "reprocessing" of the past. But Augustine's concept of "re-collection" suggests, to a psychologist, that this process of creative reconstruction might itself be the most fruitful focus of life history research. Whatever is involved in accomplishing such a focus would seem, however, to be complex, especially so when the investigator is a thorough collaborator in the reconstruction.

One final area of question is indirectly highlighted in the Confessions (or in any other good autobiography). Augustine presents intimate descriptions of his relationship with his mother, friends, and religion, as well as an indirect, but equally intimate, view of his culture and historical period. Pascal (1960, p. 181) sees this as the foundation of truth in autobiography: "It is inspired by a reverence for the self, tender yet severe, that sees the self not as a property but a trust... Hence it seeks
to trace its historical identity, in all its particularity. Informed with
the consciousness that the self escapes definition...it reveals it not so
much by contemplation and analysis as through its encounters with the world''.
But we see only one aspect of these encounters; the impact of the individual
on his social world, its view of him, and many of the sources of these
relationships are significant areas of darkness -"which neither 'the spirit
of man that is in him' itself knoweth." Erikson (e.g., 1964) labels
these encounters the "actuality" of the person, which he differentiates
from inner experience, the person's "phenomenal reality". He includes in
it the biological, social, and political/historical influences on an
individual. He describes it, in the same terms as Pascal's view of the
autobiographical self as "a trust", as a research imperative: "...every
infantile or pre-rational item...must be studied in its double nature of
being a property of each individual life cycle, and of being a property
of a communality, and for this reason subject to the fate of institutions"
(ibid, p. 207, original emphasis).
. Because my intention was avoiding any interference with Hilda's "own
story", I omitted, apart from my introductory discussion of our relationship,
any direct consideration of these "actualities" in her life history. I did,
however find myself drawn to readings on her historical period and frequent
musings over what memories seemed appropriate for which developmental stage.
I am presently inclined to agree with Erikson that these considerations
should not be isolated from Hilda's "phenomenal reality". It seems a great
deal to ask of a person logical investigation that he be alternately an
historian, sociologist, and social and developmental psychologist, but an
account including these "actualities", however fumbling and incomplete, may
be less of a distortion than a "pure" presentation of the person's "inner"
story in a social void. In other words, this, especially so far as an account of the interpersonal experience goes, may be the main business of a second party in the life history endeavor.

The overlapping questions which I have outlined above can be summarized in one final quotation from Augustine: "And how know they, when from myself they hear of myself, whether I say true?" For Augustine, the answer is in his reader's "charity \( \frac{\text{which}}{\text{believeth}} \) all things (that is, among those whom knitting onto itself it maketh one)." I would replace this with the more currently acceptable term "judgment", i.e., I agree with Augustine that the form of validation in this work is consensual. I have suggested several inchoate strategies for enhancing my own ability at making the numerous judgments required by my project, and for reducing the requirements on the reader's - although, perhaps thankfully, never entirely eliminate them. Methods for developing an increasingly secure sharing of judgments are precisely what the scientist, in his self-imposed restrictions on imagination and personal fancy, gains over the biographer and fiction writer. My hope is that refinement of such methods, together with rekindled and aggressive exploration of life history research, may eventually lead to psychology reclaiming its share of this uniquely rich resource.
References


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