

FOREWORD

I write this book in secret, locked away in a small hotel room at night and in the early hours of dawn in New York. While I write it I want to be hidden from the ever more audible turmoil of a wrathful world in travail. My eye and ear have grown for the moment too sensitive to the remotest events of this turbulent world. But now I must concentrate—to exaggerate a trifle, I may say I would hypnotize myself so as to hear nothing, to see nothing, perceive nothing but the dead friend concerning whom I now set down these lines.

This book is in fact what I call it on the title page: notes for an autobiography. It may well be so alarmingly frank, so excessively detailed—down to trifles that for others will verge on sheer boredom—that it will prove

one of the numerous mistakes in my life. It is the outcome of an idea that I have always found repugnant, but that has by now, surprisingly, grown into an urge, nay a compulsion: to violate my own privacy.

The explanation is that I started writing too soon. It would have been better put off.

There are two reasons why I did not wait. For one thing, I was possessed by the thought that my advanced age might not leave me time to put in all I wanted to put in. The other reason is that although I am still (Spring of 1948)—at least so I think—in a reasonably normal state of mind, I have seemed to notice in myself the first symptoms of a gradual decline in my own nervous condition since the twenty-eighth of August, 1947; it started on that day, and has kept growing ever since. I have a possibly mistaken premonition that these symptoms may foreshadow a sort of depressed condition, in the neuro-pathological sense.

I am quite aware that this is lay talk—the language of a layman with a tendency to hypochondria. I have never consulted a psychiatrist in my life; nor have I the slightest intention of doing so. To me the idea of lying on my back as a patient on a psychiatrist's couch is wholly repugnant.

Accordingly this premonition does not hold over my head the results of a medical examination, not even the erudite book of a world-famous authority. Only an article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, one of those reference books always at hand on my shelves for the sleepless nights when people like me jump from bed to

take refuge in some massive tome, knowing that it will either console them or drive them frantic.

In this treatise two physicians threaten me that in case of a fairly serious upset “the irruption of images, feelings and cravings into consciousness leads to distorted views of reality and to falsification of facts.” This is not a condition in which I care to write chapters of autobiography; so I must say what I have to say before unmistakable signs of such a condition make their appearance.

That is the only reason for writing at all these chapters of my life; their sole purpose is to satisfy my need to create for Wanda a memorial made of the simple materials at my disposal, paper and ink: a memorial as humble as her short life, as my own qualifications for writing biography. Dedicating a memorial means to me setting down what has happened around and within me during the days, weeks, and months since her death, and recording among other personal remembrances old and new the conversations I had with her after she died.

I do not know, I have no idea at all, whether other people will find the same things in the book that the few people who knew us both well will find. Still I cannot resist the absolute compulsion to write it. Not that writing can assuage my anguish; on the contrary, every moment I spend setting down these words is a torment. But somehow I feel that I could not even exist through these days except by preoccupying myself with her.

There was a moment when I envied the architect from the cemetery management, who knelt down in my room

to expound the large blueprint of a headstone unrolled upon the floor. I envied him not only because, without the slightest affectation, he could be courteously objective and yet grave in the face of this decease, but also because the material from which he was to carve a memorial in the Linden Hill Cemetery was granite that would endure for centuries, not the mere pages (soon forgotten if ever read) of a friend yet sooner forgotten.