

Susan Sontag



Reborn

Early Diaries 1947–1963



PENGUIN BOOKS

REBORN

Susan Sontag was born in Manhattan in 1933. She was a philosopher, writer, filmmaker and political activist, and is widely considered to be one of the most influential thinkers of her generation. Her non-fiction works include *Against Interpretation*, *On Photography*, *Illness as Metaphor*, *Regarding the Pain of Others* and *Notes on Camp*, and two volumes of diaries, *Reborn* and *As Consciousness is Harnessed to Flesh*. She is also the author of several novels, stories and plays. Her books have won multiple prizes and have been translated into thirty-two languages. Susan Sontag died in December 2004.

By the Same Author

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Brother Carl

PLAYS

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Lady from the Sea

REBORN

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Early Diaries

1947–1963

Susan Sontag

EDITED BY DAVID RIEFF



PENGUIN BOOKS

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Preface

I have always thought that one of the stupidest things the living say about the dead is the phrase “so-and-so would have wanted it this way.” At best, it is guesswork; most often it is hubris, no matter how well intended. You simply cannot know. So whatever else there is to be said about the publication of *Reborn*, this first of what will eventually be a three-volume selection of Susan Sontag’s journals, it is not the book she would have produced—and that assumes she would have decided to publish these diaries in the first place. Instead, both the decision to publish and the selection have been mine alone. Even when there is no question of censorship, the literary dangers and moral hazards of such an enterprise are self-evident. *Caveat lector*.

It is not a decision I ever wanted to make. But my mother died without leaving any instructions as to what to do with either her papers or her uncollected or unfinished writing. This might seem out of character for someone who took such care of her work, who labored furiously on translations even in languages she knew only passably, and had informed and decisive opinions about publishers and magazines the world over. But despite the lethality of myelodysplastic syndrome, the blood cancer that killed her on December 28, 2004, she continued to believe until only a few

weeks before her death that she was going to survive. So instead of speaking about how she wanted others to look after her work once she was no longer around to look after it herself—as someone who was more resigned to death probably would have done—she spoke emphatically of returning to work, and of all that she would write once she got out of the hospital.

As far as I am concerned, she had an absolute right to die as she wished. She owed posterity, let alone me, nothing as she fought to live. But obviously there are unintended consequences of her decision—the most important here being that it has devolved to me to decide how to publish the writings she left behind. In the case of her essays, which appeared in *At the Same Time* two years after her death, the choices were relatively straightforward. Despite the fact that my mother certainly would have substantially revised the essays for republication, they had already been either published during her lifetime or delivered as lectures. Her intentions were clear.

These diaries are a completely different matter. They were written solely for herself, and she produced them steadily from early adolescence to the last few years of her life, when her delight in the computer and in e-mail seems to have curbed her interest in diary-keeping. She had never permitted a line from them to be published, nor, unlike some diarists, did she read from them to friends, although those close to her knew of their existence and of her habit after filling a notebook of placing it alongside its predecessors in the walk-in closet in her bedroom, near other treasured but somehow essentially private possessions, such as family photographs and mementos of her childhood.

By the time she fell ill for the last time, in the spring of 2004, there were close to a hundred such notebooks. And others turned up as her last assistant, Anne Jump, and her

closest friend, Paolo Dilonardo, and I were sorting through her effects in the year after her death. I had only the vaguest idea of what was in them. The sole conversation I ever had with my mother about them was when she first fell ill and had not yet rekindled her own belief that she would survive her blood cancer as she had the two previous cancers she had suffered from in her lifetime. And it consisted of a single, whispered sentence: “You know where the diaries are.” She said nothing about what she wanted me to do with them.

I can’t say for sure, but I tend to believe that, left to my own devices, I would have waited a long time before publishing them, or perhaps never published them at all. There have even been times when I’ve thought that I would burn them. But that was pure fantasy. The reality, in any case, is that the physical diaries do not belong to me. While she was still well, my mother had sold her papers to the University of California at Los Angeles library, and the agreement was that they would go there upon her death, along with her papers and her books, as they have. And since the contract my mother concluded did not restrict access in any important sense, I soon came to feel that the decision had been made for me. Either I would organize them and present them or someone else would. It seemed better to go forward.

My misgivings remain. To say that these diaries are self-revelatory is a drastic understatement. I have chosen to include a lot of my mother’s very severe judgments. She was a great “judger.” But to expose that quality in her—and these diaries are replete with exposures—is inevitably to invite the reader to judge *her*. One of the principal dilemmas in all this has been that, at least in her later life, my mother was not in any way a self-revealing person. In particular, she avoided to the extent she could, without denying it, any discussion of her own homosexuality or any acknowledgment of her own ambition. So my decision certainly violates

her privacy. There is no other way of describing it fairly.

In contrast, these diaries are anchored in her adolescent discovery of her own sexual nature, of early experiments as a sixteen-year-old freshman at the University of California at Berkeley, and of the two great relationships that she had as a young adult—first with Harriet Sohmers Zwerling, whom she first encountered in that year at Cal, and would later live with in Paris in 1957; and then with the playwright Maria Irene Fornes, whom my mother met that same year in Paris (Fornes and Zwerling had been lovers previously), in New York between 1959 and 1963, after my mother returned to the United States, divorced my father, and moved to Manhattan.

Once having decided to publish her journals, I had no question of excluding material, be it on the basis of it putting my mother in a certain light or of its sexual frankness or of its unkindness to some who figure in them, although I have chosen to omit the real names of some private individuals. To the contrary, my principle of selection was partly informed by my sense that it was the rawness and the unvarnished portrait this material presents of Susan Sontag as a young person, who self-consciously and determinedly went about creating the self she wanted to be, that was most compelling about the journals. It is for this reason that I have chosen to title this volume *Reborn*, drawing from a phrase that appears on the front of one of the early journals; it seems to sum up what my mother was about from childhood onward.

No American writer of her generation was more associated with European tastes than was my mother. Impossible to imagine her saying that she had “all Tucson” or “all Sherman Oaks, California, to tell,” as John Updike has said of his beginnings as a writer that he had all of his hometown of “Shillington [Pennsylvania] to tell.” And even more impossi-

ble to imagine was my mother returning to her childhood or to her social and ethnic context for inspiration, as many Jewish-American writers of her generation would do. Her story—again, the appositeness of *Reborn* as a title seems to me reinforced—is precisely the opposite. In many ways, it is the same as Lucien de Rubempré's—the ambitious young person from the deep provinces who wants to become a person of significance in the capital.

Of course, my mother was no Rubempré in any other meaning of character, temperament, or project. She did not want to secure favors. To the contrary, she believed in her star. From her early adolescence, she had the sense of having special gifts, and of having something to contribute. The fierce and unrelenting desire to constantly deepen and expand her education—a project that occupies so much space in the diaries and that I have tried to include in the same proportions in this selection—was in a way the materialization of this sense of herself. She wanted to be worthy of the writers, painters, and musicians she revered. It was in this sense that Isaac Babel's *mot d'ordre*, “You must know everything,” could have been Susan Sontag's as well.

This is the very opposite of the way we think today. A belief in oneself is a constant in the consciousness of those who succeed in the world, but the form of that self-confidence is culturally determined and varies greatly from period to period. My mother's was, I think, a nineteenth-century consciousness, and the self-absorption of these journals has something of the tone of those great, selfish “accomplishers”—Carlyle comes to my mind. And this is far removed from the register in which ambition expresses itself in the early twenty-first century. A reader looking for irony will find none. My mother was profoundly aware of this. In her essay on Elias Canetti, which, along with her piece on Walter Benjamin, I always thought to be as close to a sally

into autobiography as she would ever make, she quoted approvingly Canetti's musing, "I try to imagine someone saying to Shakespeare, 'Relax!'"

So again, *caveat lector*. This is a journal where art is seen as a matter of life and death, where irony is assumed to be a vice, not a virtue, and where seriousness is the greatest good. These traits my mother exhibited early. And she never lacked for people who tried to get her to relax. She used to recall that her benevolent and conventional war-hero stepfather had pleaded with her not to read so much lest she never find a husband. The more self-assuredly cultivated version of this was the remark of the philosopher Stuart Hampshire, her tutor at Oxford, whom she told me once had exclaimed in frustration during a tutorial, "Oh, you Americans! You're so serious . . . just like the Germans." He did not mean it as a compliment; but my mother wore it as a badge of honor.

All of this might make a reader think that my mother was a "natural European," in Isaiah Berlin's sense of there being Europeans who were "natural" Americans and Americans who were "natural" Europeans. But I do not think this is quite right in my mother's case. It is true that for her American literature was a suburb of the great literatures of Europe—above all German literature—and yet probably her deepest assumption was that she could remake herself, that we can all remake ourselves, and that backgrounds could be jettisoned or transcended virtually at will, or, rather, if one had the will. And what is this if not the personification of Fitzgerald's observation that "there are no second acts in American lives"? As I say, on her deathbed that she never fully believed would be her deathbed, she was planning the next first act that she would live after the treatment had bought her some more time.

In this, my mother was remarkably consistent. One of the most striking things to me reading her journals was the impression that, from youth to old age, my mother was fighting the same battles, both with the world and with herself. Her feeling of mastery of the arts, her breathtaking confidence in the rightness of her own judgments, her extraordinary avidity—the sense that she needed to hear every piece of music, see every artwork, be conversant with all the great works of literature—are there from the start, when she is listing books she wants to read and then ticking them off as she reads them. But so is her sense of failure, of unsuitability for love and even for eros. She was as uncomfortable with her body as she was serene about her mind.

That makes me sadder than I can possibly convey. When my mother was very young, she took a trip to Greece. There, she saw a performance of *Medea* in an amphitheater in southern Peloponnesus. The experience moved her profoundly because as Medea is about to kill her children, a number of people in the audience started yelling, “No, don’t do it, Medea!” “These people had no sense of seeing a work of art,” she told me many times. “It was all real.”

These diaries are real, too. And reading them, I have very much the anxiety that I am responding as those Greek spectators in the mid-1950s did. I want to shout, “Don’t do it” or else “Don’t be so hard on yourself” or “Don’t think so well of yourself” or “Watch out for her, she doesn’t love you.” But of course I am too late: the play has already been performed and its protagonist is gone, as are most though not all of the other characters as well.

What remains is pain and ambition. These journals oscillate between them. Would my mother have wanted them exposed? Again, there are practical reasons behind my decision not only to allow their publication but to edit them

P R E F A C E

myself, even if there are things contained in them that are a source of pain to me, and much that I would have preferred not to know and not to have others know.

What I do know is that as a reader and a writer my mother loved diaries and letters—the more intimate the better. So perhaps Susan Sontag the writer would have approved of what I've done. I hope so, at any rate.

DAVID RIEFF

REBORN

1947

11/23/47

I believe:

- (a) That there is no personal god or life after death
- (b) That the most desirable thing in the world is freedom to be true to oneself, i.e., Honesty
- (c) That the only difference between human beings is intelligence
- (d) That the only criterion of an action is its ultimate effect on making the individual happy or unhappy
- (e) That it is wrong to deprive any man of life
[*Entries “f” and “g” are missing.*]
- (h) I believe, furthermore, that an ideal state (besides “g”) should be a strong centralized one with government control of public utilities, banks, mines, + transportation and subsidy of the arts, a comfortable minimum wage, support of disabled and age[d]. State care of pregnant women with no distinction such as legitimate + illegitimate children.

1948

4/13/48

Ideas disturb the levelness of life

7/29/48

. . . And what is it to be young in years and suddenly awakened to the anguish, the urgency of life?

It is to be reached one day by the reverberations of those who do not follow, to stumble out of the jungle and fall into an abyss:

It is then to be blind to the faults of the rebellious, to yearn painfully, wholly, after all opposites of childhood's existence. It is impetuosity, wild enthusiasm, immediately submerged in a flood of self-deprecation. It is the cruel awareness of one's own presumption . . .

It is humiliation with every slip-of-the-tongue, sleepless nights spent rehearsing tomorrow's conversation, and torturing oneself for yesterday's . . . a bowed head held between

one's hands . . . it is "my god, my god" . . . (in lower case, of course, because there is no god).

It is withdrawal of feeling toward one's family and all childhood idols . . . It is lying . . . and resentment, and then hate . . .

It is the emergence of cynicism, a probing of every thought and word and action. ("Ah, to be perfectly, utterly sincere!") It is a bitter and relentless questioning of motives . . .

It is to discover that the catalyst, the [*Entry trails off at this point.*]

8/19/48

What seemed once to be a crushing weight has sharply shifted position, in a surprising tactic, swung beneath my fleeing feet, become a sucking force that drags and tires me. How I long to surrender! How easy it would be to convince myself of the plausibility of my parents' life! If I saw only them and their friends for a year, would resign myself—surrender? Does my "intelligence" need frequent rejuvenation at the springs of *other's* dissatisfaction and die without it? If I can hold myself to these vows! For I can feel myself slipping, wavering—at certain times, even accepting the idea of staying home for college.

All I can think of is Mother, how pretty she is, what smooth skin she has, how she loves me. How she shook when she cried the other night—she didn't want Dad, in the other room, to hear her, and the noise of each choked wave of tears was like a giant hiccup—what cowards people are to involve

themselves, rather, to passively let themselves be involved, by convention, in sterile relationships—what rotten, dreary, miserable lives they lead—

How can I hurt her more, beaten as she is, *never* resisting?

How can I help me, make me cruel?

9/1/48

What does the expression “in his cups” mean?

Stone-slung mountain.

Read the [Stephen] Spender translation of [Rilke’s] *The Duino Elegies* as soon as possible.

Immersing myself in Gide again—what clarity and precision! Truly it is the man himself who is incomparable—all his fiction seems insignificant, while [Mann’s] *The Magic Mountain* is a book for all of one’s life.

I know that! *The Magic Mountain* is the finest novel I’ve ever read. The sweetness of renewed and undiminishing acquaintance with this work, the peaceful and meditative pleasure I feel are unparalleled. Yet for sheer emotional impact, for a sense of *physical* pleasure, an awareness of quick breath and quickly wasted lives—hurrying, hurrying—for the knowledge of life—no, not that—for a knowledge of aliveness—I would choose [Romain Rolland’s] *Jean-Christophe*—But it should only be read once.

•

... “When I am dead, I hope it may be said:
‘His sins were scarlet, but his books were read.’ ”

—Hilaire Belloc

•

Immersed myself in Gide all afternoon and listened to the [conductor Fritz] Busch (Glyndebourne festival) recording of [Mozart’s] *Don Giovanni*. Several arias (such soul-stretching sweetness!) I played over and over again (“Mi tradi quell’ alma ingrata” and “Fuggi, crudele, fuggi”). If I could always hear them, how resolute and serene I would be!

Wasted the evening with Nat [*Nathan Sontag, SS’s step-father*]. He gave me a driving lesson and then I accompanied him and pretended to enjoy a Technicolor blood-and-thunder movie.

After writing this last sentence, I read it again and consider[ed] erasing it. I should let it stand, though.—It is useless for me to record only the satisfying parts of my existence—(There are too few of them anyway!) Let me note all the sickening waste of today, that I shall not be easy with myself and compromise my tomorrows.

9/2/48

A tearful discussion with Mildred [*Mildred Sontag, née Jacobson, SS’s mother*] (damn it!). She said, “You should be very happy I married Nat. You would never be going to

Chicago, rest assured of that! I can't tell you how unhappy I am about it, but I feel that I have to make up to you for this."

Maybe I should be glad!!!

9/10/48

[Written and dated on the inside cover of SS's copy of the second volume of Andre Gide's Journals]

I finished reading this at 2:30 a.m. of the same day I acquired it—

I should have read it much more slowly and I must re-read it many times—Gide and I have attained such perfect intellectual communion that I experience the appropriate labor pains for every thought he gives birth to! Thus I do not think: "How marvelously lucid this is!"—but: "Stop! I cannot think this fast! Or rather I cannot grow this fast!"

For, I am not only reading this book, but creating it myself, and this unique and enormous experience has purged my mind of much of the confusion and sterility that has clogged it all these horrible months—

12/19/48

There are so many books and plays and stories I have to read—Here are just a few:

The Counterfeiters—Gide
The Immoralist— "

Lafcadio's Adventures— "
Corydon—Gide

Tar—Sherwood Anderson
The Island Within—Ludwig Lewisohn
Sanctuary—William Faulkner
Esther Waters—George Moore
Diary of a Writer—Dostoyevsky
Against the Grain—Huysmans
The Disciple—Paul Bourget
Sanin—Mikhail Artsybashev
Johnny Got His Gun—Dalton Trumbo
The Forsyte Saga—Galsworthy
The Egoist—George Meredith
Diana of the Crossways— "
The Ordeal of Richard Feverel— "

poems of Dante, Ariosto, Tasso, Tibullus, Heine,
 Pushkin, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Apollinaire

plays of Synge, O'Neill, Calderón, Shaw, Hellman . . .
 [*This list goes on for another five pages, and more
 than a hundred titles are mentioned.*]

•

. . . Poetry must be: exact, intense, concrete, significant,
 rhythmical, formal, complex

. . . Art, then, is thus always striving to be independent of the
 mere intelligence . . .

. . . Language is not only an instrument but an end in it-
 self . . .

... Through the immense and narrowly channeled clarity of his mind, Gerard Hopkins word-wrought a world of wracked and exultant imagery.

Wielding his pitiless lucidity, shielding himself from fleshiness by the rigid spiritualization of his life and art, he yet created work, within its limited scope, of unsurpassed freshness. Upon the anguished issue of his soul . . .

12/25/48

I'm completely engrossed, at this moment, in one of the most beautiful musical works I've ever heard—the Vivaldi B Minor p[iano]f[orte] concerto on Cetra-Soria with Mario Salerno—

Music is at once the most wonderful, the most alive of all the arts—it is the most abstract, the most perfect, the most pure—and the most sensual. I listen with my body and it is my body that aches in response to the passion and pathos embodied in this music. It is the physical “I” that feels an unbearable pain—and then a dull fretfulness—when the whole world of melody suddenly glistens and comes cascading down in the second part of the first movement—it is flesh and bone that dies a little each time I am sucked into the yearning of the second movement—

I am almost on the verge of madness. Sometimes—I think—(how deliberately I pen these words)—there are fleeting (oh so quickly flown) moments when I know as surely as today is Christmas that I am tottering over an illimitable precipice—

What, I ask, drives me to disorder? How can I diagnose myself? All I feel, most immediately, is the most anguished need for *physical love* and mental companionship—I am very young, and perhaps the disturbing aspect of my sexual ambitions will be outgrown—*frankly, I don't care*. [*In the margin, and dated May 31, 1949, SS adds the words: "Nor should you."*] My need is so overwhelming and time, in my obsession, so short—

I shall, in all probability, look back on this with a great deal of amusement. Just as I was once terrifiedly and neurotically religious and thought I should one day become a Catholic, so now I feel that I have lesbian tendencies (how reluctantly I write this)—

I must not think of the solar system—of innumerable galaxies spanned by countless light years—of infinities of space—I must not look up at the sky for longer than a moment—I must not think of death, of forever—I must not do all those things so that I will not know these horrible moments when my mind seems a tangible thing—more than my mind—my whole spirit—all that animates me and is the original and responsive desire that constitutes my “self”—all this takes on a definite shape and size—far too large to be contained by the structure I call my body—All this pulls and pushes—years and strains (I feel it now) until I must clench my fists—I rise—who can keep still—every muscle is on a rack—striving to build itself into an immensity—I want to scream—my stomach feels compressed—my legs, feet, toes stretching until they hurt.

I come closer and closer to bursting this poor shell—I know it now—contemplation of infinity—the straining of my

mind drives me to dilute the horror by the opposite of abstraction's simple sensuality. *And knowing that I do not possess the outlet, some demon nevertheless torments me—brims me with pain and fury—with fear and trembling (wrenched, racked I am—most wretched—) my mind mastered by spasms of uncontrollable desire—*

12/31/48

I read again these notebooks. How dreary and monotonous they are! Can I never escape this interminable mourning for myself? My whole being seems tense—expectant . . .

1949

1/25/49

I am going to Cal for this semester if I can get into a dorm.

2/11/49

[SS is writing just before she leaves her home in Los Angeles about her decision to attend Berkeley.]

. . . Emotionally, I wanted to stay. Intellectually, I wanted to leave. As always, I seemed to enjoy punishing myself.

2/19/49

[SS has arrived at "Cal," the University of California, Berkeley; she is barely sixteen.]

Well, I'm here.

It's no different at all; it seems it never was a matter of finding more felicitous surroundings, but of finding myself—finding self-esteem and personal integrity.

I'm no happier now than I was at home—...

... I want to write—*I want to live in an intellectual atmosphere*—I want to live in a cultural center where I can hear a great deal of music—all this and much more, but ... the important thing is that there seems to be no profession better suited to my needs than university teaching ... [*Across the remark about teaching, SS later scrawled: "Jesus!"*]

3/1/49

I bought *Point Counter Point* today and read steadily for six hours to finish it. [Aldous] Huxley's prose is so deliciously assured—his observations so gloriously acute, if one glories in the deft exposing of our civilization's emptiness—I found the book very exciting, though—a tribute to my embryonic critical abilities. I revel even in the inevitable depression which follows the reading of the book, simply because I have been aroused to a barren agitation in such a skillful manner!

Virtuosity impresses me more than anything else at this moment of my life—Technique, organization, verbal luxuriance appeal to me most strongly. The cruelly realistic comment (Huxley, Rochefoucauld)—the mocking caricature, or the lengthy, sensuous philosophic exposition of Thomas Mann in *Der Zauberberg* and [Der] *Tod in Venedig* [*The Magic Mountain* and *Death in Venice*] ... Very narrow of me—

•

“The problem for me is to transform a detached intellectual scepticism into a way of harmonious all-round living.”

P[oin]t Counter P[oin]t

•

4/2/49

I am in love with being in love!—Whatever I can think of Irene [*Lyons, lover of Harriet, becomes SS's lover and plays an important role in the journals from 1957 to 1963*] when I do not see her—Whatever intellectual restraint I can imagine myself possessed of—vanishes with the pain + frustration I feel in her presence. It is not an easy thing to be rejected so utterly—

4/6/49

I have not been able to bring myself to write of this until I had achieved some temporal + psychic distance—

What I know is very ugly—and so unbearable because it cannot be communicated—I tried! I wanted to respond! I wanted so much to feel a physical attraction for him and prove, at least, that I am bisexual—[*In the margin, dated May 31, SS has added: “What a stupid thought!—‘at least bisexual.’”*]

... Nothing but humiliation and degradation at the thought of physical relations with a man—The first time I kissed

him—a very long kiss—I thought quite distinctly: “Is this all?—it’s so silly”—I tried! I did try—but I know now it can never be—I want to hide—Oh, and I’ve messed up Peter’s life so—

His name is James Rowland Lucas—Jim—it was Friday evening, March 11th—the night I had planned to attend a Mozart concert in San Francisco.

•

What am I to do? [*In another, this time undated, later “comment,” SS has written: “Enjoy yourself, of course.”*]

[*Certainly written in April 1949, but undated in the notebook*]

Going home for a weekend was an amazing experience. I felt in myself a further emotional emancipation from what I—intellectually—find flawed—I think I am finally free of my dependence on / affection for Mother—She aroused nothing in me, not even pity—just boredom—The house never seemed as small, nor everyone so innately dull and trivial, and my own vitality was oppressive—Here, at least [*e.g., at Berkeley*], in undisguised aloneness, I have figured some pleasures and compensations—in music and books and reading poetry aloud. I need pretend to no one; I dispose of my time as I wish—At home there are all the pretenses and rituals of amicability—the terrifying waste of time—I must deal with the time of this summer carefully, for there is much to accomplish—

If I am not accepted at Chicago [*after one term at the University of California, Berkeley, SS had applied to transfer to the*

College of the University of Chicago], and, consequently plan to return to Cal in the winter, I shall stay up here for the first summer session. If not, then I shall audit these courses in the UCLA 8-week session.

2:00–5:00 every day I shall set aside for writing and study outside in the sun, and whatever time in the evenings I can manage—I shall be quiet, courteous, and disinvolved!

4/8/49

This afternoon, I heard a lecture on “The Function of Art and the Artist” by Anaïs Nin: she is very startling—pixie-like, other-worldly—small, finely-built, dark hair, and much make-up which made her look very pale—large, questioning eyes—a marked accent which I could not label—her speech is over-precise—she shines and polishes each syllable with the very tip of her tongue and teeth—one feels that if one were to touch her, she would crumble into silver dust. [*In the margin, SS later writes: “Harriet was there.”*]

Her theory of art was preciously intangible (discovery-of-the-unconscious, automatic-writing, revolt-against-our-mechanistic-civilization)—She was analyzed by Otto Rank.

4/14/49

I read [Djuna Barnes’s] *Nightwood* yesterday—What a great prose she writes—That is the way I want to write—rich and rhythmic—heavy, sonorous prose that befits those mythic ambiguities that are both source and structure to an aesthetic experience symbolized by language—

4/16/49

I read the major part of [Dostoyevsky's] *The Brothers Karamazov* and suddenly feel frantically impure. I wrote three letters to Peter and Audrey completely severing those relationships and to Mother, semi-declaring my revulsion for the past—

•

Oh, it was Irene, too—

She's right and admirable, to be honest—

•

And to think I had talked myself into affection for Peter, because I was so lonely and I couldn't imagine finding anyone better than he! And all that mess with Audrey—Hell, if Irene can be honest and reject me—I can (for the first time) be sincere myself—

[On the inside cover page of the notebook dated 5/7/49–5/31/49, SS writes in capital letters: "I AM REBORN IN THE TIME RETOLD IN THIS NOTEBOOK."]

5/17/49

Finished [Hermann Hesse's] *Demian* today and was, on the whole, greatly disappointed. The book has some very fine passages, and the first few chapters describing Sinclair's early adolescence are quite good . . . But the straight-faced super-