Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas* is a great book for illuminating any young mind, because I think young women and young men both are dumb on the subject of what a hazard it is for women to write. And also strikingly in *Three Guineas*—and it’s one of the contrasts between Hilda Doolittle and Marianne Moore—Virginia Woolf points out that women—she is thinking of English women—do not have a legal claim to a nationality. If they marry a Dane, they are a Dane. They go wherever the husband goes, and consequently are not chained by the false loyalties that—the main argument in the *Three Guineas* is of a series of false loyalties that make for deep falsehood in writing.

One of the falsehoods that Virginia Woolf sees no way out of involves writing: she says get to a mimeograph machine, but do not go through an editor, do not go through a publisher, because you will find you are writing in order to please the editor or the publisher or whomever. Of course Virginia Woolf’s most difficult person to please was herself. Where Marianne Moore could share with her mother, Virginia Woolf couldn’t even share with herself; and her terrific doubts...she was a very keen appreciative reader, and a wonderful essayist, but when it came to relation to her own work, the whole world that wants to stop writing was nothing like her own sense of having gone wrong in a sentence or a paragraph and yet it’s one shared by all writers.

Well, Virginia Woolf’s answer was that she didn’t believe there was a writer of distinction who had not an independent income, an income that didn’t come from a job. I can think right away of something that Virginia Woolf was conveniently overlooking, which was the work of Dorothy Richardson; all her life Virginia Woolf denied that work. But Dorothy Richardson never really could bring the great Miriam novel to a completion. She is the one working writer that I know of in the twentieth century, the kind that has to earn her living daily and write like Trollope early in the morning before going to work and kept to it over years. In the same period when Pound was raising money to try to rescue Eliot, who was on the point of a nervous breakdown, and Eliot’s career was complicated by his emotional life,
Richardson's was complicated just by her exhaustion in the period that she was working. You worked 10 hours a day and you came home—and she wrote the same way she worked in the dentist's office. More than that: she wrote articles in dentists' magazines.

Well, both Marianne Moore and H.D. had forms of personal subsidy. At one point I remember Marianne Moore either saying or writing candidly that friends had invested money for her quite early and after The Dial she did not have to work. She didn't have to take any kind of work that was going to eat away at her writing. In the case of H.D., money was also invested for her. At one point I asked Pearson when I was working on the H.D. material, I said, "But didn't she have some money of her own?" Because it's very clear that H.D. lived entirely on Bryher's stipends most of her life. That was the offer from Bryher. But Bryher was also back of Dorothy Richardson. It's Bryher who rescued Dorothy Richardson in the period of her being able to write Pilgrimage; and Sitwell...Edith Sitwell seems to be another woman poet that women don't mention or...and by the way, another maiden. There are two of them, Marianne Moore and Edith Sitwell. Edith Sitwell, dying, said there was one thing she regretted: she had never done that thing that they talk about. It was an experience she hadn't had. So maybe she needed another life. Then there would have to be other English courses.

But I wanted to talk about...by the age of seventeen I had seen that I was the heir of a remarkable age of masters. At that time Marianne Moore seemed to me the equal of H.D., and Pound, and Eliot. It took a little later, not until Williams wrote "The Wedge" and I began to understand the metaphysical force of Williams's poetry, that he'd truly come to be a master that I've studied ever since. But I was also devout enough that I would take Ezra Pound's word for it and struggle and struggle with Williams like somebody trying to piece out a recalcitrant text in Chinese, some kind of counterpart of Pound's Cantos. But H.D. I discovered on my own.

The war had just begun, the Second World War, the War, and I belonged to a small enough group in those days, since that was the war against Hitler, who saw it in terms of a world mystery. Now that years have passed by I read Toynbee, who's of the same opinion (and we are suffering from the same thing), but at eighteen, I don't know how at eighteen I knew, but I said, when a terror like Hitler starts terrifying the world, if you enter that you can only win by becoming more terrible. And when the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and when it was deliberated to destroy Dresden, picked out as non-military targets, I saw that what my youthful heart quailed at was quite true. But I have always been fascinated by history and it's always there, the contamination of terror has opened up. We couldn't have had anything more terrible than our Civil War, if you want to think about our erasing and repressing something, the millions who died in the Civil War we repressed, we've gotten legend to cover it, and poets eventually will have to uncover that legend. But the Second World War needn't be uncovered; we were alive while it was going on; and the wars since—there has been a remarkable definition on the part of many, many poets and historians of what it is that is going on in the modern war.

H.D.'s very first breaking open with a task to do in poetry—that's a very im-

portant step, the one from writing your poems and feeling called to poetry (and I'm thankful that it was a long period that I had before the tasks began to appear): it's the one in which you, as Pound said, learn your craft, and you get the confidence that you do have a craft. (Marianne Moore, by the way, of all that master generation, was the absolute craftsman. Think of the respect of Pound, of Eliot, of Williams, of something more than respect, the awe, at her craftsmanly worked poems, and yet in thinking about Virginia Woolf's warning, we see that she won her place right away by her craftsmanly worked poems and that lot of energy was going into the expert....She loved to rhyme, though, and let's not take her loves away from her, and she loved fittings—but her poems finally became performances, an athleticism of the poem appeared.) In H.D.'s case, she was already admired for that—as we know, the beginning of Imagism was taking three poems of H.D.'s and putting at the bottom "H.D." and then putting "Imagist," with an "e" on the end to give it this feeling of the continent, and sending it off to Poetry magazine.

Now, I'll start just with that nucleus, because it is a nucleus from which the whole tenor of H.D.'s comes in the very first place and it's intimately associated with Pound's intentions and Pound's program in the poem, because it was not uncommon, by the way, not only for women but men to sign with initials. There are several memoirs where people had trouble distinguishing "D.H.L." from "H.D." and thought they were the same person. Very good example—they were writing poems back and forth to each other—the Eurydice-Orpheus poems are an exchange and it's an interesting exchange to read, and that it was intense you can tell by H.D.'s reaction. Did she read The Man Who Died? She did later but I mean did she in the beginning and forget it? She's got several contradictory statements about it, but the book might have been too important even by that time for her because she knew that she was in the book and she was in the very beginning of Pound's book. The "H.D." was not written by Hilda Doolittle. However, if you were a young writer wanting to make it in London and you arrived the year that there was a very famous play about a Miss Doolittle and her learning English, I think that you also might want to call yourself "H.D."—or H.D. would have been living her whole life trying to fill out the blanks in My Fair Lady which is another career, an entirely different one than we have, and Pound was certainly like the Professor in the role that he played with everyone, not just selectively with H.D. Except with Marianne Moore. They all were overawed by Marianne Moore's technique and had very little correspondence to offer about what...she did it better than they did, in many ways. When she...I am wandering from the center of H.D., but these two women do come close together. When she was working on La Fontaine, one thing I know—that's a period when I corresponded some with her and also met her—is that she was very happy because she was exchanging—Pound's letters reflected it too—she would send her translations to Pound and Pound could find fault with them. So maybe that's a huge book for a man to find fault with—which gives her a form of corres-

Riding; you find yourself short-circuited in every direction and every bit of energy in the first place has suddenly got diverted into a whole lifetime of simply contradicting: that's her way of, a kind of an attack-defense—endless, mostly having to do with her name.

In H.D.'s case she took the name, took the H.D., pursued it and submitted her poems under the "H.D." so it had the immediate personal relief of removing her from the comic stage association with the other Doolittle created by Shaw. The early letters show that Shaw was very serious for them in that period and that they were quite aware; more than that, that play with Eliza Doolittle in it is a play in which a man models a woman and the woman secretly remains herself. And it was the model of the little-does-he-know-what-she-knows-he-knows and so forth that made many a marriage of one figure sitting knitting while the other discourses upon everything that goes on in the world and the one sitting knitting begins to make you go back to the myths of the Sphinx who refuses to tell you what it is that's going on in this locked-up corner of what mother actually knows or something. (You finally find out she only knows knitting and that she's having trouble as a matter of fact keeping track of the knitting.)

Once H.D. is launched, those first two poems were striking, and that's extremely important in the beginning of anyone's poetry, that it strikes. It still seems to me one of the things, and it can't be taught, the force of something that strikes us, and more than that it's cooperative: no critic can decide what is going to strike a mind. Our own minds are waiting fields, waiting for certain things and when it strikes you never forget it. When it strikes it enters deep in you and remains a primary poem, and primary poems are what change—change judgments and so forth at different periods. One of the weaknesses of our period, because we're much more seeking our sexual identity than we are our poetry, is that we're entertaining lots of poems because they are vehicles of information about feelings and so forth that have been repressed. But a poem is not primarily a vehicle of repression; it acts marvelously, to open up things when there's repressed content—is a real force of something and the role of there being a repression present may have a lot to do with the force that comes forward to strike the identity of the poem.

But it's amazing that H.D.'s very first Sea Garden was judged to be entirely those Imagist poems. She had only a handful of imagist poems; she ends up Sea Garden with a long poem that shows that she's always going to be wanting to write a long poem and a poem that goes toward narrative—and that even put her in a critical position in relation to people who want a war in which you choose sides. That whole group were distressed when they opened their copy of the Egoist and found not only new poetry but lists of German poets who had been killed. The European mind was destroyed in the Second World War—I mean in the First World War. The German mind was destroyed in the Second World War. Most people don't realize that Hitler was the enemy of the German mind. I mean that he almost did completely—ended forever, the spirit that had entered...and blamed it by the way, of course, for entering the European mind. That there might ever be a European mind again is very, very doubtful. And, tritely, because we're beginning to experience the whole world and that makes the problem of the European mind no longer big or widening at all.

Well, the ardor of H.D. was there from the very beginning and it carried her beyond the bounds of form. We find early correspondence between Pound and Eliot lamenting that she didn't keep an essential virginal stance—it's just amazing how the men could ask their mistresses to be virgins but it was—the virginal mind. Eliot is the bitterer attacker, by the way, of this. His wonderful remark that Marianne Moore had a mind too virginal to be violated by an idea, was an example, and she has declarations in her own poetry that show that intention. She will not have to do with that which she despises. Well, that is exactly our Virginia Woolf, that's caught in the Virginia Woolf bind. There was a cooperation in the Moore household of a kind of censorship. It's a censorship that William Carlos Williams would try to shock in Paterson, shamefully as a matter of fact, because the dialogue of the lesbians in Paterson was designed in good part to shock Marianne Moore and her mother and see if he could get by with it, if they would approve of it or not. H.D. seems never to have...she did not take those poems for Pound to blue-pencil or say, "What do you think of these?"; she simply showed the poems. That's quite clear in all accounts, including Pound's; and Pound found them astounding. That in a way that is not often remarked upon the usual Poundian wants to point out that Pound was perceptive and saw right away there was a poet, but that was something more about where Pound was at that time.

By Red Roses to Bronze, which is H.D.'s work that follows the Collected Poems—there's a malaise after the Collected Poems in '25—and then the poems through the thirties: sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between Edna St. Vincent Millay and H.D. There was a form of—as I usually put it, "fire-and-ice ladies"—and there were four of them in America; the fourth one was Robert Frost, who made declarations of this kind of poem. Robert Frost's got widely quoted, but it doesn't seem to have the same implications as Edna St. Vincent Millay's or H.D.'s—it never disappears, and it's one of the elements in H.D. all the way through that is discounted again. All of these are formula discounts about how a young lady should behave. It's the one that makes the word "hysteria" get used as a psychological term for hysteria, saying, well, it has to do with the womb.

But H.D.'s notes and thoughts on the moon and so forth show that her answer to Lawrence was not to deny phallic thinking—so she really had no trouble with Freud. She was very excited when she found him—and it must have seemed natural to her indeed that she found—Freud with a theory of the phalus as a center because it strengthened her sense that her own sexual organs were a center. I'm amazed that this wasn't more of a response. One wonderful article I remember by a woman analyst writing on cunt envy—using the word at the point when you could use that word—pointing out that men are much more envious of women whose sexual organs are not about to be chopped off or not about...and so forth; and of course the man has the picture that the woman doesn't have to earn a living and he does—lots of pictures that really are a failing to see the positive picture of their body. And H.D. is building the positive picture of the meaning of a woman's body.

Then she always goes further, because her disposition from the very first, from Sea Garden, the one that made her images something quite different from just an image, was that she was certain that she could find in her Shakespeare or she could find in her Goethe that the world was a book and that to live is to read, to read deep into it, and there are no incidental texts, no accidental things. And there again she had the
agreement of Freud; the number of angry Freudians who responded to that marvelous *Tribute* because of her absolute equality with Freud. Yet Freud does not seem to question her equality with him. I think he saw very few creative people indeed; and his identity as a creative person is what H.D. recognized and it gave her a person who wasn’t a poet but a person who was of her order. And I have such a strong feeling of that, and it’s not a democratic feeling about the world, that these people are extremely rare, and Freud was of the same rarity as H.D. H.D.’s greatest problem in her life was that she, no more than the extraordinary handful of great men poets she knew, could tolerate their presence. Follow through Williams’ and Pound’s correspondence, they were having as much difficulty as you could ever have, being based largely upon each one thinking the other’s poetry was wrong, right down to the very use of language; and that correspondence went on for their whole lifetime and their friendship, and they got along best if they—like you do with your relatives, if you see them for a weekend, and you know you’re going to be hopping on the train in short order.

Well, then the story of H.D., which became a kind of myth, is itself an extension of exactly what she saw Freud was seeing, and that is that hidden in the way that grips us is something like the imprint, that there are certain aspects of life which form a plot and when they begin, then we acquire a fate. We also can acquire the foolishness of the fate—Freud can’t give up the twenty-eight cigars a day, and feeds that cancer for agonized years, knowing what he’s doing and yet caught because Freud himself is such a fateful event that he has no way to break from its force. And sometimes, reading lovingly in H.D., I think about how little she could ever break with the fateful poet who emerged as she came into her work. She comes into the work in the Second World War. Her First World War poems were the hints; the First World War broke loose with several long poems that obviously Pound and the admirers of H.D. were going to forget were in the volume; they never even talk about them. A few critics who were not of the school, and so who were not looking for the purist thing that Pound and Eliot were praising her for, weren’t in her literary crowd, read that first book with some appreciation of its potentialities, but *literature* decided not to read it—those weren’t the potentialities that the general teaching of literature was going to draw.

But the biggest split and isolation for H.D. involved being surrounded in a cocoon by Bryher, protected economically and also protected literally and isolated, isolated from the literary scene, self-isolating, which she could be, and had all the cooperation home, with Bryher working historical novels, and a feeling of living throughout history. So that when we’re in H.D. studies or reading deeper and deeper in H.D., the question comes over and over again that we’re up against life read in a different way than we are told it is, and that’s what separates her poetry from Louise Bogan or from the established poets of the thirties and forties. And that’s because she wasn’t metaphysical, which was a proposition, an intellectual proposition.

Metaphysics is a substitute for the sacred life. And it’s true that when I say sacred life I call upon special sanctions that might seem unfair indeed—we have to speak of somebody who is so much building and searching for—not finding, but searching for—the sacred life, that they’re going to be presumptuous throughout. Because a metaphysical poem says you are presumptuous; and then irony appears and you’ve

got thinking about—I remember Sister Mary Korte telling me, “Thinking about God is not God”—and H.D. is presentation. And that was Pound—Pound was presentation. Both of them have the same trouble. At times we wish that Pound could have thought. H.D.’s got a good mind when she’s thinking, and she is not mixed up about what she’s doing when she is writing in the sacred mode. So in the war trilogy—before the war trilogy—as she prepares to study, as she rightly put it, with Freud, she tried poems that would prepare her, and they are poems that show the signs of the megalomaniac of the poet, I mean, the Priestess, she plays all the high cards and speaks from them. There’s nothing wrong with this scenario except it limits you to the high cards; it’s very hard to manage wholeness. Sacredness is easy for a while—sacredness up to the breaking through of the walls is life within sanctuarity or in the part of us preparing for the sanctuity of the worship of the god. In *The Walls Do Not Fall* and in the war trilogy, this sense of the sacred invades all aspects of life, and gives its signs from streetcars (these are accidents, I’m not really referring to texts at this point). The three books took an unbelievable and merciless attack; only Laura Riding and Dorothy Richardson were treated in the same way. “Innocent Will” is treated with lofty academic contempt.

Let me go back to that moment in the Second World War—I asked Rexroth, does anybody see it the way we do, this little group of anarchists, most of them Jewish anarchists and disciples of Emma Goldman, and sentimental, as we were called, New England Emersonian and Thoreauian anarchists, how we saw the war and how we saw a figure like Roosevelt, especially, with the same alarm that we viewed Hitler and Churchill. (I’ve had such a long lifetime of hating presidents that I have bored myself. I don’t think one more “hate president” poem would really stir me. I know a poet who has written a poem about his habit of hating the president, no matter what.” And then they fill it in—that’s what I find incredible!—they get really hateful, if you’re looking for that.) Well, in H.D.’s life, this world, this sacred world, filled itself in. And one of the criticisms in this is that she, without disdain, she really moves through the world and those things that we hate she hates very abstractly and loves very immediately, things that are immediate presentations. The very first poem of “Hermes of the Ways” has an hallucinatory quality, and I think it was a break-through, where suddenly instead of a thing being an image in a poem it was present. That’s the feeling you get and that’s the feeling that remains in the poem. As a matter of fact, the poem dissolves and disappears, the opposite of what you’re taught in a literature class. There’s nothing being done with words at all, they’re evocative throughout, or present—that was the theme that Pound preached and that H.D. preached and that went along with a new cadence as a new idea; and they were poets who wrote by cadence, and that also isolated them from the critical acclaim which was for regularity. And that expanded, that very first...the moment...the appearance...and it was the appearance of “Hermes,” the appearance of a divine power that she knew, that governs ways. She was looking at sea paths and the god of the sea paths.

H.D. is always a realist in relation to what a divine power is, so she doesn’t question things by trying to put a woman in that position. The appearance of Our Lady in the war trilogy is Our Lady, not suddenly a substitute, nor is she surprised that she does not take the place of the he that haunts the poems too. Our Lady is very specifically
Our Lady, over and over again, and she replaces Venus and becomes, as a matter of fact, the sum of all the previous women, and in a way I think it tells us something about how H.D. saw the problem of gathering womanly strength was to become the summation of all the previous women. In talking with her, she wasn’t interested in Emily Dickinson’s poetry, she knew Edith Sitwell and Edith Sitwell had admired H.D.’s poetry but H.D. is really very removed from a response to contemporary work. I was surprised, but then not surprised, remembering Virginia Woolf, who vehemently disliked fellow women writers who began to be of her own order, as if they were rivals.

Certainly one of the aspects of writing that emerges very strongly (and the Freudianism, I think, helps), is that in writing we have only one thing, and that is that our selves emerge. It’s not a rival Robert Duncan. One is bad enough; in my No Exit there are two more Robert Duncans in the room, and that’s hell, absolute hell. But there is no rival for being yourself, and that is what is emerging in a poem, not a rival to be in magazines of the time, and H.D. understood that always. She never really had her moments. Gertrude Stein caused moments of envy and rivalry in both H.D. and, strikingly, in Virginia Woolf, who kept her memoirs going; when all the students at Oxford wanted to hear Gertrude Stein she thought she’d lost—I don’t know why, but she thought she’d lost her entire public and was going to be passe the very next day.

There are a few points in the late thirties when H.D., fishing around, sends a text at one point to Blues, an avant-garde magazine, and tries to write an avant-garde text. It does show that she was tempted out there to try to see if she could also be the latest thing, like Djuna Barnes...and yet she must wisely have seen that it was false. Once you saw what you had to do you no longer were going to be doing things like that at all. And that never happened...well, okay, I no sooner say “no” than I remember some poems written during the war. After the war trilogy, there are some...trying to keep that going, and that group of poems has interesting things in it especially in relation to later poetry, the later supernatural narrative poetry, but are really written, it seems to me, to see if it couldn’t return to the excitement.

So one of the things that happened in the formation of the poet was the same thing with Pound; how he kept going through the Adams years, God knows, because they were a long period in which he never returned to the force that’s really in the poem. And the break out in the Pisan Cantos comes from that long, bottlenecked state, and by that time there were such massive distortions and compressions that we have a poem that truly expresses our times. Had he been a kindly social worker he would not have written the Cantos at all and he certainly wouldn’t have written the last ones, and so we would have had no evidence that our time is monstrous. If it weren’t for the last Cantos, we would just have sophisticated anti-Semitism as you get it in Eliot and Fitzgerald and a whole series of others, and Virginia Woolf, by the way, that little fashion of writing back and forth smart remarks about Jews that don’t have any substance.

One of the characteristics of H.D.’s road is that she never went there. The whole Jewish matter was not a Jewish matter, because it belonged to the sacred. All the way through she understood the sacred, and studied and studied, and in her last years she was still studying the nature of the sacred and working to unify the sacred myth or story with the world story, to keep it as a solid center, the story. “Myth” means “story.” And the truth of myth is when the story is compelling, when the story is so compelling that we can tell that we’re not just making it up, but it seems to have a force of its own going and an intent that goes toward, not metaphorically, not with a mind thinking about what ought to be the result here at all, but have a whole identity of its own that the author or the storyteller is following and we are too, listening, then it really is myth, and H.D. worked not toward just a personal myth but with the recognition that nothing is just personal but everything transpersonal and goes toward a new human being.

Those very first poems in Sea Garden, the long ones, had to do with the emergence of a new...like Lawrence, very influenced by Lawrence, by the way—in an account there were long sessions of talking late into the night—that whole group were fascinated: couldn’t there be the emergence of a new human being? And that’s part of the subject that we’ve got today; that’s what new feminist writers are talking about. In picturing the new woman, it has shifted in the last five years to picturing the new human being, and it’s really astounding. And more than that, to a secret history of the existence of human beings throughout time. And that is the one that H.D. felt very strongly.

Eliot was a convert to Episcopalian Christianity, but only Lawrence and H.D. agreed with Henry James that Christ has the same reality that...I remember the shock in the text that Pickwick has, and I realize that Pickwick was realer than my mother was—a truly creative reality moving through history. And the fight, the fight in the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, where Christ was given over entirely to the church and the church is not a story—as a matter of fact when myth came to mean a lie or myth came to mean “what those people think,” that ground had been won by Jane Harrison. Interestingly enough for our notes too about women and what they can draw upon, H.D. was ignorant of Jane Harrison in the early years. It’s Frazer who was giving them all their clues in The Golden Bough. Of course coming on it later with Jane Harrison, one of the great writers, very great writers, and still not discovered in literature courses, it’s astounding that they didn’t draw directly on it. But had they drawn directly on it they wouldn’t have come across this...they came across something much more important—its reality.

Jane Harrison herself, at the end of her life, in her eighties, learned Russian, because she was preparing to go to Russia, where she was sure that there were bear cults of Artemis, and she would get to see the dance that she’d looked for all her life. The literalness here—it’s Jessie Weston ending her career as a folklorist by announcing in a book called Quest for the West—it’s before Ritual to Romance—that not only had she come to the conclusion that the Grail had to do with gnostic cults, but she found gnostic cults in London and joined them. It isolated Yeats completely in the period. And the break between generations is quite amazing. I asked H.D., “But didn’t you ever talk with Yeats?” And she said, “Well, Tommy said there was something wrong about his thought and so none of us smart young people had anything to do with him.” Pound of course loved him and so he saw him all the time. There was a wry kind of humor of history that your sophistication would separate you from a Yeats.
Yet on the other hand, it’s a hopeless thought to think of H.D. being in the Golden Dawn hermetic society which Yeats was in for some twenty-five years—he left finally out of the emptiness of it for him. I remember at one point when I was writing on the H.D. book and I passed—my parents had been hermeticists—and I passed a little hermeticist church—a Rosicrucian church, I guess it was—and it had on its blackboard that the lecture that night was going to be on correspondences. I still had a great mistrust; of course I went to it and found myself back in Sunday School. There was more spirit running up and down the streets anywhere than there was in this row of people reciting their Sunday School lesson on resurrection. The great lines that ring out and are made true, again, because they are in the rhyme of H.D.—rhyme is a little secret that isn’t perpetuated in hermetic circles. Again, they think—it’s the difference between this thinking and the feeling that wants the immediate presence.

With Yeats, we know now as we get more and more of his biography, his wife is the one who had the dictation and Yeats himself only had one of what we call hallucination, which was the smell of violets in the room, so he seems to have been separated from the astral world except when he was writing, except in the rhythms and the allogonic trance—trance thinking, trance feeling, but a trance of poetry, not a trance of just any kind. They go together because we find in H.D. in the back of the war trilogy that Bryher and H.D. met with a young Hindu and they had table turnings, and one of the breakdowns of H.D. came when she did it alone. Now there she could have turned to her theosophy and learned, “Thou shalt not sit at a Ouija board alone,” because the multiplication of voices and the multiplication of realities that emerges is unbuilding the same way that your own center of intention and integrity built itself.

In the late thirties, reviews like Southern Review and Hudson came out with Yeats issues. And all of the Yeats issues really misbehave—sometimes you wonder, was he dead in the beginning and stinking even then? We had the amazing proposition of a poet—England only had one great poet—maybe the last one—and Anglo-Irish that to their embarrassment, moreover—but when they came to acclaim that one great poet, they turned away from a whole side of him. (This was, by the way, the shaping mood of Blackmur, of that generation I so hate it’s hard to remember their names.) In school we were taught that Yeats was wonderful poetry so we studied its resonances and to some degree its coloring, but that his ideas were wrong, don’t go into the loony part. When Virginia Moore wrote her book The Unicorn, it was a courageous breakthrough. And I asked Professor Parkinson, who had worked on Yeats, I said, “Where did she find that material?” and he said, “It’s all there on the shelf; she shouldn’t have quoted from it. He was crazy.” Another close friend of mine is a German translator of Yeats and he asked, “Do I have to translate The Vision? It’s a crazy book; it’s embarrassing; it should never have been printed.”

H.D. didn’t have to worry about “It should never have been printed”; she printed them herself, enlarged her few little books that she wanted to get out. My own publisher cut out a good part of The Gift because it was just muddled, it was not metaphysical, and “nobody’s interested in that” was the reply of it. Well, most of the missing novels are part of an enormous plot that show as a matter of fact how large the associations are in Helen and in the works that follow the Helen. No one doubts in reading the Helen that it is a poem that is at once the story and at the same time is a set of personal keys. In the early twenties in a story H.D. repeats throughout a dramatic interior monologue, “James Joyce was right, James Joyce was right”; and I’ve always thought that she caught on to part of what that change was going to be before she started it herself, because Stephen and Bloom are not masks but persons in which Joyce is embedded, and what was called “mythology” is present throughout.

Again, it relates to a time, eternal time, and it’s in eternal time that we don’t have the problem that Eliot poses, “Here is, my goodness, here is Ulysses today,” because this today and yesterday has been entirely differently disposed. Eliot needs a today because he needs a tomorrow. And H.D. is not really writing for tomorrow. She’s writing to open up today. This is still consistent with the idea that the poem was a presentation, that the images were not to illustrate some idea in the poem—that’s a split—the split in the Imagists went three ways: one was the impressionists, and Amy Lowell can stand for them, I think as an example we would all know; but another one we don’t quite notice, and that is that Eliot was highly considered as an Imagist because he made striking images and they even wondered, are they metaphysical or something. But there were striking figures in the poem; but they had no psychological depth because no such thing exists in Eliot’s world. There is no psychological depth to today if today is only transient, if it isn’t present, if it isn’t the very place where it is. And so the ecstasy...another worthwhile approach, the kind of ecstasy you find in H.D. and in Pound, in the end where his ecstasies are the only thing that carry, ecstasies and prayers to be relieved of his guilt, are all direct; they’re not social dues being paid; and they differ from the ecstasies in Four Quarters, The Waste Land is a poem of great desolation because it has no such resource, doesn’t have the resource that Pound had long ago rejected; Eliot had been taught at Harvard better than to have the resource of something that we wrongly call belief because the world of the imagination seems to be a total system of its own, I know at one point one of the street questioners said, “Do you believe in the devil?” and I said, “I don’t believe; I live in the imagination and I can imagine the devil, I can imagine no devil, I can imagine a hundred devils, and my imagination doesn’t do that at all once”; so I’ve got a clue when that happens in the imagination.

But the imagination is larger than and contradictory to the idea of a belief. A belief is...“I promise not to imagine this” is what’s written under belief. And all beliefs have systems; you say, “I promise not to imagine so-and-so” and “I promise not...” and this promise is none that H.D. ever made. Pound made some very unfortunate ones in the shaping of his own fate. So when she swept...when the Rat-Set boat came into the poem and somebody said, “Well there he is, that’s and much,” I said, “But at last he’s got Ra and Set in the boat and he’s coming home, he’s coming home to what he always had...what in the very beginning he believed was there in poetry, somewhat brainwashed by Yeats.” It was a very special case, because Yeats took Pound apart for a year to read to him and in that time seems to have done directed Pound’s deep mind that in distress—for instance...for the Poundians, Pound you know is the guy who knows economics and has got the right view of government, and so forth. But when Pound is in distress in that poem, and he is frequently, the prayers that come don’t belong to that system at all. And he has two
or three figures: he has the Aphrodite of whom it’s as if he says, “This Aphrodite that you see all the time painted”—H.D. says much the same thing in some passages—you see her painted and you call her beautiful but as Plato would say, you haven’t begun to discover what that leads into; you haven’t whetted your consciousness with this Aphrodite and then you will discover... and finally in the Cantos it’s a whole river of crystal light that surpasses all things to him but the most important thing is that he prays to her.

He prays to the mother; and when he’s praying to the mother, by the way, he is not praying to this crystalline radiance—“Magna Mater” is the mother figure in the Cantos and is prayed to with only a hint here and there of the terrible mother who is also very strong in that figure. When my mother died, H.D. told me that when her mother died it wasn’t for twenty years that she could recall her. And when she did she felt she’d already become her mother, that her mother was no long staying in her way so she could be Helen. One of the adventures of Helen is, “Now I’m Helen; now I’m supposed to be Helen.” And Helen is... as in H.D.’s constant play again as a mother, she’s the mother of Perdita in the play of Shakespeare and she stays by the Shakespeare; Shakespeare becomes one of her mysteries. Everyone around is a sacred personality.

In the Hedgehog, the children’s book, written I take it for Perdita, at just the right age (and one thing I’d like to learn from her is what was it like to have The Hedgehog as a book as a child), what we have is the child that had been in Algernon Blackwood, she could have found it in George MacDonald, she could have found yearning for it in Nietzsche’s child that the nineteenth century began to dream of. That’s one we haven’t talked about; we’ve talked about being man and being women but being children...? Nietzsche said we live all our lifetime in order to come to be a child—and there’s the dual role of the child in all of H.D.’s poetry—she’s both coming to be a child, she’s coming to have a child, and the child comes as a pure revelation, one that comes as a sign, as an omen.

The thorniest row I think for the critic is—in order to bring H.D. into a right position in our literature, we have to change our entire literature, our entire concept of literature. Women’s writing is learning that; in order to discover women’s writing they simply have to throw away the reading list that they were given and discover women writers and as a matter of fact not make judgments beforehand and collect a whole bunch and find out when it’s all through what it is that lasts, that’s present. Remember it will be always changing; but that means lots of discoveries; and H.D. is a discovery that has been made; Dorothy Richardson is a discovery that still seems to be a secret cult going around. Time magazine said of Dorothy Richardson, it’s like Proust without sex, or something, I mean...the snide remarks that can be thought up—you see my San Francisco prejudices—by New York to put down major writing in the twentieth century by women. There are some women novelists who were not in the literary world so that you discover them on the shelves by going through the library and actually reading some of those stray novels. And poems, I think, are too. It’s a massive job because it is true, so many poems are written you wonder if we shouldn’t have closed the season quite some time ago.

Staring at these stacks and stacks and stacks of books and realizing that you had to read them, preferably at a college, I think the great prayer that goes up is, “Dear God, I hope nothing will be added to the reading list this year,” especially if you’ve been in the system for about twenty years and somebody’s going to be upply and add a book that you actually have to read some time, and this is the cry I heard of distress at Ra-Set—“We have to learn Egyptian now?” This goes along with people who want to be one world—“BUT I don’t want to learn no Egyptian in order to be one world.”

I’ll make one last note: we have to uncover I think a great deal of nineteenth-century occult literature—both theoretical occult literature of the nineteenth century, the pseudo scientists, but we also have to open up many, many mystical novels that were written in that period, and look again at poems that come in the category that are dismissed usually because of this thing, prejudice. The prejudice, by the way, we think of as content right away, but the obscurity of a composer like Scriabin or a painter like Kandinsky we find out were deeply rooted in their having been Rosicrucians or Theosophists or having been in other words heterodox in their interests.

A last note on H.D.’s last letters is, there came increasingly a sort of questioning, “Why can’t I die? Am I going to live forever?” A tiredness—“I’ve been at it so long, and do I have to write again?” Not just live, but do I have to write again? And that pall comes out in the poem, just as William’s poems have them—“I am a poet, I am a poet”—in Paterson—I think we better look at that pathos if we think that women are the only ones who are made to feel that you’re in the wrong place—but the pathos of utter exhaustion and of writing-agony and of consciousness, the agony of consciousness: “Do I have to? Do I have to face this, do I have to go through the consciousness that I know I’m going to be in again when I go through this poem? I’m old; can’t I be excused?”

I also read Pound’s very last years as years of contrition. I don’t know of any other poets who have periods of contrition, of barest recognition of the hubris he had been deeply committing all the way through the poem. It’s the only truly heroic poem of our period, I mean where the poem itself is heroic, meaning it commits hubris for its very best reasons and produces the open sore or wound of its time and bears it. So there are futher mysteries. I think in the further mysteries that...Pound’s contrition, if you want to lay it off on him, that’s just great, and if you want to sum it up that he was anti-Semitic, that’s just great, because you’re not even thinking about the world we live in today and what share we do or do not carry of all those human beings around us. Within it, do I have to take any more? I’m only sixty-six, and I keep thinking, well, if I live next year, it’s been better...there’s a lot...I wouldn’t like to lift the paper again and find out it’s the same world it’s been for the last forty years, or whatever. I mean, the underlying despair and anger now increases in my work in this period almost to obliterate it, and frustration...I’m just talking about when our liberal causes don’t go through, I’m talking about when our liberal causes do go through, they do grievous wrongs, are poorly thought out, or seem to be misapplied.

While H.D. is not as political as I am—and I’m a product of the late thirties—in her the same feeling about life and about our effort to illuminate it and our feeling that it’s just there if we can just come clear of it, that root of the poem that we can clarify things, throws us disastrously into our own darkness. Not one we were pre-
pared for, not the other guy’s darkness, and our darkness is dramatic, but it has also as we know the same root that the worst things in history have come from, that we belong to them—oddly enough, we’re human before we finish. And I would repeat again that in the very last poems of H.D., the agony was always present and the agony increases about couldn’t she be put to rest, couldn’t this poetic disturbance and trouble finally end. There are days when—I hope none of my critics are here—when I fantasize disappearing and being a milkman or something, not being anything connected with even my own tasks. The tasks are all emerged from one’s own psyche, deep from one’s own psyche, and they also are tasks laid on it by the openings of the spirit. The spirit—here again is where I was close to H.D., so her poetry spoke to me right away. There are spiritual directions, and I don’t mean they are all good. Throughout the universe, if you increase possibilities, you increase possibilities of evil as well as possibilities of good. But in that struggle you also learn obediences; and the sense of her obeying the call of the poem in the last poems—this is one, if you wanted the contrast, Marianne Moore became more and more beloved of New York because she didn’t write what was called for by anything but Manhattan, and that was not the Manhattan that Whitman had calling him. And H.D., on the contrary, questions in the narrative poem “Vale Ave,” for instance, very severely that she couldn’t—it was the command she obeyed—and she couldn’t tell whether that command came from Luciferian or the Satanic. In the spiritual world, spirits also had double natures as psyches do.

San Francisco, California

George Hitchie
Condescension and Affection: Some Observations on Marianne Moore

In terms of critical sophistication, this has turned out to be an almost desperately low-profile paper, as though written by one of Marianne Moore’s humbler animals, as perhaps indeed it has been, though I’m not really able to judge that. It is a matter of observations, not because of a mere wish to echo her own early book title but because I could think of no word more accurate for what I seemed to be doing. I’m going to begin (and very possibly never get very far beyond) three little bundles of observations that seem to me to have some resonances in common, and that I like to think may turn out to be categorical imperatives, at least for the kind of paper this is and the kind of critic I apparently am.

First is the frontispiece portrait of Marianne Moore in Laurence Stapleton’s fine book Marianne Moore: The Poet’s Advance. The photograph’s subscript indicates that it was taken “about 1935,” which means she was close to fifty at the time. But anyone seeing it and not knowing the who or when would surely see a very beautiful young woman of about thirty.

Second are some statistics. There is the Festschrift for Marianne Moore’s Seventy Seventh Birthday, put together by Tambimuttu; it includes forty-six contributions in prose or verse, of which either thirty-seven or thirty-eight are by men. And there is Charles Tomlinson’s volume on Marianne Moore in the Twentieth Century Views series, which contains twenty-two items, twenty-one of which are by men (the single eccentric item is a 1919 letter from Marianne Moore herself to Ezra Pound).

Third is a little cluster of fragments from some of the men in question. There is William Carlos Williams, writing in his autobiography, “Marianne was our saint—if we had one—in whom we all instinctively felt our purpose come together to form a stream. Everyone loved her.” Next is Allen Ginsberg, when he was forty, addressing her on the occasion of her seventy-seventh birthday as “Little Flower.” Next is William Sasserstrom, like me and Ginsberg some thirty to thirty-five years Marianne Moore’s junior, telling of arrangements for an appointment with her at Schrafft’s in 1958, when she was seventy or seventy-one, she wondering by telephone how he would recognize her since he had never seen her in person, and he