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# Reveries of a Cataloguer

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## Reveries of a Cataloguer · *Louis H. Silverstein*

IT WAS BRYHER who led me to H.D. I discovered Bryher purely by accident during my college years. The men's room in the old Indiana University Library stacks was near the beginning of the PR6000 section (modern British literature). Being a compulsive reader on the "john" I would often grab something to sample from those shelves en route. One day, I grabbed *The Player's Boy* and thus began my fascination with the historical novels of Bryher. About a year later *Ruan* was published and reviewed in one of the New York Sunday Book Review sections, and I begged for and received a copy for Christmas. Shortly thereafter I discovered the treasures of New York's Strand Bookstore and found most of the later novels of Bryher. As new titles were published, I acquired them. I knew nothing of Bryher's pre-1930 writing until years later when I found *Development*, *Two Selves* and *West* in the vast storehouse of Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library. How I wish that they might be republished so that I and other Bryher readers might be able to obtain our own copies. The most fascinating volume of all for me was Bryher's memoirs, *The Heart to Artemis*, a volume which I have turned to again and again. It continues to fascinate me even though I now know how reticent she was and how much more there was to Bryher's life than she was willing to divulge.

To me, Bryher is one of the unsung heroes of the twentieth century, an explorer, an innovator, a pacesetter, a patron. How many today are aware of Bryher's role in the literary review *Life and Letters Today*, a magazine which published the work of many of her distinguished friends and contemporaries? It is remarkable how Bryher managed to keep it going during the terrible days of World War II amidst flying bombs and air raids, and she was able to do this simply because she had the foresight to stockpile huge quantities of paper in the late 1930s. Who is aware of Bryher's interest in and influence on the emerging field of psychoanalysis? Not only Bryher's own studies and her analysis with Hanns Sachs but also the great financial resources which she made available so that others might benefit from this new science have yet to be fully documented. The efforts Bryher made to help German and Austrian psychologists (many of whom were Jewish) escape from Nazi controls are also unrecorded. No history of cinematography could be written without reference to Bryher's role, in-

cluding her sponsorship of experimental films, her editorship with Kenneth Macpherson of one of the finest film magazines ever published, *Close Up*, and her own critical writing on film. Though many are aware of Bryher's lifelong liaison with H.D. and her relationships with Robert McAlmon, Kenneth Macpherson, the Sitwells, and Dorothy Richardson, there are more riches to be uncovered in her friendships with Marianne Moore, Sylvia Beach, Dorothy Pilley Richards, Robert Herring, Lotte Reiniger, Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska, Helen and Kurt Wolff, the Leslie Hotsons, and others. Above all, we have yet to be given the full story of Bryher's forty-year collaboration and friendship with Norman Holmes Pearson, the man whom so many look to because of his foresight in the preservation of great archives.

But I digress from the main topic of my thoughts: the woman who is being honored by this issue and whom we are remembering on the centenary of her birth. She is an individual who has only achieved the recognition and acclaim that she deserves in the past decade, after years of relegation to the limbo of minor literary figures of the early twentieth century. Her creative output spanned fifty years, yet she was for decades considered important only on the basis of a small group of poems written in the second decade of this century. These poems earned her the label "imagist," which was unfortunate as she was a far more versatile writer than such a label would imply. Her later poems and prose pieces remained largely ignored, except by the few who recognized in H.D. a major poet who translated the resources and experiences of a lifetime into literature.

Being an American literature major, I had encountered the name "Hilda Doolittle" and the fact that her poems were considered part of the "imagist" movement. Beyond a few anthologized poems, I knew for many years nothing of her work other than a few titles: *Trilogy*, *Tribute to Freud*, and *Helen in Egypt*. (Being a librarian, I link titles with authors and store them in my mind, awaiting the spur of some future reference; and that is what happened with H.D.) Of course, I am certain that I encountered her during the time I worked as a student assistant at Indiana University's Lilly Library and came in contact with book and manuscript collections (including one of the collections formed and sold by Louis Untermeyer whenever he needed moolah) which probably included titles by H.D.

It wasn't until I read Bryher's *The Heart to Artemis* that I became curious about the woman who obviously represented Artemis to Bryher. By that

time I was saturated with the American expatriates in Paris, having devoured every biography and memoir I could find, including *Shakespeare and Company*, *Exile's Return*, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, and both editions of *Being Geniuses Together*. As I read biography after biography, references to H.D. became more and more prevalent, especially in works by or about Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Sylvia Beach, and Robert McAlmon. Thus I became more and more curious about the elusive figure behind the initials.

Of my twenty-three years as a librarian at Yale University, at least fifteen have been spent cataloguing materials for the Yale Collection of American Literature. Numerous volumes from the libraries of both H.D. and Bryher, many with presentation inscriptions to one or the other from their friends, have passed through my hands. As a picture evolved of the contacts, friendships and relationships these women had, I began to wonder how these books had reached the Yale University libraries. I had observed the man who had been responsible for their coming to Yale, Norman Holmes Pearson, chairman of the American Studies Department. To my regret, I was too shy to approach him, as well as too conscious of my own hearing and physical handicaps. It wasn't until much later that I unfolded the details of his friendship with H.D. and Bryher and understood how much the Yale libraries owe to his foresight and perseverance.

The acquaintance apparently crystalized at a cocktail party at the home of William Rose Benét in 1937, after which a sporadic correspondence ensued. Fortunately both sides of Pearson's correspondence with H.D. and with Bryher have survived and are preserved at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The friendship was strengthened during the dark days of World War II when Pearson was stationed in London with the OSS. By the end of the war, the friendship was firmly entrenched. From the mid-1940s until his death in 1975, Norman Holmes Pearson became confidant, preserver, literary agent, protector, editor, advisor, and traveling companion to both H.D. and Bryher, and also H.D.'s literary executor. It is remarkable how he was able to convince these two women to send their manuscripts, correspondence, personal papers, family photographs, memorabilia, and parts of their libraries to him for safekeeping on "a little shelf at Yale." That "little shelf at Yale" has now grown into two enormous archives housed within the marble enclave of the Beinecke Library.

Pearson gradually augmented the papers sent by Bryher and H.D. through his acquisition of the relevant papers and archives of many of their friends, associates and relatives, individuals like Gretchen Wolle Baker, Robert Herring, Clifford Howard, Robert McAlmon, Kenneth Macpherson, Brigit Patmore, George Wolfe Plank, and Eric Walter White. The Beinecke Library has continued to expand its holdings of H.D. materials with such acquisitions as H.D.'s letters to Havelock Ellis, to Gemma D'Auria, and to the Society of Authors. The archives of H.D. and Bryher are housed side by side with many of the archives of their close friends and associates, including Norman Douglas, Viola Baxter Jordan, Norman Holmes Pearson, Ezra Pound, Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, and William Carlos Williams.

All these holdings make the Beinecke Library a valuable center of resource materials for the study and research of the writings and lives of both H.D. and Bryher, all due to the efforts of Norman Holmes Pearson. By way of illustrating this, let me point out that all of H.D.'s manuscripts for writings published after 1946 are preserved in this archive in their various drafts as are her unpublished manuscripts. However, with very few exceptions, none of the various manuscript drafts of her writings that were published before 1946 have survived. Likewise, her correspondence after 1946 is more comprehensively represented than is her pre-1946 correspondence. There are exceptions, as her files of letters from Richard Aldington, Bryher, Robert Herring, Kenneth Macpherson, and Perdita Schaffner are fairly complete.

But once again I have wandered astray of my narrative: How did I come to be associated with the H.D. and Bryher papers? It is surprising since there is a distinct division between the curatorial and manuscript cataloguing activities at the Beinecke Library and the rare book cataloguing activities (of which I am officially a part) which are located across the street behind the massive gothic limestone walls of the Sterling Library. However, Lawrence Dowler encouraged more flexible use of staff; and knowing my interest in Bryher, Suzanne L. Rutter, Head of Technical Services of Beinecke, and Stephen R. Young, Head of Rare Book Cataloguing, suggested that I might be asked to catalogue the H.D. and Bryher papers. Needless to say, I was delighted to be given the opportunity to utilize my knowledge of modern American and British literature and literary figures. In addition to having the support of Ms. Rutter and Mr. Young, I also

owe a great deal to David Schoonover, formerly the Curator of the Yale Collection of American Literature, and now the Curator of Rare Books at The University of Iowa, without whose assistance and support the cataloguing of the H.D. papers would not have been possible.

We decided that since H.D.'s papers were more heavily used, it was important that they be catalogued before the Bryher papers. This proved a wise decision, although there were difficulties since usage of the collection was extremely heavy while I was trying to catalogue them, even though such usage was limited to individuals who had begun projects before I began my work. As I became more and more acquainted with the content of the papers, I was often called upon to assist researchers in pinpointing aspects of the papers that might be useful for their projects. I enjoyed my contacts with these researchers and felt that for the first time in my career my abilities, background and interests were being used in the manner I had hoped would develop. Through cataloguing the H.D. papers, I formed friendships among the researchers; and though several of them have suggested that I should write about the papers, I have felt that my real contribution lay in being able to assist and guide them in their work. What I really owe to these researchers, particularly to Diana Collecott, Susan Friedman, Barbara Guest, Donna Hollenberg, Jeanne Kerblat Houghton, Adalaide Morris, and Virginia Smyers, is the opportunity to develop self-confidence and to realize that my handicaps are not a deterrent to face-to-face public service work.

Cataloguing the H.D. papers proved to be much more of a challenge than I ever expected. While the bulk of the archive initially seemed to be together, I soon found that there was much more material than anyone had realized. Sections of H.D.'s papers were discovered to have been interfiled with Pearson's personal papers (fortunately also housed in the Beinecke Library) and others were mixed in with Bryher's papers. Much time was spent in trying to ferret out this material and reconstruct H.D.'s archives. Furthermore, I accidentally but fortunately discovered that sections of letters to H.D. had been removed from the archives and filed with the correspondent in cases where Beinecke had the other person's papers. That her archive was not thought important enough to be kept intact reflects her former stature as a minor figure. I am still not convinced I have found everything that properly belongs with the H.D. papers, and I suspect that as the Bryher and Pearson papers are catalogued, more items will

surface that will either have to be interfiled or catalogued as a supplement to the H.D. papers.

Besides having to reassemble the archives, I found the order of materials within it chaotic at best. To illustrate this point let me refer to the correspondences among H.D., Bryher and Kenneth Macpherson. In this case the archives of all three individuals are housed at the Beinecke Library and it seemed logical that the best way of proceeding was to work simultaneously with all sides. For a while it seemed hopeless because the letters were in such disarray and in some cases filed in the wrong archive. The problems were further compounded by the fact that there were large blocks of time when the writers did not bother to date their letters. H.D. rarely dated her letters with a year, usually a month and a day, sometimes the name of a day of the week and that day's date, sometimes just the name of the day. It took me a while to realize that sometimes H.D. and Bryher wrote to each other twice or even three times a day. I spent hours poring over sections of the correspondence trying to get the letters in some sort of chronological order so that they might be placed in folders in a logical sequence. I found myself playing literary detective, learning to use a perpetual calendar and looking for dating clues within the letters themselves. I developed a sense of where people were at given times and was able to draw upon my knowledge of the literary history of the period as there were constant references to books currently published and to events I had read about in various biographies. (I would come home after a few hours work with the correspondence and start hunting through various books in my personal library trying to pinpoint references that had rung a bell in my mind.) Even my childhood stamp collecting days proved to be useful in establishing dates, particularly when dealing with smudged or indecipherable cancellations. Of course, the expenditure of so much time to establish a chronological sequence for the correspondence makes the cataloguing of the H.D. papers a very expensive undertaking, one that cannot be justified for most archival cataloguing projects, but in this case, I feel it was time well spent.

Organizing the manuscripts proved to pose equally challenging problems. A small portion of them had been gradually given to the library by Pearson in the years before his death and each section had been individually catalogued. Since they were properly part of the H.D. papers, we decided that they should be decatalogued and incorporated with the rest following

archival cataloguing principles. In working with the manuscripts I had to figure out the order of the different drafts and put them into a logical sequence. Since even some of the sections of the drafts were mixed up and out of order, it took a great deal of time and patience and quite a bit of textual comparison to straighten out the disarrays. There were some areas which were in such chaos that I continued to approach them, tried to muddle through them, decided I wasn't yet equipped to deal with them, and moved on to other parts of the papers. These problem areas included the groupings of individual short stories and individual poems. It wasn't until the end of the cataloguing that these two groups fell into a logical order as a result of my having learned enough about H.D.'s working methods, about Pearson's practice as literary agent and executor, and about their relation to each other. With the poems, the factor that facilitated their arrangement was the monumental New Directions publication of Louis L. Martz's edition of H.D.'s *Collected Poems, 1912-1944*. I benefited from the scholarship that went into assembling that volume, and the notes proved invaluable to me.

As I worked with the manuscripts I learned a great deal about the creative process. In H.D.'s case, some manuscripts required a great deal of rewriting and others seem to have sprung basically intact. *Helen in Egypt* is an example of a poem that I would have thought required a great deal of rewriting and revision. However, when I examined the original copybooks in which H.D. composed the poem and compared them with the various typescripts, I was amazed at the facility with which that poem appears to have been written. Even though I realized that this epic represents the culmination of H.D.'s lifework and that all her experience and knowledge were transmogrified into it, it amazed me how little she reworked the penciled lines in the manuscript copybooks. Of course, there was rewriting, rearrangement and revision but certainly not to the extent that I would have thought necessary. *Helen in Egypt* is a masterpiece to me, deserving of a place in the ranks of such modern epics as Pound's *Cantos*, Eliot's *Waste Land*, Crane's *The Bridge*, Williams' *Paterson*, and Zukovsky's *A*.

My work with the H.D. papers has added to my conviction that the critical attention and reappraisal H.D. has been given in the past decade and is continuing to receive was long overdue and highly merited. Of course, poor and inadequate editing such as that of *The Gift* do not help to



place H.D. properly in the canon of American literature. I read *The Gift* in the original typescript, and I loved it and would not have changed or cut a word of it. There were sections I found difficult and confusing, but I believe that a scholarly edition with footnotes in the appropriate places would have helped clarify those passages. I also believe H.D.'s own notes, properly footnoted, should have been included as an appendix. *The Gift*, in my opinion, is an extremely important work with respect both to H.D.'s creative output and to American literature (a literature which is a melting pot of so many religions, philosophies, traditions, experiences, discoveries, and modes of expression). To me, one of the remarkable things about H.D.'s writing is the individuality with which each item can be read and appreciated in such diverse and related fields as literature, psychology, classical studies, occultism, cinematography, history, and religion.

While cataloguing the H.D. papers, I have had many interesting experiences, including those involving my own errors. I was called to task for one such error by the tall, willowy, and intense Dale Davis, poet, publisher and literary connoisseur of Rochester, New York. The first time I met Dale, she swooped down upon me exclaiming, "How could you do such a thing?" I thought "Oh dear, what have I done now?" and inquired to what she was referring. She explained that I had allowed one of H.D.'s writings to be published out of context and in the wrong draft. What had happened was that City Lights Books had decided to publish H.D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision* (one of the more heavily used of H.D.'s then unpublished manuscripts at the Beinecke) and had asked for another short unpublished manuscript which would complement the volume. I was asked to select some possibilities, which I did, and they were sent off for consideration. Included among the selections was a manuscript entitled "The Wise Sappho," which Pearson had acquired from H.P. Collins whose *Modern Poetry* (1925) contains one of the earliest appraisals of H.D. and who had been presented with the manuscript by the poet herself. I was unaware that it was actually an earlier draft of a section of H.D.'s (unfortunately) still unpublished "Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets." It was this *faux pas* which Dale Davis pointed out, and that incident marked the beginning of a very wonderful and special friendship.

To illustrate some of the pitfalls that lie in wait for the unsuspecting cataloguer, two experiences which I had in working with the manuscripts are worthy of mention. When I began cataloguing the H.D. papers, I

used as a guide an inventory of the manuscripts which had been prepared after Pearson's death. Included in the alphabetic sequence was a manuscript listed as "Classical Fragments." I had not been able to identify the piece which consisted of two typed pages of prose poem segments, and I assumed that it was an early unpublished H.D. manuscript. I discussed "Classical Fragments" with Dale Davis, who became intrigued by it and wrote to James Laughlin, inquiring about its availability for publication. Laughlin realized that there was a connection between "Classical Fragments" and Richard Aldington's *Love Poems of Myrrhine and Konallis, and Other Poems* (1926) and wrote this to Dale. We then started doing bibliographical checking and found that the short prose segments were incorporated into the verse sequence relating to Myrrhine and Konallis published in Aldington's 1926 compilation, although they had been excluded from a 1917 publication of the same sequence. After that, I examined the manuscript more carefully and discovered to my chagrin that the last two lines on the second page had been added in what was unmistakably Aldington's handwriting. Although "Classical Fragments" has now been catalogued as a manuscript by Richard Aldington, Dale Davis and I have a lot of unanswered questions and we plan more research.

The other incident involves a typescript of poems that turned up amidst the correspondence in a folder labeled "poems by May Sarton." While cataloguing the papers, I unsuccessfully attempted to verify them in various collections of Sarton's poems and found that they did not resemble any poems written by her. I asked several of the researchers if they could recognize them, but no one seemed able to suggest who might have written them. Finally I copied down the title and first lines of the individual poems, headed for Sterling's Reference Collection, and started hunting through poetry indexes. After checking about nine of the poems, I finally identified the author as Robert Duncan and was able to verify all of them in a volume of his work. These situations exemplify the care that must be taken by a cataloguer before attributing unsigned manuscripts to an author, even an author whose papers are being catalogued.

I began these reveries about the cataloguing of the H.D. papers with the statement that "it was Bryher who led me to H.D." As the cataloguing of the Bryher papers is done, the thought occurs that for many it will be H.D. who will lead them to Bryher.