

Art and Ardor in World War One: Selected Letters from H.D. to John Cournos

“WRITE ME, JOHN, as I am going to write you, with *no* reservations.” So H.D. characterized the intimate tone of most of her fifty-five letters to the writer John Cournos, her confidant during the turbulent years of World War One and its aftermath. H.D. met Cournos soon after he arrived in London in 1912 through their mutual friend Ezra Pound. Cournos had travelled from Philadelphia to Paris in pursuit of Dorothy Yorke, an American girl with whom he was conducting a doomed, protracted love-affair. Doubtless both his romantic difficulties and his literary aspirations appealed to the young H.D., who had herself recently sorted out complicated romantic feelings—about Pound, Frances Gregg, and Richard Aldington. Their friendship blossomed after Hilda and Richard, newly married in 1913, moved to a flat in Kensington across the landing from Pound and his wife, Dorothy. In 1914 Cournos took over Pound’s old room nearby, thus placing himself in one center of London’s literary life. When Pound’s *Des Imagistes* (1914) appeared, featuring the poets surrounding H.D., it also contained two prose pieces by Cournos.

Rapidly the Aldingtons and Cournos became inseparable. In the first flush of their marriage they seemed to Cournos an ideal couple, whose love was based on respect and mutual inspiration. His description of them in his *Autobiography* evokes the romantic hopes dashed at the beginning of H.D.’s novel *Bid Me to Live*: “Here were two poets, man and woman, who were happy together and worked together.” Then came the outbreak of war and H.D.’s pregnancy, which ended in the stillbirth of her first child in 1915, a painful ordeal that left her frigid, guilty, and depressed. By the spring of 1916 the Aldingtons set out for the south of England, renting a cottage in North Devonshire by the sea to escape the blight and growing hysteria of wartime London. Cournos soon joined them, and it was there that he became infatuated with H.D. when she encouraged him to work on his first novel. There, on at least one occasion, they all bathed nude along with their neighbors Carl and Flo Fallas, hedonistic behavior stimulated by the doomsday atmosphere which was never absent from consciousness.

While in Devon, under the pressure of conscription, Aldington enlisted as a private in a local regiment. H.D. was “dreadfully upset” by Richard’s departure, Cournos reports. Immediately after, “she impetuously walked over to me in the sitting-room we all jointly occupied, and kissed me.” Moved by this “revelation of confidence” and the implication that they were left together “to maintain the thinning spread of spirit in growing chaos,” he resolved to console her in the days ahead (*Autobiography*). When H.D. left for Corfe Castle at the end of July to be near Richard’s army camp, Cournos remained in Devonshire to pack up their books, returning to London at the beginning of August, where he rented rooms just above the Aldingtons at 44 Mecklenburgh Square.

Many of these vivid letters, thirty-four of which are dated 1916, were written from Corfe Castle, a country village that H.D. found quaint and peaceful. High-spirited and chatty at first, they became increasingly fervid and overwrought as she grew anxious about Aldington’s gradual desperation and estrangement after he began to face the possibility of death in the trenches. Still mourning the loss of her first child and afraid of another pregnancy, she was avoiding conjugal intimacy. She worried that her refusal of sexual relations contributed to Richard’s “wounded” spirit and to the curtailment of his creative work, the most important dimension of life to each of them. Though she thought that suffering was fuel to a poet, she was troubled by the notion, current then, that physical release enhanced spiritual freedom. Therefore, though tormented by jealousy, she minimized her own inner turmoil and permitted Aldington’s affairs with Flo Fallas and other women in order to assuage her guilt. Sometimes helping with practical arrangements, Cournos was H.D.’s confidant and her accomplice in these desperate measures.

Besides revealing her confusion and distress, H.D.’s letters in 1916 show the same attention to nuances of feeling and the same intensity as her early poetry. They also provide the sources of important ideas in her work and indicate specific literary influences. For example, these letters suggest that her ambivalence about the Fallas affair probably lies behind the twisted emotions of the posthumously published poems “Eros,” “Amaranth,” and “Envy.” The recurring motif of female sacrifice, felt on her own pulse here, becomes part of her critique of the warrior ethos as early as her translations of Euripides’ *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (1919). Also, in her tendency to turn to scripture for spiritual sustenance and then to allude to

the beauty of classical Greece almost in the same breath, there is the same characteristic blend of Moravian pietism and neo-Romantic aestheticism evident in the poems of *Sea Garden* (1916). Her many references to “the daemon” that is the source of her “clairvoyance,” a creative self within the self, suggest the influence of D. H. Lawrence, a friend with whom she exchanged manuscripts in these years. (Compare Lawrence’s comment, in the Preface to his *Collected Poems*, that it was not until he was twenty that his “real demon would now and then get hold of [him] and shake more real poems out of [him], making [him] weary.”) H.D.’s version of the demonic aspect of creative inspiration is further elaborated upon and transmuted into art in the poems of “The God” (1913–17) and in her early prose fiction. In these letters H.D. expresses fear of Lawrence’s influence, too, fear based upon his dogmatism about sex roles and his restriction of her imaginative range, a sense of him she will later clarify in her poem “The Poet” and in *Bid Me to Live*.

Clearly art was her life and her lifeline. Particularly after Aldington engaged in an affair with Cournos’ intended, Dorothy Yorke, the act that resulted in the break-up of H.D.’s marriage in 1917–18, she turned to creative work with renewed determination. In *Bid Me to Live* H.D. would later depict the hothouse atmosphere of life at Mecklenburgh Square, where a grim web of action and reaction led “Julia” (H.D.) to accompany “Vane” (Cecil Gray) to Cornwall. To Cournos she describes her suffering and depression, her sense of being “done with life” and out of control, her need to purge herself of “dreadful pain and bitterness.” Though there are several letters from Cornwall, she does not mention Cecil Gray nor her second pregnancy there; rather she describes her poetry as a bulwark against the “general madness.”

Perhaps because Cournos blamed H.D. for his fiancée’s liaison with Richard Aldington, there are fewer letters after 1916. Several written in 1918 are strained and defensive, indicating the rift, and quite pathetic in their sense of isolation when H.D. complains of being forsaken by members of her former literary circle, such as Lawrence, who sided with Aldington. Most notable is H.D.’s letter of November 1919, describing her new relationship with Bryher, the resourceful young woman who had rescued her from probable death in childbirth eight months earlier and who was to become a second mother to her daughter Perdita. Besides portraying Bryher’s severe emotional crisis and the strain of being with her at

first, H.D. candidly documents both the intensity of the bond between them and her fear of being overwhelmed by it.

Established in a new life in Switzerland and Italy a few years later, H.D. describes the need to work through and comprehend her troubling personal story, which she would often term a “hieroglyph” that she must decipher, in order to achieve her “real artist personality.” In several letters she refers to prose fiction she is writing with that intention, and to several women writers like herself (such as Dorothy Richardson and May Sinclair) who employed the psychological theories of Freud in their fiction to explore female consciousness. Also in the twenties, H.D. describes a continuing game of hide-and-seek with Richard Aldington, who had virtually abandoned her after his discharge from the army and Perdita’s birth. On one hand, she displays curiosity about his whereabouts; on the other, concern lest he discover hers. (Earlier he had threatened her with jail if she registered Perdita in his name.) Still angry at him for wishing to sue her for divorce as an adultress, she is nevertheless greatly relieved when they reestablish contact in 1929, writing to Cournos that they are “very close to one another intellectually and spiritually.”

Surprisingly, H.D.’s correspondence with Cournos concludes in 1930, well after the publication of his novel *Miranda Masters* (1926), an unsympathetic portrait of H.D. which incorporates some of these letters *verbatim* in the text. Though probably she was hurt by this betrayal of trust, H.D. continued to write to Cournos infrequently. In her last letter, polite and guarded, she refuses to intercede with her friends on his behalf when Cournos was struggling to find work during the Depression.

In preparing this selection, I have edited letters that are both representative of the friendship’s stages and interesting in their own right. There are many more that fulfill these criteria but remain unpublished. Since H.D. rarely dated a letter with anything more than the day of the week, I have retained the date added by a hand other than her own. (Alfred Satterthwaite, Cournos’ step-son and literary executor, informs me that either Cournos or his wife Helen dated them.) When no such date is added, I have had to depend on internal evidence, a sequence established by earlier letters, or ancillary correspondence. Where H.D. did not herself date a letter, the date supplied is enclosed in square brackets; where that date is uncertain or approximate, it is preceded by the conventional *c.* for *circa*.

These letters have been transcribed directly from the manuscripts or

from photocopies provided by the institutions that own the originals. The provenance line at the foot of each letter describes the copy-text and gives the location of the manuscript. (MS refers to an autograph original; TS to a typescript original.) I have tried to copy H.D.'s idiosyncratic punctuation, the many dashes and exclamation marks that reflect her agitation, especially in 1916; and I have also retained occasional spaces in the text which are not quite paragraph breaks, but often indicate a new line of thought.

I am obliged, first of all, to those institutions which have allowed the inclusion of letters in their possession: the Houghton Library at Harvard University and the Bryn Mawr College Library. All unpublished material by John Cournos is copyright by his estate. All unpublished material by H.D. is copyright © 1987 by Perdita Shaffner and used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation, agents. I am grateful to Mrs. Perdita Schaffner and Professor Alfred Satterthwaite for their permission and their encouragement. Finally, I wish to thank Louis Silverstein, the *doyen* of H.D. scholars, for his advice and generosity.

Donna Krolik Hollenberg

Sunday [July 1916]

Little artist:—

I fell out of train at Corfe Castle¹ after many tribulations (with a few compensations) not into the arms of, but into the salute of a very tall, strange person whom my mind told me must, of all his majesty's many, be only *One!* It was R.A.²—looking very well, taller, tremendously full-chested with a cropped but not disfigured head! I could only talk for a few minutes. I was very confused and dazed. He is changed—not hurt—just self-contained and very definite and determined to get on!—It's hard to write. I wish you could see R. Only one thing is certain: he is strong—perhaps stronger than we knew—and the Carl³ business is only the buzzing of a little gnat about the ears of a self-possessed, kindly big Newfoundland! The *image* is, of course, a superficial one—but not far wrong! R. said “Carl looks an awful little [unintelligible]—he can't do anything—I have

to do half his work!" And I was so sorry for *little* Carl—and it only makes R. more beautiful! He understands C. perfectly—so we need have no fear. And after I am settled I will write Flo.—I met the officer *Prinq* who has been kind to R. He is a good person, very important, seeing to all transportation of troops here—and he seems to care for R.—that cheered me immensely!—They have told R. that he is a "marked man," whatever that means. He is down on the roll under "late attested Darbyman," and he says there is nothing made of the conscript business—so I suppose his chance is as good as anyone's!—

The first time he saluted seriously was to a swell officer on a motor-cycle and I did laugh as you said I would. It *was* funny! *R. is the most dynamic automaton you could ever imagine!*—He is amusing about his work & tells me the jokes! He comes this afternoon. I will write more later.

This little town is so, so beautiful—so old and peaceful—no flies & cooler than Devonshire. All the houses have beautiful grey tiles and tufts of rock-moss between. We have plum-trees and summer lillies [sic] in the garden, and the same gulls inland from the sea!—It is so still. You must come here some time!—

Korshune.⁴ I think of you. I spoke of you to R. He loves you dearly: Do not be afraid of anything! Go on with your work. I will not forget—I do not forget!—

Be very brave—but, as is written on the first mystic gate of somewhere or other (perhaps you know the place) "Be bold"—and on the second gate—"Be bold," and on the third "Be not *too bold!*" Do not hurt your beautiful mind with neglect of your body—be a Florentine, but be a Greek!—

I will write soon again.

Hildushka

MS Houghton

1. Corfe Castle is a village in Dorset on the southern coast of England, four miles southeast of Wareham.
2. Richard Aldington (1892–1962), poet and novelist, was H.D.'s husband until their divorce in 1938.
3. Carl R. Fallas (1885–1962), fiction writer. He and his wife Flo were introduced by Cournos to the Aldingtons at Devon. Carl and Richard enlisted at the same time, after much soul-searching.
4. John Cournos (1881–1966), translator, novelist. His real name was Korshoon, Cournos being the name of his stepfather.

Sunday [Sept.4, 1916]

Korshune:

He has *got his stripes!* That means he will be kept on here for another three months longer: perhaps even more, though there is always a chance that he may be sent abroad. Carl also got his! It is the greatest good luck. R. was called out of the ranks by adjutant (a very great blood) and asked if he would take a commission. R. said he preferred being a non-com. for the present—but the adjutant taking a fancy to R. will mean a difference in his “social” status. He is no longer an outcast! God—you do not know what he has suffered! But it *must* be better now. Korshune, I have been awfully wracked. I have been writing a long, very long poem,¹ or rather series of poems, about double the length of the *Tribute*²—so, though I am awfully happy, I am torn and tired. Do not worry about my health. Always remember it was *you* who saved my daemon from Hell! And now it is R. we must help, first and foremost—for the battle is still waging— Of course, it will as long as the war lasts.

I did not properly thank you for the book—but I may tell you it was inspiration on your part to send it. Korshune, you understand these things:—the touch of it has enflamed me. I believe it has helped me to write.

Be happy as you can—ah Jantchick—courage.

H.D.

MS Houghton

1. H.D. probably refers to the series “Amaranth,” “Eros,” and “Envy,” posthumously published in *Collected Poems* (1985).
2. H.D.’s poem “Tribute” first appears in *Sea Garden* (1916).

Tuesday—September 5 [1916]

Dearest Korshune,

This is going to be a long letter so be prepared for the worst.

Also, do not worry about me—whatever you do, do not worry as you must help me with strength not worry.

If I felt you would worry, you see, I could not write.

I received a copy of the *Poetry Review of America* a day or so ago. In it there were two very beautiful and intense poems of Richard’s,¹ that made me see and understand his emotions and attitude. I mean what you and I thought was perhaps a mild and distracting flirtation was apparently very

intense passion. You understand.

Now, I was glad for myself to *know* this as the slight cloudiness of my understanding was cleared away. At least, the first way to help oneself and others is to *see* what it is that needs our help.

I believe that Richard was and still is in love with her [Flo]. Richard's reserve is very great. I can not and perhaps would not if I could, break it down. In a way, it would help me if he would just talk frankly with me. I almost pray that he will for then we can talk it all over and I might be able to help more. As it is, I am afraid he is suffering desperately on my account. Well, it is natural and certainly he would be base if he did not. But you see it means that I must keep up my end—that intolerable burden. I mean, if he does not want to tell me anything, I must just take his devotion to me—and he is deeply devoted—as the uppermost thing, even if I know it only secondary, and not seem to pry into his inner, more intense emotional nature.

I am writing this very calmly—though it does go up and down across the paper—so think it all over calmly and help me with your advice.

I have lain awake almost all night—and this has happened a number of nights. This is what I think: would it be best to endeavor, to determine to see it through superficially. By that I mean, would it be a good and wise sacrifice and a beautiful sacrifice, to try to get her to come here, to have her live, as she suggested, here with me, to have Carl come in the old way, to have the pairing up afternoons out walking. It would be at most only a taste of her that R. would get, but I think in all this desperate life he is living, perhaps that taste of her would be his ultimate heaven, would give him peace. On the other hand, I know how nerve-wracking it is to possess and *not* possess at the same time. I wonder then if it would not hurt him more. At the same time, I am ready to give my own life away to him, to give my soul and the peace of my spirit that he may have beauty, that he may see and feel beauty so that he may write—as that is the ultimate desire of all of us. You understand.

I am writing this calmly. But I have lived through hours of torture beside those in which you saw me were paradise.

[unsigned]

TS Houghton

1. The *Poetry Review of America*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Aug. 1916), contains the poems "Images" and "Inarticulate Grief" by Richard Aldington.

Friday [?Sept. 8, 1916]

Dear K.

Thanks for good long letter. It has helped but it is the thought *back* of it that helped most—for I see clearly now. “Again and again the battle must be fought and won.” I know that, only I seem to be a spirit now—something that burns and flames away and wants to write! R. has made me this—but without you I could not have entered this flame. I am tired out—but I do not feel discouraged—only happy with an intense, positive (*not* negative) peace! About R. and Flo—*that*, as you say, is a symbol. And if being torn by unanswered passion is going to make R. a great poet, we must not let *any* personal consideration come between R. and his work—his fate. In the end, there is peace, and if R. is to gain peace, he must *take* Hell to him first. I know now the price—but it is “a deep & ever increasing delight.”

R. writes—“Hang Flo & damn Carl. You asked me to come to London with you—For Gods sake, love your Faun & don’t be nobil [sic]”—

We will wait—we will pray that R. may not be cheated of his test by fire—his work—But I am *quite* clear-headed. What I do, I do deliberately and with eyes open. The hurt I suffered has freed my song—this is most precious to me.

And you—do not you deny your fate. If love of me—absolute and terrible and hopeless love—is going to help you to write—then *love* me. Do not let *ought* and *ought not*, this evil spirit, torment you. With the Daemons there is no conscience. At the same time I *know* our daemons act with calm, with *dignity*. There is, nor will be ever, anything petty or sordid about any of us, as long as love is a flame—a torture—not a means toward forgetfulness [sic] and sloth. I say this with certainty—to deny *love* entrance is to crush and break beauty. Let love crush and break you but *never* love by denial and conscience!—

Work and love and your work will be beautiful.

H.D.

Thanks for Swinburne’s [illegible]. I will write again soon—must see R. & talk about London—if we do not come together, I will come *alone* after his vacation. Do not *waver*.

Hildushka.

MS Houghton

Wed. [Sept. 13, 1916]

Dear Korshune,

I was made very unhappy this morning by a letter from Frank¹ in which he tended me some very paternal advice. "Don't brood too much over R. and don't surround him with too much tenderness." I wrote him at once, the enclosed. Destroy it. I send to you, I don't know just why. I feel somehow better to have you read it. I felt this morning with Frank's letter and yours, very lost somehow. I know I am a fool. I don't want you to tell me you care for me, — only I said write, in case you let your affection turn upon itself and break itself and you. I don't want you to say you care. But I had a feeling that I might help you with your work — that your affection for me might at any rate. I know what I say and what I think. I was not asking for the gratification of a few compliments. I don't care whether you think me beautiful. Understand that. I have never lied to you, not in the least little bit, have I? I have come to you with everything, everything. I do not want to come if it hurts you, if it mars or clouds your own thoughts. When I said I could love you, you know what I meant. I meant if it would help R. I never lied to you. It may seem bitter, but I think the greatest bitterness comes when those we love lie to us. That is the reason I have felt this Fallas business so terribly. There was something clouded, something that was deceiving. I feel I have things a little out of proportion. At the same time, if I could talk to Flo clearly, if Flo has a capacity for clarity and I can get at it and her mind and her attitude to R. and her love for Carl, — if I can clear all this, if I can see clearly, a great burden will be lifted from me. I have written Flo, and wait to hear. I told her that I would look for a place for her in Corfe if she wanted. I wrote clearly and affectionately but not in an over-balanced way. I wanted her to feel that I am her friend, and Carl's friend. I feel bitter at times because I feel that she and Carl were inflaming R. for nothing, just for some minor gratification. But if Flo loves R., there is nothing I would not do for her and for R. But you must be my friend. You must be near me with advice. I will be clearer if I can talk to Flo. She may be a great help, a great influence in R.'s life. If so, I will always be tender and grateful to her.

It helps me to write this to you. I feel without you very helpless. At the same time, I will never write again if it troubles you. Do not answer this if it tires you. I do not want you to answer when you are tired. Or if you write, write simply and do not enter into things that touch you too deeply, if that seems best to you.

Sometimes, I feel in wanting Flo to come I am putting my head in a noose. But then again I say, *no* deception, no lies can hurt beauty. Beauty, to be of any worth, must help things, must clear clouds and ugliness. And then again I say, — perhaps I was wrong, and it was I who made the ugliness. However that may be, I want to clear things. I want to clear it all as best I can. I want to see clearly. You saved my life in Devon. Again and again I think of it. I had lost all self-confidence, all faith in my beauty, in my power. You saved me. You may save me again. But I ask nothing.

I feel I ought perhaps not to send this, even as I held back Frank's letter. But I could not quite trust Frank. I do trust you.

Do not write too hurriedly. Do not write if you do not feel clearly. Above all, do not write if it takes time from your work.

H.D.

I have all faith in my work. What I want at times is to feel faith in my self, in my mere physical presence in the world, in my personality. I feel my work is beautiful, I have a deep faith in it, an absolute faith. But sometimes I have no faith in my own self.

H.D.

May I see the poem?

I have just re-read your letter. And I think this reply may sound hard to you. But believe that underneath is sympathy and a desire to serve you. But I must keep a hard surface in this sadness of mine. I will be happier soon.

TS Houghton

1. F[rank] S. Flint (1885–1960), Imagist poet and translator, authority on modern French poetry. He and his family lived nearby in Swanage when H.D. was in Devon.

Thursday [?Sept. 14, 1916]

Dear Korshune,

Thank you for Nation. I loafed this morning and was very glad for the paper. I always read Wells' story.¹ I find it more interesting. It is really very good newspaper comment on the whole complicated psychology. He seems to understand and cover the whole ground very well.

I feel quiet and calm this morning, with the sort of after battle peace. I am often unhappy to think that my complicated nature has led R. to think that I am unhappy. That was why Frank's remark hurt me to the heart. I

think of it and wonder if perhaps it would be best for me to leave England as R. first begged me to do. I wonder if I am not causing him pain by staying here.

You will think me far gone when I talk of America. Well, I am. I am really far gone. I am well. I am not letting my sadness hurt my mind. But when Frank said that, I thought America only could help now. Do not worry. I am writing you as always as if talking to myself. Perhaps writing this, will free my mind. I know you look at all this calmly and want to help. You help more than you know just by being there to listen to my grievances. You clear the pressure from my mind. You know I want to stay here. Do not worry about me—just write calmly and affectionately.

Last night I thought of you and those beautiful, beautiful days we had together in Devon. I took great comfort in the words you had said, in the tender way you touched my hands and spoke to me. You have done more than you know. I think of you with peace. I seem to have separated love and peace in my mind, but you seem to make me feel that there can be love and peace together. I love the Greek world as you know but sometimes the hard light, the cruel, bitter beauty tortures me too much. Then I turn to you as if to some beautiful Florentine lover. You do not mar or interfere with my love of Richard, or my love of my Greek world. But you remain another phase, another world that does not interfere with the first one. You understand? If I may come sometimes to that great, quiet Florentine room, if I may come with my girlhood again (for you make me feel a girl somehow) and if you will comfort me with tender words and lover's devotion, you will help me. You will help me more than you know. Last night I thought of you and your tenderness. I seem to need it. Not only because it is in itself beautiful, but because I know Frank was right and perhaps in my own pain, I was harming or saddening Richard. So I think of your eyes and find peace. Already my mind is more at peace. Just writing like this is the greatest comfort I have these days. You know that I need you. I may be making a great deal of fuss about nothing when I write so fully about this Fallas business. But then I remember how you too found dear R. changed and I say I was right to come, that there was some need of me and need without Flo. Still I want you to write, to reassure me that I was right in coming. I have been so battered that I feel at times that I have been wrong. But you know that you said I must come. I believe it was right. But Frank upset me. Poor Frank. It was not his fault. I was so unhappy

that day. I had not seen R. all week and it was important, at least I thought it was, to talk over the Fallas matter—and there was Frank and wife and two babies, and such confusion and row, and I had to attend to R.'s food etc. etc. Then Frank wanted to arrange the next week-end again and R. said it made him too tired. When I wrote Frank this, he wrote as I told you that I was surrounding R. with too much tenderness. Well, I argue it out and just feel sorry for Frank. Then I am in the darkness and I write to you.

Then when R. comes this week, there will be Frank again. And through it all, I seem to feel the war, my own pitiful inefficiency and powerlessness. And I think if R. could have been happy with Carl and Flo, how mean of me to have come, and kept Flo away. Write and tell me you think I did the best.

I have not heard from Flo. Perhaps I have spoiled it for her, too—her chance of seeing Carl. You see how sad I feel. Then I think that after all, Flo does not love R. and that Carl was just exploiting him and that in the end he would be “warned” and perhaps suffer more, far more than now. Well, Korshune, I am working in the dark but for you. I take comfort in the remark you once made—“I feel responsible. I introduced you to them.” You knew them in the old days and you seemed to think I was right to try to bring R. back to his old love of books and his work and his old beauty.

This letter may seem rambling but it gives me peace to sit in front of the machine and let it go on and on. And I know it comforts you to listen as if I were talking to you. I do love you, Florentine, but you know the great and tender and bitter Greek love is beyond my love for you. You must know that. At the same time, one does not preclude the other. You once asked me what the difference in my feeling for you and R. was. I said I would think it out and tell you. With R. I feel older, mature, not maternal, I hope, but mature, ready to help, desirous only to obliterate myself if my help is not wanted! I feel him Greek and masculine and intellectual and strong and perhaps at times cruel. I feel him very passionate and terribly sad, and in the midst of a new growth which is tearing and causing him pain. With you, I feel young, a girl of sixteen, inexperienced, shy almost, wanting your help. I feel like the Florentine you said you had created with your own imagination. I feel you must help me. I feel peace in your presence.

Well, I don't know more than that. I pray you help me. Your poem gave me great happiness.² I will look at it impersonally later and let you know if there is anything that seems weak in construction. But I don't think there is.

I may go over to Swanage this afternoon. And I will try to be gentle with Frank in the belief that you will take away my hurt that he perhaps unwittingly gave me.

You will write me and give me faith in my course of action.

R. says he is almost sure we will be able to come to London Wednesday or Thursday of next week. If you will have coffee and something for our breakfast, I think I can manage the other things. And we will have meals out I suppose most of the time. You must give R. peace. Do not all these subtleties come between. Speak tenderly of Carl. Make him feel we are all friends as in the first days in Devon.

I feel much happier now.

Hildushka

TS Houghton

1. H.G. Wells' novel *Mr Britling Sees It Through* was serialized in *The Nation* from May 20, 1916 to Oct. 2, 1916. It depicts the effect of the coming catastrophe upon the orderly life of civilized English society.
2. Probably Cournot's poem "Sacred and Profane Love," reprinted in *In Exile* (1923).

Tuesday [Oct. 31, 1916]

Dearest Korshune:

I am out of bed and trying to get strong enough to go and see R. on Saturday. I have passed through a curious "illumination" lying alone and ill these last ten days! I know I need you more than ever! R. has also been writing me terribly intense letters and visions he has had. Knowing his state of mind has intensified my own. Think of me tenderly, very tenderly! I need your prayers. I write this to R. — I write it to you. It seems the only answer, "*Unless you become as little children, you shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.*"

My visual nature has been intensified. I seem to see colours in relation to people already now. I see you as blue, blue, lapis-lazuli blue! — Blue, blue and peace comes with you! — I write you this — are you near? I am also blue — R. is a clear, fair wine-red, it is the *indigo* of the spectrum. This red takes its exquisite shade from the blue that mingles with it. But there

is another¹ now — ah Jantchick, give me courage. There is a yellow flame, bright, hard, clear, terrible, cruel! There is the yellow that sees in me its *exact* compliment. There is a power in this person to kill me. I mean literally. For the spiritual vision, his thoughts, his distant passion has given me, I thank God—because vision is of God! I thank God! But dear Jantchick, there is yet another side—if he comes too near, I am afraid for myself! I do not mean physically—(though I do not expect to see him physically)—I mean in a more subtle way. I do not want to deny fate—but is it fate that I die or that I live! You have magic—I trust you!—Do not worry. I am getting stronger—writing you gives me this strength. But I must tell you this!—

When I see R. I think I will tell him. He is strangely [sic] different. He speaks now of visions and dreams just as we do. There is none of that physical reserve—you know what I mean. If R. is spared, he will be wonderful! How I miss him. You will help me? You do not think me at all foolish? O I know you do not—you are *blue, blue!* We have both the same beautiful grey eyes. We are kindred spirits!—And Richard will love you now—I feel he does love you and so tenderly.—You and he are guardian lovers to me. Protect me.

You, no doubt, know in your heart of whom I write as a cruel-fire! I do not want that person to die. He has a great gift. He is ill!—But I must be protected!

Tell me what you feel. Above all, be tender—but I can trust you for that.

My love to you—
Hildushka

MS Houghton

1. D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930), English poet and novelist, a close friend from 1914–18. In *Bid Me to Live* H.D. fictionalizes the part Lawrence and his wife Frieda played in the events at 44 Mecklenburgh Square that led to the breakdown of H.D.'s marriage.

Feb. 2 [1918]

Dear John:

I seem to have written you strange, sad letters of late. But don't worry. I am quite serene again and only want to go on with my work. I admire you more and more & your determination to "make good" is a constant

spur to me. I want to go to Cornwall & live very, very quietly for some time. I feel I can *work* there & have something worthy of you & your trust & faith in me. I read the poems with great joy—the one to A.A. touched me deeply.¹ I won't say I cried as my feelings go beyond tears these days. But my heart is deeply touched & I appreciate (more than you can guess now) every thought you send toward me, every prayer to the Grey-eyed Goddess.—Be true to her. She will not fail you.

Be strong, John. Stay as long as you can away—But be assured you will be welcome again in London. Everyone—Brigit,² O.S.³—ask of you. Don't let any harm come to you. Be strong

for
Hildushka

D⁴ is quite well—is busy & seems happy.

MS Houghton

1. Cournos' book of poems *In Exile* is dedicated to "Andree," possibly the "A.A." referred to here.
2. Brigit Patmore (1882–1965), H.D.'s friend and later the mistress of Richard Aldington. A minor novelist, she described H.D. in her memoir *My Friends When Young* (1968). H.D. bases the character "Mavis" in *Palimpsest* on her.
3. (Francis) Osbert (Sacheverelli) Sitwell (1892–1969), English satirist, poet, novelist. H.D. dedicated *Tribute to the Angels* to him.
4. "D" probably refers to Dorothy Yorke, who shared H.D.'s lodgings while Cournos was in Russia.

[April 3, 1918]

Bosigran
Pendeau
Cornwall

John dear:

I hardly know what to say except to welcome you back with all my heart and soul! A great weight is lifted from my spirit—just to know you are safe again.¹ I can not tell you how often I have thought of you—how deeply I have prayed for your safety. If only I could have had a little talk—but you are safe—our talk can wait, dear John. One thing, I must impress again & again on you. (Though *you* are the one who has always en-

couraged and helped me.) That is, your writing, your work. We will go mad with the general madness unless we: “build our house upon a rock.” Your rock (as mine) is creating & imaginative work—I want to hear when you get back to your “chapters,” for I always feel a sort of proprietary interest in your opus.² John, don’t let the outside world hurt you. It seems almost to kill one at times. But you are stern and valiant. I trust you to fight on!—Don’t think I have forgotten you or will. I can’t go into all my curious mental & spiritual tangles now—only I want you to know that I am happy here. This is really not ill-named the “English Riviera,” though I used to scoff at the title. There are strange birds & rare flowers—not a bit like Devon—really like South Italy—but mysterious, grave, Celtic, Druidic. Someday you must come when all your affairs are straight again.

Let me know your plans. I can not tell you how glad, how glad I am!

Hildushka

MS Houghton

1. Cournos went to Petrograd with the Anglo-Russian Commission in the autumn of 1917. At the beginning of the Russian Revolution, it was a dangerous place to be.
2. H.D. encouraged Cournos to work on his first novel, *The Mask* (1919). Its second part is dedicated to her.

May 2 [1918]

Bosigran
Pendeau
Cornwall

Dearest John:

I must hear from you!—

I wish to God you were here now—your hands in mine. John, if you could guess what I have suffered. *I am battered now and done (in a way) with life.* I want to do some good work. I want that. I cling to that. Don’t feel bitter towards me!

What I write to you must be secret—even my *moods*—do not say to anyone I seem sad even.

I can’t explain about the *others*.¹ I feel loyal to them. I should die if I allowed myself to resent all that has happened.

If you could take my hands, you would feel tender—you would understand!

I got the check for the Russian article²—thank you—for it was you who sent it really.

Are you settled at Hotel [Benica]? I don't know what to do about my room at 44. There is a girl in there now but she may move. I will move out if I come back ever to London. I don't suppose you would want my room now. But let me know if you do!—

I used to pray to you with bitter, bitter tears in that very room—I lay awake nights & nights & nights.

I never gave up my tenderness towards you—I longed for your hands.

I love you deeply, John. I don't know what I will do “after the war.” But send me a line. Can't you trust me?

John—I have been loyal to you right through it all.

Hildushka

I am doing some choruses—would you like to see them?³

MS Bryn Mawr

1. Richard Aldington, Dorothy Yorke, the Lawrences, Cecil Gray.
2. Unidentifiable.
3. Probably *Iphigenia in Aulis* (1919).

Aug. 7 [1918]

Bosigran
Pendeau
Cornwall

[no salutation]

I want to hear from you, if possible, by return. How are you? You did not answer my last note, which was terse & perhaps too impersonal.

I don't want you to speak to anyone of *any* of this I write. I have been ill,¹ suffering a little for about three weeks—may have to come to town. Anyhow (at any rate) I am coming in about three weeks. Miss James² has been pretty dreadful—have given up my room, but she has behaved badly about the furniture. I may try for a little flat somewhere. Do you happen to know of one?

John, if I do stay in London, will you come to see me—will we be friends as we were? I feel I need you. I want to work & you help me. I want to rid my soul of a dreadful pain & bitterness and I turn to you for

that. I feel a few talks—a little of your old tenderness, and life will come back & colour of life to me. I feel better just to think of it. I think perhaps I will give you joy, too, John. Write to me. Tell me frankly of yourself. Perhaps, though, your life is full and you do not need nor want me. I could understand and sympathize.

Hildushka

MS Houghton

1. This may be a veiled allusion to her second pregnancy, or to illness associated with it.
2. H.D.'s landlady at 44 Mecklenburgh Square, the "Miss Ames" of *Bid Me to Live*.

Monday [c. 1919]

Dear John:

Thank you for writing. I was very anxious— Yet, as you say, there was nothing to be said! They¹ are to be pitied—O it was so terrible—you can't imagine. Though I was of it—still I felt detached. I don't know what will happen.

Let me write you. I need your friendship, your affection. But don't tell what I write to Brigit. I am happy & *not* happy. I want Brigit to feel I am serene and secure as I *am* in a way. She was so good—did so much for me.

Do you see Mrs. Shakespear?² I talked freely to her about A.³ and R. several times as I was anxious about you.

I have had some spiritual experiences—I am not able to think of myself as a *person* now. I must move, act, & do as it is *moved* upon me to do & act. I feel you and I are so near, so much allied in spiritual experience. I need your strength. I am cut off from everyone in the old world—but, as I reach out, I find you (and in a less degree, Fletcher⁴) exist for me in a world of reality. Lawrence seems not to exist and R. seems far and far. I do not even write—poor boy—I suffered so for him. I think him very strange and unbalanced now—his actions were quite unaccountable. I pray for him—indeed they both need our pity—But you, dear, I always trust and believe in you—when everything fails there is you. I trust in your greatness. Perhaps we will meet soon. Perhaps before long. In the meantime, please write me of your experiences. Are there illuminations? Or is it some personal relationship you allude to. Write me, John, as I am going to write you, with *no* reservations.

Do you see Fletcher. Tell him anything you want about me—I know I

can trust him as I trust you. I will write you more soon of myself and my life here.

Goodnight, best of [?ones]

Hildushka.

MS Houghton

1. Probably H.D. refers to Richard Aldington and Dorothy Yorke. In the unpublished *roman à clef*, *Fields of Asphodel* (1920–21), H.D. writes that Aldington indicated that he would assume responsibility for H.D.'s daughter, but then when H.D. insisted upon registering her in his name, he threatened to sue her for divorce as an adultress.
2. Olivia Shakespear (1867–1938), novelist, was the mother of Dorothy Pound.
3. "Arabella" was Dorothy Yorke's nickname.
4. John Gould Fletcher (1886–1950), Imagist poet, who refers to H.D. in his memoir *Life Is My Song* (1934).

[Nov. 1919]

Dear John,

I have just sent you a wire about opera. In case you can come opera, I will enclose your ticket and you might as well go direct to your seat. No worry about clothes, come anyhow.

I am hoping you can will like Bryher.¹ I am writing you in strict confidence about her. You must not speak to Fletcher or anyone. But she is going every day to a specialist and there is possibility of insanity. The doctor tells me that her sanity for the present depends on me. This sounds exaggeration but you are used to the exaggerations of life. She likes you but remember she is horribly sensitive and covers it. She is devoted to me. I can do nothing, am only hoping, if I have the strength, to open her mind to possibilities. She is shut in and blind to life and I have never, never met such a tragic personality.

I have again and again told her that I can not stand the strain of living with her and yet I can not leave her. She helps me in many ways but I want freedom and if the tie becomes too much, I must leave her. Yet I know my influence may help her and may help many, many others later. But I am not a philanthropist. I must have my freedom first and if the strain becomes too great, I shall just chuck her and the maddening problem of her life. There may be a doom over her and I may be only hurting myself trying to help her. On the other hand, she may be made for happiness, her own and other people's and I may be her means of escape, her one means, and it would be base of me not to help her. I am fond of the girl, but I am

not strong and if this thing is not soon helped, this madness of hers, a real suicidal madness, I can not stay with her. She is better than she was, but I am certain I can not stand it if the doctors do not help her soon.

Do not let her know I write you so personally. But she likes you and your book.² She wants to know about Russia. She may be able to help in many ways, but she can never help you as much as you may be able to help her.

I must see you one day and have a good talk. I really must. You and I are not people, we are forces of some sort.

I like your book, John, more than ever. The last chapters are magnificent. You have real greatness and you must go on writing if not for yourself, for many, many others.

You will burn this letter and you know it is confidential. The worst thing is, the girl is in love with me, so madly that it is terrible. No man has ever cared for me like that. She seems possessed at times with a daemon or spirit outside herself. One side of her is so childlike that I am moved and must be tender, then this other thing comes out. It is awful, like something from without, a possession.

I understand those people Christ touched, those men and women and children too, possessed with devils. It is definite with her, something from outside. But I am not Christ. I have not the strength nor the love to banish this thing.

Dear John, I know you will read sincerity into this. There is no one else I could write to like this. But on re-reading your book, I gain new confidence.

I have been like a figure in those plays you write of. I have been all alone—can you understand—facing all those problems that South Audley Street³ stands for, quite alone yet not willing to be flung into that maelstrom of capital and social evils. Do you think I wanted to face all those things? I have been quite alone, moving without my own will, moving, tired to death, like a shell from which the spirit has departed, but moved like a piece in a play, pushed forward.

Do you think anyone would help me? That was the funny thing. No one would really. They were all afraid. I had to take the thing into my hands and the doctors said she would certainly go mad if she stayed another year in that house.

Perhaps I have played my part in this play and it is your clue to enter.

Well, anyhow, dear John, you will at last be patient with me. And if you can help you will. You will because you will not be able to do other than you are meant to do, and if you are meant to help, you will.

You and I are like people in a play. I don't think I suffer any more. I doubt if you do. Some day I must tell you of my life. But not my life at present, this poor girl's life is what concerns me.

While I was at the Scilly Isles, I wrote some "Notes on Thought and Vision."⁴ I must send them to you later. I wonder what you would think of them.

I trust you will come tomorrow. I will wait your wire before posting this.

If you are free, Monday, can you see me here as the girl goes home to dinner and we could talk.

H.

TS Bryn Mawr

1. Annie Winifred Ellerman (1894–1983), writer and philanthropist. Bryher was H.D.'s lifelong companion.
2. Cournos' novel *The Mask* (1919).
3. Bryher's parents, Sir John and Lady Hannah Ellerman, lived at 1 South Audley Street, Mayfair.
4. *Notes on Thought and Vision* was published posthumously by City Lights Press (1982).

July 9 [c.1920–21]

[no salutation]

I must thank you for your letter, dear John. You are and have been for a long time, a symbol of strength to me. It may sound conceited, and no doubt is (but as seekers after truth, you and I have no regard for petty appearances) but you seem in all this tangle, the one person that stands equal with me in oneness of purpose and a determination to pull through.

Outwardly, I am really very weak, but I always know far and far away somewhere that I am very strong.

Your knowledge of my strength helps me as well as your knowledge of my weakness.

You are quite right about the novel and I shall certainly chuck it.¹ But I must explain to you first that the novel is not intended as a work of art—at least, not as it stands. It is a means to an end. I want to clear up an old

tangle. Well, I do not put my personal self into my poems. But my personal self has got between me and my real self, my real artist personality. And in order to clear the ground, I have tried to write things down—in order to think straight, I have endeavored to write straight. But I hope to come clear and then turn to my real work again. You must remember that writing poetry requires a clarity, a clairvoyance almost. I have been too weak to dare to be clairvoyant. I have tried instead to be merely sensible. I mean in the common sense of that word. In the long run, the clairvoyance is the only real sanity for me.

But in the novel I am working through a wood, a tangle of bushes and bracken out to a clearing, where I may see again.

Don't take my novel seriously, dear John, though the fact that you have done so is another proof of your good faith. I have a surplus of good things here²—sun, sea, wind, hills, birds, work both mental and physical. But sometimes, often and often in fact, I long for your good self to run in and talk. I don't suppose you imagine I think of you as I do, often and often.

But we will talk when I come to London.

Keep well, dear John.

Hildushka

Please write your [?full] address as I have mislaid it.

Thank you for the cutting and thank Alec³ if you see him for Sphere and also Nation. I will write him soon.

MS Houghton

1. H.D. refers to either *Paint It To-day* (1920) or *Fields of Asphodel* (1920–21), unpublished autobiographical novels at the Beinecke Library, Yale University.

2. Cornwall.

3. Sir Alec Randall (1892–?), a friend of Richard Aldington's from university days. Randall wrote a memoir, *Richard Aldington: An Intimate Portrait* (1965), which refers to H.D.

Sept. 14 [c.1921]

Hotel Washington
Curzon Street
Mayfair, W.I.

Dear John:

Thank you so much for your nice, long letter and for the 2 envelopes of clippings. I simply couldn't read R.A.'s stuff but one day *will*. I have been

inquiring around & have learnt nothing definite. R.A. seems to be great friends with Eliot who spends a certain time with him in the country.¹ A friend of Mrs. Eliot says she will find out what she can for me. But you know this is *PRIVATE*. Because if R.A. finds out I am inquiring around *he* will either make himself altogether scarce or *come to see me*. I don't think I am ready for the latter. The reason I say that is that I learn from Miss Weaver² (this in *CONFIDENCE*) that *he*, R.A. has been inquiring about *me*. That he has been to her several times, *she* says, asking for news, begging in fact, just to know "where H.D. sleeps," "not for her sake but for his own" etc. etc. I don't know whether this is repentance of sorts or merely liver. I must not be cynical, but you know how I must feel. He also wrote direct to Miss Weaver a few weeks ago asking her to ask me to *write him*. It was merely a matter of business, nevertheless he seems to be making a definite move. However I don't trust him and have been keeping up my attitude of absolute aloofness & indifference. Of course *au font* I should *like* to see R. but things being at present so difficult with money, my mother, my baby etc. I don't dare think of seeing him.³ It wouldn't be fair to myself nor to my friends who did so much to help me. However as you had been so beautiful & kind in Paris, I thought you might like to know. It is so mysterious, isn't it? I will write you any further news. I am so tired with rushing about. I am awfully happy here but all the time exasperated to think I have to go back, now in about 10 days. It is just a snatching all the time, no peace. Much to my surprise, May S.⁴ *called me up*. I did not tell her I was here. She found out from D. Richardson.⁵ Wasn't it queer? She insisted on my going to see her so I went *with a crowd*. D. Richardson & Miss Weaver & the 2 McAlmons.⁶ Miss S. was very affable. *What* is up? Has R. been on to her? I don't understand as she was *crushing* to me the last time I saw her. It may have been nerves or something but she was so very affable this time. Well, what next? Miss S. is in the country now & I do not see her again. But perhaps I will [*able*] her direct next time I am in London, in the spring or possibly even at Christmas. Perhaps it is as well, I am going because really I am dead-beat already with love of London and strain of emotional memories.

Tell Helen,⁷ of course, anything, but I am *very* anxious it doesn't get about. I know you understand.

Again thanks, dear John. Write again to Riant Chateau or Lloyds Bank —

As ever
"H."

Very best wishes to H.
MS Houghton

1. Richard Aldington was T.S. Eliot's assistant editor when Eliot started the *Criterion* in 1921.
2. Harriet Shaw Weaver (1876–1961), publisher of the Egoist Press, Paris, under which imprint the early work of H.D., Joyce, Eliot and other "modernist" writers appeared.
3. H.D.'s mother and Aunt Laura came to live with her in 1921.
4. May Sinclair (1865?–1946), English feminist and author.
5. Dorothy Richardson (1882–1957), English educator, novelist, and journalist; pioneer in psychological fiction.
6. Bryher and Robert McAlmon (1895–1956), her first husband, an American author and publisher. McAlmon later refers to H.D. and Bryher in *Being Geniuses Together* (1938).
7. Helen Louise Kestner (1896–1952), later John Cournos' wife, was a detective story writer under pseudonyms John Hawk and Sybil Norton.

Sept. 15 [1922]

c/o Madame[?]Jundt]
Riant Chateau
Territet, Suisse.

Dear John:

I was so glad to hear of you. I have just come from a little visit to Paris where I met Bryher fresh from England. It was very kind of you to ask about my work. As a matter of fact, I should be glad of some one to look over some of it. Do you know a man called Samuel Roth?¹ He was starting a magazine in New York, "Two Worlds," and he has several essays & some of my poems. He was coming here en route to Vienna but never turned up. He was very much interested in my attempted "novels" and wanted to set one up in his magazine. But I have not yet seen the magazine & anyhow don't feel quite secure on that score. I have written two long short stories, a little in the manner (I am told) of the late Henry James. Never mind! I felt happy and serene in doing them & they got off my chest some weighty matter that was obsessing me. Then I have another "impressionistic" bit, not a story, not long enough for a novel. But the three would make a moderately solid prose work:²

1. Floriel.
2. Behind me a Sword.
3. Beryl.

Now would you like to see this or turn it over to your agent? I can work it up into some manageable form & send it if you think best.

I see mention of you in the back of this "Dial" & in other papers & am most eager to see "Babel."³ With all good wishes,

Hilda

MS Houghton

1. Samuel Roth (Norman Lockridge) (1894–1974), Austrian-born American poet, editor, and publisher. His magazine, *Two Worlds Monthly*, published the work of Joyce and Lawrence, allegedly obscene material, which led to a landmark Supreme Court decision defining obscenity in 1957.
2. H.D. probably refers to the three stories of *Palimpsest* (1926).
3. Cournos' third novel, *Babel* (1922).

Dec. 12 [1922]

c/o T. Cook—Via Tornatuoni
Florence

Dear John:

Indeed, I did enjoy your book¹ & some weeks ago, too, had a nice letter forwarded me from you from Lloyds Bank. I am & have been, since arriving here the first of November, very busy on a sort of novel—an emotional transcription of my first visit to Greece.² This has taken me so far from my old life & my old thoughts, that your book read in between, was in a way, quite a shock. I mean you described things so very well that at times I could not bear to read further. That is really a high compliment, but my own personal outlook so often intruded, that, on the whole, I don't believe I am an able critic. Suffice to say, I *enjoyed* every word & found parts highly illuminating!

I will read the volume sometime when I am not myself working at such a hectic pace—try to give it full justice.

I shall be awfully interested to hear what you think of the States. I myself think there are tremendous possibilities but things change & prejudices sweep so suddenly across the whole populace. One never can know

for long, where one is. I, for one, decided *not* to turn back on the old place. In my novel I am trying to make a bridge over. I saw a clipping (sent my mother by a cousin) about you. An interview! You said (or the *reporter* said for you) some quite telling and trenchant things. Certainly you are doing splendid work.

I am hoping to write more fully one day soon. I am just hurrying this thing off with my best Christmas wishes. I am not myself over-eager for the day (which for all of us) has poignant memories. But I dare say it will be very happy. I have little time to be lonely. My mother, aunt & little girl are all here. I see, too, the McA's off and on, from Rome. They are both dear, loyal young things and just young enough and talented enough to "give promise." Bryher always passes on your notes &, in your last, I was intrigued by the mention, several times, of "H.D."

Well, let me hear when you have time to write.

I have left Switzerland, I think more or less, for good, as it is far, far cheaper living here & also one occasionally meets "some" one. I see Norman Douglas.³ He is a continual delight. He said he had met you years ago, when he was on the *English Review*. I wonder if you remember him? Rodker⁴ (gossip says) has pulled off an *enormous* sum on a translation (managed from Florence) of *Casanova*. I heard from Plank⁵ the Whitalls⁶ have a BOY, but perhaps that stupendous news reached you.

My mother read every word of your book and was terribly interested. More anon! A happy New Year!

Yours
H

MS Houghton

1. Cournot's novel *Babel*.
2. H.D.'s discarded novel *Niké*.
3. Norman Douglas (1868–1952), novelist and essayist, was assistant editor of *The English Review*.
4. John Rodker (1894–1955), British poet and translator.
5. George Plank (d.1965), artist and illustrator of H.D.'s children's book *The Hedgehog* (1936) and of James Whitall's memoir.
6. James Whitall (1889–1954), translator, a Quaker from Philadelphia whose memoir *The English Years* (1938) describes H.D.

Feb. 5 [1929]

Riant Chateau
Territet

Dear John,

I want to thank you for your letter. I am grieved that you are not so well. Let me know if you are better and where you are. About Saxty¹ . . . she wrote me herself and, as well, I heard from the Poetry B.S.² she was in [sic] the prowl. I can do nothing and have not answered. After all, she is a complete stranger to me, I had not heard from her for ten years. I will do what I can of course, if she does turn up, but one can not write that way into the void. I have had too much experience with that sort of vague thing.

I suppose you have heard the rumour that R. and A. have had a violent and final quarrel. I don't myself believe it is final though people say he has sold all his books. I thought perhaps you might have heard something and I would be glad for news but please don't "spread it" that I am asking as they may get very secretive and we may as well know how things stand. I am upset as I fear R. may do something melodramatic, no one seems to know WHY he has sold his books. He has completely broken up the establishment in the country. But you must have heard all this. I heard it reported that he said he must have more "sex expression," in which case I think he is decidedly a "border line case" if not actually "certifiable." I don't know what to think and I see no way of helping him or her. It may seem odd to you, but I would like very much to help one or the other of them. It seems very odd to myself, that I should feel that way but I DO. I would like to know what A. is going to do, where she is, if with her mother. R. too . . . I don't know why. I can't do anything material but I CAN think of them as part of that life of mine in London that "went down in a day." I hope you will understand that in speaking to you, it is in that spirit. I know A. behaved as only she could, as only R. did, but they are both part of our "youth" for what it is worth and I do want to do what I can, anything that I can. I don't mean material or even personal things. But I want to think of them tenderly and perhaps in the long run that will most help . . . it sounds horribly Salvation Army but it is only after one have [sic] completely suffered that one can afford to feel that peculiar tenderness. Anyhow, do know John that I want always the best for you . . . and if I get across this summer, I want especially to see you. I do hope you understand that.

And let me have a line . . . I will tell you if I have any news.

Yours
Hildushka

MS Houghton

1. Possibly Lady Margaret Sackville (1881–1963), poet and president of the Poetry Society. She spoke at the inauguration of Harold Monro's *The Poetry Review*.
2. The Poetry Bookshop, at 35 Devonshire Street, Theobald's Road, London, operated by Harold Monro, became a lively meeting place for artistic people. It also published *The Chapbook* which included poems by H.D. and Richard Aldington.

July 3 [1929]

169 Sloane Street. S.W. 1.

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter. I am here till about mid-September. Let me know if you happen this way. There is a scheme for printing all of the Imagists in a new volume,¹ but this is to be kept strictly PRIVATE. If you have a poem or a slice of not-too-long prose that you would like included, will you write me here as soon as you can. But please do not speak of this as the publisher's sole idea is to spring it. If it comes off, there will be good royalties and a small sum down to each contributor. I believe so far, Fletcher, Flint, R.A., Lawrence, H.D. have consented. There is yet Ezra of course who is uncertain and one or two others. It would be nice out of sentiment for the old "Argo" (as you call it) if you would be so good as to come in too.

I did not write sooner as I was so very, very uncertain how you DID feel about hearing from me. I wrote you that little note because I was happy not because I was unhappy. About the same time, without any intervention, R. wrote me and I have been in close touch with him ever since. We saw one another much in Paris and write constantly. We are very, very close to one another intellectually and spiritually. There may be some definite separation later, but if there is, it will be because of FRIENDLINESS and nothing else. There is no question of R. and self ever becoming in any way "intimate" again and that is why this other relationship is so exquisite and sustaining. I want you to know this and to share it with me. I wrote you about Dorothy Yorke because there WAS no bitterness in my heart. I could not otherwise have written. Then too I recalled so many ex-

quisite things, the way R.A. called "John" to you,² there in that garden in Devon, the things you used to send me, those little cigares and how you used constantly to write me. Some red roses in the Hampstead flat and how you used to sit there with R. and me. You were so part of the lovely past, that when I thought of R. as alone and his old self, I immediately turned to you too. I was so very surprised (it was silly of me) to have your letter. But it did not matter. Because all I felt and do feel is astonishingly clear and sane to me, is entirely alive and vibrant and if it has no connection with the John of now, that is not surprising. I was silly to think that you too could immediately jump back into that little room, be there, recall those roses and all the little things. It was childish and silly of me and too, it was god-like. In that god-like little world, you ARE, John, and YOU, you see, dear John, can not and will not take any of that from me. I suppose my sorrow was that you could not be happy with me; I suppose I thought you would have some tenderness too toward the past, toward Dorothy Yorke in the far past. As for "spies," I had plenty of people who could have found "things out" for me, John. I wrote you, simply because you had loved Dorothy Yorke and I felt there would be a great bond of tenderness just of our own, for that reason. Something that no one in the world would quite understand, would quite share.

Hildushka

TS Houghton

1. *Imagist Anthology* (1930), new poetry by the Imagists: Richard Aldington, Cournos, H.D., John Gould Fletcher, Ford Madox Ford, Joyce, Lawrence, W.C. Williams. Cournos submitted "Shylock's Choice," a one-act play.
2. H.D. and Cournos thought they heard Aldington call to them in Devon after he left for army camp.