

1. Bohemia: London 1911-1912

A beginning is an artifice, and what recommends one over another is how much sense it makes of what follows.
(Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love*, 1998)¹

In the spring of 1911, Richard Aldington's undergraduate career at University College, London came to an end after less than two terms. He would later describe this episode of his life as marking 'the departure from buttressed respectability towards the freer if frowstier fields of Bohemianism'.²

His departure from the university was forced upon him, the result of his solicitor father's failed financial speculations, and he would always resent it: both because it denied him academic standing, and because he hated not to be in control of his life. It also confirmed him in his contempt for his father's ineptitude in managing his affairs, a contempt to which he would give expression in several fictional portrayals. Such was the pain of this youthful experience that he attempted in later years to rewrite the scenario, by representing the university course as unsatisfying (probably true), and implying that he had been asked to leave the college because of his rebelliousness (untrue).³

At the opening of Aldington's fifth novel, *Very Heaven* (1937), Chris Heylin's tutor reflects: 'What does one say to an undergraduate whose parents have lost their money? . . . Oughtn't I to help this boy? Bright lad. Pity to be a clerk or something. How, in point of fact, does one 'help'? . . . Whatever happens, life will turn sour in his mouth at forty.' Chris's own sense of loss and his anger towards his tutor and his parents are palpable: 'What am I to say to the old codger? He won't understand in the least. . . . How can he know what it is to have life crash around you? . . . But what am I to do, my god what *am* I to do? Chauffeur, barman, bank-clerk, airman, dole-man, door-man, butter-slapper, thief? They take it pretty calmly at home. *Nearly everything has been lost, darling, and we fear you must come home at once, not another penny can we spare for you.* That means: Get a job. Help the rich to keep rich. I'd a life's work planned. . . . I'm merely young, healthy, strong, reasonably intelligent and not bad-looking, so nobody does anything or cares.'⁴

Aldington started to take control of his own story when he rejected the most obvious route open to a literate young man without money or qualifications: a post as a clerk in the City. Fortunately, his own sociability had gained him another opening. The sports editor on one of the London dailies, whom he had met amongst

a group of friends with whom he went rowing on the Thames, offered him a free lodging in his flat in Bloomsbury and the opportunity to report on sporting events two or three afternoons a week.⁵ This offered him freedom, time to write poetry, a slender income – and did not, he felt, constitute selling his soul.

However, as *Very Heaven* intimates, the 18-year-old who walked south down Gower Street on that spring morning of 1911 may not have been as convinced of his good fortune as he later led himself to believe. Certainly, his few months at University College had disappointed his academic expectations. Perhaps it was predictable that a widely-read young man with a passion for the classics and literature and an enormous aptitude for languages would find the first year of a London undergraduate degree unsatisfying. He says of his English lecturer, Gerald Gould (then ‘a white hope of English poetry’), that although he was a good lecturer, ‘as far as I was concerned he had to expound authors already familiar’.⁶ Aldington had no contact with the most eminent of the university’s lecturers, A.E. Housman, the poet and Professor of Latin, who was merely ‘seen occasionally cruising gloomily about the corridors’;⁷ W. P. Ker, Quain Professor of English Language and Literature and a fine medieval scholar, was also unknown to him.

However, student life had made Aldington the centre of a lively-minded group of young men, including Alec Randall, later a diplomat (and a life-long friend), Arthur Chapman, another aspiring poet, tragically drowned during the 1911 summer vacation, and Vivian Gaster, son of the Chief Rabbi.⁸ Randall later commented on what a romantic figure Aldington had seemed to them all, ‘with his handsome features, his sparkling merry eyes, his reddish beard and velvet jacket and flowing bow tie’.⁹

For a time after leaving university his chosen path would be a more isolated one, and he would need a steady nerve to manage it. He had the advantage of knowing to what he aspired: ‘the way of life of the good European . . . to know and to enjoy the best that had been thought and felt and known through the ages’.¹⁰



The London literary scene in this period was vibrant and open to new ideas. Helen Carr tells us that, ‘London’s intellectual and creative life was based on a series of interconnecting, loosely constituted groups which gathered around certain publishers, editors, writers, literary hostesses and actresses as well as in societies and informal discussion groups.’¹¹ The literary giants were still the few remaining Victorians, Thomas Hardy, Henry James and the critic Edmund Gosse. The established writers of the new century were all now in their mid forties to early fifties, men such as Joseph Conrad, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, and women like May Sinclair, Ethel Colburn Mayne and Violet Hunt. These were writers strongly alive to the political and social issues of the day, if not, for the most part, stylistic innovators. Many of them were regular reviewers in the newspapers and journals, so that standards of taste were not solely determined by the more conservative critics



Ezra Pound, 1913

such as Gosse or Arthur Waugh and E.B. Osborn (literary critics for the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Morning Post*, respectively), Arthur St John Adcock (editor of *The Bookman*) and the poets Hilaire Belloc and Henry Newbolt, influential though these writers were.

The poetry scene was perhaps the most diverse. Although the 'Aesthetic' or 'Decadent' poets of the 1890s were long gone, their influence was still felt. (Both Ezra Pound and Aldington were admirers of Swinburne.) Of the 'Rhymers' Club' poets who succeeded them, only W.B. Yeats, Ernest Rhys and Arthur Symons were still on the scene.¹² Yeats was a towering presence in the literary world, although much of his time in recent years had been spent in Ireland, establishing the Abbey Theatre. Rhys was a generous supporter of new poets and their ideas. Symons was the chief apologist in England for the French Symbolist movement; partly as a result of his work as a literary critic, a range of French poets from Baudelaire to Laforgue was read and discussed amongst aspiring writers and in the literary journals of the day.

The older, more established poets centred on The Poets' Club, founded in 1908, which met at the United Arts Club in Mayfair for a monthly dinner followed by speeches or readings. Newbolt and the banker, Henry Simpson, were its presidents and the young T.E. Hulme its secretary.¹³ In response to a very disparaging review of the Club's 1908 Christmas anthology in the *The New Age* by F.S. Flint, Flint and Hulme met up in March 1909 and started the more informal weekly meetings of less conventionally-minded poets at the Tour Eiffel Restaurant in Percy Street off the Tottenham Court Road. The group included Edward Storer, the Irish poets Desmond FitzGerald and Joseph Campbell, Florence Farr, the actress and friend of Yeats, and the American, Ezra Pound.

Young writers also clustered round the editorial teams of the two progressive journals of the day, *The New Age* and *The English Review*. The latter was the brainchild of Ford Madox Hueffer, later Ford Madox Ford, the novelist and critic. He had founded the monthly journal at the end of 1908, in response, according to his account, to the refusal of all existing newspapers and journals to print Thomas Hardy's 'A Sunday Morning Tragedy' (his ballad about a young woman who dies from an abortion). From Hueffer's offices above a butcher's shop at 84 Holland Park Road, *The English Review* printed work by both established and 'new' writers. By the end of 1909, Hueffer had been forced to sell the journal after only twelve issues, but under the editorship of Austin Harrison it continued to publish the work of a wide range of contemporary writers until well after the First World War.

The full title of *The New Age* was *The New Age: a Weekly Review of Politics, Literature and the Arts* and its editor, Alfred Orage, purchased it in 1907 to provide a cultural platform for Fabian socialism. The range of views expressed in its pages, however, was broad, and it covered most of the controversial issues of the day. Like *The English Review* it published new young writers and reviewed their work, if not always favourably.

During 1910, as Hulme became more interested in philosophy than in poetry, the Tour Eiffel meetings fell away; but in their place he instituted weekly gatherings of artists and intellectuals at 67, Frith Street, the home of his friend Dolly Kibblewhite. It was here one autumn evening in 1912 that Ezra Pound would meet the senior civil servant and sponsor of the arts Edward Marsh and his friend, the Cambridge poet Rupert Brooke: they were planning an anthology of recently published poetry.¹⁴ They invited Pound to contribute, but the three could not agree on what to select from his *oeuvre*. In consequence, he would not appear in the 1912 *Georgian Poetry* amongst other young poets like Lascelles Abercrombie, John Drinkwater and Wilfred Gibson who had gathered round Brooke and Marsh and would come to be known as the Georgians.



Aldington was soon to be introduced to the world of Flint, Hulme and Pound; but first he was to meet one of the three women who would dominate his life for the next twenty years and more. His introduction to her came through mutual friends, the Hilberys: 'She [Maude Hilbery] . . . asked me one day, 'Will you see a clever boy we know who is alone in London because he won't go into his father's law business? All he wants to do is write. He's got some job reporting for a paper – mostly football matches I believe!'¹⁵

In 1911 Brigit Patmore was twenty-nine years old and the mother of two small sons.¹⁶ Her charm and beauty, her minor talent as a pianist, her husband's successful career in insurance and the fact that he was the grandson of the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore all gave her the status, means and aptitude for the role of literary hostess, which she would acquire by the end of 1911. It was a role she desired not because she was an aspiring writer but because of her fascination with literary people and her dissatisfaction with her marriage to the philandering

Deighton Patmore. Her older son Derek wrote in 1968: 'My earliest memories of my mother are of a lovely young woman with red-gold hair. She had a pale creamy complexion which emphasised the gleaming colour of her hair, and her eyes, which were grey, though sometimes tinged with green, had a melancholy expression. . . . She craved love and affection.'¹⁷

D.H. Lawrence's fictional portrayal of Patmore echoes this description. Lawrence's 'Clariss' is 'a frail, elegant woman – fashionable rather than Bohemian . . . cream and auburn, Irish, with a slightly-lifted upper lip that gave her a pathetic look.'¹⁸ The novelist Violet Hunt wrote later: 'She was very beautiful with a queer, large, tortured mouth that said the wittiest things, eyes that tore your soul out of your body for pity and yet danced.'¹⁹

Patmore was instantly smitten by Aldington, a 'lively, humorous boy . . . tall and broad-shouldered, with a fine forehead, thick longish hair of the indefinite colour blond hair turns to in adolescence, very bright blue eyes, too small a nose and a determined mouth'.²⁰ There was mutual enchantment and before long they were lovers.

In early 1911, shortly after the Patmores' move from Fulham to 52, St Helen's Gardens in Kensington, Brigit had received a visit from Violet Hunt, a client of her husband. The two women became friendly and Patmore started to attend Hunt's weekly literary *salon* at South Lodge, on Campden Hill Road. She occasionally accompanied Hunt on some of her excursions to campaign for women's suffrage, although the two women's recall of this aspect of the relationship differs. Hunt remarks rather acidly in her memoirs: 'She was no real suffragette, though she had collected with me and rattled her box at stations. Nothing but her eye protested. Delicately cynical, she accepted things as they were.'²¹

In September 1911 Hunt's lover, Ford Madox Hueffer, novelist and founder of *The English Review*, had been residing in Germany for a year in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain a divorce from his wife. Hunt and Hueffer (allegedly) underwent a marriage ceremony in France, returning to London in November as Mr and Mrs Ford Madox Hueffer. (The resultant scandal would lead to a libel case being brought by Hueffer's real wife). With the couple's return to South Lodge in November 1911, Hunt's tea parties resumed, and in her drawing room one Tuesday afternoon Patmore observed a long slim, young man with a shock of curly reddish hair, leaning back in a low arm chair, 'as self-possessed as Violet's superb grey Persian cat sitting on the window-sill.'²² This was the 26-year-old American, Ezra Pound, who had spent most of August in Germany, working as Hueffer's secretary. Now he was bursting onto the London literary scene in earnest – for the second time. His idols were the medieval and Renaissance poets of Southern Europe, his more recent models Browning, Rossetti and Yeats.²³ It was his desire to meet Yeats which had first drawn him to London in 1908 and he had thrived there socially and creatively. Yet, despite publishing four volumes of poetry and one book of literary criticism, he had been unable to make a living and had been forced to return to the U.S. in 1910. He had lasted only eight months back home, achieving neither literary nor financial advancement; Europe – and specifically London at this stage of his life – was his cultural milieu and it was here, he knew, that he would make his name as a poet.

Patmore was keen to introduce her young lover to him. She invited both men to tea: 'They seemed to enjoy it all very much and went away together, Ezra enchanted to have a young mind to indoctrinate and Richard overjoyed to find someone who was interested in him and who knew what it meant to write poetry.'²⁴ This relationship would deteriorate in later years, but it would remain an important one for the younger poet. He wrote to Amy Lowell in 1917, at a time when the two men were not on speaking terms, 'We were great friends, very great friends, and I cannot forget how much his knowledge and sympathy meant to me, after many years of spiritual isolation. . . .'²⁵ Nearly three decades later he would write: 'Ezra was a citizen of the world, both mentally and in fact. . . . Instead of pap, he fed me meat.'²⁶



Patmore, Pound and Aldington became inseparable but the stage was now set for the entry of the fourth member of the group and Pound was the impresario who would engineer it. He was tied into a web of sexual relationships that must by now, as the young women concerned began to occupy the same geographical space, have exercised his ingenuity to manage.

At the age of sixteen he had met and fallen in love with Hilda Doolittle, a year younger than himself and the daughter of the professor of astronomy at the University of Pennsylvania, where Pound was an undergraduate. Four years later they had become unofficially engaged. When he first left for Europe in 1908, the status of the engagement was unclear; and during his two-years absence a young woman, Frances Gregg, came into H.D.'s life 'like a blue flame'²⁷ and filled the vacuum left by Pound.²⁸ Whereas H.D.'s relationship with Pound had been intellectual and romantic, in Gregg she found a passionate lover. Their relationship was disrupted on Pound's return (and much to H.D.'s distress) when he and Gregg were mutually attracted.

When Pound returned to Europe in February 1911, the status of his engagement to H.D. was still unclear. In July Gregg and her mother embarked on a European tour, and H.D. went with them; by the end of September they were in London, where Pound proceeded to organise their social calendar.

There was a further complication. On his first visit to London Pound had fallen in love with Dorothy Shakespear, the daughter of Olivia Shakespear, novelist, literary hostess and the friend and former lover of Yeats. Dorothy, although the same age as H.D., was closely supervised by her parents. While they approved of Pound as a poet, they did not (and in this respect they resembled Hilda's parents) view him as a suitable son-in-law; his access to her had been severely restricted. Back in London in 1911, he felt more confident of his prospects, financially and matrimonially, and on 11 October – less than two weeks after the arrival of Frances and Hilda – he formally asked Henry Hope Shakespear for Dorothy's hand. Pending Hope's investigations of Pound's financial affairs, the engagement remained unofficial. No-one in Pound's circle knew of his attachment.

At the end of October the American women were due to sail home, but H.D. was eager to remain in London and her parents agreed that she should stay until their retirement trip to Europe the following year. She accompanied Frances and



Brigit Patmore, 1913

Mrs Gregg to Liverpool for their embarkation before returning to London alone, excited but apprehensive, desperately missing Frances, for whom her passion was unabated, and uncertain about the status of her relationship with Pound. He took on the role of her 'nearest male relation', organising her enrolment as a reader at the British Museum and requesting Brigit Patmore to ask her to tea.²⁹

Patmore tells us: 'The tall girl I went to meet at the entrance [to Patmore's club near Piccadilly] seemed too fragile for her height and build. Had her head been held high and her shoulders straight, she would have looked, as Richard might have said, "like a goddess". But no goddess ever showed such extreme vulnerability in her face, nor so wild and wincing a look in her deep-set eyes. She had soft brownish hair, a pallid complexion and a pouting sensitive mouth, but a magnificent line of jaw and chin gave a reassuring strength.'³⁰

At Patmore's house H.D. met Richard Aldington. She was charmed by both of them; they were equally fascinated by her. There has been speculation that Patmore, like H.D., was bisexual. In 1919, in response to being sent the manuscript of her lesbian friend Bryher's autobiographical novel, H.D. would write that she wanted Patmore to see it, 'because she is sensitive and feels (knows in another way) and because she is so intensely and vitally interested in women who are more than women, or different from what is ordinarily accepted as such.'³¹

Patmore certainly seems to have felt safer in her relationships with women than in those she had with men. However, she craved – and courted – male admiration and desire (as both H.D. and Violet Hunt would discover to their cost), perhaps to compensate for her unfulfilling marriage, perhaps behaviour she had learned from her mother. She wrote in her memoir, 'The love of sorrow I learned from my mother, who passionately believed a man could be faithful and kind, and, finding this not so, grieved her wild heart to death.'³²

In H.D.'s autobiographical novel *Bid Me To Live*, 'Julia' says of Morgan, the Patmore character: 'If she wanted women, let her have women, not use women, as Julia felt she did, as a sort of added touch of exoticism, something to stir and excite. . . . She had seen it often enough, Morgan with her arms around him, and her "Oh, darling, it's really women I love."³³ This more malicious representation of Patmore's sexual proclivities seems to hit the mark, but it was an insight that would come later; for now, the two women became close friends.

It is not easy to understand why, over the ensuing months, Patmore became willing to surrender her young lover to H.D. Caroline Zilboorg suggests that 'Patmore found her [H.D.] charming and sexually attractive, and probably encouraged her own lover in his attentions to H.D. out of a genuine willingness to foster romantic relationships but also impulsively as a way of loving H.D. vicariously through him.'³⁴

It may simply have been a case of giving in to the inevitable, as the young couple's shared love of literature and of all things Greek, as well as their shared aspiration to be poets, brought them together. It is also unlikely that Patmore's relationship with Aldington was rooted in much more than friendship and physical attraction – and, on her part the fillip of having a handsome and virile lover ten years her junior, on his the excitement of having as his first sexual partner an older, beautiful, sexually experienced woman of higher social class. For Patmore, this affair could not, of course, have progressed much further without risk to her social position. Meanwhile, their friendship brought the three of them great pleasure. Patmore recalled years later, 'We three were bound together, but lightly, gaily. We liked being together. We laughed and read, walked about London, looked at pictures, had meals in tea-rooms.'³⁵



H.D., 1913

Pound appears to have been oblivious of the complexities of his friends' feelings for one another, flinging himself into the role of poetic mentor of H.D. and Aldington, studiously ignoring H.D.'s requests for clarification of the status of her relationship with him, but giving her the job of acting as his hostess. He managed to keep his real matrimonial intentions hidden until the spring of 1912.

Pound also (if we are to trust H.D.'s autobiographical novel, *Asphodel*) criticised her grey chiffon dresses as 'all right for Philadelphia' but 'too nun-ish' for London, and persuaded her to move from her lodging house in Great Ormond Street to Portman Square, as somewhere he could more easily send his friends. As for her poetry, it was 'not modern enough' and yet 'too modern' for him to recommend to journals (as he had Frances Gregg's verse).³⁶

Why did H.D. stand for this patronage? She had a deep lack of self-confidence. The provincial gentility of her background and the strict, though kindly, religious discipline to which she had been accustomed, seem to have led to a continuing anxiety about the opinions of others on her part. The only girl in a family of six children, she had been expected by her father, of whom she was very fond, to achieve great things. Hence the choice for her of Bryn Mawr, the prestigious women's college. Like Aldington, however, she had dropped out of university (during her second year), but in her case because of academic failure. Like Aldington again, she subsequently chose a partial account of the facts, explaining that she had had to give up her course because she was ill. She does seem to have gone through some kind of nervous breakdown at this time, but whether this was cause or consequence of her withdrawal from college is unclear.

She had lived at home while attending college, commuting daily; and at home she remained afterwards, quietly studying on her own. Her novel *Paint It Today* gives us a glimpse of H.D.'s feelings at this stage of her life: 'She felt instinctively that she was a failure by all the conventional and scholarly standards. She had failed in her college career, she had failed as a social asset with her family and the indiscriminate mob of relatives and relays of communal friends that surrounded it. She had burned her candle of rebellion at both ends and she was left unequipped for the simplest dealings with the world.'³⁷

The chance to travel with the Greggs must have seemed a liberation. She had been romantically involved with Pound since she was fifteen, her parents' disapproval of him only adding further excitement to the romance. (The same was true of her relationship with Gregg.) From the start he had played the role of her mentor and teacher. An intelligent girl with a love of nature and of literature, and creatively gifted, she may have lacked belief in herself as a woman and as a scholar: but she did believe in herself as a poet. Pound did not discourage her; but what he most needed from a woman was a belief in *his* creative powers. In London, however, in a social world alien from her own, H.D. needed him, to guide her through the traps of middle-class society and protect her reputation; this may have been a world of artists, but the standards of moral conduct were still strict – as poor Violet Hunt would soon discover. Whether Pound was the man to provide her with this protection we might question; but he was all she had.

We might also wonder why Professor and Mrs Doolittle were willing to allow their only daughter to live in London for several months, alone except for a young man whom they had thought unsuitable as a husband for her. They clearly trusted her good sense and respected her desire to study. They may also have had the

wisdom to recognise that, back home again, with no new prospects, she would languish. In any case, young American women of the period had greater social freedom and independence than their British counterparts; Dorothy Shakespear was rarely out of her mother's sight.³⁸

Aldington was a breath of fresh air to H.D., and he clearly admired both her beauty and her intellect; this was a relationship of equals, or, if there were any inequalities, she was the superior. Throughout his life he would believe her to be the greater poet.³⁹ They shared a love of classical Greece, its mythology and its literature, and set about learning the language and translating texts together, chiefly the poets of the *Greek Anthology*. At nineteen, Aldington was not yet old enough to be eligible for a reader's ticket; he depended on her to copy materials from the British Museum Reading Room for him. They met daily.



Pound, H.D. and Patmore became the centre of Aldington's social and creative life, but through them he met other artists and writers. Perhaps the two most important were Frank Flint and Harold Monro. Flint was the same age as Pound, but a Londoner from an extremely poor background who had educated himself and mastered ten languages. His paid employment was as a post office clerk but he was appointed poetry reviewer on *The New Age* in 1908 when only twenty-three (although by 1911 he had ceased to hold this post). His first poetry collection, *In the Net of the Stars*, was published in 1910. It was Flint who, with T.E. Hulme, had started the Tour Eiffel poets' meetings and both Pound and Aldington were to learn a great deal from his knowledge of contemporary French poetry. Aldington and Flint became close friends; their frank, lively and mutually influential relationship would last for more than a decade, although in the mid 1920s, as Aldington struggled to put his life back together after the war and as the two men's lifestyles became increasingly incompatible, their friendship would come to an abrupt end.

It was Harold Monro's new journal which would carry, in August 1912, Flint's influential survey of contemporary French poetry. Monro, a melancholic 32-year-old poet, had embarked on a mission to disseminate new English poetry more widely: through a literary journal, the *Poetry Review*, which began publication in January 1912, and through a poetry bookshop, which opened in Devonshire Street at the end of that year.⁴⁰ Dominic Hibberd, Monro's biographer, describes his 1911 collection of verse, *Before Dawn*, as 'perhaps the first collection of genuinely modern English poetry'.⁴¹ Monro came to be associated chiefly with Edward Marsh's Georgian poets, whose anthologies his bookshop would publish. However, he was a good friend to the young Aldington, who wrote short reviews and notices for the *Poetry Review*, and he would publish Aldington's first collection of poetry in 1915 as well as the first of the Imagist anthologies in April 1914.⁴²

A letter from Aldington to Monro, undated but clearly from the spring of 1912, gives an indication of Monro's interest in the younger poet, but also of Aldington's good humour, shrewd judgement and confidence in his own creative powers:

My dear fellow,

Your rebuke was perfectly just and justifiable, and argues an interest flattering to me.

The real answer is this: If I am so feeble-minded as to remain permanently under Pound's influence, God help me, I'm not worth bothering about. If I am so dull and stertorous-minded as not to be influenced by a man of Pound's intellect – then also God help me. I know I am extremely susceptible to other people's influences, especially when they are congenial folk, but I think they always simmer down and become absorbed in the Kosmic RA!⁴³



In the spring of 1912 Aldington was still working for his sports editor and spending a great deal of time with H.D. and with Pound. April, however, brought a storm to this serene social landscape. H.D. received a letter from Gregg with the news that on 10 April she was to marry an English lecturer, Louis Wilkinson, and that they would embark immediately for London on their way to the continent, where he was due to lecture. Both the news of the marriage and the imminence of Gregg's arrival were a terrible shock for H.D.

Predictably, the reunion was a traumatic one. Gregg seems to have persuaded H.D. that it was for her sake that she had entered into this marriage and that she wanted H.D. to travel with her and Wilkinson, so that the two women could be together again.⁴⁴ The truth seems to have been even more complicated: a mutual attraction existed between Gregg and Wilkinson's friend, the Welsh writer and lecturer John Cowper Powys, who, married himself, had brought Wilkinson and Gregg together to facilitate his access to the latter. Powys had travelled to London with them.

H.D. was torn between her passion for Gregg and the satisfactions of the life that she had been living for the last six months. Whether feelings for Aldington were also involved is hard for us to tell. What both her fictionalised accounts of the incident intimate is that H.D. took Aldington along to meet Gregg and that the latter, alert to the presence of a rival for H.D.'s affections, adopted a shrewd tactic to undermine him: she suggested that he lacked *class*. 'He has the manners of an innkeeper's son.'⁴⁵ . . . I hated him to open the door for you and brush your shoulder. . . . I think him under the surface, unclean.'⁴⁶ 'Fayne Rabb', remarks the narrator of *Asphodel*, 'made people seem common.'

The response of H.D.'s two male friends, Aldington and Pound, to her proposed travels with Gregg is more surprising. Pound had the measure of Gregg of course, and the fact that he took charge was in character; what was less characteristic was his immediate grasp of the sexual complexities of the situation and the good sense with which he acted. He was concerned that H.D. would find herself compromised emotionally as well as morally if she followed the couple to Europe; he also suggested that she owed it to Gregg to give the marriage a chance of success.

He, too, seems to have played the class and reputation card: "Did you ever hear



Frank Flint

of your mother going to Bruges or Ghent or Little Rock or Athens, Ohio, with anyone on their honeymoon?" "Well, no – not exactly on their – " "Exactly."⁴⁷ When remonstrating failed, he picked her up in a cab on the morning of the trio's intended departure, took her to Victoria Station, informed Wilkinson and Gregg that she would not be accompanying them, retrieved the cheque for her travel ticket from Wilkinson and whisked her and her luggage away in another cab.

H.D. may have been a little relieved that the decision had been made for her, but she was in a state of shock. She was, therefore, appreciative of the tact and understanding of her other male friend. Aldington recognised how important Gregg was to her and that the break was devastating; he also knew that she needed sympathy. The narrator of *Paint It Today* writes: 'He was English and of another world and it was much pleasanter reviewing the irreparable past with him than

with Raymond [Pound].’ She continues: ‘I had never met anyone in my life before who understood the other half or the explanatory quarter of the part of the sentences I left unsaid.’⁴⁸ Trust, so vital a quality for H.D., was being established between them.

However, the tranquillity of her London life had been disturbed, and she felt that she must get away, at least for a while, to restore her equilibrium. Paris, the city she had seen in Gregg’s company less than eight months earlier, seemed a good choice. It was familiar, within easy reach, and offered cultural delights to transport her out of her recent misery. Pound would be there briefly, in transit for his projected summer walking tour of troubadour country. There would also be Walter Rummel, of whom we shall hear more shortly. Aldington suggested that he might come; he had never been to Paris. However, to do so, he would have to give up his sports-reporting post and the income it gave him. At the beginning of May H.D. left London, leaving her young admirer with a dilemma to resolve.

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