

# **Radical Reading Practices in the Archives of H.D. and Gertrude Stein:** *A New Approach to Autobiography*

## **Radical Reading**

When I first came to the work of H.D. and Gertrude Stein, I was still learning to read modernist writers. While I was aware that the works produced in the early twentieth century were often challenging to read, I had a limited sense of the variation amongst them. As my reading progressed, I found that each modernist writer had his or her own ideological and literary program to enact and unveil in his or her work.

Reading modernist works together let me examine and reflect on the differences, but it also taught me the limitations of the way I read. I wanted to apply the same methodology to every writer, to parse Ezra Pound like T.S. Eliot because they knew each other and read each other's work. But this approach, of pretending that works written at the same time could be read the same, was inadequate. Some modernist writers were in dialogue, but many were not. Some modernist writers can be read the same way, but others cannot.

This essay presents two writers—H.D. and Gertrude Stein—and puts the two of them in conversation with each other, but in a different way than writers are often compared. While I will discuss some of the similarities and differences between them, my interest is not in comparing their works, but in comparing the ways we can and should read their works. H.D. and Gertrude Stein demand (and their works enact these demands) different ways of reading than we ordinarily use. I have turned to their archives at the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at Yale University to continue my exploration of why and how we can read their two sets of work differently.

These modernist female writers have much in common superficially. Both were Americans who never completed their educations (H.D. failed out of Bryn Mawr; Stein managed

to get herself in Johns Hopkins Medical School despite having no diploma from Radcliffe, and left Hopkins without a degree). Both spent most of their working life in Europe, associating with other American expatriate and European literary and artistic figures. Both had a long-term companionate relationship with a woman. Finally, both women were seminal writers in a period of experimentation, and were recognized—eventually—in their lifetimes as influential and important figures.

They did meet each other, but were not friendly (though there does not seem to have been animosity on either side). Frankly, I doubt their work interested each other very much. While both wrote in a variety of genres—fiction, memoir/autobiography, and poetry—their works are stylistically and formally radically different, influenced by and influencing very different movements within modernism. Both writers also saw their relationship to their work differently, and had fundamentally opposed notions of composition and highly dissimilar writing practices.

It is these differences in composition and in the relationship of the writers to their work that establish the different ways to read these writers and their work. Archives present the possibility of reading the person behind the page, reading the writer's insecurities, missteps, and their decisions, good and bad. What archives also allow us to do is explore new ways of putting pieces together regarding writers and their legacy. Both Stein and H.D. had high anxiety during their lifetime about who would read their work. It is only many years after their death, with both of their statuses established, that we can experiment—as, I believe, they would want—with how to read them.

I began this project with a feeling of trepidation, wanting to read as radically as both of them wrote. The power of both of their prose and poetry is that it demands more of us: demands attention, demands a willingness to work hard as readers. Their self-awareness as writers

encourages us to be self-aware readers. That, more than anything, is what I set out to become, and what I set out to do: to read well, to read experimentally, and to read radically, coming to this work with a desire to renew their importance and to refresh the way that we approach them and other writers of their period.

### **Reading for Themes**

Those ideas and motifs that H.D. and Stein have in common manifest themselves in different ways throughout their writing. These themes are both personal and literary, and inform both the way that the writers approached their writing and their relationship to their work.

The first theme is time. H.D. and Stein were profoundly conscious of their place in time, and of the drive to innovate and experiment that was so much a part of that particular moment in literary history. The idea of time also informs my approach to their archives, as drafts and notebooks represent the making of works in real time, something that is effaced when a work is finally published. Archives allow us to read the layering of decisions and roads not taken vertically, which gives us greater insight into composition and the evolution of style. Both of these writers also had different relationships to the idea of the past: H.D. was adept at taking up ancient themes and motifs and re-shaping them into modernist works, while Stein's work is consistently preoccupied with the new.

These different senses of time influence the way in which these two writers viewed their relationship to their work. H.D. presents herself as a fragile vessel for ideas that come to her from realms of mystery and magic. Words themselves only encode the meanings that come from this other realm. Language to H.D. is therefore important, and worth striving for the most perfect word for the correct occasion, but the ideas—the mystery—is more important.

Stein's relationship to her work, and indeed, to her words, is the opposite. If the function of language for H.D. is to express the ideas that move through her mysteriously, then for Stein language is sufficient unto itself, and pliable. Language—and not mystery—is Stein's obsession, and her role is to shape and re-shape language in ways that challenge how we read and consider the world around us. The major differences between the ways in which H.D. and Stein approach their work and the idea of language can be localized in H.D.'s repeated use of the word "translate" and "gift" and Stein's use of the word "make." These two words reflect the radically different writing processes of the two writers.

H.D. ties together the words "gift" and "translate" in her two major works of memoir, *The Gift* and *Tribute to Freud*, and through these words explores the process of translating mystery into language. Translation as a process is an imperfect one for H.D.: it requires selecting the word that most closely approximates the idea she hopes to convey. Decisions are made, but once the word has been chosen, the other possibilities fade away, and only one can be read. Those who have "the gift" are able to translate history, myth and magic into language that evokes these eternal forces and ideas.

Stein in her two essay-lectures "Gradual Making of the Making of Americans" and "Composition as Explanation" explores the idea of "making," which is so essential to her epic semi-autobiographical novel, *The Making of Americans*. This word comes to stand for Stein's emphasis on the made-ness of text, on the drafting and studying of life that she did in preparation for her epic work. Stein does not want us to read only the end result of the process. Through language she selects and repeats she demands that we read the making of the text as well as the text itself.

Reading the relationship of the writer to the text and the writer's process is made possible by examining archives, which give us access to these processes, allow us to read both the choices and the composition, and enable to make sense of the different ideological programs contained in the different kinds of autobiographical writing that H.D. and Stein undertook.

Style, also, has a role to play as a signalling device for the writers' processes. H.D. has been celebrated as a writer of crystallized, pure sentences, while Stein is renowned as a humorous writer whose repetitions are based on colloquialisms and speech. "HD Imagiste" writes lines and sentences without any excess. Stein's work can seem capacious and overwhelming. Both writers present difficulties of interpretation, but ultimately it is impossible to read them, their processes or their writing alike.

## **H.D.**

H.D.'s *Tribute to Freud*, written in 1944 as a reflection on her analysis with Freud in the early thirties, is a memoir about interpreting her life experiences in order to reveal hidden meanings. The memoir is full of signs, symbols, and mysteries. *Tribute to Freud* as a text becomes the mediating force for us to access the mysteries of H.D.'s life, and through her, greater mysteries. Translation as an idea becomes central to this process of reading signs, symbols and life events, and penetrating their elusive hidden meanings.

The archives at the Beinecke have several versions of *Tribute*, but, interestingly enough, there are few substantial differences amongst them. H.D., against Freud's wishes, kept a notebook describing her experiences with him, a notebook that became the first part of *Tribute to Freud*, "Writing on the Wall." The notebook has almost no dates in it, and structurally appears quite consistent with the book that would rise out of it, as the entries are separated on the page by section breaks that became the familiar section breaks of the text. Already in this first notebook

draft, H.D. has distilled her experiences into a series of poignant and illuminating reflections on herself, Freud, and the mysteries of the universe. The later drafts of *Tribute* are typescripts with only the addition of section break numbers or minor grammatical corrections. H.D. appears to have been satisfied with her first attempt to translate the experience of working with Freud, and so kept the text more or less the way it was.

Comparing excerpts from the notebook with the final text of “Writing on the Wall” indicates both the process of translation from experience to text as well as H.D.’s interest in the idea of translation itself. In an early passage in the book, H.D. writes, “I do not know how the Professor translated it” (9) about Freud’s interpretation of her gestures and comments. Actions—and later experiences and dreams—can be translated in much the same way as texts, because for Freud and H.D., every gesture, every event may be loaded with hidden meaning requiring careful thought and consideration. Other early references include a mention of “your nursery translation” (29) of Grimm’s or other fairy tales, a book H.D. refers to because it includes the story of Little Brother, Little Sister, a story which she and her brother act out in life. Once again, actions require translation, here in light of texts. Texts, in particular *Tribute to Freud*, become H.D.’s major vehicle for exploring her hidden life and her mysterious visions.

While H.D. does refer to traditional processes of translation in *Tribute*—i.e. the translation of one language into another—her major concern becomes the limitations of this kind of translation. Another of Freud’s analysands, a gifted woman whom H.D. envies both for her closeness to Freud and for her great personal charm, “had translated the Professor’s difficult German into French” (39). While H.D.’s anxiety about other individual’s giftedness becomes important when turning to her other memoir, *The Gift*, the translating of Freud’s book becomes important primarily because H.D. is concerned about the exactitude of translation, writing “I

think it is impossible to assess this or appreciate it in the translation” (104) of the *Interpretation of Dreams*. Translating from one language to another, translating even events and symbols, is problematic for H.D. and Freud because it makes the final interpretation too staid, too final. Freud deplores to H.D. “the tendency to *fix* ideas too firmly” (93), which becomes something that H.D. will try to avoid in the text of *Tribute*. The selection of correct language allows ideas to breathe, to be re-interpreted, to rise out of intuitive processes without the imposition of limitations.

One of the major threads originating in the notebook draft of “Writing on the Wall” is H.D.’s examination of the intuitive processes of translation that she and Freud sometimes share and sometimes do not. In the earliest pages of the notebook, she makes reference to the fact that the Professor was “not always right,” [Fig. 1] which becomes page 18 of the New Directions paperback of *Tribute to Freud*. “But the Professor was not always right” (18) becomes a refrain throughout the book, as H.D. asserts the validity of her own translating processes through her writing. Her “intuition cannot be really be translated into words” (99), because her “form of rightness, [her] intuition, sometimes functioned by the split-second (that makes all the difference in spiritual time-computations) the quicker” (98). Language is subordinated to this intuition, and symbols and signs cannot remain fixed so long as intuition remains fluid. H.D. later contradicts herself, saying about the Professor that “(actually, he was always right, though we sometimes translated our thoughts into different languages or mediums)” (47). The language of Freud is H.D.’s language of signs and symbols, but Freud fails to make the dazzling connections and intuitive leaps that H.D. does both in her mind and on the page. Freud’s interpretations of H.D.’s visions, despite his concern over not fixing symbols too concretely, are limited by his failure to intuit, to see many meanings. H.D.’s translating process then becomes writing and intuiting the many possible meanings behind events, symbols and words themselves.

Words become charged forces in *Tribute to Freud*, literally to the point of explosion.

*'Time,'* he said. The word was uttered in his inimitable, two-edged manner; he seemed to defy the creature, the abstraction; into that one word, he seemed to pack a store of contradictory emotions; there was irony, entreaty, defiance, with vague, tender pathos. It seemed as if the word was surcharged, an explosive that might, at any minute, go off. (75)

The passage, [Fig. 2] in the notebook, explains the power and possibility of language as well as enacting H.D.'s intuitive processes of translating the different meanings behind a word or a symbol. The Professor says a word, and H.D. reads myriad meanings into it. Simultaneously, the passage suggests the ways in which gesture and language, interpretation and reality, can be laid on top of each other. Time, both the word and the idea, becomes central to the Professor's concerns for his immortality. "He was looking ahead but his concern for immortality was translated into terms of grandchildren" (63). Once again, a term—grandchildren—becomes symbolic of a whole host of meanings within the text. The very real anxieties about time that H.D. and Freud both possess become localized and translated into a series of words that take on many meanings. By exploring from the first draft of the memoir this interplay between word and meaning, H.D. allows her words to become more than themselves.

H.D.'s word-pictures and her "writing on the wall" represent the fusion of H.D.'s and the Professor's translating processes, with his psychoanalytic interpretation sometimes at odds with H.D.'s more literary and mythical translation of the writing and images. While travelling with her companion Bryher in Corfu, H.D. experienced what she called "writing on the wall," a series of images that she connected to Greek and Egyptian mythology. The experience becomes the title of the notebook—which has "writing on the wall" written on the inside cover—as well as name of the first part of the memoir. Much of the psychoanalysis that occurs in the memoir is an attempt to come to grips with what the images mean as symbols and what they mean about H.D.



The Professor translated the pictures on the wall, or the picture-writing on the wall of a hotel bedroom in Corfu, the Greek Ionian island, that I saw projected there in the spring of 1920, as a desire for union with my mother. (44)

While the Professor's translation is interesting to H.D., she discards it relatively quickly in favor of another translation of the images: "Perhaps my experiences there might be translated as another flight—from a flight" (44). Her trip to Corfu was a "flight from reality" (44); likewise, these images are a flight from the realities of "clock-time." Freud reads H.D.'s desire for union into the images (her mother had recently passed away), but fails to grasp—he does not speak the intuitive language—that the images represent H.D.'s desire for freedom from traditional worldly restraints, in particular the strict chronology of clock-time, which signals reality. H.D.'s process of translation of the three images she sees, a face, a chalice and a tripod, becomes a project of exploring the loaded realm of time and her own inner landscape, which is full of this longing for communion with the ancient and the eternal.

H.D.'s notebook entries become the text of "Writing on the Wall" in which she discusses the possible translations of these picture writings, and the connections that the images and words have to ancient symbols and to the future. The tripod comes to symbolize for H.D. the Delphic oracle, the priestess whose pronouncements in verse "could be read two ways" (51). H.D., aligning herself with this priestess, writes that

We can read my writing, the fact that there was writing, in two ways or in more than two ways. We can read or translate it as a suppressed desire for forbidden 'signs and wonders,' breaking bounds, a suppressed desire to be a Prophetess, to be important anyway, megalomania they call it—a hidden desire to 'found a new religion' which the Professor ferreted out in the later Moses picture. (51)

What is most powerful about this passage is that the words themselves constantly encode two meanings. "Writing" means both the writing on the wall and the literal text that we are reading throughout the passage. The images represent H.D.'s desire to break boundaries and her writing of "Writing on the Wall" stands for a similar desire, because Freud disapproved of the notebook

that she kept. Her interest in “forbidden signs and wonders” extends from her desire to live outside clock-time, and to connect herself to those biblical and classical figures ([Fig. 3]; 50) that also experienced writing on the wall. Her writing becomes a vehicle to describe how “symbols can be translated into terms of today” (51), whether as the dangerous religious figure that Freud suggests she may become, or as simply the poet who makes ancient symbols like the tripod relevant again.

But the second possible translation of H.D.’s writing of the memoir and her writing on the wall images is a more problematic reading of both events.

Or this writing-on-the-wall is merely an extension of the artist’s mind, a *picture* or an illustrated poem, taken out of the actual dream or daydream content and projected from within (though apparently from outside), really a high-powered *idea*, simply over-stressed, *over-thought*, you might say, an echo of an idea, a reflection of a reflection, a ‘freak’ thought that had got out of hand, gone too far, a ‘dangerous symptom.’ (51)

The passage contains the same limitations and dangers presented by translation: the many possible interpretations of an image, word or event can blind the translator to the reality behind the thing to be translated. While the passage contains a possible critique of all writers who might read too much into their visions, the main concern seems to be the fear of possession, of being taken over and consumed by visions. But, for H.D., if one manages to remember that many possible interpretations behind writing and pictures, then the possibility of things going “too far” diminishes. H.D. offers herself up as another item to be read and interpreted in this passage, even as she offers up her writing and her word-images as things to be translated. The next section, however, resolves her anxieties with the statement that the “writing continues to write itself or be written” (51), emphasizing the idea that the writing comes to her without her solicitation. If the words come to her unbidden, as they did to writers in the past for the sake of future generations, then there is far lesser chance that she is mistranslating the writing. [Fig. 4 ] contain the text of

these passages from pages 50-51, which already have the same words italicized that would appear in print. H.D.'s anxieties and probing of manifold meanings seem to have sprung fully-formed from her, the content "project[ed] from within" making its way to the outside. The section breaks would be added later, but it is interesting to note that initially, H.D.'s rebuttal of the dangers of over-reading appeared immediately after she problematizes the reading of her writing on the wall.

All of the writing and interpreting that H.D. has done in the course of *Tribute to Freud* amounts to a translation of a process of coming into understanding. H.D.'s continued interest in imagery and the symbolism it contains informs her description of the psychoanalytic process:

*Kennst du den Berg undo seinen Wolkensteg?* 'Do you know the mountain and its cloud-bridge?' is an awkward enough translation but the idea of mountain and bridge is so very suitable to this whole *translation* of the Professor and our work together. (108)

As in earlier passages, H.D.'s writing style—the repetition of translation, for instance, and the colloquialism of "so very suitable"—reflects the genesis of the memoir in a notebook, and the notebooks close to complete transcription into published book form. The major importance of the project is to cue readers visually to the nature of the project: H.D. and the Professor's bridging the gap and climbing towards possible meanings of images, words and symbols. But the passage also contains the same anxiety about translation ("awkward enough") that occurred in earlier passages in addition to serving as a reminder of the various translating processes that occurred throughout the memoir of H.D.'s own intentions and her life events. Translation is perhaps the essential word, for good and ill, in *Tribute to Freud*, reflecting as it does H.D.'s writing process from notebook to published work, her translating between languages, her exploration of manifold meanings, her anxieties, and her hope to tie herself to the past in order to affect the future.

Translation, and this process of coming into understanding, is H.D.'s "gift," a gift in which she exceeds her teacher. Her gift allows her to access other realms and other times, as when she suggests she could go speak to a "kindly being" about giving Freud more time to live. "Only I could do this, for my gift must be something different" (73-4), she writes, saying also "As if again, symbolically, I must be different" (61). Translation and her writing separate her from others. Writing allows H.D. to escape clock-time, and preserves her memory for those of us who have followed. It ties her to the past and to the future, because it is her gift—and not Freud's exclusively—that allows her to understand the many meanings encoded in events, words and images. While *Tribute to Freud* constantly emphasizes the giftedness of other individuals, in particular Freud's other analysands and the other doctors H.D. worked with, H.D.'s other major work of autobiography, *The Gift*, written around the same time as *Tribute*, becomes the enactment of her giftedness. She continues her processes of translation in the text, moving through time and memory seamlessly as she compresses over many drafts the narrative she wants to tell.

The text of *The Gift* is less concerned with the literal process of translation, though H.D.'s writing of *The Gift* is itself a process of translating images and memories into a more condensed text that enacts more than it explains. H.D.'s archives hold many drafts of *The Gift*, including a first draft, typed and covered in annotations, which contains most of the material that would become the published version in addition to dozens of pages of extra material. The second draft is shorter, neater, and explains less H.D.'s intentions for the text. A third draft became *The Gift: The Complete Text*, and a fourth cut draft became the standard edition of *The Gift*. The evolution of the text through these drafts offers insight into H.D.'s writing and thinking process, but the omissions that took place between the first and final draft seem the most worthy of

examination, for the roughest material often explains most clearly what H.D. had in mind for the text. The final version of the text enacts in language what the first version described or explained. Suggestively, the final chapter of *The Gift*, “Morning Star,” which is the culmination of H.D.’s claiming of her own giftedness, was the least altered from first to final draft. The ending, it seems, was pre-determined.

As was the case with *Tribute*, H.D. explores the possibilities contained within language in words that were cut from later drafts of *The Gift*. In Chapter 1, “The Dark Room,” H.D. writes that “No, thoughts are not *things*. Although they are the essence of something, as the light is of the candle. The candle is on the candlestick to give light—so that I can peer down the intricate corridors of memory and really see...” [Fig. 5]. Freud’s concern about making words or interpretations too fixed returns with a vengeance here: H.D. wants thoughts to retain their luminosity, their possibility, the presence of many radiating meanings inside one idea. Later in the same chapter, H.D. celebrates thoughts because they “glow inside and outside equally; images and pictures living and complete” [Fig. 6]. The ability of thoughts to lead to pictures, to “really seeing,” becomes connected to H.D.’s statement that “A word opens a door” [Fig. 7] to pictures and to other meanings. There is magic and mystery contained in language and in thought for H.D., because thought and language give access to realms of the past and to images. Her continued preoccupation with the interplay between images and words is essential to her gift, which is making use of flashes of insight and pictures of the past and transcribing these insights and pictures into texts, as she did in *Tribute to Freud*, and as she does in *The Gift*.

In the same chapter, in other omitted passages, H.D. writes about the process of coming to insight through pictures, and the unpredictability of the process.

The trouble is, the process of this letting loose or letting flow, continuous images, like moving-pictures, is a secret one cannot, with the best will in the world,

impart./ Because one really does not quite know how it works, when it will work, or how long it will continue to work, once it is started. The store of images and pictures is endless and is the common property of the whole race. But one must of necessity begin with one's own private inheritance... [Fig. 8]

The flexibility of the process of thinking, seeing and making meanings of out words and pictures is problematic, because it is unpredictable. That at once makes it a gift—"in these flashes we have the ingredients of the gift" [Fig. 9]—but it also causes deep anxiety for H.D. If the store of images is the property of the whole race, but only a few can explain and experience these images, then her gift is rare and essential to the entire world. As ever, she must begin with herself, with her private inheritance, and use herself as a vessel to translate images and ideas for others.

H.D. eventually "weds" thoughts and words together in a later omitted passage, asserting that there are hidden meanings in all of the images and memories contained in *The Gift*.

Now thought wedded or welded inviolably to the word and that word the right word, may give no true expression of the emotion of the dream-picture. The dream-pictures focussed and projected by the mind, may perhaps achieve something of the character of a majic-langern slide, and may perhaps "come true"... [Fig. 10]

H.D.'s concerns about words and thoughts continues to be the extent to which a language or thought fixes a memory or an image too firmly, eliminating the possibility of manifold interpretation. Her repetition of the phrase [Fig. 10] further emphasizes her anxiety about the fixing of images and memories, which may happen despite her best efforts to pick the "right" word. Ultimately, it is her often-expressed interest in "the hidden meaning in all this" [Fig. 11], omitted from later drafts, that informs her insistence that:

The dream, the memory, the unexpected related memories must be allowed to sway backward and forward, as if the sheet or screen upon which they are projected, blows and is rippled in the wind of whatever emotion or idea is entering a door, left open. The wind blows through the door, from outside, th[r]ough long, long corridors of personal memory, of biological and of race memory. Shut the door and you have a neat flat picture. Leave all the doors open and you are almost out-of-doors, almost within the un-walled provence of the fourth-dimensional. This is creation in the truest sense... [Fig. 12]

Writing should leave all the doors open, and should avoid the making of a “neat flat picture.”

The goal of a writer is to move through the corridors of memory and tap into the collective reserves of the human race and produce a flexible, life-affirming text with ideas and images that transcend the language, and reach into the “fourth-dimensional,” a realm that human beings cannot easily experience or capture. The text—the sheet or screen onto which memories and dreams are projected—must be a flexible medium, one that “affirm[s] in positive and concrete terms, our debt to the past and our responsibility to the future...” [Fig. 13].

The passages cited above were taken from the first four chapters of *The Gift*, and clearly indicate not only the consistency and refinement of H.D.’s explorations from *Tribute to Freud*, as well as her continued interest in the past and in the mysteries encoded in language. The later chapters of *The Gift* in their rough form become increasingly focused on H.D.’s sense of her own gift to leave interpretation open and bring readers into a greater sense of understanding. H.D.’s comment that “The Mystery may fade and go; it goes far back through time. It goes forward through time. When the time-clock stops, the keeper-of-the-mystery knows the beginning, knows the end” [Fig. 14] draws in her previous worries about clock-time, a sense of which fades when she enmeshes her readers in her web of images and dreams. While clock-time in the form of the bombing raid runs encircles the events in *The Gift*, it is only the impetus to access a realm outside of clock-time, the spur to remembering. H.D. herself becomes “the keeper-of-the-mystery” because she can, as she does in *Tribute*, through her writing, her gift, turn off clock time and invoke mystery. The task that falls to her is “if we could reconstruct the fragments, we might redeem the promise, we might even restore the Gift” [Fig. 15]. Putting the fragments together—in the form of thoughts, words, pictures, and mysteries—propels the final chapters of

*The Gift* into a final reclaiming of H.D.'s giftedness, because she has throughout the text insisted on putting fragments together in new, flexible ways.

In the final chapters, H.D. crawls through the web of associations in order to put together a final comprehensive picture of what constitutes her gift.

I had these few fragments of a cosmic picture puzzle and although I could not put together the whole picture of time on time (time and its seasons moving in their rhythmic progression and repeating their same patterns) I could yet know that such pattern existed. It was part of a child's phantasy, you may say, megalomania or egomania of a child who imagines it sees God when it dreams..." [Fig. 16]  
H.D. raises and dismisses again a similar set of anxieties to what she raised in *Tribute to*

*Freud*—her putting together the cosmic picture puzzle may be simple "megalomania," though even as she suggests this, she also writes that she "could yet know such a pattern existed." Her gift allows her to recognize a pattern and to begin to put it together, even if the entire outline eludes her.

So I, like the cat, clawed my way through a very avalanche of memories and associations and watched them go down with my father's mysterious accident and with that intuition that made the cat a s[ac]red anima among hieratic people, I clawed my way out of the ruins. [Fig. 17]  
By clawing her way out and sifting her way through the memories and associations that surround her, H.D. manages to defeat banal reality, and write what her intuition tells her, no matter how limited by language or vision the text itself is. The early chapters continue to spell out the limits of her writing and her gift, though the final section of *The Gift* will subvert these expectations.

Clock-time intrudes in the form of H.D.'s terror because of the bombing, making her question whether she should continue in the face of possible personal destruction, as *The Gift* contains much of H.D.'s essence—the story of her early childhood and a physical manifestation of many of her literary concerns. In the final moments of the bombing:

I could not write down. [I sketched preliminary chapters] In the other room, were the chapters, but how could I see and be and live and endure these passionate and



terrible hours of hovering between life and death, and at the same time, write about them? [Fig. 18]

Her terror is both for herself and her manuscript; the text comes to stand for her attempts to capture the gift and to write as much as she remembers of the dreams and memories of the race. “The Gift,” she writes, “I think must have been this Gift of understanding, of linking up all the mysteries through time, in all lands and for all peoples” [Fig. 19]. While all of the earlier cited passages were omitted from the final versions of *The Gift*, this omission is the most profound explanation of what constitutes the gift and the scale of ambition of both *The Gift* and H.D.’s gift. No wonder H.D. is concerned about megalomania, or about the limits of language, dream and image to suggest all mysteries everywhere, throughout time, if her ambition is this vast. This is the challenge, ultimately, for H.D.: to take herself and her life experiences, whether it is writing on the wall or a childhood in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and connect these aspects of herself to larger questions of writing and meaning. The problems associated with the intrusion of unpleasant realities, such as bombing, or the frustrations of clock-time make it harder to write texts that stand for mysteries everywhere. H.D., by acknowledging along the way the limits of her vision and her gift in this initial draft, shows us her frailties, her insecurities as a writer.

But the final moments of the final published draft of *The Gift* wash away these doubts, for H.D. enacts her giftedness through the text instead of parsing it with rhetorical questions and personal fears. H.D. writes that “I saw, I understood... This, I could remember, letting pictures steadily and stealthily flow past and through me.... I remembered how my mind, after a certain pause of tension and terror, had switched into another dimension where everything was clear...” (134-5). Her fear is always that she “could not achieve the super-human task of bringing back what had been lost, so the Promise might be redeemed and the Gift restored” (135). And yet, the letting in of pictures, visions, and the crossing over into the realm of eternity is exactly what

occurs in the final pages of *The Gift*. H.D. sees her ancestors; sees visions of Indians and Moravians who shared mystical ideas during the founding of the Moravian community; she hears the voices and sees the faces of those individuals who have eluded her throughout the writing of her book. In the space of two pages (141-2), the voices come together and collapse into the sound of the all-clear, combining both time-out-of-time and clock-time. H.D.'s ability to write this, and her ability to see and hear it, represents a triumphant though hard-won battle to redeem the Promise to remember the collective past and her personal past.

Together and individually, *Tribute to Freud* and *The Gift* contain H.D.'s anxieties and aspirations for her writing and for herself. Conscious always of the limits of her language, H.D. wrote words to suggest ideas and to enact elaborate symbolic programs, not to describe reality. Her interest in eternity and in ancient symbols led not only to her great ambition, but also to her constant wondering if she was too ambitious. In many ways, H.D. writes herself and her ambitions into her texts, as she reaches towards a more complete, universal language of symbols and images that represent the experience of the whole human race. Her gradual elimination of explanation in the final drafts of *The Gift* is a final confirmation of her desire to leave translations open, so that future readers could continue to find new, flexible meanings in her texts. In the final version of *The Gift*, ambiguities resonate, and far less of the self-reflexive wondering about egomania exists. The prior versions—just as the notebook version of *Tribute to Freud*—are effaced in favor of a final, complete text.

### **Gertrude Stein**

Gertrude Stein's approach to writing is in many ways the opposite of H.D.'s. Uninterested either in ancient symbols or in penetrating eternal mysteries, Stein wrote to document reality, to catalogue human behavior. Ambitious and prolific, Stein also was interested

in the process of writing, but her sense of language was quite different from H.D.'s. *The Making of Americans*, her epic novel-memoir, like *The Gift* and *Tribute to Freud*, exists in many rough versions, but these rough versions lack the cohesiveness of H.D.'s texts. In fact, *The Making of Americans* can be said to be a novel written and re-written in sections and fragments, pieces that still seem to resonate in the final text of *The Making of Americans*. And while H.D. strives to eliminate explanations in her later drafts, Stein wrote a series of lectures that were published as essays in order to explain her writing process and the intentions behind her work.

“The Gradual Making of the Making of Americans” and “Composition as Explanation,” though they certainly contain some of the stylistic eccentricities for which Stein is famous, were works that were intended to explain Stein’s writing, particularly *The Making of Americans*, to audiences, and how the works were literally made over time.

And I want to tell you about the gradual way of making *The Making of Americans*. I made it gradually and it took me almost three years to make it, but that is not what I mean by gradual. What I mean by gradual is the way the preparation was made inside of me. (135)

Stein’s writing of the lecture [Fig. 20] seems to indicate the clarity of her thinking about the writing process: she spent years listening to people, asking questions, and absorbing responses. The book was made through the accumulation of her observations, which were then distilled into a series of reflections about what “made” different kinds of individuals (136). Talking and listening—living—propelled Stein towards a project of documentation. Initially interested in documenting in order to find out what “was inside them that made them that one” (136), Stein also was interested in helping people to become “what they should become” (136). Her writing serves to document human behaviour, to explain it, and ultimately, to help others to change their behavior.

Making, then, is essential to every level of the project: Stein wishes to understand what she is made of as well as what others are made of, while simultaneously exploring the different ways in which texts can be made. Talking and listening—and then documenting through writing—become the first means by which Stein negotiates her process of making.

And being so occupied with what made me myself inside me, made me perhaps not stop talking but for awhile it made me stop listening. (137)

Throughout the novel, Stein negotiates her internal world, trying to come to grips with what she is writing and why, while focusing on the external world. As her focus shifts from talking and listening to people, Stein reverts to “learning of what made people...by experience and not by talking and listening” (137). The archival materials from *The Making of Americans* will bear witness to the gradual experiential making of the text, as Stein thinks and then writes in different fragmentary forms. The text is made slowly inside her as she moves from talking and listening to fully experiencing—a term for Stein that suggests full absorption as opposed to just documentation—the people and the world around her.

The earliest fragments and studies of *The Making of Americans* are a testament to Stein’s awareness of the ways in which texts are made inside authors, and the possible ways in which texts can be made. Her scribble, “Creating the influences that have made me what I am, I am told” [Fig. 21] is one of made such acknowledgments. Stein considers her internal landscape as she writes, “All of it makes me more of it, more of it makes me more than more than all of it” [Fig. 22] in another one of her loopy-scrawled notes for *The Making of Americans*. These influences “make” Stein, and making, when repeated, becomes one of the words that Stein manipulates and re-uses throughout the text, exploring the different connotations and denotations surrounding the word “make.”

Studies preserved in Stein's archive also demonstrate Stein's multi-faceted interest in making, both in what makes individuals and what makes texts. The studies are numbered and on small pieces of paper, bound together in miniature notebooks from various stationers in Paris. I imagine Stein wandering the streets of the city, writing notes to herself about the novel and making notes about the various individuals she comes across. Reminders include: "Remember to make Mrs. H—make husband foolish..." [Fig. 23], or "Reaching to decide in him and no one could ever understand him from day to day what life meant to him to make it worth his living..." [Fig. 24]. These notes are written hastily; they mention both the writing process and the personalities of individual characters. Making is involved in both aspects: Stein is the one who *makes* the characters behave a certain way in a text, but she is also interested in exploring what *makes* a human being do something in real life, and writing that in the text. The studies also allow her to write what is different between people: she can consider "convention" that "makes certain that not any one...is particular in differing" [Fig. 25]. She can explore individuals and types of people, making a history with characters who stand for larger realities or patterns.

Later studies and notes take up these themes and continue to explore them through the idea of repetition, both in language and in types of people. Stein is writing a history of how "listening to repeating came to make completed understanding..." and how her description of the repeating "already came to make in each one a completed history of them" [Fig. 26]. Her listening to human repetitions informs the syntax of the text, as the text itself is made out of repetitions, but the repetitions become the defining aspects of what makes each individual an individual, the fabric of their personal history. Understanding for Stein is predicated on making sense of repetitions, and what they suggest about the "bottom nature" of humans, and how that makes "the whole of them" [Fig. 27]. Bottom nature is Stein's term for the essence of every

human, the part of a person that produces repetitions. Examining the bottom nature of different kinds of people allows Stein to “make a history of each one of them,” which is the goal of her project. The sense of making informs every layer of this project, from the scraps of paper on which Stein wrote her initial thoughts and observations to the final pages of the manuscript that contain much of the same language. As she repeats herself throughout the process of writing the novel, constantly assessing and re-assessing the “many ways of making kinds of men and women,” Stein makes a novel that is “now a description of learning to listen to all repeating that every one always is making of the whole of them” [Fig. 27].

These preliminary studies—written in a large hand on small pieces of paper—evolved into longer sections of the novel-memoir, written in a smaller hand on larger pieces of paper, a trend that demonstrates the development of the making of the novel. Stein’s themes are the same—probing the “bottom nature in other men and makes of each man that kind of man” and the ways that “many millions [are] being made of each men of women” [Fig. 28], but the thoughts are longer, more spelled out. Stein begins to build the syntactical patterns of repetition for which she is famous when she writes longer sections, as the thoughts continued to crystallize after she jotted them down. The similarity of many of the studies, even the language between them, informs the longer sections of text, as Stein stitches together the repetitive studies into a longer narrative that resists easy linearity. Indeed, the final narrative structure of *The Making of Americans* owes a great deal to the existence of these original studies, as the repetitions of the text and the careful examination of individual character’s behavior stems from the earliest scraps of paper that Stein carefully preserved.

The longer sections of the novel-memoir—which seem neither to be a full draft of the novel nor studies exactly—deal with both individual characters and specific types of people, and

the idioms relating to “making” that define their respective personalities. All the characters in *The Making of Americans*, including David Hersland, his wife Martha, and Julia Dehning, a woman from another family, are referred to in these long-short sections. For Martha, “sometimes it was a hurt feeling that made her sad” [Fig. 29]. In the case of Julia, “living thinking feeling” [Fig. 29] made her the kind of woman she was. While these phrases—either the way that feelings “make” emotions, or the way that behaviors “make” people—are repeated throughout Stein’s novel, the repetitions reflect her interest in the way that idioms and colloquial phrases—make someone sad; living, thinking, feeling—can be used repetitively to create a conversational text. Stein’s characters are described in every-day terms, and become more universally indicative of types of people because the descriptions tend to be general and colloquial. The text is made out of common phrases, and indeed, out of common people, phrases and individuals Stein could have observed.

But Stein is not only interested in individual characters: she is interested in families, and how units of people are made in the same and different ways from individuals. It is “the family way that made all them” [Fig. 30] who they were in addition to their own bottom natures. Two of the other things that help to “make” a family for Stein are religion and money. These ideas are also expressed in idioms, but Stein’s use of them—and her consistent reliance on the verb “to make”—encourage a more thoughtful look at what the language itself suggests. A father can “make all his children feel him, he could in a way make them fearful of him and the religion in him” [Fig. 31]. The use of “make” here evokes the ways in which people experience emotions, as well as foreshadowing Stein’s interest in the way in which religion shapes an individual in the published version of *The Making of Americans* (41-2). Money, and later the idiom “making a living,” are another essential aspect of what binds a family together. David Hersland already

“had made for himself enough money to support him and a wife and children” [Fig. 31]. In Stein’s use of “making a living” (33) in the published draft and in this excerpt, the idiom of making money or making a living seems to take on a new cast, as expressions that are part of Stein’s continued interest in the idea of how people and families are made.

The verb to “make,” a word that helps us read and understand Stein’s prose, is the word Stein selects both for the title of the novel-memoir and for a note that mimics the title inside the first complete draft of the novel-memoir. “*The Making of Americans being the History of a Family’s Progress,*” the title of the manuscript as written by Stein in the inside cover of the notebook in which she wrote the complete first draft [Fig. 32] encapsulates the different elements of the text discussed above: the making of individuals and families, the idea of evolution over time. Many pages into this version of the novel, Stein writes “The Making of an author being a History of one woman and many others” [Fig. 32], a statement which emphasizes the extent to which Stein’s making of the text mirrors her own growth as an author. She is making herself by observing and listening; by writing down what she hears and experiences. The pages are a history of her development—she, too, is an American, being made in her own way—as a writer and a thinker about language.

While the “gradual making” of *The Making of Americans* both inside Stein and on the page manifested itself in the variety of writing that she did, the final manuscript draft of the novel-memoir contains most of the original language Stein used, and continues to explore concepts of making literally from the opening page of the work. “The old people in a new world, the new people made out of the old that is the story that I mean to tell for that is what really is and what I really know” [Fig. 33]. She continues on to describe that the “family itself was made up of the parents and four children” [Fig. 33]. The final published manuscript includes not only



these quotations but also others about the various levels of making, suggesting that the children would go on to “make many generations for them” (*The Making of Americans* 33). Stein writes that she is making a history of a family, a family that she “knows” because her family lived the immigrant experience. Her family—veiled with different names—becomes the vehicle by which she can document the processes of making generations and making texts. Further excerpts from the manuscript—[Fig. 34] and [Fig. 35]—represent the continued incorporation of Stein’s phrases about the making of emotions and how individuals make their own histories and demonstrate their inner selves through repetition. Stein seems to be literally re-making the text even as she refers to making within it.

Stein’s final pre-publication version of the novel-memoir was typed, and while it eliminates some of the idiosyncrasies and personality of the earlier drafts, it does represent the pinnacle of Stein’s making of a self-referential text. As before, with other earlier drafts, the same language appears but is transformed by context. The movement from studies and notes to rough drafts to final draft is not atypical for writers, but in Stein’s case, the movement seems far more self-conscious. She repeats language knowingly, the same phrases in multiple places in the text excerpted from various studies. There seems to be a layering effect, as moments of observation and listening, referred to within the text, become the very text itself. [Fig. 36] and [Fig. 37], by incorporating the same language of the earlier studies in new locations and in different ways is a literal enactment of Stein’s arguments about the transformative effects of context on language, but the argument is here applied between versions, not within one version of a text. Even as Stein’s text grew to a thousand pages, her ideas solidified. “There are many ways of making kinds of women and men” [Fig. 37] and “the nature in each one makes a long history of each of them” [Fig. 36] could almost be the theses of *The Making of Americans*, so prominent a role do

they play in the physical text. The final iterations of the text are more preoccupied with coming to “meaning” than merely documenting or transcribing human behavior, which channels Stein’s original program into a new direction.

The “question of meaning” that Stein refers to in [Fig. 37] is an important one to take up at the end of examining Stein’s various uses of the word “make,” for “making a difference” and “making meaning” are two phrases Stein used sparingly. Her interest was in documenting human behavior and language, not probing H.D.-like ancient mysteries. But Stein still seems curious about why—why it takes more to make a meaning than it does to just make a description. In many ways the description is enough: people’s gestures, behaviors and feelings reflect their inner nature without needing to probe too deeply. Perhaps the real answer to the “question of meaning” is the extent to which processes are meanings. Stein, so concerned with ideas of making texts and how people are made, is invested in both the process of coming into understanding, of making a history, as well as the end result. The work along the way provides meaning for the writer of the text as well as the reader, who gets to read into the made text their own set of meanings. Stein never lets her readers forget that there is a process at work, that her texts are made from life. By doing this, she forces readers to consider how her words are chosen and deployed, and what her use of colloquialisms, idioms and repetitions suggest about the individuals and world she is writing.

Stein’s reflections on *The Making of Americans* in “The Gradual Making of Americans” and “Composition as Explanation” lead to a broader statement of her intentions for the novel, which was to create a new kind of narrative form. The made-ness of her text, the ways in which it resists easy categorization as a realistic novel or memoir or even a catalogue of human behaviour, amounts to an exploration of what Stein calls a “continuous present.” In

“Composition as Explanation,” she writes that she “commenced making portraits of anybody and anything. In making these portraits I naturally made a continuous present including everything and a beginning again and again within a very small thing” (499). All of Stein’s studies and fragments of the text (writings that captured the very small things she refers to) added together resist any kind of linear narrative because they show people and reality. These pieces of experience tell a story of how people and lives are made in the present tense, but Stein never seeks to end her work. She keeps writing, filling boxes of more material, more thoughts and studies, until she has “made almost a thousand pages of a continuous present” (498).

This continuous present becomes tied, inevitably, to Stein’s interest in repetitions, for repetitions—like a continuous present—resist easy beginnings or endings. Stein’s focus becomes how repetitions, so alike, can be deployed in various contexts in order to indicate the difference that context makes to repetitions.

Whether there was or whether there was not a continuous present did not then any longer trouble me there was or there was not, and using everything no longer troubled me if everything is alike using everything could no longer trouble me because if lists were inevitable if series were inevitable and the whole of it was inevitable beginning again and again could not trouble me so then with nothing to trouble me I very completely began naturally since everything is alike making it as simply different naturally as simply different as possible. I began doing natural phenomena what I call phenomena and natural phenomena naturally everything being alike natural phenomena are making things be naturally simply different.  
(500)

“Naturally everything being alike” makes things “be naturally simply different” when Stein begins again and again, using and re-using the same kinds of language (as seen above) to indicate the many possible uses for language and humanity’s relatively limited awareness of language. Likewise, people seem relatively limited in their capacity to see and make sense of time, in particular the present. By forcing people to live in the present through repetition, making them re-live the same language, Stein creates texts that radically alter the way that individuals

experience not only language but time itself, because her works resist the linear development— or even the circular development—of traditional narratives like H.D.’s.

This creation of a new narrative form, a new “composition,” leads to Stein’s final meditation on the nature of time and observation. She writes:

The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different and this makes what those who describe it make of it, it makes a composition, it confuses, it shows, it is, it looks, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is seen as it is seen. Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition. (“Composition as Explanation” 497)

“Civilization is not a very long thing” (“Gradual Making” 153) to Stein, which enables writers to constantly change what they are looking at and how then they compose what they see on the page. Again making is essential to this process: what writers “make” of what they see in turn “makes a composition.” The essence of a composition is to make “what is seen as it is seen.” Writers therefore both signal the change in time and affect the change in the way people see and experience the world; compositions—like *The Making of Americans*—track the developments in narrative over time and continue to push the boundaries further.

But the ground-breaking that new kinds of composition enact becomes problematic, for those who make the new kinds of composition are initially unpopular and unsuccessful, until rapidly the tables turn.

This is the reason why the creator of the new composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic, there is hardly a moment in between and it is really too bad very much too bad naturally for the creator but also very much too bad for the enjoyer, they all really would enjoy the created so much better just after it has been made than when it is already a classic, but it perfectly simple that there is no reason why the contemporaries should see, because it would not make any difference as they lead their lives in the new composition anyway, and as every one is naturally indolent why naturally they don’t see. (“Composition as Explanation” 496)

Readers, Stein says, already “lead their lives in the new composition anyway.” Writers merely make the continuous present on the page that readers move through every day, and their role is essential because they show their audiences what they cannot see by themselves. A work loses its edge when it becomes a classic, because it no longer contains exactly what an individual would see and feel in the present. The distance imposed on a work when it becomes a classic is more enjoyable, perhaps, in part because it explains what is already past, or the work allows us to escape to a previous time. Writing therefore makes and contains the present, giving access to readers of other times and places, letting them see.

Stein, throughout her career, pushed the limits of narrative, forcing readers to re-examine the way that texts are made. Her archives capture the staggering ambition of her project, and let us read her work vertically, as a series of experiments and studies that continue to affect the final version of her work. Insisting that “I am no longer in what I write” (Dydo 493), Stein wrote herself into her works as a maker and a craftswoman, not as a translator of eternal ideas. She wrote to capture the world in its present state, to explore the use (not exactly the meaning) of language, and to erode traditional narrative forms.

### **Side-by-Side**

I turned to Stein and H.D.’s archives in order to show the radically different ways in which these writers wrote. H.D.’s archive contains none of the small pieces of paper that Stein’s archive is so full of; whether H.D. wrote brief studies—which seems unlikely—is perhaps less important than the fact that H.D. preserved none. H.D.’s texts sprung almost fully formed, and were translated on the page the first time. The agony lay not in the making of the text, but in the imagining of it, the thinking behind it. If texts required further distilling, as *The Gift* did, the text shrunk, as only what was essential remained. Translating as a word signals this process, and

suggests H.D.'s relationship to her work—that of oracle, priestess or interpreter. Stein's archives, on the other hand, are made of fragments, of reality. There is no mysterious repressing of explanation. Indeed, Stein goes out of her way to later explain what she was doing in her works. Stein is a craftswoman, reflecting her moment instead of penetrating mysteries, using words not as possible explosive fields of meaning but as idioms, patterns of repetition. We read other people in Stein's works: rarely does she let us read herself except as an invisible hand manipulating the words on the page. Her anxieties surface rarely, and are dismissed more rapidly than H.D.'s.

We cannot read H.D. or Stein in the same way, and cannot approach the materials in their archives with the same reading strategies. These differences are apparent, and reflect the different kinds of experimentation that occurred during the period of time in which H.D. and Stein worked. But this reading of Stein and H.D. side-by-side to identify their differences and to demonstrate the importance of new reading practices has its own limitations. The environment that moulded H.D. and Stein and which they in turn had a hand in moulding was, in its own way, a truly idealistic period about the possibilities of language. While H.D. and Stein used words in different ways and for different reasons, they were both idealists who believed in the power of words to convey, stylistically and literally, what they meant. "Translating" and "making" are both processes that reflect an anxiety about meaning and careful attention to a final product. The difference of course is the extent to which earlier versions of the text remain present for future readers when they approach the actual text.

For both writers, there was some small drive for self-effacement. Stein insisted throughout her career that the writing itself have primacy, and that her job as a writer was to listen and describe the world, not herself. H.D.'s concerns about her own giftedness and her

elimination of large sections of *The Gift* reflect her sense of herself as a vessel, channelling eternal ideas for the sake of humanity. Both writers were in the business of drawing attention to the things most people do not see, either the inevitable repetitions that are a part of human thought and behaviour or the mysteries of myth and history. Once again the writers are idealists: not content as many of their male compatriots were to bemoan the destruction of Western civilization, H.D. and Stein wrote realities and mysteries for the sake of educating readers and other writers.

The greatest difference between H.D. and Stein is tied to one of their greatest similarities: while the physical written materials in their archives are radically different, the existence of both of their relatively complete archives indicates their shared fears about their literary legacy. After having worked for a lifetime to achieve recognition, which both of them did by the time they died, their archives stand as monuments to their willingness for future generations to read their processes and to approach their work anew. Canonized writers have archives, because even their imperfect work has value for posterity. Both gave permission to be read in the context of their unfinished, unpolished work, and while the form that that work takes speaks volumes about who they were as writers and their relationship to their own work, their archives make them vulnerable and keep them alive even to the present day.

As women, as modernists whose work was often defamed as difficult or inconsequential, these writers must have felt it was even more important to have archives. Returning to the materials themselves makes it possible to read H.D. and Stein without all of the critical lenses that are so often applied to them: feminist, queer, social-historical, and art historical. These women were more than a set of personality traits, and more even than a set of texts: they were individuals who shaped themselves through their writing and who were in turn shaped by their

relationship to their work. Whether it was their intention that the archives would allow us to escape from traditional discourse about them, and help to establish new ways to read their work, is impossible to say. But their works require new reading and new criticism to keep the discourse from becoming as predictable or as confining as it often has become.

### **Other Modernists**

Once it becomes clear that Stein and HD cannot be read alike, the question becomes: how do we read others of their time, and indeed, writers of any time? If we cannot read H.D. and Stein—writers who superficially have so much in common—then how do we read others who were influenced by them or who influenced them?

My answer is that we have to read writers as individuals, and pay attention to the way that they ask to be read. Radical reading is about recognizing a writer's personal vision, as well as the vision that their works suggest. When we read writers in the same way, and look for the same themes and conventions amongst them, imagining once again that everyone should be read in the same way, we do them and ourselves an injustice. While writers do sometimes imagine themselves in dialogue with each other or with past writers, many, particularly modernist writers, imagine themselves as something new and autonomous, requiring new ways of reading and thinking about writing.

Perhaps my defence of radical reading is also predicated on my frustrations about the reading of H.D. and Gertrude Stein as feminist icons, or as women modernists, or even as writers who we know to be important but who we do not enjoy reading. H.D. and Stein may have been less enjoyable to read, and harder to read, because we have been reading them wrong. Reading modernist literature only through a collective historical or social lens limits us: we have to read them through individual lenses as well. Because so much writing that seemed new and



challenging was written at that time, we have lost sight of the fact that not all of it was new in the same ways.

For writers who have archives, I believe a new look at their work in the context of radical reading practices may be merited. For writers who have been given full attention, for instance T.S. Eliot, this may not be crucial. But for demonized writers like Ezra Pound, or writers who are usually read through particular political lenses, a re-imagining of their work seems timely, and, perhaps, essential. We cannot continue to read in the same ways that we have, because there is too much good material waiting to be deciphered and examined. We cannot say simply because something was new then, it did enough.

Modernism, and writers like H.D. and Stein, still has many things to teach us: about literature, about living, about writing, and about reading.

### **Learning to Read, Again**

This project taught me to read differently, and taught me much about reading modernist writers. My sense of unease and intimidation has faded as I read and thought more. And while H.D. and Stein are still hard to read—hard on purpose—I have come to love and appreciate both of them, as writers and as teachers. Without women writers like H.D. and Stein, my path to writing and my ability to read archives would be much more limited. They represent a turning point in the history of literature and education, when women were both starting to be educated fully and to be able to read and write what they wanted. I owe them and the women that followed a debt.

That debt also consists of the unspeakably joyous moments that I have spent studying their archives. Both of them had terrible handwriting, and it was often nearly impossible to decipher what they had to say on the margins of their manuscripts. But what was more powerful

than reading the decisions and scribbles was reading the omissions. I was given access to their vulnerabilities, to their frailties, to the imperfections that never made their way into print. As someone learning not only how to read, but also how to write, studying those omissions let me imagine myself more self-confidently as a writer. It gave me hope for my future, even as it gave me ideas as a critic. As I read more, I realized that my interests lie both in making and in translating. I hope to bridge the gap between the two more profoundly than H.D. or Stein ever did.

Whether I will ever have an archive in this digital age remains to be seen, or what the shape of such an archive would be. For this reason, too, the change in archive form and research practices over time, it seems important to return to reading archives. I often was the youngest person in the library while I did this research: I worry that my generation and the ones that follow will rely on easier reading practices, and in so doing, lose much. As our access to information continues to grow, we sometimes forget that the materials we already possess are worthy of re-examination, and require further study.

I am a product of my time, but I choose to remain a product of Stein and H.D.'s time, and the time of every other writer I have read. Learning to read again was a reminder that every act of reading is an act of surrender to another's worldview. Reading radically demands thoughtful surrender, a willingness to acknowledge the aspirations and anxieties each reader brings to an act of reading. I surrendered to H.D. and Stein, and in so doing, located my own aspirations and anxieties, re-discovering myself as a student, critic, writer, and most importantly, reader, of texts, the worlds that shaped them, and the writers that created them.

Fig. 1:

Am I my brother's keeper? So far as my undisciplined thoughts permit me ... and further than my disciplined ones can take me. For the Professor was not always right. He did not know ~~what~~ <sup>the</sup> I did but - that I looked at things in his room before I looked at his, for ~~the~~ <sup>know</sup> the things in his room were symbols of Ethernity & contained him <sup>them</sup> as Ethernity ~~contains~~ <sup>contains</sup> ~~now~~.

This old James, this beloved light-house keeper, old Captain January shut the door on transcendental speculations, or at least transferred their occult or hidden equalities to the occult or hidden regions of the personality,

Fig. 2:

when I said to him one day that time  
went too quickly (did he or didn't he  
feel that?) He struck a semi-comic  
attitude, he thrust <sup>his arm</sup> forward <sup>his arm</sup>  
as if <sup>an invisible presence</sup> incidentally addressing an audience.  
"Time," he said. The word was  
uttered in <sup>inimitable tones</sup> his familiar manner, but  
seemed to defy the creature, the  
abstraction; into that one word, he  
packed <sup>is</sup> a store of contradictory  
emotions; there was irony, sarcasm,  
defiance with a vague, tender pathos.  
It seemed as if the word was  
uncharged, an explosive that might  
<sup>at any minute</sup> go off! <sup>Many</sup> of his words die  
in a sense, explode, <sup>drusting</sup> down  
prisons, useless dyes & dawns,  
<sup>driving</sup> down <sup>hard</sup> slides  
<sup>it is true, but</sup> opening up <sup>mines</sup> of  
hidden treasures. "Time", he

Fig. 3:

Was not the Mambres physician  
Aesculapius, <sup>himself,</sup> reported to be ~~king of~~  
son? Religion, art & <sup>medicine</sup> ~~learning~~, through  
the latter <sup>ages</sup> ~~centuries~~ became separated;  
they grow further apart from day  
to day. These three, working together  
to form a new vehicle of expression  
or a new form of thinking & of  
living, might be symbolized by  
the tripod, the third of the images  
on the wall before me. The tripod  
we know, was the symbol of prophecy  
& oracular utterance; the Pythian  
of Delphi, sat on the tripod when  
she pronounced her verse complete,  
that famous / Delphic utterance  
that could be read two ways.  
We can read <sup>or translate</sup> / any writing -  
the fact that there <sup>is</sup> ~~is~~ writing -  
in ~~the~~ <sup>two</sup> ways. We can  
read it or a suppressed desire to

Fig. 4:

forbidden "nigyo & murder" I was being  
Inevitably, a repressed desire to be  
a Proprietor, to be important anyway,  
negotiated <sup>in</sup> mind, they say it is  
a hidden desire to "find a new  
religion" which the Proprietor generated  
out in the later News picture.  
or it is merely a projection of  
an artist's <sup>mind</sup>, a picture <sup>or</sup> an illustrated  
poem, taken out of the actual  
dream or day-dream content &  
projected as from outside, really  
a high-powered idea simply  
over-stressed, over-thought you  
might say, an echo of an idea,  
a reflection of a reflection, a  
"freak" thought that had got  
out of hand, gone too far,  
might be a "dangerous symptom."  
But symptoms as  
inspirations, the writing continues

Fig. 5:

No, thoughts are not things. Although they are the essence of something, as the light is of the candle. The candle is on the candlestick to give light- so that I can peer down the intricate corridors of memory and really see;

Fig. 6:

~~it that a sort of glow, an aura formed round memories, that~~  
Thoughts <sup>are</sup> no longer things as people have a way of insisting nowadays, <sup>are</sup> saying, but ~~the~~ thoughts <sup>are</sup> ~~were~~ auras or lights, that ~~they~~ glowed inside and outside equally; ~~that~~ images and pictures ~~are~~

living complete, not dried up in memory  
/moss/ moss -

Fig. 7:

Someones brain who died thousands of years ago. A word opens these a door, ~~the~~ are the keys, it is like that little flower that Mrs. Willimas called a primula, that mamalie called himmelsschlüssel or keys of heaven.

Fig. 8:

The trouble ~~is~~, the process of this letting loose  
or letting flow, continuous images, like a  
~~moving-picture~~ moving-picture, is a secret one can not, with the  
best will in the world, impart. / Because one really does  
not quite know how it works, when it will work, or how long  
it will continue to work, once it is started.  
The store of images and pictures is endless and is  
the common property of the whole race. But one must  
of necessity begin with one's own private inheritance;  
~~there, already the measure is ~~filled full and running~~~~

Fig. 9:

In these flashes or ~~throw-backs~~ we have the ingredients of  
the gift. They had so much to give us, Papa and Papalie and  
old whole called  
/ Father Weiss of that town had ~~been~~ effect on the

Fig. 10:

Now thought wedded or welded inviolably to the word  
and that word the right word, may give no true expression <sup>of</sup>  
the emotion or <sup>of</sup> to the dream-picture. The dream-picture  
focused and projected by the mind, may perhaps  
achieve something of the character of a magic-lantern/slide,  
and may perhaps "come true," in the projection.

~~metal-ring way of expression (thought wedded inviolably  
to the word and that word the right word) but in the  
breath of the veil way of expression~~



Fig. 11:

There was some sort of hidden meaning in all this.  
on the edge of the

Fig. 12:

The dream, the memory, the unexpected related  
memories must be allowed to sway backward and forward, as  
if the sheet or screen upon which they are projected,  
blows and is rippled  
sway in the wind of whatever emotion or idea is  
entering a door, left open. The wind blows through the door,  
from outside, through long, long corridors of personal memory,  
of biological and of race memory. Shut the door and you have a  
neat flat picture. Leave all the doors open and  
you are almost out-of-doors, almost within the un-walled  
province of the fourth-dimensional. This is creation in the  
truer sense, ~~expression in the breath or the veil~~

Fig. 13:

~~that we are~~ not able to stabilize our  
purpose, to affirm in positive and concrete  
terms, our debt to the past and our responsibility to the  
future, until we are forced to face up to the final  
realities, in a ship-wreck or an earth-quake or a tornado or

Fig. 14:

For Mysteries were ordained and those who established  
the Mysteries, ordained their keepers from the beginning. The  
Mystery may fade and go; it goes far, back through time.  
It goes far, forward through time. When the time-clock  
stops, the keeper-of-the-mystery knows the beginning, knows the end.  
They made a circle, their hands clasped in a ring and sang.

Fig. 15:

in some way, we had failed to keep a promise, he thought in some way, if we could reconstruct the fragments, we might redeem the promise, we might even restore the Gift.

Fig. 16:

rose was a ~~Scot~~ rose and I as to remember that. Well, I had remembered that, I had these few fragments of a cosmic picture-puzzle and although I could not put together the whole cosmic picture of time on time (time and its seasons moving in their rhythmic progression and repeating their same pattern) I could yet know that such a pattern existed. It was part of a child's fantasy, <sup>you may say,</sup> megalomania or ego-mania of a child, who imagines it sees God when it dreams or has a vision of an Old Man on Church Street who sent the Young Man who at first I thought was the gardener, in his sleigh. They gave me a lily flower, cut short

Fig. 17:

its home. So I, like the cat, clawed my way through a very avalanche of memories and associations and watched them go down with my father's mysterious accident and with that intuition that had made the cat a scared animal among hieratic peoples, I clawed my way out of the ruins. I myself, cat-like,

Fig. 18:

All this I saw, running in/ luminous sequence, but this  
I could not write down: I <sup>sketched (preliminary)</sup> ~~note down the six~~ chapters of this.  
In the other room, were the ~~six~~ chapters, but how could I see and  
be and live and endure these passionate and terrible  
hours of hovering between life and death, and at the same  
time, write about them? Yet now, as I sat in the chair, and

Fig. 19:

that funny way and said, "until the Promised is redeemed and the  
Gift restored." The Gift, I think must have been this Gift  
of understanding, of linking up all the mysteries through time,  
in all lands and for all peoples. And the initiates of  
~~their own~~

Fig. 20:

not been written. Any way gradually as it took me about  
that is one way to feel about three years to make it, but that  
it. is not what I mean by gradual.  
And I want to tell you about What I mean by gradual is  
the gradual way of making the the way ~~it was made~~ the  
making of Americans. I made it preparation was made inside of  
me, ~~and~~ ~~although~~ as I tell it

Fig. 21:

Among the influences that  
have made me what I am,  
I am told.

Fig. 22:

All of it makes me  
more of it, more of it  
makes me more than  
more than all of it.

Fig. 23:

Remember to make  
Mrs. Howard make  
her husband foolish, all the  
like Mrs. Matinee, fix  
him with her eye,  
and he does it.

Fig. 24:

teaching to decide in  
him and no one could  
ever understand him  
from day to day  
what life meant  
to him to make it  
worth his living, get

Fig. 25:

(#45) I  
The remaining or receiving of  
conversation which is in  
expressing and not enjoying  
not only in enjoying is  
or done that it makes  
certain that not any  
one possessing is  
particular in differing.

Fig. 26:

way of being. This is now more description  
of the feeling such a one has in  
them, this is now more description  
of the way listening to repeating  
comes to make completed understanding  
This is now more description of the  
way repeating slowly comes to make  
in each one a completed history of the  
them.

Fig. 27:

them the history of them, the  
bottom nature of them, the nature  
in the nature mixed up in them  
to make the whole of them in  
anyway it mixes up in them. ~~So~~  
Sometimes then there will be a history  
of way me.

There are whole beings then, they  
are themselves inside them, repeating  
coming out of them makes a history  
of each one of them.

There are many ways of making  
kinds of men and women, Now there  
will be a description of every kind  
of way every one can be a kind  
of men and women.

them. This is not a discussion  
of learning to listen to all  
repeating that every one always  
is making of the whole of them



Fig. 28:

is mixed up in them the nature of  
other kinds of men, natives that are a  
bottom nature in other men, and makes  
of such men that kind of man.

There are then many millions  
always being made of such  
men of women, there are ~~some~~

Fig. 29:

virtuous feeling being bitter and  
thinking in them from the nature  
of them when this is strong enough  
in them to make their own in  
men and women. } Julia Dilling.  
Sometimes some  
one to say one is strong enough  
to make his own or her own  
living thinking feeling feeling

David Burdell who was to be  
married to her, sometimes it was  
a heart feeling that made her such  
not angry when any bad thing happened  
to her sometimes it was a heart feeling  
that made her a little bitter. All  
this had been important feeling  
to her, sometimes it had made

Fig. 30:

thing inside them after the  
family way that made all  
them and there were the  
hands to live with and  
over to be forgiven when they

Fig. 31:

a feeling of being important  
to himself inside him, he could  
make all his children feel him,  
he could in a way make them  
fearful of him and the religion  
in him, and all the religion was

a very good thing. David Keiland  
was a very man then but already  
he had made for himself enough  
money to support him and a wife  
and children. And now it had

Fig. 32:

The Making of Americans  
being the History  
of a Family's Progress.

The Making of an author  
being a  
History of one woman and many other

Fig. 33:

Chapt. I

It has always seemed to me a rare privilege this of being an American, a real American and yet one whose tradition it has taken scarcely sixty years to create. We need only realize our parents, remember our grandparents and know ourselves and our history is complete. The old people in a new world, the new people made out of the old that is the story that I mean to tell for that is what really is and what I really know.

The family itself was made up of the parents and four children. They were a group very satisfying to the eye prosperous and handsome; the father joyous, strong-featured

Fig. 34:

were walking with him sometimes, made  
them afraid of him and then in his  
later living made them angry with him  
and in his latest living made them  
take care of him, made his wife feel  
her power with him and sometimes  
feel she had no importance for  
him, made him do the graces and  
services in the house with him  
a man who would not interfere  
with them for they could not  
feel a power in him for the  
feeling in him to them that in

Fig. 35:

more in her living as she goes on  
repeating the way everybody always  
does in living, more and more than in  
each one of them in their living  
the history of each one comes out  
in them, more and more each one  
is repeating and each part of  
their living has its own repeating  
and makes of that part a history  
coming out from them, then in the  
whole living there comes out more  
and more a repeating that was  
in them always inside them, from  
the beginning on to the ending;

Fig. 36:

There are then many as I was saying who all their lives are repeating and each repeating has in it as strong feeling as any part of their being, there are many millions always being made such of them, sometime there will be more understanding of the meaning in this saying. There are always many millions who only sometime in repeating have such feeling, in many of such of them repeating is just going on because they are living and in living one always goes on repeating, there are some who have not enough activity inside them to go in this way in their repeating, these have to *with a certain impulse or so to go on repeating, they copy themselves,* copy themselves in their way of talking, sometime in their loving, often in their way of walking, of moving their hands and shoulders, in their ways of smiling, there have been some and always will be some who copy themselves so in all their living, in their eating and drinking, in every moment of their daily living.

of their kind of them. The nature in each one makes a long history of each of them and sometime there will be a history of every one and the nature in them and how in their servant living the nature in them comes out from them.



Fig. 37:

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kind of men and women, that always I am looking and comparing and classifying of them, always I am seeing their repeating. Always more and more I love repeating, it may be irritating to hear from ~~some~~ them but always more and more I love it ~~less~~ than of them. More and more I love it of them, the being in them, the mixing in them, the repeating in them, the deciding the kind of them, every one is who has human being.

This is now a little of what I love and how I write it. Later there will be much more of it.

There are many ways of making kinds of men and women. Now there will be descriptions of every kind of way every one can be a kind of men and women.

This is now a history of Martha Herland. This is now a history of Martha and of every one who came to be of her living.

There will then be soon such description of every way one can think of men and women, in their beginning, in their middle living, and their ending.

Every one then is an individual being. Every one then is like many others always living, there are many ways of thinking of every one, this is now a description of all of them. There must then

As I was saying always every one know the whole repeating  
of this <sup>last</sup> one, every one who ever knew this one really knew all the  
repeating coming out of this one, always then it was a question of  
meaning to make of this one a whole one inside one.

Fig. 38:

women, it takes more to make  
a marriage for them, it takes other