H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) (1886-1961)
Poet, novelist, and memoirist

Portrait as a young woman, photographer and date unknown

Photo by Man Ray (1922)
Collective ennui

I did not specifically realize just what it was that I wanted, but I knew that I, like most of the people I knew, in England, America, and on the Continent of Europe, was drifting. We were drifting. Where? I did not know but I at least accepted the fact that we were drifting. As least, I knew this—I would (before the current of inevitable events swept me right into the main stream and so on to the cataract) stand aside, if I could (if it were not already too late), and take stock of my possessions. (13)
Bryher (Annie Winnifred Elleman) (1894-1983)
Novelist, poet, memoirist, and editor

Photo by Islay Lyons (date unknown)

Photo by Man Ray (1923)
Travel was difficult, the country itself was in a state of upheaval; chance hotel acquaintances expressed surprise that two women alone had been allowed to come at all at that time. We were always “two women alone” or “two ladies alone,” but we were not alone. (50)

Bryher during the filming of *Borderline* (1930)

Kenneth Macpherson, Robert Herring, and Bryher at Advent Bay, Norway (July 1929)
H.D., Scrapbook collage of Bryher (undated)
H.D., Scrapbook collage of Kenneth Macpherson (undated)
Sigmund Freud
(1856-1939)
Founder of psychoanalysis

Freud with Yofi: “A little lion-like creature came padding toward me—a lioness, as it happened.” (H.D. 97)
Summer of 1920 – Travels in Greece that result in the “writing on the wall” episode

1933 – H.D. in analysis with Freud in Vienna for “paranoid” fear that the rise of Adolph Hitler would mean a second world war

1938 – Freud family flees Nazi Germany for London. Summer meeting with H.D.

September 19 – November 2, 1944 – H.D. composes her tribute to Freud, *Writing on the Wall*
Temporal organization of a memoir of a clinical encounter

The words return with singular freshness and poignancy, as I, after this long time of waiting, am able to remember without unbearable terror and overwhelming heartbreak those sessions in Vienna. The war closed on us, before I had time to sort out, relive, and reassemble the singular series of events and dreams that belong in historical time to the 1914-1919 period. I wanted to dig down and dig out, root out my personal weeds, strengthen my purpose, reaffirm my beliefs, canalize my energies, and I seized on the unexpected chance of working with Professor Freud himself. (90-1)

The years went forward, then backward. The shuttle of the years ran a thread that wove my pattern into the Professor’s... It was not that he conjured up the past and invoked the future. It was a present that was in the past or a past that was in the future. (9)

I do not want to become involved in a strictly historical sequence. I wish to recall the impressions, or rather I wish the impressions to recall me. Let the impressions come in their own way, make their own sequence. (14)
The years between seemed a period of waiting, of marking time. There was a growing feeling of stagnation, of lethargy, clearly evident among many of my own contemporaries. Those who were aware of the trend of political events, on the other hand, were almost too clever, too politically minded, too high-powered for me intellectually. . . . Where is this taking you, I wanted to shout at both parties. One refused to admit that the flood was coming—the other counted the nails and measured the planks with exact mathematical formulas, but didn’t seem to have the very least idea of how to put the Ark together. (57)
The eve of World War Two

I had begun my preliminary research in order to fortify and equip myself to face war when it came, and to help in some subsidiary way, if my training were sufficient and my aptitudes suitable, with war-shocked and war-shattered people. But my actual personal war-shock (1914-1919) did not have a chance. My sessions with the Professor were barely under way, before there were preliminary signs and symbols of the approaching ordeal. And the thing I primarily wanted to fight in the open, war, its cause and effect, with its inevitable aftermath of nervous breakdown and related nerve disorders, was driven deeper. With the death-head swastika chalked on the pavement, leading to the Professor’s very door, I must, in all decency, calm as best I could my own personal Phobia, my own personal little Dragon of war-terror, and with whatever power I could summon or command order him off, for the time being at any rate, back to his subterranean cavern. (93)
The London Blitz, 1940

There he growled and bit on his chains and was only loosed finally, when the full apocryphal terror of fire and brimstone, of whirlwind and flood and tempest, of the Biblical Day of Judgment and the Last Trump, became no longer abstractions, terrors too dreadful to be thought of, but things that were happening every day, every night, and at one time, at every hour of the day and night, to myself and my friends, and all the wonderful and all the drab and ordinary London people. (93-4)
1944, as *Writing on the Wall* is composed

But here we are today in a city of ruin, a world ruined, it might seem, almost past redemption. (84)

. . .last night, here in London, there were the familiar siren-shrieks, the alerts, each followed by its even more ear-piercing and soul-shattering “all-clear,” which coming as a sort of aftermath or afterbirth of the actual terror is the more devastating. Released from the threat of actual danger, we have time to think about it. And the “alerts” and the “all-clears” are punctuated by the sound of near or far explosions, at three in the morning, after seven and at lesser intervals . . . the war is not yet over. (102)
“Instinct for the particular in the general”: H.D.’s clinical memoir as also a psychoanalytic primer or quasi-history

[Long “purely imaginative sequence” in chapter 59 (76-81) speculating on what Freud might have realized while examining hysterics under the supervision of Jean-Martin Charcot]

This obviously is not a historical account of the preliminary steps that led to the establishment of a new branch called psychological research and a new form of healing called psychoanalysis. The actual facts are accessible to any serious student of Professor Freud’s work. But it seems to me that it might have been through some such process of inner reasoning that the theme opened. The theme? I write the word and wonder why I write it. It seemed to me to suggest music—yes, musical terms do seem relevant to the curious and original process of the Professor’s intuitive reasoning that led up to, developed, and simplified the first astonishing findings of the young Viennese doctor whom the diagnoses of his elders and betters had not always satisfied. (81)
**free association:** Psychoanalytic method according to which voice must be given to all thoughts without exception which enter the mind, whether such thoughts are based on a specific element (word, number, dream-image, or any kind of idea at all) or produced spontaneously. (Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* 169)

Thoughts were things, to be collected, collated, analyzed, shelved, or resolved. Fragmentary ideas, apparently unrelated, were often found to be part of a special layer or stratum of thought and memory, therefore to belong together; these were sometimes skillfully pieced together like the exquisite Greek tear-jars and iridescent glass bowls and vases that gleamed in the dusk from the shelves of the cabinet that faced me where I stretched, propped up on the cough in the room in Berggasse 19, Wien IX. The dead were living in so far as they lived in memory or were recalled in a dream. (H.D. 14)

[Comparing the analytic method to the Socratic method] There was something of that in the Professor’s method of analytic treatment, but there was a marked difference. The question must be propounded by the protagonist himself, he must dig it out from its buried hiding-place, he himself must find the question before it could be answered. (84)

Another question, another question mark, a half-S, the other way around, for seal, symbol, serpent certainly, signet, Sigmund. (88)
The couch, stove, and antiquities cabinet that H.D. recounts in her memoir, Berggasse 19, Vienna (these objects now live at the Freud Museum in London)
The stairs at Berggasse 19, where H.D. occasionally passed Freud’s other patient, J.J. van denr Leeuw (and which your professor fell down in 2008)
The couch, as reconstructed at the Freud Museum, London
Reconstructed cabinets of Freud’s collection of antiquities, Freud Museum, London
But no one has told me that this room was lined with treasures. I was to greet the Old Man of the Sea, but no one had told me of the treasures he had salvaged from the sea-depth.” (96-7)
the unconscious: the part of the mind that is inaccessible to the conscious mind but affects behavior and emotions (OED).

In Freudian theory, the contents of the unconscious are ideas that were formerly conscious that become repressed. Animated by instinctual energy, these repressed contents try to re-enter consciousness (the return of the repressed), but they can only return in a distorted, censored way (in phenomena such as slips of the tongue or dreams). In particular, childhood wishes are often fixated in the unconscious.

Freud’s structural diagram of the psyche
H.D’s description of censorship in the dream process

The sleeping mind was not one, not all equally sleeping; part of the unconscious mind would become conscious at a least expected moment; this part of the dreaming mind that laid traps or tricked the watcher or slammed doors on the scene or the unravelling tapestry of the dream sequence he called the Censor; it was the guardian at the gates of the underworld, like the dog Cerberus, of Hell. (72)
The log memory as a metaphor for the psychoanalytic process of tapping the unconscious

The log is like a round table or a solid thick stool. It is too heavy for us to move, but Eric, our half-brother (a grown man to us), shifted it easily. We saw what was under the heavy immovable log. There was a variety of entertaining exhibits; small things like ants moved very quickly; they raced frantically around but always returned to the same ridge of damp earth or tiny lump of loam. In neatly sliced runnels, some white, wingless creatures lay curled. The base of the log had been the roof of a series of little pockets or neat open graves, rather like Aztec or Egyptian burial chambers, but I did not know that. These curled, white slugs were unborn things. They were repulsive enough, like unlanced boils. Or it is possible that they were not essentially repulsive—they might be cocoonless larvae, they might "hatch" sometime. But I only saw them, I did not know what they were or what they might portend. My brother and I stood spellbound before this disclosure. Eric watched the frantic circling of the ants attentively. Then he set the log back carefully, so as to crush as few of the beasts as possible, so as to restore, if possible, the protective roof over the heads of the white slugs.

There were things under things, as well as things inside of things.
The log memory as a metaphor for the psychoanalytic process of tapping the unconscious

[After reflecting on the death of her parents and brother]

I did not want to face this. There are various ways to escape the inevitable. You can go round and round in circles like the ants under the log that Eric pried up for us. Or your psyche, your soul, can curl up and go to sleep like those white slugs. (31)
H.D. evaluates the revolutionary potential of Freud’s “royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious” (closer here to the Jungian collective unconscious)

He had dared to say that the dream came from an unexplored depth in man’s consciousness and that this unexplored depth ran like a great stream or an ocean underground, and the vast depth of that ocean was the same vast depth that today, as in Joseph’s day, overflowing into man’s small consciousness, produced inspiration, madness, creative idea, or the dregs of the earliest mental unrest and disease. He had dared to say that it was the same ocean of universal consciousness, and even if not stated in so many words, he had dared to imply that this consciousness proclaimed all men one; all nations and all races met in the universal world of the dream; and he had dared to say that the dream-symbol could be interpreted; its language, its imagery were common to the whole race, not only of the living but of those ten thousand years dead. The picture-writing, the hieroglyph of the dream, was the common property of the whole race; in the dream, man, as at the beginning of time, spoke a universal language, and man, meeting in the universal understanding of the unconscious or the subconscious, would forego barriers of time and space, and man, understanding man, would save mankind. (70-1)
recapitulation: Ontogenesis is the development of an individual organism from its earliest stages to maturity, while phylogenesis is the evolutionary development (and diversification) of a species. Ernst Haeckel’s proposition that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny” sums up the (discredited) biological conjecture that the stages of growth in the individual animal from embryo to adulthood parallel the evolutionary development of its species (sometimes referred to as embryological parallelism). The theory of recapitulation assumed both literal and metaphoric importance for both post-Darwinian scientists and those who articulated theories of the social in the early twentieth century.

At many points in his career, Freud’s own work seemed to reflect the theory of recapitulation. For instance, in Totem and Taboo he argued that “primeval people [have] the same feelings and emotions that we have elucidated in the primitives of our own times, our children,” and attributing to “the psychic life of present-day children, the same archaic moments . . . which generally prevailed at the time of primitive civilization (qtd. in Philip Rieff, Freud: The Mind of the Moralist 189-90).
Childhood of the race in H.D.

He had confined his researches to the living texture of wholesome as well as unwholesome thought, but contemporary thought, you might say. That is to say, he had brought the past into the present with his thoughts. The childhood of the individual is the childhood of the race—or is it the other way around?—the childhood of the race is the childhood of the individual. In any case (whether or not, the converse also is true), he had opened up, among others, that particular field of the unconscious mind that went to prove that the traits and tendencies of obscure aboriginal tribes, as well as the shape and substance of the rituals of vanished civilizations, were still inherent in the human mind—the human psyche, if you will. But according to his theories the soul existed explicitly, or showed its form and shape in and through the medium of the mind, and the body, as affected by the mind’s ecstasies or disorders. But there was an argument implicit in our very bones. We had come together in order to substantiate something. I did not know what. There was something that was beating in my brain; I do not say my heart—my brain. I wanted it to be let out. I wanted to free myself of repetitive thoughts and experiences—my own and those of many of my contemporaries. (12-3)
The princess dream

I pored over this picture as a child, before I could read, in our illustrated Doré Bible. . .The name of this picture is *Moses in the Bulrushes* and the Professor of course knows that. The Professor and I discuss this picture. He asks if it is I, the dreamer, who am the baby in the reed basket? I don’t think I am. Do I remember if the picture as I knew it as a child had any other figure? I can’t remember. The Professor thinks that there is the child Miriam, half concealed in the rushes; do I remember? I half remember. Am I perhaps, the child Miriam? Or am I, after all, in my fantasy, the baby? Do I wish myself, in the deepest unconscious or subconscious layers of my being, to be the founder of a new religion? (37)
The writing on the wall in Greece

I am not actually analyzing this as I watch the pictures, but it seems now possible that the mechanism of their projection (from within or from without) has something to do with, or in some way was related to, my feelings for the shrine at Delphi. (49)
H.D., Scrapbook collage of the author and ruins (undated)
H.D., Scrapbook collage of Kenneth Macpherson and assorted ruins (undated)
Delphic tropes in psychoanalysis (self-analysis)

It can in fact be said quite generally that everyone is continually practising psychical analysis on his neighbours and consequently learns to know them better than they know themselves. The road whose goal it is to observe the precept γνῶθι σεαυτόν [know thyself] runs via the study of one's own apparently accidental actions and omissions. (Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* 210)

*Know thyself*, said the ironic Delphic oracle, and the sage or priest who framed the utterance knew that to know yourself in the full sense of the words was to know everybody. *Know thyself*, said the professor, and plunging time and time again, he amassed that store of intimate revelation contained in his impressive volumes. But to *know thyself* is to set forth the knowledge, brought down not only a storm of abuse from high-placed doctors, psychologist, scientists, and other accredited individuals the world over, but made his very name almost a by-word for illiterate quips, unseemly jokes, and general ridicule. (H.D. 73)
The Delphic tripod as signifying psychoanalysis

Religion, art, and medicine, through the latter ages, 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 or of living, might be symbolized by the tripod, the third of the images on the wall before me, the third of the “cards” I threw down, as it were on the table, for the benefit of the old Professor. The tripod, we know, was the symbol of prophecy, prophetic utterance or occult or hidden knowledge; the Priestess or Pythoness of Delphi sat on the tripod while she pronounced her verse couplets, the famous Delphic utterances which it was said could be read two ways. (50)
Admiration as the final note of *Writing on the Wall*

[Synthesis of all of the *Leitmotifs* of the memoir in conversation with Goethe’s poem, “Mignon”]

and in the end, she does not ask if she may go; or exclaim, if only we could go; but there is still the simple affirmation, with the white roses—or the still whiter gardenias, as it happened—of utmost veneration.

*Dahin! Dahin!*  
*Geht unser Weg! o Vater, lass uns ziehn!* (111)

*It’s there! It’s there! It’s there our way leads! Father, we must go on!*