



Passionate Minds: Women Rewriting the World

Claudia Roth Pierpont

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A series of extraordinary explorations of the biographies and literary achievements of twelve modern women writers, **Passionate Minds** tells the stories of women who "rewrote" the world that they inherited, shaping beliefs about vital issues ranging from religion to sex to race to politics.

Claudia Roth Pierpont organizes these probing portraits into three sections. Broadly speaking, the first deals with issues of sexual freedom, in essays on Olive Schreiner, Gertrude Stein, Anaïs Nin, and -- surprisingly, for those who do not know her as a writer -- Mae West. The second section, which examines Margaret Mitchell, Zora Neale Hurston, and Eudora Welty, deals with issues of race and the American South during a period of wrenching change and retrenchment. The third focuses on politics, particularly on the experience and historical interpretation of Soviet Communism and Nazi Germany: the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva, Ayn Rand, Doris Lessing, and, in a dual essay that is also a moving account of an enduring friendship, Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy. Throughout, Pierpont anatomizes both the lives and the art of her subjects and suggests their roles in the progress -- if it has been progress -- that has taken place in the attitudes of women over the course of the century.

Individually published in *The New Yorker* during the past eight years, these essays -- brought together in revised and expanded form, and containing ample new material -- reveal unsuspected parallels, contrasts, and influences among the twelve women discussed, illuminating each of them in new and startling ways.

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