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“Where—Am I?": H.D.'s Search for Identity

by

Dianne Berger

Under the Direction of Randy Malamud, PhD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2021

## ABSTRACT

Hilda Doolittle is best known as the imagist poet H.D. In a career lasting a half-century, H.D. also penned essays, memoirs, fiction, and translations of classical Greek works. Regardless of the genre, H.D. reveals much of her self in her work. Immediately following World War I, she confronted her traumatic experiences during the war years. During World War II, she concentrated on the relationships—primarily with males—that had formed her identity. In the last work published in her lifetime, she conveyed what she had learned in her lifelong quest for identity. I explore selections from H.D.'s work in these three categories.

Due to the traumatic responses exhibited in World War I, trauma theory captivated physicians of the body and the mind. A much-debated aspect was the value of the narrative in overcoming trauma. H.D. seemed intuitively to grasp the importance of the narrative but, like many trauma theorists, first hoped to uncover the “truth.” She began this search in 1921 by writing two autobiographical accounts of her war years; by 1940, she wrote her final volume recounting these events. She had learned that the “truth”—if it exists—is less important than remembering, repeating, and working through one’s experiences. In the 1940s and 1950s, H.D. turned to memoirs to pay tribute to her family, Sigmund Freud (with whom she underwent analysis), and fellow poet Ezra Pound. Each acts as a modern elegy acknowledging the importance of her lost loved ones yet freeing herself from their power over her. Finally is *Helen in Egypt*, a poem with prose captions in which H.D. imparts the lessons she has learned. She now grasps the illusiveness of “truth” and instead emphasizes the lifelong quest for identity ahead of us all.

INDEX WORDS: H.D. H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), identity, trauma, elegy, autobiographical, mourning, memory, Modernism (literature)

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2021

“Where—Am I?": H.D.'s Search for Identity

by

Dianne Berger

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Office of Graduate Services

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

August 2021

**DEDICATION**

In Memory of H.D.

*Imagine there's no countries*

*It isn't hard to do*

*Nothing to kill or die for*

*And no religion too*

*Imagine all the people*

*Living life in peace...*

*You may say I'm a dreamer*

*But I'm not the only one*

*I hope someday you'll join us*

*And the world will be as one*

John Lennon (1971)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Randy Malamud, Tanya Caldwell, and LeeAnne Richardson each played an indispensable role in creating this dissertation. I will never forget their willingness to help and the insight they provided. Randy strongly encouraged me to reach out to Lara Vetter, the 21<sup>st</sup> century's reigning expert on H.D. When I finally overcame my unease in contacting Lara, she provided enormous guidance and encouragement as well. As I began exploring H.D.'s life and career, I did not fully appreciate the community of support on which H.D. depended as she wrote. Randy, Tanya, LeeAnne, and Lara have provided me with a real-world example of its importance. While, as Randy suggested, the completion of this dissertation leaves me feeling relieved (happy, pleased, excited), I also have a sense of loss. I enjoyed the journey far too much.

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## INTRODUCTION

In *Asphodel*, an early work of autobiographical fiction, H.D. asks, “Where—am I?” The context of her question leaves no doubt that she searches for her lost sense of selfhood rather than her corporeal self. In *Bid Me to Live*, a later work exploring the same life events, she has not triumphed in her search for self; she is not yet confident in her I. However, she has developed a strategy for self-discovery and self-healing: “When I try to explain, I write the story. The story must write *me*, the story must create *me*” (*Bid* 110). H.D.’s journey toward selfhood lasted a lifetime, complicated by the trauma she suffered during World War I. I explore three crucial periods in her quest. First is the autobiografiction—*Paint It Today*, *Asphodel*, and *Bid Me to Live*—that she began as early as 1921 and went unpublished until either shortly before her death or long after. Next are her three tributes—*The Gift* to her family, *Tribute to Freud*, and *End to Torment* about her relationship with Ezra Pound—written in the 1940s and 1950s. Finally, I examine *Helen in Egypt*, H.D.’s personal *magnum opus*, written in the mid-to-late 1950s and published coincident with her death. My purpose is to trace H.D.’s struggle—and her success—as she develops the importance of the narrative as a means of overcoming trauma.

### “Where—am I?”: H.D.’s Search for Identity

Hilda Doolittle (1886-1961) was an American-born poet who lived the last fifty years of her life in Europe. She is anthologized in American and British Literature as H.D., a *nom de plume* assigned to her by Ezra Pound. Not only did Pound impose a name upon Doolittle, but he also christened her innovative and experimental poetry *Imagiste*. H.D. remained a poet until her death, but, following the Great War, she published her poetry rarely, often in limited editions for a select audience. She spent much of her creative energy on prose, which frequently went unpublished as well. All her work, regardless of genre, is life-writing. In her early works are the

gardens, woods, and seashores of her American childhood; her later works feature her personal feelings of anguish, loss, and disembodiment. At times, she realized that too much self was present even in her poems and published them in a redacted version.

Chart 1, arranged chronologically by year of origination, highlights the sheer volume of H.D.'s work encompassed in her half-century career.<sup>1</sup> Although she is best known as a poet, the chart emphasizes the variety of genres in which she worked—poetry, prose, drama, and one of the silent movies she wrote, produced, and acted in. It also calls attention to the gaps in her output after World War I and before World War II that originated from her periods of psychological distress. Much of her work remained unpublished for many years. Chart 2 illustrates how H.D.'s association with Norman Holmes Pearson, as both friend and literary executor, resulted in the publishing of her earlier works and the creation and publishing of new material. After Pearson's death, H.D.'s daughter, Perdita Schaffner, took on the task of unearthing unpublished works, a process that continues today. Chart 2 also highlights how literary perspectives *du jour* have influenced the publishing of H.D.'s earlier works. In both Charts 1 and 2, blue indicates poetry; green indicates fiction and autobiografiction; pink indicates essays and memoirs.

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<sup>1</sup> Charts 1 and 2 are for illustrative purposes, only, and do not provide a complete catalog of H.D.'s work. Nor do the charts provide the pen names chosen by H.D. and alternate titles for the works; I will address these anomalies for the works I explore. The charts are based predominately on the published works of Susan Stanford Friedman, who acknowledges that the date of origination is often an estimate. Publication dates for works published after 1990 are based on *The Cambridge Companion to H.D.*

**Chart 1: Chronology**

Begun c.		Published
1912	<i>Sea Garden</i>	1916
1916	<i>Hymen</i>	1921
---		
1919	<i>Notes on Thought and Vision</i>	1982
1921	<i>Paint It Today</i>	1986
	<i>Asphodel</i>	1992
1923	<i>Palimpsest</i>	1926
1924	<i>Hedylus</i>	1928
	<i>Red Roses for Bronze</i>	1931
	<i>Pilate's Wife</i>	2000
	<i>The Hedgehog</i>	1936
1926	<i>HERmione</i>	1981
1930	Film: <i>Borderline</i>	1930
	<i>Kora and Ka</i>	1934
1931	<i>Nights</i>	1935
	<i>The Dead Priestess Speaks</i>	1983
---	Unpublished Short Stories	
1939	<i>Bid Me to Live</i>	1960
1940	<i>Within the Walls</i>	1990
1941	<i>The Gift</i>	1969
1942	<i>The Walls Do Not Fall</i>	1944
1943	<i>Majic Ring</i>	2009
1944	<i>Tribute to Freud</i>	1945
	<i>Tribute to the Angels</i>	1945
	<i>The Flowering of the Rod</i>	1946
1945	<i>By Avon River</i>	1949
1946	<i>The Sword Went Out to Sea</i>	2007
1947	<i>White Rose and the Red</i>	2009
1948	<i>Advent</i>	1974
1949	"H.D. by Delia Alton"	1983
	<i>The Mystery</i>	2009
1950	<i>Bid Me To Live (Revised)</i>	1960
1952	<i>Helen in Egypt</i>	1961
1957	<i>Vale Ave</i>	1982
1958	<i>End to Torment</i>	1979
1959	"Winter Love"	1972
1960	<i>Hermetic Definition</i>	1972

**Chart 2: Publication**

Begun c.		Published			
1912	<i>Sea Garden</i>	1916			
1916	<i>Hymen</i>	1921			
1923	<i>Palimpsest</i>	1926			
1924	<i>Hedylus</i>	1928			
1930	Film: <i>Borderline</i>	1930			
1924	<i>Red Roses for Bronze</i>	1931			
1930	<i>Kora and Ka</i>	1934			
1931	<i>Nights</i>	1935			
1924	<i>The Hedgehog</i>	1936			
1942	<i>The Walls Do Not Fall</i>	1944			
1944	<i>Tribute to Freud</i>	1945			
1944	<i>Tribute to the Angels</i>	1945	Association with Norman Holmes Pearson		
1944	<i>The Flowering of the Rod</i>	1946			
1945	<i>By Avon River</i>	1949			
1939	<i>Bid Me to Live</i>	1960			
1950	<i>Bid Me To Live (Revised)</i>	1960			
1952	<i>Helen in Egypt</i>	1961			H.D.'s Death
1941	<i>The Gift</i>	1969			
1959	"Winter Love"	1972	2nd Wave Feminism		
1960	<i>Hermetic Definition</i>	1972			
1948	<i>Advent</i>	1974			
1958	<i>End to Torment</i>	1979			
1926	<i>HERmione</i>	1981	Gender Studies		
1919	<i>Notes on Thought and Vision</i>	1982			
1957	<i>Vale Ave</i>	1982			
1931	<i>The Dead Priestess Speaks</i>	1983			
1949	"H.D. by Delia Alton"	1983			
1921	<i>Paint It Today</i>	1986			
1940	<i>Within the Walls</i>	1990			
1921	<i>Asphodel</i>	1992			
1924	<i>Pilate's Wife</i>	2000	Mysticism and the Occult		
1946	<i>The Sword Went Out to Sea</i>	2007			
1943	<i>Majic Ring</i>	2009			
1947	<i>White Rose and the Red</i>	2009			
1949	<i>The Mystery</i>	2009			

## Pertinent Literary Criticism

The era in which H.D.'s work has been published conditioned the response of literary criticism. In “‘Uncanonically Seated:’ H.D. and Literary Canons,” Miranda B. Hickman describes the evolution of criticism on H.D.'s works. For her published poetry in the 1910s and first half of the 1920s, criticism focused on her works as the epitome of the modernist, Imagist poet. Focus on the body of works—poetry and prose—published in the late 1960s and 1970s allowed her to escape her Imagist label and captured the attention of feminist “recuperative” critics in the 1970s and 1980s (Hickman 11). Her autobiografiction published in the 1980s and 1990s opened the floodgates for readings based on lesbian poetics and, later, queer studies. From the mid-1990s, there has been interest in H.D.'s works of mysticism and the occult. Most recently, in *A Curious Peril: H.D.'s Late Modernist Prose* (2019), Lara Vetter explores H.D.'s post-World War II prose, in which H.D. refocuses her traumatic experiences from the personal to the universal.

In the following chapters, I explore three groups of H.D.'s works: (1) her early works of autobiografiction—*Paint It Today*, *Asphodel*, and *Bid Me to Live*; (2) the memoirs of her family, Freud, and Ezra Pound—*The Gift*, *Tribute to Freud*, and *End to Torment*; and (3) and her final work, *Helen in Egypt*. My interest in H.D. is specific to her quest to redeem her sense of self. Initially, H.D. focused on the trauma of her World War I years. Later she recognized that a lifelong crisis of identity had plagued her. During this period, she transitioned from a search for truth to an acknowledgment that truth is, at best, elusive. I examine her process of repeatedly remembering and working through memories in her autobiografiction to incorporate them into her identity. Her interest in psychotherapy gave H.D. a model for healing, but she—as she did in her poetry—took psychology's analytic precepts and forged a model all her own. I then explore

how she made use of her memoirs to both pay tribute to others but also empower herself. Finally, I consider how she passed on the knowledge gained in her lifelong quest to a new generation.

Although much of the existing criticism on H.D. is not specific to my project, select elements mesh with my focus. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar highlight H.D. in their three-volume work, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*. Although Gilbert and Gubar borrow the World War I term *No Man's Land* for their title, they focus on metaphoric wars rather than the literal wars that are my focus. In the first volume, *The War of the Words* (1988), they introduce their concept of *family romance*. Although drawing on Freud's model from both his "Family Romances" (1909) and "Female Sexuality" (1931), Gilbert and Gubar then make the term their own. They find that Freud's model for the family romance is a "suitable paradigm for the analysis of literary history at just the point [the twentieth century] that the woman writer confronts both a matrilineal and patrilineal inheritance" (*The War of the Words* 167). They then note that "like many other feminist theorists" [they both] use Freud . . . [and] swerve from Freud" (169). Later in *No Man's Land: Volume 3-Letters from the Front*, Gilbert and Gubar dedicate a chapter to H.D. and the family romance. In this chapter, they trace the "evolution" in H.D.'s work from the "normative father-daughter paradigm" to "the original mother attachment" (171). In their account, Gilbert and Gubar discuss H.D.'s autobiographical fiction, memoirs (elegies), and late poetry and fiction—many of which I explore.

In *Poetry of Mourning*, Jahan Ramazani also uses the term *family romance* with no attribution to either Freud or Gilbert and Gubar. He uses this term only when writing of women poets' elegies in the twentieth century and their movement from expressing "respectful homage, submissive lament, grateful inheritance, and . . . consolation" to expressing guilt, rage, ambivalence, and defiance (295). I use the term *family romance* and, like Gilbert, Gubar, and

Ramazani, make the term my own. Rather than an attempt to psychoanalyze H.D., I use the term to describe some of the challenges she hints at, overtly recognizes, or is encouraged (by psychiatrists) to resolve as she works through her traumatic experiences.

Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate's approach in *Women's Fiction and the Great War* (1997) is a direct response to Sandra Gilbert's argument that the Great War was a form of "sex warfare," an approach that they critique as "sensitive only to drama and to violence" (3). In contrast, they explore how the war "located" both men and women, what new opportunities it offered for men and (especially) women, and the impact on men and women of the period's social and technological changes (3-4). The impact about which Raitt and Tate write includes trauma. I have drawn heavily on Tate's "H.D.'s War Neurotics" in building my knowledge of the evolution of trauma theory. Tate writes of the evolving attitudes on combatant and non-combatant war neurosis captured in the *Lancet* medical journal during the war years (1914-1918). The *Lancet*'s argument until late 1915 was that "no one, whether soldier or civilian, would suffer any long-term mental problems as a result of the conflict" (Tate 241). By late 1915 however, the reality of war neuroses for both combatants and non-combatants was an acknowledged problem.

Tate also chronicles H.D.'s accounts of her traumatic symptoms, which H.D. attributed—throughout her life—directly to the war. Tate sees H.D.'s reconstructions as a search for truth rather than what modern trauma theorists consider a journey toward healing. Tate, therefore, cautions against accepting H.D.'s memories at face value as her memories were written and rewritten over more than forty years. Tate surmises that this lengthy period of writing and, indeed, the act of writing itself compounds the memories "with fantasy" (245). She is bolstered in this supposition by a parenthetical note, handwritten by H.D., in one of her memoirs: "(But



this never happened. Surely this was fantasy.)” (245). While Tate views H.D.’s re-remembering and revising as inconsistent with truth-telling, I consider H.D.’s acceptance of the impossibility of finding a single unimpeachable truth as realistic and necessary in creating one’s sense of selfhood.

As with Trudi Tate’s exploration of trauma theory, Elizabeth Brunton’s essay “ ‘I Had a Baby, I Mean I Didn’t, in an Air Raid’: War and Stillbirth in H.D.’S *Asphodel*” (2017) provides a link for exploring H.D.’s trauma in the wartime loss of her child. She delves into H.D.’s autobiographical novel *Asphodel*, in which she writes of giving birth to a stillborn child during World War I. Brunton argues that H.D. sought to “courageously” articulate her grief, but conventional language failed her (66). Consequently, H.D. seized upon the “language of shell shock and the jingoistic wartime journalese” of the wartime press (66). She notes that while the public language of war built around collective experience developed and circulated quickly, the private language of pregnancy loss remained unspoken. While Brunton does not explore H.D.’s war trauma using modern trauma theory, she initiates a discussion of trauma associated with stillborn births by introducing the research report written, in 2004, by Penelope Turton et al. According to this research, it was not until the mid-1990s that psychiatric professionals recognized the trauma associated with stillborn births as a form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

In my final chapter, I draw from Lara Vetter’s *A Curious Peril*. Vetter points to H.D.’s late prose as evidence of her progress in working through the trauma of World War I. The aerial bombardments of the second war, coming so quickly on the heels of the first war, created for many Londoners a “panic” that “forcibly” returned them to their “originary scene of loss” (Paul Saint-Amour qtd, in Vetter 2). H.D. turned to her art to help her overcome “the unremitting

anxiety, mental strain, and deprivation” caused by World War II (3). In doing so, she adds a new aspect to her *oeuvre*. H.D.’s late prose is political rather than personal, a historical and cultural analysis rather than an analysis of self, a public rather than private act.

## Overview of Chapters

### *Chapter 1: H.D.’s Autobiografiction: Paint It Today, Asphodel, and Bid Me to Live*

I begin by exploring psychological theory in general and trauma studies specifically as they have evolved since World War I. The twentieth century created, what Dori Felman calls, a “crisis of truth” by presenting humans with memories that cannot be fully remembered and understood, events that cannot be positioned firmly in the past, acts that cannot be “constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition,” and events for which our experience has not prepared us (5). Facing this crisis of truth in treating World War I’s shell-shocked victims, many practitioners embraced Sigmund Freud’s earlier theories for treating hysteria. Controversy flourished over the efficacy of hypnosis versus analysis, the importance of the literal versus a constructed truth, and the value of the bond between subject and listener. However, one aspect remains irrefutable even today: the importance of the narrative in overcoming trauma.

Beginning with Aristotle, we have attached importance to literary genres. Our list of categories grows, but, at its most rudimentary level, there is the division between fact and fiction. An autobiography is assumed to be a factual account of the writer’s life. If the autobiography constitutes a pact between author and reader that facts—truths—are being communicated, does fictionalizing the account nullify that pact? Philosophers might argue that *truth* does not exist; psychologists might argue that truth is less important than creating a life narrative that supports emotional health; authors might argue for their ability to symbolically (and economically)

convey truths with their artistry. The debate rages on and now includes the question of how to describe a work of fiction with autobiographical elements. Of the plethora of possible alternatives, I argue for the term *autobiografiction*. As described by Max Saunders, autobiografiction seems the perfect vehicle for working through one's life experiences, especially traumatic experiences.

Modern trauma theorists now recognize the value of the narrative in transforming life, which is "inherently chaotic or meaningless," into a "meaningful story," a story that can facilitate *working through* trauma (LaCapra 17). Working through is a process of exploring an experience or feeling, overcoming resistance to it, and, finally, accepting the repressed experience or feeling to survive and re-engage with life. However, in her early prose works, H.D.'s initial goal was not to work through her trauma but instead to remember, "try to remember" facts, events, and words (*Asphodel* 114). Her search was for the *truth*. While writing of one's life may begin as a search for truth, it often results in epiphanies, moments of being, and healing.

In the three volumes of autobiografiction, H.D. focused on her life during the years 1910-1921. *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel* were written in 1921-1922; *Bid Me to Live* was begun in 1933 and completed in 1950. Each book recounts the same situations and includes the same cast of characters. However, the characters' names change from book to book. This thirty-year-long process of remembering, repeating, and working through her memories is consistent with what modern trauma theorists refer to as integrating the traumatic event into a series of associative memories that allows one to reestablish ownership of one's self. Although H.D.'s initial intent was a search for the truth, she quickly realized that what was at stake was her selfhood.

## *Chapter 2: H.D.'s Elegies: The Gift, Tribute to Freud, and End to Torment*

Next, I explore H.D.'s later prose works: *The Gift*, *Tribute to Freud*, and *End to Torment* (written 1941-1958; published 1956-1979). They are unique in that they are unambiguously autobiographical, and they share a common theme. Each is a memoir presenting a slice of H.D.'s personal history: *The Gift* of her childhood in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; *Tribute to Freud* of her analysis with Freud in 1933 and 1934; *End to Torment* of her complicated emotional relationship with Ezra Pound from 1905 through 1913 and their reconnection in 1958. Each is also an elegy—to mourn the loss of her childhood, to mourn the death of Freud, to mourn the ruin of Pound. In each, H.D. subtly—perhaps even subversively—conveys a gift to herself: an affirmation of her life, an appreciation of her struggle, a refusal to be the victim. In refusing to be the victim, she moves toward successful mourning. She is no longer possessed by, bound by those whom she has loved. She can now find the ecstasy in remembering. This journey has occupied most of her life and most of her writing. In her early works of autobiographical fiction, she acts out her trauma; in her constant rewriting, she works through her trauma. Building on this early prose, she is finally ready to speak and respond as herself.

Always ahead of the literary and psychological curve, her memoirs apply principles of successful mourning and working through trauma that Jacques Derrida and Dominick LaCapra put forth a half-century later. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida explores sacrifice as a means of appeasing what is considered to be a higher power; in *The Work of Mourning*, Derrida explores friendship, fidelity, and the art of constructive mourning. LaCapra chides Derrida for stressing the “excess of generosity or gift giving and [eliding] the problem of the victim” being the gift—being the scapegoat (24). He argues that trauma can be resolved only when the traumatized

extricates the “element of gift giving from victimization” and progresses from acting out to working through (55). H.D. confronts this same aporia in each of her autobiographical works.

H.D. addresses the sacrifice she was asked to make: rejecting her gift of vision, denying her psychic abilities, abjuring her poetic individuality. She initially clings to acting out her trauma by reenacting traumatic scenes in which “victimization is combined with oblation or gift giving” (LaCapra 24). She remains the victim; she maintains her fidelity to the absent divinity: her father, Freud, Pound. However, she ultimately transitions. She writes of having made the required sacrifice, but, in the end, she rejects the sacrifice demanded of her and reestablishes her singularity.

### ***Chapter 3: H.D.’s Quest: Helen in Egypt***

H.D. wrote her version of her life over and over before putting her demons to rest. She then returns to the poetry that she loved most and tells of her quest. On the day before her death (so the legend goes), H.D. received the publisher’s copy of *Helen in Egypt*. It is the story of the real Helen who, as Stesichorus wrote in the *Palinode*, had been whisked to Egypt before the Trojan War and replaced in Troy by a phantom. In addition to expanding on Stesichorus’s version of Helen, H.D. draws heavily on Euripides’s many plays on the Trojan War. Typical of her work in replicating classical themes and translating the poetry of ancient Greece, H.D. borrows from Euripides but makes his stories her own. The Helen who is in Egypt, as H.D.’s narrator explains, “is both phantom and reality,” a person who does not want to immerse herself in the “river of forgetfulness,” but instead, “does not want to forget” (Helen 3). H.D.’s Helen is a woman who—although known to us all via others’ words—searches for her identity.

H.D.’s return in *Helen in Egypt* is one of making a full circle, embracing what she has learned along the way to make sense of her journey—no longer for herself, but for others. Her

poetry is crisp, crystalline, cool; she is no longer afraid to present it alongside the more emotive prose. She refashions the myths she loves and makes them relevant to the twentieth century. It is a story of both rebirth and resurrection—the past, present, and future are one. I agree with Lara Vetter that *Helen*—like all H.D.’s later prose and poetry—is political rather than personal, a historical and cultural analysis rather than an analysis of self, a public rather than private act. In *Helen*, H.D. imparts the lessons she has learned during the first half of the twentieth century, a turbulent half-century for her and the world. She invites readers to begin their own quests—for identity and peace.

## 1 CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through

*A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.*

Walter Benjamin “The Storyteller” (1936)

*In reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self.*

G rard Genette *Narrative Discourse* (1980)

*Once my pen intervenes, I can make whatever I like out of what I was.*

Paul Valery “Remarks about Myself” (1975)

Interest in trauma theory has exploded in the last one hundred years, not only in psychiatry but also in neurobiology, philosophy, and literary theory. Shoshana Felman refers to the twentieth century as a “post-traumatic century” (1). In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Felman and Dori Laub focus on the later evils of the twentieth century—the Holocaust and the Second World War with all its related atrocities—and the impact they have had on the human psyche. Decades passed before the importance of first-hand testimony to these atrocities was sought. Later still came the many truth and reconciliation commissions, usually mandated by governments as an official truth-seeking mechanism but, most often, seeking restorative rather than retributive justice. It is crucial, however, to remember

how the twentieth century began and the destruction it left in its wake: approximately ten million World War I combat deaths, ten million civilian casualties (mostly starvation and disease), ten million soldiers wounded (often permanently disabled—mentally and physically), and, at the least, twenty million people killed by the flu pandemic unleashed near the end of the war—approximately 3% of the world’s population wiped out.<sup>2</sup>

The word *trauma* has appeared in English writing since the seventeenth century. Initially, it signified (as did the original Greek word) the physical: “a wound, or external bodily injury” (*OED n.* “trauma” def. 1). By the nineteenth century, the meaning of trauma had expanded to include “a psychic injury, [especially] one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed,” or as psychologist William James (brother to literature’s Henry James) eloquently described trauma: “thorns in the spirit” (def. 2.a). The *Oxford English Dictionary* places the use of the word *trauma* in the sixth band of usage frequency (out of eight bands), inferring that trauma is used as frequently as the words *dog*, *machine*, *stress*, and *headache*. The adjective *traumatic* has likewise journeyed to include the psychic as well as the physical. According to the *OED*, *traumatic* is used less frequently than *trauma* and more often in “educated discourse” than everyday speech. The definition of traumatic has continued to evolve and now describes events that are “distressing, emotionally disturbing” but do not meet the criteria for clinical trauma (*adj.* “traumatic” def. 2b). Even the American Psychiatric Association has broadened its definition of trauma to include not only life events that are rarely experienced (such as war) but also life events that are more frequently experienced (such as sexual abuse/violence and stillbirth).

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<sup>2</sup> Estimates of the death and destruction caused by World War I and the flu pandemic vary by source and by the era in which they are collected. It is possible that upwards of 100 million died from the pandemic, a disparity that is easier to comprehend as we face our own pandemic. I have chosen conservative estimates and rounded the numbers instead of providing precise figures.



In exploring H.D.'s autobiografiction and memoirs, I write of her trauma, emanating from World War I and the stillbirth of her child, and her distressing and disturbing life experiences, which (more colloquially) can be described as traumatic. A brief survey of modern trauma theory is an excellent place to start, as this theory came to life in the mid-nineteenth century and developed a life of its own during World War I.<sup>3</sup> At this pivotal time, the focus on trauma centered more on its treatment than its cause. Creating a narrative of traumatic experiences had long been a significant step in what Sigmund Freud called "remembering, repeating, and working-through" the traumatic (*Remembering* 145). During the war, the trauma narrative became a point of intent interest.

In "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin laments the loss following the Great War of "what seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions . . . the ability to exchange experiences" (83). He attributes this loss of communicable experience to the horror of trench warfare fought with modern technology, the collapse of economic systems, and the disintegration of social systems. All these losses certainly contributed to the collective societal malaise noted by Benjamin (and Freud) more than a decade after the war. The war also revived interest in understanding individual trauma, which began with the advent of the modern railway and the associated fright of railway accidents. At this time, trauma was deemed a physiological condition attributed to concussion of the spine or organic changes in the brain. However, by the twentieth century, trauma had acquired its psychological meaning: the "wounding of the *mind* brought about by sudden, unexpected, emotional shock" (Leys 4). Trauma was recognized as a "memory crisis" that created a "hysterical shattering of the personality" (4).

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<sup>3</sup> Since the late twentieth century, trauma has become a topic of interest for neuroscience. Research in neurohormones and neurophysiology attempts to ascertain the part the body plays in trauma, in hope of finding a neurobiological treatment. This research is beyond the scope of my essay.

Within months after the Great War began, hysterical breakdown in combatants was observed. However, the British medical journal *The Lancet* argued for the first year of the war that “no one, whether soldier or civilian, would suffer any long-term mental problems resulting from the conflict” (qtd. in Tate 241). In fact, the expectation was that civilians should suffer no ill effects at all. Since neuroses are “caused largely by boredom, the excitement of the war should make [even existing neuroses] diminish” (qtd. 242). The “spectacle” of British men “laying down their lives for a principle so glorious” should be a transcendental experience for the populous (qtd. 242). However, the reality of war neuroses for both combatants and non-combatants quickly became an acknowledged problem, even in *The Lancet*.

Initially, the debate over what was called *shell shock*<sup>4</sup> in combatants was whether it was a physical or psychological condition. Most practitioners called in to treat shell shock viewed it as a physical condition—or a lack of moral fiber. However, a few practitioners could not help but draw a parallel between what they encountered in the shell-shocked—re-experiencing, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, hypervigilance, terrifying and repetitive nightmares—and the symptoms associated with what Freud had called female hysteria: “bodily expressions of obstructed or ‘repressed’ emotions” (Leys 84). For Freud and Joseph Breuer, hypnotism had been a mechanism for retrieving forgotten, dissociated, or repressed memories and bringing them into consciousness and language.

With a view of trauma as a problem of memory, some practitioners reverted to Freud’s early treatment of hypnotic catharsis to cure the “virtual epidemic of male hysteria” that immediately became a signature event of the war (83). However, almost twenty years before the war, Freud had abandoned hypnosis because the success of hypnosis raised “two great doubts”

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<sup>4</sup> In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association recognized the concept of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which includes what was formerly known as shell shock

(Freud “Autobiographical” 16). Freud’s experience showed that results seemed dependent on the “personal relation” between patient and doctor (16). More crucially important to Freud, this dependence “escaped every effort” at the control so vital in his quest to raise psychoanalysis to a discipline rather than pseudo-science (16). The concern over the doctor/patient relationship inherent in hypnosis continued during the Great War. However, hypnosis raised even more fundamental concerns: How does cathartic abreaction heal? Does its efficacy depend on the “affective reliving” (emphasis on the emotions) of an event or the “conscious reintegration” (emphasis on the cognitive) of the “dissociated” memory? (Leys 86). Must the patient be subjugated to the practitioner’s authoritative control, or must the subject take an active role? Moreover, it begs the most fundamental question of all: What is memory—how do we remember; how do we forget?

For Freud, the goal of therapy—either under hypnosis or in work with an analyst—was, first, for patients to remember their traumatic emotional experiences, yet distance themselves from the experiences by being a spectator of an experience happening to “other to themselves” (Leys 100). The next step was for the patient to create a narrative “in full consciousness of that lived experience as *past*” (100). With the shell-shocked, this was difficult, if not impossible. Patients emotionally lived, rather than relived, their experience and often became “confused to the point of swooning” when asked to narrate their experiences in the past tense” (101). How could practitioners recover a subject’s feeling or emotion of the traumatic experience but place it in the past? William James’s early theory that a feeling surging “up in our consciousness is not the memory of feeling” but a new feeling—the actual emotion recaptured by bringing back the past—gained new currency but provided no answer (95). Freud and other pioneers in psychoanalysis continuously (and often self-contradictorily) argued over this dilemma. However,

they could reach no consensus other than suggesting that a patient's emotional acting out "be interpreted" by the practitioner as the patient's narrative of the past (100). In recounting experiences, shell-shocked patients alternated between viewing the experience as belonging to the subjective I and belonging to some objective other. There were also patients even unwilling to partially recognize the experience as their own. Consequently, patients often disavowed the recounted experience as being a memory of an event in their own life.

Freud's contemporary Pierre Janet advocated forgetting as the best mechanism for overcoming trauma. Nevertheless, Janet's work is pertinent to modern trauma theory for recognizing the near impossibility of getting the traumatized to forget; for identifying the difference between normal memory—"the act of telling a story"—and traumatic memory, which is "wordless and static;" and for concluding that "The ultimate goal . . . is to put the story . . . into words" (qtd. in Leys 105). The narrative gained importance as both a reconstruction and a transformation that situates and organizes "those experiences in their proper time and place" and becomes part of the victim's life story (112). Akin to Freud, Janet found that the narrative provides a path to self-understanding even if it does not provide a verifiable personal truth—"memory conceived as truth-telling is overestimated but . . . memory conceived as narration is crucial" (118). Alternatively, in Benjamin's words, "It is not the object of the story to convey a happening per se, . . . rather it imbeds it in the life of the storyteller" ("Motifs" 159).

Today, we acknowledge that trauma is "fundamentally a disorder of memory" (Leys 2). The emotions of terror and surprise caused by events can destroy the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition that allow for recollection and integration of the experience into normal consciousness. The experience of trauma remains "fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented *as* past, [and] is perpetually re-experienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic

present” (2). From the beginning of the modern interest in trauma, it has been understood as an experience that so profoundly immerses the victim in the traumatic event that it precludes “the kind of specular distance necessary” to establish cognitive knowledge of the event (9). For more than one hundred years, modern trauma theorists have recognized both the lack of subjectivity and temporality exhibited by the traumatized and the significance of creating a narrative in treating trauma victims. Trauma theorists continue to appreciate the importance of the traumatized integrating the traumatic experience into their life story. But what is meant by experience?

The word *experience* has been used in English since the 1300s. The *OED* chronicles the diverse meanings the word may convey. The noun *experience* first referred to a test, an experiment, a trial, or the actual observation of facts or events; later, the concept expanded to include being consciously the subject of a state or condition or consciously affected by an event (*OED n.* “experience”). Suddenly—but concurrently—experience denotes subjectivity, affect, and emotion in addition to the clinical and objective. As time passes, the human side of experience becomes more pronounced. An experience becomes an event that has taken place within the knowledge of an individual, a community, or humankind at large, either during a particular period or generally; it becomes knowledge based on something one has undergone—lived through; it becomes aptitudes, skill, and judgment acquired by study and practice—an experienced soldier, an experienced teacher (*OED n.* “experience”). The meaning of experience resides both in the mind of the speaker/writer and listener/reader.

To escape the ambiguity conveyed by the word *experience*, philosophers (as did Freud) often employ German to delineate their meaning of an experience. *Ereignis* is an event about which one knows but which has no personal impact, much like the profusion of news reports,

gossip, and innuendo that overwhelms us each day. *Erlebnis* is an event lived through by oneself, but in philosopher Giorgio Agamben's view, an event that is "mute" (Agamben 42). He views these mute experiences as ones that can be known in an intellectual sense but fail to attach the "rhapsody of perceptions" needed for complete knowledge. His concept of *Erfahrung* differs from *Erlebnis* by being a lived-through event but one that impacts both one's subjectivity and sense of self. Agamben uses these terms to explain Walter Benjamin's lament on the poverty of experience that befalls modern humankind. In doing so, he addresses the questions asked by modern trauma theorists.

In *Infancy and History: An Essay on the Destruction of Experience*, Agamben tackles the malaise of modernity. While his focus is on experience in a societal, cultural, collective sense, I contend that his concept of infancy as a state of being without the authority of language is also relevant at the individual level, especially as it pertains to trauma studies. Agamben builds a model of infancy to demonstrate how traumatic events can negatively impact a subject's ability to articulate the experience as a subjective one. I argue that Agamben's infancy model is more effective than Freud's death drive in explaining the current view of trauma: a fundamental mental dissociation that destroys the victim's ability to integrate the traumatic experience into consciousness and language but, instead, leaves the experience fixed or frozen in time.

Much like modern trauma theorists, Agamben argues that for events to become meaningful, they must be translated from *Erlebnis* (a non-subjective event) into *Erfahrung* (a subjective event) and that this translation can take place only through the "power of words and narration" (16). Therefore, Agamben dismisses the Kantian view of the subject as a cognizing consciousness receiving intuition—an I defined only by thinking. He focuses instead on a subject that is conscious of self—a unified subject. Agamben's unified subject can comprehend *Erlebnis*,

which is “anterior both to subjectivity and to an alleged psychological reality,” and transform it into *Erfahrung*—a transformation from “mute to voiced” (42). Thus, experience is a question of language rather than consciousness or reason, as reason can only reside in language.

In addition to exploring *Ereignis*, *Erlebnis*, and *Erfahrung*, Agamben also examines what he calls limit experiences. These are “experience at its extreme . . . experiences of the inexperienceable” (45). They are inexperienceable because they happen to the part of us that lacks consciousness and subjectivity—the part of us Agamben calls the “it,” comparable to Freud’s “Id” (47). Agamben further maintains that “psychoanalysis shows us indeed that the most important experiences are those that belong not to the subject, but to ‘it’” (47). The limit experiences common to all humans are the moment of birth and the moment of death, neither of which “belong[s] to us;” neither of which we can “call ‘ours;’” neither of which is an “experience of the I” (45, 47). However, Agamben clearly breaks with Freudian psychology in challenging the importance of what Freud called the death drive.

Late in his life, Freud concluded that conflict in the psyche activates the death drive, which is conservative and seeks to restore an earlier state. The death drive is an organic instinct acquired historically, “an *old* state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return” (Freud *BPP* 45). Alternatively, Agamben maintains that shock drives one “backwards toward [the boundary of human] infancy” marked by language rather than deathward, as Freud posited in his death drive (47). Agamben points out that his theory of infancy does not assume an infancy that “chronologically precedes language and which, at a certain point, ceases to exist in order to spill into speech” (55). There is no need for speech to erupt suddenly because language is inherent in the human being. The point of infancy to which Agamben takes us is congruent with identity formation, the concept of being,

the subjective I. He expands the list of rhetorical indicators of subjectivity to include terms that “organize the subject’s spatial and temporal relations,” including *now*, *yesterday*, and *tomorrow* (53). Thus, an experience that has not been transformed to the subjective would be ambiguous (or even decidedly wrong) in terms of pronouns used and orientation toward past and present—just as is seen with the traumatized.

Agamben’s focus is on the expropriation of experience that has led to the malaise of modern people. His goal is to explore the possibilities of a future experience that can replace traditional experience in the modern era. However, his theory of infancy is also applicable to the study of trauma. In the human life cycle, the constitution of oneself as I—a “subject within language”—removes the human self from infancy (63). Infancy is the “moat” that must be crossed to take humans from their natural ability to make sounds to their learned ability to create meaning (63). The bridge over this moat is language. We see trauma victims return to various points on this bridge—from the muteness or babbling of the severely traumatized to a lack of organized subjectivity. All trauma victims can be said to return to some point on the infancy continuum. For many, the transformative action is to articulate the nature of their experience and reconstitute their subjectivity through narrative.

H.D.’s autobiografiction and memoirs illustrate the importance and efficacy of the narrative in reestablishing selfhood following clinically traumatic experiences as well as experiences that are distressing and disturbing. In her autobiografiction, she works herself across Agamben’s bridge from infancy to full subjectivity. In her memoirs, she begins by purposefully taking a step back for self-protection before, once again, make a complete crossing. She, like Agamben, develops a unique twist on Freudian psychology. When Freud wrote *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through* in 1914, his purpose was to advocate for these three steps in the



environment of psychoanalysis as he had in hypnosis. He maintains his expected roles of trained analyst and patient (the analysand). The analyst assists the analysand in remembering experiences, dreams, and fantasies; interprets them; and guides the analysand in working through their problems. Freud's concept of the repeating function has the analysand continuing to act out what has been repressed—again, with the analyst recognizing the repetition and bringing the analysand to see this behavior. In H.D.'s earliest therapeutic works, she exhibits the lack of subjectivity and temporality expected of the traumatized. She first narrates experiences and emotions that she views as crucial and later finds that she has omitted some and overstated others. Her repeating is not one of acting out but covering the same ground repeatedly, each time with a changed perspective. For H.D., it is the construction and reconstruction of the narrative that cures.

Freudian analysis required an analyst (practitioner) and analysand (patient) to construct and reconstruct a narrative. Modern trauma theorists like Felman and Laub retain the two-party analysis system but base their theory on a listener, rather than an analyst, and traumatized subject. In *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (1998), Suzette Henke provocatively asks, "Is [the analyst] truly necessary?" (xi). She introduces the term *scriptotherapy* to describe the process of "writing out and writing through traumatic experience" in a way that mimics psychoanalysis and becomes a therapeutic alternative (xii). While she does not negate the benefit of having the empathetic support and validation of a listener, she offers the possibility that some authors can envisage an audience providing this support and validation. Alternatively, can one act as both subject and listener? I argue that in her early prose, this is H.D.'s goal.

## 1.2 H.D.'s Autobiografiction: *Paint It Today, Asphodel, and Bid Me to Live*

### 1.2.1 *Art as a Means to an End*

In 1916, H.D. wrote a series of poems she called *The Islands*.<sup>5</sup> Within these poems were the sea and allusions to Greek mythology that she loved, yet, in three of the poems, the “anguish of a deserted woman” was palpable (Martz xiv). Acutely digressing from Imagist precepts, these poems were raw, personal, and confessional. H.D. was at the height of her despair: her child had been born dead, the war raged, her husband was a soldier. Aldington had also begun an affair for which H.D. sadly accepted some responsibility—“I whose heart, / being rent, cared nothing / was unspeakably indifferent” (H.D. “Envy”). When *The Islands* was published in 1920, she omitted these three poems from the collection. By 1920, she had begun to understand, accept, and deal with her angst—her healing began. This process of healing would last decades. Since she was a poet, it is not surprising that her approach was grounded in the written word. However, H.D. turned to prose rather than poetry. Writing to John Cournos to defend her prose, she explained:

[This] novel is not intended as a work of art . . . It is a means to an end. . . . My personal self has got between me and my real self, my real artist personality. . . . I have tried to write things down—in order to think straight. . . . But I hope to come clear and then turn to my real work again. . . . [But] writing poetry requires[s] a clarity, a clairvoyance almost. I have been too weak to be clairvoyant. (Hollenberg *Art* 147-48)

Freud’s talking cure was in its infancy. Not only was there no trauma theory as we know it today, but the debate on the causes of and cures for trauma was also raging. One crucial aspect of overcoming trauma that H.D. intuitively grasped was the power of words as a healing

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<sup>5</sup> H.D.’s typescript of the poems bears the inscription “Corfe Castle – Dorset – summer 1917.” Louis L. Martz suggests that the year should be 1916 because in that summer H.D. spent the summer at Corfe Castle while Richard Aldington was at the nearby military Training Center.

mechanism. Freud often questioned, revised, or rearticulated his psychoanalytic theories, but he never wavered on one aspect. He firmly and consistently acknowledged the importance of transference—the phenomenon that occurs when the analysand redirects emotions or feelings originating from their earliest “object-attachments” to the analyst (Freud “Autobiography” 26). Specific to psychoanalysis rather than other psychotherapeutic methods such as hypnosis, transference becomes “the best instrument” of analytic treatment (26). Transference, Freud argues, enables the analyst to teach analysands—the subjects who undergo psychoanalysis—“how to interpret dreams” and extract their “unconscious thoughts and memories” from a “text” that analysands themselves have provided (Freud “Fragment” 235). For Freud, the roles of analyst and analysand were sacrosanct.

Suzette A. Henke counters Freud’s position by asking, “Might the therapeutic power of psychoanalysis reside more in the experience of ‘re-memory’ and reenactment than in the scene of transference posited by Freud?” (xi). She argues that scriptotherapy—the writing of traumatic experiences—can be equally as therapeutic as analyst-led psychotherapy; that writing—like talking—reconstructs, interprets, and integrates experiences that have previously existed as incoherent sensory and affective emotions. She posits that the forms referred to as life-writing—memoirs, diaries, letters, journals, *bildungsroman*, autobiography, and “other personally inflected fictional texts”—can perhaps be more therapeutic than traditional therapy as they offer three “subject-positions”: (1) the recollected experiences of the “authorial consciousness,” (2) the “early, fragmented (and often traumatized) version of the self,” and (3) the “ostensibly coherent subject” that is revealed in the process of scriptotherapy (xiii; xv). The concepts of subject-positions and writing as a process are crucial in my exploration of H.D.’s *Paint It Today*,

*Asphodel*, and *Bid Me to Live*. The form of each text and how each contributes to the textual whole are equally important.

In these three texts, H.D. reworks her experiences and emotions with the consistent goal of creating a coherent subject in each text. The texts are not “formal” or “contractual” autobiographies in which the “real author, narrator, and the name on the title-page all coincide” (Saunders 3-4). As all deal with the same specific periods and incidents in H.D.’s life rather than a complete life picture, they could be considered memoirs—except they are fictionalized. As in a *roman à clef*, names are changed but not with the intent to protect H.D. from disapprobation or in an attempt to satirize; portraits of the characters are so thinly veiled, the name changes would offer little help in defending a suit for libel. As in a *Künstlerroman*, art and the artist often take center stage, but the primary focus is on the person, the self. For lack of a more appealing choice, I find that I must, like Max Saunders, invoke the “cumbersome” term *autobiografiction* to describe these three of H.D.’s works where the fictional and autobiographical meet (7). Despite the clunky jargon, Saunders makes a convincing case for autobiografiction in Modernism.

In *Self Impression*, Saunders explores modernist autobiografiction beginning with the forebears of Modernism—Walter Pater, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Ford Madox Ford—and proceeding through the high Modernism of James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and many others. Saunders focuses on the years between 1870 and 1940 to demonstrate the profusion of experiments in life-writing. This profusion was unusual given the modernists’ disdain for the conventionality of Victorian biography and autobiography and, later, growing skepticism of “the reality or intelligibility” of the self on which life-writing depended (21). Nevertheless, Saunders chronicles what he views as a modernist revolt in life-writing that transformed both Modernism and life-writing. As he develops his history, he creates a taxonomy

of the forms that Modernism brought to life-writing. His chapter on the term *autobiografiction* and its early association with the spiritual quest is compelling.

When Saunders began his research into autobiografiction, he assumed the term was a postmodernist invention. However, he found that Stephen Reynolds, a young writer who was a protégé of Conrad and Ford, originated the word. In his 1906 essay “Autobiografiction,” Reynolds explains “the need for coining [this] rather dreadful portmanteau-word” (Reynolds qtd. in Saunders 169). He defines autobiografiction as being “focused on ‘spiritual experience,’” with a “prevalence of pseudonymity in the quest after the ‘inner life’” (169). Reynolds seems to relate the word only to autobiography in exploring what he views as a new literary form. However, Saunders notes that his examples include other forms of life-writing, as well. Although Reynolds likens the spiritual experiences in these works to “the writer’s journey through [Bunyon’s] Slough of Despond,” Saunders expands the emphasis on spiritual experiences to include the psychological (Reynolds qtd. in Saunders 174). As Saunders traverses the prose and poetry of Modernism, it is impossible to overlook the despondency—as well as the epiphanies and moments of vision—experienced by the writers’ fictional alter egos (206). For H.D., autobiografiction was a means of writing herself out of trauma.

Although Saunders does not directly discuss trauma narratives, he opens the door to that discussion. He views autobiografiction as one of many literary methods that allows the writer to unweave “the fabric of the real,” express “anxieties about its unweaving,” “minister to those anxieties,” and “perhaps even counter them” (528). He chronicles the approaches to selfhood in life-writing from the *fin de siècle* through postmodernism. In this period, “a crisis of self and personality” has existed, producing many (often competing) theories on selfhood (506). Saunders addresses theories that the self is known only through language, that selfhood is only language,

and that selfhood is merely a side-effect produced by language. He explores theories of the multiplicity of selfhood, the performativity of selfhood, and the fictionality of selfhood.

Although the desire is to structure a boundary between autobiography and fiction, he argues that this is impossible. Saunders views autobiografiction as a name for works that “hybridize autobiography and fiction” and the system that locks “autobiography and fiction together, in order to claim to keep them apart” (523). Autobiografiction allows writers to express selfhood but also the “anxiety or despair of selfhood” (528). The fictionalization of the autobiographical provides the distance necessary to express and counter the anxiety and despair.

Saunders also delves into the pseudonymity of autobiografiction. While the pseudonym for an author was used long before the late nineteenth century, he argues that modern disturbances in life-writing introduced a “comparable disturbance in the idea of authorship” (136). One “*fin de siècle* development” is that of authors breaking the contract implied in autobiography/biography in truthfully naming the subject and author (140). Saunders contends that so many exceptions to that contract or rule had long suggested it was more a “utopian hope” than a rule (141). However, he sees the fictionalization of the author for either autobiography or biography as a “radically disruptive act,” supporting his need for the category of autobiografiction (143). He also writes of the Great War’s impact, which magnified the natural “distorting power of memory” (162). Authors after the war saw a need to “fictionalize experiences that would otherwise be unbearably close [and] impossible to achieve any aesthetic detachment from” (162). While Saunders recognizes the war’s contribution to fictionalized memoirs, he finds it only one aspect of modernists’ focus on the inner life.

The pseudonymity referenced by both Reynolds and Saunders is an integral part of H.D.’s works. Rachel Blau DuPlessis writes that “H.D. began her official career as a writer with

a crisis of naming” (*Career* 6). We can argue that it came even earlier. Her father named her by running his finger down a list of names and lighting on *Hilda*. Her surname, Doolittle, was for her an odd, funny name that elicited mockery. Therefore, when Ezra Pound pronounced her “H.D. Imagist,” she was initially less disturbed at Pound’s naming of her than was her husband, Richard Aldington. Later, however, the name H.D. became a burden. It was so aligned with her Imagist poetry that exploration into new forms risked comparison to the perception of what the poet H.D. should produce. For H.D., the name became a role that she performed, a role that was confining. For her prose works and non-Imagist poetry, H. D. created a bevy of names—male, female, and non-gender-specific names. Often the new pseudonyms had the H.D. initials or D.A. initials for Doolittle and Aldington. Her wish was that her works would be published under each chosen pseudonym, but publishers adamantly refused. She once cleverly worked around this problem by titling one of her essays, “H.D. by Delia Alton.” Among H.D. scholars, there is much speculation on the significance of H.D.’s choice of each authorial name.<sup>6</sup> Her legal names were Hilda Aldington or Mrs. Richard Aldington; her gravestone reads “Hilda Doolittle Aldington.” Although she was far more than “H.D.,” that is the name we must employ, according to convention and for lack of a more definitive choice, when writing about her.

In her autobiografiction, H.D. enacts a new beginning or, more accurately, a series of new beginnings. It is not only the choice of authorial name that delineates her autobiografiction; it is also the form and content of each. H.D.’s title for *Bid Me to Live* was *A Madrigal*; *Today*, *Paint It Today*, *Asphodel*, and *Bid Me to Live* are routinely referred to collectively as H.D.’s *Madrigals*. As she works through her trauma, the focal point of the content tightens, and the narrative structures and devices change. When assessing her prose, feminist thinkers point out

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman does an excellent job of cataloging H.D.’s pseudonyms both in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and in *Penelope’s Web*, pp. 35-68.

H.D.'s subversive bending of narrative conventions as a challenge against hierarchical authority. In these three works, I argue that the change in content and narrative form is also a guide to her trauma recovery. It is impossible to know if H.D. orchestrated the textual evolution toward healing in the *Madrigals* or the evolution occurred because of her healing. In either case, the *Madrigals* are a textbook case of remembering, repeating, and working through.



### 1.2.2 *Paint It Today* (written 1921)

*The life of an artist . . . differs from the lives of other persons in that its events are becoming artistic sources even as they command his present attention. Instead of allowing each day, pushed back to the next, to lapse into imprecise memory, he shapes again the experiences which have shaped him. He is at once captive and liberator.*

Richard Ellmann in *James Joyce* (1959)

*My past, the past, the past that never was, and making something real of it. And it's always eluding me. I think I've found it and it's wrong. But the wrong way can be illuminating too, it so often points out the right way—ultimately.*

Perdita Schaffner quoting H. D. in “A Sketch of H. D.: The Egyptian Cat”

In 1921, H.D. embarked on her autobiographical fiction with the novel *Paint It Today*. The war had ended; she had survived its devastation physically but was shattered emotionally. Shortly after the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915 (which brought the war home to non-combatants), she gave birth to a stillborn child. The following year, her husband, Richard Aldington, became a soldier, traumatic because she and Aldington were pacifists who had done all they could to keep him out of the war. When forced to join or be conscripted, Aldington suddenly embraced being a soldier and much later wrote one of the first World War I novels, *Death of a Hero*. H.D.'s brother Gilbert Doolittle was killed in action in 1918; her father later died of a broken heart. Although not officially divorced until 1939, the Aldington marriage had collapsed by early 1919.

It had been a marriage of minds, the intimacy of feelings, respect, affection, and encouragement—especially artistic encouragement. The union’s collapse also resulted in the breakdown of the literary enclave (Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, and John Cournos) of which H.D. and Aldington were a part. While wracked with the Spanish flu in 1919, H.D. gave birth to her daughter, Perdita (“the lost one” in Latin)—not the daughter of her husband but of aspiring composer and music critic Cecil Gray. She was saved—physically, financially, and emotionally—by the young shipping heiress Winifred Ellerman (Bryher), who became H.D.’s lifelong companion.<sup>7</sup>

Another loss that H.D. attributed to the war years was her inability to write the impersonal, crystalline poetry for which she was known. She turned instead to prose as a mechanism for reclaiming her self. The unfinished *Paint It Today* (written under the *nom de plume* Helga Dart) is the first of these efforts. It remained unpublished until years after her death when it was included in *The Cutting Edge: Lesbian Life and Literature Series*. *Paint It Today* is different from *Asphodel* and *Bid Me to Live*: it is written in exquisite prose that is near poetic; it delves more deeply into her childhood; it more directly addresses H.D.’s bisexuality. When H.D. scholars consider *Paint It Today*, they often treat it as an anomaly that must constitute a category of its own rather than the precursor to *Asphodel* and *Bid Me to Live*. I begin with *Paint It Today*, however, as it lays out all of H.D.’s post-war struggles, most of which she revisits in the other two books—often with different emphasis—and some of which disappear as H.D. continues her exploration of the war years.

*Paint It Today* is the first in a series of portraits H.D. constructs of her war years, and within the text are portraits of herself and those who impact her life. Hugh Kenner argues that

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<sup>7</sup> Annie Winifred Ellerman (1894-1983) was a novelist, poet, and memoirist who used the pen name “Bryher,” taken after her favorite of the Isles of Sicily.

“the painter of self-portraits looks in a mirror, but the writer [of autobiografiction] must look in the mirror of memory” (Kenner 349). In launching into *Paint It Today*, H.D. makes a similar point. A portrait of one’s past is indelibly colored by the present, as one is looking into the mirror of memory with the eyes of succeeding experience but never with the enlightenment of the future. However, the text in *Paint It Today* is attributed to Helga Dart on H.D.’s typescript; the portraits are painted by a woman who both is and is not H.D. This designation complicates our relationship to the narrator who paints the portraits—and to the portraits themselves.

First is the portrait of “an archaic, small Hermione,” the girlhood-self of Midget—whether protagonist, hero, or object I will discuss further on (*Paint* 4). She is part of an “inferior race,” lacking in physical beauty yet with a spiritual beauty destined to be broken “in the process of civilizing, of schooling, of devitalizing” (5). As “the only girl in a very large family,” her “chief hunger” was for a twin sister (6). The next portrait is of an older Midget, a young woman who has failed in school, failed to live up to family expectations, and failed in her first love affair with the “irreverent male youth,” who cannot possibly be anyone other than Ezra Pound (7). Her yearning for a girl just like herself is fulfilled when she meets the beautiful Josepha (suggesting Frances Josepha Gregg). Midget now gains a new perspective on life, love, and poetry. How much of the attraction is due to Josepha’s artistic attributes, or Midget’s inherent erotic attraction to women, or Midget’s need to defy her family and the male youth (who all believe that Josepha has “an unwholesome quality about her”), is a decision for the reader (9). Whatever the reason, it is with Josepha’s appearance that Midget can contemplate the possibility of a future.

At this juncture, the narrator introduces—bit by bit—lines from an anonymous third century BCE Latin poem: “*Cras amet qui numquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet*,” which is often translated “Tomorrow let him love, who has never loved; he who has loved, let him love

tomorrow.” Throughout her story, the narrator continuously returns to and tinkers with this translation: linking the past and the future, linking both the past and future to the present, questioning the possibility of love, rejecting the idea that anyone she knew could know what love was or could be. The male youth, now referred to as her erstwhile fiancé, provided Midget the “shadow of an understanding” of love; Josepha provides her with—at least what she believed to be at the time—the truth of love (22). Projecting beyond “the compass of this story,” the narrator tells us that Midget will learn the greater truth of love, the “emotional white truth” (23). Before that pinnacle, she will also learn the black truth of love.

This black truth is not as ominous as it sounds; it is somewhat like the shadow of love provided by the erstwhile fiancé, but a shadow so black that it becomes “a glorious color” (23). There are other lessons to be learned. As the narrator points out, love can happen both in concert with one’s own will and against one’s own volition. Failing to embrace Midget’s vision of a shared future, Josepha abandons Midget and returns to the United States. Midget turns to the Faun (representing Richard Aldington), who is thoughtful, sympathetic, charming, “tolerant and kind” (25). Later, Josepha suddenly re-enters the story. She has entered into a sham marriage to provide cover for her affair with a married friend of her new husband. She then invites Midget to join her and her husband in their European travels. Instead of accepting the invitation, Midget turns to the Faun.

Midget’s parents, Professor and Mrs. Defreddie, then join her in Europe with the intent of taking Midget home to America, following a brief European tour. Midget has “never faced a direct issue [from her parents] with absolute defiance;” she has never said, “I can’t” or “I won’t” (39). However, she does not want to return to America. Midget plans how she will convince her mother but, at the last moment, knows she cannot speak to her mother without fear that her

words will forever fracture their relationship—or that she will be ordered to do as she is told and return home. Her anger at her mother is palpable; Midget even wonders how Orestes felt when he “held the knife to slay his mother,” Clytemnestra (42). She tries to diffuse her anger by thoughts of her mother’s sacrifice, but this only makes Midget angrier, for even as her mother sacrifices herself for others, she also sacrifices Midget on the altar of conformity. After a brief verbal outburst accompanied by foot stamping, she tells her mother that she plans to marry the Faun, Basil—an alliance the Defreddies would deem highly suitable. In this scene of defiance and submission, we learn that Mrs. Defreddie’s encounter has been with her daughter Margaret who ultimately—even though subversively—submitted. It was the mind and soul of Midget who exploded in defiance.

The narrator quickly dispenses with Midget’s marriage and the five years of the war but takes time dealing with its aftermath. Through her translation of *Cras amet*, the narrator infers that one must love tomorrow because “today is dead,” that there is no love left except the “love of duty, love of sacrifice” (46). Midget finds this especially true for Basil, who has embraced duty and sacrifice by joining the army at the expense of his “self,” his “soul” (47). She dismissively announces the end of their marriage with the phrase, Midget “had lost her companion,” and she, like Psyche, has been “sent on her mission into hell” (47-48). At this point, mid-way through *Paint It Today*, the text takes an intriguing turn.

The first half of the text has moved chronologically, from Midget/Margaret’s childhood through the following thirty years, with only the occasional foreshadowing of events. For students of H.D., it is obvious how closely the events and characters of the story correspond to those of H.D.’s life. With a polymodal focalization, the narrator has sometimes told the story of the protagonist’s inner self, Midget, and, at other times, of the protagonist’s outward self,

Margaret Defreddie. At other times, Midget and Margaret have been allowed to speak for themselves. The narrator has fought to maintain objectivity but occasionally loses the battle and lets her own I creep in. She warns, however, that her lack of objectivity is an error because (an unidentified) you “and I are out of this story, are observing” (26). In *Penelope’s Web*, Susan Stanford Friedman proposes that this text is an analysis carried out by the author/narrator/analyst Helga Dart and the protagonist/analysand Midget/Margaret. However, I find that the textual *ménage à trois* corresponds to Henke’s concept of three subject positions. Foremost is the recollected experiences of the authorial consciousness provided by Helga Dart—perhaps the part of H.D. that can (almost) maintain the distance necessary to act as the analyst. Margaret Defreddie is Midget’s physical self: the object created by—traumatized by—the world. Midget is the inner self, the hero, the protagonist that Helga Dart hopes to save.

At the halfway point—without warning or transition—the chronological order of events breaks down. In a Bergsonian manner, the text breaks its connection with real time and enters the *durée* of individual consciousness. Chapters 5 and 6 become a “tidal wave” of memories and fantasies, experiences and feelings, life and art, myth and reality (*Paint* 48). Midget responds—in letters probably not sent—to a 1915 letter from Josepha. Midget confronts the lies that she now understands existed in their relationship. However, she counters with a new fantasy—a lover who is never named but can only be Edgar Allan Poe’s spirit. She focuses obsessively on the baby that Josepha wrote she was about to deliver, but even Helga Dart does not mention H.D.’s lost child. Midget becomes obsessed with poetry, art, and mythology. She chides herself that she could not feel as Basil wanted her to feel, with “warmth and depth and warm intensity,” for she could only feel with “cold intensity” (59). Most alarmingly, Midget has “found a new trick of seeing,” a trick that even she realizes is “not altogether a good trick” (48). Friedman

suggests that H.D. wrests control of the text away from Helga Dart during this transition to accent the modernist conflict between the “real and ideal, the personal and the transcendental;” in other words, it is an artistic ploy (*Penelope* 209). Nevertheless, at the end of Chapter 6, when the narrator regains control of the text, Helga Dart sympathizes with many of Midget’s ramblings.

Finally, in Chapters 7 and 8, “it was over, . . . the peril, the suffering, the agonizing,” the five-year agony “we called the war” and the two years of recovery (*Paint* 67). The narrator relates that she (not Midget) has “survived” and “grown up” so that she can resume Midget’s story (67-68). It seems that Margaret has been supplanted by both the narrator and Midget. The narrator tells the story of Midget and the girl, white Althea (depicting Bryher), the companionate relationship of two equals—thoughtful women who talk and argue, agree and disagree, in a present which is no longer “dead,” but “living” (80). *Cras amet* no longer loves among the dead but the living. As Midget becomes alive, she becomes less dependent on the narrator, for she has recovered her I. After hinting in Chapter 5 that readers will hear more of Brindel (symbolizing H.D.’s daughter, Perdita) and ending the text with this same promise in Chapter 8, *Paint it Today* breaks off. H.D. does not allow Helga Dart to write the end of this story.

H.D. rivals Virginia Woolf in the mass of memoirs, letters, essays, and notes that exist in addition to their artistic works. In these documents, both H.D. and Woolf provide access to the person, the artist, and their art. Like Woolf, H.D.’s perspective on love, sexuality, war, politics, patriarchy, and art are discernable in her artistic works but laid bare in her life-writing where she explains, interprets, questions, and justifies her art. *Paint It Today* is an anomaly. Within the text, H.D. bares her soul; concerning the text, there is only silence. H.D. abruptly ends the work and, without comment, moves on. Still, she picks up themes from *Paint It Today* in her other works of

autobiografiction, in her memoirs, and in *Helen in Egypt*. Often, when she revisits these themes, her approach is quite different. In some of her later works, she omits a recurring theme entirely.

An abundance of scholarship offers rationales for her alterations and exclusions. For example, *Paint It Today* is considered H.D.'s "most' lesbian' novel" with its references to Oscar Wilde, Algernon Swinburne's poetry, and hyacinths to encode homoeroticism (Laity xviii). Undoubtedly, referring to Althea as *the friend* can invoke "the code common in lesbian literature for lover" (Friedman *Penelope* 205). Likewise, Midget's passionate desire for "a girl child of her own age, a twin sister," and the satisfaction of this desire when she meets Josepha can establish Midget's "lesbian desire" and evoke the concept of the sister-lover (*Paint* 6; Laity xxi). Although so prevalent in *Paint It Today*, Friedman argues that, in her later works, H.D. felt the need to veil this heretical "lesbian erotic" (*Penelope* 211). This claim gains relevance when considering the obscenity charges raised against Radclyffe Hall for *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928.

Nevertheless, there are interpretive possibilities beyond the lesbian erotic in this and most of H.D.'s other works. Before beginning *Paint It Today*, H.D. and Bryher traveled to America, where they spent time with H.D.'s Bryn Mawr classmate Marianne Moore, one of H.D.'s "most important *literary* friendships" (Debo 35, my emphasis). H.D. and Moore had reconnected after Bryn Mawr when both began publishing poetry, with H.D. and Richard Aldington publishing Moore's work in the *Egoist* during the years they were assistant editors (1914-1917). Until H.D.'s death, she and Moore were both "personal friends and professional allies," writing reviews of each other's work, as well as providing both support and critique in private correspondence (35). Following the trip to America, when H.D. began writing *Paint It Today*, she wrote to Moore asking for her appraisal of the work, even sending Moore a draft. This request for feedback is remarkable as it hints that H.D. began this work—which is so personal



and was abandoned so quickly—with a view toward publishing it. It also raises the possibility that the sister H.D. longs for throughout her work can be a sisterhood as well as a sister-love, a sisterhood that H.D. hints at in a letter to Moore. H.D. writes: “*You* are one of the tribe to which these two girls, Josepha & Midget, belong. Bryher is also one of the tribe, with European variations” (quoted in Debo 57; H.D.’s emphasis). The tribe to which H.D. seems to refer is a group of women—Moore, May Sinclair, and others, as well as Frances Gregg and Bryher—who consider each other intellectual equals and support each other’s literary endeavors. This tribe may be a sisterhood like that of the loving and supportive sisters Philomel and Procne, a sisterhood that H.D. invokes throughout her *oeuvre*.

However, it is not only the shrouding of the lesbian erotic that haunts H.D.’s later autobiografiction and pleads for further consideration. In *Paint It Today*, H.D. portrays her marriage as a lesser of two evils, a ploy to subvert parental command, and she dismissively remarks on its end. However, even in this text, there is the possibility that her relationship with Basil is what she referred to as the black truth of love, similar to the shadow of love introduced by the erstwhile fiancé but far more intense. In this family romance, her mother is the villain; H.D.’s dead child goes unmentioned; her living child is a promise that remains unfulfilled.<sup>8</sup>

It is not only the gaps, erasures, and disparities that make this text unique. The first half of the book is traditionally chronological, with only brief forays into foreshadowing. The second half of the book ebbs and flows—in time, in plot, in discourse. Throughout the text are beginnings—primarily, the beginning of relationships. In *Paint It Today*, H.D. explores four

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of *family romance*, see my introduction n.3. The family romance is discernible in H.D.’s earliest works of autobiografiction in a number of ways cited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. There is the lack of a nurturing mother and an almost non-existent father as well as a question of sexual identity. There are also H.D.’s narratives espousing her views on art and artistic vision. In Gilbert and Gubar’s works on the family romance, this search for a female aesthetic takes center stage.

relationships and the impact of each on her construction of self. The relationships with Josepha and the erstwhile fiancé are problematic; the relationships with Basil (initially) and Althea are supportive and sustaining. More textual space—as well as more emotion—is allocated to Josepha and Althea than to the erstwhile fiancé and Basil. This emphasis supports the argument that *Paint It Today* “seems to imply a primacy to H.D.’s same-sex experiences” (Romagnolo 29). However, in viewing the text as an early attempt at a trauma narrative, the ebb and flow are consistent with an effort to reconstruct, rather than construct, a sense of self.

As Max Saunders describes autobiografiction with pseudonymity, H.D.’s creation of *Paint it Today* is a radically disruptive act. She distances her self from her story to the degree that the text is often unfathomable to the reader. The despondency is palpable—as are the epiphanies and moments of vision, especially when she speaks of her art. It is a beginning of the healing process and a story of beginnings: a beginning for the girl who saw herself as a failure yet can now envision herself as an artist; the beginnings of relationships and the knowledge of love gained with each one. The breakdown in the second half of the book and its abrupt ending is indicative of the failure of this book as a healing mechanism. Helga Dart and Midget struggle for control over the portraits being painted. At times they are separate and distinct; at times, they are as one. They struggle for control of the narrative, each trying to advance their vision of aesthetics and love. Still, *Paint It Today* is a beginning.

In *Asphodel* and *Bid Me to Live*, the assessment of H.D.’s marriage evolves and becomes more significant, with her feelings for Richard Aldington alternating among love, anger, and heartache. H.D.’s view of her mother develops from one of a subjugated and subjugating presence to one of the divine. The stillbirth of her first child and the later birth of her daughter, Perdita, alternate in these later works as significant life events. Sisterhood versus the sister-love

are characterized and weighted differently. *Paint It Today*'s opening salvo of Midget being labeled "an archaic, small Hermione" goes unexplained in this text. Still, Hermione will be a presence, not only in its companion texts but throughout H.D.'s *oeuvre*. These works of autobiografiction exemplify the efficacy of scriptotherapy in reconstructing, interpreting, and integrating experiences. In H.D.'s constant reworking of these experiences, a persuasive case for Henke's concept of "re-memory" and reenactment emerges. Alternatively, as H.D. suggests, maybe one can get it right—ultimately.

### 1.2.3 *Asphodel* (written 1921-1922)

*What cannot be said will be wept*

Sappho (7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE)

*Do not pity me, spare that,*

*but how I envy you*

*your chance of death.*

H.D. “Envy” (1916)<sup>9</sup>

*[This] novel is not intended as a work of art—at least not as it stands. . . . I am working through a wood, a tangle of bushes and bracken out to a clearing, where I may see again.*

H.D. letter to John Cournos (c. 1920-21)<sup>10</sup>

Susan Stanford Friedman’s chronology lists *Paint It Today* as written in 1921 and *Asphodel* in 1921-22. Both works cover the period in H.D.’s life from roughly 1911 to 1920. The central characters from *Paint It Today* reappear in *Asphodel* but are renamed; significant events from *Paint It Today* reappear in *Asphodel* but with different emphasis and often altered scenarios. Like *Paint It Today*, H.D. did not submit *Asphodel* for publication; both were

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<sup>9</sup> H.D. wrote a series of poems she called *The Islands* in 1916. The individual poem “The Islands” was published in 1920. Three poems included in *The Islands*—“Amaranth,” “Eros,” and “Envy”—were redacted to remove signs of H.D.’s personal anguish and published in *Heliodora* (1924). Long after H.D.’s death, these three poems were published in their entirety in *H.D. Collected Poems 1912-1944*, edited by Louis A. Matz (1983).

<sup>10</sup> Donna Krolik Hollenberg notes that the letter refers to either *Paint It Today* or *Fields of Asphodel*. See p. 148 n.1.

published long after her death— *Paint It Today* in 1986 and *Asphodel* in 1992. Unlike *Paint It Today* and *Bid Me to Live*, H.D. offers no author's name on her unpublished title page for this work. She offered three possible titles—*Asphodel*, *Fields of Asphodel*, and *This Side of the Grave*. Robert Spoo chose *Asphodel* for the published title as this was how H.D. spoke of the text.

While there is much on which to speculate, the text itself offers one certainty. *Asphodel* is a forceful account of the effect of trauma on the mind and the spirit; it presents not only the power of trauma but also the hopelessness felt by the traumatized. It is with this lack of hope that H.D. pens her epigraph:

“*There are no fields of asphodel this side of the grave.*” *W.S. Landor*

This quotation is from the works of nineteenth-century poet Walter Savage Landor. While many of Landor's fellow poets thought he had quite a way with words, the reading public did not. Therefore, his fame lies not with his poetry but with his massive, five-volume prose work, *Imaginary Conversations*, in which he pairs two people (often mythological characters) from antiquity to debate a weighty philosophical topic. H.D. lifts her epigraph from Landor's fictional conversation between Aesop, of fable fame, and Rhodope, a young, enslaved hetaera (prostitute). Rhodope begs Aesop to help her gain knowledge, wisdom, and love. Aesop tells Rhodope that we can acquire these gifts only at the moment of death. In the following passage, Aesop alludes to three women: Laodameia, who killed herself to join her husband, killed in the Trojan War; Helen, whose passion led her to become the most hated woman in both Greece and Troy; Leda; who concurrently bore two sets of twins, all significant players in the Trojan War, by Jupiter and her husband.

Laodameia died; Helen died; Leda, the beloved of Jupiter, went before. It is better to repose in the earth betimes than to sit up late; better than to cling pertinaciously to what we feel crumbling under us, and to protract an inevitable fall. We may enjoy the present while we are insensible of infirmity and decay; but the present, like a note in music, is nothing but as it appertains to what is past and what is to come. There are no fields of amaranth on this side of the grave: there are no voices, O Rhodope! that are not too soon mute, however tuneful: there is no name, with whatever emphasis of passionate love repeated, of which the echo is not faint at last. (Landor 11) <sup>11</sup>

H.D. drew her epigraph from this exquisite passage and attributed it to Landor while changing *amaranth* to *asphodel* with no editorial sign to indicate a change.

Spoo proposes that this substitution may have been “unintentional,” citing H.D.’s casual disregard for spelling and punctuation (xv). This explanation is hard to embrace, as H.D. refers to this altered phrase numerous times within the text. However, I agree with Spoo’s assessment that the entire passage—and not only the single changed word—is relevant to H.D.’s *Asphodel*. The passage begs the question: Is living always worth the effort? After the trauma of her war—World War I—H.D. asks this question of herself. However, in her substitution, of *asphodel* for *amaranth*, she communicates the purpose of her narrative. Since both are flowers, why is this significant? The *amaranth* is a colorful flower that does not fade—a metaphor for everlasting beauty, immortality. The *asphodel* is a colorless flower that grows in barren soil—a metaphor for

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<sup>11</sup> In October 1919, John Bailey published *A Day-Book of Landor*, which Virginia Woolf reviewed for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Woolf notes that “single passages [of Landor’s prose] stand out in memory as some poetry does, but very little prose.” She cites the “Aesop and Rhodope” passage above as an example. See: Woolf, Virginia. “Landor in Little.” *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Volume III 1919-1924*, edited by Andrew McNeillie, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988, pp. 110-13.

gloom, signifying a phantom existence. While later Greek poets and post-Renaissance English poets romanticized the fields of asphodel as paradise, Homer paints a different picture. In the *Odyssey*, the asphodel meadows covered the area of the “shades” in Hades, a “ghostly gray” area, “incapable of giving pleasure” (Tripp 108). My interpretation of what I view as H.D.’s deliberate substitution is that she contemplates both of Aesop’s choices—of early death (suicide) or of a life of clinging pertinaciously to a world crumbling around her. She views this clinging to life as an existence lived as a ghost, a phantom, which is a part of some of the Helen myths that H.D. will revisit in *Helen in Egypt*. In her present state, she knows there are no fields of amaranth for her on either side of the grave. However, the act of writing unlocks a third possibility—to emerge from the devastation of her present and create a living future.

In *Asphodel*, H.D. most powerfully describes her trauma—what it feels like, what it does to the psyche, what it does to one’s sense of self. The poet surfaces only occasionally. While the book is sometimes acknowledged as an early example of stream-of-consciousness writing, it might more accurately be described as a jumble of direct and indirect discourse and a muddle of narrative perspective, thoughts, and emotions. As Friedman writes, there is no “distinctive narrative voice,” or more bluntly, there is not even an “identifiable narrator” (*Penelope* 171, 196). Much of the text is simply a spewing of raw emotion. However, for all its chaos, the text is meticulously presented in two parts, each with fifteen chapters and each part nearly the same number of pages. Part I covers 1911-1912; Part II resumes late in World War I, with flashbacks to the intervening years, and ends in about 1920, as did *Paint It Today*.

Our analysand—it is difficult to refer to her as the protagonist—in *Asphodel* is Hermione Gart. H.D. teased the significance of Hermione in *Paint It Today* by describing the child Midget as “an archaic, small Hermione” and continues to tease throughout her *oeuvre* (*Paint* 4). In

Greek mythology, Hermione was a small child abandoned by her mother, Helen, when Helen escaped with Paris to Troy. In Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione is the wife of Sicilian king Leontes and mother of their daughter, Perdita. Shakespeare's Hermione is falsely accused of infidelity by Leontes, imprisoned, and reported dead. Leontes orders that Perdita be taken into the wild and abandoned, but both Hermione and Perdita reappear at the play's end. Given the fleeting reference to Hermione in *Paint It Today*, it is difficult to unearth H.D.'s intent. Bearing in mind Midget's explosive reaction to her mother's expectation that she will return to America, Hermione as Helen's abandoned child seems the most likely iteration.<sup>12</sup> The allusion becomes more involved in *Asphodel*, as well as in *Bid Me to Live*.

*Asphodel* appears to open as a conventional narrative with Hermione as the heroine and with third-person limited narration to provide entrée into Hermione's mind and record direct discourse between Hermione and her fellow characters. However, reliance on this narrative structure soon fades. Perhaps there is no third-person narrator, and Hermione herself narrates this book. If there had been a narrator, they lose control. Hermione then eclipses the narrator to provide entrée into her own thoughts. When Hermione reports words she has spoken as direct discourse, she uses *I*; when providing access to her thoughts and feelings, she refers to herself as *Hermione*, *she* or *her*. Direct discourse becomes a messy mélange of dialogue set off by quotation marks with rarely any attribution to a speaker.

In the first six chapters of Part I, Hermione, Fayne Josepha Rabb (based on Frances Gregg), and Fayne's mother, Clara, explore France and then spend a brief time together in London before the Rabbs return to America. The treatment of Hermione and Fayne's relationship differs from that of Midget and Josepha in *Paint It Today*. *Asphodel's* emphasis is on the agony

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<sup>12</sup> H.D.'s mother was Helen Doolittle.



of Hermione's search—for her self, her connection to Fayne, but, most importantly, for validation of her artistic soul. While Spoo refers to *Asphodel* as a *roman à clef*—a form prevalent within H.D.'s literary circle—I find this first section more akin to the *Künstlerroman*.<sup>13</sup> It begins as a treatise on how differently (compared to Fayne and Clara) Hermione views people, places, and experiences; it becomes a study on the physical and emotional impact of art and music on Hermione. She is “something different. . . something else. Different,” and it is in England, rather than America, that she can “write, work” (*Asphodel* 53, 52). Hermione's love is likewise different; she has the strength necessary to cut the cords of family and convention. When Fayne decides to return to America, Hermione realizes that the difference between them goes deeper than their views on people and places, art and music.

In the second section of *Asphodel's* Part I, Hermione meets Jerrold Darrington (representing Richard Aldington). As in *Paint It Today*, he is caring and supportive. Hermione is able to tell him things “that she would never have thought she could tell anybody, things it appeared she had not even been aware of” (65). One of the things about which she can speak is her relationship with Fayne Rabb. However, speaking of George Lowndes (an iteration of Ezra Pound) is more complicated; their adolescent relationship and on-again-off-again engagement are difficult for her to put behind. She wants the “anchor,” the “haven” that is Darrington, yet when Fayne Rabb arrives back in London with her new husband and asks Hermione to travel with them to Europe, she falters, turning to George Lowndes for support (70). George acting as her “nearest male relative”—which he is not—stops this venture cold (86). Alone, Hermione escapes to France to sort out her life. George is also in Paris, and Hermione is forced to confront

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<sup>13</sup> In my section on *Bid Me to Live*, I will explore the *roman à clef* aspects of H.D.'s autobiographical fiction as well as the works of her contemporaries and friends. The fiction of D.H. Lawrence, Richard Aldington, John Cournos, and Frances Gregg also focuses on the pre-war/war years and the relationships within their literary circle.

his perfidious habit of becoming engaged to any number of women. Later, Darrington arrives in Paris.

In the last few pages of Part 1, Hermione has an experience that changes her life's trajectory. She befriends Shirley, an English woman who, like Hermione, believed she was engaged to George. Following her disappointment with George, Shirley has formed another *mésalliance*. Arriving at Shirley's apartment for a prearranged visit, Hermione finds that Shirley has killed herself. Hermione finds that she must assign blame for Shirley's death: "George had killed her certainly;" Shirley's new lover had killed her; Hermione, herself, had killed Shirley by not sharing her own misery with her new friend (103). She postulates that marriage could have saved Shirley from being a "virgin, gone mad, simply, like Cassandra" (103). In the end, she believes that Shirley has chosen her alternative: *It is better to repose in the earth betimes than to sit up late; better than to cling pertinaciously to what we feel crumbling under us, and to protract an inevitable fall*. Hermione must now choose hers.

Part 1 abruptly ends as Hermione ponders Shirley's suicide and leans on Darrington for comfort. When Part II begins mid-World War I, Hermione and Darrington have been married for nearly three years. While *Asphodel's* Hermione assiduously avoids assigning dates or timeframes to events, the impression is that Hermione's traumatic reaction to Shirley's death is the impetus for her marriage. To place these occurrences autobiographically, Spoo recounts in his Appendix to *Asphodel* that H.D. arrived at the Paris apartment of a new friend Margaret Cravens—"Pound's friend and secret patron"—in June 1912 to find that Cravens had killed herself the day before (214). H.D. and Aldington married in October 1913. In *Paint It Today*, Midget's marriage to Basil was a ploy to escape her mother's demand to return to America. In *Asphodel*, Hermione's marriage to Darrington is an attempt to give her life meaning and retain her sanity.

This difference does not mean that, compared to Midget's mother, Hermione's mother comes out unscathed. "The good little Eugenia," Hermione's mother, makes no appearance in *Asphodel* but is forever present in Hermione's thoughts (23). Hermione defends Eugenia against George Lowndes' disdain. She muses over what Eugenia's reaction might be to the art and music of Europe. She worries that she has broken Eugenia's heart. She praises Eugenia's softness, sentimentality, and beauty. She thinks of Eugenia's cruelty. She remembers that she almost married George Lowndes to "check-mate old Eugenia" (70). In Part II, Eugenia almost disappears.

Part II can be nothing other than a trauma narrative. It opens in a moment that defies time: "Darrington came across the room. . . . Darrington *came* as he *had always come* at her voice, *coming* toward her, . . . Darrington *called* her darling, *had always called* her darling, *had been calling* her darling forever" (107; my italics). The aspects of the verbs *come* and *call* connect Hermione's present to the immediate past and an eternal past. For Hermione, the past and the present are one. The melding is so complete that she cannot place the current moment in context to the action in Part I of the novel. She asks her husband, Jerrold Darrington:

"You remember that girl I almost forgot." "Which girl . . .?" "That American girl that crossed with me—when just was it?" "You mean when you first crossed, two years before the war." "Yes two years before the war. Where was it?" "Where was what?" "Someone, something got—killed. . . . long ago, something happened long and long ago—the other side of a chasm." (107-08)

The two-year period comprising the first part of the novel is thus quickly dispatched. Hermione then just as quickly disposes of the pre-war happiness of her marriage. She asks Darrington: "How long have we been married?" . . . "It's almost three years now." "One year before the war.

Italy and coming back just in time and everything broken, everyone scattered . . . everything different” (110). As Bessell A. van der Kolk suggests of the traumatized, she is frozen, trapped in a place and time she desperately wishes “to escape” (*Body* 10). Yet only the war provides a meaningful reference to anchor her to time; she must remember the war years to escape.

As Hermione describes, her mind has been “glued down, broken, and held back like a wild bird caught in bird-lime. . . . months and months when her flaming mind beat up and she found she was caught, . . . her mind-wings beating, beating and her feet caught, her feet caught, glued like a wild bird in bird-lime” (113). While the image of a bird caught in bird-lime does not readily pop into the mind of a twenty-first-century American, it is the perfect image of fear and helplessness for H.D.’s moment in time. Feelings trap Hermione; she has lost her very capacity to think; there are “no words to tell it in” (113). Hermione can only return in memory to happier pre-war times and describe them. Her contemplative, descriptive pauses do not evade “the temporality of the story” but instead hint at “a message still illegible but insistent” (Genette 100, 102). She is not yet able to describe the present, but she begins to remember the past sights and sounds of pre-war Italy: the “prismatic colours” of the sea as though “seen through crystal;” the “jagged edge of Capri . . . where Odysseus heard the Syren voices;” “little plots of earth” with marigolds and irises “set like bright rugs” on the side of the mountain (*Asphodel* 112). However, constantly intruding is the pain, destruction, and death that she attributes to the war.

Throughout the narrative, H.D.’s disruption of temporal order seems far less what Gérard Genette calls “deliberately sabotaged” for use as a narrative device and more indicative of what Cathy Caruth calls a “wound of the mind—the breach in the mind’s experience of time self and the world” (Genette 35; Caruth *Unclaimed* 3). Dominick LaCapra suggests that this collapsing of the distinction between past and present is a form of transference indicative of trauma. The

traumatized individual is “haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes—scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked” (LaCapra 21). Hermione is haunted not only by the war deaths but by the death of her child. She cannot escape the destruction of Europe nor the destruction of her marriage.

Not only is her relationship to time disarticulated, but Hermione also has no sense of a unified self. By Part II, all attempts toward a conventional narrative have evaporated. The *mélange* of dialogue has disintegrated into chaos. This part opens with “immediate speech” (Genette’s preferred term for *interior monologue*), virtually obliterating the narrator and giving Hermione complete control (173). However, Hermione cannot take advantage of this control. In her immediate speech, she consistently refers to herself as *she* and *her* rather than *I*. As Hermione explains it, “her thoughts were not her thoughts. They came from outside” (*Asphodel* 125). Her greatest struggle is to find “Where—am I?” a question not intended to establish the physical space she occupies but a cry against her dissociative state (107). She fights for what Genette refers to as the “conquest of the *I*,” which he attributes either to the author’s need to “detach himself from himself” or to, as in Hermione’s case, the exact opposite: “the difficult experience of relating to oneself” (249). I would argue that, for trauma victims, the conquest must also include relating to oneself as a single unified self. Hermione begins her conquest of her *I* halfway through Part II when she starts to speak of herself alternately as *I* and *she*. Hermione herself remarks on this transition: “*She* was in two parts. Part of *her* had got out, was out, was *herself*. . . . *I* don’t yet quite know how *I* did it. . . . *She* was re-established” (*Asphodel* 148; my italics). However, this re-establishment of a unified self remains throughout the novel in an uncompleted state.

To find her I, Hermione must cease trying to forget; she “must remember, try to remember” (114). With remembering, she must find the words to tell her story. Before the war, Hermione had “the ability to cope with words, to write words;” now words “fused with her horror and the memories that weren’t real” (114). Hermione’s I was lost during the war. She had her child during an air raid—those blitz attacks by German Zeppelins (called *baby-killers* by the British press) that brought the war home to British civilians. She could not tell her story, “for there were no words to tell it in” (113). The child was stillborn, yet “still born” (114); Hermione is a mother, yet she “is not, was not” (122). Her pacifist husband, who spent the first year of the war fighting against it and trying to escape it, joins the war effort to escape conscription and becomes—unfathomably to Hermione—a soldier committed to war. Jerrold has also found that, for all his love for Hermione, he can escape the feeling of death and destruction only by having relationships with other women. Hermione also escapes—into a relationship with Cyril Vane (based on Cecil Gray), by whom she becomes pregnant with Phoebe Fayne (signifying H.D.’s daughter Perdita).

While the mother in *Paint It Today* was a threat, she becomes more of a conscience in Part I of *Asphodel*. Then as Part II comes to a close, there is a rambling potpourri of thoughts on the sisterhood of women—mothers, daughters, sisters: the Madonna, Helen and Hermione, Aphrogenia mother of Rome, Mnemosyne mother of the Muses, and Hermione’s mother, Eugenia. However, the most significant distinction between *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel* is that, in *Asphodel*, H.D. first writes of the trauma associated with the stillbirth of Hermione’s first child and the collapse of her marriage. The account of the marriage’s end is troubling because, regardless of complications in the union, Hermione is reliant on Jerrold and their alliance.

In my section on *Bid Me to Live*, I not only delve into the protagonist's reaction to the end of this marriage but also those fictionalized by Aldington, John Cournos, and D.H. Lawrence. For *Asphodel*, however, more pertinent are the letters Aldington wrote to H.D. from April 1918 (before her pregnancy) until April 1919 (following Perdita's birth). Sadly, H.D.'s letters to Aldington during this time were lost or destroyed.<sup>14</sup> Aldington's letters to H.D. deal frankly with the "open" marriage they had fashioned. Always asking after Cecil Gray and writing about Arabella, his current love interest, Aldington writes, "Really, it is true that one has many lovers but only one love. . . . I can never be happy without you" (Zilboorg 49). In early August 1918, H.D. wrote to Aldington of her fear that she might be pregnant with Gray's child. In response to this suspicion and throughout her pregnancy, Aldington offers full emotional and limited (due to his lack of means) financial support. They continue critiquing and collaborating on their art. He supports H.D.'s budding relationship with Bryher, which he views as primarily as built on aesthetics.<sup>15</sup> He opines on the sadness of his and H.D.'s new marital dilemma when, in the past, their "love was so deep, so untroubled really by our other love-affairs" (105). He also deliberates over social and legal concerns—how to present the pregnancy and the impact of English laws on marriage and legitimacy. As the war wore on, Aldington suffered from the physical ailments common to the World War I soldier—trench fever carried by lice, possibly influenza—and a morbid fascination with death.

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<sup>14</sup> We don't know exactly how or why H.D.'s letters to Aldington were destroyed, but Carolyn Zilboorg offers a number of possibilities. Aldington saved the letters H.D. wrote to him while he was "at the front" and brought them home to H.D. for safekeeping each time he was on leave. Norman Holmes Pearson wrote many years later that H.D. told him she left her letters to Aldington in their apartment when she moved out and that Aldington destroyed them. See: Zilboorg, Caroline, editor. *Richard Aldington & H.D.: Their Lives in Letters, 1918-61*. Manchester UP, 2003, pp. 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> In 1918, H.D. introduces Bryher (Winifred Ellerman) to Aldington via a letter. Aldington and Bryher then begin a correspondence critiquing each other's work.

In *Asphodel*, Hermione's appraisal of Darrington's resolve to end their marriage differs significantly from Aldington's questioning how best to handle their situation in his letters—although Hermione recounts many of the same quandaries. Both accounts speak to the registration of the child's birth, parentage, and their future relationship. However, Hermione's version of the final break focuses on the words “infidelity,” “divorce,” “a cheat,” “offender,” “law,” and “perjury” (*Asphodel* 196-202). The significance of their estrangement does not lie in the truthfulness of either account; instead, it lies in H.D.'s remembering, repeating, and reworking of her trauma. In *Paint It Today*, the five traumatic years are glossed over and dismissed; in *Asphodel*, they take center stage. As Hermione tells us, “words like white lead came from her with the force of something beyond Hermione. Hermione, worn past endurance, found words that she had never dreamed she had the strength to utter” (198). With these words, H.D.'s healing has begun.

What brings Hermione to this place of healing is the girl with the “hard face, child face,” a girl who is “hard, pedantic,” and domineering (169). Hermione is both fascinated and repelled by this child who stares at her always with eyes that are “glazed over like the eyes of the blind” (176). Hermione hates the girl and hates her eyes because her eyes are always asking, “what is truth? . . . what is self?” (178-79). The girl is the “fantastically wealthy” Beryl de Rothfeldt (Bryher), a “devastating cruel daemon” who will not let Hermione rest (187, 179). With Beryl, Hermione talks of literature, painting, and Greek culture—all her loves that reality's harshness has displaced. Beryl and her family make all the practical and financial arrangements that plague Hermione. In the end, Hermione turns to Beryl. In the beginning, Hermione had “only wanted to take” from Beryl (177). In the end, Hermione makes Beryl promise to give up thoughts of



suicide and “grow up” so that Beryl can take care of Hermione’s newborn child—take care of the child “exactly like a puppy” (206).

H.D.’s near geometric precision in building Parts 1 and 2 and her story’s chronological order gives credence to a linear text. However, the pertinent time gap between the two parts and what is hidden in that gap belies linearity; the mental disorder of Part 2 invalidates it. One can argue that *Asphodel* is a circular text. It begins with Hermione’s love for Fayne and her heartbreak in finding that they could not build a supportive and sustaining relationship. *Asphodel* ends with Hermione and Beryl developing the sort of relationship that Hermione could only wish for with Fayne. However, Hermione negates the argument for circularity as she describes her idea of the veil of Aphrodite:

[I]f your lover leaves, you stoop down and pick the broken cyclamen and make a border for the veil. Darrington can never be torn from the veil of her Loves. . . .  
 The veil must be woven subtly and one flower cannot disown another. Fayne is the very sea-blue edge. The edge of hyacinths is (though I had forgotten her)  
 Fayne (136).

This passage hints at H.D.’s notion of the palimpsestic layering of events and their associated emotions. A past event may be imperfectly erased and overwritten by a new event, yet the past retains some power to color the perception of the present. As tempting as the palimpsest theory may be, it hints at a degree of authority lacking in this text. *Asphodel* is a text of ebb and flow—remembering, repeating, and attempted reconciliation.

In *Asphodel*, H.D. brings memories, feelings, and words together to create a testimony. In—almost, but not quite—finding her I, Hermione becomes the narrator and, possibly, the analyst. She has—almost, but not quite—fulfilled two functions of the narrator: the story is

becoming more compelling, and the text is becoming more controlled (Genette 255). However, the function of the narrator's orientation toward the narratee requires speculation: who is the narratee? Genette contends that "every discourse is necessarily addressed to someone and always contains below the surface an appeal to the receiver" (260). I would argue that, in *Asphodel*, H.D. is the narratee—the listener—and that this is where the emphasis of the text lies. For more than a decade, she becomes "the reader of [her] own self" (261). This brings us back to Suzette Henke's concept of three "subject-positions": (1) the recollected experiences of the "authorial consciousness," (2) the "early, fragmented (and often traumatized) version of the self," and (3) the "ostensibly coherent subject" that is revealed in the process of scriptotherapy (xiii; xv). For most of *Asphodel*, Hermione is the fragmented self lost in the wood, the tangle of bushes and bracken. She is alone in this quest with only her recollected experiences and no authorial consciousness to guide her. At last, Hermione becomes the ostensibly coherent subject, almost the analyst, the authorial consciousness. H.D. is the reader, the listener who begins to see again.

As *Asphodel* comes to an end (c. 1919), Hermione initially believes that the "past seemed safe and secure and the war was but a curtain that had fallen," that she and Jerrold Darrington can put the "dark disaster" behind them (*Asphodel* 195-96). When it becomes clear to Hermione that she cannot merely extinguish the past, she turns to Beryl de Rothfeldt (depicting Bryher), who will not allow Hermione to "forget" but makes her "remember" (179).<sup>16</sup> The book ends with Hermione forming what she sees as a supportive relationship with Beryl. However, for H.D., *Asphodel* did not result in the hoped-for closure to her war trauma. She abandoned *Asphodel*

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<sup>16</sup> While *Paint It Today*, *Asphodel*, and *Bid Me to Live* all cover H.D.'s war years, there is one traumatic event that is only mentioned in *Asphodel*—and here only briefly. While pregnant with her daughter, Perdita, H.D. was deathly ill from World War I's flu epidemic. She credited Bryher's care for her survival. In *Asphodel*, she includes a brief, muddled scene in which (perhaps) a doctor, in khaki "on special duty—epidemic," moves a delirious Hermione from her rooming house to a medical facility (188). Later, Darrington visits Hermione and refers to her "set-back" (191). In the "Advent" section of *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. and Freud discuss the pandemic, as Freud's pregnant daughter died of the flu.

and—much later—remembered, repeated, and reworked these same experiences in *Bid Me to Live*.

#### 1.2.4 *Bid Me to Live* (written 1939-1950)

*I am amazed at the sudden “mushroom growth” of cheap psycho analysis everywhere. Five novels one after the other are based on it: its in everything. And I want to prove it wont do—its turning life into a case.*

Katherine Mansfield letter to John Middleton Murry

October 13, 1920

*The ghost, whatever it was, was not dead. Ghosts don't, of course, die.*

H.D. *Bid Me to Live*

*Stories are the only enchantment possible, for when we begin to see our suffering as a story, we are saved.*

Anaïs Nin *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*

In October 1959, H. D. instructed Norman Holmes Pearson, her editor and literary advisor, to destroy carbons of the unpublished *Asphodel* in preparation for the publication of *Bid Me to Live*, a novel that H.D. called *Madrigal*, for which she listed the author as Delia Alton. She explained that *Asphodel* is the old *Madrigal* “material without the daemonic drive or the *daemon* that (or who) was released by [psychoanalysis]” (Hollenberg *Between History* 247).<sup>17</sup> She argued that since *Madrigal* is “Phoenixed out of *Asphodel*,” the “*Asphodel* ‘nest’ should, in the traditional manner, be burnt,” but that she, “untraditionally,” is “picking it apart to see how it

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<sup>17</sup> At this time, H.D. also instructed Pearson to destroy all copies of *HERmione* for the same reason. She was reworking *HERmione* into *The Gift*.

was put together” (247).<sup>18</sup> The classic madrigal themes are love, longing, and death, and, fittingly, H. D. began *Madrigal* in 1939, soon after her divorce from Aldington and as her fear of a new world war increased. Her war-fears were realized, and the text lay dormant until 1947. She then made revisions and corrections to the text until the mid-1950s when “At last the War I story had ‘written itself’” (*H. D. by Delia Alton* 180).<sup>19</sup> Had it written itself? More pertinently, who was Delia Alton, to whom H.D. gave authorial credit? Why was a fresh authorial viewpoint needed to supplant *Paint It Today*’s Helga Dart? Much had happened to H.D. in the years between the two wars. She had twice gone through analysis with Sigmund Freud, her contemporaries had published their versions of H.D.’s life story, her relationship with Richard Aldington had been rekindled, and she had established a friendship and professional relationship with Norman Holmes Pearson. Before exploring the book, I will delve into this background.

With *Bid Me to Live*, H.D. had finally written the story that Freud told her, in 1933, she must write in order to heal. Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in the early 1930s reminded H.D. of how fragile peace can be and led her to fear another war. Based on her experiences in World War I, “war, death, and betrayal in love” were incontrovertibly linked, and her fear of the inevitability of the next war led to an emotional crisis that once again stymied her art (Freidman *Psyche* 29). Several weeks into her analysis, H.D. told Freud of a “flood of war memories” released while reading a recently published volume of D.H. Lawrence’s letters. Susan Stanford Friedman writes that “Freud seemed to have connected the repression of these memories with her loss of creative direction” (*Analyzing* 300). His “cure” was, as H.D. wrote to Bryher, to write of these events “straight, as history, no frills, . . . just a straight narrative, then later, changing names and so on”

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<sup>18</sup> Legend has it that only one Phoenix could be alive at any time. When the Phoenix was nearing death, it built its own funeral pyre from which the new Phoenix rose.

<sup>19</sup> See Susan Stanford Friedman’s “Chronology: Dating H.D.’s Writing” in *Penelope’s Web*, p. 364.

(280). However, she struggled with Freud's dictum to revive the project she had begun with *Paint it Today* and, later, *Asphodel*. Her "emotional moorings [had been] shattered" by the first war; in 1933, her "shelves were full of unfinished manuscripts," and she was "hardly writing at all" (Friedman *Analyzing* xvi). Her struggle was not caused by doubt of the narrative's efficacy in overcoming her emotional distress; it was caused by doubt of her selfhood. As Freud wrote of his patient Dora, H.D.'s life had become "an unnavigable river whose stream is at one moment choked by masses of rock and at another divided and lost between shallows and sandbanks" (Freud, *Dora* 10). To reclaim her artistic selfhood, she had to clear away the flotsam and jetsam and trace her life's river back to its source. It took several more years of therapy for her artistic self to emerge—during a time when H.D.'s embrace of psychoanalysis and the redemptive value of the narrative was atypical for an early modernist writer.

H.D.'s companion Bryher was an early and enthusiastic advocate of psychoanalysis. Havelock Ellis, an English physician who studied human sexuality, was a member of H.D. and Bryher's social circle in the early 1920s. At Bryher's insistence, H.D. entered analysis with their friend Mary Chadwick in 1931 and, later, with Hans Sachs.<sup>20</sup> Even so, it was not until just before her analysis with Freud that she became "keenly interested" in psychoanalytic journals and books and found them "terrifically absorbing" (letter to Viola Jordan qtd. in Friedman *Psyche* 19). By this time, Freudian psychology had swept the London social world and the English literary world. Freud had begun to publish his work—in German and occasionally in French—on various neurological and psychiatric topics in the 1880s. Psychiatrist Abraham Brill translated

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<sup>20</sup> H.D. found analysis with Chadwick unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. She wrote that Chadwick "could not follow the workings of my creative mind," and H.D.'s art was always of primary concern in her analysis (Friedman *Psyche* 18). She also felt "inhibited from speaking freely because Chadwick was a member of H.D.'s immediate circle" (18). As I will explore later in this section in my chapter on *Bid Me to Live* and in my next section on *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. regarded herself less as an analysand and more as a student of psychoanalysis in her work with analysts. Friedman warns that we must avoid viewing H.D.'s analyses "in the early days of psychoanalysis through the perspective of what psychiatry has become" today (21).

and published a few of Freud's works in English beginning in 1909. In 1914, Virginia Woolf's husband, Leonard, wrote the first review of Freud's work to appear in a non-medical journal. By 1920, London had discovered Freud, whose works were translated by James Strachey and published by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press. Psychoanalysis then spread beyond the elite and galvanized public interest, with psychoanalytic theory a novelty available in the press, advice columns, and self-help literature.

In the early 1900s, Freud branched out from writing about hysteria, adult sexual fantasies, childhood sexuality, dreams, family romances, and trauma to begin a life of writing "aesthetic investigations"—on literature, art, sculpture, and artists themselves—that even today influence the interpretation of art (Freud "The Uncanny" 123). In one of his earlier works on aesthetics "The Creative Writer and Daydreams" (1908), Freud explores the source from which the creative writer "draws his material" (436). Predictably, Freud looks to childhood to explain artistic creativity. He does not imply that creative writers draw their inspiration from a pathological source. However, he writes that in psychological novels (limited omniscient narration), the author sits in the protagonist's mind. Freud suggests that the modern writer inclines toward splitting up "his ego, . . . into many part-egos, . . . to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes" (440). He softens this by stating that his observations pertain to "less pretentious authors of novels, romances, and short stories," which some critics related to the pulp fiction of Freud's day (441). Nevertheless, after softening his stance that all fiction is autobiographical, he went on to psychoanalyze da Vinci in "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood" in 1911.

In 1913, D. H. Lawrence published *Sons and Lovers*, opening the floodgates of psychoanalytic criticism, with analysts-*cum*-critics and critics-*cum*-analysts lauding *Sons and*

*Lovers* as the most penetrating exploration of the *Oedipal* scenario ever described in literature. Analyst and critic Alfred Kuttner took this a step further in 1915, writing that, in *Sons and Lovers*, “Mr. Lawrence has found the very core of himself; here he has dipped deep into his own childhood, setting down all that he ever knew or felt” (Kuttner 256). Lawrence claimed not to have read Freud but hated what was being done to his “poor book” and ultimately responded with *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) in an effort to repudiate Freud and psychoanalysis (qtd. in Spitzer 93).

Virginia Woolf also viewed Freud’s work as a threat to the artist’s creative power and did not read Freud until after his death. This stance might seem unusual as the Bloomsbury Group, with which Woolf is closely associated, took an early interest in Freud’s work. Woolf undoubtedly gained second-hand knowledge of Freud through conversations with her Bloomsbury companions, especially James and Alix Strachey and her brother Adrian Stephen, who all became practicing psychoanalysts. Even so, it seems that Woolf did not avail herself of psychoanalysis for her life-long emotional problems.<sup>21</sup> However, Julia Briggs suggests that Woolf’s experience with Harley Street’s “mind’ doctors” during her “1913 breakdown” bled into her art (“Virginia Woolf” 24).<sup>22</sup> In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf delivers, what was for her, a polemical diatribe on Harley Street *mind doctor* Sir William Bradshaw, son of a tradesman with a “grudge, deeply buried, against cultivated people” who had time to read (97). Sir William

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<sup>21</sup> “James [Strachey] often wondered why Leonard did not persuade Virginia to see a psychoanalyst about her mental breakdowns. There were analysts with sufficient knowledge to understand her illness in those days. Although this knowledge was available, I did not agree with James that it would be of help to Virginia.... Virginia’s imagination, apart from her artistic creativeness, was so interwoven with her fantasies-and indeed with her madness-that if you had stopped the madness you might have stopped the creativeness too. It seemed to me quite a reasonable judgement for Leonard to have made then, if he did so. It may be preferable to be mad and be creative than to be treated by analysis and become ordinary” (Alix Strachey quoted in Julia Briggs’s “Virginia Woolf Meets Sigmund Freud.” *Virginia Woolf Bulletin of The Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain*, vol. 27, 2008, p. 15).

<sup>22</sup> Briggs description of *mind doctors* and Woolf’s description of Bradshaw seem to equate to the Harley Street specialists who treated nervous problems but were not psychoanalysts.



worshipped “proportion” in all things and swooped, devoured, and “shut people up” who could not achieve his idol (102). Even before *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf found Freud’s influence on fiction irritating. She protested that “characters have become cases;” she resented “Freudian explanations” that offered a “patent key that opens every door” (Woolf “Freudian” 197). She mocked this aspect in “An Unwritten Novel” (1920) by having the narrator invent a life (including childhood trauma) for a woman seen riding on a train and then having the narrator’s story collapse as she learns the woman’s actual story.

Katherine Mansfield’s aversion to psychoanalysis was also based on its impact on literature. She was not (in her short life) well-versed in Freud’s theories and may have developed her aversion to them in her job reviewing novels and from her association with D. H. Lawrence. She was aware enough of Freud’s theories to chide “the mysterious non-existent creatures—the young writers of to-day—[as] trying simply to jump the psycho-analyst’s claim” (“Psychology” 159). However, she was (perhaps instinctively) aware of the psychological impact of a tyrannical father who remained alive for his children even after his death and presented this in “The Daughters of the Late Colonel.”

Woolf also later found that she had inadvertently been incorporating Freud’s theories into her work. Likewise, she developed an understanding of the narrative’s potential to resolve one’s own painful experiences. In 1939, Woolf finally met Freud, and, after his death a few months later, she began to read his works. In her memoir “A Sketch of the Past” (1939-1940), Woolf acknowledges that *To the Lighthouse* emancipated her from her obsession with her mother—that she had done for herself “what psychoanalysts do for their patients,” expressed a long-felt, deeply-felt emotion and then “laid it to rest” (81). She also found that she and Freud had a common concern—the reason for war. She adopted Freud’s insights on the power of the

primitive feelings that lurk within our modern minds as her own, and these insights became the theme of *Between the Acts* (1941). Freud's teachings are even more pronounced in Woolf's "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," in which she challenges readers to "drag up into consciousness the subconscious Hitlerism that holds us down" (217). In the end, Woolf managed to cull from Freud's writings truths that she could accept as her own.

As I will discuss later in my section on *The Gift*, H.D. was also able to glean from Freud's works what most benefited her. She differed from her modernist contemporaries, however, by being far more personally connected to Freud. Also, even before her analysis with Freud, H.D.'s purpose in composing her earliest autobiografiction—*Paint It Today* and *Asphodel*—differed from that of her peers in creating their early fiction. *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel* were written as mechanisms of healing with the hope of resuscitating her creativity. Her purpose was to recapture her poetry, and she acknowledges that all three of her works of autobiografiction were instrumental in doing so. However, *Bid Me to Live*'s composition differs from that of the earlier works. There is a difference in perspective that would naturally occur with an almost twenty-year gap in creation. H.D. says it best: "You cannot paint today as you painted yesterday" (*Paint It Today* 3). Also, the fiction written about H.D. by her inner circle following the war could have also contributed to this difference.<sup>23</sup>

In 1917, D.H. Lawrence began writing *Aaron's Rod*, which was not completed until 1921 and published in 1922. While Lawrence's purpose for this novel was to show the post-war crisis and collapse of Europe, the first third of the novel includes satirical portraits of his circle of

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<sup>23</sup> While I will examine the works of D.H. Lawrence, John Cournos, and Richard Aldington that cover the war years, other members of H.D.'s circle wrote about H.D.. Frances Gregg's husband, Louis Wilkinson, developed an unsympathetic character based on the pre-war H.D. in *The Buffoon* (1916). Brigit Patmore, a close friend of Aldington and H.D., wrote of both in several of her memoirs, alternating her character assessment based on whom she was closest to at the time. Susan Stanford Friedman writes that Patmore also wrote a memoir of the events of 1917-1918, but that it was never published (*Penelope* 387-88 n.15).

friends: Julia and Robert Cunningham represent H.D. and Aldington; Josephine Ford signifies Dorothy (known as Arabella) Yorke, the beloved of writer John Cournos and paramour of Aldington; Cyril Scott is based on Cecil Gray, with whom H.D. later had a brief affair and became pregnant. Lawrence's timeframe is 1917-18, the same timeframe H.D. covers in both *Asphodel* and *Bid Me to Live*. However, Lawrence wrote contemporaneously, and H.D. wrote both of her accounts retrospectively. Lawrence refers to the entire group as Bohemians and is dismissive of them, except perhaps for Josephine (Arabella). He saves most of his vitriol for Julia (H.D.), painting a portrait in which, as Susan Stanford Friedman writes, Julia "epitomizes the corruption of Bohemia" (*Penelope* 152).

In John Cournos's *Miranda Masters* (1926), H.D. is the title character. The book focuses on events in the life of Cournos, H.D., Aldington, and Arabella Yorke (all only thinly veiled with fictitious names) from about 1916 to 1918. Cournos was living in the servants' quarters of the house where H.D. and Aldington had rooms. When she joined Aldington at his WWI training camp, H.D. allowed Cournos's lover Arabella Yorke to stay in her rooms. Later, H.D. returned to the house, Cournos traveled to Russia, and Yorke occupied the servants' quarters that Cournos vacated. Aldington and Yorke immediately begin an affair, about which Cournos learns upon his return. He is angry and initially turns his affection and support to H.D. In the end, however, he blames H.D. for Aldington's infidelity and Yorke's promiscuity. His vengeful book is modernist only in fleetingly dealing with conundrums of the modernist period—war, materialism, mechanization; it is Victorian in its excessive emotion and its archvillain—Miranda Masters. As the book is mainly discursive, it is difficult to read past the multitude of exclamation points and uses of *alas*—"She was, in his sight, the great poet of this unfortunate age—born, alas, out of time!" (34). The sheer hatred, however, is impossible to miss. Even Cournos's stepson and

biographer, Alfred Satterthwaite, cannot escape it—“[Cournos] regarded H. D. alone as the traitress, because she had accepted the trust [to look after Yorke in his absence] and had betrayed it. He could not see her as a victim. He alone had been victimized” (403). Cournos even holds H.D. responsible for—and writes of—the syphilis he believes he has contracted from a prostitute on a night that he was hoping to have sex with H.D., who refused him.<sup>24</sup>

Richard Aldington’s account of the pre-war and war years in *Death of a Hero* (1929) is quite different. His purpose is to depict the dehumanized and mechanized battlefield conditions of the first world war and critique a British culture that sent young men unprepared into this war. It is autobiographical in portraying Aldington’s experiences at the front and in the “brutal satire of [his] own parents, particularly his mother” (*Zilboorg Letters* 213). Max Saunders suggests that it is likewise effective in providing satirical sketches of the modernists (T.S. Eliot, Ford Madox Ford, D.H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis) in their “pre-war bohemian life” and “pre-war and wartime bohemian gender politics” (427, 428).

Saunders’s second observation is essential in assessing Part II of *Death of a Hero*, where Aldington portrays his pre-war and war love life. George Winterbourne, the hero, ultimately loves and is sexually involved with two dissimilar women who are best friends—his wife, Elizabeth, and his paramour, Fanny. However, the young, pre-marriage Winterbourne was sexually inexperienced but extraordinarily well-read. He trusted completely in the early twentieth century’s birth-control methods, advocated marriage only when desirous of children, and

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<sup>24</sup> More than thirty years later, the publication of H. D.’s novel *Bid Me to Live* “was a fresh blast of oxygen which fanned the embers of [Cournos’s] hatred into a roaring fire” (Satterthwaite 405). Cournos and Yorke felt that Yorke had been unfairly represented as a promiscuous home-wrecker; he was “angered by his minor role” and “furious that the novel accorded him such small importance or significance” (407). Cournos contacted Yorke and asked for her help in publicly countering H.D.’s presentation of them: “John’s and Dorothy’s resentment was private and personal; they had been maligned; but it was also generous, because they extended their resentment to include the portraits of Richard Aldington and D. H. Lawrence” (405). Cournos contacted Aldington for support but Aldington refused. Cournos then wrote “a long vituperative letter to H.D.,” which Aldington advised her to ignore (406).

preached free love and open marriage. The experienced Fanny is an advocate of Winterbourne's treatise even before meeting him; Elizabeth has to be convinced, but, like many converts, she becomes a zealot. As he was drafting his book, Aldington wrote to H.D. that he based these two women on Nancy Cunard and Valentine Dobrée, and Zilboorg suggests that H.D. accepted Aldington's contention.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps Zilboorg is correct in arguing that it would be a "misreading of [*Death of a Hero*] to see George's love life as Aldington's indictment of Arabella and H.D." (*Letters* 213). However, I wonder how successful either woman could have been in completely dissociating herself from her fictional counterpart.

*Bid Me to Live's* portrait of H.D. and her marriage to Aldington are quite different from those she renders in *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel*. In 1939, when she began *Bid Me to Live*, H.D. had almost two decades of experience to influence her new portrait and to internalize these other portraits. My second concern is how H.D.'s collaborations with Norman Holmes Pearson and Richard Aldington while writing *Bid Me to Live* influenced her interpretation of people and events. H.D. and Aldington's prodigious correspondence during and after the war had come to a standstill in January 1920.<sup>26</sup> It reemerged in March 1929 and continued until H.D. died in 1961. In February 1949, H.D. first wrote Aldington about her *Madrigal* project, offering to send him the manuscript and asking him to comment on anything he might "especially dislike" or that she needed to "subdue or tone down" (Zilboorg *Letters* 304). While Aldington showed some interest that H.D. was recreating her memories of this time, he did not initially request the manuscript.

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<sup>25</sup> "Nancy Cunard was an important and notoriously bohemian figure in avant-garde literary, artistic, and political circles from 1916 on and throughout the 1920s and 1930s" (Hopkins 36). Artist and author Valentine Dobrée was another notoriously bohemian figure during this same time.

<sup>26</sup> Caroline Zilboorg's *Richard Aldington & H.D.: Their lives in letter 1918-1961* (nearly 1,200 letters survive) provides insight into their half-century long relationship as well as H.D.'s creative endeavors, especially *Bid Me to Live*.

Almost a year before this, Aldington had written H.D. asking her opinion on “the wisdom of [Aldington] doing a Lawrence book” (282). Aldington proceeded to write *D.H. Lawrence: Portrait of a Genius But . . .*, (1950), and letters between Aldington and H.D. become filled with reminiscences—and critiques—of Lawrence (whom they call “Lorenzo”) during the war years. H.D. even incorporated some of these reminiscences into her text. Under the mistaken impression that Aldington’s book on Lawrence is a personal memoir, she asks Aldington to send her the final version. She tells Aldington that her letter to the Lawrence character at her madrigal’s end has “‘placed’ him in time and space and eternity, at last, to my own satisfaction” (306). In December 1952, Aldington finally asked to see H.D.’s manuscript and found her account “really good, authentic, and concentrated,” but, in Zilboorg’s opinion, he seemed “unusually close to defending his behavior” at the time and “slightly bitter” (362, 363 n.3). As always, though, he endorses all criticism of Lawrence.

Norman Holmes Pearson, H.D.’s confidant and editor from 1937 until her death, had an equally profound influence on the content of *Bid Me to Live*. Pearson was adamantly opposed to the *Madrigal* title and authorial Delia Alton; H.D. was steadfastly in favor of both. Pearson ultimately won both battles. He also suggested that she “insert a dedication, perhaps to Lawrence” (Hollenberg *Letters* 247). H.D. had reservations about this suggestion, agreeing that the Lawrence character, Rico, “centralizes and inflames the story,” but countering that “the others have almost as much importance” in the story’s evolution (247). She argued successfully that her epigraph, Robert Herrick’s poem “To Anthea,” was a more appropriate dedication “to the spirit of the whole, shot to bits” (247). While H.D. and Pearson were close friends, Pearson’s mission was to establish American Studies as an academic discipline at Yale, revive interest in the works of expatriates such as H.D., Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein, and acquire collections of

their works for Yale. He was instrumental in “shepherd[ing] [H.D.’s] work through the publication process, protecting her from the potential sting of rejection and guiding” the reception of her work by reviewers and critics (4). He was also always “alert to what would benefit readers,” Yale University, and the field of American Studies (4). Under Pearson’s guidance, *Bid Me to Live* became both a literary enterprise and a trauma narrative.

*Bid Me to Live* opens like a treatise on history, tying the present to the mythology of Greece and the Golden Age of the Virgin Queen. It begins as a tale of the first war and a caution for the second. Perhaps this cautionary tale is what H.D. intended to write, but the story quickly becomes personal. She immediately introduces the significant characters: Bella Carter, akin to “the harlot of the middle-age miracle-play” (characterizing Arabella Yorke); Frederick known as Rico, “Already, too much a person” (representing D.H. Lawrence); Rafe Ashton, soldier, husband, adulterer (epitomizing Richard Aldington); and Rafe’s wife, Julia, the “nun-figure” (H.D. *Bid* 1-2). Unlike the protagonists of *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel*, Julia tells her story. She is securely grounded in her I, but her I is “Mrs. Rafe Ashton” (3). Her story hinges on two events. In the present is Rafe’s need for both Bella and Julia—“I would give her a mind. I would give you a body” (1). Remaining from the past is her emotional conflict over the loss of “the child . . . But she never thought of that . . . something had died . . . But she did not think of that” (4). In Julia’s mind, she and Rafe are precisely as they have always been, “except for a gap in her consciousness, a sort of black hollow, a cave, a pit of blackness” (4). The story is now set.

Julia, like Hermione in *Asphodel*, is both obsessed with and baffled by time. She must, “like a tight-rope walker,” tread carefully across the “narrow thread, . . . the umbilical cord, the silver cord that bound” her and Rafe to the past (11). However, this feat is impossible since the past has been “blasted to hell,” and the only reality is what “lives in the minds” of those who

lived before August 1914 (11). When Rafe returns to the front, he leaves Julia his watch, which only serves to remind her that time keeps “on ticking” (16). Rafe and their shared past help Julia keep her balance and not fall off the “thin wire, thin living web” on which she must navigate to live in the present (23). This balancing act becomes almost impossible as the war works its vile spell on Rafe, and he becomes “not-Rafe,” a stranger (25). Not-Rafe is embracing and enjoying much about warfare and, at the same time, becoming obsessed with death. He is no longer the poet but the “heartily oversexed . . . young officer on leave” (25). Rafe’s unveiled affair with Bella is neither his fault nor Bella’s—she was only “a part of a play,” with entrances and exits (28). The blame must lie with Julia, who is “holding on to something that had been smashed to hell” (28). It is at this point that Julia’s thoughts turn to Rico.

Rafe finds that Julia is sharing her poetic efforts with Rico for his critique. In the past, Rafe would have occupied this position as a guide, but Julia cannot envision the Not-Rafe doing so. Feeling rejected, Rafe tries to reclaim his past role, and Julia sees this as a way to reclaim what they have lost. Bella and Rico inadvertently provide support for this endeavor. Bella satisfies Rafe’s outsized physical needs, which Julia cannot fulfill since their child’s stillborn birth; Rico connects with Julia “cerebrally,” providing her with poetic inspiration (32). Rafe’s jealousy renews his interest in her poetry and brings Rafe back to her; “It was poetry that had brought Rafe to her, in the beginning; it was poetry that gave back Rafe now” (33). It is Rafe that matters. Unlike Rico and his “man-is-man, woman-is-woman” fixation, Rafe views, as does Julia, the “realm of consciousness” as “sexless” (35). After her child’s traumatic death, it was only Rico who “seemed remotely to understand” what she felt and what she needed—the cerebral connection to her poetry (38). Julia loves Rico “in another dimension, out of the body, wandering in thought, in dream” (40). However, in Rafe Ashton, for one moment—one last



time—dream and reality merge. Unfortunately, the war that “will never be over” again intrudes (40). To retain his sanity, Rafe must forget. Sadly, he tells Julia, “Bella makes me forget. You make me remember” (40). Julia, conversely, must remember to recover her sanity.

Julia turns to Rico for support and salvation: “He was tired out. She was” (45, her sentence unfinished). She assents to a plan she believes Rico and his wife, Elsa (representing Lawrence’s wife, Frieda), have been hatching. Julia and Rico will pair off, leaving Elsa free to take Cyril Vane (signifying Cecil Gray) for her lover. However, a physical relationship between Julia and Rico seems impossible because even “a touch on his arm made him shiver away, hurt, like a hurt jaguar” (48). Left with Rico’s “valiant indifference” to any relationship other than a cerebral relationship, Julia and Rico remain connected only through their poetry, and Elsa cannot begin her anticipated affair with Vane. Julia then plays a part in “this curious mixed partners dance of death? dance of life?” by entering into an affair with Vane (65). She leaves London and escapes with Vane to Cornwall, where there is “no war,” neither the armed conflict that she associates with her child’s death nor the emotional conflict within her marriage (66). In the peace of Cornwall, Julia takes stock of her situation. She questions if her personal war was “pre-ordained, written or carved on a temple wall” (90). Alternatively—and certainly not her original intention—had she “not so much condoned Bella and Rafe as actually encouraged them” (90). Had it all been merely a play, with Rico playing a small part but, as usual, becoming “the centre of the stage” (91)? She finds that she must explain her insights to Rico.

The final chapter of *Bid Me to Live* is Julia’s letter to Rico.<sup>27</sup> She writes that she will never see him again, but she wants to thank him. She can write because she now understands what Rico called the *gloire*. Julia does not connect her experience with Rico’s references or

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<sup>27</sup> H.D. wrote that in the summer of 1939, the “War I story bubbled up,” but the letter from Julia to Rico “was not finished until winter 1948” (*Compassionate* 112).

examples of the *gloire*; she tells him what the *gloire* means to her.<sup>28</sup> She believes that she may have “caught” the *gloire* from Rico but knows he is wrong in believing that the *gloire* is part of his man-is-man, woman-is-woman ideology—the *gloire* is both man and woman. It is, as the unborn child, unseen but alive, a part of its mother, a mother who must “keep it alive, [herself] living with it” (107). It is the living spirit inside the artist that inspires. Realizing Lawrence’s genius and believing that this genius can be hers also gives her the strength to move forward.

*Bid Me to Live* differs from *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel* in many ways. *Bid Me to Live*’s structure is far more conventional as it moves forward chronologically with only brief flashbacks; the ebb and flow of the earlier books are missing. Susan Stanford Friedman argues that the three texts “stand alone and together,” forming a palimpsest of three layers—*Paint It Today* as the lesbian layer, *Asphodel* as the mother layer, and *Bid Me to Live* as the wife layer (*Penelope* 212). The three texts repeat each other, overlap, and flow into each other. Consequently, Friedman cautions that no single text of the madrigal cycle provides truth. However, from the perspective of trauma narratives, *Bid Me to Live* offers—if not truth—some closure. H.D. has continued tracing the source of her anguish and removing the barriers to her selfhood.

In *Bid Me to Live*, H.D. eloquently portrays the love and dependence between herself and Richard Aldington; she is more open about Aldington’s affairs. She emotively describes the impact on her of their stillborn child. The mother becomes the muse with no trace of the censor. As Friedman remarks, there are also “gaps and silences” in *Bid Me to Live*—lesbian desire, Perdita’s birth—reported in the earlier works (*Penelope* 143). Friedman concludes that these “erasures suggest the conflict between speech and silence that pervades women’s writing” (143).

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<sup>28</sup> In D.H. Lawrence’s poem “Gloire de Dijon” (1917), a (presumably) male speaker gazes on a woman taking her morning shower. A glowing golden shadow encompasses the bathing woman, giving inspiration to the poet.

Might these erasures suggest resolution rather than “repression and resistance” (143-44)? Is what remains in *Bid Me to Live* a declaration of their importance and continued presence in her soul? In addition to the four decades that went into the creation—and the associated reinterpretations of her experiences—of *Bid Me to Live*, her analysis with Freud, and her collaboration with Aldington and Pearson, there is another slice of H.D.’s personal history impacting this story.

In 1946, H.D. suffered a severe breakdown and was admitted—without her consent—to the Küssnacht Klinik, where she remained for seven months. In 1953, she was re-admitted to the Klinik and began analysis with Dr. Erich Heydt, who remained her analyst and friend until her death in 1961. In the years between her two treatments at the Klinik, H.D. revised *Bid Me to Live*, which she had begun in 1939 and then abandoned (and which had its foundation in 1920-1921 with *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel*). From 1940 to 1950, she had also produced many other novels, poetry, essays, and memoirs. The autobiographical nature of all of these works provided fodder for H.D.’s analysis with Heydt. From 1955 until 1960, H.D. wrote a three-text tribute to Heydt: *Magic Mirror*, autobiografiction; *Compassionate Friendship*, a diary; *Thorn Thicket*, a memoir. In her tribute, she describes her analysis and its ties to her literary works. She found that “references to my writing” were constructive and provided Heydt with many texts—even though she questions whether Heydt read what she provided him (*Compassionate* 147). Inadvertently or purposefully, H.D. guided Heydt to her lingering emotional conflicts.

In her tribute to Heydt, H.D. continuously returns to the work she steadfastly refers to as *Madrigal* and its theme of loss—“departure, desertion, death” (*Thorn* 165). She writes that Heydt seemed most interested in dredging up her early relationship with Ezra Pound but was also

instrumental in helping her resolve the trauma of her child's stillbirth.<sup>29</sup> Also, Heydt's marriage, which took place during their analysis, sent H.D. into a frenzy of pain, jealousy, and resentment that, finally, enabled her to assess her past losses of influential male relationships. As H.D. writes, "The feelings that I should have had in 1917, were awakened or invoked some forty years later, through other people" (*Thorn* 172, her emphasis). The concept of *through other people* is intriguing, primarily when H.D. refers to, what she calls, her *initiators*.

While the term *initiator* suggests one who introduces another to a form of knowledge or observances, H.D. hints at many different meanings for *initiator*: "actor, charlatan, magician;" "agents of deception, loss, destruction;" a "correlation of entities;" the "father-image;" a "synthesis, counter-clockwise" (*Compassionate* 96, 102, 103, 122, 142). She lists her initiators as Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, Johns Cournos, D.H. Lawrence, Cecil Gray (composer and music critic; father of H.D.'s daughter, Perdita), Kenneth Macpherson (Bryer's second husband, H.D.'s lover, and director of the films the trio made between 1927 and 1930), Walter Schmideberg (an analyst with whom H.D. worked in 1936-1937), and Erich Heydt (102).<sup>30</sup> Curiously, her list of initiators consists of six men from her early life, all linked to her artistic output, and two of her many psychiatrists. For H.D., the purpose of analysis was most often to unlock her artistic potential, and it revolved around her art, as evidenced by her providing Heydt with her work as a stimulus for their analysis. Each of her initiators provided H.D. with insights essential to her art; each was also an agent of deception, loss, and destruction. Even Dr. Schmideberg betrayed H.D. by sharing "a profound love [with Bryher] well beyond the warm

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<sup>29</sup> I will address H.D.'s work with Heydt regarding Ezra Pound in my chapter on *End to Torment*. Heydt was also concerned with H.D.'s issues with paternal authority while Freud had been more concerned with maternal conflicts. I will address this aspect of her work with Heydt in my chapter on *The Gift*.

<sup>30</sup> H.D.'s list is in chronological order based on her introduction to the *initiator*. There does not seem to be an attempt in the original list to assign any importance to the order other than a point in time. As she continues working on this tribute, she occasionally brings up other important figures in her life (all male) that appear to be additions to the list.

bonds of friendship,” or, at least, surreptitiously consulting with Bryher regarding H.D.’s analysis (Friedman *Analyzing* 577). The young Dr. Heydt betrayed the much older H.D. by marrying. Heydt enabled H.D. to acknowledge the debris remaining in her life—and in her art—precipitated by her dysfunctional relationships with men.

I contend that *Bid Me to Live*’s gaps, silences, erasures, and changes in perspective, pointed out by Friedman, are products of resolution rather than avoidance. Remaining in this text are the unresolved trauma of her child’s loss and the departure, desertion, and death inherent in all her male relationships. However, taken together, *Paint It Today*, *Asphodel*, and *Bid Me to Live* raise her autobiografiction to a higher level by presenting not only the spiritual journey at specific points in time but also its progression. The changes in pseudonymity are a revealing aspect of this evolution. H.D. describes this process in her 1949-1950 essay “H.D. by Delia Alton,” written at Norman Holmes Pearson’s request to elaborate on her poems and prose written after 1930. Having both two authors and two subjects—H.D. and Delia Alton, the essay’s use of *I* and *we* is often puzzling, but, throughout the essay, the experiences and emotions of both are linked to those of the characters in their literary output. However, H.D. and Delia warn us at the end of the essay that they are “not Julia Ashton of the War I *Madrigal*. . . or any of those whose lovely names [in other works] startle and enchant me, as I read them now as if for the first time, in my own prose and poetry” (“H.D.” 220). *Paint It Today*, *Asphodel*, and *Bid Me to Live* are each a waystation in a quest, H.D.’s quest to grapple with and resolve her trauma and other harrowing experiences. Each of H.D.’s fictional alter egos begins the quest at a different point retrospectively. Starting the quest at their distinct point of despondency, Midget, Hermione, and Julia each bring with them what they have learned, have their unique epiphanies and moments of vision, and leave behind what they have overcome.

### 1.2.5 *Transition: From Trauma Narrative to Elegy*

*Paint It Today*, *Asphodel*, and *Bid Me to Live*—all based on the same experiences yet dissimilar in many ways. Susan Stanford Friedman asks, Why? H.D. painted each of these portraits from the perspective of the present—re-viewing, re-evaluating, and, at times, resolving the past. In writing *Paint it Today* and *Asphodel*, H.D. began to work through the bona fide trauma she experienced—the stillbirth of her child, which she linked to the cataclysmic war and the collapse of her marriage. When laying the first two texts aside, she had not wholly regained her I, but she was on a path to do so. However, as *Bid Me to Live*'s Julia reminds us, “Ghosts don’t, of course, die” (10). Why are there erasures of experiences in *Bid Me to Live* that played such a large part in the first two texts? I propose that, by the time she composed *Bid Me to Live*, H.D. had resolved many of her traumatic experiences and incorporated them into her life story.

*Bid Me to Live*, however, brings to the forefront my next topic. This novel is a transition from her trauma narratives to her understanding of sexual politics in the world of literature and embracing her position in this world. Norman Holmes Pearson’s insistence that H.D. include D.H. Lawrence in her madrigal helped her to appreciate the equation present in all human relationships. There are good and bad in every relationship; those in a position of power are not always right; in each relationship, there are opportunities to learn about ourselves. Also, her work with Erich Heydt built on her previous forays into analysis, which had been focused on the family romance. H.D. centered her efforts with Heydt on *Bid Me to Live* and her other post-World War II prose and poetry, and she came to appreciate the significance of her male relationships. *Bid Me to Live* transitions us to H.D.’s elegies for those she has loved and lost: *The Gift*, *Tribute to Freud*, and *End to Torment*. However, they are not traditional elegies. In these elegies, H.D. reclaims the parts of her self she had relinquished.

## 2 CHAPTER 2

### 2.1 H.D.'s Elegies: *The Gift*, *Tribute to Freud*, and *End to Torment*

#### 2.1.1 *Gods, Goods, and Gifts*

*Every poem an epitaph.*

T.S. Eliot *Four Quartets* (1943)

*When it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. . . . I suppose I did what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest.*

Virginia Woolf writing of *To the Lighthouse*  
in "A Sketch of the Past" (1939)

*My first desire is not to produce a philosophical work or a work of art: it is to preserve memory.*

Jacques Derrida in "Dialanguages" (1985)

H.D.'s late prose works *The Gift*, *Tribute to Freud*, and *End to Torment* (written 1941-1958; published 1956-1979) are unambiguously autobiographical and share common themes: loss and sacrifice. Each is a memoir outlining a slice of H.D.'s personal history: *The Gift* of her childhood in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; *Tribute to Freud* of her analysis with Freud in 1933 and 1934; *End to Torment* of her complicated emotional relationship with Ezra Pound from 1905 through 1913 and their reconnection in 1958 following Pound's twelve-year incarceration in St.

Elizabeths Psychiatric Hospital and ignominious return to Italy. Each is also an elegy—to mourn the loss of her childhood, to mourn Freud’s death, to mourn Pound’s ruin. In each, H.D. subtly—perhaps even subversively—conveys a gift to herself: an affirmation of her life, an appreciation of her struggle, an assertion of her intent to move forward.

In her autobiografiction, H.D.’s goal was to “try to remember” facts, events, and words; her search was for the truth. (*Asphodel* 114). However, during a lifetime of analysis with such psychoanalytic pioneers as Hanns Sachs, Sigmund Freud, and Erich Heydt, she learned what modern trauma theorists now maintain: narratives of personal or collective history provide truth only insofar as they give insight into a period or phenomena or provide a “feel” for experience or emotion (LaCapra 13). As H.D. wrote, “It is the *feel* of things” (*End to Torment* 44). By the time H.D. wrote *The Gift*, *Tribute to Freud*, and *End to Torment*, she was attuned to feeling as well as remembering. Some memories comforted rather than traumatized her, and she sought them out.

In these later works, H.D. turned to the elegy to commemorate those she had lost—but she did not write a traditional elegy. What she delivers is, in many ways, what Jahan Ramazani calls the modern elegy. Ramazani argues that the elegy began to change in the late nineteenth century due to the frenzied pace of modern life, the decline in religious belief, and the breakdown of social customs around mourning. In America and Britain, periods of mourning were shortened, and mourning rituals became less extravagant. In America, newly professionalized funeral directors sought to fictionalize death, concealing death and the dead using “makeup, euphemism, and posh coffins” (Ramazani 17). The Great War also took its toll on the traditional elegy when the nineteenth-century soldier encountered twentieth-century technology—machine guns, tanks, chemicals, airpower, explosives—that eradicated fighting forces and often left nothing identifiable of the men to bury. The traditional elegy was ill-



equipped to provide solace amid the speed and stress of modern life and the massive loss of life during the war. The elegy had to be redefined and reinvigorated. Postwar, modernist elegiac writers were front and center in this project. They resisted “obliteration of the dead” and no longer felt constrained by the Victorian social convention of grief as a private matter (14). Modern elegists brought death to the forefront—sometimes with anger, sometimes with satire, rarely with denial. While the traditional elegy was full of passion, remorse, consolation, and hyperbole—but was “person empty,” the modern elegy became “person filled” (19). The elegized is described in “rich, particularizing detail” with no attempt to hide their “blemishes” (18-19). The author of the modern elegy paints a portrait of the dead, foregrounding the author’s own emotions and reflections and, consequently, portrays a human being in all its complexity.

W. H. Auden became the master of the modern poetic elegy. Although heir to the poetry of W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, Auden chose to meditate upon the individual in the modern world—in Auden’s words, an “age of anxiety”—rather than to ruminate over a mythological past. Writing from this modernist perspective, he nonetheless embraced traditional rhyme and meter in his elegies. His sonnet sequence, “In Time of War,” elegizes all victims of industrialized warfare, “living men in terror of their lives” who can “die too soon” (Auden 80). Contrary to the English elegiac tradition, he does not subscribe to what Freud called normal mourning, the translation of “grief into consolation,” redirecting the poet’s grief into some “brilliant artifact” like the “sunlike radiance of [the deceased’s] immortal soul” (Ramazani 3).<sup>31</sup> In his elegies for Yeats, Freud, and Henry James, Auden commemorates the dead and emphasizes his communion with them but is willing—even compelled—to challenge their greatness.

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<sup>31</sup> Ramazani is referring to John Milton’s “Lycidas” (1637), a memorial elegy to Milton’s fellow King’s Cambridge student, Edward King.

While Ramazani focuses on the poetic elegy in *Poetry of Mourning*, I find his observations equally pertinent for prose. In a 1925 diary entry, Virginia Woolf considered a new name for her fiction to supplant the word *novel*; elegy, she wrote, seemed a likely candidate. Woolf's elegiac texts would not conform to the traditional elegy. They would be modern elegies in the way in which Ramazani describes them as being "an elegy for the elegy," mourning not only the dead and the rituals of mourning but even the legitimacy of mourning (Ramazani 8). Woolf and other modern elegists mourn the elegy itself. They feed off the multitude of war deaths, the collapse of societal rituals, and the downfall of literary traditions, thus creating an elegy "crammed with corpses" (8). In *Jacob's Room* (1922), Woolf laments the war dead, the death of mourning, and the death of words' ability to give meaning. It is one of the first war novels, not a novel of armed combat and violent death, but a novel of loss—the loss of ingrained social conventions, the feeling that perhaps civilization was lost. It is a novel about Jacob Flanders, who was one of the generation of "simple young men" of whom there was "no need to think of them grown old" (Woolf *Jacob's Room* 44). The book is an elegy to the young war-dead—as well as to her brother Thoby Stephen—who had grown up in a world that now seemed impossible to envision.

Ramazani differentiates not only between the traditional and modern elegy but also between the traditional and modern *family* elegy. The traditional family elegy postulates the deceased's virtues, records their last words or dying expressions, provides consolation to the bereaved, and, above all, connects the child to the parent. The modern family elegist often recognizes the need to separate oneself from dead parents, which, in its most "violent" form, can become an "act of exorcism" (220-21). The need to separate is especially true of women writers' elegies in the first half of the twentieth century, which exhibit a determination to "rethink the

daughter's position within the family romance" (295). It was a transition from respect, submission, and gratitude to a continuum, ranging from a placid acceptance of the debt owed to one's parents, to a challenge of patriarchal authority, to outright anger and vitriol. For the modern elegist, Lycidas need no longer be transformed into a shiny object; the dead and the author can be human, with all the human's associated faults and complexity.

In assessing the modern elegy, Ramazani leaves the door open to a broad interpretation. Perhaps the one absolute of what he calls the modern elegy is that it is an "art of losing" rather than an art of saving, an art of immersion rather than an art of transcendence, an open wound rather than a suture (4). For this reason, he finds modern psychoanalysis more effective than literary theory in explaining the elegy, and, consequently, he begins with Freud's normal, healthy, successful mourning. However, he quickly refutes Freud's "overly rigid distinction" between mourning and melancholia, choosing to see these two terms as matters of emphasis within mourning. This stance allows Ramazani to recognize all the complexities of grief, anger, compensation, and tribute.

Dominic LaCapra also incorporates both literary theory and psychology in his study of historiography and trauma. Akin to Ramazani, he challenges Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia. His thesis begins by elaborating on the difference between absence and loss. Absence "is not an event;" loss is a specific event that carries with it the possibilities of past, present, and future (LaCapra 49). Losses can be "at least in part compensated for, worked through, and even to some extent overcome" (65). Absence and the "anxiety it brings" can only be worked through "in the sense that one may learn better to live with it" (65). While it is crucial that loss not be conflated with absence, LaCapra acknowledges that absence can be "absolutized

and fetishized such that it becomes an object of fixation and absorbs [and] mystifies” (50).<sup>32</sup> In this way, absence (lack of) can be “converted” into loss (53). LaCapra remarks on a somewhat positive aspect of converting absence into loss. As the primary affect associated with absence is anxiety, the conversion of an undefined absence into a specific loss “gives anxiety an identifiable object . . . and generates the hope that anxiety may be eliminated or overcome . . . [or at least] lived with” (57). With this point, LaCapra, like Ramazani, negates Freud’s concept of normal mourning and pathological melancholia.

LaCapra connects mourning to working through and melancholy to acting out (repeating). The working through of trauma makes it possible for the traumatized to distinguish between past and present and reinvest in the possibility of a new life. In acting out, the past is “performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present” rather than a past that is represented and inscribed into memory (70). The traumatized is haunted and possessed by the past, with no hope of a future. Nevertheless, LaCapra argues that for some trauma victims acting out may be a necessary precondition for reaching the point of working through. The processes of working through may then “counteract the force of acting out and the repetition compulsion” (22). Absent the process of working through, mourning becomes only “endless grieving” (75).

I agree with Ramazani that knowledge of psychology is essential when delving into the modern elegy. However, I am less dismissive of literary theory as a guide. Jacques Derrida was a philosopher by training, but his impact on literary studies rivals his impact on philosophy. Memory fascinated Derrida, and “questions of memory, remembrance, recalling, living on, forgetting, retrieving, losing, saving, surviving, and mourning” cut across all his work (Richter 151). Focus on these questions is especially true of *The Work of Mourning*, a collection of

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<sup>32</sup> An example of this phenomenon offered by LaCapra is the oedipal complex.

Derrida's memorials to his dead friends, and *The Gift of Death*. In *The Work of Mourning*, Derrida explores friendship, fidelity, and the art of constructive mourning; in *The Gift of Death*, Derrida explores sacrifice as a means of appeasing what one regards as a higher power.

In the last twenty years of Derrida's life, mourning became far more personal as he was asked to deliver testimonies in the form of memorial essays and eulogies for friends and colleagues he had outlived.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, his philosophy of the work of mourning haunts most of his later writing. Like Ramazani, Derrida challenges Freud's delineation between normal mourning and pathological melancholy, mourning that does not end. For Derrida, the concept of mourning is an aporia. The mourner is asked to cling to the memory of the lost and, in doing so, the "success [of mourning] fails," leading to a state of interminable mourning (*Memoires* 35). The mourner is also asked to relinquish the lost and, in doing so, the "failure [of mourning] succeeds" in bringing mourning to an end but, with its end, a loss within our self (35). To resolve this aporia, "memory and forgetfulness" must be combined; fidelity and infidelity to the dead must coexist; mourning must bring an end to mourning while maintaining the connection to the mourned ("Dialanguages" 151-52). One must keep the memory of the lost within but within as the other.

In his memorials, Derrida learns that while his friends' deaths leave him speechless, silence is untenable. He recognizes the danger that the testimonial can become calculated, retaliatory, or self-serving, as well as the treachery of personal memory. Derrida's response to the aporia of mourning was to bear witness to his friend and the part of his friend living on in himself; this, he wrote, was the "debt, the last one, he owed to a friend" (*Work* 160). This debt did not dictate the avoidance of difficulty and conflict in the relationship, just that he not "claim

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<sup>33</sup> These testimonies are collected in Derrida's *The Work of Mourning* and include those for Roland Barthes, Paul de Man, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and Jean-François Lyotard.

to have the last word” (98). He fought against the premise of either fully incorporating or being fully introjected by the lost friend. Instead, he maintains we must view our interiorization of the lost as an inheritance, but one in which portions may be either embraced or rejected, affirmed or refuted, supplemented or reduced.

Primary in this act of inheritance and mourning is the influence of memory. Derrida draws on two foundations of memory. First is the Greek model of Mnemosyne and Lethe, memory and forgetfulness, emphasizing the oracle of Trophonios’s dictate that one must drink from both pools to prepare one’s mind. As Derrida points out, the Greeks also referred to Mnemosyne as a truth figure, an *aletheia*. However, the concepts of Mnemosyne/*aletheia* and Lethe/*lethe* refer not only to memory/truth and forgetfulness but also to disclosure (*aletheia*) and concealment (*lethe*). Complementary to his foray into the Greek influence is Derrida’s discussion of the opposition in two German words for memory. *Gedächtnis* is the memory that thinks and preserves within itself the memory of its thinking, as happens in memorization. *Erinnerung* is voluntary memory, an “interiorizing memory” that gathers and preserves experiences (Derrida *Memoires* 51). Within memory, there is always a tension between what we record as facts and the impact of our experiences. In applying both the Greek and German models, memory becomes a construct molded by both the interplay and opposition of disclosure and concealment by facts and experiences. This dichotomous model determines that the past we resurrect is always a past that never existed, a past that had “never been present” (59). However, the value in this resuscitated past is that it “engages the future” (58). As structured by Derrida, the tribute to the lost conforms to Ramazani’s concept of the modern family elegy. In each, there is the remembrance, living on, forgetting, retrieving, losing, saving, and surviving that produces successful mourning—and a life to come.

In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida posits that European history is a history of responsibility, the “responsibility of a free self” (4). At the core of this history is the move from the secrets “of the sacred, orgiastic, or demonic mystery,” often relying on the loss of consciousness or demonic possession to obliterate personal responsibility, to what we call religion. Derrida focuses on the shared religions of the people of the Book, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, as having initiated the religion of a free self. This concept of religion is predicated upon a subject who says *myself*, who relates to oneself as an “instance of liberty and singularity,” a self embracing responsibility (5). This religion could only come to exist once the “mystery of the sacred” [was], “if not destroyed, at least integrated, and finally subjected to the sphere of responsibility” (4-5). European history is thus a “*passage*” from the irrationality of demonic desire to an “ethical conscience” (5).<sup>34</sup> The first step in this passage is embracing the responsibility to break with ancient knowledge and norms. In conjunction with responsibility, faith is required to venture into a life beyond knowledge and certainty into one of “absolute risk” (8). At the end of the passage is what Derrida calls “the gift”—the “marriage of responsibility and faith” (8). He calls this the gift of death.

Derrida argues that the gift of death is tied to the “terrifying mystery, the dread, fear, and trembling,” resulting from the gaze of God, “the absolute highest being” (8). At the heart of this gift is Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac—the “unique, irreplaceable, and most precious”—to the new God (55). God has given Abraham no rationale for this supreme sacrifice, and he does not have to; he is simply God, the divine other. Abraham has no way of knowing the reason, yet he is free to decide whether to sacrifice his son. Derrida offers another intriguing part of this story. God is not silent; he provides clear instructions to Abraham; he

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<sup>34</sup> Derrida argues that historicity must ever remain a passage—a “problem, never to be resolved”—as resolution would determine “the end of history” (*Gift* 7).

simply provides no justification for the sacrifice. Abraham is also not silent; he tells his servants and Isaac he is going on a mountain to sacrifice to God. However, Abraham is secretive. When Isaac asks why they have no sacrificial lamb, Abraham responds enigmatically that God will provide the lamb. According to Derrida, Abraham “speaks and doesn’t speak. He responds without responding. . . . He responds indirectly. He speaks in order not to say anything about the essential thing that he must keep secret” (60). Quoting Kierkegaard, Derrida concludes that “Abraham *cannot* speak [frankly], because he cannot say that which would explain everything” (62). Abraham’s aporia is in the decision he must make to either betray the divine, absolute other by speaking of the demand for sacrifice or to betray his own singularity by making the sacrifice.

In her three memoirs, H.D. strives to achieve singularity while, at the same time, to acknowledge the part of those she has loved that has become a part of her self. She writes that she began analysis “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” (*Tribute* 13). She wanted to “take stock of [her] possessions,” the first of which was that she “*owned*” herself (13; her italics). However, she immediately retracts this claim and writes, “My family, my friends, and my circumstances owned me” (13). In these three texts, she attempts to reclaim her self but also pays homage to the parts of the lost others that are a part of her. In these three texts, she succeeds in varying degrees. The memoirs encompass equal parts of veneration and resistance but with varying degrees of candor. At times, she succeeds in reclaiming her self; at times, she fails; she often subversively masks success in failure.

In each of these three memoirs, H.D. describes the sacrifices imposed upon her by those whom she considers higher powers: rejecting her gift of vision, denying her psychic abilities,



abjuring her poetic individuality. These obligatory sacrifices threatened her identity, yet she initially made them willingly. First, she clings to acting out her trauma by reenacting traumatic scenes in which “victimization is combined with oblation or gift giving” (LaCapra 24). She remains the victim; she maintains her fidelity to the absent divinity: her father, Freud, Pound. However, she progresses from acting out to working through; she transitions from victimization to mourning. She manages to break her “bond with the dead” (in Pound’s case, destroyed rather than dead), which had invested the trauma of loss with “value” and created an “unconscious desire to remain within [the] trauma” (LaCapra 22-23). She escapes the divination of the lost; she refuses to give the gift of her self; she embraces her inheritance.

### 2.1.1 *The Gift* (written 1941-1944)

*A title is always a promise.*

Jacques Derrida *Memoires for Paul de Man* (1989)

*Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"*

*Let us go and make our visit.*

T.S. Eliot *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917)

*I believe the phrasing of a question to the Delphic oracle in the old days, was considered as important as the answer to it.*

H.D. *Majic Ring* (1943-44)

H.D. began *The Gift* in 1941 during a London Blitz air raid. She completed the first six chapters in that year, wrote the final chapter in 1943, and, in 1944, completed the sizable "Notes" section that complements the text. *The Gift* was not published in its entirety until 1998. Scholars are divided over H.D.'s intent for *The Gift*. It is undoubtedly autobiographical, a narrative of female empowerment, and a treatise against war. It may be read as a religious and prophetic text, a search for meaning, or a search for her mother. H.D.'s copious endnotes on her family's history and the history of the Moravian Church—both in Europe and America—complicate the discussion on intent. There is a fair amount of consensus that the title of the book refers to the psychic gifts H.D. believes she has inherited from her Moravian grandmother. My approach differs by focusing instead on the gift that H.D. is being asked to give, the sacrifice she, like all

women in her family, had been asked to make—the sacrifice of their artistic or spiritual gifts at the behest of a male, higher power. In *The Gift*, H.D. creates a modern elegy for all the dead women in her family but also an elegy for a few of the male higher powers. Like Abraham, H.D. often finds she can neither keep silent nor speak frankly. She speaks enigmatically, then, to avoid saying anything about the essential things she must keep secret.

H.D. opens *The Gift* with the provocative statement, “There was a girl who was burnt to death at the seminary . . . where our grandfather was principal” (35). The child Hilda, rather than H.D., makes this opening statement. Hilda then quickly introduces her parents, grandparents, siblings, and other family members. She also relates that the girl’s burning is not part of her personal history. As the girl burned, the other girls “stand[ing] around” were Hilda’s mother and aunts (35). Interspersed within her introduction, she also tells why the girl at the seminary was burned to death. She died because she was wearing the huge hoop crinoline of the 1800s—which virtually encaged women—prohibiting anyone from tearing off her burning clothes to save her. When Hilda’s grandfather Papalie—as principal of the seminary, a higher power—tries to save the burning girl, he is thwarted by the crinoline—exemplifying the existing social system—from doing so. In this opening volley, we learn much about Hilda’s family; the girl who burned to death remains forever nameless.

Within the following few pages, readers learn that—before Hilda’s birth—her mother’s sister, her aunt’s daughter, her father’s first wife, her sister, and her half-sister have all died (and it would be tempting to add H.D.’s stillborn daughter to this list). Musing on these deaths, the young Hilda asks, “Why was it always a girl who had died?” (37). Why is the gift of life more tenuous for females than for males? Nevertheless, Hilda—the only girl in a family of five brothers and eight boy cousins—lives and believes she is the “inheritor” of a mythic family gift

(37). Hilda struggles to understand what her inherited gift is. She understands inheritance; she is accustomed to spreading flowers in the family graveyard and remembering the dead. The essence of the gift, however, escapes her. H.D. suddenly interjects to explain that the “expression of [this] gift” lies buried in cemeteries not only nearby but in older countries far away and to warn us that in Hilda’s “flashes of flash-backs [are] the ingredients of the Gift” (37, 42). H.D. speaks to remind us that Hilda has only the perspective of a child.

Why does H.D. engage a child to narrate rather than simply tell her own story? Masters of narrative discourse such as Gérard Genette, Wayne C. Booth, and Robert Dale Parker pay scant attention to employing the child narrator.<sup>35</sup> Parker provides some guidance, writing that child narrators are typically unreliable due to their lack of understanding of the adult world. Therefore, adult readers may “depend on the child’s narration” but must interpret events from an adult perspective (Parker 70). Although these critics provide limited direction on interpreting the child narrator, each refers to Henry James’s *What Maisie Knew* as a prime example of the genre. From Booth’s perspective, the effect of the child narrator in *What Maisie Knew* is essential in creating the reader’s response: pity but also the “illusion of life,” which can be present only if there is “bewilderment” (Booth 45). However, all these masters of the narrative agree that there is a limit to the bewilderment readers can be asked to endure when employing a child narrator.

For this reason, both Parker and Genette recognize the importance of a shift in focalization to convey significant information that escapes the primary focalizer, especially that of the child narrator. Parker writes that the additional focalizer can be either another character or an “exterior narrator” (72). H.D. assumes this role of the exterior narrator when she interrupts to

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<sup>35</sup> Genette Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cornell UP, 1993.; Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. U Of Chicago P, 1983.; Parker, Robert Dale. *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*. 2nd ed., Oxford UP, 2008.

alert readers to the importance of Hilda's flashbacks. Chiefly though, H.D. silences herself in the first chapter except for a few authorial comments. This silencing is an unusual stance, as Genette argues that the "autobiographical narrator . . . [has no] reason to impose silence on himself" (198). Why does H.D. find her self-imposed silence necessary?

I contend that H.D. employs the child Hilda to speak many truths that H.D. finds necessary but uncomfortable. These truths are typically sprinkled innocuously within the family story that Hilda tells. The truths are often about her father—a respected professor and astronomer, a reticent man, somewhat an outsider in Hilda's gregarious maternal clan. Her Papa never speaks "much about himself;" he is typically too busy to interact with his children, busy doing "we didn't know quite what" (39). Upon Hilda's birth, he was so busy that "he ran his finger down the names in the back of a dictionary" to choose her name (40). She dismisses thoughts creeping into her mind of her "kind father" having a connection to Bluebeard from the fairy-tale simply because her "Papa had a black beard" (39). Yet her Papa has a dead wife and two dead daughters in the family cemetery, who are somehow distinctly his and not part of her sizeable Moravian family. If her Papa had named her Alice (the name of her dead sister) rather than Hilda, would she have been the one to die? Or perhaps she would have been gifted—whatever that might mean.

For Hilda's mother's Moravian family, *gifted* meant *artistic*—able to draw, write a book, or play music. Hilda's mother was gifted in music—both playing the piano and singing, but she no longer sings. Once when Mama was "alone," "hiding," and "singing," she heard her father outside the door asking, "who is making that dreadful noise in here?" (51). Mama said she knew "he didn't mean to hurt me," but "Mama never sang any more" (52). Nevertheless, the concept of *gifted* is one to which Hilda's mother repeatedly returns. She assures Hilda that—even though

a fortune-teller told her she would have a “child who was in some way especially gifted”—neither Hilda nor her brothers are gifted (51). Hilda repeatedly tells us that it is her mother who speaks of her children as not being gifted; it is her mother who “gave [her own] gift away” (43). Just as Hilda does of her father, she speaks deferentially of her mother’s attributes: her artistic gifts; her devotion to her husband, children, and other family members; her intelligence and creativity. As when Hilda speaks of her father, criticism of her mother is veiled, tempered, and appears uncalculated in a childlike manner.

Much has been written of the Freudian dynamics permeating *The Gift* and H.D.’s attempt in this memoir to work through her veneration and resistance to both parents.<sup>36</sup> However, my focus is on how H.D.’s text reflects her mourning process rather than a critique of the family romance. She resists incorporating either her mother or father into her self. With her mother, this resistance takes an unorthodox turn. In an intriguing passage, Hilda declares that she is the “inheritor” of caring about Fanny, her aunt, who died in childhood (37). As she reflects on this inheritance, she ventures that perhaps she is Fanny “come back,” which would make her the child of her grandparents just as her mother was (37). She then writes, “in a sense, I would *be* Mama” (37; my italics). Since this declaration comes from a child, it can be easy to overlook this reversal of supplanting rather than incorporating the loved one in the process of mourning; H.D. does not allow us to overlook it.

Hilda’s reverie on her mama and her gift engages H.D., who spends the second chapter telling the story of her mother’s premarital visit to a fortune-teller. Now H.D., rather than Hilda, supplants herself into her mother, Helen Wolle, describing in detail the landscape Helen encounters along the way, the thoughts triggered by the landscape, Helen’s frock, and the sounds

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<sup>36</sup> See Susan Stanford Friedman’s *Psyche Reborn* and *Penelope’s Web*.

coming from a nearby church. She alternates between deliberating on what her mother must have been thinking and authoritatively relaying Helen's thoughts. As Helen was a small child during the American Civil War, she could not possibly have remembered its beginning. However, "Mama . . . had heard the stories so many times" that H.D. can recount her mother's reconstructed stories of the event (61). As Helen travels to visit the fortune-teller, H.D. tells us that Helen's mind is primarily occupied with approaching thirty and being unmarried. She debates marrying her cousin Edd, but she has no desire to do so. Her thoughts are only for "the young Spaniard who was a student at the University, who had caught her in his arms" and kissed her in a way she "must not think of" (64, 78). Helen also assesses her personal qualities. She knows herself to be "authoritative, even dictatorial . . . [and sometimes] mechanical (70). She does not analyze "any of her feelings;" she does not "look back" (71). While with the gypsy fortune-teller, she remembers things that the gypsy recalls for her. As is her custom, Helen puts these uncomfortable memories aside when she leaves.

As the third chapter begins, H.D. is in control of the narrative. First, she delivers a treatise on dreams, their connection to memory, and the mythologizing inherent in dreams. A recent mythologized dream is about one of Hilda's early Christmases. The specific Christmas seems unimportant; each had the same family gathered, the same rituals, and the same religious symbols. Then H.D. tells us that this particular Christmas is meaningful because it followed Papalie's death and her family's move from the Wolle family enclave in Bethlehem to the outskirts of Philadelphia, where her father would be the professor of astronomy. This wrenching move provides entrée into her father's story, and again H.D. recruits Hilda to narrate. Papa is "outside everything;" the house, the Doolittle children, and the extended Moravian family belong to Mama (96). Her father is a "separate" entity, and "no one [in the family] seemed to belong to"

him (97). However, sometimes when Papa comes home, he greets Hilda as *Töchterlein* (little daughter), “not looking at Mama” (95). Hilda feels that, for Papa, she is special.

Papa seems only an occasional occupant of their new home as he spends much of his time in his off-campus observatory. Everything in the house “revolved around” her father, a distant, detached figure who never told “us what he was doing” in his work as a professor of astronomy (97-98). Even Hilda’s mother does not “pretend to” understand his work (97). The times when he gives his children gifts or spends time alone with them are rare occasions, so rare that Hilda focuses on one particular Christmas outing that took place before their move to Philadelphia. Papa takes the children out in the snow one night before Christmas and buys them a box of cardboard animals. As H.D. takes over the narration, she recalls that everything about this night was different; “Even the snow was different” (99). In this way, H.D. brings this chapter back to its beginning to muse over memory and dreams: the reliability and importance of both, emphasizing learning how to interpret them.

As Chapter IV begins, H.D. leaves Hilda behind and brings us into her present moment. Luftwaffe bombs are peppering London, and “time is wiped away” (109). The bombing also reminds her of the possibility of “complete physical annihilation” (109). It brings to mind those she lost during the first war—Papa and brother Gilbert, but, interestingly, not her stillborn child—and those she has lost since: chiefly, her mother, Helen. With occasional assistance from Hilda, H.D. recounts old memories and uses them to interpret her dreams. At this point in her life, she has found that giving her mind “wings” can counteract the panic caused by the fear of annihilation (110). As she lies awake, her memories are “magic;” when she sleeps, her dreams leave her “not so safe” (113). In this chapter, H.D. recalls random images, words, tales, and sensations from her childhood to provide insight into her recurring dreams.



Chapter V's title is "The Secret," and H.D. offers two possibilities for decoding the secret's meaning within the text. Her narrative is of a late-night encounter between Hilda and her grandmother, Mamalie. It takes place in the Doolittle's new house, where several Wolle family members have come for a visit. The children have been put to bed, and the adults—absent Professor Doolittle, of course—have gathered on the porch to talk late into the night. Mamalie, elderly and infirm, leaves her adult children and retires to the bed she shares with Hilda. Mamalie—most often mistaking Hilda for long-dead family members and her living children—recounts her Moravian family history. The discourse includes the gift Mamalie has inherited from them, the gift of returning in a dream state to experience momentous events in her ancestors' lives. After H.D. recounts the history, she confesses that this episode with Mamalie may not have actually occurred but could have come to her in a dream.

H.D. also mentions throughout her tale that it took her many years to realize the story's significance in her own life. She, too, has inherited this gift, which manifested itself in her childhood but remained unexpressed until the bombs fell onto London. The "shock to [her childish] mind" that unloosed the gift was when she "found my father wounded" (166). She then recounts this story in Chapter VI. As he often did, her father returned home early and alone from a reception he attended with Hilda's mother. As usual on these occasions, each took a streetcar home. On this evening, Professor Doolittle arrived at the door dazed and bleeding. The children tried, unsuccessfully, to wash away the blood, and Hilda's brother Gilbert ran for help. Gilbert comes back with adult help, and then Helen Doolittle arrives home. The children are dismissed as the adults take over. Frightening new words, like *concussion*, are being bandied about, and Hilda does not understand what is happening. As is usual when the story is about her father,

Hilda narrates. As expected, her narrative is a mix of present and past, facts and childish suppositions.

In this instance, Hilda interrupts the story of her father's accident to relay three memories that appear extraneous to the story. First, she tells of her older, beloved half-brother Eric cutting himself while shaving as she and her brother Gilbert tease him about his fiancé Nellie. H.D. makes a point of her mother telling her and Gilbert that they are not to lock the door when playing in the bathroom. She does not explain why Eric asks that they do not mention Nellie to him "anymore" (201). Next, H.D. intervenes and spends pages describing a "terrible time, that [she and her brothers] never told anybody about," when they were to visit a farm while her parents were at the World's Fair. The family maid, Ida, apparently pocketed the money intended to pay the farmer for the children's keep. Ida then took the children instead to her cousin's house, where they were mistreated. Finally, Hilda tells of the "man in the milk-cart" who offered her a ride. She accepted and, while riding, "looked at the man and I saw he was . . . he had . . . and he said" (205; H.D.'s ellipses). At this point, Hilda lied to the driver, telling him that she had reached her home, jumped out of the cart, and ran home. The story then abruptly returns to Professor Doolittle's accident as Hilda waits for word on her father. However, word of Professor Doolittle's condition is not forthcoming.

In the final chapter, H.D. is blasted into the present by Luftwaffe bombs falling on London.<sup>37</sup> The only way to alleviate her fear and anxiety is to remember Mamalie's story of the early Moravian faithful. As she lets the "images and pictures flow through" her, she recalls that she, like Mamalie, has the "Gift of Vision" to see into the past, link its terrors to the present, and

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<sup>37</sup> Germany's Luftwaffe conducted a *blitzkrieg* (lightening war) against the United Kingdom from September 7, 1940 through May 7, 1941. The near-daily raids on London hurt war production and killed and left homeless many civilians. By the end of the Blitz, more than 40,000 civilians in London had been killed and almost fifteen percent of Londoners had been left homeless.

envision a future (212; 214). In addition to relating her past and present terrors, H.D. writes of other emotions linking the past to the present—mental exhaustion, the compulsion to feel gratitude for things that should be “taken for granted” (217). She equates her present condition of being “over-strung, under-nourished” with that of the “over-strung, possibly under-nourished” child Hilda (217). Even with the qualifying *possibly*, it is impossible to think of the upper-middle class Wolle/Doolittle family as physically under-nourished. To solve this riddle, Suzette Henke points us to “H.D. by Delia Alton,” in which Delia Alton writes of “emotional starvation” (194). Perhaps this wordplay is one of H.D.’s subversive attempts to say what she is unwilling to state openly. However, *The Gift* ends on a positive note. H.D.’s reclaiming of many childhood memories and the resulting psychic connection to her Moravian past have enabled her to move beyond the terror of the bombing into a sense of eternity—and hope. As comforting as this was, it was not the outcome that Freud would have wished.

In her initial analysis with Freud in 1933, H.D.’s primary motivation was to elicit his help in “deciphering the occult visionary experiences” that had begun following her initial emotional breakdown in 1919 (Friedman *Psyche* 131).<sup>38</sup> Instead, Freud encouraged H.D. to focus on her relationship with her mother. In Freud’s view, this was vital for any lesbian, based on his conclusion that a lesbian was a woman who had failed to transfer her affection from the mother to the father during her “passage through the Oedipus complex” (124). Also, Freud considered H.D.’s visionary experiences to be “‘dangerous symptoms’ of neurosis reflecting problems . . . [she] had in completing the difficult route to ‘normal’ femininity” (131). Friedman posits that

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<sup>38</sup> In both *Psyche Reborn* and *Penelope’s Web*, Susan Stanford Friedman delves deeply into H.D.’s analysis with Freud. Friedman’s interpretation of the analysis and its influence on H.D.’s *The Gift* and *Tribute to Freud* are crucial when exploring these works from the perspective of Freudian psychology. Since my focus is on the elegy and mourning, I predominantly rely on Friedman’s work for background information.

Freud also saw the visionary experiences as symptoms of her unresolved mother complex—symptoms that threatened her ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

As she did with most of Freud's theories, H.D. found a way to cull from them the aspects she found helpful and make them her own. As she recovered her mother, she understood and appreciated the prevailing societal obstacles facing the woman artist. She then began the transformation of the *mother* to support her artistic endeavors. In *Paint It Today*, the mother confronts her daughter with societal expectations she assumes will be met. In *Asphodel*, these expectations are so internalized that they live in the mind of her daughter. In *The Gift*, she transforms her mother by supplanting her thoughts into her mother's mind. H.D. also pays homage to her mother by acknowledging, "How could I know that this apparent disappointment that her children were not 'gifted,' was in itself her own sense of inadequacy and frustration, carried a step further?" (*Gift* 51). In H.D.'s later analysis with Freud, he kept his focus on H.D.'s lack of progressing *normally* through the Oedipus complex and attaching herself emotionally to her father. Friedman writes that *The Gift*—and especially Chapter VI—is a "self-analysis that protects and heals by bringing the exiled daughter back 'home,' by redefining that home so that it empowers instead of suffocates"—much as Freud wanted her to do (Friedman *Penelope* 330). However, H.D. disagreed with critics who credited this chapter on her father's concussion, "What It Was," as the book's defining moment.

H.D. writes that the preceding chapter, "The Secret," is the crucial chapter of *The Gift*. In this chapter, she describes the gift passed along to her by her maternal grandmother, Mamalie: a gift of seeing, hearing, and experiencing the past ("H. D. by Delia Alton"<sup>39</sup> 196). This psychic connection is the "thing," the gift that the child Hilda has inherited; it is a gift about which she

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<sup>39</sup> Delia Alton is one of H.D.'s many pseudonyms. In the notebook "H. D. by Delia Alton," H.D. provides insight into her later poetry and prose.

was “not free to express [her] understanding” until 1941 (*Gift* 166). Freud had cautioned H.D. about believing herself a prophetess and seer; he had warned her that these beliefs were pathological. H.D. paid lip service to this advice during Freud’s lifetime but, after his death, abandoning those beliefs was a sacrifice that she was unwilling to make. As she completes *The Gift* during the 1941 air raid, H.D. elects to liberate and reclaim her gift. This gift is a part of who she believes herself to be.

How can we interpret *The Gift*, and what (and to whom) is the *gift* being conveyed? As in all literary works, the answer lies—no matter the author’s intention—with the reader.<sup>40</sup> Also, as in many literary works, arriving at an interpretation is further complicated by the author's hints. Interpretation is especially frustrating concerning *The Gift* due to H.D.’s numerous references to it in her essays and letters. In “H.D. by Delia Alton,” the authors return time and again to *The Gift*, as H.D. also does in *Majic Mirror* and her letters. In “H.D. by Delia Alton,” the authors write that, in *The Gift*, “There was a great deal more to be said than I could more than hint at” (189). I will now explore these *hints*.

In *The Gift*, H.D. devotes the most significant amount of text to her Moravian heritage and the Moravians’ history in Europe and America. Her “Notes” are about one-third of *The Gift*’s length and are almost exclusively about the Moravians. While *The Gift* is filled with fantasy and images, the “Notes” are predominantly historical facts based on extensive research.

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<sup>40</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman thoroughly investigates *The Gift* in *Psyche Reborn*, summing it up as a “spiritual reunion with her mother that . . . helped to confirm art as a possible female destiny in a world that designated aesthetic genius and creation as the province of men” (137). In *Penelope’s Web*, Friedman refers to *The Gift* as a “self-analysis that protects and heals” (330). Lara Vetter, in *A Curious Peril*, quotes from “H.D. by Delia Alton” and *Majic Ring* to emphasize H.D.’s “faltering faith in the factual” (Vetter 36). Vetter explores H.D.’s post-World War II prose, which she finds more political than her early prose. I believe that *The Gift* can be seen as a waystation on this journey. Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues that, in *The Gift*, H.D. “parses a gift [that is] more than creativity, more than heritage, more than talent, . . . [but a] vision of power and peace” (qtd. in *The Gift* 2). In *Writing beyond the Ending*, DuPlessis explores women’s narrative strategies of muting (subversively expressing what—for women—must not be said). While DuPlessis does not delve deeply into *The Gift*, her concept of muting is a process I will explore.

H.D., rather than the child Hilda, narrates when writing of the Moravians and their gifts. I conclude that H.D. was compelled to present this information in the logical manner of the scientific men in her life—Papalie, her father, and Freud—rather than with artistry to provide it the gravitas she felt it deserved.<sup>41</sup> H.D. justifies her *gift* to these dead men in the only language they would have understood.

While H.D. provides brief biographical sketches of her immediate family in the “Notes,” we learn most about them and her relationship with them in the text, usually from the child Hilda or, in the case of her mother, by H.D. taking over her mother’s thoughts. It is from H.D. that we learn that, in her analysis, Freud told her that she must reach closure on these relationships, especially those with her mother and father. Even as she prepared for her analysis with Freud, she wrote psychologist and friend Havelock Ellis that she was “hoping” that Freud could help resolve remnants from her childhood that continued to haunt her (Freidman *Analyzing* 14). H.D. then recounted the “terrible incident” of her father’s accident and how she and her brothers were “shunted aside” (14). Early in her analysis, H.D. wrote to Bryher that she was now able to interpret a dream of Scorpio, who represents her father, a “cold, distant, upright, devoted father and husband,” whose scientific profession leaves her with a sense of “terror” (212). Later in discussing a “block” in her analysis, she attributed the block to the “‘father’ vibration” that lingers even after she is learning to “idealize the mother-idea” (331). As H.D. repeatedly wrote in *Tribute to Freud* and in her letters to Bryher, Freud viewed the “mother-fix” as a crucial aspect of H.D.’s analysis (Friedman *Psyche* 132). It is therefore not surprising that the family romance plays a large part in interpreting H.D.’s *oeuvre*.

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<sup>41</sup> Papalie (Francis Wolle) was a biologist; H.D.’s father (Charles Doolittle) was a mathematician and astronomer.

However, it is intriguing that little mention is made of the time gap between H.D.'s analysis with Freud in 1933 and 1934 and her working through the issues he considered paramount by writing *The Gift* in 1943. H.D. let these issues lie dormant until after his death. In completing *The Gift*, she felt she had resolved the father vibration and mother-idea to her satisfaction. Writing in notes not published with *The Gift*, H.D. writes, "It was presumed that I loved my father. Perhaps love is not the word for it. Or shall we say, if each of us, individually is a sun . . . Papa was . . . not so much Jove or Jupiter or Zeus-Pater, God the father, as Saturn, Time, father-time" (qtd. in Henke 28-29). She had also begun the transformation of her mother. Upon completing *The Gift*, H.D. began writing (as Delia Alton) an autobiographical account of the visionary experiences that had so disturbed Freud. In this work, *Majic Ring*, she writes, "I didn't think my own personal pattern or patterns of husband-friend-self or mother-father-child . . . [were] as important as my mind seemed to make it or my mind seemed to want to make it. That is why the various stories or the novels had proved unsatisfactory, had been a 'lot of useless stuff . . . no good'" at all (74-75). Nevertheless, after writing this, H.D. returned to the husband-friend-self puzzle with *Bid Me to Live* and continued to flesh it out until this book's publication in 1950.

For me, the most challenging hint H.D. provides in *The Gift* is the unexpected turn in "What It Was" from her father's accident to three unrelated incidents in her childhood before her equally bewildering return to the accident. Each of these incidents focuses on *that which must not be told*; in the third story, an additional complication is that what the milk-cart driver "was . . . had . . . [and] said" is purposely left unsaid (*Gift* 205). Missing from each of these three stories is why the story must not be told. A possible interpretation is that H.D. illustrates how random, unsought memories intrude as we attempt to process experiences. Alternatively, the child Hilda

may signal that there is more to each of these stories—and that of her father’s accident—than the adult H.D. is prepared to divulge.<sup>42</sup>

In writing of the modern family elegy, Ramazani distinguishes between those written by men versus women. He argues that females (specifically those writing after the nineteenth century) are more likely to use the “parental elegy to vent continuing rage, to reinspect childhood wounds, and to scrutinize parental power in its absence” (Ramazani 22). While Ramazani’s focus is on female poets, his argument is compelling for women’s prose, as well. As is often the case with H.D., she offers a variation on Ramazani’s theme. The rage, wounds, and scrutiny are present in her early autobiografiction, where she provides some protection to herself—and others—with pseudonyms. *The Gift* is largely non-fictional, yet she is unable to voice truths that remain uncomfortable. In *The Gift*, H.D. leaves this task to Hilda.

In *The Gift*, H.D. gives a posthumous gift to Freud. Her Moravian family motto was, after all, *L’amitié passe même le tombeau*—Friendship traverses even the grave. In this memoir, she finally confronts the family romance that Freud believed was her burden. Her work in *The Gift* is replete with images, scenes, and symbols that are classically Freudian. We can view this as homage paid to Freud. Alternatively, her use of Freudian tropes may be an example of the “magnificent charades” H.D. attributed to their sessions (H.D. *Tribute* 120). In these charades,

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<sup>42</sup> In *Shattered Subjects*, Suzette Henke suggests that H.D.’s symbols and imagery—and what she leaves unsaid—is “rife with sexual symbolism and illicit desire” (33). Henke notes, however, that H.D. was fully conversant with Freud’s theories by the time of her analysis and may have used Freud’s tropes but given them a meaning all her own. For example, the pervasive snakes in her dreams could disguise real or imaginary violation or could be symbolic of a “patriarchal gatekeeper” denying women a place in a man’s world (34). In *Psyche Reborn*, Susan Stanford Friedman’s focus is on “the return to the mother” and its importance in H.D.’s life as an artist (145). Friedman rarely explores the symbolism and imagery in *The Gift* other than to write that H.D. “accepted, without any moral hesitation, the incestuous base of erotic passion implicit in Freud’s theory of adult sexual love” (143). H.D. believed that she could draw on “her early feelings about her father and her more recent dreams centering on father-symbols” to explore her relationships with men (143). Later, in *Penelope’s Web*, Friedman notes the child’s “innocent attempts at interpretation” in *The Gift* as well as those instances when there is no attempt at interpretation (331). The latter typically occur in presenting nightmares, and Friedman sees this as the adult narrator’s resistance of “the pursuit of analysis” (338). Friedman views the nightmares of the child Hilda as “inseparable from the nightmare of history” that H.D. experiences as she writes *The Gift* (339).



Freud interpreted the meaning of H.D.'s dreams, memories, and impressions; H.D. argued for her interpretations. In their sessions, Freud was the final authority; H.D. may hint that she now assumes this role. Perhaps H.D.'s gift to Freud is tempered by her desire for dominion over her sense of self. Whether her gift to Freud is total reverence or something a bit less, the gift she gives herself certainly surpasses the gift she bestowed upon Freud. To her own satisfaction, H.D. justifies the spiritual gift that Freud had anxiously asked her to renounce.

**2.1.2 Tribute to Freud (“Advent” written 1933 & “Writing on the Wall” written 1944)**

*I don't ask you for forgiveness for betraying, wounding, or doing harm to you, for lying to you or breaking an oath, I don't ask for forgiveness for a misdeed, on the contrary I ask you to forgive me for listening to you, too faithfully, . . . for loving you, for preferring you, for choosing you and letting myself be chosen by you, . . . and as a result, for having sacrificed . . . the best of what is mine.*

In “Literature in Secret” (1999), Jacques Derrida’s summary of Abraham asking for God’s forgiveness in Kirkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*

*He will trouble the thoughts of men  
yet for many an aeon,  
.....  
only I,  
I will escape.*

H.D. “The Master” (written before November 1935)

In *The Gift*, H.D. wrote of many types of gifts: memorable presents she received, inherited characteristics, artistic and spiritual gifts passed down through generations. Her preoccupation with gifts continues in *Tribute to Freud*, a story of her quest to find the perfect gift for the man she called the Professor. One can argue that the text itself, which she designates as a tribute, is her gift to Freud, but H.D., as usual, complicates that argument. The text meets

multiple criteria implicit in the term *tribute*: it begins as an “homage” that the “subject” is under “obligation” to pay to her “sovereign;” throughout, it is an “acknowledgment of affection and esteem;” finally, it evolves into a “testimony” of Freud’s contributions to psychoanalysis (“tribute, *n.*” *OED*). In her tribute, H.D. lovingly bestows these gifts on Freud, but we can often read her conflict in doing so. Unlike *The Gift*, where H.D. employed the child Hilda to speak of—or hint at—things she was reluctant to state, only H.D. speaks in *Tribute to Freud*. Nevertheless, she reserves the privilege of speaking enigmatically.

H.D. complicates our understanding of what she intends to convey in her *Tribute*. In a dispute with Norman Holmes Pearson over the use of the word *tribute* in the title of her “Tribute to the Angels,” she argues that the term must remain in the title as she is writing about “a *payment that I owed them*” (qtd. in Morris 513; H.D.’s emphasis).<sup>43</sup> She refers Pearson to three biblical references to support her argument.<sup>44</sup> These scriptural references tie the meaning of *tribute* to both a tax and a freewill offering and indicate that a tribute can be paid in money, goods, respect, or honor. Adalaide Morris depends on this “homework” assignment for Pearson to argue that H.D.’s idea of a tribute is aligned with the ancient, precapitalist gift-economy, “organized by obligations to give, receive, and reciprocate” (493). Morris also relies on Marcel Mauss’s research to emphasize the sacred aspect of gift-giving in mythology and religious rituals. She argues that for H.D., the god is always in the goods.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> This quotation is from Adalaide Morris’s “A Relay of Power and of Peace: H.D. and the Spirit of the Gift,” in which Morris quotes Pearson’s notes (24 OCT 1944) for H.D.’s *Trilogy*. Morris’s essay explores H.D.’s concept of gift-giving, which Morris likens to that of anthropologist Marcel Mauss’s 1967 work *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Mauss explores precapitalist societies and concludes that the concept of a free gift is unfeasible. In the forward to Mauss’s work, Mary Douglas summarizes his argument as “each gift is part of a system of reciprocity in which the honour of giver and recipient are engaged” (xi). Mauss’s work is used to compare a market economy versus a gift economy, in which a social bond evolves leading to a mutual interdependence (i.e. solidarity) between giver and receiver.

<sup>44</sup> Numbers 31:28, Deuteronomy 16:10, and Romans 13:7

<sup>45</sup> As I explore *Tribute to Freud*, I will write of the misreading of *gods/goods* that appears repeatedly in H.D.’s text.

Ariela Freedman counters that Morris provides too “romantic” a reading of H.D.; the word *gift* does not “bear only utopian implications, read as always ‘sacred’”(197). Instead, Freedman contends that H.D.’s purpose for her tribute is to distinguish between the spiritual and the material. H.D. seeks to “underline the difference” between the “sacred vision” she hopes to convey and the secular, materialistic vision she attributes to Freud (190). While both Morris and Freedman’s interpretations of H.D.’s work as a *tribute* are intriguing, Freedman makes one point with which I agree entirely: *Tribute to Freud* is undeniably an elegy. It is a modern family elegy, as Ramazani describes it—a transition from respect, submission, and gratitude. H.D. acknowledges the debt she owes to Freud, yet she also challenges his patriarchal authority.

*Tribute to Freud* consists of “Writing on the Wall,” written in 1944, and “Advent,” a text she assembled from the notebooks she kept during the first month of her analysis with Freud in March 1933. In “Advent,” the cast of characters H.D. reports she discussed with Freud are familiar: her parents, Bryher, Richard Aldington, her still-born child, her daughter Perdita, Ezra Pound, Frances Gregg, and D.H. Lawrence. In our post-2020 world, Freud and H.D.’s references to the “Spanish influenza” epidemic are gripping, primarily as they were written more than a decade after its terror (“Advent” 129). H.D. contracted the flu late in her pregnancy with Perdita (1919), and nightmares of “death in the house” continue to haunt her in 1933 (163).<sup>46</sup> This traumatic event created a bond between H.D. and Freud since his “favorite daughter,” Sophie, died in childbirth from the influenza epidemic (128). The accounts in “Advent” are more personal than those in “Writing on the Wall” and often express frustration with Freud more

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<sup>46</sup> While *Paint It Today*, *Asphodel*, and *Bid Me to Live* all cover H.D.’s war years, there is one traumatic event that is only mentioned in *Asphodel*—and here only briefly. While pregnant with her daughter, Perdita, H.D. was deathly ill from World War I’s flu epidemic. She credited Bryher’s care for her survival. In *Asphodel*, she includes a brief, muddled scene in which (perhaps) a doctor, in khaki “on special duty—epidemic,” moves a delirious Hermione from her rooming house to a medical facility (188). Later, Darrington visits Hermione and refers to her “set-back” (191).

directly. In “Advent,” she writes that she was “rather annoyed with the Professor” for dismissing the creativity of women who did not have “a male counterpart or a male companion from whom they drew their inspiration” (149). She also writes of the times she “did not say” things to Freud, the times she tried “to meet him halfway,” the times she challenged him, “though not in words” (“Writing” 43, 68, 98). Recording her sessions in a notebook was a direct challenge to Freud, as he demanded that his analysands refrain from pre-session preparation, note-keeping, and sharing with others the substance of sessions. H.D. did all three—in private.

The tug-of-war Freud and H.D. play over her preparatory notes for each session is prevalent in “Advent.” Freud was opposed to any form of “preparation” by his analysands, believing that “preparation inhibited the flow of free association, thereby indicating resistance” (Friedman *Penelope* 301). For Freud, preparation included note-taking, diary-keeping (which he considered a “neurotic trait”), and analysis of one’s dreams outside the analytic session (301). When H.D. began her first twelve-week analysis (six sessions per week) with Freud in Vienna on March 1<sup>st</sup>, she was aware of Freud’s prohibition but argued in “Advent” that, although he did not want her to take notes, “I must do that” (165). She rationalized her notes as simply “preparing myself for the happiness of talking with him afterwards” (165). Freud’s objections to her notes increased through March; H.D.’s arguments in their favor continued. Undeterred, her extensive preparatory notes continue daily through March 25<sup>th</sup>, when they suddenly cease. At the end of their sessions on June 12<sup>th</sup>, she writes that she had “discontinued the notes [in late March], at the Professor’s *suggestion*” (187; my emphasis).

In addition to her note-taking, H.D. and Bryher wrote to each other daily to discuss H.D.'s sessions with Freud, whom they call *papa*.<sup>47</sup> H.D. also wrote to Kenneth Macpherson (Bryher's husband and H.D.'s former lover), as well as selectively permitting Bryher to share parts of their letters with him. The Sigmund Freud portrayed in H.D.'s letters is more human—witty, loving, sensitive, judgmental, intractable—than the godlike figure she depicts in her tribute. The letters are gossipy and fun, and, as Susan Stanford Friedman points out, H.D. is adept in choosing what to share—and what not to share—with her audience. H.D.'s self-censorship is “affected by the [individual] to whom they are written,” what the individual wanted to hear and was comfortable in hearing (Friedman *Analyzing* xxv). In her letters to Bryher, there is much talk of the escalating political unrest throughout Europe. H.D. is anxious over the deteriorating environment for Jews in Germany and Austria; Bryher is concerned with the threat of a European war and economic collapse, as well as the Jewish situation.<sup>48</sup> Yet, in her analysis, H.D. is circumspect in discussing her “war phobia” with Freud (Friedman *Penelope* 288). Freud alternated between having faith in a world's humanity that would stop Hitler and sobbing over “the fate awaiting his grandchildren” (289). Freud was old, sick, and frail by the time H.D. began her analysis, and she could not “in all decency” focus with him on her “own personal little Dragon of war-terror” (H.D. *Tribute* 93). H.D. sought to protect Freud at the expense of exploring her own fears.

In addition to her preparatory notes and her letters describing the sessions with Freud, H.D. wrote a poem hinting at her relationship with Freud. Written sometime in 1933 or 1934, she called it “The Master.” In it, she praises this godlike old man and emphasizes her love for him.

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<sup>47</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman's *Analyzing Freud: Letters of H.D., Bryher, and Their Circle* contains letters to and from H.D. in the years 1932-1937 pertinent to her analysis with Freud. Recipients and senders include Sigmund Freud, Havelock Ellis, and Ezra Pound.

<sup>48</sup> Bryher helped more than one hundred Jews escape Nazi persecution.

She also expresses her anger at his mysteries, his refusal to provide answers, his treatment of her as a child. However, she saves her greatest anger for his sense of patriarchal authority:

I was angry with the old man  
 with his talk of the man-strength,  
 I was angry with his mystery, his mysteries,  
 I argued until day-break;

O, it was late,  
 and God will forgive me, my anger,  
 but I could not accept it.

I could not accept from wisdom  
 what love taught,  
*woman is perfect.* (Part IV)

Friedman doubts that H.D. dared to “bring up with Freud” her anger over any of his pronouncements (*Penelope* 302). Instead, she wrote of her anger only to Bryher. “The Master” was not published in H.D.’s lifetime. In 1935 while preparing a volume of poems for publication, she was pressed to include “The Master” but “adamantly refused” in fear of having her “analysis spoiled again” (304). The poem would be evidence that she continued to write of her sessions with Freud and of the intense anger toward him she often felt—but did not express.

H.D. remains reluctant to challenge Freud openly in her tribute; instead, she borrows his own words to challenge him stealthily. She writes that the Professor asked “only one thing of me”— “to never endeavor to defend” him (“Writing” 86). This was not a request but a “shalt

not” from a higher power (86). H.D. takes advantage of this commandment by repeating throughout “Writing on the Wall” that “the Professor was not always right” (98). She also dedicates her tribute to “Sigmund Freud, blameless physician.” The original blameless physician was Asklepios of the Greeks, of whom H.D. writes that he was “half-man, half-god,” but H.D. notes that he “went a little too far when he began actually to raise the dead” (100). She assures us that Freud did not “pretend to bring back” the actual dead, but that he “raised from dead hearts and stricken minds and maladjusted bodies a host of living children” (101). However, she completes her analogy of Freud as the blameless physician by reiterating that he was not always right.

It was not until five years after Freud’s death that H.D. rendered her final gift to Freud in 1956 as *Tribute to Freud*. The first part of the tribute is “Writing on the Wall,” a short memoir of eighty-five sections, each about a page long. I argue that H.D. delays paying tribute to Freud until section seventy-eight. For only eight sections, she then capsulizes Freud’s career and his contribution to psychiatry. H.D. begins “Writing on the Wall” unconventionally for a tribute. Reminiscing of her initial analysis with the Professor in 1933, she quickly progresses to the following year’s analysis and attributes her return to Vienna in 1934 to the recent death of fellow-analysand J.J. van der Leeuw. His death seems an unusual trigger for her return as she had never been introduced to van der Leeuw, did not know his name until after his death and had only spoken to him once—briefly in passing. Offhandedly mentioning Freud’s advanced age and van der Leeuw’s comparative youth, H.D. recounts that she tells Freud she has come back to Vienna to tell him how sorry she is for van der Leeuw’s loss. She has assumed that van der Leeuw was the one to “carry on the torch—carry on [Freud’s] ideas” (6). H.D. quotes Freud as



responding ““You have come to take his place”” (6).<sup>49</sup> H.D. then continues her reverie on van der Leeuw and how odd it is that she had never “consciously” thought of him (8). Without warning, her memories return to her first session with Freud, with another reference to his advanced age.

For most of the memoir, she ponders the appropriate gift for the Professor. When her analysis with Freud began in 1933, she agonized over what she should offer him. She wanted to give him “something different” but could not find what she wanted, and so had “nothing” for him (8-9). Freud had mentioned the beauty of the gardenias in Rome and how, while there, even he “could afford to wear a gardenia” (9). H.D. searched all over Vienna but was unable to find a single gardenia. She spent several years on this “quest” before finding the flowers in 1938, when Freud began his exile from Nazi persecution in London (11). Amazed to see that Freud’s Greek, Egyptian, and Asian artifacts had made the journey with him, H.D. wrote on the card accompanying the gardenias, “To greet the return of the Gods” but failed to include her name (11).<sup>50</sup> Freud assumed she had sent the gift, and his acknowledgment referred to this phrase, noting, however, that some who saw the card read *goods* rather than *gods*. This confusion remains a constant theme throughout the remainder of her tribute as H.D. returns to “the Gods or

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<sup>49</sup> In *Analyzing Freud*, Friedman writes that “Freud *astutely* replied” that H.D. had come back ““to take [van der Leeuw’s] place”” (400; my italics). When Friedman quotes this exchange earlier in *Psyche* and *Penelope*, the word *astutely* is missing. Since this exchange is disclosed by H.D. after Freud’s death, a number of conjectures may be made on its meaning. H.D. could have been hinting that Freud recognized her as the new heir apparent. Freud also could have said this in recognition of, what he viewed as, H.D.’s intent to take van der Leeuw’s place as the impetus for her return.

<sup>50</sup> H.D.’s first visit to Freud in Vienna was in 1933. Freud escaped to London in mid-1938 and H.D.’s visit to him was in the fall. Leonard and Virginia Woolf visited Freud early in 1939. Julia Briggs sums up their meeting as follows: “Virginia Woolf met Sigmund Freud on: The 28th of January 1939 at 20 Maresfield Gardens. She said to him: We have often felt guilty – if we had failed to win the Great War, perhaps Hitler would not have been. He said to her: It would have been infinitely worse if you had not won the war. She gave him: Her close attention. He gave her: A narcissus. And the consequence was: She finally read his work. And the whole world said...but no doubt the whole world had other things to worry about in January 1939.” Quotation from a talk given by Julia Briggs at the Charleston Festival in 2006. “Virginia Woolf Meets Sigmund Freud.” *Charleston Trust*, 13 Jan. 2011, [www.charleston.org.uk/virginia-woolf-meets-sigmund-freud/](http://www.charleston.org.uk/virginia-woolf-meets-sigmund-freud/).

the Goods” reference. It is only at the end of this section that she finally acknowledges that Freud is dead. Her gift then takes on a new meaning.

H.D. justifies her belief that, although “Everybody will be scribbling memoirs” of Freud, no one can “scribble exactly *my* impressions of the Professor” (15; her emphasis). She concedes that she and Freud never argued about the “greater transcendental issues,” but there was “an argument implicit in our very bones” (13). She hints that a significant area for contestation was Freud’s focus on “the familiar family-complex,” while her focus was on intricate thoughts, imagination, dreams, and memory (14). Even though “the Professor was not always right,” she “did not argue” with him (18). However, in her tribute, H.D. makes veiled comments on his attempts to shock her, to break something in her—“something that would not, must not be broken” (16). She muses that he was “a terribly frightening old man, too old and too detached, too wise and too famous altogether” (17). Without transition, she then writes of her father and her older brother, Gilbert, highlighting their superiority and command. Her mother receives censure for favoring her brother but also praise for her occasional willingness to laugh away Gilbert’s demands. However, into these reflections, thoughts of the Professor often intrude, linking the present and the past, linking Freud and her father.

H.D. acknowledges Freud’s dictum on the “actuality of the present,” its relationship to the past, and both the present and past’s “bearing on the future” (23). However, she has faith in “another time-element” that is “fourth-dimensional” (23). This fourth dimension links symbols, sacred objects, people, emotions, and events in a manner that obliterates the distinction among past, present, and future. All are simply “priceless broken fragments” that are meaningless until matched with “other broken bits” that then, for H.D., create reality (35). She often refers to these fully formed visions as writing-on-the-wall. Since she wanted to “give the Professor something

different,” could developing his appreciation for her gift of vision be her gift to Freud (39)?. His gratitude is unlikely since the Professor called her writing-on-the-wall her “most dangerous” symptom (41). H.D. immediately shifts to her Princess-dream, one of her most recent out-of-time experiences.

However, this reminiscence leads to thoughts of Madame Marie Bonaparte, Princess George of Greece, or, as Freud calls her, “Our Princess” (42). Madame Marie had the means to provide Freud with just what he needs and wants. She had the Greek figures that Freud loved waiting for him in London after his flight from Vienna; she translated his works into French. H.D. acknowledges being “impressed, probably not a little envious of that *gifted* lady” and not being able to “compete with her” (42; my italics). Compared to the gifts of Our Princess, the gifts that H.D. can give Freud seem so small. Her gifts to Freud are that she does not argue with him, even when she believes him wrong; she dwells on the parts of her childhood that he finds pertinent.

In Freud’s view, the most pertinent aspect remaining from her childhood is “a desire for union with [her] mother,” which has led to H.D.’s episodes of writing-on-the-wall (44). While both she and Freud were drawn to history, cultures, religions, and mythologies and the need to interpret them, Freud viewed H.D.’s experience of seeing “writing-on-the-wall” as a “danger-signal,” the “most dangerous or the only actually dangerous ‘symptom’” of her propensities toward the occult (41). She described writing-on-the-wall as a “sort of dream or projected picture or vision as a sort of halfway state between an ordinary dream and the vision of those who, for lack of a more definite term, we must call psychics or clairvoyants” (41). H.D. argues against her writing-on-the-wall as a symptom, as abnormal, as dangerous. She reminds us of writing-on-walls in the Bible and classical literature. She offers that it can be evidence of “suppressed desire

. . . , breaking bounds, . . . megalomania . . . , a hidden desire to ‘found a new religion’ . . . , [or, more likely in her case] an extension of the artist’s mind” (51). At length, she details her own experience in viewing—and interpreting—writing-on-the-wall.

H.D. then moves seamlessly to an image of pre-war Vienna and the “signs of grim coming events” (57). During this fearsome time, she arrives for a session with Freud and gives him two gifts. First, when he asks what it is like on Vienna’s streets, H.D. tries to protect Freud by enigmatically telling him, “It’s very quiet . . . much the same as usual” (61). She does not mention the stacks of rifles on the streets or the swastikas chalked on the pavement leading “to the Professor’s door” (59). She views the second gift as her presence, as “*no one else has come*” (61; her italics). She alone has not abandoned Freud.

Nonetheless, these gifts seem not sufficient. H.D. continues page after page to be preoccupied with a gift for Freud. She does not want to “murmur conventional words;” her gift must be “something different” (63, 74). What H.D. longs to give Freud are additional years of his life: to reverse the “sands of his life;” to be the only person who can “entreat a kindly Being” to give him eternal life, or to “change my years for his” (73-74). H.D. longs to make the supreme sacrifice, to sacrifice her life for his, to give Freud time to increase his own—and the world’s—store of knowledge of the mind.

For a few sections, H.D. vacillates on the significance of Freud’s contribution to this knowledge. There were, after all, many others who contributed to psychological theory. However, Freud had the extra advantages of being “astute, methodical, conscientious, subtle, clever, original” (82). Psychoanalysis has indeed become a business enterprise for “astute doctors who ‘squeeze you dry’ with their exorbitant fees for prolonged and expensive treatments” (83). Certainly, Freud is guilty of contributing to this materialization of psychiatry

when he uses “the idiom or slang of the counting-house, of Wall Street,” and of the businessman when he speaks of striking oil (83). Most importantly for H.D. in 1944, “in a city of ruin, a world ruined, it might seem, almost past redemption,” how can one take “a flight from reality” to engage in academic thought (84-85)? Then H.D. remembers that Freud asked “only one thing” of her (85). At the time, she expected his request to be a “*shalt not*” rather than a demand for action (85). She was correct, but the type of *shalt not* was unexpected. Freud asked that she “never at any time, in any circumstance, endeavor to defend” him or his work (86). H.D. now knows that her gift to Freud must be to remember him without the “unbearable terror and overwhelming heartbreak” of their analysis in pre-war Vienna (90). She must put aside her personal worship of Freud, as well as their conflicts, and academically assess his universal impact.

Achieving this objectivity is not an easy task as H.D.’s spiritual “Garden of Remembrance” for Freud leads her repeatedly to *Kennst du das Land?*, the song of remembrance Mignon sings to Wilhelm Meister in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (“Writing” 94).

Know you the land where lemon blossoms blow,  
 And through dark leaves the golden oranges glow,  
 A gentle breeze wafts from an azure sky,  
 The myrtle’s still, the laurel tree grows high—  
 You know it, yes? Oh there, oh there  
 With you, O my beloved, would I fare.

Know you the house? Roof pillars over it,  
 The chambers shining and the hall bright-lit,  
 The marble figures gaze at me in rue:

“You poor poor child, what have they done to you?”

You know it, yes? Oh there, oh there,

With you, O my protector, would I fare.

Know you the mountain and its cloudy trails?

The mule picks out its path through misty veils,

The dragon’s ancient brood haunts caverns here,

The cliff drops straight, the stream above falls sheer.

You know it, yes? Oh there, oh there

Our path goes on! There, Father, let us fare!

In Goethe’s story, Wilhelm Meister’s career as a writer and actor has shown him that the theater “is mired in vanity” (Bell xvi). The more Wilhelm recognizes this, the less satisfaction he takes from his theatrical successes and the more he retreats into his personal relationships, particularly with the “mysterious androgynous child Mignon” (xvi).<sup>51</sup>

H.D. has an affinity to Goethe’s Mignon, describing her personal Mignon as “a soul” that began as a small, not pretty body that finally became pretty but too tall (“Writing” 106). It was “very easy” for everyone to see that she was not “quick and clever” like her brother Gilbert (101). She was simply a “wispy and mousy” sister between two “glowing and gold” brothers (106). Like Mignon, H.D. engages her master in a “ritual of question and answer” (107). For H.D., Freud has many aspects—papa, the Professor, the Master. In Goethe’s song, Mignon

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<sup>51</sup> Goethe’s “mysterious androgynous child Mignon” also brings to mind the child Midget in *Paint It Today* (1921). Midget with “no grace and beauty of girlhood seems of an inferior race” (*Paint It Today* 5). She never attained conventional beauty but, more importantly for her, she was “alive” and her “creative intellect” remained “intact” (83, 85). Finally, “memories came to Midget”: memories of gardens, of the war, and, most importantly, of those she had loved (86).

addresses Wilhelm Meister first as her beloved, then as her protector, and finally as her father. As H.D. observes, the first two verses end with Mignon's plea to Meister; the final verse ends with an affirmation. Mignon, like H.D., has found her self.

Reflecting on Mignon's song, H.D. ultimately gives her gift to Freud. He was "not always right;" he may have been "always right in his judgments," but H.D. claims for herself the more extraordinary gift of intuition (98). She analytically (for H.D.) assesses his purpose, successes, and potential faults. What H.D. is unwilling to do, however, is sacrifice her sense of self. It is noteworthy that she chooses for her tribute's title the phrase "Writing on the Wall," which Freud called her most dangerous symptom. While Freud was alive, H.D. was unwilling to challenge him in words; after his death, she found the words to challenge him. As she did in *The Gift*, H.D. speaks in *Tribute to Freud*. She had been willing to sacrifice much to Freud—even her life, but she is now unwilling to sacrifice the gift she believes she has been given. Like Abraham, H.D. cannot keep silent.

### 2.1.3 *End to Torment (written 1958)*

*As the Professor once said to me, "the analysis is never finished."*

H.D. "Hirslandin II" (1957)

*"O fragile human . . . Say and write what you see and hear.' . . . It happened that a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and inflamed my whole heart . . . not like a burning but like a warming flame . . . But I . . . refused to write for a long time."*

Hildegard von Bingen *Scivias* "Declaration" (c. 1151)

*So we were together  
though I did not think of you  
for ten years;*

*it is more than ten years  
and the long time after;*

.....

*there is something left over,  
the first unsatisfied desire —  
the first time, that first kiss*

H.D. *Winter Love* (1959)



Like H.D., Ezra Pound was an American by birth. The two met while Pound was a student at the University of Pennsylvania, and he was highly influential in her growth as an artist. They were engaged twice before Pound relocated to Europe. When H.D. and Frances Gregg traveled to London, H.D. and Pound reconnected—and Pound and Frances Gregg connected, both artistically and personally. H.D. was heartbroken over this betrayal, especially with Pound's seeming preference for Gregg's poems over hers. With a sense of rejection, she turned over a collection of poems written by Pound for and about her to Gregg, who named it "Hilda's Book." As portrayed in *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel*, Gregg abandoned both Pound and H.D., returning to America to marry Louis Wilkinson. After the Wilkinson marriage, it was Pound who intervened and stopped H.D. from leaving London to travel with the new couple on their honeymoon trip. Later, Pound became a constant presence in the Aldington marriage, which only Pound and H.D.'s parents attended. It was Pound who named her and helped to launch her career as H.D., *Imagiste*. Later, H.D.'s reliance on Pound waned, and both she and Aldington viewed his assistance as interference. The Aldingtons and Pound remained close for several years until Pound's insistence on being the ultimate arbiter of Imagist poetry made their tight-knit friendship awkward.

Ultimately, Pound's politics made their friendship impossible. By early 1921, Pound had become disenchanted by England and moved to France. Later, France too lost its appeal, and he moved to Italy. In Italy, Pound's anti-Semitism led him to embrace the fascism of Benito Mussolini, and in 1939, Pound sailed to New York to plead for America's embrace of fascism. Later, when war became a reality, Pound delivered radio broadcasts from Italy praising Mussolini and Hitler. In 1943, the United States indicted Pound, *in absentia*, for treason. After killing Mussolini in 1945, Italian Partisans took Pound into custody, and he was questioned by

the American FBI. For several weeks, he was held outdoors in a six-foot-square cage with steel bars. In late 1945, Pound was returned to the United States, where he was charged with treason but declared mentally unfit to stand trial. Instead, he was sent to St. Elizabeths Hospital, where he remained until 1958. He was then declared permanently insane with no possibility that further treatment could be beneficial. Upon release, Pound returned to Italy, where he died in 1972.

During and after World War II, individuals in the literary community developed firm and divergent opinions on Pound's political activities. Sentiments led to actions, and battle lines were distinctly and forcefully established when Pound was awarded the first Bollingen Prize for Poetry in 1948. As can be discerned from H.D. and Aldington's correspondence in the 1930s and 1940s, random memories of Pound and their early years frequently appear.<sup>52</sup> By the 1950s, Aldington's reaction to Pound had become intensely negative, which may be explained by the FBI interviewing Aldington about Pound, his relationship with Pound, and Aldington's politics, which, although quite conservative, were anti-fascist (*Zilboorg Letters* 357). He urged H.D. to "keep out of" the mess surrounding Pound (357). By 1957, Aldington believed that Pound was "unjustly scapegoated by the international press" (Hollenberg 197). Bryher's reaction to Pound was more consistent and forceful. She "strongly repudiated any attempt at supporting Pound after the war" (Debo *American* 116). In addition to Bryher's revulsion to Pound's politics, Annette Debo maintains that Bryher also viewed H.D.'s interest in Pound as "one more string, pulling H.D. back to her early American years," which, for Bryher, was "a rejection of their forty-year relationship" (115). However, H.D. could not put aside the Ezra Pound of her youth.

Pound's embrace of fascism repelled H.D. However, upon his impending release from incarceration at St. Elizabeths Hospital, H.D. seemed to have no option but to think of him. The

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<sup>52</sup> *Richard Aldington and H.D.: Their Lives in Letters 1918-1961* by Caroline Zilboorg.

American Press made him a *cause célèbre*; some fellow poets rallied around him in support of his impact on modern poetry rather than his politics; H.D.'s friends and correspondents talked of little else. Two people were primarily instrumental in what became H.D.'s memoir of Ezra Pound, *End to Torment*. First was her literary executor, Norman Holmes Pearson, who chaired the American studies program at Yale. Pearson was "invested in positioning H.D. as an American writer" (72).<sup>53</sup> The first step was for H.D. to regain her American citizenship, and Pearson successfully encouraged H.D. to do so.<sup>54</sup> Pearson also believed that H.D.'s penning a memoir of her lifelong friendship with another "American modernist" poet (Pound) represented an "avenue toward solidifying H.D.'s position in the American canon" (116). In 1958, H.D. was fully engaged in the repatriation project and began her memoir of Pound.

In addition to Pearson's encouragement, her current psychiatrist, Erich Heydt, relentlessly prodded H.D. to remember and work through her association with Pound.<sup>55</sup> Heydt's fascination with Pound could have contributed to this encouragement, as H.D. remembers Heydt's first words to her were, "You know Ezra Pound, don't you?" (H.D. *End* 11). He pushed H.D. until she remembered Pound with the hope that she could then reclaim her self. Although she dedicates *End to Torment* to Pearson, the text is full of Heydt. Lara Vetter argues that, as loyal as H.D. remained to Freud, Heydt's existential psychoanalysis offered her "an alternative

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<sup>53</sup> As Annette Debo explains in *The American H.D.*, it was not until the 1890s that the production of anthologies designed to "to prove the unique character of American literature . . . began in earnest" (74). The first journal of American literature was published in 1929, including six reviews by Norman Holmes Pearson. American studies programs began to appear at universities in the 1930s. Almost all prizes for American literature began to be awarded during the twentieth century.

<sup>54</sup> When H.D. married British citizen Richard Aldington in 1913, she automatically lost her American citizenship and became a British citizen. The law treated males and females differently, so expatriate Pound remained an American citizen. H.D. was ultimately repatriated in December 1958 and regained her American passport, but she never returned to the U.S. to live.

<sup>55</sup> H.D. composed three texts about her psychiatric treatment with Erich Heydt. *Magic Mirror* by Delia Alton (1956) is an autofictional account; *Compassionate Friendship* by H.D. Aldington (1955) is a diary of her treatment during 1955; *Thorn Thicket* (1960) is a diary of her thoughts in 1960 about her treatment during 1955.

and more flexible model of identity and empathy” (*Curious* 174).<sup>56</sup> Freudian analysis presumes a “relatively reliable index of interpretation” in assigning meaning to symbols, linguistics, and dreams (184). Existential analysis lacks this “commitment to universal keys to knowledge” and, instead, explores the “immediate experience” of each patient and honors their “subjective experience” (185). Given H.D.’s attachment to her mystic, visionary experiences, she would have appreciated the flexibility of existential analysis.

In addition to the debate on a reliable index of interpretation, Freudian analysts and existential analysts viewed the relationship between the analyst and analysand differently. The transference of “affectionate feeling” to the analyst is considered a “necessary” part of Freudian analysis and “is, ideally, a one-sided affair” with the analysand transferring feeling and the analyst maintaining distance (181). Rather than this “fictive emotional relationship between analyst and analysand,” existential analysis depends on a “‘genuine’ and nonhierarchical relationship” (187).<sup>57</sup> H.D.’s attachment to the much older Freud had been as a daughter to a father or student to teacher. Her relationship with Heydt was much different. In 1953, when H.D. began analysis with Heydt, she was sixty-seven, and Heydt was thirty-three. Nevertheless, she romanticized her relationship with Heydt and, when he became engaged, H.D. felt rejected. While *End to Torment* provides an entrée into her analysis with Heydt and her unresolved feelings toward Pound (and Heydt), it is a continuation rather than a first attempt. H.D. began this journey with *Compassionate Friendship* (1955) and *Magic Mirror* (1956).

In *End to Torment*, H.D.’s focus is on Pound the young man and his “Dryad” Hilda Doolittle, for, as she writes, “The significance of ‘first love’ can not be overestimated” (19). This

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<sup>56</sup> In *A Curious Peril* “The Invisible Other; The Psychoanalyst as Spy,” Vetter provides an in-depth discussion of the differences in Freudian Psychoanalysis and Heydt’s Existentialist Psychoanalysis.

<sup>57</sup> In describing existential analysis, Vetter relies on the works of Medard Boss, who trained Erich Heydt.

significance was especially true for H.D. as so many of her memories of Pound and their early love were painful. While Heydt promised to help her put her memories “*ins rechte Licht*” (the proper perspective), she continued to fight against her memories (24). Even as she begins her memoir, she questions the authenticity of the memories she recounts. She writes of the “Snow on his beard. But he had no beard, then;” H.D. asks, “did he,” “am I wrong” (3). As Lara Vetter notes, she “emphasizes the clutter and disarray of memory, which can bear but a tenuous relationship to truth” (*Curious* 194). This emphasis on the clutter and disarray of memory is most evident when H.D. writes of the young H.D. and Pound. When her memories are of their adult years, they often become quite specific, with dates assigned.

When musing on Pound of the present day, H.D. relies heavily—and repeatedly—on others’ portraits. First is a 1957 article “Weekend with Ezra Pound.” Its author, David Rattray, was a recent Dartmouth graduate when he made a two-day visit to Pound in St. Elizabeths. Rattray most often strives for an objective portrait. He provides examples of Pound’s vigor, hospitality, generosity to students, and charity; he likewise documents Pound’s “tirade” of anti-Semitism and his “unwillingness to be told anything that he hadn’t already found out for himself” (Rattray 344, 346). Rattray’s most detailed exploration of Pound is of his relationship to John Kasper and T. David Horton (who was present on the second day of Rattray’s visit) of Silver Dollar Books.<sup>58</sup> Rattray came away confident of Pound’s involvement in Silver Dollar’s

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<sup>58</sup> From Greg Barnhisel’s “‘Hitch Your Wagon to a Star’: The Square Dollar Series and Ezra Pound”: “Spurred on by Pound’s conviction . . . that what America sorely needed was a student-aimed series of inexpensive reprints of crucial economic and historical texts, [Pound’s friends John] Kasper and [T. David] Horton founded a publishing house in 1951 and immediately began to publish just such a collection, which they called the ‘Square Dollar Series.’ Not surprisingly, Pound’s own work formed the cornerstone of the series” (Barnhisel 276). The “crucial economic and historical texts” referenced by Barnhisel are those promoting fascism and anti-Semitism. John Kasper included texts in the Square Dollar Series promoting white supremacy. Barnhisel argues that Pound was not anti-black but concerned with the Jews’ manipulation of Blacks. Norman Holmes Pearson was a member of Square Dollar’s advisory board. In 1951, Pearson wrote to H.D. that “I gave them the use of my name, not really for any support of Ezra’s particular views, but as a gesture of friendship to him” (Hollenberg *Between* 118).

anti-Semitic and Fascist agenda, as well as Pound's support of Kasper's Seaboard White Citizen's Council. However, Rattray concludes that Pound's support of Kasper was a means of furthering his anti-Semitic ends rather than a belief in white supremacy. While H.D. brings this article to our attention, she does not comment on the article's content or Rattray's conclusions. Still, reading this article unlocked her memories of Pound.

As she did in *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. subscribes to Freud's dictum on the "actuality of the present," its relationship to the past, and both the present and past's "bearing on the future" as well as her own "fourth-dimensional" time element (*Tribute* 23). She again links symbols, people, emotions—those "priceless broken fragments"—to create her reality (35). In *End to Torment*, she continuously returns to Rattray's article, tying his presentation of Pound as a "human being" to her memories of Pound's humanity (*End* 9). Yet, H.D. also surreptitiously includes symbols in her memoir that paint a less human portrait of Pound. In this portrait are the devouring lion, snarling panther, the madness of the wolf-man, and spells of the Satyr. First, she introduces "The Poet in the Iron Cage," a painting of a lion "padding behind symbolic bars" that H.D. finds hypnotizing (6). The allusion seems obvious since Pound is confined in St. Elizabeths Hospital and was earlier confined in a steel-barred cage in Italy. However, for H.D., it leads directly into her fear of being "caught, caged, confined" in the Klinik Künsnacht, as she had been the year before (7). This thought then evokes another "confinement," awaiting the birth of her daughter Perdita. Pound visited her in the hospital and said, "my only real criticism is that this is not my child" (7-8). This memory conjures visions of Pound "pounding," beating, and banging his walking stick, precisely as he had when he stopped H.D. from leaving London with Frances Gregg and her husband (8). She surreptitiously alludes to Pound's inhumanity while praising Rattray's humanization of Pound.

As well as Rattray's article, Dr. Heydt and H.D. discussed the portraits of Pound that crop up in the German and American media.<sup>59</sup> Heydt pressed her to remember and reproached her with his belief that she is "hiding something" (21). As she reminisces, it is difficult to distinguish between her memories of Heydt and Pound. Not only do the past and present merge, Heydt and Pound often merge. At times, Heydt makes her feel "young and happy," and memories of Pound flow (17). At other times, when she uses the word *suffocating*, it can refer to either Heydt or Pound. H.D. equates the memories Heydt evokes to a "cloud," not seen clearly but conjuring "emotions" (24). Heydt's description of his role is that of the "mirror" to catch the light of each "fiery moment" she retrieves (24). H.D. writes of the pain it causes her to remember these moments—and to give them substance.

Although H.D. most often refers us to others to censure or absolve the post-war Ezra Pound, she voices her support for the women around him. For Pound's wife Dorothy Shakespear, his daughter Mary de Rachewiltz, Mary's mother Olga Rudge, and Pound's latest sycophant Undine, H.D. offers praise, compassion, and recognition of their bond.<sup>60</sup> Early in her memoir, H.D. may offer a clue that this will be the case when she writes of the "*mariage du ciel et de la terre*"—the marriage of heaven and earth (*End* 19, her emphasis).<sup>61</sup> Her use of this term is intriguing, evoking both the early Christian church and the consecration of nuns. I am drawn to

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<sup>59</sup> While H.D. frequently returns to the Rattray article, there are a number of other works (published in the 1950s) on Pound that she refers to. Ramon Guthrie's poem, "Ezra Pound in Paris and Elsewhere" is published with the Rattray article. H.D. also describes a picture, given to her by another patient at the Klinik, of a lion pacing behind bars (or trees), entitled "The Poet in the Iron Cage." There are works in German that Heydt and H.D. discuss: (1) Peter Demetz's article on Pound in *Merkur*, in which Demetz writes commentary on the *Pisan Cantos* but, like Rattray, intersperses it with tales of his visit to Pound at St. Elizabeths and (2) Eva Hesse's *Ezra Pound, Dichtung und Prosa*, from which Heydt pulls biographical references for H.D. to explore.

<sup>60</sup> H.D. and Pound refer to artist Sheri Martinelli as Undine.

<sup>61</sup> In composing her works by hand, H.D. underlines titles, foreign words and phrases, as well as the many words and phrases she wants to emphasize. In printing, all her underlining becomes italics. What is she referring to with *mariage du ciel et de la terre*: a concept, a phrase, a literary work? In Hildegard's works, the dichotomy is typically between heaven and earth since the consecration of nuns involves their marriage to Christ.

Hildegard von Bingen's (1098-1179) writings, first *Scivias*, which I have used as an epigraph to this section, and now *Ordo Virtutum* (c.1151), considered the first morality play.<sup>62</sup> In some ways, Hildegard's writings echo in H.D.'s memoir. Hildegard presents an "allegorical struggle between personified virtues and the Devil over the destiny of a human soul," with repentance being the theme (Potter 202). In this play, the sixteen Virtues are all female and allowed to sing their stories; the Devil is a male and only allowed "to shout his oaths and temptations rather than to sing them seductively" (205). One Soul, entrapped by the Devil's rhetoric, abandons the Virtues to "seek worldly success" (205). Unlike most morality plays, the depths of disgrace into which the Soul sinks are not portrayed. Instead, the Virtues continue to sing of virtue until the Soul returns "lamenting and penitent" (206). The Devil tries to reclaim the Soul, but he is thwarted by the female Virtues, who physically and spiritually assist and defend the Soul. H.D. performs this act for the women in Pound's life. She believes that she has now reclaimed her soul and can pay tribute to the women who are in the throes of Pound's passions: the compassionate Dorothy, who is his protector and pillar of strength; Mary, his translator and keeper of his legacy; Undine, his muse, who will now be tossed aside—reminding H.D. of herself.

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<sup>62</sup> Hildegard, also known as Sybil of the Rhine, was dedicated at birth to the Catholic Church, and she went on to found a convent. In addition to writing *Scivias* and *Ordo Virtutum*, she wrote music and the text to her songs as well as several volumes on visionary theology. (See: *The Life and Works of Hildegard von Bingen* at <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/med/hildegarde.asp>) All of Hildegard's works were published by the end of the nineteenth century. In *Magic Mirror* (1956), H.D.'s fictionalized account of her analysis with Erich Heydt, she references Hildegard when discussing the hieroglyphic aspect of her writing—and remembering. She argues that she uses hieroglyphs rather than symbols in her work because, for her, "images crowded on one another, . . . slash at each other" until she finds the perfect "hieroglyph"—a word, name, or reference—to express an experience, to "explain things for her" (H.D. *Magic Mirror* 60-61). H.D. ponders over the name she should use for her own character in *Magic Mirror*, writing, "Yes, I am Julia Ashton, . . . and I am other names in other stories" (55). She questions, "Was she Hildegard?" in this story (61). She ultimately decides that, in this work, she must be Erica to identify with Heydt.



Also, in H.D.'s passage on the marriage of heaven and earth, she mentions Balzac's novella *Séraphita* (1843).<sup>63</sup> In an earlier reference, she writes, "Ezra brought me the story;" in this reference, she invokes the names of its principal character, "Séraphitus-Séraphita" (*End* 11, 19). This character is considered female at birth only because her parents gave her the feminine name *Séraphita*. As she grows into an androgynous human, she/he is referred to as *Séraphita/Séraphitus* based on the gender perceived by those who behold her/him. Rather than a story of sexuality, it is a story of spirituality. Some call her/him "mad;" others debate whether she/he is one of the humans that God is preparing to be an angel in earth's "nursery-ground of heaven" or, alternatively, an angel that God has sent for a brief sojourn on earth to learn humanity (*Séraphita* Chapter III). *Séraphita/Séraphitus* takes this latter view and longs for her/his "marriage" in heaven (Chapter IV). However, more pertinent to H.D.'s memoir than androgyny or marriage is Balzac's focus in this text on spirituality and the artist. *Séraphita/Séraphitus* argues that her/his spirituality is like that of artists who "bear within them a mirror which reflects nature in her slightest manifestations" (Chapter III). Poetry, music, painting, and sculpture are referenced continuously as a form of consecration—a marriage of heaven and earth.

H.D. and Pound had "gone through some hell together, separately," and the thought of him is a part of the "rubble heap" that constitutes her wartime trauma (26, 30). Even before the war, she "was separated from [her] friends, [her] family, even from America, by Ezra" (35). She believed that she had "been bound with him, bound up with him and his fate" (37, 35). As she continued her work with Heydt, H.D. begins to understand the "strange man" that is Ezra Pound

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<sup>63</sup> Balzac wrote the story of *Séraphita* as a frame for a discussion on the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Swedenborg worked for most of his life in the physical sciences but abandoned them in 1743. He then turned to theology. He claimed to interact with the denizens of heaven, hell, and the world of the spirits in between.

in a way that she had not been “equipped to understand the young poet” (38). She can finally voice her feelings about Pound’s political activities rather than, as before, hint at them through references to the works of others. There is no way to rationalize, “to accept, to forgive, to forget what Ezra has done;” however, for H.D., there is a “But” (34). She vacillates over linking Pound the fascist to Pound the poet. Ultimately, she believes that his poetry must stand on its own, free of connections to his personal failings.

In this memoir, H.D. devotes considerable space to Pound’s *Cantos*.<sup>64</sup> Pearson began teaching graduate seminars on Pound’s poetry in 1949 at Yale and tried to recruit H.D.’s help in annotating *The Cantos* (Hollenberg 70). H.D. notes that she read them “or read at them or in them . . . [but] gave it all up” (H.D. *End* 4). When H.D. embarked upon *Helen in Egypt* in 1952, Pearson “often called the poem her ‘cantos’” and emphasized the parallel between her work and Pound’s (Hollenberg 121).<sup>65</sup> In 1958, H.D. regained her interest in *The Cantos* due to Pound’s notoriety, Pearson’s focus on Pound and his poetry, and Heydt’s focus on Pound and *The Cantos*. As she immerses herself in *The Cantos*, she finds it difficult to focus on specific sections, “without becoming entangled in the whole”; she has struggled to find Pound’s meaning in the past and does not “know [it] now”; reading *The Cantos*, even now, makes her feel “dazed and dizzy” (*End* 26, 27, 30). Mid-memoir, H.D. gains “a new power over the material”; she can see that “Bushel baskets of inseminating beauty [fall] upon barren ground . . . [with] much chaff among the wheat” (30, 36). What lays “the ghost” for H.D. is thinking of her “own lines” in *Helen in Egypt*; her work gives her “power over” Pound’s material (30, her emphasis). It is “not

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<sup>64</sup> Pound’s *Cantos*, although unfinished, consists of 116 sections. He began work on the *Cantos* in 1915, but the work published during Pound’s lifetime dates from about 1922 to 1962. The *Cantos* were published several times during Pound’s life, including the sections available at the time of publishing. In *End to Torment*, H.D. refers most often to *The Pisan Cantos* (Sections 74-84) published in 1948 and *Rock-Drill* (Sections 84-95) published in 1956.

<sup>65</sup> *Helen in Egypt* will be the focus of my next chapter.

easy” to recall Ezra in the way that Pearson, Heydt, and her contemporaries ask; it is “easy enough” to do with her own (48-49). As she writes of her experiences with Pound, the experiences become “real”; the past, present, and future come “together,” and this act of remembering becomes an “ecstasy” (55). The act of writing makes her whole.

H.D. wrote *End to Torment* in 1958 as Ezra Pound was seeking release from federal custody. Attaining his freedom, he immediately left for Italy, where he remained in declining health for the remainder of his life. H.D. last saw Pound in 1938.<sup>66</sup> It is Pound the boy and young man whom H.D. memorializes since the young Pound had a profound impact on her personal and professional development from 1905 until 1919. As she writes in *End to Torment*, she had to “wait 50 years for the right word” because she “felt too involved in the legend [of Pound] to judge fairly, to see clearly” (3, 27). The words began to come when her analyst Erich Heydt “injected [her] with Ezra, jabbing a [hypodermic] needle into [her] arm . . . and the virus or anti-virus” took effect (20). What resulted was a “cloud of memories” of the “fiery moment” that was their youth, memories that were “painful” to retain (24). As my epigraph from Hildegard hints, writing led H.D. to the fiery moment that is the marriage of heaven and earth.

Pound himself became a symbol for H.D. He is a symbol of the patriarchal wall that the female artist must scale or burst through. She reveals that their relationship had been one of “unconscious—really unconscious—rivalry” (41). Another revelation is that “To recall Ezra is to recall my father” and “cold, blazing” intellect (48). This coupling of her scientific, conventional father and the artistic, iconoclastic Pound is peculiar. However, it allows H.D., in a manner far different from her other memoirs, to remember and acknowledge that her relationship with

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<sup>66</sup> Prior to this meeting in the fall of 1938, H.D. had last seen Pound in 1929. She did not correspond with him from 1940-48. (See: Louis H. Silverstein “Herself Delineated: Chronological Highlights of H.D.” (pp. 40-42) in *Signets: Reading H.D.*, edited by Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, U of Wisconsin P, 1990.)

Pound caused the schism between her and her father, as the two men struggled to form the girl Hilda into an image they had created. For H.D., Pound's imprisonment brought back memories of his social isolation in Philadelphia, following his 1908 expulsion from Wabash College. Rumors abounded about the reason for the loss of his teaching job; H.D. writes that Pound admitted to her that a woman was sleeping in his room at the college, but he also said, "They say in Wyncote that I am bi-sexual and given to unnatural lust" (15). H.D. admits that, at the time, she did not understand all that this implied.

Scholarship on H.D.'s symbolism of Pound abounds. Susan Stanford Friedman writes of Pound being a symbol of H.D.'s sense of rejection by men, her "sexual inhibition," and her "crisis of naming" (*Psyche* 38, *Penelope* 36). Debo writes of Pound's symbolizing for H.D. the irreparable damage caused, for her and Pound's generation, by World War I. She also writes of Pound symbolizing H.D.'s "youth and American past" (126). Vetter writes of H.D. setting "aside her anti-war stance" and making the "guilty compromise . . . of supporting the Second World War . . . [due to] the menacing figure of Hitler" (*Curious* 13). For H.D., Pound symbolized the "rubble heap" of her own war experiences (*End* 30). Debo concludes that Pound had become "more of a symbol than a person" for H.D. by the time she wrote *End to Torment* (126). As my brief list of examples shows, Pound was an overwhelming symbolic presence for H.D. This crushing specter may explain why H.D. has not seen Pound since 1938 and why she leaves it to others to visit Pound, talk to Pound, help Pound, and write about Pound.

The pain in this memoir is no less than in *The Gift* and *Tribute to Freud*. She clings to the veils that allow her to convey meaning without speaking. There is no child Hilda to surreptitiously ponder the mysteries and unfulfilled desires of her life. Still, the words of others are relentlessly called upon to hint at what must remain unspoken. Only occasionally can she

“put away childish things” and openly describe the hurt and despair that marked her relationship with Pound but also the unwavering support he always provided (44). She has come to accept that she must react to Pound based on “the *feel* of things, rather than what people do” (44, her italics). Old habits die hard, and H.D. sent her draft of *End to Torment* to Italy for Pound’s comments. He critiqued her work as he had for more than fifty years and added, “Torment title excellent, but optimistic” (King xi). Perhaps Pound did not grasp whose torment had ended.

Norman Holmes Pearson gave this memoir its title. Late in her memoir, H.D. first uses this term in response to a letter from Pearson. He has heard on the radio that “Ezra is free!” and speaks of Pound’s “end to torment” (Hollenberg 222). H.D. responds in her memoir, “*Ezra’s end to torment*—that is all that matters” (H.D. *End* 48; her emphasis). Is this a pledge or an expression of frustration? H.D. complicates our interpretation of this entry by immediately chronicling the torment he has caused her, rather than Pound’s personal torment: severing her “(psychically) from friends and family,” his lack of compassion for the “20,000 victims of the first big air attacks and the fires in London,” blustering “his way in,” . . . blustering “his way out,” his “clumsy dancing,” (48-49). After this episode of what can be termed as catharsis, H.D. begins to remember Pound’s positive attributes. For her, the act of remembering, writing, and working through was an “ecstasy” (55). Her ability to mourn Pound effectively ends her torment as well.

Throughout *End to Torment*, H.D. often writes of the fiery moment. At one point, she gives the term more clarity than she has earlier. The ““fiery moment”” is the foundation of “creative output” (41). She also acknowledges that perhaps “there was always a challenge in [Ezra’s] creative power. Perhaps, . . . there was an unconscious—really unconscious—rivalry” (41). Amid these two statements, she quotes (for the fourth time) Pound’s statement from his

visit before Perdita's birth: "My only real criticism is that this is not my child" (41). However, there is a child throughout this memoir, the child with the red-gold curls that appears to H.D. She tells us that this child is the "'fiery moment' incarnate" (33). The fiery moment and the child with red-gold curls continue to permeate H.D.'s memoir. Missing, however, in the last quarter of her memoir is Pound's critical statement. Perhaps H.D. now sees that Pound's gift to her—his early tutelage and support for the creation of her poetry—is their child, the "Child of Séraphitus-Séraphita" (47). She has taken this gift from Pound and made it her own in creating her *cantos*, *Helen in Egypt*.

H.D. has written an elegy to the lost youth and young love that she and Pound shared. It is a modern elegy brimming with anger, disappointment, hurt, and frustration—but ultimately, as much closure as one can hope to achieve. Like *The Gift* and *Tribute to Freud*, her unwillingness or inability to speak directly shrouds much, but she scatters bread crumbs of meaning along the way to guide readers. In H.D.'s tribute to Ezra Pound, she bestows on him a gift. She can finally view Pound as he was to her—someone who both gave and took but "gave extravagantly" (49). At last, she can acknowledge that this man who caused her torment did not want to "break" her but to "make" her (49). Still, she can now acknowledge that he would have destroyed her and "the center they call 'Air and Crystal' of my poetry" (35). H.D. often chose to sacrifice herself to Pound; she no longer must.

Coming to terms with Pound reminds her that writing is her inheritance rather than a "grim compulsion" (56). She writes that Erich Heydt had challenged her for "'hiding something'" regarding Pound, and she learns that hidden was her "deep love for Ezra" (Hollenberg 220). This ability to "go back & [go] on" is the gift she gives herself (221). Unlike *The Gift* and *Tribute to Freud*, H.D.'s purpose is to celebrate rather than validate. A significant

purpose in the earlier works was to defend her psychic vision; in this work, her gift to herself is to pay tribute to her artistic sensibility.

### 2.1.4 *Transition: From Elegy to Quest*

Like Derrida's Abraham, H.D. often speaks without speaking, responds without responding in her elegies. She begins *The Gift* in distancing herself from her sacrifices by speaking through the voice of a bewildered child. However, the adult finally finds her voice in the last chapter, and she uses that voice to embrace her mystic gift and reclaim, what she believes to be, her identity. In *Tribute to Freud*, she employs a different tactic to disavow the sacrifice. In the text, she suggests that there is no sacrifice so great—even sacrificing her life—that she would deny Freud. Yet, the title, "Writing on the Wall," betrays the fallacy of that pronouncement. *End to Torment* is not the first time H.D. has addressed her relationship with Ezra Pound; she has fictionalized him in her earlier poetry and prose. In this text, she uses the words of others to hint at what she is reluctant to say. In the end, she writes of the sacrifices that she willingly made and resolves him of the responsibility for them. In all three memoirs, she renounces her sacrifice and casts off her victimhood.

H.D.'s journey toward healing has occupied most of her life—and most of her writing. It culminates in *Helen in Egypt*, the last of her works published during her lifetime. Rather than a recounting of Helen's epic journey, it is a template for our own quest. H.D. ties the Trojan War to the catastrophic wars of the first half of the twentieth century to provide a vision for our world's future. She links Helen's story to the lessons she has learned from her life to provide impetus as we chart our individual destinies. There is no well-defined ending for Helen's quest; it ends with many questions and few answers—but with the hope of continued evolution. If we assume the goal of Helen's quest to be self-knowledge, she seems prepared to continue that life-long journey.



### 3 CHAPTER 3

#### 3.1 H.D.'s Quest: *Helen in Egypt*

##### 3.1.1 *Helen? Who is She?*

Helen of Troy has fascinated poets and playwrights for centuries. All agree that she was extraordinarily beautiful, but consensus ends with this statement of her physical attributes. Her divine parentage is sometimes disputed; her power over men—and their power over her—is debated; her end is sometimes tragic but, at other times, romantic. In H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, the question “Helen? Who is she?” is persistently asked. In many ways, Helen was a sister-soul to H.D. Both have a tragic war history; both were often defined by their romantic relationships; both were branded by the words of others. By the time she wrote her story of Helen, H.D. had remembered and worked through her past; her quest for identity was almost complete. She now provides Helen this opportunity. In doing so, she guides readers through their own quests. As so often happens, the story must begin with war.

The Trojan War was fodder for the tragic playwrights of Greece in the fifth century BCE. This mythic war was an exemplar of Greece's actual battles against Persia and the Peloponnesian War, wars that “tore the Greek world apart” (Hall *Trojan* ix). Troy became a “mythical prism” through which classical playwrights “refracted” Greece’s contemporary fixation on war (ix). While most of these plays comprised an “all-male cast of super-heroes,” Euripides took a different approach (ix). He often focused on the women—daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers—whose worlds were torn apart by male violence. Three of Euripides’s dramas featured Helen.

Euripides’s *The Trojan Women* (c. 415 BCE) is a story of the unspeakable atrocities faced by the Trojan women as they await their futures to be decided by the victorious Greeks.

The actions in the play are not unlike those being perpetrated on those conquered by the Greeks in a fight against the islanders of Melos in Euripides's day (416 BCE). In Melos, men of military age were put to death; women and children were sold as slaves. In *The Trojan Women*, the aged queen of Troy, Hecuba, is condemned to slavery in the treacherous Odysseus's household. Hecuba and King Priam's daughter, the prophet Cassandra, is driven insane and forced into a marriage with the victor Agamemnon as his "special prize" (*Trojan* 133 n. 249). Adding to her horror, the prophetess foresees that she will be axed to death by Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra, upon her arrival in Sicily. Andromache, the beloved wife of dead Prince Hector, sees her small son tossed to his death from the towers of Troy. She is then forced to become the concubine of Neoptolemus, who threw her son to his death.

The fates awaiting the rank-and-file women of Troy are not pronounced publicly, but these women sing of what awaits them. But what of Helen, the woman who caused this war, a "woman who had not been carried off by force" but who "went willingly" to engage in a "love affair" (49)? Euripides treats Helen unkindly in *The Trojan Women*. Andromache proclaims that Helen is not a child of Zeus but of many fathers: the "Avenging Spirit, . . . Envy, . . . Murder and Death" (60). Even Helen's husband, Menelaus, intends to take her back to Greece "to be killed in retribution for all those whose loved ones died" at Troy (63). Euripides does not allow Helen to sing, as he has all the other Trojan women; however, he has Menelaus allow Helen to speak in her defense. Helen blames Hecuba for giving birth to Paris; Priam for not having Paris killed when the oracles said that Paris would bring destruction on Troy; Paris for his greed; Menelaus for leaving her and Paris alone together; the gods for damning her with beauty. Helen's defense does not move Menelaus, and he still vows to take her back to Greece to face "the wretched

death that she deserves” (67). With this promise, Euripides completes his tale of Helen in *The Trojan Women*.

Three years later, Euripides returns to Helen, not in Sparta but in Egypt. He embraces the poet Stesichorus’s (seventh century BCE) palinode, absolving Helen from causing Troy’s destruction by arguing that the real Helen was transported to Egypt while a phantom Helen was sent to Troy by Zeus to wreak havoc.<sup>67</sup> Euripides’s *Helen* (412 BCE) is classified as a tragedy, but as Edith Hall writes, it is “by far the lightest and funniest” of “all Greek tragedies” and might best be categorized as “tragedy at play” (*Medea* xxiii). It is a story of reality versus perception, the physical world versus the spiritual world, rhetoric versus truth.

The play opens with Helen finally telling her own story of being replaced in Greece by a “breathing phantom” of herself, only her “name” (Morwood *Medea* 120). Her real self is swept away to Egypt so that her “body may remain free from disgrace” even though her “reputation” is ruined (121). Awaiting rescue by her husband, Menelaus, Helen is now hiding at the Egyptian king Proteus’s tomb, under whose authority she receives safe-haven. Proteus’s heir, Theoclymenos, kills all Greeks who come to Egypt to thwart any attempt to take Helen back to Greece—not to protect Helen but to keep her for himself. At the tomb, she encounters Teucros, the greatest of Greek archers, driven into exile for the crime of not dying for Greece as his older brother did. Teucros immediately recognizes “the most loathsome woman” in the world, but Helen convinces Teucros that she only looks like that “wretched woman” (121-22). She then questions Teucros about what has transpired in the seven years since the war’s end. She finds that Menelaus is presumed dead; her mother, Leda, hung herself; her brothers, Castor and Polydeuces, have either been killed or transformed into stars.

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<sup>67</sup> Stesichorus had apparently written an earlier poem casting all blame for the Trojan war on Helen. She then had Stesichorus struck blind. After he writes his palinode, his vision is miraculously restored.

Teucros leaves, and a despondent Helen laments her life. The Greek slaves who were whisked away with Helen to serve her in Egypt hear her lament and join her. Helen argues that, although blameless, she has lost everything and has no hope since Menelaus is dead. Her “best course is to die” (127). Her slaves remind her that, while she has been told of Menelaus’s death, she does not know if he is, in truth, dead. Her task must be to pursue the truth, and she accepts this quest. Meanwhile, Menelaus, prohibited by ill winds from returning to Sparta since the end of the war, is shipwrecked in Egypt. With him is Helen, whom he “had dragged from Troy” (131). When he seeks refuge at the “proud gates” of a “prosperous man” (Theoclymenous), Menelaus is turned away by a servant because he is a Greek (131). The servant tells him that “Helen, the daughter of Zeus,” lives in Theoclymenous’s palace (132). This news confuses Menelaus, but he rationalizes that—“in the wide world” of countries, cities, and women—some women must share names (133). Helen is warned that Menelaus is in Egypt, and they, by accident, meet. Menelaus refuses to believe that she is the *real* Helen and leaves her to return to his shipwrecked wife, Helen. On the way, a servant finds him and reports that his shipwrecked wife has been “lifted up and disappeared into the air’s embrace,” but not before admitting that she is a phantom and Helen is “totally innocent” (136-37). The lovers reunite, and Helen tells Menelaus the story of the gods’ trickery and what she learned from Teucros.

Helen and Menelaus petition Theoclymenous’s sister, Theonoe, to help them escape Egypt. Theonoe agrees to keep their secret but insists they must develop their own escape plan. Menelaus develops several warrior-like plans, but Helen points out the pitfalls of each. She then offers a workable suggestion. Menelaus is to play the role of one of his own soldiers who has come to Egypt to announce Menelaus’s death to Helen. Theonoe and Helen will substantiate that this was the purpose of the sailor’s earlier visit to Theoclymenous’s palace. Helen will then

request a ship and “adornments” to provide Menelaus a suitable burial at sea, giving them the opportunity to escape (150). She convinces Theoclymenous that burial at sea of an “empty shroud” is a Greek tradition for those lost at sea (155). Helen’s plan succeeds, and she and Menelaus are off to Sparta.

While the romantic action of the story belies its classification as a tragedy, the Chorus focuses on its tragic underpinnings. Neither the Trojans nor the Greeks sought out the truth; instead, they believed what others told them, most often what they “wanted to hear” (134). The Trojan War was fought for no reason; “words could have settled the quarrel” (152). Instead, there was a “contest of blood” that caused “sufferings upon sufferings in a miserable, lamentable welter of catastrophe” (152). It was madness to try to resolve strife with the “mighty spear’s point” (152). Troy was “destroyed for nothing” (154). These were compelling observations as the Greek wars raged from 431 to 404 BCE. Even the romance and froth in *Helen* present political uncertainties. Euripides’s contemporary Gorgias wrote of *Helen* that speeches “written with skill, [but] not moulded with truth” can “mould the mind” in any way speakers wish (qtd. in *Medea* xxv). Menelaus, as well as Theoclymenous, was forced to see that he fought for nothing.

A positive aspect of *Helen* is the redemption of Helen’s selfhood. But, Euripides quickly disabuses us of this in *Orestes* (408 BCE). Orestes is the son of Helen’s sister, Clytemnestra, and Menelaus’s brother, Agamemnon. Agamemnon returns home quickly after the Trojan War, bringing with him his prize, Cassandra. His wife, Clytemnestra, also has a lover who kills Agamemnon and Cassandra. Seven years later, Orestes returns to Argos and kills his mother and her lover to avenge his father’s death, and the citizens of Argos then debate his punishment. As Orestes awaits his fate, Menelaus and Helen return from their seven-year disappearance. The couple returning to Greece is unlike the couple that left Egypt; they are much more like the

Menelaus and Helen of Troy. Helen is “vain and silly,” and Menelaus is “duplicitous” (Hall *Orestes* xxi). Helen is seen only once in this play, arranging a tribute to her dead sister that conforms to Argos’s conventions of mourning. She is talked about throughout the play, always in the most derogatory terms. Even Helen’s earthly father, Tyndareus, calls her a “vile woman” to whom he will never speak again (*Orestes* 62). Throughout the debasement of Helen, Menelaus never comes to her defense or offers the story of the phantom Helen who caused so much destruction.

Menelaus’s only concern is positioning himself to benefit whatever Orestes’s fate may be. The citizens of Argos present diverse standpoints: Is matricide so horrendous a crime that there can be no rationale? Is avenging one’s father’s death justified regardless of whom one must kill? Menelaus remains silent. Orestes and his co-conspirators (his sister Electra and best friend Pylades) devise a new plan—to kill Helen and, by killing the most hated woman in Greece, achieve glory. Apollo intervenes as Orestes attempts to kill Helen (and threatens to kill Menelaus and Helen’s daughter, Hermione). He whisks Helen away to live in eternity with the gods. He instructs Orestes to suffer a brief exile, after which he will be tried for matricide by the gods and acquitted, then become the ruler of Argos. Apollo tells Menelaus to return to Sparta, use Helen’s dowry to reestablish his rule, find a new wife, and permit Orestes to marry Hermione. Both Menelaus and Orestes find Apollo’s solution to be excellent.

In these three plays, Euripides complicates the search for Helen. The purpose in *Helen* appears to be an exploration of truth, identity, and reality. Bookended as it is between *The Trojan Women* and *Orestes*, *Helen* reads like a fantasy. Edith Hall lauds Euripides as—among other accolades—“an existentialist, a psychoanalyst, . . . a mystic” and, most tenaciously, a “pacifist feminist” (*Trojan* xiv). Other than in *Helen*, he failed Helen of Troy on all counts. After

exploring these three plays, the question in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* resonates. "Helena? Who is she?" (37). There is no better choice than the existentialist, psychoanalyst, mystic, and pacifist feminist H.D. to answer this question.

### 3.1.2 *Helen in Egypt (written 1952-1955)*

*The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.*

Walter Benjamin “The Storyteller” (1936)

*O father, I am young and very happy.*

*I do not think the pious Calchas heard*

*Distinctly what the Goddess spake.*

Walter Savage Landor “Iphigeneia” (c. 1864)

*Many the shapes the gods take*

*many and many the things they plan*

*and the plans they break;*

*what was to have been, was not;*

*for God has invented a plot*

*far different from any we could have dreamt [sic];*

*behold,*

*as in this event.*

H.D. Translation of Euripides’s “The Bacchae” (c. 1930)<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> H.D. “The Bacchae.” “Notes on Euripides, Pausanias, and Greek Lyric Poets.” TS. H.D. Papers. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, p. 29.



In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. synthesizes her lifelong quest for identity by expanding on Euripides's *Helen*. We have traced H.D.'s journey in her prose, beginning with her collection of images and memories in *Paint It Today*; her search for truths in *Asphodel*; and, finally, her working through trauma in *Bid Me to Live*. In *The Gift*, *Tribute to Freud*, and *End to Torment*, H.D. delivered the elegies fundamental for acknowledging her gratitude while celebrating her individuality. In *Helen in Egypt*, she both commemorates her journey and challenges us to accept the conditions of a lifelong quest for identity. H.D. entreats us to reject the hope of finding a singular and unimpeachable truth. She presses us to look beyond the obvious in viewing ourselves—and others—to see the multiplicity of selves existing within us all.

H.D.'s *Helen* is rife with possibilities for interpretation and often mirrors the aspects—psychology, feminism, existentialism, pacifism—that Hall identifies in Euripides's works. Susan Stanford Friedman takes a psychological approach, referencing H.D.'s work with Freud. Friedman also refers to *Helen* as an epic. It meets Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's criteria for an epic as depicting “a war without end” (350). But, as Friedman points out, H.D.'s epic is “unconventional in its handling of chronology, situation, and plot” (*Psyche* 59). Rachel Blau DuPlessis views this severing of conventional narrative forms by twentieth-century women authors as a feminist act of severing the “dominant ideology and authority” (*Writing* x). Robert O'Brien Hokanson counters that *Helen* is a treatise on the unreliability of any narrative, given the possibility that any number of “ideological codes are embedded” within (335). While focusing on H.D.'s prose works after World War II, Lara Vetter writes of these literary works as filled with the need to forget happiness, to resolve agony, to solve “the riddles of misunderstanding and cruelty,” yet also retaining a “trace of hopefulness” in a world of war without end (*Curious* 30). Because of what seems an endless state of war in our world, Bennett and Royle suggest that

we must explore the idea that “there is no literature that is not war literature” (355). Each of the scholars named above has demonstrated this notion in writing of the battles for identity, equality, truth, and peace inherent in *Helen in Egypt*.

I view *Helen* as a meditative quest in which Helen explores her memories and the memories of others to “fight for Helena,” to answer “Helena? who is she?” (37). I set out two rules of engagement. First is to avoid the compulsion to equate the poem’s mythological beings with individuals from H.D.’s past. Rather than naming names from her past, I take H.D. at her word and treat *Helen*’s characters as hieroglyphs. In *Magic Mirror* (1956), she discusses the hieroglyphic aspect of her writing—and remembering. She argues that she uses hieroglyphs rather than symbols in her work because, for her, “images crowded on one another, . . . slash at each other” until she finds the perfect “hieroglyph”—a word, name, or reference—to express an experience, to “explain things for her” (60-61). In *Helen*, H.D. relies heavily on the hieroglyph to delineate the progress of her quest.

My second rule is to affirm the importance of the prose that introduces each section of the poetry. H.D. composed *Helen in Egypt* from 1952 to 1954. Norman Holmes Pearson and Erich Heydt encouraged H.D. to record her poem and, in doing so, she saw the need for including “some captions or short descriptive paragraphs . . . along with the poem” (Hollenburg 177). The captions, which H.D. instructed should be in italics, were added to the poem in 1955. Critics differ on the importance of these captions—whether they should be ignored or embraced—and their possible interpretations.<sup>69</sup> Certainly, the prose captions complicate the reading of the poetry. Still, I find that they enhance *Helen*’s capacity to warn of barriers to the quest for identity. In a similar vein but long after her death, Pearson categorized H.D.’s “juxtaposition” of

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<sup>69</sup> In “The Origins of the Prose Captions in H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt*.” Susan Barbour provides details on the captions as well as a discussion on H.D. scholarship of this hybrid text.

prose and poetry in *Helen*'s quest as a method of engaging readers in meditation on the flux of life, as well as providing an example of the flux (Dembo 440). However, we do not know if this was H.D.'s intention. In 1952, she initiated a dialogue with Pearson about *Helen*, which continued until just months before her death in 1961.<sup>70</sup> In these letters, H.D. often discusses her intentions in writing *Helen*; however, she also notes that the poem must write "itself," how "puzzled" she becomes by the turns her writing takes, and the "fun" of seeing where her inspiration leads (Hollenberg 143-44, 146, 151). Whether the captions result from intent or inspiration, like Pearson, I find them essential in engaging readers in contemplating their personal quest as well as Helen's.

H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* is divided into three parts: "Pallinode," "Leuké," and "Eidolon."<sup>71</sup> "Pallinode" (a retraction or apology) borrows from four stories of Helen in Egypt and Helen of Troy written by Stesichorus and Euripides. H.D. provides a fifth version as Helen tells her own story. Rather than a retraction or apology, Helen's goal is to separate the fact, fantasy, and fiction of her life and find out who she is. Achilles arrives in Egypt and complicates Helen's quest as he begins his own journey for identity. In "Leuké," Helen escapes to the white island where Stesichorus wrote that Achilles and Helen lived as man and wife. She reverts to her earlier selves to decipher meaning in her life. On the island, Helen finds her former lover Paris and Theseus, who in Athenaeus's writings had kidnapped the child Helen, who was quickly rescued by her brothers. Both Paris and Theseus attempt to impose on Helen their version of her story. In "Eidolon," Helen learns to listen to her own voice and returns to Egypt. The story has come full

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<sup>70</sup> *Helen in Egypt* was published in 1961 quite soon after H.D.'s death. Hollenberg writes that H.D. was involved in the printing process until early June 1961 (292). After a stroke in June 1961, she was no longer involved but Erich Heydt read *Helen* to H.D. "from her publisher's copy" (292).

<sup>71</sup> What H.D. refers to as *pallinode* is typically spelled *palinode*.

circle as the child she and Achilles conceived on the beach is born, and her questioning continues.

As *Helen* begins, a disembodied, authoritative voice in the prose captions introduces us to “*Helen of Troy*” and “*Helen in Egypt*,” each of whom has a “*story*,” and suggests that Helen of Troy “*was a phantom, substituted for the real Helen*” (1).<sup>72</sup> The Voice immediately sweeps us into contemplating the selfhood of a mythological character. The poem’s Helen follows the Voice, speaking her thoughts, confidently referring to herself as I. She is assured of her half-mortal, half-divine parentage and being rescued from Troy by Zeus, who swept her away to Egypt. When Helen’s story reaches a point where she recounts what she has spoken to others or words spoken to her, this speech is enclosed in quotation marks as expected. The Voice, likewise, encloses Helen’s words in quotation marks when the Voice quotes Helen—often quoting Helen in advance of her speaking the words. The published text seems to conform to the basics of scholarly writing. Yet, throughout the poem, words, phrases, and sentences are randomly italicized, as in this monologue by Helen.

. . . everlasting, everlasting  
 nothingness and lethargy of waiting;  
*O Helen, Helen, Daemon that thou art,*

*we will be done forever*  
*with this charm, this evil philtre,*  
*this curse of Aphrodite;*

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<sup>72</sup> The Voice’s words are printed in italics, as H.D. requested; therefore, the poem’s title is differentiated using roman font.

so they fought, forgetting women,  
 hero to hero, sworn brother and lover,  
 and cursing Helen through eternity. (4)

It is easy to overlook the italicized emphasis of these lines. From reading H.D.'s artistic endeavors and personal correspondence, we know that she enthusiastically indicated emphasis in her writing.<sup>73</sup> However, in *Helen in Egypt*, I suggest there is something more in play.

H.D. had been a devotee of ancient Greek poetry for decades before writing *Helen*. In her earliest published poems, she employed Greek myths along with Imagist principles. Later in *Heliadora* (1924), she included snippets—all italicized—of her translations of Plato, Meleager, Sappho, and Euripides in her poems. The liberties she took while translating did not go unnoticed. Eileen Gregory notes that educational theorist Douglas Bush and others faulted H.D. for “violating the letter [and spirit] of the text, in misconstruing, altering, adding to, over emotionalizing, and modernizing the original” in her translations (*Hellenism* 56). She indeed does all of these things—and with magnificent effect. In her working notebook for *Helen*, H.D. “records re-reading” of five of Euripides’s plays “in the French translation of Leconte de Lisle” (Gregory 83).<sup>74</sup> In her notes, H.D. records (often with emphasis) words and phrases that she finds compelling from both de Lisle’s translation and the Loeb English translation of Euripides’s works (1914-1916). It is beyond the scope of my essay—as well as beyond my capabilities as a translator—to authoritatively declare each of H.D.’s italicized portions in the poetic sections of

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<sup>73</sup> In her handwritten textual matter (letters, notes, and drafts), H.D. shows emphasis underlining and, occasionally, bolding. Printed versions of these material emphasize by italicizing.

<sup>74</sup> Eileen Gregory’s work on H.D.’s notebook lists a number of secondary sources H.D. relied on while composing *Helen in Egypt*. These include de Lisle’s translations, Arthur Way’s translations in the Loeb edition of Euripides’s works, Gilbert Murray’s *Euripides and His Age* (1913), Robert Graves’s *The White Goddess* (1951), and May Sinclair’s *Divine Fire* (1904),

*Helen in Egypt* to be her translation of Euripides or her re-translation of de Lisle and Loeb's translations of Euripides. Yet, this is a tantalizing possibility.

If H.D. is interpreting and transforming the words of others to use in her poem, we have a multiplicity of voices in *Helen in Egypt*, rather than simply those of the Voice and Helen. These other voices come to us from throughout the ages and further complicate our understanding of identity, war, love, duty, and reality. Helen's italicized polemic—*O Helen, Helen, Daemon that thou art*—begins much like Andromache's invective against Helen in Euripides's *The Trojan Women*, where Andromache rejects the thought of Helen as a daughter of Zeus. Instead, Andromache, having lost her husband, Hector, and baby son in the war, regards Helen as the daughter of all the evil demons that the earth breeds.<sup>75</sup> H.D.'s Helen then immediately transitions to capitalize on de Lisle's use of the French *philtres* to refer to a magic love potion in his translation of *Andromache*. This reference is to Hermione's invective against Andromache, who has been brought back to Greece as a war prize by Hermione's husband (Gregory "Notebook" 92).<sup>76</sup> In each case, women blame the personal losses of war on other women rather than the men who launched and conducted the war. By including the words of Andromache and Hermione in Helen's plea, H.D. evokes the human propensity to war, the suffering of noncombatants due to war, and the false rhetoric that tries to justify war. The array of voices also highlights the difficulty of shaping one's personal identity concurrent with others' evaluation of one's worth.

H.D. not only reveals the multiplicity of opinions that comprise an assessment of Helen's character, but she also highlights the duality often existing in one's personality. She does so by

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<sup>75</sup> Gilbert Murray translation of *The Trojan Women* l. 767-770. "O Helen, Helen, thou ill tree / That Tyndareus planted, who shall deem of thee / As child of Zeus? O, thou hast drawn thy breath / From many fathers, Madness, Hate, red Death, / And every rotting poison of the sky!"

<sup>76</sup> From Vol. 2 of Leconte de Lisle's *Euripide*: "Mais toi, qui es une femme captive et une esclave, tu veux . . . posséder ces demeures, et, par tes philtres, je suis odieuse à mon mari . . ." (But you, who are a captive woman and a slave, want to own these mansions, and, by your love potions, I am abhorrent to my husband)

toying with the attributes of ancient gods and goddesses. Isis was a goddess in the ancient Egyptian religion as early as the third millennium BCE. In the first millennium BCE, the wars among the Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians spread each area's culture throughout the Mediterranean region. The worship of each area's gods and goddesses became common, perhaps as a means to strengthen ties between the conquered and the conquerer. However, different aspects of a deity often predominated in each area. H.D.'s Helen links Isis, Thetis, and Aphrodite when recalling a "protective mother-goddess" or "life-symbol" (H.D. *Helen* 15, 13). However, when Achilles compares Helen to Isis, it is to Isis the "envious" (17). He also compares Helen to Hecate, who began as a goddess of fertility but was later feared as "a witch" (38). H.D. not only emphasizes the competing traits extant in us all but how emotion can affect our perception. As Achilles continues to taunt Helen by comparing her to aspects of the goddesses he finds offensive, Helen begins to understand that intense emotion can unleash the elements of one's personality best left restrained. Even legendary heroes such as Achilles can be two people living in one body.

H.D. had a lifelong fascination with classical Greek poets, as evidenced in her pre-World War I poems. Her "engagement with Euripides" began around 1912 and, Eileen Gregory argues that "no modernist poet shows a greater literary exchange with an ancient writer" than H.D. with Euripides (*Hellenism* 181). In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. draws extensively from at least eight of Euripides's plays as well as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.<sup>77</sup> An example from the *Iliad* (Book VI) occurs in *Helen* when Paris recalls his fellow Trojans' demands that he return Helen to the Greeks, which Paris refuses to do. *Helen*'s Paris reminds Helen of this refusal by quoting the

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<sup>77</sup> Works of Euripides influencing H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* include *The Trojan Women*, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Helen*, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, and perhaps others.

Trojans shouting “return the wanton to Greece” and his firm answer, “they can not, they will not”—lines that do not appear in the *Iliad* (*Helen* 125-26).

Paris’s memory of the event differs from Homer’s account not only in what was said but also in Paris’s perception of himself as a strong, decisive man. His view of himself is not one held by his family, Helen, and all Trojans in Homer’s works. Paris’s brother Hector rails, “Would that the earth might open her jaws and swallow him, for Jove bred him to be the bane of the Trojans, and of Priam and Priam’s sons” (*Iliad* Book VI). As Paris’s recollections of his actions and others’ words in *Helen* are not italicized, they seem to indicate H.D.’s acquiescence of Paris creating his own revisionist personal history. This tactic provides a fourth potentiality of the technical aspects of recording speech and thoughts in *Helen in Egypt*. First is italicized guidance from the authoritative prose Voice; next is the quoted speech by the poem’s characters to convince, confront, or coerce each other; then is the mystery of the italicized words that interrupt Helen’s thoughts and might consist of H.D.’s translation from one of her subtexts, conveying added meaning; finally is access to the non-italicized exploration of feelings, ideas, and memories by the poem’s characters.

H.D.’s Helen is obsessed with “recalling, remembering” (*Helen* 14). More than one hundred times in the poem and captions, H.D. writes of remembering. In his plays, Euripides likewise has his women characters stress the importance of remembering. In *Hecuba*, when Odysseus comes to take Hecuba’s daughter Polyxena to be sacrificed on Achilles’s tomb as a blood offering to the dead Greek hero, Hecuba implores Odysseus—to no avail—to remember how she saved his life. When Helen and her husband Menelaus are reunited in *The Trojan Women*, she begs him on bended knee to spare her life by remembering their pre-war happiness; Hecuba counters by asking Menelaus to remember those dead because of Helen’s perfidy. In



*Electra*, when Electra and Orestes plan to kill Clytemnestra, Electra asks her mother to remember her many evil deeds—most notably, killing Agamemnon. Clytemnestra reminds Electra that her father, Agamemnon, slashed her sister Iphigenia’s white throat.

H.D.’s Helen also (twice in italics) reminds readers of Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, who was sacrificed to the gods in exchange for the wind to power Greek ships leaving for Troy. She reminds us so often that even the Voice questions, “*Why does Helen recall Iphigenia?*” (72). In his last years, Euripides also became fascinated with Iphigenia.<sup>78</sup> As Edith Hall writes, it is “tempting to speculate” on Euripides’s views on politics and war, but there is no verifiable trail of evidence other than his plays to establish his purpose in writing of the Trojan War while the Peloponnesian War raged on (xiii). In Euripides’s *Iphigenia at Aulis*—fraught with moral dilemmas involving patriotism, pragmatism, public duty, and parental responsibility—he encourages his audience to consider the complex issues that those in power may present.

*Iphigenia at Aulis* is a play about Agamemnon’s vacillation in carrying out the will of the gods by sacrificing his daughter, Clytemnestra’s pleas for help to prevent this atrocity (as well as her threat of retribution), and Achilles’s need to somehow stay above the fray. It is also about the young Iphigenia’s initial terror that turns into resolve to be the sacrificial lamb. In Iphigenia’s view, Greece looks to her—and her alone—to get the ships across the sea so that Troy can be defeated. Only she can atone for Helen’s treachery and—after Greece wins this war that her sacrifice ensures—it will be her name, rather than Helen’s, that will be forever invoked, in honor rather than vilification. Although plays, poems, and artwork continue to depict Iphigenia, her

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<sup>78</sup> Euripides died c. 406 BCE about two years before Sparta defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War. *Iphigenia among the Taurians* was written in 412 BCE; *Orestes* in 408, and *Iphigenia at Aulis* just prior to his death. Edith Hall notes that Euripides’s son produced *Iphigeneia at Aulis* after his father’s death and may have also “completed or rewrote it” (Hall *Bacchae* xxv).

name has not supplanted Helen's and, most often, represents tragedy rather than heroism. Yet, in H.D.'s *Helen*, the Voice and Helen constantly ask that Iphigenia be remembered, even while H.D.'s Achilles looks upon Iphigenia as only one "white throat" that must be sacrificed to the gods of war (H.D. *Helen* 244). Perhaps H.D. points to the tragedy of war and the human tendency to be swayed by rhetoric.

Criticism of *Helen in Egypt* often focuses on its lack of closure, with Helen continuing to question her future. The Voice provides no help other than to suggest that Helen may not understand the messages she believes she has received. From a feminist perspective, Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis identify the poem's climax much earlier than the poem's end. Friedman cites Helen's discovery in "Leuké" that the Goddess Thetis can take on many shapes as the pivotal moment. DuPlessis's critical events are those linking Helen and her child and those linking Helen and Thetis. George Hart and Robert O'Brien Hokanson take a more inclusive position. Hokanson suggests that the poem's end is an anticlimactic circularity of questioning and doubt, stressing "intuition over knowledge and the concrete moment over historical context" (343). Hart's argument is similar but concluding that the circularity of the poem advocates for viewing circularity as a process itself rather than the result of a process.<sup>79</sup>

Hart describes the process in *Helen* as Helen's quest to connect symbols with meaning—deciphering her hieroglyphs. She then moves toward the realization that a symbol can have "various levels of meaning," can shift in meaning (Hart 166). Interpreting symbols becomes a process of engaging with the totality of meaning in each symbol's circle or wheel. Peppered throughout H.D.'s story of the Trojan War are the symbols of twentieth-century war—the *High Command*, the *allies*, *Holocaust*, *world-leadership*, *dictator*—linking the human propensity for

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<sup>79</sup> Hart notes that Friedman advocates for the circle as evidence of the beginning and end of a process rather than the process itself (165).

conflict and war throughout the ages. Helen initially rejected Lethe, the “river of forgetfulness,” in creating her totality of meaning (*Helen* 3). Later, in her encounter with Theseus, he argues—like the oracle of Trophonios and Derrida—that one must drink from both the pool of Mnemosyne and Lethe to prepare one’s mind. Helen then embraces the “circular movement of memory and forgetting” that will enable her to construct her identity and finally answer the question, “Helena? who is she?” (Hart 167; *Helen* 37). She finds that her circle of memory and forgetting is filled with dreams and images, but also oblivion. Helen’s task of remembering then becomes more difficult as she struggles to incorporate the memories of Achilles and Paris into her own reality, to include them in her circle of meaning.

Due to the worrisome lack of closure, critical attention often evolves into an assessment of H.D. and her contribution in *Helen* to awareness of the occult, psychoanalysis, feminism, or modernism. Friedman finds the resolution of the quest in “the resurrection of the female divine spirit” (*Psyche* 269). Hokanson acknowledges that *Helen* does not end with “triumphant illumination” but, instead, reveals the modernist commitment to “self-reflexiveness and detachment” (344). For Hart, H.D. succeeds in presenting the “fluid and functioning process” of memory and forgetting in “both content and form” (176). Certainly, H.D. was proud of her artistic accomplishment in *Helen* and relished Pearson’s view of it as her *magnum opus*. In many ways, *Helen* was H.D.’s gift to herself. This aspiration does not negate the importance of the knowledge that readers can gain from *Helen in Egypt*.

The Voice both explicates mythological relationships and provides insight into Helen. The Voice purports to be the voice of reason and truth. The Voice guides us on what we “may surmise,” what Helen might “possibly feel,” what she “seems” to have done (*Helen* 39, 75, 91). The Voice “queries, wonders, and extrapolates” (Gregory *Hellenism* 222). The Voice often

answers Helen's questions—frequently before they are asked. The Voice emphasizes the “endlessness of (re)interpretation and inscription” (Friedman *Penelope* 358). Late in the poem, the Voice remarks that we have seen three Helens during this quest: first the “transcendental Helen,” then the “intellectual” Helen, finally the Helen “numb with memory” (*Helen* 258). The poem ends (unsatisfactorily for many) with questions that remain unanswered. However, there is a lesson to be learned. Neither the revisionism of the Voice nor that of Stesichorus and Euripides can answer the question, Helena? Who is she? Only Helen can find the answer.

H.D. delighted in writing *Helen in Egypt*. She saw it as “a sort of tribute, or wants to be, to LIFE” (Hollenberg 146). She found it “really funny . . . to find the clues unraveling” as she wrote (152). *Helen* is a marriage between her lifelong love of Greek classics and her never-ending search for identity. Like Euripides, H.D. employs Helen in Egypt to teach the difference between perception and reality, rhetoric and truth, reason and emotion, as well as how skillful speech can mold the mind. However, H.D. highlights the impossibility of constructing a single, unambiguous truth. She teaches that the youthful search for identity is only the first step. The search for personal identity—and healing—is eternal, with many twists and turns along the way. Less overtly, she argues that our contribution to a national identity must involve challenging the concept of war without end. Early in her quest, Helen asks, is “Fate inexorable?”, is “War inevitable?” (H.D. *Helen* 32, 34). These two questions remain unanswered, but Helen has learned the power of those “finite” moments when choosing our destiny (303). H.D.'s gift to readers is inviting them to begin both the quest for identity and peace.

#### 4 CODA

Although it was not my original intent to both begin and end this essay reflecting on the words of Walter Benjamin, H.D. has led me to do so. In 1936, Benjamin explored the early twentieth century's destructive impact on the ability to communicate experience. For H.D., the war years worked its devilry on her ability to write the crystalline, impersonal poetry that had made her the prime example of the Imagist movement in 1912. Initially, her poetry was regarded as exemplifying F.S. Flint's three rules for Imagism: "1. Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective. 2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation. 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome" (Beasley 38). Yet, as Lara Vetter points out, the objects H.D. portrayed in her early poems were "often portrayed as subject to the forces of the environment that surround them, their verbs often cast in the passive voice" with this "passivity of the object" the focus of the poem (*Curious* 4-5). Even before the war, H.D. broke from the theoretical confines of Imagism.

In her early work, H.D. seized on the doctrines of Imagism to help her "control the surges that arose from her violently responsive nature" (Martz xiii). However, after the war, even the structure provided by Imagism was insufficient. She could no longer, as T.S. Eliot insisted, "completely separate" the person "who suffers" from the "mind which creates" (Eliot "Tradition" 18). Her poetry became "a turning loose of emotion" rather than the "escape from emotion" for which Eliot advocated (18). When her poetic control was exhausted by emotions unleashed by war, death, and desertion, she turned to prose to release and explore her torment.

H.D. first allowed Midget to open the door of memory. She then recruited Helga Dart to enable Hermione to explore her traumatic experiences. Much later, Delia Alton supported Julia in finally, after a decade's work, helping H.D. to work through the emotional impact of her war

years. During these years, analysis also helped restore “her confidence in herself as a gifted woman” (Martz xxiv). In the quarter-century encompassing the writing of autobiografiction, H.D. continued to write poetry. She based much of her poetic output on Greek myths and themes, often incorporating her creative translations of classical poets. While H.D.’s Greek mask paired with Imagist principles had initially provided “poetic control,” her bitterness and anguish now broke through (xvi). Little of her poetic output was published, often because even H.D. found it “too personal, too intimate, for public presentation” (xvii). This “fallow” period for her poetry lasted until the 1940s (xxiv). While the second World War initially reinvigorated the demons from the first, surviving the London bombings eventually set her free. She then asked, “we passed the flame: we wonder / what saved us? what for?” (H.D. *Collected Poems* 511). The answer: to testify.

In her final years, H.D. became what Benjamin described as a “storyteller.” He mourned a loss he attributed to World War I and the twentieth century in general. This loss was “the ability to exchange experiences,” which he argued seemed “inalienable to us” before the war (Benjamin 83). Benjamin longed for the return of the storyteller. As H.D. learned, before exchanging experiences, one must often do the hard job of incorporating one’s experiences into their own life. A key aspect in Benjamin’s art of storytelling is the storyteller’s ability to leave listeners an opportunity to interpret a character’s experiences and apply them to their own lives. It is only then that one can become a storyteller and pass on what Benjamin called a “real story” that “openly or covertly” provides wisdom and “makes it the experience” of the listener or, in H.D.’s case, the reader (86-87). It is this experiential wisdom that H.D. provides in *Helen in Egypt*. It is not her personal story; she explored that in her autobiografiction and memoirs.

Like the great storytellers of the past, H.D. takes us back to our beginnings in *Helen*. She points us toward “Mnemosyne, the rememberer” rather than history (97). She does not conform to what Benjamin calls the epic tradition—“*one* hero, *one* odyssey, *one* battle,” but instead provides a “web” of many stories, many memories that create a whole (98). H.D.’s Helen searches for meaning, but her quest results in only the “perplexity” inherent in one’s initial attempt toward this goal (99). H.D. does not, as Benjamin recommends, “keep the story free from explanation” (89). She provides an overabundance of explanation and recommendations, much of which is often mistaken and self-serving. In doing so, H.D. paints a portrait of reality that encourages readers to question the validity of their own truths as well as others’ truths.

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