H.D. and freedom : realization through nature, vision, and gender authority

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A Thesis

Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

College of Arts & Sciences

Department of English

2013

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Abstract

This thesis is a study in the constructs of H.D.’s poetry, and how they work in relation to the reader. Specifically, H.D.’s concern was creating a sense of freedom for her readers as a means to representation and identity. To achieve this state of consciousness, H.D. began by exploring the sacredness within nature. In the process of articulating her idea into a more exact form she turned her focus towards gender. By removing the objective aesthetics surrounding women, H.D. developed a gender authority. Through this authority she continued her quest for freedom and, in doing so, instilled a sense of renewal in a society affected by the traumas of World War II. Yet, her triumphs were not accomplished without great struggle. She would have to endure personal trials, both mental and physical, throughout her career before completing her epic visionary collection of poems. By studying the emotional effect that H.D.’s poetry has on her readers an understanding in the agency of women, their authority, and freedom for all genders will reveal itself.
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Introduction

The stories of Hilda Doolittle’s transformation into H.D., “leaving the bare initials, the essential signature that might be cut in stone” are commonplace among scholars, but her concern for developing an idea of freedom is lesser known (Duncan 46). Beginning with her time in the Imagist movement, H.D. worked toward creating an idea of freedom for her readers to experience. This idea of freedom is a particularly human sensation that leads to an explicit understanding of the individual and the world that exists around the individual. Initially, H.D. found a route towards creating this effect through nature. Yet, overtime she concentrated on creating a sense of authority within women through her idea of freedom. While early poems, such as “Orchard,” do emphasize the struggles of the feminine, her later poems will explicitly bring the role of women into the foreground. She sought to create an image of women that existed beyond aesthetic and sexual value, and establish them in a role of authority. Eventually, as historical events began to affect her, she would use her poetry as a source of renewal within society, in an effort to fight back against trials such as World War II. Simultaneously, she also maintained the gender authority she had been developing in her poems. Of course, achieving this freedom is no small feat, and would require readers to become active participants in her poetry.

Merely looking at the words on the page will not suffice in the reader’s quest for freedom, as there is a rigorous dedication required. In his essay “Understanding Modern Poetry,” from his book Reasons In Madness, Allen Tate comments on the participation of the reader: “The most persuasive reason of all [That modern poetry is misunderstood] is the decline of the art of reading” (87). Tate continues to argue that because society has
reached a point in which there is an oversaturation of published work readers “do not have to attend to the letters and words on the page in order to ‘read’ what is there” (87). Tate’s essay, published in 1941 and towards the end of H.D.’s career, serves to remind readers that in order to experience the state of freedom that H.D. establishes throughout her poetry, they must “attend” to the poems, and not simply try to force an emotion within themselves. H.D.’s poetry necessitates this act of reading to the point where it is almost laborious, but with good reason. Readers must “attend” to every line that H.D. has written in the hope to reach the sense of freedom she strenuously worked into her writing. Thus, the failure to read the poems in a manner that immerses the readers into the work threatens the freedom that exists within the lines.

The intense connection that H.D.’s poetry calls for between the readers and the poem is in effort to achieve an emotional complex. As her writing evolved overtime, H.D. never ceased to continue articulating this complex. The readers, then, experience the journey H.D. is embarking on so long as they strive to read her poetry with the proper attention. Just as the poet has to sweat and work to bring her ideas in the poem to life, the readers must truly endeavor to experience what the poem offers. Similarly, the gender authority H.D. articulates in her writing is threatened by ideals of the past, which reject any notion of women as anything beyond aesthetic and sexual objects.

While freedom exists for all of humanity, it possesses a particular relation to gender. Women, as history conveys, have suffered and been oppressed for the simple nature of their sex. For H.D., her “gender authority and the vision that comes with it is positioned in a culture that not only denies its import and meaning, but insists that, for any authority, a female can never suffice” (Duplessis 81). Freedom, then, becomes
something more significant to women, rather than men, because of the struggles they have endured to achieve even the slightest sensation of it. As her career progresses, H.D. begins to focus more on depicting a gender authority that raised women to the same level as their male counterparts, even sometimes placing them in higher regard. While creating this sense of freedom for women, H.D. also sought to instill the ideas of their authority within men, especially in her later career.

Her time with the Imagist movement followed by her time translating and experiencing physical visions, to her psychoanalytic sessions and endurance of World War II are grounded by a common thread: H.D.’s tireless effort to instill a sense of freedom, especially in women, throughout her poetry. As the following chapters will convey, the articulation of her idea may have changed over time, but she never lost sight of reaching a complete sense of freedom. And while she went through the process herself, she wrote in a way that invited her readers on the quest as well. Ultimately, H.D.’s poetry allows for a sense of renewal to take place within her readers, providing a continued hope for the future. As the readers dedicate themselves to her poetry they become free to understand their individuality, as well as the world around them.
Chapter 1:
Sacred Nature

In the *H.D. Book*, Robert Duncan writes, “we find in H.D.’s early work the evocation not only of presences of Nature but of the poet’s own nature, her temper or virtu” (50). Through her poetry, H.D. reveals a sacred understanding of nature that will evoke an emotional sensation and lead to a state of freedom. Readers will find themselves making connections with the nature imagery through the sensory and visual aesthetic of her early Imagist poems in an effort to embrace what H.D. was trying to present. This achieved state was a metaphysical connection to one’s own emotion that allows for an understanding in the sacredness of the environment. The images of plants, fruit, and foliage in her poems do not exist merely as instances of aesthetic technique, but rather as something to be understood in relation to the “emotional complex[es] Pound calls for in “A Few Don’ts” (Duncan 294). As a poet, H.D. believed her readers could see beyond the surface of her nature images, and into the emotion provoking structures they were. As an Imagist she retained the idea of nature’s sacred potential and worked towards a way to present it within her poems. The sacredness she acknowledges in her writing through nature would have a profound effect on her readers, instilling a sense of freedom within them. In H.D.’s Imagist poetry, nature is the essential component that sparks the quest for a continued understanding and sense of freedom.

Her nature imagery can be traced back to the days of her youth. Annette Debo points out that “as a child H.D. witnessed the growth of the steel mills and the transformation of her town through the mill’s production and pollution (she deplored in letters the cutting of the town’s beloved trees)” (25). This industrialization haunted H.D.,
and from that memory she found a platform to communicate ideas of power, control, and endurance. Seeing as industrialization not only affected H.D.’s hometown but many other areas across the nation, she believed this phenomenon would have the same distressing effect on others as it did on her. Marianne Moore, a close friend of H.D., “offered the insight that for H.D. nature is a ‘symbol of freedom’ represented through ‘wiry diction, accurate observation and a homogenous colour sense’” (Debo 43). Moore’s understanding of nature as a “symbol of freedom” draws attention to what H.D. believed it could inspire. Symbolically, nature, for H.D., represents an environment with no constraint that is free to grow wild. Thus, there is a quality of representation in nature that exists beyond aesthetic value. She used nature to develop a commonality among readers, which then created a tension towards the preconceived notions of the role of women. H.D.’s early poetry called for an understanding of nature that was not reduced to aesthetics as a means to provide authority to women, or, in the very least, convey the struggles of their gender. Her inclusion of nature elements in her poetry serves as the path for readers to recognize this freedom and represent themselves with its images in a communal effort. In order to do so, nature must be acknowledged by the reader in a way that will conjure the sacred. Only then will the reader’s journey through the poem invoke certain emotions, strive for a spiritual connection, and ultimately leave the reader with a rediscovered sense of freedom. H.D.’s writing is excitable in this manner, capable of triggering that sense of discovery.

While the emotional qualities H.D. was interested in incorporating into her poetry existed prior to her first publications, Pound wanted to articulate what her poetry could do through the Imagist manifesto. In the essay “A Few Don’ts,” Ezra Pound writes, “An
‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (294). Here, the image is established as something more than a visual illustration, something that also has to work in the confines of time. In a single moment Imagist poetry sought to develop a detailed representation, and along with that a corresponding feeling. The instantaneous nature of Imagism, the roots of which can be found in H.D.’s poetry, meant to strike an immediate emotion into the readers without using any elements of excess. On the matter of understanding the image in its most basic form John Ciardi writes, “it would seem impossible for man to think in any depth were he not able to ‘see pictures’ in his mind’s eye. The very words of human languages are images at root, and all written languages seem to have evolved from some form of drawing” (864). What Ciardi makes clear is that the image, before it can be anything else, needs to exist within the reader’s mind as a mental drawing. Possessing this mental drawing allows the reader to then explore the image as something with an affect, an emotional signifier. The sacred quality of nature works in a way that instills a representative control within the readers. To discover this sacredness, H.D. uses images from nature to create a “drawing” within the reader’s mind in an instant of time and, does so in a direct and powerful manner in order to invoke an emotion. This approach to crafting poetry, while it does use emotion, removes the ‘dreamy’ sensation that previous poets sought, and utilizes an objective methodology.

As Tim Armstrong argues in Modernism, the image was “constructed on a regime of elimination and prohibition—an ‘objectivity’ constructed on fear of pollution, a deathliness which must constantly be voided and avoided; an engagement with the symbolic which has its roots in poetic mourning” (31). As Armstrong argues, Imagism
strives to strip poetry down to its most basic structure. Anything that exists beyond the image stands to ruin not only the poem, but also the poem’s relationship with the reader. Certainly, as previously discussed, this approach provides the reader with a particular emotional experience. H.D. constructed her early poems to emphasize this experience and avoid anything that might distract from it. The “pollution,” as Armstrong calls it, would interfere with the reader’s relationship to nature in H.D.’s poetry, but she had found a way to incorporate subjective qualities into her poems without completely disregarding the Imagist manifesto.

Through a method of establishing identity, H.D. creates a specific voice and, in turn, furthers the freedom of representation for her readers. Yet, Jo Gill argues, “In her early imagist writing, the eschewal of a conventional lyric speaking position is evidenced by the paring away of voice and identity such that only spare, elemental images remain” (79). It is possible to view H.D.’s poetry as lyrically nonconventional because the direct route statement prevents the poet from focusing too much on the self, but H.D.’s poetry certainly did not lack voice. While she manages to remain within the realm of the Imagist guidelines, her use of pronouns throughout her poems creates a sense of identity that also works with the spatial relationship between the narrator, the reader, and their environment.

As the manifesto calls for a “direct treatment” of the object, Imagism, in its most ideal form, sought to avoid matters of the personal. This, in turn, affected how the poet was present in her own poetry, and ‘where’ the voice was. For example, in Pound’s poem “In a Station on the Metro” there is no ‘I’ used, leaving the narrative voice not clearly defined. H.D.’s poetry, on the other hand, makes use of pronouns in a particular way, so
that the use of voice and self in her writing creates a sense of the personal that is not over-saturated with the intimate details about the poet’s life. Rather, H.D.‘s personality within her poems works in a way that allows the reader to have a personal experience as well. Certainly, H.D.‘s use of pronouns gives a sense of authority to the poems, but it does not overpower the reader. Rather, H.D. creates a voice that encompasses both the narrator and the readers.

Through the use of pronouns, H.D. allows the personal into her poems while maintaining the Imagist desire for a “direct treatment” (294). Peter Nicholls writes, for the Imagists, “the format of ‘objectivity’ is threatened by the incursion of the (rhetorical) ego, whereas for H.D., poetry becomes itself the medium in which the ‘I’ constitutes and reconstitutes itself. Yet this ‘I’ carries no obtrusive burden of ‘character’” (198). H.D. positions the narrator in the poem in a way that promotes a shared quest between the reader and the speaker. Rather than become isolated, the ‘I’ of the narrator seems to invite the reader, just as the use of pronouns such as ‘we’ and ‘us’ does as well. Yet, H.D. does not overuse these pronouns; she implements them almost sparingly, just enough to build the subjective community she desires. She also prevents the ‘I’ in her poetry from becoming too personal by overpowering it with the presentation of nature images as a means of connecting to the sacred. As she does this, the nature images develop a greater relationship with the pronouns in the poem, thus becoming representative of the readers. When this begins to happen, the readers, then, begin to embrace the freedom the poem creates.

Of course, the pronouns are just one of the elements H.D. uses in her quest for freedom; the spatial qualities within the poem also contribute to its emotional sensations.
Peter Nicholls points out that while “the images of Pound and Aldington are distinguished by a sense of cool detachment and balance, H.D.’s early poems are fraught with a kind of psychic violence. Objects are not held at a contemplative distance here, even though the clarity of presentation might seem to situate things and events at some kind of remove” (198). By removing the sense of distance between the images and the readers, H.D. brings her readers into the poem so they may participate. This generates an intimacy, and the reader’s sensory experience is heightened. Not only do readers feel closer to what is happening, they also feel closer to the poet/narrator. As the relationship with the poet grows, the reader’s understanding of what is at stake is enhanced. This goes back to the idea of the poet as a guide. H.D. continually ushers her readers towards nature within the poem. As the readers draw close to the imagery they will discover its sacred qualities. Once the reader begins to experience these qualities, the sense of freedom H.D. is striving for begins to reveal itself. The sacred principle in nature brings forth freedom so that the readers may experience it not solely in the poem, but in their actual environment. H.D. is working to create an effect on the readers that will last even after they have finished reading her work.

To achieve this continued effect, H.D. is explicit in the words she chooses to create her images. She never strays from the idea of leading her readers to a sense of freedom, and in doing so she develops a balance between the visual and emotional elements of her poem. She uses nothing that will lessen the value of her work, because to do so would risk the chance that the readers fail to discover her central idea. In How a Poem Means, John Ciardi writes, “Like words, images possess both denotation and connotation: they denote certain sensory (usually visual) identifications and they connote
an emotional aura. Like words, therefore, images in a poem tend to fall into overtone themes united by either their denotations or their connotations” (865). Ciardi’s thoughts on the two approaches lend themself directly to H.D.’s writing. It is in these environments that H.D. also constructs what Ciardi calls an “emotional aura” for the words, which is a form of connotation. Thus, readers embark on not only a visual and spatial experience but a sensual feeling as well. This emotional effect that readers undergo is a compassionate connection to other individuals and the world around them. As readers identify the nature images within the poem they will be overcome with an emotional sensation that will simultaneously lead them to a sense of freedom, and this feeling is what creates an effect that lasts after the poem. This freedom also allows the reader to approach the poetry in a more exploratory mode, one that even has the potential to examine the effects of the spiritual, and its connection to poetry and its participants. The combination of all of these elements within her poetry is crucial in developing the desired effect on readers, and revealing a sense of freedom.

The dichotomous relationship between the elements within H.D.’s poetry can be referred to as her presentation. Overall, presentation was an important focus of the Imagists, as they believed that “it is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works” (Pound 295). H.D. furthered her idea of presentation by creating a process that would not only produce an emotional affect, but also create a feeling of freedom that could represent the self. This process would allow for an experience that exceeds the realm of poetry and push the readers into environments bigger than themselves. By concentrating all energy into writing poetry that aimed to explore nature beyond its aesthetic value, H.D. believed she could assist her readers in
achieving a state of consciousness that brought forth the idea of complete freedom for all genders. In her early Imagist poem “Orchard,” all of these ideas can be grounded.

“Orchard” begins with the narrator observing a pear falling from a tree. During its fall she comments on the bees, but never identifies them directly. She uses the bees as a point of comparison, writing that they were “not more fleet than I” (28). The narrator then falls onto the ground in a bowing position and makes a declaration towards the trees from which the pear fell. She then asks to be spared from the tree’s aesthetic beauty. In the second stanza, the bees continue to move about, and again, the narrator does not distinctly identify them as such; she uses modifiers instead of nouns, calling them just “honey-seeking” (28). The air echoes the noise they make, and the narrator reminds the readers that she is still in solitude, and in the same position as the first stanza. In the third stanza, she begins reaching out to a spiritual force in the orchard. Before calling the force by name, she describes it as “rough-hewn,” thus giving it a certain aesthetic quality (29). She then states she has brought an offering to the spiritual force. The stanza ends with the narrator’s desire to be spared from the aesthetic nature of the orchard, echoing the sentiment—“(Spare us from loveliness)”—from the first stanza (28). The fourth and final stanza begins with a description of an assortment of fruits and nuts. Interestingly, the items that are described are not in their raw state, but instead in a prepared form, “pomegranates already broken” (29). The final line of the stanza, and the poem, reinforces the idea that the aforementioned foods are the offering raised to the spiritual power.

Working with the readers, the narrator establishes the pear as the image with the most substance from the start of the poem. The second line, “As it fell,” gives the falling
fruit its significance. The fall brings it to life and conveys a sense of urgency. What really makes this image stand out is her description of the bees in the following line. Through the use of modifiers, the narrator never has to obviously state what the bees are. They become something more in the background of the poem, letting the pear sit in the foreground. Her comparison of the bees to herself—“They were not more fleet than I”—does not give the bees precedence over her, and solidifies their place as a point of reference to the narrator and for the readers. Had she baldly identified the bees rather than using modifiers to suggest their presence, the image they would develop would “become stereotyped and degenerate into forceless clichés” (Ciardi 865). What I mean by “stereotyped” is fixed and conventional. There is no power to the bees until the narrator renames them as “honey-seeking, golden-banded,” which gives them substance but a different kind of content than if named in the ordinary fashion (28). Now there is an element of mystery about them. This encourages the reader to work through them, as a background image, to imagine what they are. This process engages the readers with the poem, and in this moment they begin to make the connection with nature.

The use of punctuation becomes an important part of the poem as H.D. uses parentheses around the line “(Spare us from loveliness)” (28). Presented in this manner, the line signals a thought she is sharing with the reader. This is also the first time the narrative does not reflect a singular ‘I,’ but instead the plural form of the first person pronoun. The narrator introduces an ‘other’ here which could be the inclusion of the reader, but given her tendency to write with the feminine in mind it is likely to represent women as a collective. Her focus on women can be inferred from the depiction of the falling fruit towards the narrator in the beginning of “Orchard.” The scene echoes the Fall
of Man, where Eve took a piece of forbidden fruit which resulted in her and Adam’s banishment from the Garden of Eden. This idea of a woman bearing a burden, and searching for an end to suffering will continue throughout the poem. This line also achieves a great sense of emotion through the word ‘spare.’ To be spared, or the act of sparing, is an end to punishment and a display of mercy. So, the narrator sees “loveliness” as something of a punishment, which she needs a reprieve from. This is where the pear truly becomes the image, the “loveliness” provides an emotion in relation to the pear, a tension. While on one hand the pear is a source of nourishment, it is also causing distress for the narrator. Referring to the fallen fruit as “loveliness” seems ironic, and builds a tension around it. The pear is then identifiable as something connoting both pain and pleasure.

Until this point, the emphasis of the poem has been on the pear, through its fall and the effect this has on the narrator. When H.D. states she is falling she subtly shifts the attention towards herself, and away from the falling pear. She completes this shift by mirroring the fruit’s fall:

I saw the first pear

As it fell—

The honey-seeking, golden banded,

The yellow swarm

Was not more fleet than I,

(Spare us from loveliness)
And I fell prostrate

Crying: (1-8)

The reader is immersed in the initial image by the time they reach the second half of the above stanza; it is a quick transition to seeing the speaker’s body collapsing “prostrate” and understanding the implications of the narrator’s cries. In regard to Pound’s poetry, which I believe holds true for this poem as well, Peter Nicholls writes that he has a “way of talking about image as an ‘equation’ for a particular mood, for in such poems there is a subtle shift of attention away from the object itself towards something else which allows desire to be meditated by a tradition or a set of conventions” (170). Through the image of the falling fruit H.D. creates an effect as well as a similar effect by the time the poem reaches the human figure falling. The fall is articulated in the parenthetical statement that takes place in the line just before. The desire to be spared anticipates the emotional outcry of the narrator, building up to the actual moment. The position of the body as if it is bowing is important as well. The symbolism of position suggests the narrator is succumbing to a hierarchy of some kind. This relationship between the narrator and nature will continue throughout the poem, representing the oppressive qualities of the aesthetic, particularly on women.

Again, the use of punctuation plays an important role in the following lines. In the seventh line she writes, “And I fell prostrate,” ending the line with the adjective which signals a break, or a stop, and emphasizes the submissive position of the narrator (28). The same emphasis occurs again in the following single-word line, “Crying.” While ending the previous line with the word “prostrate” can establish a sense of being
overwhelmed, giving an entire line to one word articulates the exact emotion H.D. is after. The readers direct all of their attention to the word, creating a pause between it, the previous line and the line to follow.

The line also ends with a colon. Identifying the purpose of the colon is crucial here; everything that comes after is a declaration of the narrator. Now, the narrator uses the word ‘us’ out loud, so to speak, instead of simply thinking it. The voice then takes on an accusatory tone, differing from the submissive position of the body. The narrator establishes a sense of authority in the poem as she writes:

You have flayed us

With your blossoms,

Spare us the beauty

Of fruit-trees. (9-12)

Here, she makes reference back to the group she mentions in the parentheses. The cause of the flaying comes from the blossoms of the fruit trees, which places the attention back on the initial falling pear. And, again, the narrator asks to be spared, only this time using her voice, establishing a voice that is not internal but instead is speaking directly to the trees. Reading the last few lines of the stanza with the narrator’s voice gives the poem a certain reality. This reality gives life to the images such as the pear, which intensifies its effect. H.D. begins to invite the readers into a moment in time and to a place. Her voice does not represent an environment but an event. The “image convey[s] not only the appearance of things or the sensual feel of things and moods, but experience, the
reciprocity between inner and outer realities” (Duncan 42). The parenthetical line represents an “inward” reality, and her voice after the colon represents the “outer” reality. The outer reality serves as a bridge to the events in the poem. It is the connecting force that will bring the emotions of the parenthetical line to nature by way of the reader. The cry, while it is the narrator’s voice, also belongs to the ‘other’ because of her use of “us.” Now, side by side with the narrator, readers are engaging with nature to convey the emotional struggle. The first verse moves readers from nature images to the narrator’s self, then to the initial emotion, and finally to the emotional connection with the poem.

The second stanza echoes this transition and works to reinforce some of what happened in the first stanza:

The honey-seeking

Paused not,

The air thundered their song,

And I alone was prostrate. (13-16)

This stanza begins with the bees as part of the background, again referring to them as the “honey-seeking.” (28). The second line, “Paused not,” displays not only a relentlessness but also a disregard for what is happening. The line “The air thundered their song” works in the same way as the line “The yellow swarm” does in the first stanza. Of course, the song is the bees’ buzzing and the thunder represents the song’s reverberation throughout the air. H.D. continues the sense of mystery in nature here, encouraging the readers to discover the image for themselves. Again, this process pulls the reader closer into the
poem. As she transitions from an outward nature to an emotional state she is constantly pulling the readers toward a new understanding of nature. This new understanding emphasizes its sacred qualities, which ultimately will provide the reader with freedom.

As the bees continue to swarm, the narrator ends the stanza stating, “And I alone was prostrate,” leaving her in submissive solitude while nature continues to exist around her. The transition from nature to emotion is heightened because the bees are not bothered in the same way that the narrator is. This makes what the narrator is feeling a specifically human emotion. This is significant because it allows readers to see that while nature is a powerful force, the freedom H.D. is guiding her readers towards is a uniquely human sensation, one that can only be attained by those who consciously seek it. Contextually, the freedom that is being created throughout the poem is specific to women as the narrator calls for an end to “loveliness.” While readers of any gender can achieve this state, the poem is working to remove the stereotypical association of beauty with women.

The third stanza is probably one of the most important in regards to H.D.’s use of nature as a connection to emotion. This verse exists as a narrative within the narrator; she is not using her ‘outer’ voice here. She identifies a spiritual and metaphysical presence by pinpointing the “God of the orchard” and developing a relationship with it (29). This God operates not in a religious sense but in a sacred manner. This can be understood perhaps in the context of ‘Mother Nature,’ an encompassing idea that oversees the environment. The spirit is not a force in the biblical sense, but one that develops through emotion. As the narrator reaches out to the spiritual force it is not in the form of prayer, but instead an offering. This anticipates what is to come in the fourth stanza but it displays a certain sensory action. The offering is a gift for the spiritual presence. This gift is a way to make
a connection with the god in a compassionate manner, which shows a certain level of caring towards the orchard.

On H.D.’s inclusion of the gods in her work, Vincent Quinn writes that she “expresses the desire to be a comrade of the gods. She considers the difficulty of achieving this relationship a test of her ardor and, of itself, a strong reason for making an effort” (38). As Quinn points out, H.D. wanted to develop a relationship to the gods just as she wants to develop a relationship with her readers. In this sense then, she is inviting readers with her as she makes this connection. The gods represent a spiritual authority, something H.D. also saw in nature. By bringing the two together, she develops a strong emotional complex. This is created by seeing nature as something of divine importance for women. Once this is acknowledged by readers they will continuously see that nature exemplifies freedom. And any action against nature is a disregard for freedom. Thus, embracing nature and its sacredness is a gesture towards freedom for women, and giving them a sense of authority.

The narrator’s desire to be spared from loveliness leads her to connect with the spirit of nature. This stanza is the point of unification in the poem between the narrator and nature as she writes:

O rough-hewn

God of the orchard,

I bring you an offering—

Do you, alone unbeautiful,
Son of the god,

Spare us from loveliness: (17-22)

She concludes the stanza with a request for mercy, identical to the parenthetical line in the first verse. The repetition reinforces the desire. The offering that is mentioned in this stanza symbolizes a sense of tradition and an order. As H.D. writes, to communicate with nature some kind of offering must be presented. Even though the falling fruit is causing the narrator’s suffering she approaches the issue with an understanding of authority. She establishes a sacred connection with nature, and does so on behalf of a group. In depicting nature in this forgiving and accepting manner she provides the reader with a lens to see nature not as a place to be industrialized, but instead as a place to cultivate the self. H.D. exercises a certain level of humility in this stanza in her desire to present the offering. For readers, this reflects a level of respect that should be administered toward nature. To approach nature with respect, as H.D. displays, exemplifies an emotional connection. This stanza is a crucial piece of the poem that articulates what H.D. is after. Nature serves as a spiritual sanctuary where individuals can experience emotion to its fullest extent.

The final stanza incorporates the physical presence of nature and reiterates what the third verse begins to convey. While attempting to connect to the spirit of nature, H.D. presents it in its tangible form. The fourth stanza carries on looking as if it was a grocery list, but it is nature’s products in a prepared state for consumption:

These fallen hazel-nuts,

Stripped late of their green sheaths,
Grapes, red-purple,
Their berries
Dripping with wine,
Pomegranates already broken,
And Shrunken figs
And quinces untouched,
I bring you as offering. (23-31)

What needs to be remembered is this stanza exists as an outwardly directed statement. The description of each item and their state represents the narrator’s voice speaking to the spiritual power she acknowledged in the previous stanza, describing what exactly she is offering. Each natural item has been transformed into its desirable processed form; the grapes into wine and the nuts stripped of their shells. Perhaps the offering is the preparation of the food as well as its consumption. If this were the case, it would reinforce the sense of respect the narrator conveys in the third stanza. Acknowledging the gifts of nature as nourishment also gives them a sense of vitality to readers. Up until this point the poem has shown that nature can be a place of spiritual and emotional discovery, and now the narrator reminds her readers that nature’s products are also necessary for life. She depicts nature as a spiritual and physical provider. As the readers identify the nature imagery, H.D. is already shifting them into the realm of the sacred, giving nature metaphysical qualities. The stripped nuts and the wine grapes also reflect a transforming human process. Over the course of the poem the readers themselves undergo a
transformation in which the sacredness they discover in nature changes them into a more free state of consciousness. This state does not abide by guidelines, or restrictions, but allows the readers to understand their environment in a superior manner. Thus, the relationship between humans and nature works symbiotically because nature will lead individuals to freedom, and, in turn, the individuals will call for a continued discovery of nature. In this sense, H.D.’s poetry transforms nature into an activity to connect with; participation is necessary on the reader’s behalf. The process then in understanding the poetry and its presentation becomes a traditional and sacred act, constantly urging the reader to obtain a greater comprehension.

She concludes the poem informing the God of the orchard that the food is an offering to encourage a pardon from “loveliness,” which circles the poem back to the first stanza where the narrator cried out for the same thing. Here, she ends the poem in her own voice speaking directly to the spiritual source of nature. The readers conclude with this final line, almost as if they are speaking to the God of the orchard. This is because during the course of the poem H.D. first establishes an ‘I’, and then an ‘us.’ She then goes on to communicate with a spiritual presence of nature, attempting to be granted relief, repeating over and over what she desires for herself and the ‘other.’ As the poem closes, the final stanza is entirely H.D.’s outward voice, presenting the offering, leaving the readers to utter the final words, “I bring you as offering,” and cutting away from the burdens of loveliness which inhibits the sacredness of nature. In the final line H.D. and her readers connect with nature communally, and forge ahead into freedom.

H.D. would continue her search for freedom, particularly concerned with gender, even as the Imagist movement began to dissolve. Her investigation would cause her to
reexamine her own body of poetics. While she had found a way to actively engage her readers on an emotional level, she sought a new way to do so. Her efforts would be marked by serious artistic tension and even physical strain. One of her greatest challenges would arise from not only maintaining the freedom she sought in her early work, but finding a way to evolve it as well. Her new “outlook is marked by her longing for an intense realization of nature, art, and love; she detests complacency and mediocrity” (Quinn 52). Her desire for this profound understanding would cause her to begin redefining her poetry. One of the endeavors H.D. would begin during her transformational process would be translations. These translations, which will be explored in Chapter 2, represent a transition within H.D., perhaps a decoding of herself. Along with her translations she will write her artistic manifesto *Notes on Thought and Vision*. Throughout the essay she will explore gendered authority and begin to realize the “revolutionary potential of poetry” (Graham 133). As she reaches this point in her career, the nature images of her early work will become something of the past, although not entirely. She “moves away from a focus on flowers and landscapes to offer the first fully realized example of the emphatically women-centered poetry for which H.D. has become known” (Graham 113). Despite moving in a different direction later in her career, H.D. will continue to retain the importance of an emotional reader engagement that leads to the sacred. The constructs of the Imagist movement and nature helped her realize she was capable of having a profound effect on her readers, one that, although rearticulated, will strive to evoke freedom in a more exact manner. The years after Imagism will be tumultuous for H.D., but not without great accomplishment.
Chapter 2: 
The Agony of Vision

In the posthumously published *Notes on Thought and Vision* H.D. writes that “The swing from normal consciousness to abnormal consciousness is accompanied by grinding discomfort and mental agony” (19). Her statement provides insight to the struggle she was enduring on the road to vision. Following the Imagist movement’s initial anthology, the group began to dismantle and fall apart, as did H.D.’s personal life. She suffered a miscarriage and separated from her then husband, Richard Aldington. After their separation “he disavowed any plan to help her…she must plan her own life without depending on him” (Guest 89). The devastation of these events plunged H.D. into bouts of crippling anxiety and severe breakdowns, but through the “agony” she would come to realize the authority and purpose she possessed as a female poet. H.D. wrote *Notes on Thought and Vision* in 1919, and with it challenged the stipulations set forth in Pound’s Imagist manifesto. H.D. had reached a point where she felt the need to explore the freedom in nature’s sacredness from her earlier writing at more intense level. The unpublished text would transform the sacred quality of nature into a more complex understanding of freedom as well as the authority of women. She then articulated her new perspective in the collection of poetry titled *Hymen*. As the title reveals, this collection was more concerned with the role of women than her earlier work. Between the effects of Imagism and a series of personal struggles, H.D. would find herself developing a deeper understanding of freedom through *Notes on Thought and Vision* and *Hymen*. This trying time of her life signifies a shift away from Imagism towards a visionary body of poetics.
H.D.’s new desire for exploration contradicts some the tenets set forth by her former husband, Richard Aldington. In the preface to *Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology*, published in 1915, Aldington writes that the Imagists “allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject” in their poetry’s content (Modernist Journals Project). This seems to agree with H.D.’s ideas of openness, exploration, and the vision of the individual. Yet, Aldington continues, “it is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911” (Modernist Journals Project). In the opening line Aldington claims that the Imagists are open to any poetic content, and then he contradicts himself when he weighs in on what constitutes good and bad art. As much as he and Pound wanted Imagism to be a movement of freedom it could not exist as such because of the guidelines they established. H.D. may have participated in developing the Imagist manifesto, and it may have been created for her, but that does not mean she could completely blossom as a poet under its guidelines. H.D.’s realization that something greater existed within the sacredness of nature drove her to embrace the abstraction Pound had warned about.

In the particular section of “A Retrospect” where this injunction is made Pound also writes, “Don’t be viewy—leave that to the writers of pretty little philosophic essays” (10). To the contrary, while composing her artistic manifesto not only does she welcome abstraction, but she also shows her readers the way to the over-conscious, an elevated level of cognition, acknowledging, “Every person must work out his own way” (23).
Despite the fact that H.D. was approaching a moment in her career that would begin to redefine her poetry, her personal life was in shambles.

As H.D.’s marriage was falling apart she permitted Aldington to take in other lovers and she “writes that she gives up her own bed to the lovers. Then she realizes that she has, despite her machinations, suffered two losses—Aldington and Lawrence” (Guest 89). The loss of her friend D.H. Lawrence deeply affected her and pushed H.D. to seek a change of environment. While staying at Cecil Gray’s house in Cornwall she befriended Winifred Ellerman, better known as Bryher. The two women would develop a life long companionship, and Bryher would play a crucial role during H.D.’s vision experience, around the same time she had written Notes on Thought and Vision.

The essay marks the start of H.D.’s intense venture to obtain a sense of authority and freedom of the self through two key ideas she fashioned: brain vision and womb vision. Throughout the essay she provides the reader with a poet’s perspective of the constructs in a gendered authority. As she discusses in the essay, this authority will also lead to a different sense of freedom, one evolving from her earlier work. Notes on Thought and Vision thus marks the beginning of a new chapter for H.D. as a writer. Albert Gelpi writes in the introduction to the essay, “The importance of ‘Notes on Thought and Vision’ is that it anticipates a lifetime spent in the divination of such epiphanal ‘spots of time’” (9).

The essay begins with H.D. declaring that there are “three states or manifestations of life: Body, mind, over-mind” (17). The last term, the over-mind, signifies some sort of consciousness, but because it is not precisely defined it seems to be rather abstract. Notes
on Thought and Vision would push H.D. to cross the border to become the author of a “little philosophic essay.” She continues in the essay by stating, “the aim of men and women of the highest development is equilibrium, balance, growth of the three at once” (17). Her concern about states of consciousness and equilibrium foreshadows the philosophical ideas that are to come, but it is important to note her specific inclusion of both “men and women,” a designation which carefully distinguishes both genders and opens the possibility for women to find a voice. This conscious effort to give the female individual influence is crucial in Notes on Thought and Vision. As the essay progresses, H.D. articulates her idea of feminine authority, as well as how she reached those conclusions.

This idea of the over-mind that H.D. begins her essay with is particularly interesting. To explain the term she writes, “when a creative scientist, artist, or philosopher has been for some hours of the day intent on his work, his mind often takes an almost physical character. That is, his mind becomes his real body. His over-mind becomes his brain” (18). Here, H.D. describes the over-mind as a presence in the individual that becomes apparent through a strict dedication to craft. The mind acts in the way the body does, and develops an acute sense of feeling. The over-mind still belongs to the individual; it does not act as a divine spiritual presence that oversees all. Instead it serves as a lens for an individual perspective, “ordinary things never become quite unreal nor disproportionate. It is only an effort to readjust, to focus, seemingly a slight physical effort” (18).

One of the most significant parts of the essay takes place after H.D. comments on the over-mind. She furthers her idea by making a comparison to a jelly-fish writing,
“That over-mind seems a cap, like water, transparent, fluid yet with definite body, contained in a definite space. It is like a closed sea-plant, jelly-fish, or anemone” (18). She continues by noting that “into that over-mind, thoughts pass and are visible like fish swimming under clear water” (19). While it is certainly easy to observe the nature imagery here, there is nothing hard or precise about it as one might expect from an Imagist. H.D. is chipping away at an idea of what she believes to be vision. The over-mind is a vessel through which thoughts pass, acting as a receptor for the mind itself. In turn, she must attempt to make connections not only with her environment but also with thoughts and ideas. If thoughts pass through the over-mind that would mean they exist beyond it; they do not belong to a specific individual’s over-mind. Therefore, different over-minds may experience similar thoughts, connecting many different bodies. Achieving the over-mind and developing this connection reinforces what the beginning of Notes on Thought and Vision says is the goal of men and women: equilibrium.

Expanding on the likening of the over-conscious to a jelly-fish, H.D. explains the long feelers which exist like a jelly-fishes’ tentacles, hanging from the over-conscious down through the body. The feelers and the body then have a direct relationship in which the body is allowed to extend into space, and so it plays just as important a role in achieving over-conscious as the tentacles do. The feelers are not separate from the over-conscious; “they are not of different material, extraneous to the grey matter of the directing brain. The super feelers are part of the super mind, as the jelly-fish feelers are the jelly-fish itself, elongated as an extension” (19). These tentacles serve as an extension of what H.D. refers to as “super-feelings.” These feelings are part of the over-conscious and the world, reaching into the individual, then back into the transmission of thought.
They also assist in the reaction to certain contacts. Because jelly-fish lack a brain or central nervous system, they rely on their tentacles to detect any sort of stimulus. The ‘super-feelers’ work in a similar manner, detecting happenings and relaying them back to the over-conscious. Once they return to the over-conscious they become part of a bigger process. This process is part of understanding freedom in a more acute sense than ordinarily experienced. To approach her poetry as a conduit of freedom she must move beyond the immediate and look towards the over-conscious.

At this point in the essay, H.D. begins to incorporate the authoritative role that gender plays in the over-mind, a role that will continue to articulate her idea of freedom, and specifically focuses on the male and female functions within vision. To assume that both sexes can operate in the same manner, H.D. claims, is to refuse to see the differences that exist, so she takes care to distinct between them. Physical anatomy contributes to their experience of freedom. She writes that this state of consciousness, womb vision, can be “placed like a foetus in the body” and thus gives the state a gendered identity (19). If consciousness could exist like a foetus, H.D. is then implying that women can obtain that level of thought. As for the men, she leaves it up to question: “Is it easier for a women to attain this state of consciousness than for a man?” (20). Immediately H.D. establishes a separation between the sexes. This is particularly interesting because if men cannot reach this state of consciousness without a mature womb, then only women have the ability to achieve this thought process. If this is the case, the woman is granted a greater sense of authority than the man. By viewing the womb as a place for the state of consciousness to exist, she gives women a unique sense of energy as a category of persons capable of creative expression. Womb vision, H.D. believes, gives “no biological reason that women
cannot be great artists; women, too, have life energies and ought to be free to direct these energies to art and the creation of world consciousness rather than only into sex and birth, if they so choose” (Robinson 232). Traditional gender dynamics are altered through this lens, which points to women’s specific biological difference as an ability to create art that cannot be made by men.

H.D. then breaks down vision into two categories, that of the womb, and that of the brain. She writes that “the majority of dream and of ordinary vision is vision of the womb” and that “the brain and the womb are both centres of consciousness, equally important” (21). Earlier in the essay, H.D. had pointed out the significance of creation that the female possesses, whereas now she states the brain and the womb must exist equally. She then answers her own question about whether or not the state of consciousness can occur in the “love-region of a man’s body” (20). On this matter Janice Robinson writes that, for H.D., “the birth of life is one level the birth of a human child, on another level the birth of a literary child. But neither experience excludes the other. These separate dimensions may in fact enhance and enrich one another; each may bring the other within the realm of possibility” (233). The birth of life is a form of creation. While childbirth is an exclusively female experience, the birth of “the literary child,” as Robinson calls it, can happen for women and men alike. To this effect, the male can begin to understand womb vision, as well as develop the balance between womb and brain consciousness.

H.D. is quick to remind the reader that the goal, no matter one’s sex, is vision. “The over-mind is like a lens of an opera-glass. When we are able to use this over-mind lens the whole world of vision is open to us” (23). Once the individual can fully realize
the over-mind, she can begin to tap into vision as a source of freedom. As H.D. writes, “the whole world” is open to the individual when she is able to make use of the state of consciousness. She does not provide step-by-step instructions to achieve the state of consciousness; rather, she provides her own experience in achieving the goal, which provides the readers with only a sense of direction. From this point, it is up to the reader’s own free will to endure the “agony.”

H.D. applies the struggle of achieving vision to the relationships that exist between people. She notes that “there are two ways of escaping the pain and despair of life, and of the rarest, most subtle dangerous and ensnaring gift that life can bring us, relationship with another person—love” (39). A relationship signifies the creation of something; it is a creative process in itself. H.D. identifies it as both “dangerous” and “ensnaring,” conveying the abstraction of what it means to love and to be loved. This is a significant step away from Imagism as it deals with an issue that is subjective. She continues, “One way to kill that love is one’s heart. To kill love—to kill life” (39). She urges her readers to keep the love within themselves alive so that they may be able to explore and understand the complexities of life. To this effect, when love is removed it then signifies a death. On the other hand, when love is recognized it signifies a rebirth in the individual. It is part of the process towards achieving the over-conscious state of mind. Identifying love then becomes something more than an objective discovery because “artistic creation as a passional state, as a sexualized constatation, takes place within this context of relationships and birth” (Burnett 33). By giving relationships and love the significance of an artistic process H.D. expands the reader’s scope of vision, as well as her own. She concludes her thoughts on the subject, writing “To accept life-but
that is dangerous. It is also dangerous not to accept life” (39). She creates a paradox informing readers of the difficulties no matter what path they choose, although to forgo love is to lose the vision.

Towards the end of the essay H.D. explicitly makes the claim that “the realization of this over-conscious world is the concern of the artist…The mind of men differ but the over minds are alike” (40). Despite the differences in gender, the over-minds are the connecting force between individuals as well as the gateway to vision. As men and women progress towards understanding their over-conscious they begin a creative process that makes them more in tune with themselves and others. Whether it is birth or writing, the idea of creation is present and “thus the moment of artistic creativity is a moment of knowledge; it is also a moment of recovery of a more primal connection to life” (Robinson 233). The connection to life H.D. is striving for is an articulated freedom, the same quality she sought in her early poetry. Only now she understands that in order to fully experience this freedom she must be open to all facets of life, love, relationships, nature, thought, vision, and the ability to create. She particularly understands the connection between love and gender through the idea of creation.

Shortly after Notes on Thought and Vision was written, H.D. traveled to Greece with Bryher. The war had cause dangerous conditions in Greece, which forced the couple to redirect their route to Corfu, and while staying there H.D. had a vision experience. On a dark wall in her bedroom, light was formed in the shapes of people and objects. The experience was so intense that H.D. could not complete the vision to its end, so Bryher had to finish what she started. Bryher informed her partner that the vision concluded with “a circle like the sun-disk and a figure within the disk; a man, she thought, was reaching
out to draw the image of a woman (My Nike) into the sun beside him” (H.D., Tribute to Freud 56).

H.D.’s vision in Corfu is an actual experience of what Notes on Thought and Vision depicts through language. The process was difficult to withstand not only mentally, but physically as well. Her body could not tolerate the intensity of the vision. As she recalls, “I [dropped] my head in my hands; it [was] aching with the effort of concentration” (55). Shortly after this moment H.D. allowed Bryher to take over. The switch is interesting for two reasons. First, it shows what the body can endure during the vision. While the process is mostly a cognitive effort, the mind cannot complete the vision unless the physical body can endure it as well. Thus, an emphasis is placed on the body as equal in strength to the mind. As H.D. wrote in Notes on Thought and Vision, an equilibrium must be developed in order to pursue the over-conscious. The second interesting aspect is the shared experience of the two women. As H.D. is beginning her exploration of gender and she experiences this vision, she also shares it with her partner. Bryher’s ability to take over for a physically exhausted H.D. speaks to the authority of women that H.D. was beginning to articulate in her writing. At this point in time, she knows she is somewhere between complete vision and the past poet she was. As she writes, “I consider this sort of dream or projected picture or vision as a sort of halfway state between ordinary dream and vision of those who, for lack of a more definite term, we must call psychics or clairvoyants” (41). She is reaching for something during this experience, but she is not in the fully realized state of conscious she needs to access. Perhaps “Writing on the Wall” is a reaffirmation of sorts for H.D., letting her know what she is trying to obtain is not completely impossible.
As in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, gender plays an important role in her memory of this experience. The final image of the winged Nike resonated strongly with H.D. Nike, the goddess of winged victory, symbolizes an achievement in the creative-vision process. Beyond victory, Nike also serves to represent the balance of both men and women, as well as the authority of the female. According to Bryher, the male figure was drawing the figure of Nike, to stand beside him, which makes her a crucial part of the vision. The end of the vision “is described by H.D. as determining the meaning of the whole series, which is thus a resolution of sexual difference, integration and wholeness through bisexuality” (Buck 122). After her vision, H.D. understands that conveying the role of the female in theory will not be sufficient in itself; instead, she will also have to exemplify this role.

“Writing on the Wall” makes clear how the vision changed H.D. Profoundly affected she writes, “I must drown completely and come out on the other side, or rise to the surface after the third time down, not dead to this life but with a new set of values, my treasure dredged from the depth. I must be born again or break utterly” (54). She knows that, as a poet and a person, the freedom she is seeking will alter her values and her outlook, both of which she is willing to “break” for. Her next step would be to apply her new philosophies to her poetry.

H.D. composed *Hymen* in 1921, shortly after her vision experience with Bryher. The volume articulates her changing ideas of gender authority, and “the collection as a whole is characterized by female sensuality: many of the poems feature luscious colors, especially red, gold and purple, and revel in powerful physical sensations connoted by heat, sea (conventionally gendered feminine) and light” (Graham 115). Similar to the way
she explored nature in her earlier work, she is using a gender dynamic that will convey to readers her thoughts about feminine authority. She also strives for the sense of freedom she acknowledged in *Notes on Thought and Vision*. Lastly, she keeps the Greek element alive, particularly in poems such as “Phaedra,” which derives from myth and works with the emotional constructs of the female.

While several versions of the story of *Hippolytus* featuring the figure Phaedra exist, Euripides authored the particular one that should be used in reference to H.D.’s writing. Indeed, her translations come from his original texts. This version will lend itself to the poem as well as an understanding of it. The story of *Hippolytus* is concerned with a false feeling of love that is plaguing Phaedra. Her stepson rejects the love of Aphrodite, and as a result the goddess casts a spell causing Phaedra to fall in love with Hippolytus. She is distraught with this unfamiliar emotion, and “rather than give in to it Phaedra means to starve herself in silence” (Kovacs 118). Her nurse discovers what is causing Phaedra’s torment, and informs Hippolytus who swears to tell no one how he learned of this. Disgusted with the news, Hippolytus curses Phaedra as well as the whole female race. Out of fear of being publicly exposed, she commits suicide. Theseus, Hippolytus’ biological father and Phaedra’s husband, discovers her body and punishes his son. The punishment resulted in Hippolytus’ mortal injury, and while she suffers, the truth of the matter is revealed to Theseus. The father and son reconcile before death completely takes Hippolytus.

H.D.’s poem does not directly tell Phaedra’s story; she “makes use of feminine figures renowned from the classics, reimagining their experiences in ways that speak to a modern audience” (Graham 117). Thus H.D. utilizes the persona of Phaedra in the poem.

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to express the difficulties of vision, and how an individual might work through it. The poem also reflects the idea of gender authority through the understanding of true and forced feeling. As the poem will demonstrate, passion is a necessary component in understanding the soul. “Phaedra” tells the story of an internal struggle and is a “poem of vision, or more accurately, the poem of a woman possessed and tortured by the powers of vision” (Burnett 46). This notion of torture arrives from H.D.’s struggle to articulate the body’s significance in creation to freedom. “Phaedra” is not a mere illustration of H.D.’s thought or experience, but instead is a part of the continued process of understanding the constructs in her new vision.

“Phaedra” begins with the narrator asking her soul to recall a memory of a specific place in the red sands of Crete, then the earth, and then the incredible heat:

Think, O my soul,

of the red sand of Crete;

think of the earth; the heat

burnt fissures like the great

backs of the temple serpents; (1-5)

The opening line hinges on her soul, an intangible part of her. Here, the narrator is trying to reach to her over-conscious, to conjure memories and “it is memory that is the source or matrix or artistic birth” (Robinson 233). Thus, the poem is born, signaling the start of creation. It is important to note that the narrator calls on her soul rather than her body. While the body represents the physical nature of individuals, in Phaedra’s case lust, the
soul represents the principles of feeling and thought within the individual. H.D. writes in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, “the body is like an oyster and the soul or spirit, a pearl,” therefore her call to the soul signifies a deep internal struggle (51). Considering how important the body is to H.D. in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, it is peculiar that she does not give it a greater significance in the poem. Perhaps this is because her theory of the body works within the context of her essay. In “Phaedra,” H.D. is writing using the mask of the Greek figure who is experiencing an uncomfortable sexual experience. Therefore, because of the context of the poem, H.D. is hesitant to give the body the authority she calls for in *Notes on Thought and Vision* so as to avoid letting it become a stereotypically female source of sexual power.

She then goes on to liken the “burnt fissures” to the “temple serpents,” a comparison which invokes *Notes on Thought and Vision*’s idea that “the world of vision has been symbolized in all ages by various priestly cults in all countries by the serpent…In my personal language or vision, I call this serpent a jelly-fish” (47).

The second half of the stanza creates a sense of tension:

think of the world you knew;

as the tide crept, the land

burned with a lizard-blue

where the dark sea met the sand. (6-9)

The narrator recognizes that the world she is trying to recall at one time was familiar. Something has limited her memory, though, and this part of the stanza tries to work past
that obstacle. She finishes the stanza with the line “where the dark sea met the sand,” a line that depicts two different worlds and the place between them. Because the tide is constantly moving, it makes the point between ocean and shore almost nonexistent. As the Greek myth depicts a woman struggling under the powers of vision, this image in the poem conveys a similar notion. The narrator recognizes the feeling of being caught between two different emotions. Here, it is clear that H.D. is not yet a full visionary, but she seems to be moving beyond the hard-cutting images of her past. This idea of being in transition will present itself again during the poem.

The second verse also opens up with the narrator asking her soul to discover something: “Think, O my soul—/ what power has struck you blind—“ (10-11). The dashes after each line signify a break in the thought process, emphasizing the concentration she is exerting to figure out what inhibiting force is holding her back. Interestingly, she declares that she has been struck blind, which reinforces a loss of vision. Her blindness, in reference to the soul, is of a metaphysical nature. The narrator cannot comprehend the emotion she is feeling. Similarly, in relation to the body, the blindness acknowledges the lack of sexual authority over the self. Here, as in the first stanza, the narrator is struggling with the constructs of the body in the poem. Because her body is being possessed by a force, she cannot work towards an over-consciousness, but must understand what her body is going through. As the Greek myth and Notes on Thought and Vision convey, the inability to express a personal sexual authority represents a disconnect within the self. This separation lies in the inability to understand feelings of love towards another, or the authority of gender in the individual. The narrator must find
a way to articulate the authority of the body through this state of control. The stanza continues:

is there no desert-root, no forest-berry

pine-pitch or knot of fir

known that can help the soul

caught in a force, a power,

passionless, not its own? (12-16)

The narrator reinforces this disconnect when she refers to the influence as “passionless.” The lack of desire in her possession informs the reader that while she is being taken over, she is also fighting false feeling. This struggle is different than the one H.D. describes in *Notes on Thought and Vision*. In the essay, she calls for the individual to embark and endure the journey towards the over-conscious. In the poem, the vision works more as a possession, not a feeling the individual actively chooses or creates. In *Notes on Thought and Vision*, H.D. refers to womb vision also as love vision. And, as stated before, womb vision concerns itself with creation, whether physical or artistic. True artistic creation cannot happen without passion, just as the narrator in the poem did not create the plaguing feeling, thus deeming it “passionless.”

In the third verse the font becomes italicized. Considering the last two stanzas open with the narrator trying to think, the italicized words here can represent her concentration in recalling her memory. She begins the verse by declaring a disjunction
within herself and begins to beseech the Gods of Crete, which she says she has done before. She concludes the stanza asking for their recognition:

So I scatter; so implore

Gods of Crete, summoned before

with slighter craft;

ah, hear my prayer: (17-20)

The narrator writes that she has “summoned” the Gods before, but only with a “slighter craft.” Through the mask of Phaedra, H.D. is making reference to the poet she was as she had called to the Gods in her earlier poems. The line “ah, hear my prayer,” the line is spoken to the Gods, and the narrator is putting her voice into the poem. Then the colon at the end of the line directs the attention of the reader to what is about to follow:

Grant to my soul

the body that it wore

trained to your thought

that kept and held your power,

as the petal of black poppy,

the opiate of the flower. (21-26)

As the prayer begins, the narrator asks that her soul be given the “body that it wore.” As *Notes on Thought and Vision* points out, the soul is an important part in the process of
utilizing the over-conscious, but the body needs to be as well. As previously stated, she likens the body to an oyster and the soul to a pearl: “The oyster makes the pearl in fact. So the body, with all its emotions and fears and pain in time casts off the spirit, a concentrated essence, not itself, but made, in a sense, created by itself” (51). The physical body may not be of the utmost importance in the process of vision, but without it there is no spirit. What the body endures, both good and bad, contributes to the feelings and thoughts of the soul. As a physical component of vision, then, the body conjures emotion and feeling into the over-conscious. From there it works its way into thought. As the following line in the poem states, at one point the body had been “trained” to this thought. This suggests the body understood this process but lost it somewhere along the way. If this is the case, then remembering this process and returning to it would be a symbol of rebirth; the event is thus a gendered moment of creation and an act of love.

In the final lines of the stanza the narrator likens the body to the petals of the black poppy. Symbolically, the petals are a powerful part of the plant as they provide a milky substance that can be extracted and turned into opium. This substance can relieve pain and blunt the senses, thus providing the user with a truly narcotic experience. The narrator needs her body to return to its existence as a vessel that retained the power of the Gods, which could heal the soul. As such a vessel, her body would work like the narcotic petal, acting as a physical force and transmitting experienced emotion into the soul without being stimulated personally by those affects. As the verse conveys, if the narrator could regain this body, then perhaps she could dismantle the force she has been overcome by.

The fourth stanza continues the italicized concentration:
For art undreamt in Crete,

strange art and dire,

in counter-charm prevents my charm

limits my power:

pine-cone I heap,

grant answer to my prayer. (27-32)

The “undreamt art” the narrator mentions in the first line represents the magic curse that is overtaking the body. Because it is undreamt it represents a vision that is not fully understood by the individual. In the second line she refers to the art as “strange” and “dire.” The narrator continues, asserting that “counter-charm prevents my charm,” and therefore establishing a paradox. The force overpowering the body prevents her from feeling what is natural. Being forced to accept a feeling, or sentiment, inhibits the self from freely expressing its true emotion. As the narrator demonstrates in the poem, there is an incredible discomfort in the false feeling being forced upon her. She closes the stanza offering a prayer to the Gods in the form of a “pine-cone.” The significance of this nature image lies in the fact that the pine-cone is a reproductive part of the plant, carrying seeds to spread. The offering presented by the narrator signals a desire for a rebirth, a chance to rid herself of the overtaking force. The pine-cone’s reproductive qualities also lend themselves to the female authority as a symbol of power.

The fifth stanza returns to a plain, non-italicized font, suggesting to readers a return from the preceding prayer and dreamlike narrative:
No more, my soul—

as the black cup, sullen and dark with fire,

burns till beside it, noon’s bright heat

is withered, filled with dust—

and into that noon-heat

grown drab and stale,

suddenly wind and thunder and swift rain,

till the scarlet flower is wrecked

in the slash of the white hail. (33-41)

The dashes at the end of the first line signify a pause for the readers. They wait for a moment, understanding the authority of the narrator. She continues in the statement “no more,” calling for an end to the loss of control of herself. Following that declaration, the narrator describes a shift in the weather, which depicts a major change that is taking place. The “wind and thunder and swift rain” foreshadow a violent transition that is going to occur. The poem begins to take form and represent a woman who has accepted a dark fate, and is willing to endure the strife. The closing lines of the stanza reinforce the oncoming change in a violent manner. The image of the “wrecked” scarlet flower is a shift from the black poppy in the third verse. Its color represents a violence, or anger, which is finally destroyed by the “white hail.” The white serves to represent a sense of
purity. The destruction of the flower by hail continues the change that is taking place in the poem, signaling a return to purity.

In the sixth and final stanza, the narrator returns to the image of the poppy, this time observing it as interior:

The poppy that my heart was,

formed to blind all mortals, made to strike and gather hearts

like flame upon an altar,

fades and shrinks, a red leaf

drenched and torn in the cold rain. (42-47)

The poppy now serves to represent the narrator’s heart, and what it used to be. Whereas before, the poppy symbolized the outer body, it now becomes internal. This suggests that perhaps the abilities of the Gods existed within the narrator on a more spiritual level, and the relationship her spirit has with the body is not what she had originally perceived. Yet, because of the force overtaking her, the heart became compromised and, thus, cannot function the way she knows it should. In the second line of the stanza she states that her old heart would “blind all mortals,” informing readers that her former body did not provide a complete vision. She furthers her frustration in the lines that follow, stating that her heart would act “like flame upon an altar.” The religious imagery she conjures here presents itself as something of an act, as if the fire on the altar was used as a symbol of hell to scare individuals into joining a religious sect. This reflects the body as a symbol of sexual power, and how it worked in relation to others. H.D. does not want the female
body to be reduced to a physical object, and in her realization renegotiates the selective authority women have over their bodies. The two final lines of the poem leave readers with a detailed depiction of the read leaf, as it lies tattered. While the destroyed leaf may represent an end to an aspect of the force, it does not mean a complete transformation has taken place. The poem shows H.D., as a poet, at a point in her career when she is reaching for a greater understanding of freedom, but, as she reveals in her poem, she is not quite there yet.

The collection of poems that makes up *Hymen* serve to articulate, in poetic fashion, what H.D. composed in *Notes on Thought and Vision*. Poems such as “Phaedra” reveal that she is still working towards an idea of freedom that exists well beyond the nature images of her early career. Specifically, she is wrestling with how the body functions as a factor in gendered authority within the context of the situation. Unfortunately, the poem does not show H.D. in the complete visionary over-conscious state. This is also due in part to her inability to personally face the traumatic events of World War I, which she would need to learn how to do so to achieve her vision. Certainly H.D. understood loss at this point in her life, between Aldington and her miscarriage, but she was yet to witness devastating social events first hand. The idea of vision she would achieve in her later work was “provoked by the intense social and spiritual vulnerability which H.D. experience in London during the war years and especially in the Blitz” (DuPlessis 86). *Notes on Thought and Vision* is the beginning of “agony,” and more difficulties are still to come, but “there is no way of arriving at the over-mind, except through intellect” (H.D. 21).
Chapter 3:

Maternal Authority and Rebirth

After enduring several personal traumas during the course of World War I, H.D. would go on to establish herself as a visionary poet on the brink of World War II. *Trilogy*, her collection of war poems, “was provoked by the intense social and spiritual vulnerability which H.D. experienced in London during the war years and especially the Blitz” (DuPlessis 86). The poems were a testament to her belief in a feminine authority, the purpose of the writer, and the healing process that would need to take place after the madness of the war was over. In addition to the aforementioned themes, the collection of poetry also served as a resurrection of sorts for H.D., who places herself in the position of the Virgin Mary in the conclusion and assumes a sense of purity about herself as a poet. This vulnerability was a new facet in her life that allowed her to approach writing with a sense of majesty that had not been seen in her earlier poetry. Of course, H.D.’s new outlook was not realized alone; she had undergone psychoanalytic sessions with Sigmund Freud in the early 1930s. The purpose of these sessions was “primarily to free herself of ‘repetitive thoughts and experiences,’ but she went too to prepare herself for the imminent war” (Robinson 267). Between the loss of her brother in combat in World War I, as well as her former husband Richard Aldington’s shellshock, H.D. was struggling with repressed feelings that stemmed back to her childhood. Freud’s insights, although she did not always believe them, taught her to accept the past and use it to continue writing her future. In *Trilogy*, H.D. redefines what freedom is in the face of social conflict, while simultaneously articulating a feminine authority, all of which would not be possible without Sigmund Freud and their sessions.
Sigmund Freud was seventy-seven years old and towards the end of his career when H.D. first met him. Their meeting was not by chance; it “was undoubtedly Bryher’s introduction as well as the recommendation of Hanns Sachs that enabled H.D. to have sessions with [Freud] in 1933 in Vienna” (Robinson 268). In the beginning, H.D. was an anlaysand of Freud’s, and their relationship was that of a doctor and patient. As they spent more time together, H.D. began to think of herself as Freud’s student. She was particularly proud of this idea seeing as she was “working under the direction of the greatest mind of this and of perhaps many succeeding generations” (H.D., Tribute to Freud 18). In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D.’s intimate documentation of her time with him, she outlines particular moments that challenged her past, gender roles, and her thought process. Specifically, the sessions forced her to reexamine feminine authority through her repressed memory, which would lead to a newly articulated agency in her poetry and to a new understanding of language.

Interestingly enough, Freud originally believed H.D. had come to Vienna for reasons associated with the gender constructs of femininity, but not in the same way that she imagined. Rather than focusing on H.D.’s interest in feminine authority and freedom as the reason for their sessions he cited the loss of her mother and the difficulty H.D. had in coping with her death.

The Professor had said in the very beginning that I had come to Vienna hoping to find my mother. Mother? Mamma. But my mother was dead. I was dead. Anyhow, he was a terribly frightening old man, too old and too detached, too wise and too famous altogether, to beat that way with his fist, like a child hammering a porridge-spoon on the table. (H.D., Tribute to Freud 17)
In this passage, H.D. questions the role of mother, and then refers to the role as “Mamma.” Her unfamiliarity with “Mother” signifies a disconnect from an adult view of the maternal relationship. She then writes “Mamma,” displaying a childlike state. Her choice of words conveys a missing link or, as Freud would call it, a repressed memory. She then goes on to write that her “mother was dead,” thus declaring that a part of herself and her past was “dead.” H.D. possibly understood the relationship with her mother better as a child, and losing her mother had killed that part of her. And while she dissociates herself from a maternal perspective, she concurrently seems to put herself in that position with her description of Freud. H.D. sees Freud as a “child hammering a porridge-spoon,” a characterization conveying what seems to be the perspective of a mother. Perhaps this role had become more familiar to H.D. considering she’d been a mother for quite some time by the time she began the sessions. Whether this maternal role is natural, subconscious, or learned over time, H.D. will implement it in Trilogy through the ideas of creation and birth. While H.D. may have disregarded Freud’s initial idea that the loss of her own mother compelled her to see him, her natural reaction to his theory is to develop her approach toward feminine roles, an approach she will continue to explore as her time with Freud continues. His observation may not have been completely accurate, but it triggered an idea she had been wrestling with.

The idea of motherhood in her work can be traced back to her idea of ‘womb vision’ in Notes on Thought and Vision. In that essay H.D. wrote that creation could be artistic, such as poetry, or physical, which only a woman can experience. Freud’s speculation about H.D.’s mother caused her to revisit questions such as who is the
mother, what is her role, and what effect can this figure have? These questions were not necessarily new to H.D., but had yet to be fully formed in her poetry in a way that articulated a feminine authority. As Trilogy will convey, H.D.’s effort was to depict the motherly figure not as subordinate but instead as necessary as the father-figure.

Freud brought motherhood to the foreground of H.D.’s thought process and he continued by challenging her with his ideas about sexuality. In Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, written in 1905, Freud developed the concept of penis envy, which simply states that because a woman does not have a penis she lacks the same authority as a man. Additionally, because the woman does not have male genitalia she either desires men or wishes to have a baby to fill the void. In turn, this idea casts women in a submissive light with men as their superiors. Without male genitalia, women need to rely on men to fulfill their desires, and could not possibly compare to male authority. Considering H.D.’s past poetry and writing, in which she called for a feminine authority and freedom, it is not surprising that Freud’s idea did not sit well with her:

The knowledge or reading psychoanalysis offers H.D. is not that all subjectivity is split, nor that the phallic definition of sexuality produces femininity as lack, but that the actual women is herself lacking because a woman…As a result the psychoanalysis to which H.D. turns cannot resolve the phallic definition of sexuality as a problem for women. And, moreover, the effects of its own implication in that definition necessarily mark H.D.’s use of psychoanalysis as a model for representation of female sexuality, its difficulties and their resolution. (Buck 100)
The details and definitions of the phallus were not the concern of H.D.; she was more troubled by the simple idea of women as ‘lacking’ merely because of anatomy. Rather than getting lost in translation and politics of the theory, “H.D. adapts and contests Freud’s grave picture of femininity by recasting it as uncanny rather than lacking” (Chisholm 132). Without a penis, women, in H.D.’s view, were more of a mystery, and they would require investigation and interpretation to begin to understand their significance. This idea of the unknown in the agency of the feminine would be explored in her poetry to depict women not as insufficient, but rather as unique. As Claire Buck points out, “the central insight which H.D. takes from psychoanalysis is that the self if a text to be read” (99). Through psychoanalysis, H.D. learned that people and symbols needed to be construed and decoded. The difficult truth in the matter is she would have to apply this theory to herself, and doing so would require her to recall a great deal of her past.

In *Tribute to Freud* she admits that her miscarriage in 1915 was due “from the shock and repercussions of war news broken to [her] in a rather brutal fashion” (40). This loss, coupled with the deaths of her brother and father, as well as with her failed marriage with Aldington, had a lasting and traumatic effect on H.D. The thought of another war taking place was terrifying to her for the effect it could have. The past haunted H.D. and hindered her ability to completely express herself. Throughout their time together, Freud “was attempting to restore her primal integrity” back to a fundamental mentality. His urging of H.D. to embrace her past, although quite troublesome, was an effort to get her to nurture a complete expression in her language, rather than stifling herself. By blocking
the past H.D. was dismissing her own experience. These incidents, dating back to her childhood, would become pivotal pieces in *Trilogy*, and Freud not only assisted in the process of their recollection, but helped her to see their significance as well.

On avoiding situations that she did not want to deal with, H.D. writes, “There are various ways of trying to escape the inevitable. You can go round and round in circles like the ants under that log that Eric [her brother] pried up for us. Or your psyche, your soul, can curl up and sleep like those white slugs” (Tribute 31). Here, H.D. describes two different situations. The first--ants running in circles--reflects a sort of oblivious panic. The second describes surrender. While the first may suggest chaos, and the second is surely suggesting a mode of sloth, they are both are irresponsible to any individual searching for truth. More importantly, they are restrictive. In avoiding her past, H.D. was simultaneously preventing herself from obtaining a sense of freedom. She could not possibly write poetry of visionary magnitude if she refused to acknowledge her own trials. Remembering and accepting her past granted H.D. a new sense of autonomy, one that would allow her to explore it without the fear of pain, instead accepting its necessity.

As Freud helped her, H.D. also “recognized for herself the importance of persistence in remembering” (Pearson vii). As she began to embrace her personal past, she still saw the importance of a greater historical timeframe. Embracing her personal history would liberate H.D. from the restrictions of repression and, similarly, accepting a world history could do the same for her readers. Through a detailed observation of a range of historical events, H.D. could emphasize significance for the culture at large. Just as her own trials were demanding and successful, the reader would be exposed to the
hardships and triumphs of history through a body of work that would not hide any of the horrors.

H.D.’s idea of history also lent itself to the present, specifically in actions that would alter the already existing past. In “The Walls Do Not Fall,” the first section of *Trilogy*, H.D. explains the importance of the past during moments such as “the burning of the books,” which was “the most perverse gesture” (16). This line is in reference to Nazi troops that destroyed hundreds of books during the war, attempting to erase a sense of culture from the world. H.D.’s comment that their act is “the most perverse gesture” expresses her disgust at the resulting alteration of history as well as literature. Books served as a bridge to the past. Like psychological repression, the destroyed books would hide something from future generations, thus limiting their ability to explore and understand what has been.

Overall, H.D.’s sessions with Freud took place not for one particular reason as “she was in search of some general principles that would give coherence to her experience...a sense of unity seemed especially necessary to her” (Fields xxxiv). Until this point in her career, H.D.’s poetry maintained such a central focus that her vision seemed limited. Her early Imagist poems successfully encouraged emotional connections by readers, and, in turn, exposed them to an idea of the sacred. Yet, because her early poems placed an emphasis on specific imagery she prevented herself from giving the complete view, or as Freud referred to it, her dream. It was during their sessions together that “he helped her realize that her dream could, and even should, be regarded with as much prognostic weight as the Sibyl’s, the oracle’s, and Freud’s own dream” (Chisholm 17). Freud helped H.D. discover the value in her own language as something of a spiritual
forecast. Rather than consistently focus on specific objects, she began to dwell on the workings of the soul and creation. Realizing the significance in her own writing would cause a shift in her approach to poetry. As Freud instilled confidence in H.D., she would go on to reflect this in her poetry, articulating feminine authority and creating a visionary journey.

The psychoanalytic sessions between Freud and H.D. were a truly crucial moment in the poet’s career. H.D.’s vision in Corfu with Bryher was an initial indication of the struggle she would have to endure to fully realize the idea she was after. As time would prove, H.D. would enlist the help of Freud to see her dreams in their most complete state, free from restrictions of any kind. During these sessions H.D. “[reaffirmed] her dedication to the task of the poet: create new modes of communication, to discover new values…H.D. [presents] us with a vision of the hoped-for heaven, or haven, the hoped-for peace” which was needed as World War II was evidently a few years away on the horizon (Robinson 314).

The Blitz began in the fall of 1940 in London, where H.D. and Bryher were living. The bombing would last for months on end and greatly devastate the city. Compared to how she dealt with the preceding World War, H.D. faced the destruction with a new courage and vitality, as “she wrote now to prove that creativity could conquer death” (Guest 253). Her years spent with Freud would prove to be effective as the chaos of the war was taking place in her immediate environment. Rachel Blau Deplessis writes, “the fires, the bombing raids, the constant alarms of the Blitz, ‘brought things to a burning focus and reality’” (73). The reality of war taking place would test H.D.’s work with Freud. She had spent a great deal of time accepting her repressed memories and
feelings, and the oncoming World War challenged her to maintain this new courage. The destruction brought upon London, an important place in her past, would become integral to her idea of acceptance, survival, and renewal after loss.

London had been H.D.’s home when she first left America. It was there that the Imagist Movement was started and she spent so much time working with Pound and Aldington. Even though she had made great efforts to distance herself from the movement and become her own poet, the city was a symbolic cornerstone in her career. During the Blitz, “Parliament, Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London were hit; the British Museum, where H.D. and her young companions had studied and written their first Imagist poems, was hit, and its library was demolished” (Robinson 306). H.D.’s own history was being wiped out before her eyes; the war was changing things forever. With the confidence and vision Freud had helped H.D. achieve, she would fight back against the opposing force, “poetry was her weapon against the war” (Guest 265). Trilogy would challenge the social conflicts taking place around her, as well as the role of the female in trying times. The writing would challenge H.D. to rise up and capture the vision she had been after for so long.

Trilogy is composed of three different sections—“The Walls Do Not Fall”, “Tribute to the Angels”, and “The Flowering of the Rod.” H.D. published the poems in consecutive years near the end of World War II in 1944, 1945, and 1946 respectively. The long form structure is broken up into smaller cantos, and spans over one hundred pages. It is visibly different from her earlier poetry sheeryly because of its length. H.D.’s idea of freedom is an undertone throughout the epic, but “resurrection is the poem’s central theme and it asserts the recuperative potential of women whose power rivals that
of male figures” (Graham 118). This idea of resurrection is constantly present and offers a wide spectrum of imagery and symbols far more expansive than her Imagist poems. While there is a communal theme to the entire collection, each section works with a variation on that theme. “The Walls Do Not Fall” defends art and the poet in society. “Tribute to the Angels” develops the sense of unity through a plethora of references to various religions and through word play, while also conveying the significance of the female. “The Flowering of the Rod” is a culmination of feminine authority and hope for the future. Through the trope of resurrection, H.D. articulates the integrity of a female force, giving women a particular necessity in times such as war.

In the essay “Hymen and Trilogy” Sarah Graham notes that “where Hymen celebrates women’s sensuality, Trilogy, responding to this new social context, promotes female spirituality and ‘points to a way out of war’” (118). The survival H.D. sought included the hope for creating a prosperous future. Thus, surviving the war would be representative of a rebirth. As H.D. believed, a feminine authority could lead others towards this rebirth, and encourage creation even in times of great distress. The spiritual force of women is brought into the light in Trilogy through symbol, religion, personal narrative, and motherhood. Utilizing what she had learned from Freud, H.D. presents the reader with the dark truth of reality, but never ceases to offer the hope that society and humanity will prevail.

“The Walls Do Not Fall” begins by depicting the dreary scene of an area that had been damaged during a bombing. This motif will last through the section, which utilizes the destroyed buildings as symbols. In the first canto H.D. writes:
ruin everywhere, yet as the fallen roof

leaves the sealed room

open to the air,

so, through our desolation,

thoughts stir, inspiration stalks us

through gloom (3)

The roof parting ways with the building is an obvious scene of terror, but H.D. reflects on it as a moment of awakening. The roof acts as a cover, preventing exposure to the “air.” When the roof is blown off, the room becomes “open”, creating a sense of vulnerability. Surely without a roof there is an element of danger, but that danger will exist should an individual remove her personal ‘ceiling,’ so to speak. H.D. transforms this moment of loss into possibility; similar to the way she learned to express her memory with Freud. Even “through gloom,” inspiration can still exist, testifying that moments of horror can become moments of revival. During this canto, H.D. reaffirms that depressed pasts can form into bright futures. She also acknowledges the symbolism in the buildings that remained stranding after the bombing.

As the canto closes, H.D. describes the only surviving feature of a house that was destroyed in the bombing. She personifies the house, writing that its flesh “melted away” and its heart was “burnt out” (4). In the final stanza, she concludes her description: “yet the frame held: / we passed the flame: we wonder / what saved us? what for?” (4). Even though many aspects of the house were destroyed, the frame, a fundamental component,
remained intact. Obviously this gives an importance to the frame. The house could certainly be rebuilt from the skeletal structure just as people can experience a rebirth after they have been shaken to their core. As Vincent Quinn writes, “she sees the ability of the walls of some buildings to withstand repeated bombing as a metaphor for the strength of men to endure suffering in their search for God” (117). Certainly the walls that withstand the bombing serve to represent hope and survival, but Quinn’s remark that they also represent a “search for God” dismisses the various religions H.D. will include in the poem. H.D. ends the canto posing the existential questions of “what saved us”, informing the reader that metaphysical sources may have prevented death, yet she is not sure who, or what, this source is. The questions that follows—“what for?”—is far more significant to H.D., for she believed a spiritual force existed within poetry and could foster the vision she was after, as we will see as the poem continues.

The belief that poetry is a vital aspect of culture is one of the strongest themes in “Walls.” The section “repeatedly invokes a hostile interlocutor who suggests that poetry is outmoded and misdirected, accusing the speaker, a poet, of being ‘retrogressive’ and attempting to ‘scratch out / the indelible ink of the palimpsest of past misadventure’, an allusion to H.D.’s revisionary project” (Graham 118). H.D. takes a stance to defend the art, past and present, which gives it a sense of purpose in the act of rebirth. In particular, the tenth canto, where she dismantles the doubt that the accusing voice presents, and articulates the importance of poetry in times of war. She writes:

remember, O sword,

you are the younger brother, the latter-born,
your Triumph, however exultant,

must one day be over,

_in the beginning_

_was the Word._ (17)

H.D. directs the statement towards the sword, which represents war. She then goes on to acknowledge that the victory of combat is only temporary. Thus, victory is a lonely state of existence and lacks the capacity for people that the poet possesses. She also reminds the reader that the “Word” was there in the “beginning,” which signifies the creation of something. This brings the reader back to the spiritual maternity that H.D. is calling for throughout _Trilogy_. The “Word,” with all of its power, was created before anything and still exists. Poetry then becomes an act of endurance over time, a testament to the power of creation. After the glory of battle fades the world will still have poetry.

In addition, this phrase signifying creation is borrowed from the Book of John. This is a nod to the act of creation and its historical significance. The source of this verse lends its sacredness, not its religiosity, to the poem. For H.D. “words beget, create, indicate values; poets are sacred because they manipulate, manage, attend and offer conduits for messages” (DuPlessis 86). In _Trilogy_, H.D. presents poets as messengers with clairvoyant traits. This role possesses qualities of the maternal as it places the poet in a position that seeks to care for the reader’s future. _Trilogy_ calls for the survival and spiritual renewal of the readers, as well as a way to move into the future, which the poet will nurture them through. In the process of developing an understanding of the poem, the reader then will embrace the work in an attempt to become a part of that vision.
The final canto is the culmination of what has been built up in the first section of *Trilogy*. Endurance, rebirth, and the defense of the poet are foundational aspects needed for H.D. to declare the journey underway. The canto provides a scene that has been affected by a bombing, echoing the start of “Walls.” H.D. declares that the walls remain standing, but in a moment of uncertainty she also writes, “I do not know why” (58). Understanding why the walls have not fallen will become H.D.’s mission and, as the section hints, they remain standing due in part to the search for true art. As she continues describing the hazardous scene of twisted doors and sagging floors, H.D. notes: “we are voyagers, discoverers of the not known” (59). Her shattered world becomes symbolic of a journey in search of an unknown truth, and “she knows that failure in this endeavor is almost certain, but she believes that the sublimity of the goal gives dignity even to those who do not reach it” (Quinn 124). To actually become a visionary is an extraordinary feat, one that H.D. knows cannot by attained be all of her readers. Yet, by simply attempting to reach this state the reader has partaken in a noble cause and therefore is noble in turn. She concludes the section by writing, “we have no map; / possibly we will reach haven, heaven”, offering hope to the reader. What adds to the effect of this poem is H.D.’s use of ‘we’ instead of ‘I.’ She constantly strives for a unification throughout *Trilogy* and her choice in language reinforces the idea that even in times of chaos no one is alone. She develops an idea of community with all of the survivors but because of her desire for such a strong connection among the group it becomes something more. The maternal force in the poem directs this idea towards a postwar family. The desire in the quest of the poet, and the readers, connects them in an emotional way. Yet, even though “the poem ends with an affirmation of community (‘we’) and determination to continue
the quest, there is no absolute conviction that salvation will result” (DuPlessis 120). Indeed, part of the driving force behind this quest is the uncertainty that comes with it. Such a great challenge includes devastating risk, but H.D.’s refusal to let this stop her is a nod to her time with Freud as well as a display of poetry’s power. As her journey continues her focus will shift to emphasize feminine authority in relation to social context.

Janice Robinson writes that “Tribute to the Angels is both more esoteric in symbolism and more personal in revelation that ‘The Walls Do Not Fall’” (316). While Robinson is correct that “Tribute” possesses a more personal tone, the second section of *Trilogy* is not written for a select group. Rather, the section contains allusions and imagery that necessitate a dedication from readers. “Tribute” requires a sincere dedication to the poem in order to continue the voyage.

One of the intriguing aspects of the section is the multiplicity of religions. True to her past poems, H.D. opens the first canto referencing “Hermes Trismegistus,” a figure in Greek mythology (63). While the inclusion of Greek references and symbols is not new in H.D.’s poetry, she begins to incorporate different mythical figures as the section continues. In the fifth canto she writes, “Raphael, Gabriel, Azrael, three of seven” making reference to the archangels (67). Further in the section she also makes reference to Annael and Uriel, two more of the archangels. These angels do not solely reflect Christianity, but in some cases are used in Judaism and Islamic religions. The inclusion of different beliefs is due in part to H.D.’s new approach as “she seems to be broadening the scope of her religious references in order to include both the Semitic cultures of the Near East and Christianity…This shift is a consequence of her wish to establish the
essential harmony of all religions, regardless of sectarian differences” (Quinn 116). The previous section ends with H.D. declaring a quest for haven, and acknowledging that the journey will be tough and may possibly end in failure. “Tribute” becomes the embrace of that journey and in that acceptance is the inclusion of different routes than can potentially lead to a haven. H.D. develops a sense of equality among the different creeds, giving no importance to one over another in the search for Truth. As the journey moves along H.D. maintains the sense of hope she established in the first section, only in “Tribute” she finds another symbol to use in maternal qualities.

In the eighth canto H.D. exhibits a kind of word play writing “mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary, / Star of the Sea, / Mother” (71). In the first line she works through different languages repeating the word mother. As she reaches the end of the line the word evolves into Maia, who, in Greek mythology, is the mother of Hermes. She concludes the line with Mary, a name that is historically associated with both the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. She concludes the canto with the word “Mother,” on a line by itself, which emphasizes its meaning. This seems to echo Freud’s original charge that H.D. had come to him to reconcile her feelings towards her mother. In this section, and all of Trilogy for that matter, H.D. is embracing the idea of motherhood as a necessary quality within the realm of feminine authority. The sessions with Freud sought a ‘speaking cure’; the act of discussion would lead to an identification and raise that thought into consciousness. In this canto, H.D. works through the word mother, simultaneously reinforcing the idea of unity through the same meaning in different languages. As she reaches the idea of a mother in Greek mythology and then one that
pertains to a Christian mode of thought, she concludes simply with the word that started her sessions with Freud.

In the twenty-third canto she writes:

a half-burnt-out apple-tree

blossoming;

this is the flowering of the rood,

this is the flowering of the wood

where Annael, we pause to give thanks

thanks that we rise again from death and live. (87)

The first stanza in the aforementioned section is an immediate symbol of rebirth. H.D. notes that the tree did not appear to be alive, but its blossoming signifies that life has been restored. The next line refers to the branches as the “rood,” a reference to the cross where Christ was crucified. This image, matched with the process of transubstantiation, amplifies the idea of rebirth. In the final stanza H.D. mentions Annael followed by another immediate reference to resurrection. On the inclusion of Annael, Janice Roberts writes, “H.D. saw herself as this companion, the angel Annael. She felt she had passed through death twice. A tree blooming in an old garden square among the ruins of London brought memories of World War I, the miraculous birth of her child, and now a precognition of her own rebirth. This was transubstantiation” (320). It is important to note that Annael is closely associated with Venus, whom H.D. mentions several times in “Tribute”, and is widely used as a symbol for femininity. Her observation of a tree
fighting to survive conjures images from a time H.D. feared, but it simultaneously comes to represent a new life out of a time of destruction. Her transubstantiation is the process of becoming an authoritative voice for the feminine, adopting qualities associated with Venus. Her vocal adoption of Annael is a call to restore a sense of integrity to not only females of the present, but to justify females throughout history.

Towards the end of “Tribute,” H.D. maintains the focus of feminine authority and depicts her vision of “Our Lady” (93). The females figure embodies “H.D.’s lexicon of symbolic equations, is also the Virgin Mary, who to Roman Catholics is the Queen of the Angels…And the Virgin Mary is equated…with Mary Magdalene” (Robinson 322). Similar to the way H.D. has been using a multitude of religious symbols, she here envisions a female figure that embodies women throughout history, giving her origins in “Goldfinch,” “Candeladra,” and “Pomegranate” (93). By unifying the figures into one, she creates a source of female power with one voice to project its potential. As “Our Lady” embodies females throughout history, she also becomes a vehicle for H.D.’s voice.

The figure “Our Lady” serves, therefore, to represent a re-authorized femininity and what she carries articulates a feminine intellectuality as well. H.D. writes that “she carries a book but it is not the tome of ancient wisdom,” making clear that the female figure brings something unseen with her (103). She continues that the book is the “unwritten volume of the new” containing “blank pages” (103). The blank book she carries marks the start of creation, as H.D. calls for the pages to be filled with a new understanding of the nature of women, their intellect, and their influence. The canto slowly builds as H.D. depicts ‘Our Lady’s’ environment writing that “she is not shut up in a cave”, or “imprisoned in leaden bars” (103). H.D.’s ideas of rebirth and
transubstantiation hit their climax when she closes the canto defining the figure as “the butterfly, out of the cocoon” (103). The journey that H.D. takes the reader on throughout *Trilogy* has arrived at the point of discovery in the freedom of the female figure. The blank pages that are presented portray the female in the ‘uncanny’ image that H.D. sought during her time with Freud. She makes it “necessary to discover the feminine as opposed to the masculine wisdom…necessary for a woman to achieve her own perception of her own nature in order to begin” (Robinson 325). While *Trilogy* works through several different ideas in the first two sections, the overarching theme comes into focus near the end of “Tribute.” She urges the reader to rethink gender roles, and for her female readers she overcomes the stereotypes that have followed them throughout history.

The third and final section, “The Flowering of the Rod,” continues her call for a rethought feminine authority articulated through ideas that came to her during her sessions in Vienna. The heart of “The Flowering of the Rod” lies within the images and story of the Virgin Mary and the Magi Kaspar. Through these figures H.D. concludes *Trilogy*, and perhaps the journey, capturing the essence of femininity not only through the perspective of women, but through society as well. Shortly after the section begins the reader is introduced to a female character attempting to purchase myrrh in a marketplace. Given the historical context of the scene, independent and confident women were seldom heard of, let alone regarded with respect. The merchant, an Arab, dismisses her request for the herb telling her “it is not for sale” before trying to continue on his way (H.D. 130). Despite the Arab’s refusal, the woman continues her pursuit of myrrh as “she simply didn’t care whether he acclaimed or snubbed her” (103). Her persistence comes as a shock to the Arab as “this had never happened before” (103). In this scene H.D. notes the
unjust treatment of women, as well as a female display of authority diverging from what is expected at the time. Her assertion is reminiscent of the idea H.D. conveys in “The Walls Do Not Fall” that those who attempt the journey but fail are still left with a sense of nobility for even trying. The female character in this particular scene “is indecently assertive, ‘unmaidenly’, ‘unseemly,’ not conformable to any gender codes…She deliberately shrugs off all the men’s social cues demanding her inferiorisation or timidity” (DuPlessis 95). H.D. utilizes the character to shake off all misconceptions about women as seen through the men’s eyes. The character’s defiance upsets an established set of beliefs, and foregrounds H.D.’s continued pursuit of feminine purpose and wisdom.

Yet, the Arab’s refusal is not representative of a dismissal by men everywhere, rather a reminder that the female must be properly understood, as Kaspar will demonstrate.

Before Mary abandons her quest for myrrh and the focus of the poem turns towards Kaspar, she leaves the reader with the words: “I am Mary, the incense-flower of the incense-tree, / myself worshipping, weeping, shall be changed to myrrh;” (138). This comes shortly after canto 16 in which she states: “I shall be Mary-myrrh” (135). Mary’s declaration that she will be changed to myrrh echoes the word play section of “Tribute to the Angels” previously discussed. Through sound, H.D. blends the words Mary, mother, and myrrh so that each could be replaced by the other. Obviously this conveys some of the techniques used in her sessions with Freud, as they would use words that would lead to other words and meanings. The conclusion of Trilogy will emphasize the importance of the Mary/myrrh/mother metonymy, but before H.D. gets there she will continue to show the reader a different perspective of women in her quest.
As H.D. introduces the character Simon, he is wary of Mary Magdalene sitting on the floor “kissing His feet” (143). On the other hand, Kaspar does not share the same suspicion of the woman as Simon, and H.D. notes “it is not fair to compare Kaspar with Simon” (146). Here, she creates a separation between the two men. Simon is similar to the Arab. He operates upon the stereotypes of women, observing Mary Magdalene as someone of lesser value and not an equal. Kaspar, on the other, symbolizes something else. His inability to call what was cast out of Mary “devils”, referring to them as “daemons,” depicts him as a person of intellect. Rather than assume an ill temperament towards women, in particular in relation to a woman he does not even know, Kaspar tries to understand her. His ability to formulate his own opinion about Mary is “symbolic of all men who are self confident enough not to need to split the image of women into chaste virgin and the seductive whore, two categories or definitions that do not conform to any true feminine reality” (Robinson 331). H.D. thus uses Kaspar to reinforce her idea of ‘feminine reality’ through a male perspective. As Trilogy advocates for this appreciation of femininity, H.D. realizes that a full potential cannot be reached unless all are included, bringing the reader back to the idea of unity. When both men and women readers realize the full wisdom of the female, and refuse to dismiss it as inferior, they inherit the concept of H.D.’s vision.

She closes the section placing herself and her gender at the poem’s center. The final scene depicts the gathering for the birth of Christ, a monumental moment of creation. H.D. shifts her persona putting herself in the place of Mary, and ultimately restoring a sense of purity in women. This sense comes from the inability to decipher which Mary H.D. is using. In this way, she creates an all encompassing idea of women,
that one Mary is not better than the other but both play crucial roles and serve a purpose in feminine authority. It is important to note that throughout Trilogy H.D. imagines herself as all of the woman characters, not being selective, but embracing everyone. In her acceptance she embodies women throughout history, leaving no one behind, and restoring a sense of integrity no matter who they were or what they did. In essence, this makes H.D., as the poet, a mother of creation. Trilogy is the rebirth of feminine wisdom and authority and H.D. serves as the maternal spirit behind it. Her ability to recognize herself in this position is a testament to her time with Freud where she learned to express rather than repress. And while “she achieved freedom from trauma through her work with Freud, H.D. also gained an even deeper recognition, which she expresses in the ‘The Flowering of the Rod’…Freud began to regard H.D. as a Mary figure…And even more important for H.D., she came to see herself as Mary, the Virgin” (Robinson 331). As the scene comes to a close, Kaspar, the symbol of feminine understanding through a male perspective, gives Mary, a symbol of feminine authority, the proper respect as he “stood a little to one side like an unimportant alter-servant” (170). The final lines literally place creation in the arms of women:

She said, Sir, it is a most beautiful fragrance,

As of all flowering things together;

But Kaspar knew the seal of the jar was unbroken.

He did not know whether she knew

The fragrance came from the bundle of myrrh
She held in her arms. (172)

The first two lines reciprocate the feeling of respect that Kaspar has displayed towards Mary. When equilibrium is developed between man and woman a unity is born, and then can blossom. Kaspar’s inability to recognize Mary’s appreciation for their unity signifies that although a confident man can work towards an understanding of feminine wisdom it will never be a complete journey. Kaspar must continue his view of Mary even after the birth to ensure that future generations do not make the same mistake in their perceptions of gender.

In the final lines, H.D. notes that the odor was coming from the myrrh Mary was holding. The myrrh symbolizes Mary Magdalene, as well as all ‘Marys,’ as noted in an earlier canto. H.D. then brings “The Flowering of the Rod” and Trilogy full circle as Mary holds the myrrh in her arms, essentially giving birth to herself and a complete feminine authority. Sarah Graham writes that “the poet appears in the final scene of her poem as either Mary or Christ, taking a central place in a united spiritual mythos that counters loss with resurrection and redemption through the female” (123). While Graham is certainly correct that H.D. is at the center of the ‘resurrection and redemption of the female’, to see her only as the newborn Christ would be to forget her sessions with Freud. During her time in Venice Freud helped to foster an intense sense of feminism, as well as a confidence to support her new outlook. H.D. uses the Virgin Mary to signify motherhood and birth, in this case rebirth, into a new feminine authority. The myrrh, which symbolizes a number of feminine ideas, represents the new life that H.D. has brought to women, as well as the hope for new life in those affected by the war.
The traumas of World War I left H.D. spiritually crippled, and the past she tried to forget only haunted her existence. Her time with Freud proved to be successful, though trying at times. He had found a way to reach her, even when her friends could not. After the sessions with Freud, she had come to recall past memories in the face of the oncoming World War and use them as sources of strength. More importantly she developed an articulated theory of gender authority, which she came to express in *Trilogy*. The collection is a resistance to the destruction of war and “H.D. not only recuperates the disparaged women of the past but also positions herself in the revised Nativity” (Graham 123). Her time with Freud was an obvious learning process but as *Trilogy* proves her learning continued during her writing. The journey she calls for her readers to embark on with her begins as mystery and when she reaches her destination she realizes that a complete unity is necessary. Her vision requires a new outlook on the roles and agency of the female, but as she notes the men must share this outlook as well. Rachel Blau DuPlessis writes that the “female intellectual and emotional passion will precipitate a major spiritual change…but both wings together, both liberated genders, will allow spiritual flight” (96). It is necessary for the individual female to recognize her true self in order to undergo the ‘spiritual change’ DuPlessis mentions. Yet, without the male counterpart, they will not be able to progress. H.D. reforms the vision of women giving them the proper authority as a gender completely equal, but reminds her readers that we all must work together to keep the new hope alive. To repress or revert to old ways would be failure, just as accepting a life of luxury to avoid the struggle of the quest. As H.D. writes, “I would rather drown, remembering—than bask on tropic atolls in the coral seas” (121).
Bibliography


