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**H.D.: SUBLIMITY AND BEAUTY IN  
HER EARLY WORK (1912-1925)**

**MERCEDES ROMON-ALONSO**

**A thesis submitted in candidature  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of English Studies  
University of Durham**

**1998**

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**23 AUG 1999**

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## H.D.: Sublimity and Beauty in Her Early Work (1912-1925)

Mercedes Romón-Alonso  
Ph.D. , University of Durham, 1998

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study the poetry written by H.D. between 1912-1925 in relation to two Romantic categories: beauty and sublimity. I shall attempt to show how H.D. subverts and revises the Romantic sublime offering alternatives that can be identified with a "female sublime". A direct consequence of such revision will be her commitment to beauty, which acts in her poems as a generative drive. Her understanding of beauty will be shown to have its roots in Sappho, Plato and the Victorian Hellenists, among others, and to have undergone analogous transformations to those of sublimity.

**Chapter I** reopens the debate around Imagism and Imagist poetry showing that the problem of defining what Imagism is or was originates in the overwhelming authority of theory versus praxis. My goal is to deconstruct the critical fallacies on which Imagism has been built and to free the poetry which it represents. This allows me to question the myth of H.D. as "Imagiste" and to open her early poetry to new readings and interpretations.

In **Chapter II**, I review the theoretical background to the aesthetics of the sublime represented by Longinus, Burke, Kant and Wordsworth. I also establish the critical frame within which this research will take place, drawing on Thomas Weiskel, Patricia Yaeger and Joanne Diehl. I initiate a study of sublimity in H.D.'s first volume, Sea Garden, and show the alternative treatment that this Romantic genre receives from this female poet.

H.D.'s revisions of the Romantic sublime take us in **Chapter III** to a study of her poetics, as presented in her essay "Notes on Thought and Vision". I discuss a variety of sources for the composition of these "Notes", such as Havelock Ellis' influence, H.D.'s letters to John Cournos and her friendship with D.H. Lawrence. I show how H.D. understands artistic and poetic creativity as 'vision' and how the recovery of the abject female body allows her to formulate a notion of creativity that transcends gender.

**Chapter IV**, pursues H.D.'s transformations of the Romantic sublime in Hymen, and presents Sappho as a model for the fusion of sublimity, love and eroticism in the poems of this volume.

**Chapter V** begins with a theoretical discussion surrounding the aesthetics of the beautiful in relation to Chapter II. It continues with H.D.'s understanding of beauty within her essays, in particular, "Responsibilities", "Notes on Thought and Vision" and "Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets". In the light of recent work on Pater's masculine model of Hellenic beauty, I discuss H.D.'s own configuration of beauty.

## DECLARATION

**This thesis is the original work of the author, except where acknowledged by reference, and no part of the thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other university.**

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**The authors** I quote in this thesis.

## Foreword

The purpose of this thesis is to study the poetry written by H.D. between 1912-1925 in relation to two Romantic categories: beauty and sublimity. I shall attempt to show how H.D. subverts and revises the Romantic sublime offering alternatives that can be identified with a "female sublime". A direct consequence of such revision will be her commitment to beauty, which acts in her poems as a generative drive. Her understanding of beauty will be shown to have its roots in Sappho, Plato and the Victorian Hellenists, among others, and to have undergone analogous transformations to those of sublimity.

Bringing in the notions of sublimity and beauty in relation to H.D.'s poetry, not just as subjective emotions, but rather as Romantic aesthetic categories, raises numerous questions. Now that H.D. has been recognized as a Modernist author, it would appear problematic to relate her work to the Romantic tradition. However, if there are enough elements within H.D.'s early poems to show that, indeed, there is some continuity between her work and the Romantic tradition, we should have to recognize the heterogeneity of Modernism and its precarious definition once more. There are also additional problems in relation to the definition of the Romantic period. Is Romanticism a specific period in time, or, an atemporal category that refers to a specific way of writing? Some canonic figures of Modernism such as T.E. Hulme, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, understand Romanticism and the term 'Romantic' as an atemporal style, which defines great part of nineteenth century literature, including the Romantics, Decadents and Victorian Hellenists. Cassandra Laity also perceives the term 'Romantic' and the Romantic period as a mode of writing, and thus draws a continuity between H.D. and what she calls the "Romantic Decadents": Swinburne, Wilde and Pater, among others. In my study, I will also refer to H.D.'s connection to the Decadents (Swinburne) and the Victorian Hellenists (Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde) as a Romantic one. However, in relation to beauty and sublimity the term 'Romantic' will be employed in a stricter sense, indicating the poetry of the early Romantics (Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats) and eighteenth century theories that gave rise to the aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful.

Studies on the relation between Romantic sublimity and H.D.'s poetry are practically non-existent. Eileen Gregory's remarks in Classic Lines on H.D.'s use of the apostrophe is among the few exceptions that hint at the connection. Some studies have been done in relation to sublimity and other female writers, in particular, Joanne Feit Diehl's Emily Dickinson and the American Sublime, Patricia Yaeger's "Toward a Female Sublime", and Diana Collecott's paper "Waving, not Drowning: Women Writers and the Sublime". These works have highlighted how the relation of the female poet to the tradition of the sublime in poetry is difficult and controversial. Taking into account those studies, I shall pursue the peculiarities and transformations that the sublime undergoes in H.D.'s poetry. The theoretical background for this thesis has been provided by a wide range of studies on the sublime by philosophers such as Edmund Burke and Kant, and critics like Longinus, Thomas Weiskel, Stuart Ende, Harold Bloom, and Angela Leighton, among others.

The second topic of my research, that of beauty in H.D.'s early work, has been, by contrast to that of sublimity, quite well explored, in particular by Laity in H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle, and Gregory in H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines. In this thesis, I will take on board some aspects introduced by those critics in relation to H.D.'s beauty, such as Pater's Dorian model of masculine beauty. I will also provide my own views on the subject, drawing mainly from H.D.'s essays and reviews such as "Responsibilities", "Notes on Thought and Vision" and the still unpublished "Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets". It should be noticed that I omit commenting on H.D.'s fictional works, such as Paint it Today and Asphodel, both written in the early 1920s, in favour of those neglected essays.

At the centre of this thesis, I will provide a detailed analysis of "Notes on Thought and Vision", which I take as a manifesto of H.D.'s poetics. This text informs H.D.'s specific use of the sublime and appears as the axis of her early poetic production as well as of her notion of beauty. However, thus far it has yet to receive a systematic evaluation. The essay has been discussed in relation to female poetics (Friedman), or within the context of the Great War (Burnett), but the notions and patterns developed in it need greater attention from critics.



## Chapter I

### Imagism Revisited

There is no absolute standard by which one may determine whether or not a poet is an imagist. All such classifications are arbitrary. (Glenn Hughes viii)

#### I. What is Imagism?

##### 1. The History of Imagism

The history of Imagism seems to be dominated by the same series of paradoxes as History itself. Objective history, we have learnt, is not possible as it depends on the approach taken and the interpreter of that history whether we view one reality or another. But if we have to give up that absolute, maybe we can still find other ways of coming around it, or at least, as close as possible. By providing and adding perspectives taken from different angles and at different times we can manage to reconstruct the dynamics of the historical process and achieve an understanding of it, if not a more complex and truthful view than we would by looking only in one direction. This is precisely the aim of this chapter.

The first text I encountered offering a fresh view on the making of this poetic movement was Cyrena Pondrom's "H.D. and the Origins of Imagism". Pondrom analyses the history of Imagism as it stands so far and makes a major contribution to the history of the movement by pointing at aspects that have been missed and neglected for years. In particular, her analysis focuses on the attempt to separate Ezra Pound's contribution to Imagism from H.D.'s. Such an attempt has to be seen as necessarily revisionary, and a bold one too, as it challenges the long sustained critical belief in Pound's Imagist protagonism. Pondrom's revision can be read, for example, against standard texts on Imagism such as Herbert Schneidau's Ezra Pound: The Image and the Real or Hugh Kenner's The Pound Era. Delimiting Pound's field of

influence on Imagist poetry and succeeding in showing the limits of that influence will help to give back her due to Pound's constructed "H.D. Imagiste" and to highlight H.D.'s protagonism in the making of Imagism. This revision attempts then to deconstruct certain critical fallacies that have for long distorted the nature of Imagism and, by extension, of Modernism, in regard to its origins, politics and development.

Pondrom's reconstruction of the history of Imagism, and consequently of Modernism, therefore includes the history never written, the history of those who avoided open protagonism. Pondrom carries out her historical and political reconstruction of the events that surrounded the creation and appearance of Imagism, basing her evidence on H.D.'s autobiographical notes and Pound's letters to Harriet Monroe and friends. Thus she manages to delineate a calendar of Imagism that reveals through a temporal pattern the origin and direction of influences, their expansion and manipulation, their crystallization and dispersal. Pondrom's well documented calendar of Imagism (90-91) shows how Pound's Imagist poems became *better* expressions of the Imagist practice *after* he read H.D.'s "Priapus", "Hermes of the Ways", and "Epigram" in early October 1912. Pondrom observes an influence that springs from H.D.'s poetical writing in the direction of Pound's subsequent poems such as his "Contemporania", including "A Pact" (sent to Harriet Monroe on 13 October 1912), "In the Station of the Metro" (written in Nov./Dec. 1912), and the more explicit "A Few Don'ts" (published in March 1913).

Pound had used the term 'Imagiste' for the first time, before he read H.D.'s poems, to refer to a couple of poems he had sent to Harriet Monroe for publication: "To Whistler: American" and "Middle-Aged". Pound described them as an "Imagiste affaire"<sup>1</sup> and they appeared in the first issue of Poetry in October 1912. Yet, Pound's coinage and early use of the term does not make him the founder or leader of the movement. If as a group, Pound, H.D., Richard Aldington and F.S. Flint were looking for a new poetical practice, only H.D. succeeded at once to achieve the aims of the new poetry. What Pondrom's straightforward method finally discloses is that it was H.D.'s poems in fact which "provided models which enabled the precepts of Imagism

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<sup>1</sup> Ezra Pound, "Letter to Harriet Monroe," [18] August 1912.

to be defined" (74).<sup>2</sup> H.D.'s distinctive way of writing acted as a catalyst and set an example which would determine Pound's posterior Imagist practice and theory (97).

Pondrom, it seems to me, puts her finger exactly where the major paradox and problem of Imagism is, that is, in the disruption and conflict between its theory and its practice, between its principles and public manifestos and its poetry. Similarly, Peter Jones in his introduction to *Imagist Poetry*, initiates his history of Imagism addressing the unresolved paradox: "Which are we to believe—practice or theory?" (13) he asks. Allan Rodway in "Imagism—A Necessary Evil?" once more seems to echo the conflict. Neither Jones nor Rodway, however, explore the cracks they have been able to identify and only Pondrom manages to make such cracks critically productive.

Pondrom's inference, after a close analysis of the early 'theory' of Imagism and the poetical practice of H.D., Aldington and Ezra Pound, that "H.D.'s early poems were models which enabled the precepts of imagism to be defined" (74), introduces a shift in critical studies of Imagism from the long domineering "Few Dont's" to the practice of Imagism. That approach, which has practice and not theory as the starting point of analysis, places scholars and critics on a new path, and maybe the only path, to solve the Imagist riddle. Pondrom, nevertheless, being concerned mainly with the re-evaluation of H.D. within the field of Imagism, and subsequently of Modernism, does not elaborate any further on the Imagist conflict praxis-theory, a conflict that pursued and analysed in depth must bring out a deeper revision of the history as well as the politics at work in the movement.

Reading Pondrom, one comes across not only the enlightening conflict she detects but also across some critical habits that are responsible for the 'making of Imagism' as we have known it. By the 'making of Imagism' I am referring not to the *practice* carried out by the Imagist poets, but to the body of criticism that has dealt with the movement and has turned it into a well defined and perfectly recognisable whole. This body of criticism is Pound-centred and revolves around not so much Pound's Imagist practice but Pound's theories. For those responsible for such criticism, Imagism is not

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<sup>2</sup> On September 17, 1915, Ezra Pound wrote: "the whole affair was started not very seriously chiefly to get H.D.'s five poems a hearing without its being necessary for her to publish a whole book. It began certainly in Church Walk with H.D., Richard and myself". This letter is quoted by Kenner in *The Pound Era*. It is not in Paige's collection of letters. The same interpretation of events was offered to Glenn Hughes years later. See "Letter to Glenn Hughes", Rapallo, September 26, 1927.

problematical, as it has clear principles and manifestos, as well as exemplary poems against which we can test any other Imagist practice. It is frequent in those critics to support their own arguments by resorting to quotations taken from the revelatory bulk of literary criticism written by Pound and using the authority that has been placed on this writer to back up those arguments (“Why has everyone taken Pound at his own estimation?” asks Pondrom (18)). Reading through those pieces of criticism, I find what seems an arbitrary use of quotations which overlooks the time when the quotations were formulated, and applies them sparingly to any text or poem written before or after the extracted quotation was formulated. This problem could apply to the literary criticism of all ages, but it is particularly interesting to see it at work on Imagism and Modernism, especially when we consider the effects of such critical practices in regard to the history of those movements.

One such example can be found even in Pondrom, who in spite of all her efforts to give H.D. her own due, still analyses H.D.’s first poems in relation to the authority of the immovable “Few Dont’s”. For some reason, those “Few Dont’s” seem to have stuck to the minds of critics and become a block of critical reference. They have been taken as the Principles of Imagism and, in that light, they are often quoted as atemporal Imagist rules abstracted from the particular literary background in which they emerged and were published. It is also curious to think of Pound as the ‘author’, or ‘artificer’, of the principles out of the fact that he worded them into their actual form and signed them with his own name. It would be difficult to separate what is Pound’s thought and feeling in those principles from what was actually the thoughts and feelings of a group of poets about a new poetical practice. But precisely because it is so difficult to mark a separation, it should be remembered that Imagism was not the creation of one person, but the result of a gradual interaction between T.E. Hulme, Ford Madox Ford, and F.S. Flint initially, and shortly after, Pound, H.D. and Richard Aldington, working in relation with other poets.

Going back to Pondrom’s analysis of H.D.’s first Imagist poems—“Hermes of the Ways”, “Priapus”, “Epigram”—we find that it is by applying the 1913 Imagist principles to them that she can present them as models of the earliest Imagist practice and set them in contrast with Pound’s and Aldington’s still imperfect Imagist poems of around the same time. That she takes as point of reference for such measurement the

1913 principles does not alter the final conclusion reached in her essay, but it does show her acceptance of those principles as the standard theory of Imagism. In doing so, Pound also runs the risk of circular thinking. Had she drawn her final results from a study of the general thought dominating the Imagist group before October 1912 Pound would have managed to construct a completely revisionary essay. As things stand, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of my discussion where I pointed at the existing conflict in Imagism between its theory and its practice. A clearer idea of what is meant by this may be obtained by actually looking at the debates which rose among Imagist poets, as well as to the response of critics and readership from the emergence of the movement up to our day.

## 2. Praxis versus Theory

In his introduction to Imagist Poetry, Peter Jones outlines the first instance of the conflict between the practice and the theory of Imagism when he marks that, after the publication in November 1912 of Aldington's first Imagist poems (Poetry 39-43), and in January 1913 of H.D.'s (Poetry 118-122), "Questions [were asked] and explanations given" (18). The truth is that the first Imagist poems made their appearance in the world in a quite unofficial way, forwarding Imagist poetical practice without the pompous accompaniment of manifestos or well-voiced principles. The critics' reaction to such lack of direction and silence on the part of the new poets was, as Jones puts it, "inevitable" (18). Soon after, in March 1913, the first statements from the Imagists regarding their goals and method in poetry appeared: "Imagism", by F.S. Flint (but written, in fact, by Pound) and "A Few Dont's by an Imagiste", by Ezra Pound, both published in Poetry. An editor's note accompanying Flint's notes makes it clear that there was curiosity regarding the new poetical trend, as well as a great deal of misunderstanding already about the new practice:

In response to many requests for information regarding *Imagism* and the *Imagistes*, we publish this note by Mr. Flint, supplementing it with further exemplification by Mr. Pound. It will be seen from these that *Imagism* is not necessarily associated with Hellenic subjects, or with *vers libre* as a prescribed form. (Poetry 198)

Both public opinion's response to Imagist poetry and the not quite understood goals of the school can then be said to have played a role in the formulation of the Imagist

principles. When this was done, Imagism was officially launched into the literary scene, as it now provided critics with concrete material to work on. The principles turned out to be an excellent “advertisement technique”, and by March 1914, an Imagist anthology, compiled by Pound in the summer of 1913, appeared. The machinery of writing, publishing and criticism was moving.

The anthology, compiled under Pound’s supervision, consisted of contributions from H.D., Richard Aldington, F.S. Flint, Skipwith Cannell, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, Allen Upward, John Cournos and Amy Lowell. John Gould Fletcher was left out as he had become increasingly disappointed with Pound. Des Imagistes appeared in a fashion similar to the first Imagist poems, with no introduction that would explain the new techniques displayed in the anthology. Again, the response from the public was that of confusion. Jones marks that “Des Imagistes was badly received both in Britain and America”(19). It “set America, on fire”, writes Flint in his “History of Imagism”, and Jones adds that “in London many returned their copies to the Poetry Bookshop, who published it” (19). The 1914 anthology bore in this case the specific mark of the editor, who was at that time formulating ideas about the aristocracy of the artists (in the very Platonic sense) and indifference towards the public. On February 16, 1914, for example, Pound had written in regard to “The New Sculpture”:

With the artists themselves fighting through the obscurities of a new convention it is foolish, or very nearly so, to expect a critic—even an amateur critic—to put forth generalities which shall wholly satisfy both artist and public.

Pound’s comment could well be a note about the absence of explanation in Des Imagistes.

In the meantime, Pound, like all the other poets included in the anthology, was developing his own personal variations on the basis of Imagist poetry. Pound’s poetry, in particular, was altering towards greater precision and concreteness, but it is especially his own reflections on Imagist practice that acquire deeper revision and development. Between the summer of 1913 and 1914, Pound studied the formal aspects of Imagist poetry, coming finally to the formulation of the ‘image as vortex’ in June 1914 in “Vortex. Pound” (Blast 1, June 20, 1914). What was the cryptic expression of the Imagist group, as seen by Pound, in March 1913, becomes now a

one-person manifesto, to be considered more in the line of Pound's particular development as an essayist than as a general agreement between the Imagists.

Vorticism was for Pound a stronger, more energetic kind of Imagism which kept in place the principles he had coined in 1913: objectivity, precision and presentation. Pound's alliance with Vorticism was mainly a way of defining his own aesthetics at a time when Imagism was beginning to expand and become associated with Amy Lowell. Pound, outraged by the unorthodox development that Imagism was following, dissociated himself from the Imagist group and set out for a redefinition of the 'image': from "that which represents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" ("A few Dont's") to "the image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy" ("Affirmations" 345), or, "It is ... a VORTEX, from which and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing" (Gaudier-Brzeska 92). Here there is a connection of vortex with energy, and more specifically, vortex as intellectual activity (ideas) endowed with energy. The vortex, being controlled by the intellect is not chaotic but patterned, structured. To the Vortex, Pound, Lewis and Gaudier-Brzeska attached the masculine connotations of strength and precision. As a Vorticist, Pound was more a theoretician and propagandist than a poet. In order to illustrate Vorticist poetry, Pound did not offer any of his own poems, but instead he appropriated for his own poetic notions H.D.'s "Oread", which he presented as a poetic correlative to Cubism. Years later, Lewis commented that Pound's "fire-eating propagandist utterances were not accompanied by any very experimental efforts in his particular medium" (Time 55). To a great extent, Pound's ascription to Vorticism was, as I have pointed out, a practical move to split from the Imagists.

Pound's departure from the poets who contributed to Des Imagistes becomes a symptom of how poetical theory was already dictating Pound's practice. The controversy between Pound and F.S. Flint is an example of the theoretical tensions that were rising among members of the 'Imagist school' (Jones 20). The discussion turned around Flint's interpretation of Imagism and the emergence of the movement in his "History of Imagism" (Egoist, 1 May 1915) and Pound's own opinions. In his "History", Flint shows the development of the current from 1908 until the publication of Des Imagistes in 1914, showing how Pound did not play an important role in the

movement till 1912 and actually undermining his claim to have invented it. Flint ended his article setting apart Pound's new position as "Vorticist" from the History. Vorticism belongs, according to Flint, to Pound's personal history. It is this particular comment that might have provoked Pound's furious reaction. Flint's assertion that "Since then Mr. Pound has become a 'Vorticist'" seems to suggest Pound's separatism and disagreement with the sort of poetry the others were producing. The point is that Pound would have liked the other Imagists to keep up with his new theories ("Vortex as a stricter form of Imagism" (Jones 21) ) but he missed the point that the other poets, initiated in the Imagist practice, were already developing personal ideas about the use of language and what was meant by the 'image'. Flint, for instance, would defend his early "Swan" poem (1909) as already Imagist except "for one or two weaknesses of style", whereas for Pound, only the 1913 version, amended by Pound himself, was of any Imagist value (Jones 20).<sup>3</sup>

Pound's dissociation from the Imagist poets widened when he refused to contribute to Amy Lowell's 1915 anthology Some Imagist Poets. As he wrote to her in a letter dated 1 August 1914: "I should like the name 'Imagisme' to retain some sort of meaning. It stands, or I should like it to stand for hard light clear edges. I cannot trust any democratised committee to maintain that standard. Some will be splay-footed and some sentimental". The idea of a group of poets choosing by themselves what they considered to be their best poems, without a directing hand that would control the quality of that poetry—what Pound called "democratised committee"—was for him out of the question.<sup>4</sup> Pound coined a new term to describe heterodoxy: "Amy-gism". Thus he referred to those poets who had chosen Amy Lowell's guidance, but who in reality were carrying on with their *personal* practice of Imagist poetry beyond fixed poetic dogmas. Pound saw their practice as deviating from the objectivity and hardness demanded by the Principles and thus *degenerating* into nothingness. For Pound, as it was for T.E. Hulme and would be for T.S. Eliot, separation from the principle of impersonality meant regression into the personal and association with Romanticism and

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<sup>3</sup> See also H.D.'s reference to the conflict in H.D.'s "Letter to F.S. Flint", July 5 (?) 1915, and Pondrom's comments around these events in "Selected Letters from H.D. to F.S. Flint: A Commentary," Contemporary Literature 10.4 (1969): 562-563.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed account of the schism between Pound and the other Imagists, see Hanscombe and Smyers' Writing for their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940, chapter XII.



Decadence.<sup>5</sup> Such thoughts of degeneration and poetic immaturity are behind Pound's opinion in writing: "I don't think any of these people have gone on; have invented much since the first Des Imagistes anthology".<sup>6</sup> What we are confronting here is a disagreement on principles and what those principles should be, a disparity in theory.<sup>7</sup> Whereas Pound clung to a dogmatic theory—formulated and worded by himself—Amy Lowell thought of a *similarity of tendencies* that would leave freedom to a more personal expression of Imagist poetry. Thus, she was ready to offer a more truthful picture of what was happening in the poetic development and personal expression of each poet. Pound wanted to freeze the movement, but the movement was already developing. The practice of Imagism was carrying on beyond its initial concerns and Pound's personal theories.

### 3. Critics and Readers

We have already pointed at the effects of public opinion on the theory of Imagism. If, in fact, the 1913 principles were meat for the sharks, one can really wonder why critics of all times took them so seriously and dogmatically. We could say something similar of the prefaces to the 1915 and 1916 Imagist anthologies. They were, no doubt, written in response to the criticism that Imagist poetry was receiving. They answered a need for justification that would have never been sought had this poetry been fully understood by critics and public. The preface to the 1915 edition (published in April 1915) makes reference, indeed, to the "misunderstanding [caused by] the former volume ... due to the fact that we did not explain ourselves in a preface" and the necessity now to tell the public. Equally, the preface to the 1916 anthology (May 1916) echoes once more the public's interest in Imagist poetry together with "a great deal of misunderstanding" and the consequent necessity "to explain the laws which govern us a little more fully". I would like to suggest that the contents and objectives

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<sup>5</sup> An excellent account of the meaning of 'impersonality', as a poetic technique for Modernist male poets by opposition to 'personality', can be found in Cassandra Laity's introduction and "The Rhetoric of Anti-Romanticism" in H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism and Decadence .

<sup>6</sup> Ezra Pound, "Letter to Margaret C. Anderson-- ed. of T.L.R.--", London, August 1917.

<sup>7</sup> In the preface to the 1915 anthology, Amy Lowell writes referring to Pound: "Differences of taste and judgement, however, have risen among the contributors to that book; growing tendencies are forcing them along different paths" (Some Imagist Poets v).

of these two prefaces have been shaped and determined by the current critical discourse of the times on Imagism and that, as a result, they cannot be considered to stand on their own and provide atemporal explanations of Imagist poetry. Had there been no pressure on the part of critics and public they might have adopted another form and indeed may never have been written. These prefaces are then the result of a dialectic between poets and public opinion, whereby the new poetry receives a particular response which provokes a theoretical answer from the writers, which is subject to new critical response and so on. The result of such a way of building up theory is that the original object of discussion, the poetry, is often lost amidst the discussion itself, and often, that which wanted to be dismissed is only reinforced by processes as the one described.

In the preface to the 1915 anthology we find the results of the dynamics described at work. Nearly all the “essentials” named seem to be a direct response to contemporary critical opinion on each of the principles dealt with. Point two for instance: “We do not insist upon ‘free verse’ as the only method of writing poetry” is a response to the sort of criticism which was identifying Imagist poetry with free verse, and point three seems to be an answer to Futurist fans who erroneously saw in Imagist poems a return and longing for the past because of the use of Hellenistic subjects. The Preface of 1916 addresses English and American reviewers directly. It criticizes their lack of understanding and resistance towards Imagist poetry, and specially focuses on the use of ‘vers libre’ about which critics kept on reeling. The editor of the 1916 anthology rather than dismissing ‘vers libre’ as exclusively Imagist, attempts to explain its mechanisms and history to critics who ignore the tools of their own craft and, by doing so, the editor only seems to be reinforcing that which should have been dismissed from the beginning.

The comparison between critical response to the 1913 manifestos (Pound’s) and the 1915-1916 prefaces brings up an interesting conclusion: that although the latter were less mysterious and brief than the first, they all were, on the one hand, enormously restrictive in relation to what to leave in and out in poetical practice, and on the other hand, enormously indefinite and elastic as to be able to “define the practice of a school” (Coffman 142) (and when they do so it is because they are tested against Imagist practice). This brings the reassurance that, in fact, the principles that

moved the Imagist poets were more vague and indefinite than what was just offered to the critics and public opinion.

It would be good to make a halt at this point, to remind ourselves that between the 1915 and the 1916 anthologies a "Special Imagist Issue" (May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1915), in which Imagism was discussed at length, was published by The Egoist. The issue contained Flint's "History of Imagism"; comments on H.D.'s, Flint's, Lowell's, Fletcher's and D.H. Lawrence's poetry (and even on Ezra Pound's in spite of his absence from the anthologies) written by the members of the group themselves; poems and a critic's evaluation of the movement. Harold Monroe's "The Imagist Discussed" gives us a perfect overview of the sort of criticism that Imagism was collecting. Even years later, in 1927, May Sinclair would return to this piece of criticism as an example of some (erroneous) prevalent ideas on Imagism.<sup>8</sup>

Monro's approach to the Imagists, like most critics', was theoretical. Wanting to define and give an answer about the goals and aims of the group, he resorted to the "Few Dont's" and the principles of the 1915 anthology, recently published. Finding them both equally cryptic, he reproached the Imagists for their lack of guidance: "They have not at any time taken much trouble to make themselves clear", substituting reproach for real evaluation. In fact, much of Monro's critique of Imagism revolves around the movement's attitude towards the public, what he reads as indifference for not explaining: "The very term *Imagist* is sufficiently mystifying to alienate the sympathies of the general public", "They scorn the great public figure" ("The Imagists Discussed" 78). But there is still more. Monro's views explain quite well why for the general public and critics the theory and practice of Imagism were at odds. In fact, what he is revealing is a long tradition of theoretical approach to literary works, and in the long run, a society theory-ridden and dominated by ideas and abstractions.

Monro is both ironical and patronising about the Preface and the poetry itself. Unable to find any major achievement in the Imagists, he debases their claims for the reformation of poetical diction by finding predecessors to their technique already in "most of the more important English theorists of the past": Ben Jonson, Dryden, Addison, Burke, Samuel Johnson, Coleridge, Wordsworth and even Matthew Arnold.

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<sup>8</sup> See May Sinclair's "The Poems of H.D.," published in Fortnightly Review 121 (March 1927) and republished in The Gender of Modernism, 453-67.

In Monro's opinion, they all marked the necessity to avoid familiar words deprived of sense by use and false artifice and encouraged precision of language for the objects of poetry. Of course, Monro is thinking strictly in terms of theory—what serves to reinforce our argument—for, if we stop to think about the enormous differences existing between the works of those writers, we will realise how their criteria about precision and no-clothing in verse differ enormously from one another, and that those criteria only derive their specific meaning from the actual poetic practice. Monro's search for theoretical ancestry reveals or explains why Imagism was so disconcerting: theoretical explanations were expected from the poets, yet, none came. When Pound started to publish some bits of theory, they were welcomed by the public and critics, who looked at him now as theoretician and hence, leader of the movement: "Mr Pound has offered several illuminating, though not entirely lucid, restatements of theory" (78).

Given the cryptic and innovative quality of the new poetry, we can say that the public's expectations for the poets to explain their poetry were stronger than usual, especially when they were breaking with all that which, for a long time, had been taken as poetry: rhyme, metre, music. The relation between poetical practice and theory was uneven. The manifestos, prefaces and sporadic comments were not enough for the public. A great deal of resistance could also be part of this lack of understanding. There was among other aspects, for instance, the critics' opposition to accept as 'poetry' what looked like 'prose', and to see the traditional boundaries between the two erased forever. Monro's comment on Amy Lowell's poem in the 1915 anthology, "The Bombardment", was not unusual in relation to poetry that "Labour[ed] to appear skilful". For Monro, Lowell's poem is "the most imaginative and most successful" piece in the anthology, yet, it is not "verse only, or prose written down like verse", but simply, "prose": "The piece is a confession of failure, since she appears in the volume as a poet" (80). The 1916 preface would echo and charge against this misconception of "shredded verse" asking: "But in fact, what is prose and what is verse?". In spite of all that negative response, we have to recognize in Monro an insight in noticing the development of Imagism towards something else:

"Some Imagist Poets," as an anthology, records a transitionary point in the Imagist movement. All the poets here represented figure as people who have fully recognized the difficulties of their art and are now eventually ready for a decision how to deal with them. (Monro 78)

The natural conclusion of this mixture of confusion, misunderstanding and conservative critical attitudes meant, as Monro's criticism shows, a definition of Imagism in terms of 'negativity', that is, stating what Imagism was not, rather than what it was—pointing at its supposed flaws, shortcomings and patronising its attempts to do without the old poetical tools. By doing without 'clichés', 'imagination', 'range of vocabulary', 'music', 'rhythm', 'sentiments' and 'ideas', the name 'poetry' became dubious in relation to the Imagists. This process of definition of Imagism acquires even more complexity when analysing women's Imagist poetry, such as H.D.'s, which I will be examining shortly.

We have come then to identify the two strands on which the general theory, criticism and scholarly work on Imagism have been built up to now: on the one hand, those public theories on Imagism shaped by public opinion and critical response, and, on the other, Pound's personal literary theories. The result from such a theoretical approach to Imagism, present from its official appearance in the literary scene, has been the dissociation we have been making reference to between the actual practice of Imagism and a theory which did not longer speak for the practice. And, out of that dissociation, there has been a process by which the theory has forgotten its object—practice—and has transformed itself into the object of its own discussion. It has been out of critical grounds that the theory of Imagism has equalled itself to Imagism and Imagism has stopped designating Imagist poetry. Ironically, Imagism, which originally aimed at concreteness, has lost itself in abstractions, has become an object of debate and opinion and, revolving around its own unresolved problems, keeps on producing endless one-sided discussions. A look at two critical passages will illustrate this state of things:

Herbert Schneidau in Ezra Pound: The Image and the Real (1969) initiates his chapter "Imagism as Discipline" by paying due respect to Pound: "It is nothing new to say that the basis of Ezra Pound's poetics may be seen in the Imagist movement that Pound himself *brought into being* [italics mine] in 1912 in London" (3). He keeps on trying to get things right—once more—by pointing out that "the repetitions about Imagist theory have obscured the fact that the earliest focus of Imagism was on a *discipline* [italics mine] involving what Pound called "living language" and "presentation", not on theories of the Image as such ...". Such defence of

“presentation” vs. “theory of the image” responds to views such as those held by Kingsley Weatherhead in The Edge of the Image (1967). In that critical work Weatherhead sustains that true Imagism is in fact about the “theory of the Image” and the production of “images with their edges unnicked”, such as Moore and William Carlos Williams show in their poems, and that there is no “direct treatment” if it is in “metaphorical terms” (17). We can observe, and this is just an example, how the discussion on Imagism has moved from the practice to the theory within theory. From the acceptance of Pound’s role as artificer of Imagism to discussions about the definition of Imagism in terms of the ‘image’ or otherwise.

Imagism has become then a matter of “pulling and pushing”.<sup>9</sup> There is no general agreement between critics, in the same way that there was none between Pound and Amy Lowell. Instead, all we find is critical confusion and irreconcilable positions. And, in spite of so much talk and discussions, the question which is always hovering at the heart of the problem is never addressed: What is Imagism? So far, I have tried to present it as a theoretically constructed category, too fragmented on the inside although apparently whole and neat on the outside. It is by beginning to accept certain degrees of relativity within that artificial block that we may actually start moving towards an answer to Jones’ question: “Which are we to believe theory or practice?”. The plurality of definitions about what Imagism is or was renders definitions themselves impossible. We are confronting a plurality with no absolute standards, and it is a plurality that undermines the idea of Imagism as a monolithic movement. The fact is that Imagism has been affected by the same malady as Modernism: the malady of generalisation, theory and, hence, homogenisation. Its real object and being, the Imagist poetry, has become secondary and subject to that theory. Moreover, that very practice has been for a long time distorted and manipulated by superimposing on it preconceived ideas and definitions. It has also been through the control of theory that poems and poets have been excluded or included in or out of the Imagist practice. It was because of those mechanisms that H.D., for instance, was labelled “the perfect Imagist” and her poetic production was subject for years to the reduced boundaries of “H.D. Imagiste”. That even her first poems were not only Imagist, in an ample sense,

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<sup>9</sup> H.D.’s words in Asphodel to refer to stormy heterosexual relations. The expression, taken metaphorically, seems to me very apt to summarize the state of the critics.

but something else too, has not been acknowledged for a long time as the Principles kept being hammered onto them.

The conflict practice-theory, as described so far, is an inevitable cul-de-sac which can only find, in my opinion, a solution through a pragmatic approach, a return to the praxis of Imagism, to its poetry. This return would enable us to confront the object itself, to look at it without the drapery and veils that have covered it for years. Looking at the poetical practice of all those poets included in the diverse Imagist anthologies, we would actually be confronting a practice which, out of some general aims and agreements, grew, became organic and productive. It developed in various particular ways as each poet found his/her own comfortable expression and it began to turn into something else—Modernist poetry. A pragmatic approach would finally allow us to register the personal expressions of the Imagists and to talk about Imagism in terms of the particular rather than the universal—not the universal in the particular. Only then, after acknowledging not one Imagism but different Imagist practices we could start giving a more faithful answer to the question *What is Imagism?*

#### 4. Imagist Practice

If Imagist practice is fully to be understood, it cannot be by any other means than through the study of the Imagist anthologies where each author can be studied in detail. Reading through the poems collected in the Imagist anthologies, I must agree with May Sinclair that “they *are* all doing the same thing, but doing it with such a difference that [one] wonders at the vastness of the formula that includes Richard Aldington and ‘H.D.’, to say nothing of the others” (“The Poems of H.D.” 456). In the following lines, I will try to look at the common characteristics or *similitude of tendencies* in poetic technique among the poets grouped in the Imagist anthologies. I have drawn these main lines from the reading of the poems themselves and the general guidelines derived from the discussions the Imagists had on the new poetic practice, by contrast with the previous Romantic/Victorian technique. In doing so, I am aiming at presenting Imagism as a vast formula represented in its poetical practice and not identified nor subject to the confining and reductive Poundian principles and terminology.

In those poems, we find, in first place, a struggle on the part of the poets to do away with the arbitrary character of language, to erase the gap, the distinction between the word and the object signified by the word. Their aim is to present the word as the object and the object as the equivalent of the word. In this sense we can say that what “Imagist” poetry was attempting to do was to introduce a new approach to the object. We find the roots of this new relationship to the object, now the subject and focus of poetry, in Schopenhauer, who advocated “the quiet contemplation of the object” and “losing himself [the poet] in this object”. Later on, this approach would reappear in Bergson, who influenced the general thoughts of the Imagists, especially T.E. Hulme. These ideas trickled down to the Imagist poets informally through discussions.

Take for instance:

The light passes  
from ridge to ridge  
from flower to flower—  
the hepaticas, wide-spread  
under the light  
grow faint—  
the petals reach inward,  
the blue tips bend  
toward the bluer heart  
and the flowers are lost.

(“Evening”, H.D.)

The petals fall in the mountain,  
the orange-coloured rose-leaves,  
Their ochre clings to the stone.

(“Ts’ ai Chi’ h”, Ezra Pound)

In these poems there is the peculiar effect—paradoxical as it might seem—of an absence of words, what we could call ‘transparency’. It is in this sense that we could talk about the ‘visual’ quality of these poems, meaning by this not actual visual perception, but the *immediacy* achieved by having done away as much as possible with unnecessary discursive diction, as well as abstract words or phrases that would stand on the way of direct communication. As a result, the poem hits the mind instantly and its objects—call it thing, scene, event, emotion, mood or recollection—seem to stand on their own without subjective mediation. The effect is that of being in a world of autonomous objects and raw emotions:

Under the lily shadow  
and the gold  
and the blue and mauve  
that the whin and the lilac  
pour down on the water,  
the fishes quiver.

(from “The Swan”, F.S. Flint)

The sea called—  
you faced the estuary,  
you were drowned as the tide  
passed.—  
I am glad of this—  
at least you have escaped.

(from “Loss”, H.D.)



I have told thee of the hills  
 And the lisp of reeds  
 And the sun upon thy breasts,  
 And thou hearest me not,  
 Πόρτυα, Πόρτυα,  
 Thou hearest me not.

You are not forgot,  
 O plunder of lilies,  
 honey is not more sweet  
 than the salt stretch of your beach.

(from "The Shrine", H.D.)

(from "To a Greek Marble", Richard  
 Aldington)

It is in this respect that Imagist poetry is innovative. The objects of the poems do not appear to be mediated by a particular 'I', but rather by a persona, or a vague voice, in an attempt to do away with the protagonism of the speaking subject. As a result, what the Imagist poet tries to offer the reader is not a paraphrase of moods or emotions, as was the case in Victorian poetry, but rather the experience of things. Take for instance "Autumn", by T. E. Hulme, one of the first Imagist poems. This poem cannot be considered totally satisfactory in terms of Imagist diction as Victorian similes personify the object: "ruddy moon like...", "wistful stars like...", thus revealing the point of view of the 'I', and making the feeling get lost amidst the *imagery*. Compare also the following lines by Tennyson with Aldington's and H.D.'s lines:

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
 Too full for sound and foam,  
 When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
 Turns again home.

(from "Crossing the Bar", Tennyson)

We will come down to you,  
 O very deep sea,  
 And drift upon your pale waves  
 Like scattered petals.  
 ...  
 We will come down,  
 O Thalassa,  
 And drift upon  
 Your pale green waves  
 Like petals.

("Amalfi", R. Aldington)

But you—you are unsheltered,  
 cut with the weight of wind—  
 you shudder when it strikes,  
 then lift swelled with the blast—  
 you sink as the tide sinks,  
 you shrill under hail, and sound  
 thunder when thunder sounds.

(from "The Shrine", H.D.)

Here there is a conversion of words into things, of discourse into experience, of abstract effects into concrete objects by reducing diction to its minimum necessary expression, by clipping corners (avoiding unnecessary words) and drawing veils aside (no rhyme, no inversions), thus producing an apparent simplicity which allows words and objects to appear anew, as if clean-cut for the first time. The overall effect is that

the poem does not require the interpretative skills of the intellect, as in Tennyson's, but instead seems to flow directly into the intuitive understanding of the mind (an effect that owes much to Bergson). The technique often implies close focus on the object, similar to the close-ups of a camera, so that nothing which is not essential for the poem is allowed into the poem-screen.

Consider:

Above the east horizon,  
The great red flower of the dawn  
Opens slowly, petal by petal:  
The trees emerge from darkness  
With ghostly silver leaves,  
Dew- powdered.

(...)

Sleep oozes out of stagnant ash-barrels,  
Sleep drowns over litter in the streets.  
Sleep nods upon the milkcans by back doors.  
And in shut rooms,  
Behind the lowered window-blinds,  
Drawn white faces unwittingly flout the day.

(from "Dawn", John Gould Fletcher)

The hard sand breaks,  
and the grains of it  
are as clear as wine.

(from "Hermes of the Ways", H.D.)

From this approach to the object of the poem everything else will follow: brevity of the poems (their reduction to one stanza or to a few short ones), absence of metre and rhyme, and images (on their own, or in accumulation).

The image ("Beggar", F.S. Flint), or images ("Mid-day", H.D.) in poems of this kind have the ability to convey an emotion with its multiple non-spoken angles and shades, and to do this with immediacy, or rather, simultaneity. The effect is that there is no need to decipher the words and images as they seem to find a correspondence to other words and images in the mind—I would dare to say in the unconscious mind, or maybe, in the meeting point of the conscious and the unconscious, a borderland occupied by intuition. When this occurs, diction, image and emotion are one and the same: "The fusion is complete". Bergson's ideas on the power of images, which were of great influence on the new poetic practice, echo the effect I have described:

The image has at least this advantage, that it keeps us in the concrete... many diverse images borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is an intuition to be seized. (Introduction to Metaphysics 14)

This is certainly true for most of the poems I am quoting. For those others which limp here and there, such as it is the case of "Autumn", or "Image", or some of D.H.

Lawrence's Imagist poems, the process described does not completely take place as diction builds up barriers for the mind to apprehend what is being presented. In D.H. Lawrence's "Refused" there is discursive explanation rather than objectivization of the emotions, so that it is the intellect which has to deal with the poem, not that other part of the mind which works by images and is opened up to diverse resonance. Also, the effort for objectivity is visible, that is, the metaphors chosen do not seem to match the meaning exactly; the result is that word and object appear as two distinctive realities. However, it seems to me, it is not a question of being in or out of the Imagist practice according to some fixed principles, as Pound wished, but rather, of being in more or less successfully. As Flint put it, it is not only a question of technical mastery, but of "temperament and talent".

Having perceived some technical commonality among the selected poems, we can come to the differences existing between these poets, hurled all together under the "formula" of Imagism. There are differences in voice, approach, gender focus and general practice which increased and became more noticeable as the poets evolved into a more personal poetry. One wonders, for instance, how the 'voice' and 'persona' factor has not received any attention till recently in relation to the Imagist poems, for it clearly sets apart male from female speaker—in the sense that the chosen object and the approach to it vary according to the speaker's gender.<sup>10</sup> Thus, for instance, we can set a line between H.D. and Amy Lowell, and the male poets Pound, Aldington and D.H. Lawrence on those terms. Let's take for instance, two counterparts: Pound's "Dance Figure" and H.D.'s "The Contest".

If we are to attend to the technique, to the direct approach to the object avoiding unnecessary word-clothing, we will find both poems achieve this aim. The language used is in both cases straight forward (in spite of Pound's use of archaisms, which marks perhaps the use of a mask or persona), sentences are simple, mainly following the pattern subject, verb, nominal/adjective phrase: "Thine arms are as a young sapling under the bark", "White as almond are thy shoulders" ("Dance Figure"); "Your arms are fire", "your shoulders are level" ("The Contest"). Their rhythm is also similar, based mainly on the repetition of a pattern:

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance, Jeanne Kammer's study in Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets, ed. Gilbert and Gubar, (Bloomington: Indiana UP., 1979).

I have not found thee in the tents (...)  
I have not found thee in the well-head (...)

Thine arms are as (...)  
Thine face as (...)

(from "Dance Figure")

Your stature is modelled (...)  
You are chiselled (...)

There is a glint like worn brass (...)  
There is light about your male torso (...)

(from "The Contest")

But in spite of this technical resemblance, the poems imply different voices as they present different objects. Pound chooses an ethereal woman, whereas H.D. presents the body of a male—real or statue. Those voices, in each case, present their 'objects', or the subject of their poetry, if preferred, in a gendered way. In Pound's poem, the male voice is betrayed, that is, revealed, in that "O woman of my dreams" but also in the ethereal, mystic and light presentation of the woman. In H.D., a woman's voice does not betray herself as easily as in Pound's poem. In "The Contest" we find an example of the subtle way in which device and voice fuse inseparably. It should be observed, for instance, that H.D.'s poem is closer to her object than Pound's. This is achieved by a direct 'you' which establishes an immediate closeness, by contrast with the gap revealed by the vocative form employed by Pound. In Pound's poem, the woman is seen at a distance, observed and eye-followed, and as each limb is observed, a comparison is added, 'as', in an evocative manner, which does not work as well as the metaphors used in H.D.'s poem. In this case, by using a metaphorical device, the body, its physicality is given to the reader. And by that device we know that the voice is not far from the object, but quite close. The body is also eye-studied, but in a very different manner from that in "Dance Figure". As someone who observes from a distance details cannot be noticed. But this other voice is close enough to render a minutious exploration of that body close to her (or at least rendered as it were). It is precisely the difference between voyeurism and actual physical closeness that allows the identification of the voice in H.D.'s poem as belonging to a female speaker and betrays the presence of gender in both poems. Notice:

With the turn and grasp of your wrist  
and the chords' stretch,  
there is a glint like worn brass.

Or           The ridge of your breast is taut,  
and under each shadow is sharp (...)

In fact, those bruising eyes rather suggest contact than observation, so that, in a way, there is a fusion of vision and touch. Physicality is given and with it the sensuality of the male body as experienced by the female speaker.

The same parallel we have established between those two poems in terms of gender can be observed in others. Take for instance “Evening” or “Sunsets” (Aldington), which reveal an unmistakably male voice, revealed not only through specific images (“here am I looking wantonly at her / Over the kitchen sink”, or, “The white body of the evening / Is torn into scarlet”) but also in the visual distance, and compare with “The Pool” (H.D.), or “The Weather-Cock Points South” (Amy Lowell), where there is approach to the object with physical contact. Together with the gender/voice difference we could also point at each poet’s peculiarities.

In Pound, for instance, we find quick changes in his ‘Imagist’ poems: there are ‘Greek’ sketches, Japanese haiku, shift from a persona’s voice (“Middle-aged”) to an impersonal or disembodied voice (“The Return”, which he substituted for “Middle-Age” in Des Imagistes), or the social vein (“The Garden”). It is worth remembering that while committed to “Imagisme”, Ezra Pound kept on experimenting and writing other sorts of poetry, which is surprising, if we remember his insistence on dogmatic “Imagisme” for the other poets.

Aldington’s ‘Imagist’ poems vary widely in theme, approach and length. There are those inspired in Greek poetry and with Hellenic subjects such as “To a Greek Marble” (Des Imagistes, 1914), “Amalfi” or “Epigrams (S.I.P.1916), brief and focused on the object. There are others, still more economical but less objective and impersonal, comprehending just three or four images, such as “Evening” and “Sunsets”, where images translate the desire of the observing ‘I’.<sup>11</sup> It is important to notice that such variety does not quite correspond to a chronological development but that short and long poems, more objective, or less impersonal, alternate throughout the anthologies and publications in magazines. We do not find better early ‘Imagist’ poems corresponding to the Principles, followed by poems which are already separating from ‘orthodox’ Poundian Imagism, but a combination of all sorts instead. “Childhood” (S.I.P. 1915) is, for instance, a biographical, confessional poem, extending itself for about seven pages, resorting to memory, reflection and observation of the world around through the eyes of an embittered ‘I’. “In the Tube” (May 1915) is equally a poem built around a clear ‘I’, an existentialist meditation tinted with “antagonism” and “disgust” at modern life. “Sunsets”, mentioned above, is, by contrast, a later poem.

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<sup>11</sup> I am referring to this ‘I’ as a speaking voice with a consciousness of its own.

This unpredictable shift from more objective poems to more subjective ones characterizes both the 1916 and the 1917 anthologies. Yet, in the latest, Aldington's war poems do show a conflict between the constraining mould of Imagism (concern with the object, avoiding subjectivity) and personal experience.

Amy Lowell was already in 1915, employing a different technique by writing poetic prose or "polyphonic prose". In sequences like "The Bombardment" all senses are employed and they revolve around a kaleidoscopic 'I' that draws all the outside images into the realm of subjective consciousness, thus anticipating Modernist prose. "Spring Day" (S.I.P. 1916) and "Lacquer Prints" (S.I.P. 1917) show a further experimental development. Although still bearing an accurate use of language and original clean-cut images, these fragmentary poems seem to be an attempt to encompass a more ample reality, a narrative made of images.

D.H. Lawrence makes Imagist attempts although not quite successfully. Monro refused to comment on his poetry, but his inclusion in the anthology points more clearly than ever at the vastness of the Imagist formula. The relationship between men and women is always present in his Imagist love poems which appear to be too restrictive for his objects ("Return", "The Appeal", "Repulsed"). Symbolism and personification are common practices in Lawrence's poems, which seem to be at odds with any attempt at objectivity. Often these poems turn into little dramas using the naked language of dialectal speech ("The Mowers" S.I.P. 1916).

Fletcher in his "Irradiations" or "Blue Symphony" (S.I.P. 1915) already shows the need to develop towards the long poem. His compositions are complex, recording lyric contemplation, sensation, subjective mood, and fanciful imagery, and attempting to record the fusion of the visual with the musical.

This reading of 'Imagist' poems from the side of praxis, carries away many of the worn-out problems of Imagist theory—problems which emerge precisely from the distortion exerted by the attempt to define and classify. It also brings us back to the initial assertion of this chapter, Hughes' strangely emancipated assertion that "there are no absolute standards by which one may determine whether or not a poet is an Imagist. All such classifications are arbitrary". And, in fact, it seems to me that if any answer is to be given to what Imagism is or was, it needs to be as general as possible, to allow particularity, variation and development. It needs also to be formulated from a

historical perspective, acknowledging things as they are rather than attempting to change them. That is to say, that this is no time to include or exclude poets according to fixed arbitrary principles, but it is time for revision of the oversimplified history of Imagism.

In this sense, I will add to the already formulated view of Imagism as a critical concept. the idea that Imagism/ 'Imagist poetry' is a label (now historical) applied to a body of poetry published under that name. Such wide definition of the term, which for many may amount to the annihilation of the term itself, and which for others may appear as a sort of postmodern celebration of the absence of centre, is , by no means, an easy way out of complexity. On the contrary, it embraces the whole of it. It should not be implied either that the definition of Imagism is an absolute—hence impossible, or that I am refusing definition by principle. I am just saying that the only possible definition is a mobile, fluent one and that such a sort of definition does not coincide with the traditional notion of 'definition', by nature, static. The failure of critical dogmatism has to be found precisely in its attempt to reconstruct the mobility of the poetical movement—which, as movement, was not homogeneous but dynamic and changeable—with fixed concepts.

This new way of looking at Imagism/'Imagist poetry' is actually suggested or could be drawn from a letter written by Amy Lowell to Harriet Monroe (15 September 1914):

In thinking over what could I do to help the poets less fortunate than myself, and also to help myself in somewhat the same manner that a review would do, it seemed to me that to republish the 'Imagiste Anthology' with the same group of people, year after year, for a period of five years, would enable us, by constant iteration, to make some impressions upon the public.

Amy Lowell was conscious that if the new poetry were to be published and the new poets were to gain public recognition, they would themselves need to join forces and built up a name. 'Imagist' would serve as a card of introduction into the world of letters and would enable the poets, published and referred to under that name, to be placed and known amidst the proliferation of avant-garde isms. This tactic, strictly practical, acknowledged the publishing mechanism and the necessity of critics and public for guidelines, which we have outlined before.

On the other hand, the Imagist label did not inhibit the poets' development. By 1917, the year of the last official anthology, and official date for the ending of the

Imagist school, most poets had moved already a long way away from anything that critics and public might assign to the word 'Imagist'. Poems such as H.D.'s "Eurydice" and "Pygmalion", as well as her personal poetics (as outlined in "Responsibilities" and personal correspondence), seem to confirm so. Viewing Imagism as a publishing label, also allows us to see the movement forward and backwards in the poetry of those poets labelled 'Imagists'; it dismisses the contradictions that those who look for a chronological development within the poetry of a specific poet might find. In H.D.'s poems written between 1912-1917, there is, for example, a coexistence of short and long poems, the first highly economical—'purely Imagist' for critics—, the latter showing a tendency toward poetic narrative which does not fall in or outside the 'Imagist' practice but is part of the personal poetical development of H.D.

Having opened up the term Imagism/Imagist to allow for variation and development, we could proceed to say that the label 'Imagist' was applied to a group of Anglo-American poets who writing in the span of 1908-1917, mostly knew each other, corresponded, reviewed and revised each other's poetry. What brought them together was a common preoccupation with poetry and a desire to renew poetic diction. Their practice came into being by reaction against the previous Romantic and Victorian poetic diction and technique. By seeking to renew poetic diction and technique, all these poets, labelled Imagists, were confronting a task similar to Wordsworth's in his "Preface" about a century before, although unlike Wordsworth, they were a-systematic, refused explanation and abstraction about their own poetry. It was by reaction that the Imagists got rid of all which made poetry repetitive, empty, and stopped renewal: rhyme and metre, which detained the use of the necessary word in favour of the fitting one; archaic forms, which were hollow for contemporary speakers; alterations in the canonical grammatical sequence for 'stylistic' or metrical purposes, which obscured meaning and detained understanding; decorative imagery, which made poems fall into vagueness and abstraction. In short, all that which made poetry affected, which presented it as a metalinguistic artifact, no longer close to the diction of everyday speech, and hence, unable to appeal the receptive sensibility of the reader, obliging him/her instead to think and decipher it. Therefore, these poets showed affinities in relation to their view of the 'old' poetry and their search for an alternative poetical technique. In general terms, we could say that their new technical



resources were found and determined by an avoidance of abstraction and universals and a turn towards the particular and the concrete; from abstract thought into physical reality. This was also accompanied by an exclusion of the metaphysical, and limitation to the human, what T.E. Hulme defined as keeping within the scope of vision the “limit of man” (Speculations 120). Another common technical feature for the alternative new poetry was a dismissal, again by reaction, of the subject (agent) through whom the poetical object filters into the poem. The death of the subject as agent, what has been called the dehumanisation of art, relates to a turn towards the particular, carried to the utmost limits. To avoid abstraction, the Imagist poets concluded, the intellectual ‘I’ must die, disappear from poetry.

The specific point on subjectivity made by the Imagists is that it brings in discursive practice, as a revealed consciousness discloses the purpose of the imagery and diction and appropriates reality through words, thus separating words from their referent, and introducing an intellectual function which is passed onto the reader. These poets were conscious of the arbitrary character of language and, hence, of the abstract relations that there exist between a sign and its referent. In order to achieve concreteness, they thought, one has to do away with arbitrariness, make the connection word/object necessary, in other words, make language invisible. The question in poetry, we could ask, is how to suppress the subject agent from language. Subjectivity seems easy to eliminate from the visual arts but not from poetry. The answer given by these poets was a shift from the first person ‘I’ to the ‘you’ and ‘we’ and very often the ‘it’—making the object both centre of the poems as well as grammatical subject. Thus, when the ‘I’ appears, it is either as a patient/witness of its own emotions (hence purely vocal or grammatical), or in combination with other subjects which rest its primacy. Such attempt to achieve objectivity not always meant impersonality, as I have mentioned, as gender filtered into the poems, and with it desire and eroticism. ‘Objectivity’ seems to be, in fact, the big delusion of ‘Imagist poetry’. ‘Objectivity’ is supposed to be offered as a principle opposed to ‘subjectivity’, but the truth is that the margins left between those two absolutes is wide and, in practice, ‘objectivity’ often appears simply as the non-subjective. Precisely for that reason, the presence of a gendered voice is not a problem. It only becomes problematic if ‘Imagist poetry’ is defined *a priori* as ‘objective’. Pound, for instance, would not consider

H.D.'s latest poems in the Imagist anthologies as 'Imagist' by virtue of that principle. But in fact, pure Imagism, absolute objectivity, never existed, not even in "H.D. Imagiste", proving Pound's self-deception and blindness toward gender issues, something that 'Imagist' women poets were conscious of and consciously practised. H.D.'s poetry is a prime example of apparent objectivity without impersonality, as I will show in the course of my discussion.

Such broad technical commonality is as far as we can go for an explanation of the poetry published under the label 'Imagist'. Any further explanation is futile. It is futile to identify 'Imagist poetry' with 'economy' and 'presentation', for instance, because we will always find poems which fall out of such definitions, yet, they form part of historical Imagism. It is precisely when we use such concepts as the measure of the poetical practice of the 'Imagists', that we begin to find 'problems'. What to do for instance with a poem (eg. "Oread") that at first sight presents the 'thing itself' (in the Poundian sense, i.e. condensation, economy, presentation) but reveals later some ingrained eroticism? What to do with a gendered voice which is the subject of sublimity?

To resume my point, 'problems' and 'contradictions' in the analysis of 'Imagist poetry' are the effect of the distortion and imposition of theory on practice. The object proves wrong, obviously, when viewed from a theoretical approach. We find ourselves trying to impose continuity where there is not any but little. The 'Imagists' were not poets "writing to a theory". The group existed as a "school" more in terms of poetical influence than directing principles.

## II. The Case of H.D.: "H.D., Imagiste"?

What is the role that H.D. played within Imagism? Is H.D. an Imagist poet? Was H.D. an Imagist poet at some stage of her poetic career? Was H.D. "the perfect Imagist"? These are some of the questions that need to be readdressed once we undertake a revision of Imagism. Given the long-established reputation of H.D. as the Imagist poet *per excellence*, such questions may seem unnecessary; there may even be a degree of self-evidence about H.D.'s status as an Imagist poet that will render those

questions quite superfluous. Cyrena Pondrom's revisionary research will be once more of help to put forward my argument in this specific discussion.

In the "Letters of H.D. to F.S. Flint", Pondrom focuses more specifically on H.D.'s direct contribution to that history of Imagism. Here, through the correspondence addressed by H.D. to her fellow poet and friend, Pondrom reveals the active participation of H.D. in the diffusion of Imagism after Pound's separation from the group. She also shows how H.D. was fully conscious of the movement, the poetical variety among its participants and the conflicting disagreements between them. In collecting poems for the Imagist anthologies, H.D. also simplified much of the work left to Amy Lowell as an editor: "Much of the time, it appears, the Aldingtons did most of the planning for the anthology—in consultation with Flint, and less frequently, Fletcher and Lawrence, all of whom were easier to reach from London than from Brookline, Massachusetts" (Pondrom 562). As we learn from Pondrom, H.D. took care of the affairs of the Imagist group and carried on the publication of Imagist poems in the anthologies and in The Egoist during the war years. In a letter postmarked December 19, 1914, H.D. wrote to Flint: "We have a new plan for the anthology and want—need—to talk it over with you before writing to Amy". And in another letter dated October 8, 1916: "R. keeps asking about the bunch of Imagist poems I was delegated to collect. Now don't sit down and tell me you have nothing ... I will send you R.'s batch soon". A few days later, H.D. wrote: "Lawrence has just sent his lot. I don't quite know what to think of them". Pondrom leaves little doubt about H.D.'s key role within the organization of Imagism.

While Pondrom's study answers the first question of my argument, it does not quite answer all my other enquiries and what is more, it sheds a light of irony on the reputation of H.D. as a poet. It seems that although H.D. was revered by critics as the main example of Imagist poetry, little public recognition was given to H.D. as promoter of the movement, in the way Pound was. Also, I find that H.D.'s active participation in the history of Imagism, does not make her necessarily an Imagist poet and that, therefore, the answer to the question of why H.D. was labelled "the perfect Imagist" has to be found elsewhere.

When looking at the critical assessment of the poems that H.D. wrote and published between 1912-1925, we find, all in all, a positive balance. Unlike the long

reproaches received by Imagism in its first years, H.D. soon became a favourite among critics. She was now and then mimicked by some denunciators, as Glenn Hughes records in Imagism and the Imagists, and ridiculed by others (121), but her poetical mastery was finally recognised. Glenn Hughes summarises that process superbly :

Having witnessed the placing of academic laurels on this poet's brow, let us examine briefly some of the tributes paid by professional critics and by fellow poets. In this connection it may be remarked that no other imagist, and few non-imagists poets of today, have received so much intelligent admiration as H.D. Cut off, by its subtleties and by its esoteric sources, from the possibility of appealing to the uneducated, her work delights inevitably the connoisseur. The other imagists recognize and freely admit that H.D. surpassed them all in the field of pure imagism; whereas those critics who are inclined to damn imagism in general, frequently except H.D.'s poems from their denunciation" (119)

Her excellence was proclaimed and the critical discourse "overflowed with superlatives of praise" (Hughes 119). Ever since, H.D. has remained the perfect Imagist poet and it has been on that basis that she has gained a place in the history of poetry and literature. What else could a poet wish than being worshipped in the pantheon of the muses?

Today, however, after the feminist criticism of the 1980s and the publication of more complete copies of her poems, we can perceive for the first time the full implications and the damage caused by the critical fashion that confined H.D. within the Imagist mould. By praising, it confined; by worshipping, it concealed. It not only pigeonholed the poems of the period 1912-1925 under the strict label of Imagism but it refused to see the poems beyond the Imagist doctrine, Greek classicism and aesthetic perfection. In addition, it established a set of clichés which would be reproduced from there on regardless the nature of the works published. Critics returned over and over to "H.D. Imagiste". Adverse criticism leaves room for its opposite, for re-evaluation. But how to fight the sort of positive criticism which through a span of fifty years buried alive H.D.'s poetry?

There are several ways in which we can start removing the golden armour. One of them has already been indicated in relation to Imagism. Concentration on the praxis of Imagism rather than on its theory is the first step toward the re-evaluation of H.D.'s poems of that period. Another way in which destructive positive assessment can be confronted is by analysing the terms on which it was constructed. One of the most puzzling things I have found when examining reviews and critical essays on the period 1912-1925 is the absence of explanation and real appraisal. After reading those testimonies, I still keep on asking what is in those poems that makes them "perfect

Imagist”, which emotions do they convey, through what means, how do the images and words convey the meaning?. H.D.’s poetry of that period remains as unexplained as if little had been written on it.

### 1. Critics and Fellow Writers

In this section I will analyze H.D.’s fame as an Imagist poet and the clichés that were attached to this label by looking at articles, reviews and scholarly works. Initially, I will focus on the views of other contemporary male and female writers who knew H.D. and her work and were associated to Imagism: Flint, Fletcher, William Carlos Williams, Bryher, May Sinclair, Marianne Moore and Amy Lowell. Then, I will look at a bulk of criticism that spreads from the first years of H.D.’s poetry to the 1950s and which shows the perpetuation of Imagist clichés in relation to the work of H.D. All this critical evidence and much more can be obtained from Michael Bough, whose bibliography includes all the critical work on H.D. up to 1990.

In the “Special Imagist Issue” of The Egoist, dated May 1, 1915, we find one of the first reviews of H.D.’s poetry. “The Poetry of H.D.” was written by H.D.’s fellow Imagist poet and friend, F.S. Flint. Flint’s commentary does not approach H.D.’s poems in Imagist terms. This is in itself unusual, considering that he is writing at a time when H.D. is supposed to be an Imagist poet. I suspect that as a poet himself associated to Imagism, in the unorthodox way I pointed at earlier, he values H.D.’s poetry for other reasons. He approaches the poetry of a poet, not of a movement. The result is that of an absence of repetition of the principles of Imagism and related critical terms. He does not refer for instance to H.D.’s “classicism” (i.e. Hellenism) either, which altogether with the Imagist tag is one of the most common critical views. Of H.D.’s poetry, Flint marks its precision, the attention to detail, the loneliness conveyed by the poems and the transposition into images of “things seen” and “emotions felt”. On the more critical side, one of the reproaches Flint makes to H.D.’s poetry is that of excessive objectivization: “you can cut too far and produce angularity, or too curiously and produce enigma, which was the fate of Mallarmé. In all art, it seems to me, there must be generosity and some pity for the spectator”. Such comment happens to be highly ironical in the light of Richard Aldington’s affirmation that women are unable of

the “indirect method”.<sup>12</sup> More importantly, Flint’s views tells us something about the disparity of opinions within Imagism. While for Pound “Oread”, quoted here in full by Flint, is the epitome of Imagism, for Flint it represents that risk of dehumanization. Flint keeps some of his sympathies with the French symbolists.

In this review, there is little to reproach except a rather puzzling observation for which Flint is not alone responsible. It was Richard Aldington who described H.D.’s poetry as “accurate mystery” before Flint did. As can be immediately appreciated, characterization of poetry in metaphysical and mythologizing terms such as “accurate mystery” tells little or nothing about the poetry itself. This has been a common way of reviewing H.D. As it stands, the phrase points in two opposite directions which seem, nonetheless, to be reconciled in this review. Mystery, in the sense suggested by Flint, as that which cannot be understood by the mind, only by the imagination, turns in H.D.’s poems into something that retaining its mystery can still be accurate. This skill is what Aldington praises. As I will be arguing later, such combination of contained technique and intense emotion reveals the particular way in which H.D. meets the needs of modern poetry while staying faithful to the immediate Romantic past. I will also argue that the word ‘mystery’ points, in fact, to sublimized emotions, erotic as well as spiritual, and that it certainly belongs to a Romantic critical discourse, not an Imagist or Modernist one ( in Hulme’s and Pound’s understanding of the term). In any case, the word ‘mystery’ as used by critics in relation to H.D.’s poetry cannot be accepted as strictly critical, unless it is in relation to a Romantic context. Such connection, however, is never made.

John Gould Fletcher, also reviews H.D. not within the frame of Imagism but in relation to her merit as a poet. In “H.D.’s Vision”, written in 1917 after the publication of Sea Garden, Fletcher wrote: “As I read and re-read this small volume ... I cease to care whether this is or not what the academic critics choose to label Poetry, or whether it is or is not Imagism. Whatever it is ... it is beauty independent of laws, holding but to its own hard and bitter perfection”. Fletcher is using a Romantic term, beauty, to write about H.D.’s poems. Some critics employ this term as critical in itself, as it is the case with ‘mystery’ too. Fletcher however, does not leave it there. In his review he makes a full case for such assertion. Fletcher groups H.D. with other mystic writers

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Aldington, “Violet Hunt”.

such as Plotinus and Blake: “they describe in terms of ordinary experience some supernatural experience”. The “vision” of H.D.’s poems is that of beauty and eternity of ‘ideas’, of objects presented as eternal, primal. This volume, writes Fletcher, is not “about flowers and rocks and waves and Greek myths”, but “about the soul, or the primal intelligence”. Fletcher’s views of Sea Garden are highly Platonic and spiritual. It is not difficult to see why Fletcher sees this poetry as a “vision” of an eternal world of beauty and of beautiful objects. This will be H.D.’s position in “Notes on Thought and Vision”, an essay dealing with artistic vision and the interaction between the seer and beauty. Here, Fletcher captures something explained in that essay: that to appreciate beauty and to communicate with works of art or beautiful objects we need to be perceptive and responsive. Fletcher, nevertheless, seems to be carried away by his own Platonic understanding, turning into spiritual elements which are also physical. Although H.D. is Platonic in her notions of beauty, she is also personal and pre-Socratic, weighing equally the physical and spiritual world. Her vision or spirituality belongs to the recognition of the spiritual quality of physical beauty. This double understanding of beauty, shows how a mystical reading of Sea Garden may be covering something more basic, which is the erotic and appealing attraction of beauty which can be experienced as physical or spiritual sublimity: “The light burns sharp here, like a sword; it is painful to walk in the glare of this beauty” (Fletcher 267).

The same transcendental diction pervades William Carlos Williams’ unpublished review of Collected Poems (1925).<sup>13</sup> Williams, besides making a point about “the significance of this work in the world of poetry” and H.D.’s “use of the Greek model”, presents the poetry of this poet in relation to ‘Life’. Williams reveals here a concern for life in a Modernist, Bergsonian way, but not less transcendental for that. Like Virginia Woolf in To the Lighthouse or The Waves, Williams’ search for ‘life itself’, the living experience, or the experience of ‘being’ shows in his approach to H.D.’s Collected Poems. Thus, he argues that once transported into the Greek world we are cast into a world of perfection, essential and ideal. Behind the Greek scenes there is the essence of Life, something encountered by the poet through her own life experiences. It is from his personal friendship with the poet that Williams draws parallels between the life of

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<sup>13</sup> Carbon copy, signed by Carlos Williams and sent to H.D. The review was apparently not published and no copy of it is among the Williams manuscripts at Yale. H.D. Papers. Box 46, Folder 1171. Beinecke Library, Yale University.

the poet and her work. Sea Garden, with a “jerky rhythm” (3), belongs to a young passionate H.D. who threw herself into a rough sea and nearly perished. Hymen “illustrates, ... by a beginning dull, perhaps as life itself, how H.D. rises, with intrepid reading” (3). As for the last part of the book, maturity is reached : “the strokes of anguish have begun to fall and the meter ripens” (3). Williams shows then an evolution that goes from difficult beginnings to resolution of difficulties. What is most interesting is Williams’ transcendental diction. He finishes in the following manner:

In life there is no escape for any of us save by “*Mehr Richt*”, a passage through the mist of the difficulty to an area where expansion is possible—nay limitless, the illimitable spirit—of which the breath is poetry. Such is the “mystery” of H.D. (3)

“Mystery” is possibly a quotation from either Aldington or Flint. Here it is bound to beauty and life. But, as is evident, nothing seems to have been explained about the poetry of H.D., except perhaps the fact that it conveys something transcendental, in itself inexplicable. As a critical job this is obviously not enough.

Contemporary female writers seem to have a deeper insight into H.D.’s poetry of the period 1912-1925. They write in more concrete and less philosophical terms than their male counterparts and are attentive to actual details in the poems. They comment on the type of images employed, the use of colours and the intensity conveyed. I have selected relevant reviews of the period by Bryher, May Sinclair, Marianne Moore and Amy Lowell. It will also become apparent, and I would like to stress, how some of these writers use certain words that do not belong to the dehumanized context of Hulme’s or Pound’s Imagism, but to a Romantic humanist ideal.

Bryher wrote two reviews of Hymen. One of them, “Spear-Shaft and Cyclamen Flower” appeared in Poetry in March 1922, the other, titled “Thought and Vision” must have been written alongside with the other one since it examines the same aspects.<sup>14</sup> In both reviews Bryher sets off to dismiss some of the clichés and charges of which “H.D.’s earlier poetry” (and by extension Hymen) was being accused of. First, against the charge of escapism and the characterization of her poetry as Greek, Bryher writes that Hymen is as American as it can be Greek. More interestingly, she rejects criticism of this poetry being “cold and passionless”. Here is where Bryher makes her most important contribution to the understanding of H.D.’s early poetry. She stresses

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<sup>14</sup> Winifred Bryher, “Thought and Vision,” n.d. H.D. Papers, Box 34, Folder 902. Reviews, 1922. Beinecke Library, Yale University.



the emotional side of Hymen, against the charge of coldness, but also emphasizes the “balance of intellect and emotion”. In other words, she argues that emotion is enhanced in H.D.’s poems by the directing presence of the intellect. Intellect does not generate cold poetry but intensifies emotion: emotion not as “honey, not ‘old-desire—old passion’” but “the stern heat of steel, truth, the fact”. This argument can be seen in a double light. One, as the intensity brought in by a controlling technique, or, as a fusion of the insight of the intellect with emotion. Both interpretations apply, I think, to H.D.’s poetry, although the second is more in line with the terminology of H.D.’s poetics. Bryher marks a development in the poetry of this volume in relation to Sea Garden in precisely those terms: deeper “depth of thought and originality of vision”. Bryher does not review H.D. as an Imagist poet.

Unlike the previous writers, May Sinclair reviews H.D. as an Imagist poet. In “The Poems of H.D.” Sinclair writes: “She represents the movement at its perfection” and “remains the most significant of the Imagists” (Dial).<sup>15</sup> However, Sinclair restricts the Imagist label to Sea Garden and refers to the multiple ways in which H.D.’s Imagist poems bear a personal mark and escape the “formula” of Imagism. Along with her detailed revision of the movement, she takes her time to deal with other critical comments that have been attached to H.D.’s poems: lack of passion, obscurity, and prosaic diction, all of which she rejects. Sinclair’s contribution to the understanding of the poetry of the 1912-1925 period is double. First of all, Sinclair does not shrink from commenting on the emotion and passion of the poems. She coincides with Bryher in identifying the type of sensuality present in them as “lucid, clean and austere”(Dial), somehow more authentic, controlled, but for that, more intense, punctuated by elements carefully chosen and erotically charged. Her words do not apply only to the passion conveyed but also to the diction employed: not the old (Romantic) amorous string of verbal diction, worn out images and metaphors, but freshly coined unusual elements to convey passion anew, vibrant, living. Equally interesting is the assortment of features Sinclair applies to H.D.’s poems. She quotes Flint, who quotes Aldington, in describing H.D.’s poetry as “accurate mystery”, which she thinks is the best possible

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<sup>15</sup> Originally, “The Poems of H.D.” was published in the Dial 72 (Feb. 1922): [203]-207. A longer version of this review appeared years later in Fortnightly Review 121 (March 1927): 329-340. There is a clipping of the first review in H.D.’s Papers, Box 34, Folder 902. Beinecke Library, Yale University.

definition. Along with 'mystery', there is "beauty of restraint", "a sense of enchantment, of grave things not known", "immortality impending", "metaphysical passion", "austere ecstasy", and "divine quality", all of them related to a "sense of beauty", "fusion" and "unity". In this latest evaluation, Sinclair produces a similar criticism to that of Flint's or Fletcher's; a sort of veiled evaluation, positive, no doubt, but of such quality that leaves unexplained the reason why those terms are used in relation to the poetry. They give us a sense of the poetry but leave the poetry veiled. However, although I may object to such terms as strictly critical, they seem to be pointing in a direction worth pursuing. As I will be arguing later, the metaphysical terminology employed by those critics points to the Romantic notions of beauty and sublimity.

Marianne Moore is an attentive observer of the most concrete features of H.D.'s poetry.<sup>16</sup> It is precisely concreteness, not expressed as such, but as "sincerity", "violence of truth", or a clarity and transparency of images and language, that Moore praises. Such features are related to a style that may seem abrupt, and show "sharpness", "angles" and "firmness of intelligence". Ideas do not appear on their own but through a natural corresponding element. Moore notices that "Nature in its acute aspects is to her, a symbol of freedom" and marks the similitudes between Swinburne and H.D. in that respect. Moore also picks up H.D.'s use of colour in Hymen : H.D. manages to associate colours to ideas through specific objects. It is that exact correspondence of object and idea, which the poet manages to perform, that creates the effect of sincerity or "the chiselled ivory of speech". In addition, in her review of Collected Poems (1925)<sup>17</sup>, Moore notices H.D.'s attention to detail and the transcendence with which small things are invested. Thus, what is personal fuses with the cosmic, what pertains the poet affects also the reader. She finally sees H.D. as a poet with a poetry of her own:

On each page of original verse or translation, a personal spirit manifests itself. In the making of classic personages or situations, symbols of present ones; in the concept of colour and form, as in the rhetoric, we find, intensive, unmixed, and unimpeded, the white fire of the poet.

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<sup>16</sup> Marianne Moore, "Hymen," Broom 4 (January 1923): 133-135. Repr. The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore.

<sup>17</sup> Marianne Moore, "The Bright Immortal Olive," The Dial 79 (August 1925): 170-172. See also Complete Prose.

Marianne Moore's reviews of Hymen and Collected Poems offer one more example of critical approach which does not rely on the critical clichés attached to H.D.'s first poetic works: Imagism and Hellenism. Instead it provides a fresh view of the poems. It comments on the poems, not on labels. Also, out of her own condition as a female writer, writing in a male dominated world of letters, she is aware of the intersection of gender and poetics. She comments on the significance of H.D.'s poetry for other female writers and its challenge to masculine poetics: "In the case of H.D., we have the intellectual, social woman, non-public and 'feminine'" (*Hymen* 82).

The last piece of criticism by a contemporary woman writer I would like to introduce here is Amy Lowell's section on H.D. in Tendencies in Modern American Poetry. Written in 1917, it is one of the earliest and most ambitious analysis written on H.D. up to that date. Unfortunately, it is that very ambition which leads Lowell to introduce classifications, standardisation and general statements. Thus, she presents Imagism as the final product of an evolution which started in American poetry with the work of Robert Frost, Arlington and Carl Sandburg. After placing Imagism within a wider frame of poetic change, she is obliged to acknowledge the existence of the movement as such. She speaks of the Imagists as belonging to a "school" and comments on the tenets that underlie Imagist poetic practice. In other words, she presents Imagism in the guise that has reached us, as an unproblematic neatly defined poetic current. As a result, H.D. is introduced, too, as one of best representatives of the movement. In spite of that confinement, Lowell also writes very knowingly of H.D.'s poems (mainly Sea Garden). The first and major characteristic she marks is the poet's fascination and search for beauty. Lowell writes how H.D. rescues for the modern world "a beauty long departed" (257). She finds "beauty of cadence" disclosing regularity of intervals. She shows "how to this poet, beauty is a thing so sharp as to be painful, delight so poignant it can scarcely be borne" (257). She observes in the poems "extreme sensitiveness", "piercing appreciation of the beauty of nature", "minute and impressive observation". She finds the flower poems "extremely beautiful" (266), "unsentimentally strong" (268). She sees H.D. essentially as a lyric poet. She finally fights arguments about the cold feeling of this poetry with an interesting insight: "The feeling is there but the expression chastens it" (276). As an example, Lowell refers to "Circe" where passion and control merge: "She has overlaid

it with plates and plates of wrought gold, but still, in the final count, it is just the desire of a woman, a simple, human woman, for the man she loves" (278). It is such analysis of the poetry of H.D. that is valuable for us because, if it confines H.D. as an Imagist poet, it also liberates her from that tag by discovering features that belong exclusively to the poet and that present her work in a new light.

A survey of the reviews of contemporary writers on H.D.'s poems of the period 1912-1925 has shown how the poems convey a sense of transcendence which, being difficult to explain, has been wrapped up in Romantic metaphysical terminology, such as 'mystery' or 'beauty'. Such terms, I have argued, are not in themselves satisfactory since they do not explain why or how, but are nevertheless an indication of the presence in this poetry of feeling and emotion in a form never associated to Imagist poetry. Similarly, they also speak of characteristics that belong to the poems and which put H.D. beyond the Imagist label. In the next lines, I will show how the greatest blame for the dubbing of H.D. as an Imagist poet lies with a bulk of criticism that was not learned enough, open enough, attentive enough to H.D.'s use of images, detail, colours, eroticism and to her evolution.

Harold Monro's 1915 review of H.D.'s poems in The Egoist is among those first reviews that confirmed H.D.'s early poetry within the Imagist mould. Monro on H.D. is, on the other hand, a truly gender-biased commentary and not altogether a positive one. If there is disapproval in his review of Imagist poems, there is even more opposition to poems written by a woman. He fills his critique with sexist comments such as fragility, prettiness, and simplicity lacking the 'hardness' of true poetic creation, while he avoids any real explanation of H.D.'s poems. Petty poetry and exaggerated briefness is, nevertheless, the way Monro characterizes Imagism and he concludes, therefore, how H.D. is indeed "the truest 'Imagist' of the group". The 1916 review of Sea Garden (The Times Literary Supplement 5 Oct.1916) avoids, on the other hand, sexual prejudice through sheer ignorance about the identity of the writer. This review, which H.D. read<sup>18</sup>, assumes that H.D. is a male poet. Taking for granted that H.D. is an Imagist, this critic finds in H.D.'s poems the same faults currently ascribed to the Imagists in general: monotonous and arbitrary rhythms and obscurity.

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<sup>18</sup> See H.D.'s letter to Flint (October 8, 1916) in Cyrena Pondrom's "Selected letters from H.D. to F.S. Flint."

Writing from a symbolist understanding of poetry, this critic equally points at the failure to “harmonize into beauty” “tints and colours”, “forms, colour and sensuous impression”. But besides confirming H.D. in her Imagist role, and pointing at the mistakes that the Imagists are making in poetry, there is no further analysis of this poet’s poetry.

Between 1916 and 1924, when Heliadora was published, many other reviews were written in the line of those above. In 1924, Louis Untermeyer wrote an article called “The Perfect Imagist: Heliadora and other Poems”. Here Untermeyer set out to analyze the reiterative confirmation of H.D. as “the perfect Imagist” and pointed at the shortcomings and traps that critics had created for H.D.’s poetry. Untermeyer’s conclusions to this period of criticism of H.D.’s work can be summarized by what he himself calls “an error in emphasis”. Untermeyer looks beyond the Imagist label to reveal what has been lost through such appreciation. “Intensity”, he writes, is more visible, “more noticeable than [Heliadora’s] beauty of form”. He will also fight the charge of escapism, arguing that such intensity is ageless and, therefore, it not only belongs to the Greek world but also to modern times. Accordingly, he perceives evolution in H.D.’s poetry and bravely asserts that “Oread” “belongs to a poet rather than to a movement”. Untermeyer’s valuable criticism was unusual. A year later, a review was written in response to the publication of Collected Poems (1925) titled “H.D. as Leader of Imagists” (Boston Evening Transcript 29 May 1925), which went back on the old assumptions. This article shows how thirteen years after the publication of H.D.’s first poems she is still seen as “leader of the Imagists”, “the outstanding protagonist of that school”. Such evaluation is not necessarily a positive one. The critic of this review presents H.D.’s collection as having no intrinsic value outside “the group and the period”.

In 1928, Glenn Hughes devoted a chapter of his book Imagism and the Imagists to H.D. Strikingly understanding of the making of Imagism and offering innovative statements, such as the one at the head of this chapter, Hughes’ study contains contradictions of the type we find in Amy Lowell’s book. There is acknowledgement, on the one hand, of the difficulty to “determine whether or not a poet is an imagist” (viii) and he notices how H.D managed to achieve “poetical greatness” beyond the

confining credo of Imagism.<sup>19</sup> In Hughes' opinion, her "poetical greatness" resides in her ability to voice out "concentrated objectivity" (114), "pure ecstasy" (114) and to have brought back into poetry the Greek spirit (112). Hughes emphasizes through his chapter on H.D., the perfection of her art, the "vision of beauty that she brings to the twentieth century" (124). Part of that beauty is indebted to H.D.'s Hellenism, and it is precisely the ability of this poet to recreate that sensibility that is the focus of attention of this critic. But, on the other hand, Hughes seems to address his praise to an already made "H.D. Imagiste" and to accept the general public opinion that sees H.D. as the perfect Imagist poet. There are other aspects in H.D.'s poetry that Hughes finds at fault, not in relation to Imagism but in relation to Hellenism. Hughes identifies an interesting motion in the poems, a restlessness that does not quite fit into the ecstasy and restraint of Greek beauty. Equally, "the minuteness" with which "flowers, shrubs, and trees growing near the sea, as well as the rocky cliffs, the beach and the seaweed" are presented is "least peculiarly Greek"<sup>20</sup>, and, therefore, not to be commented on. It seems that although Hughes praises H.D.'s poetry for having gone beyond the limits of Imagism, he dismisses other aspects which fall outside his understanding of classicism, thus restricting her poetry to ready made labels. It is the surprising limitations of his own views that mislead Hughes into affirming that "the extraordinary thing about H.D.'s poetry is that it has altered so little in the last seventeen years" and that her development has only occurred in terms of "length" (111).

Moving further in time we can still find critics' loyalty to previous critical tradition in viewing H.D.'s poetry, even if by now it has undergone considerable evolution. "Last of the Imagists" (October 1944), for example, written upon publication of The Walls do not Fall, argues that these verses are unsuccessful because they fail to meet some of the tenets of Imagist poetry. The critic of this review ignores that H.D. has been writing and has published a few things since 1925, and attributes the failure of the work in hand to "want of practice". What reviews like this reveal is the absence of a real study of the trajectory of this poet. Robin Skelton in "Poetry Round Up" (1958) seems to bear in mind such opinions when he writes: "Few people know her long

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<sup>19</sup> Hughes quoting Professor Fairclough, 119.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes quoting Professor Fairclough, 118.

philosophical and mystical works".<sup>21</sup> Skelton approaches H.D.'s poetry not in the light of her past "Imagist" poems, but of the new poetry of Tribute to the Angels and The Walls do not Fall. It is in the view of those new works that the question of why H.D. has kept for years a reputation as an Imagist writer, rather than as the author of Trilogy, becomes more urgent.

Voices of dissent are scarce and isolated. When they appear they do so by bringing in a fresh stream of learning and understanding that contrasts with the parrot-like repetition of Imagist clichés. Such is the case of the review of Selected Poems by Robert Duncan (Jan. 1958). Duncan's review of this new collection picks up aspects of H.D.'s poetry that have only occasionally been touched upon by critics. He describes H.D.'s poetry as "ardent and clear", "sustaining passion", "calling up sensual immediacies". Although he sees Trilogy "as a major work of the Imagist genius" he can be pardoned for the extremely perceptive analysis of the other aspects of H.D.'s poems. Of the early poems, he marks the emotion, the strain. Duncan also acknowledges evolution in H.D.'s poetry: from an image of beauty to epiphany, from the beauty of a fruit tree to the vision brought by this new symbol: "from the image to the realm illustrated by divine passions". For Duncan, H.D. performed an evolution that preceded the later developments of Eliot, Pound and D.H. Lawrence, by joining in psychic realities the personal as well as the universal.

It is not an exaggeration to say that we have to wait until the 1980s to start seeing real critical evaluation of H.D.'s poetry. We are already familiar with the most recent events in critical studies concerning this poet since the publication of Collected Poems 1912-1944 (1983). My research has tried to provide, instead, the critical history that preceded the renewed interest in H.D.'s work. What we find in that long history is a perpetuation, through critical opinion, of Imagist clichés. Except for exceptions, the view of H.D. as the epitome of Imagism is hardly unchallenged. Study, research and understanding were accessories for which most critics did not have time. Above all, it was the strength of the myth of "H.D. Imagiste" that seemed to have more authority than the evidence of a newly published piece of poetry. In this discussion, designed to analyze that myth, and to determine whether there is any real base for it, I have tried to

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<sup>21</sup> There is a clipping of this review in H.D.'s Papers, Box 35, Folder 924. Beinecke Library, Yale University.

provide evidence, first of all, of H.D.'s key role within Imagism. Secondly, through a detailed analysis of critical evidence, I have attempted to show how 'Imagist' is a tag attached indiscriminately to H.D.'s poetry by critical tradition and critical inheritance. In the course of such investigation it has also become more evident how once H.D. was placed within those moulds, critics would not look beyond the principles of the Imagist credo to explain her later poetry. Finally, in view of this analysis, the question of whether H.D. was an Imagist poet during the official Imagist period (1913-1917) can only have a yes/no answer. We can consider her an Imagist poet only in the wider sense I described in the first part of this chapter. She was involved as an editor; she used Imagism, like all the other members, as a marketing label and, finally, she made it the site of a new poetic expression. Looking at her poetic practice, what we actually see is that, although her poetry was a model for the succeeding Imagist credo, H.D.'s poetry remains in retrospect the expression of a poet sharing with other poets poetic concerns and desire for a new diction, yet finding solutions in an entirely personal way.

## 2. H.D.'s Early Poetry.

The need to break away from the restrictions imposed by the Imagist label on H.D.'s poetry explains my determination to refer from now on to the Imagist period in H.D.'s poetry as simply her 'early poetry', or the 'poetry of 1912-1925'. My goal throughout this chapter has been to crack up that compact, neat critical entity called Imagism to expose the critical fallacies on which it has been built and, above all, to free the poetry it represents. In my opinion, it is only by breaking free from its Imagist past that H.D.'s early poetry can be subject to new readings and new interpretations.

H.D.'s early poetry should, more appropriately, be considered within the context of contemporary discussions on art, represented in the conflict between Romanticism and Classicism. In this light, we can establish a connection between the new poetry, and the old Romantic and Victorian diction. This background helps us to understand the way in which H.D. recreated poetic diction while being still indebted to Romantic ideas of individual freedom as well as Romantic aesthetic values. H.D. appears to have written alongside the lines of poetic innovation of the new classicism—Imagism—while still faithful in many ways to the immediate poetic past. Under the influence of



T.E. Hulme's Speculations, the new poetry must "break away from the humanist tradition", find a new sensibility, not built around bland vital forms but around the "hardness" and "objectivity" of things. Poetry will no longer be an expression of emotions "arranged around the word infinite" (Speculations 127), neither will it have an accompanying imprecise and suggestive style. H.D.'s early poetry can be said to share in the classicist vein in terms of precise diction and a relatively economic style, as well as presentation of things—an image, a manner, a mood, a thought, a memory—but to differ from Hulme's and Pound's classicist ideals in many other ways. Conveying, creating beauty, for instance, stops being the goal of Hulme's dehumanized non-vital poetry, yet there is nothing more permanent in H.D.'s poetry than her worship and fight for beauty. Equally, Pound's Imagist principles allowed freedom of subject provided that there was a "direct presentation of the thing". But in practice, what it came down to was an avoidance of metaphysical rapture, intense emotion and eroticism. Again, H.D. may present "things" in a rather direct way, applying constraint to her diction without for that matter eliminating a sense of transcendence from her poems, or intense feeling. In fact, what a more methodical choice of words and transparent images do in H.D.'s poetry is to intensify emotion, to magnify small objects or to throw into metaphysical dimension a fragment of a thought. It is the Romantic dimensions of her poetry—beauty, mystery and transcendence—that critics could still discover. It was precisely the presence of old Romantic aesthetic values in H.D.'s early poems that determined tolerance and praise of a female 'Imagist' poet, and which, in many ways, determined H.D.'s success and acceptance where other Imagist companions failed.

As I examined reviews of H.D.'s poetry, I singled out those views that described the poems in terms of "mystery", "beauty" and transcendence. I then pointed that these terms did not explain much about H.D.'s poetry, since they were used as having critical value in themselves and disconnected from a Romantic context. In that guise those terms veiled the poetry, rather than explain it, by appealing to words of such common use that they hardly retain any specific meaning. Those views did seem to point, anyway, in the direction of something rarely connected with this poetry: the Romantic notions of beauty and sublimity. Thus, those writers' opinion came to confirm my own reading experience of the poems written by H.D. between 1912-1925. I discovered

how physical beauty, intensity, ecstasy and unity seemed all to combine to provide what the Romantics called 'the sublime'.

In the following chapters of this thesis I will show how the Romantic aesthetic categories of beauty and sublimity shape H.D.'s poetic diction and determine the dynamics of her poems. This study will necessarily be accompanied by an analysis of the multiple ways in which the poet revises those categories to make them express a 'female sublime'. I will also show, through the analysis of poems from that period, how H.D. breaks the Romantic distinction between sublimity and beauty and the new terms in which she comes to understand and express both. This interpretation has in view, ultimately, to discover a continuation between H.D.'s modern poetic practice and her immediate literary precursors. In the following chapter in particular, I will lay down a history of sublimity, frame the limits of my research and name the main critical tools that will help me in this study, finally concluding with an initiatory study of sublimity in Sea Garden.

## Chapter II

### H.D. and the Sublime

The subject of this thesis demands, by the very complexity of the terms employed, a careful definition of what is meant by 'beauty' and 'the sublime', as well as a continuous delimitation of the boundaries within which the study of these terms will take place. In this chapter, I will focus on the theory of the sublime, drawing especially on the main debates brought about by philosophers like Burke and Kant. I will then examine the understanding of sublimity in poets like Shelley and Wordsworth and will conclude with an exposition of contemporary critical responses to the Romantic sublime. My historical account of the sublime will obviously take place within certain restrictions determined, first, by the length of this thesis and, secondly, by the need to keep the leading argument as clear as possible. After exposing the framework for this discussion, I will begin to identify the elements and mechanisms involved in the experience of sublimity in relation to H.D.'s first poetical work, Sea Garden. I have devoted a separate chapter to beauty and its relationship with the sublime, both within a historical context as well as within H.D.'s poetics.

#### 1. A History of the Sublime

The history of the sublime goes back to the treatise attributed to Longinus, On the Sublime, the first one we know explicitly on this subject, written sometime in the first or third century A.D. Longinus defines sublimity as a quality embedded in the text itself: "Sublimity is always an eminence and excellence in language", and also as an effect that springs from certain style of writing: "It is not to persuasion but to ecstasy that passages of extraordinary genius carry the hearer" (2).<sup>1</sup> Ecstasy is explained in the following manner: "the soul is raised by true sublimity, it gains a proud step upwards,

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<sup>1</sup> By opposing "persuasion" to "ecstasy", Longinus is challenging Aristotle and taking sides with Plato.

it is filled with joy and exultation” (11). Longinus investigates whether there is “an art of sublimity”, that is, technical rules that lead to the achievement of “eminence and excellence in language”, or whether sublimity is a matter of “genius”, an inbred quality in the writer. Taking Nature as a model, which is “a law to herself”, he discovers five sources or rules in writing that contribute to the achievement of the sublime (as both, “eminence” and “ecstasy”): greatness of conception, passion, skilful handling of figures, noble expression and noble composition (13). Of all these sources, Longinus gives special importance to “passion”, which results in “concentration” (23), and “intensity” (27). “Genuine passion” not only makes “words inspired”, but justifies and selects the proper and right amount of literary devices that will produce sublimity. It makes figures of speech pass unnoticed (41), and brings the listeners (or readers) into partnership with the speaker (71). There is then the sense that grandeur of diction, energy of speech and right handling of the subject and figures create an intensity that overwhelms the listeners—a passion transferred from speaker to listener. Longinus offers Sappho as prime example of sublime style.

Having said that, sublimity is for Longinus a matter that transcends style. He writes:

Nature...did then implant in our souls an invincible and eternal love of that which is great and, by our own standard, more divine. Therefore it is, that for the speculation and thought which are within the scope of human endeavour not all the universe together is sufficient, our conceptions often pass beyond the bound which limit it; and if man were to look upon life all round, and see how in all things the extraordinary, the great, the beautiful stand supreme, he will at once know for what ends we have been born. (65)

The sublime in Longinus is then related to a natural moral law implanted in our souls that moves us to love that which is greatest and “more divine”. It is difficult to ignore, lurking behind this natural model, the Platonic influence. The desire for transcendence within the human soul, the admiration for what is high and noble, the natural strife for perfection and betterment and the universal validity of these signs, all point to a Platonic understanding of sublimity. The leap upward experienced by the soul of the reader/listener in a moment of literary frenzy, has a Platonic counterpart in the contemplation of the world of the Ideas, the moment when the soul has access to the ideal world. Sublimity answers the natural tendency of the soul to search for, and identify with, that which brings it as close as possible to a transcendental ideal world. For Longinus, sublimity in style is correlative to spiritual transcendence.

Longinus' account of the sublime is at the roots of the emergence of the tradition of the sublime in Europe. Following Angela Leighton, the tradition seems to have started around 1674 when Boileau's French translation of Longinus' work appeared.<sup>2</sup> In the preface to his translation, Boileau argued that the Longinian sublime was not to be found in style or in language, but that it was a force badly contained by language; an effect of mystical, psychological quality. Boileau's translation and interpretation would set off the innumerable discussions on the nature of the sublime that would follow. Leighton argues, however, that the popularity of Longinus' work was "less due to the intrinsic value of the treatise itself than to a resurgent need on the part of the age which rediscovered it" (9). "The age", she writes, "finds in Longinus an aesthetic vocabulary to meet its own requirements" (9); in other words, the treatise provides the necessary language to articulate and express the anxieties brought about by the new scientific era. At the core of the rediscovery, success and growth of the sublime in the eighteenth century, there is a crucial need to find the appropriate rational terminology to account for the nature of God and make it acceptable to the scientific age. Longinus provided that language. Such is also the explanation offered by Ernest Tuveson (Leighton 10-11), a more realistic one to the emergence of the sublime than just the simple publication of Longinus' work. For Tuveson, Longinus' work acted as a catalyzer of an earlier tradition already palpable in some seventeenth century religious writings and even more evident in the work of the Cambridge Platonists and the writings of Thomas Burnet.

In Sacred Theory of the Earth (1690), Burnet addresses the connection between natural grandeur and divine presence, which will characterize later on the way in which the sublime is described and represented. Vastness in nature, according to Burnet, evokes the vastness of God. He writes that in contemplating natural vastness we "do naturally, upon such occasions, think of God and his greatness", then adds: "and whatsoever hath but the shadow and appearance of INFINITE, as all things have that are too big for our comprehension, they fill and over-bear the mind with their Excess, and cast it into a pleasing kind of stupor and admiration".<sup>3</sup> Here we find the seeds for

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<sup>2</sup> Angela Leighton, "The Sublime in the Eighteenth century", Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1-24.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Leighton, 11: Thomas Burnet, The Sacred Theory of the Earth, ed. Basil Willey (London: Centaur Press, 1965), 109-110.

the future characterization of the sublime: vastness, appearance of infinitude, defeat of the intellect before sensorial excess, and awe. These features are rooted in the direct connection between God's attributes and nature. Burnet's Sacred Theory, as Leighton reports, was known and admired by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

David Hume provides us with an insight into the understanding of the rebirth of the sublime by implying that, in Leighton's words, "the sublime rarely loses its allegiance to theology". It is such connection that turns the sublime into an "aesthetics of the limitless" and grandiose rather than of the small and perhaps commonplace. Behind the first features we discover the transcendental, God, but behind what is small and common, there is only a world made to human measure. The sublime is, therefore, at this stage, an aesthetic correlative of the experience of the divine and its manifestations. The equivalence between the natural and the divine, encapsulated in the sublime, will become commonplace in the eighteenth century.

At this point it would be useful to bring together the two traditions I have already mentioned in relation to the emergence of the sublime in Europe: on the one hand, the wider context concerned with the future of the divinity, which is now assimilated into Nature, and on the other, a specific work on sublimity, Longinus', which offers both the necessary language to articulate the above operation as well as a context of transcendence related to the natural. The term 'sublime', understood under any of those two rubrics, would soon undergo a serious development. Leighton informs us that by the time that Edmund Burke's highly influential work was published (1757), the term sublime had already shifted from designating an experience (recognition of God's presence in the grandeur of nature) to designate an object (nature, text), or objects, which are specifically responsible for that experience. The result would be, continues Leighton, an enormous amount of mid-eighteenth century literature that sought to classify natural landscapes according to some aesthetic formulae. Thus, magnificent sites would be classified under the sublime label (12). This shift from the personal experience of the sublime to an object, which now embodies sublimity, meant that the experience of sublimity could now be articulated in more definite terms and hence be opened to closer examination.

Edmund Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, would provide the fullest account of its time on the sublime.

According to James T. Boulton, Burke's achievement was to combine a range of qualities (infinity, vastness, terror, magnitude), which had previously received separate attention, within one single theory (xviii). Beauty will no longer be an independent aesthetic mode either, but is incorporated into the system and introduced in relation to sublimity. Burke's work is a major touchstone in the evolution of the sublime.

Burke defined the sublime object as "Whatever is fitted ... to excite ideas of pain, and danger ... whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror" (39). Burke specified that pain and danger in themselves are "incapable of giving any delight ... but at certain distances ... they may be, and they are delightful" (40). *Terror* comprises for Burke fear of injury, pain and ultimately death, but with the recession of anxiety, provided by safe distance from actual danger, the crisis resolves in "delight". Sublimity is, then, an effect provoked by an object that inspires both mixed feelings of terror and delight. Besides a precise definition of what a sublime object is and what its effects are, Burke also offered an explanation of the process:

"Terror is the ruling principle of the sublime" because "no passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear" (58, 57)

The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*... is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. (57)

The mind is so entirely filled with its object that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. (57)

In other words, sublimity, does not only consist in the experience of emotions such as fear and delight, which are, as it were, at the two ends of the experience, but it also entails a suspension of all intellectual operations—a state of "astonishment"—before the reality contemplated.

Besides defining sublimity, Burke's treatise is devoted to study the characteristics of sublime and beautiful objects. He divides the passions into two; those of "self-preservation" and those of "society". The former "are conversant about the preservation of the individual, turn chiefly on *pain* and *danger*, and they are the most powerful of all the passions" (38). The passions related to "society" are founded on love and "[their] object is beauty, which is a name I shall apply to all such qualities in things as induce in us a sense of affection and tenderness" (51). Burke insists that the features defining the beautiful and the sublime are of very different nature and "keep up

an eternal distinction between them” (124). He admits that qualities belonging to the beautiful and sublime may meet in the same object, but the effect produced will not be then perfect and intense (124).

For the sublime object Burke selects the following characteristics:

*Obscurity*: “To make any thing terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary” (58). Burke considers obscure anything that is confusing, that of which we cannot perceive its boundaries, ideas such as infinity and eternity. In poetry, darkness.

*Privation*: “All general privations are great, because they are all terrible: Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude and Silence” (71)

*Vastness*: “Greatness of dimension, is a powerful cause of the sublime” (72).

Considering extension in length, height or depth, Burke writes:

Of these the length strikes least; an hundred yards of even ground will never work such an effect as a tower an hundred yards high, or a rock or mountain of that altitude. I am apt to imagine likewise, that the height is less grand than depth ... (72)

*Infinity*: “Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime” (73)

*Magnificence*: “A great profusion of things which are splendid or valuable in themselves, is *magnificent*” (78).

Burke extends all those features not just to sight but to all the senses. He offers examples of sublimity in sound, smell, taste and touch. Another contribution of Burke to the aesthetics of the sublime is the connection he makes between sublimity and power: “I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power” (64). This link is established by the relation of power and terror. If the sublime object inspires terror and pain, Burke reasons, it is because it is “a power in some way superior”. In this respect (possibly having in mind the connection between Nature and God) Burke marks that the manifestations of the deity are accompanied by terror, amazement, awe and solemnity, since the divinity is the highest gradation of power.

Perhaps the main weakness of Burke’s treatise lies in the nature of the relationship he establishes between sublime objects and beautiful objects and their effects. Although I will deal more extensively with that relationship in Chapter V, I will advance that Burke does not give the same weight to the aesthetics of the sublime as to the aesthetics of the beautiful. Burke’s description of sublime objects is dependent on its opposition to the beautiful and vice versa. They constitute a binary relationship, occupying two extremes of experience. Such radical division shows in the features that Burke assigns to each realm. The beautiful is basically the extreme opposite of the



sublime: comparatively small, smooth and polished, clear, light and delicate. And yet, in spite of this binary distinction, the aesthetics of the beautiful is not equal to the aesthetics of the sublime. It becomes second in importance, is not given enough consideration (as if beauty was an easier phenomenon to explain than sublimity) and is defined only after the sublime objects. Boulton rightly marks in this respect: “He reserves to sublimity all that is awe-inspiring and powerful in its impact and by contrast reduces beauty to a weak and rather sentimentalized conception” (xxv). I would like to argue that Burke’s conception of both aesthetics is gender-biased. He assigns to sublime objects and their experience masculine attributes, whereas he identifies beauty and its experience to feminine qualities.

Burke’s account of beautiful and sublime objects relies heavily on sensible qualities. The emphasis is on the object, its characteristics and the effects that these have on the subject. In this respect, Burke is indebted to the empiricists. Throughout the process, the subject’s mind remains passive and does not intervene in the making of the experience. Burke only mentions that moment of powerlessness and suspension produced by the action of the sublime object on the subject. There is no subjective response to such moment. The new development of the theory of the sublime in the eighteenth century is marked precisely by a shift from the objective to the subjective—from the sublime object to the subjective experience of sublimity. It was Kant in his Critique of Judgement (1790) that introduced such a radical change in the conception of the sublime.

Kant was familiar with Burke’s work and it was in relation to it, and the empiricism it relied on, that Kant’s new theories were formulated. For Kant, the sublime belongs entirely to the mind not to objects outside. Compare Burke’s definition of the sublime and its effects with Kant’s:

Whatever is fitted ... to excite the ideas of pain, and danger ... whatever is in any sort terrible ... is a source of the sublime. (Burke)

Astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its emotions are suspended. (Burke)

Sublimity ... does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our own superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us (as exerting influence upon us). Everything that provokes this feeling in us, including the *might* of nature which challenges our strength, is then, though improperly, called sublime, and it is only under presupposition of this idea within us, and in relation to it that we are capable of attaining to the idea of sublimity. (Kant 114)

Kant's conception of the sublime is designed to save it from empiricism and the realm of the senses and imagination. The main limitation of Burke's system is its reliance on sensorial personal experience and, therefore, its lack of universal application. By locating sublimity in an operation of the mind, and specifically, of reason, Kant renders the dynamics of sublimity universal. He writes: "It is in human nature that its foundations are laid, and, in fact, in that which, at once with common understanding, we may expect every one to possess" (116). Both Burke and Kant agree that sublimity is related to some overwhelming reality that defeats our mind and suspends our intellectual functions—we are left before such reality in a state of astonishment. However, what has changed from one definition to the other is the emphasis from the object to the mind, and from a passive mind to an active one. For Burke, astonishment is the effect of the sublime object on the subject, a subject that remains passive in the experience. For Kant, astonishment is also part of the sublime experience but its resolution differs from Burke's. Kant explains sublimity as a process in which, initially, the mind feels helpless and overwhelmed by the magnitude of the object confronted, then, the mind succeeds to distance itself from the object and, as it does so, the mind recalls its own superiority, its potentiality to perceive the grandeur of nature and be independent of it, which is itself a sign of its own superiority. It is such recognition that provokes the delight in which astonishment and the initial feelings of inferiority resolve. So in other words, recognizing the grandeur of nature only makes the mind realize its superior power. This is for Kant, the true source of sublimity.

Kant introduces further revisions of the sublime in relation to Burke, and as he does so, a wider gap too between mind and nature, subject and object, imagination and reason, sublimity and beauty. As his major philosophical goal is to save the sublime (as well as the beautiful) from the realm of the senses, he establishes a complex system of divisions of the mind as well as of perception. Thus he distinguishes simple sensorial impressions ("Judgement of sense") from those perceptions that involve a "Judgement of reflection". Both the beautiful and the sublime presuppose a judgement of reflection (90). Judgments of reflection are universal since they involve operations of the mind, here unfolded into faculty of presentation (or imagination, which receives sensual impressions) and two other intellectual faculties: faculty of concepts, or understanding, and faculty of ideas, or reason. The beautiful involves the imagination as well as an

intellectual faculty, that of understanding. The sublime also involves participation of the imagination and the faculty of reason (104). Regarding sublimity, Kant discovers two modes of sublimity: the *mathematically sublime*, or sublime of magnitude, and the *dynamically sublime*, or sublime of power (94). Both types of sublimity act according to the same dynamics and engage the same faculties. What creates the difference in name is the object that originates these experiences, or rather, in Kantian diction, aesthetic judgements. The first is triggered off by the limitlessness or magnitude of the natural object. The second starts off as the result of confronting the overwhelming power (“might”) of nature.

In the mathematically sublime, the subject confronts a magnitude which initially defeats the ability of the imagination to represent or understand it (this moment creates a state of awe, astonishment and “displeasure”). However, after the initial baffling of the imagination a resolution takes place. Kant explains the process as follows: “Nothing can be given in nature, no matter how great we may judge it to be, which, regarded in some other relation, may not be degraded to the level of the infinitely little...” (97). This “other relation” Kant refers to is reason. Reason has the capacity to put to the greatness of nature, a bigger unit. The cosmos, for example, he writes, “represents all that is great in nature” yet, it “sinks into insignificance before ideas or reason” (105). At the moment when the imagination is defeated by a magnitude bigger than anything it can grasp, reason intervenes bringing in the idea of the “absolutely great”, of “totality” (97,98). This defeat of the sensorial natural object before the transcendence of reason is the origin of sublimity.

The source of sublimity, then, has to be found in reason and its ability to reach the notion of totality, of what is absolutely great. In more simple terms, it is possible to explain the sublime experience before a natural magnitude as the ability of the human mind to imagine, think, of infinitude, of something bigger and greater, that surpasses and transcends the physical world.

The dynamically sublime is not very different from the mathematically sublime. Kant defines it as “sublimity predicated of might” (113). Revising and making reference to Burke, Kant writes that there are objects that can be called sublime because they allow—by their own power and the fear that inspire in us—“to discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be

able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature” (111). The power of nature, therefore, turns into a test that makes us realize the superiority and autonomy of our mind over nature (111).

The final general definition given by Kant of the sublime thus follows: “The sublime is an object (of nature) the representation of which determines the mind to regard the elevation of nature beyond our reach as equivalent to a presentation of ideas” (119), whereby “presentation of ideas” stands for the ideas of totality and power brought in by reason.

The Kantian reduction of the sublime to the realm of subjectivity also resolves in a dichotomy between the sublime and the beautiful. Both are aesthetic judgments, that is to say, do not rely on sensorial experience exclusively, but involve also a function of the mind, are in this respect subjective. However, whereas the beautiful is a function of the imagination, involving sensual perception as well as intellectual function (understanding), thus tending a link between the subject and the object, the sublime breaks that link. It is triggered off by the sensible world but becomes detached from it at the point when the imagination cannot cope with the sensible experience and lets reason intervene: “For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground external to ourselves, but for the sublime one merely in ourselves and the attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature” (93).

We can conclude that in the Kantian system, Nature, and with it the world of the senses, only plays a secondary role in the experience of sublimity. The world of “man” is defined against the world of Nature, a universal mind is proclaimed, opposition between the senses and reason split human subjectivity and antagonism is declared between love of the human world and the transcendental. However, Kant’s notion of the sublime is not universal. Plato and Longinus, we have seen, offer a very different explanation. In Plato, reason, or the soul, is a vehicle to reach what lies beyond the natural and human world. The sensible world brings to the Platonic soul intuitions of the beyond. The same idea appears in Longinus. On the other hand, if we start thinking in terms of subject and object and the relation between the two in the experience of sublimity, the possibility of breaking down the unreconcilable Kantian gap subject-object can be contemplated, as well as the involvement of the senses. Within the

Romantic tradition, Wordsworth and Keats offer a different understanding of sublimity.

In his introduction to Burke's Enquiry, Boulton informs us that some of the Romantic poets were familiar with Burke's work but did not give it much credit. Blake, for example, wrote: "Obscurity is Neither the Source of the Sublime nor of any Thing Else" and for Coleridge, the Enquiry was "a poor thing" (Boulton xxxix). Wordsworth, however, not only knew Burke's theories, but was directly influenced by them. In an essay entitled "The Sublime and the Beautiful", Wordsworth follows some Burkean ideas and revises others. The essay reflects the general shift in philosophy and aesthetics from the object to the subject under the influence of Burke and Kant. Wordsworth occupies an intermediary position between the two philosophers, now combining ideas, now creating an ambiguity that characterizes his own understanding and contribution to theories of the sublime and the beautiful:

The main source of all the difficulties & errors which have attended these disquisitions is that the attention of those who have been engaged in them has been primarily & chiefly fixed upon external objects & their powers, qualities & properties & not upon the mind itself, and the laws by which it is acted upon. (357)

There is some sort of linguistic ambiguity in Wordsworth's exposition that seems to point at his position between Burke and Kant. "The laws by which it is acted upon", may suggest mental passivity and, consequently, empiricist conception, but the context makes clear the necessity of taking the workings of the mind into account in relation to the sublime and the beautiful. He adds: "To talk of an object as being sublime or beautiful in itself, without references to some subject by whom that sublimity or beauty is perceived, is absurd" (357). Already at the beginning of this section, Wordsworth has expressed his conviction of the "infinite importance ... that the forms of Nature should be accurately contemplated, & if described, described in a language that shall prove that we understand ... the laws under which it has been ordained that these objects should everlastingly affect the mind" (350). These laws are the "law of sublimity" and the "law of beauty". It is hence implied that those two laws act upon the mind and are responsible for the experience of beauty and sublimity. This is Wordsworth's particular way of saying that there are no sublime or beautiful objects *per se*, but only in relation to a mind that perceives them now as sublime, now as beautiful. Wordsworth's original thought comes in when he affirms that "the same

object may be sublime & beautiful" (349), but the Burkean distinction between both experiences is nevertheless kept: "They are not only different from, but opposite to, each other" (349). Wordsworth follows Burke when he associates beauty with "love and gentleness" and sublimity with "exaltation and awe". Yet, because those aesthetic experiences are dependent upon the mind, they can be alternatively experienced upon the same object: "the same object has power to affect him in various manners at different times" (357). The shift from the sublime to the beautiful is a characteristic trait in Wordsworth's thought and poetry. An illustration of this point can be found in "Home at Grasmere" (1.726-44) where the poet describes such transition. In this essay he re-states how as we advance in life, feelings of love and gentleness take the place of the exaltation and awe that once we may have experienced before the same object (349). However, although beauty can follow sublimity, no intersection is made between the two. Beauty cannot resolve in exaltation of sublime quality, with the same passion, the same longing, the same quest.

In this essay Wordsworth concentrates mainly on the "sensation of sublimity" (351). The whole "sensation" or experience depends upon the necessary coexistence of three other sensations (experienced as such by the subject but deriving from certain features of the object): "sense of individual form", "duration" and "sense of power". Wordsworth chooses the mountains of Windermere to illustrate sublimity. Sight is the sense that controls the whole experience. With reference to "individual form", the object that brings about the sublime sensation must be prominent. In relation to distance and sight, the object should not be too far away, so that it is not lost among other objects of the landscape, nor so close that it will not be perceived as a whole. The object, here the mountains, will not have any power to affect the mind either unless it is contemplated under a sense of "duration"—timelessness or "duration belonging to the Earth itself". Finally, an impression of power must be combined with the other two. Such impression will either elevate the mind, through "sympathy" (351), and "participation" (352), or subdue it through "dread and awe" (352). This sense of power is conveyed by the "individual form" of the object—the lines of the mountain:

These lines may either be abrupt and precipitous, by which danger & sudden change is expressed; or they may flow into each other like the waves of the sea, and, by involving in such image a feeling of self-propagation infinitely continuous ... these lines thus convey to the Mind sensations not less sublime than those which were excited by their opposites, the abrupt and the precipitous. (352)

In this description, Wordsworth echoes Burke in seeing abruptness as a source of the sublime but differs in including features which, according to Burke, belong to the beautiful. The rolling lines giving an impression of endless flowing can be a source of sublimity too. Wordsworth also associates “danger” and sudden change to power. In a previous version of this passage, Wordsworth had made the connection even more explicit:

And the power of these outlines convey the feelings of danger & sudden change or by dim analogies to active [power del.] force expressed by the ... parts of the human body such as the shoulders or head or neck. (352).

He completes the presentation of power deriving from the natural object by adding solemnity, magnificence and magnitude to the scene, which by then has become a sublime commonplace:

To compleat [sic] this sense of power expressed by these permanent objects, add the torrents which take their rise within its bosom, & roll foaming down its sides; the clouds which it attracts; the stature with which it appears to reach the sky; the storms with which it arms itself; the triumphant ostentation with which its snows defy the sun, & c. (352)

It should be noticed that Wordsworth, like Burke and Kant, sees power as a key element in the production of the sublime. “Power”, he explains, “awakes the sublime either when

[1] it rouses us to a sympathetic energy & calls upon the mind to grasp at something towards which it can make approaches but which it is incapable of attaining; or

[2] by producing a humiliation or prostration of the mind before some external agency which it presumes not to make an effort to participate, but is absorbed in the contemplation of the might in the external power ...

so that in both cases the head and front of the sensation is intense unity” (354)

By introducing two instances of sublimity, Wordsworth is again combining as well as revising the two philosophers. For Burke, only negative feelings, such as fear and awe are sources of the sublime. Such thought is present in the second instance offered by Wordsworth. Yet, for the poet, another mode of sublimity can also occur: that in which the mind feels no fear and, exalted, attempts to participate in the powerful magnitude without success. Here, by contrast, we can observe traces of the Kantian sublime. The Romantic poet, nevertheless, departs in a personal way from the two inherited conceptions by introducing a unique twist to the understanding of sublimity: power is a source of the sublime in so far as it is dreaded or participated but never

resisted. Opposition is a state which is irreconcilable with the “intense unity” that Wordsworth chooses as a mark of the sublime (356).

After considering how the external power places the mind into a sublime state, the poet examines the *end of the experience*, which so worried Kant. Wordsworth writes that the mind is “distinctly conscious of its own being & existence” after the sublime sensation recedes. This ability of the mind to go back to itself, is due to the fact that in the sublime “our physical nature has only to a certain degree been endangered, or that our moral Nature has not in the least degree been violated” (355). In other words, the mind retains its independence and autonomy throughout the process. So unlike Kant, the sublime is not defined in terms of opposition between the subjective and the objective (*negative sublime*) but in terms of union between the mind of the subject and an overwhelming natural power (*positive sublime*). The final part of the experience does not resolve either in a recognition of the superiority of the human mind over Nature but, rather, the Wordsworthian resolution shows that Nature and mind are mirrors of each other. The correspondence between mind and Nature is a characteristic that has been stressed in relation to some of Wordsworth’s major poems and is one of the central notions of his poetics (“Preface”). Such positive exposition of the sublime should not lead, however, into the conclusion that the individual mind or self gains nothing out of such experience. In “Tintern Abbey”, for example, the mind remains in touch with Nature through sensorial experience (“the mighty world / Of eye and ear”, l. 106-7). There is no strife, no fight of the mind over the power of the external object, but rather, an intense union. The negative sublime, here exemplified in the youthful experience of nature and characterized in terms of fearless challenge and passion, has given way to a more thoughtful and sympathetic relationship with Nature:

... And I have felt  
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused ...  
 A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things ... (l. 94-103 )

What the poet values and stresses in the poem is the peaceful ecstasy of immanence. Yet, as the mind beholds all the bounty of nature and becomes aware of the extension of the natural object it expands simultaneously. As Ende has marked, the power “beyond” becomes the power “within” as the Wordsworthian self “introjects” it in an



act of identification (129-130). Hence Keats's characterization of Wordsworth's sublime as "egotistical sublime". The 'I' standing on his own contemplates the magnitude and multiplicity of the natural landscape, feels one with it and part of it, and experiences a feeling of unity and joy that expands the self.

Keats's poetry offers a more extreme example of the collapse of the Kantian barrier between the subjective and the objective and the inclusion of the senses in the experience of sublimity. Critics have marked the progressive development in Keats's poetry from Wordsworth's positive sublime ("I Stood on Tip-toe") or Shelley's search for poetic identity ("Endymion") to the more ample and inclusive realm of beauty. Keats's world of beauty incorporates the sublime. The objects of beauty engage as much the mind as the senses (Keats has been praised for his sensuous expression), and the discourse of sublimity is changed into a new one in which the conflict between selfhood and union disappears. In the later Keats the grandeur of the sublime is not present, nor the concern for self-empowerment ("Ode to a Nightingale"). Transcendence is achieved at a different level: that of union and ecstasy when the self forgets its narcissistic needs and "gain[s] in awareness of other things and persons" (Gillham163). Keats is, among the Romantic poets, the one that stands closer to H.D.'s treatment of beauty and sublimity.

Going back to a more general discussion, the sublime also gave rise to a theory of creativity that became entangled with the experience itself (Leighton 9, 13). Observing the development of such theory of creativity can help to understand better the development of the sublime I have outlined thus far. Leighton writes how the link performed by the notion of the sublime between Nature and divinity resulted in Nature becoming the measure of artistic creativity. It will be hold that art gets better the closer it is to its natural model and especially if it represents "the landscapes of the sublime" (13). As a result, God appears as chief creator, the artist and the poet as imitators of God's sublime work. A turn, however, was about to happen parallel to the withdrawal of sublimity from the natural object to the subject's mind. As the sublime begins to shift gradually from one to the other, so does the notion of the artist change from simple imitator to creator. At the point when this happens it is not God who speaks behind the sublime landscape any longer, but the creative imagination of the artist or the poet which infuses its creation with sublimity. A distinction thus emerges between

the visible (rooted in the object) and the visionary (rooted in the subject), between a landscape seen and a metaphoric landscape imagined and invested with sublime characteristics. This is the prelude of Romantic poetic *vision*. If before art was based on a recognition of sublimity in the natural landscape, faithfully recorded by the powers of translation of the artist or poet, now sublimity is projected onto the poem or canvas by the powerful creative imagination of the artist. Leighton refers to this process as “the progressive internalisation of the eye in the eighteenth century sublime” (18). As recession into one’s own imagination demands a language or a medium that will translate the poet’s vision, those means begin to prove insufficient to contain and communicate the originality and power of inspiration. The poet may use his visionary powers to make the universe speak or to transform obscure sights into intuitions of the existence of the deity, but excessive aggrandizement of his vision may also result ultimately in absolute self-reliance, in the impossibility of seeing the presence of God behind the landscape of Nature or of his own imagination.

Can the notion of the sublime survive without the existence of a transcendental entity—Idea, God? And what happens when the poet cannot discover the divine presence? In the absence of the deity the whole structure of the sublime, as explained so far, crumbles. The sublime, which has flourished by virtue of its connection to the divinity, seems now pointless. And so does the role of the artist who cannot find an outside Power that will sustain and verify his experience. What is now the origin of his experience? What does his creativity stand on? For Angela Leighton, Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” exemplifies the conflict between the absence of a divinity and the poet’s need of it (48). How does Shelley, an atheist poet, deal with these questions?

“Mont Blanc” seems to have been written bearing in mind all those key questions regarding the nature of the sublime. The poem is a reflection about itself, about the mode it cultivates, about its origins and about the initial sublime experience that is transposed into the poem. Shelley begins to write in the tradition of the sublime, of the feelings it excites and the sensorial impressions that awake those feelings. But when he tries to go beyond the merely sensorial to find the eternal reality or Power that sustains it, that fills it with meaning and transcends it, he finds that it is only through the workings of his own imagination that he can find that transcendental power. In other words, that power only exists in relation to his imagination and without it the

landscape he confronts is silent and empty of any transcendental meaning. It only reflects back his own doubts and questions. So setting out to find an external power that will make sense of sublimity, the poet finds himself brought back to the power of his own mind and imagination. For Leighton, the conflict posed by the poem remains unresolved (62). I see it differently. There is an exploration between doubt and certainty, but in the final light of doubt the poet holds to the certainty, not of an existing Power out there, but the certainty of the power of his own imagination. Indeed the assertiveness of the final question, even if it seems to be desperate, ends up proclaiming the power of human imagination to comprehend what has been unfolding in the poem: "And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind's imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?". Power seems to shift from the landscape (the traditional holder of Power so far), to the poet, to the extent that the last one becomes the true protagonist because not only is he able to embrace and encompass the sublime landscape but to give voice and meaning to it. Thus we find that the sublime is now rooted in the mind or imagination. The experience of sublimity, nevertheless, remains intact despite its original premises. The transcendental entity may have disappeared from behind the landscape but the subject can still experience sublimity, not because he discovers a major Power, but because he can experience *transcendence* through a recognition of his own power. The outside object is just a means to his own realization. I would like to bring attention to the idea that even if this evolution of the sublime seems now a final conclusion, its origins are already present from the moment that the sublime becomes a matter of aesthetics. The classification of objects under the label of sublime or beautiful, according to certain features, already implied a dissociation between meaning (transcendental entity, deity) and attributes. When objects are considered sublime in themselves because of features that can inspire terror, awe and astonishment, as we saw in Burke, the link with the deity is lost.

## 2. Critical tools.

In this section, I will deal with those critical theories that consider the previous formulations of the sublime from a critical and literary point of view. I have found these theories highly operative when discussing how the sublime turns into a genre

used in literature and how to approach the analysis of sublimity in specific texts. Thomas Weiskel provides, for example, a structural approach to the Romantic sublime, whereas studies by Patricia Yaeger and Joanne Diehl offer readings of sublimity in relation to genre and the female poet.

In The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence, Thomas Weiskel sets off to discover the structure that underlies the “vast and eclectic theory and practice” of the Romantic sublime (5). Weiskel initiates his study in the belief that by finding the structure of sublimity, as cultivated by Romantic poets and eighteenth century theoreticians, he will also find the mechanisms that govern sublimity and the notion of transcendence. From Longinus’ definition of the sublime, he takes the notion of “*hypsos* or height” as a metaphor of the sublime. He equally finds a useful idea in the effect of *aggrandizement* that a text has on the listeners or readers, as a mark of the sublime (4). For an analytical study of the sublime, Weiskel looks for a definition that will provide “stable terms for recurring elements” (22) underlying a wide and varied description of sublimity. He finds this definition in Kant, whose theory of the sublime not only appears as culmination of eighteenth century theories but seems relevant to Romantic speculation regarding aesthetics and the relation between mind and nature. Weiskel slightly modifies Kant’s definition to give it a wider scope:

We call an object sublime if the attempt to represent it determines the mind to regard its inability to grasp wholly the object as a symbol of the mind to a transcendent order. (23)

To start with, Weiskel substitutes Kant’s object, nature, for any object, the only condition being that it cannot be grasped by the mind. Next, he unfolds the Kantian definition in three phases: balance, blockage and transcendence. Such unfolding introduces temporality or linearity in the experience of sublimity. Weiskel makes clear that such segmentation is artificial and introduced for purely operative reasons. In the first phase, the relation between the mind and the object is harmonious. This is the state of normal perception. There is no discrepancy between inner and outer world. In other words, balance prevails. In the second phase, the balanced relation between mind and object breaks. The overwhelming presence of the external object cancels the representational ability of the mind, which collapses, or blocks, in its own inability to grasp the object. The experience of saturation and inundation belongs to this stage as

well as feelings of fear and anxiety. As an image, writes Weiskel, it is the abyss, the falling down. In the third phase, or “reactive” phase, bliss follows those initial feelings of fear and anxiety. A compensation device lifts up the mind from the depths of perceptual excess by introducing a new relation between the mind and a transcendent order. The mind has been lifted by acquiring a sense of power or aggrandizement, a sense of fulfilment, either derived from the object or acquired through the inner realization of the power of the human mind (23).

This three folded model reveals two characteristics of sublimity: first of all, the sublime moment appears to be regulated by an economic principle; it consists in a redistribution of energy. Secondly, the sublime moment is dynamic since it involves movement of the mind. However, those stages occur in such a manner that they, in fact, appear to be almost simultaneous. Economy and dynamism are thus characteristics that Weiskel detects in the pattern of sublimity. Still searching for a more universal pattern of sublimity than Kant’s, Weiskel finds the mind-object terminology a bit vague and outdated. Thus he translates the sublime into semiotic terms. This means that instead of a relation between mind and object, we find a relation between a signifier (object) and a signified (mind). Such translation of sublimity into Semiotics offers interesting marks for the identification of sublimity in literary texts as well as a good set of metaphors that can be associated to different types of sublimity.

In general terms, the first phase can be said to consist in a chain of signifiers in syntagmatic progress associated to a chain of signifieds. In the second phase, that chain is disrupted as a consequence of an excess of either signifiers or signifieds. An excess on the part of the signifiers is what we identify with a text that goes on and on. Here we can say that the signifiers make no progress in terms of meaning, or that there is “underdetermination”. Repetition, for instance, can create this effect. Weiskel associates to this type of sublimity the image of *horizontality* or extension, adding: “Indeed, the wasteland motif of Romantic and modernist literature presents an abridgment of the sublime moment so that we are confined to the second phase and await futilely the restorative reaction which never comes, except ironically” (26). But sometimes resolution does come, breaking out the fixation, recovering the initial pace of discourse by going back into syntagmatic time. Weiskel also sees in silence, or the “attenuation of the signifier to the zero degree”, itself another form of excess, a source

of sublimity (27). Excess can also occur on the part of the signified too. In this case, words carry too much meaning, generate multiple suggestions. This is Eliot's criticism of Swinburne. It is also, according to Weiskel, Wordsworth's characteristic way of treating an element in the landscape, which suddenly becomes all significant. This type of sublimity also breaks time and is "an apocalyptic stage" (26). The image associated to it is that of *verticality*, a form of abyss, "death by plenitude" (27). The defeat of the mind is marked in this case by saturation, the absence of logic, the inability to find clear meaning. The resolution in such case would occur by spreading meaning over the discourse so that signifier and signified go back into balance. Harold Bloom calls this last phase "counter-sublime".

Weiskel identifies two forms of sublimity aided initially by the Kantian formulae, and then by some basics of semiotics: The *metaphorical sublime*, provoked by an excess of signifiers, so that the inability to find sense becomes overmeaningful (substitution of absence for presence) and the *metonymical sublime*, characterized by excess of meaning. The metaphorical sublime corresponds to the Kantian sublime. Weiskel refers to it as *negative sublime* (present in Shelley's and Byron's poems), by contrast with the metonymical or *positive sublime*, of which Wordsworth is an example. As we have already seen, the negative or Kantian sublime entails an opposition subject-object, whereas the positive sublime implies the equality between the mind and the object and emphasizes sublimity as union, rather than as opposition or superiority of one of the elements involved. Both forms of sublimity result in the expansion of the self, whether through incorporation of power or fulfilment of narcissistic needs. Later on in his research, Weiskel will widen the understanding of those two models of sublimity, structurally identical but differing in resolution, by discovering the psychological and psycho-sexual pattern underlying those models. I will reserve such extension of the study of the sublime for the fourth chapter, which, dealing with the relation of sublimity to power, requires the incorporation of a much more subtle and complex psychological explanation. In the coming discussion, I will refer to the Romantic sublime in its positive or negative form as the 'traditional' sublime.

Weiskel's translation of different modes of sublimity into Semiotics is quite useful in terms of identification. However, labelling can prove a tricky task in this field. That

seems to be the conclusion to be drawn after careful consideration of the classification above. While agreeing with Weiskel's description of *horizontal*ity, he seems to have made a mistake in relation to his own classification. What he describes as *vertical*ity is, in fact, the clearest example of *horizontal*ity as he himself has defined: profusion of meaning, a prolongation of the fall, "an abridgement of the sublime moment", "an apocalyptic stage", "stasis". This moment is by no means vertical, and corresponds to what he previously described as the second stage of the sublime process. This confusion becomes more apparent when extending his classifications. It seems to me that vertical and horizontal are areas of the same continuum. The "fall" as central image of the Romantic sublime is certainly vertical, but the moment of ecstasy it reaches belongs to the realm of *horizontal*ity. The fear experienced by the Romantic self lies precisely in fear of remaining permanently in that stage, and the uplifting accompanying sublimity is the result of the escape from the horizontal stage. Such form of sublimity, which Weiskel also describes as *negative*, can only be *vertical* not *horizontal*. This distinction, which may appear now as a useless scholarly exercise, will prove of great importance when analysing the presentation of sublimity in H.D. and relating sublimity to gender.

Overall, and in spite of certain contradictions and deficiencies, Weiskel's structure of the sublime appears as a useful method of detection of sublimity in literary texts as well as a useful method of analysis. Isolating a structure underlying different conceptions of sublimity will also allow us to talk in more precise terms about variation and deviation from this 'genre' whenever we find it. Even if this pattern may offer limitations due to its masculine bias and the historical accounts it is based on, it still provides a wide enough pattern to be used as a critical tool. In the course of this research that tool may prove insufficient, as the conception of sublimity I find in H.D.'s poems breaks that structure. However, it will still allow us to find those aspects that are new or different in her poetry as well as those others that may answer a tradition of the sublime.

Patricia Yaeger in "Toward a Female Sublime" approaches her investigation of the sublime taking Weiskel's studies on board and equally benefiting from some of his insights into the matter. However, what is new and original about Yaeger's ideas is the introduction of gender into the discussion of the sublime. In particular, she investigates

a whole series of questions that Weiskel, writing in the structural seventies, completely missed: Is there a female sublime? Have female poets dealt with this genre in the Romantic or modern period? And if so, how did they deal with it? Are there other models of sublimity that can be identified with a female writer? Yaeger's position is that the sublime is a genre that has "conventionally, been the domain of masculine writers and poets" (191). Indeed, Weiskel himself does not deal with any female poets or writers in his study of Romantic sublimity, and all the examples from which he draws his theory are male philosophers and poets. Thus Yaeger concludes that "the Romantic sublime is a genre that is, historically and psychologically, a masculine mode of writing and relationship" (192). Yaeger focuses on the negative sublime for her depiction of the Romantic masculine sublime, taking Shelley's "Mont Blanc" as an example. She does, however, make an exception with Wordsworth, although she recognizes finally the hidden narcissism behind his poems. Thinking in this key, Yaeger asks whether it is possible to re-invent the sublime, not as a genre that eventually denies the object to assert the subject, but as a genre that dramatizes the inclusion of the 'other'. She finds those differences in the multiple ways in which some women writers re-write sublimity. The strategies that defy the negative sublime, as identified by Yaeger, are: "failed sublime", "sovereign sublime" and "feminine, pre-oedipal sublime", all having in common either a refusal to incorporate the other or an absence of fear and anxiety. In my analysis of H.D.'s poems, I will test these ideas against the poems themselves and will use them in the search for alternative forms of sublimity in H.D.

In the previous account of the history of the sublime, we saw how the displacement of power from the outside world to the subject, and the progressive incorporation of the sublime into the poet's creative imagination is the necessary step for the constitution of the poet as visionary and prophet, with or without deity. Joanne Diehl in Women Poets and the American Sublime shows the extent to which such shift has hardened up in writers like Emerson and Whitman. Her approach, like that of Yaeger's, is from the consideration that gender is a crucial element at work in the presentation of sublimity and the way writers write about it. Emerson and Whitman, for example, set the model of the sublime in the American literary tradition in terms of creativity. Their notion about the role of the poet and his access to the universe of



nature is deeply gendered as they see “the poet as the central man” and “their vision of the poetic sublime as a male-identified experience” (xi). Imaginative autonomy, that is, imagination endowed with creative sublime power, belongs exclusively to the male poet. An example will give a clear idea of what is meant. In 1837, in “The Poet”, Emerson wrote about the power that the new man in the new land could achieve:

It is a secret which every intellectual man quickly learns, that beyond the energy of his possessed and conscious intellect he is capable of a new energy (as of an intellect doubled on itself), by abandonment to the nature of things; that besides his privacy of power as an individual man, there is a great public power on which he can draw, by unlocking at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him; then he is caught up into the life of the Universe, his speech is thunder, his thought is law, and his words are universally intelligible as the plants and animals.

Emerson lays down in this passage a set of a-priori conditions necessary for the achievement and communication of poetic vision. Sexual identity seems to be the first condition and ground for the others. The sublime or visionary in creativity is shaped as an experience to which only male writers have access. Secondly, Emerson writes about the “intellectual man”, one who has had access to education and the literary tradition. He is also the “individual man”, one with social autonomy, yet somehow different from the social group. Having covered these premises, Emerson describes the process of achieving vision as an accumulation of power in the person of the writer. The writer’s power increases by incorporating the outside world, both natural and social, into his creative mind. Emerson employs a metaphor of sublimity to express the aggrandizement of the writer’s power: there is the letting go of the conscious self, at the expense of danger, and possession by a natural cosmic force that the poet appropriates as he gains vision in speech and thought. After the initial fusion with the world, the intellectual man assumes its authority. As Diehl has noticed, Emerson’s way of accessing poetic vision is characterized by “dramatic inclusiveness”. In such cases, the poetics of the sublime and its practice are related to an influx of power. As the imagination of the poet becomes more powerful, so does his poetic self become more confident. In this sense the Romantic sublime appears as the manifestation of a strong self.

Diehl’s focus on the sublime, it should be noticed, stresses the flow of power from the object to the poet. Diehl rightly brings up the relation of gender to sublimity and, similarly, a case for the examination of the type of *self* that the Romantic sublime requires. Like Yaeger, Diehl raises the question of how can American women poets

use a genre and a notion of poetics that have been exclusively identified with a male experience. As it stands, that version of the sublime offers problems to the female poet who, for a start, must possess a strong self able to survive the experience of the sublime and the confrontation of power that it involves. But, how can such encounter take place if the woman writer lacks the power of her own poetic authority? When has any female poet's speech been "thunder", her thought "law", and "[her] words universally intelligible as the plants and animals"? How can she use a model imbued in masculine poetics for herself? The question is whether poets can "identify an alternative poetics, an American counter-sublime" (25) defined in the light of female identity (xi).

Diehl finds an example of American *counter-sublime* in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Dickinson breaks away from the identification of the poet as the central man. She erects herself the centre of her own poetry and self-made world at the same time that sees the male (lover or stranger) and the masculine poetic tradition as a threat to her poetic authority (xii). According to Diehl, Dickinson's alternative version of the sublime resembles the wrestling for power that can be found in Emerson himself. However, the difference lies in the dramatization of that fight. While for Emerson, the outside world is a source of power that increases the poet's own, for Dickinson it is only a threat to her vulnerable self. Dickinson's power comes instead from her inner resources, from her own self. The solipsism of her poetry is her own defence against the outside world. She writes, as it were, in a state of siege, barricading against external power, which she identifies with masculine authority. As a result, Dickinson's poetics may appear as aggressive as Emerson's, but the difference does not just lay in a reversal of roles. Here, the female poet remains faithful to her poetic drive while her vulnerability as a female writer demands a continuous struggle with the outside world. Dickinson's poetics suggest, therefore, a counter-sublime, an inverse movement to the one offered by Emerson and Whitman, formulated right from the centre of female experience.

Diehl's interesting reading of the American sublime and her inquiries about the possibility of a female sublime or counter-sublime add a new perspective to this subject. My investigation into H.D.'s early poetry will necessarily need to test such

considerations and add, if possible, a new light to the relationship between sublimity and the female poet.

### 3. Sublimity in Sea Garden

In my previous chapter, I anticipated the presence of sublime qualities in H.D.'s early poetry. I argued that critics' observations about "mystery", "beauty", "intensity", "emotion", "passion", "ecstasy" and "unity", indicated, in fact, characteristics pointing in the direction of sublimity. I also marked how H.D. invented for herself a new poetic diction that broke up with the diction and techniques of Romantic poetry, while still maintaining elements that belonged to the Romantic discourse. These elements, disguised and intensified by H.D.'s specific technique, were the enemies of 'classicism'—as represented by T.E. Hulme, Pound and Eliot. In their view, eroticism, sexual undertones, and metaphysics lead into an unnecessary multiplication and dissolution of meaning: poetry in its most self-indulgent and unhealthy state. The term 'Romantic', as employed by the male Modernists, included Romanticism as well as Victorian Decadence. Cassandra Laity in H.D. and the Victorian *Fin de Siècle* has shown the interaction of gender and poetics within the context of Modernism and its relation to Romanticism. H.D.'s cult of beauty and expression of sublimity would set her apart from the male Modernists. For this reason, it is important to show how indeed those two Romantic categories are present in her poetry.

There are, nevertheless, problems associated to my proposition: sublimity in H.D.'s poetry. The first question we have to ask is: what does it mean for a woman poet to attempt the sublime? The answer has to be found in the intersection of gender and poetic creativity. We need to consider that for a long time, women's poetry, including H.D.'s, received an "ad feminam criticism" (Elaine Showalter). Virginia Woolf, in A Room of One's Own (101,116), already pointed at the difficult relationship of female writers and poetry, especially lyric poetry, which was not only considered to be the highest mode of writing, but also the exclusive realm of male writers. She found that, in the nineteenth century, and even in her own time, female writers were accepted as writers of novels, but they encountered a great deal of antagonism if they tried to write poetry. Gilbert and Gubar, in Shakespeare's Sisters,

explain the situation described by Woolf as a result of the masculine belief that “woman poet is a contradiction in terms” and that “the very nature of lyric poetry is inherently incompatible with the nature or essence of femaleness” (xvii). They continue arguing that lyric poetry “has been historically a holy vocation, product of mysterious inspiration” and that “before the nineteenth century the poet had a nearly priestly role” which he fully achieved “after Romantic thinkers had appropriated the vocabulary of theology for the realm of aesthetics” (xxi). Thus, the idea of the poet as a visionary, influxed with the power of words, places him in a position of authority which is dangerous for a woman to have. Therefore, the possibility of a female poet being able to master and conjure the power of poetic creativity, constitutes an apocalyptic vision for male writers and critics. She is experienced as a threatening presence to their own creativity. Moreover, there is a feeling of displacement, as male writers have to share the literary scene with women.

The same prejudices that accompany the image of the female lyricist appear if she tries to appropriate the sublime mode for her own needs. The sublime has been, as Yaeger writes, a mode or genre which “has traditionally been the domain of masculine writers and poets” (191). H.D.’s use of the sublime would mean at least breaking the literary masculine tradition and reclaiming female visionary/creative power from the muse back to the woman poet. Thus the possibility of talking of H.D. in relation to the tradition of the sublime immediately introduces difficult questions: What is the relationship of a female poet to a genre which belongs to the realm of male poetry? How does she use it? On which conditions does H.D. inherit the sublime model? Does she use specific strategies for achieving a reinvention of the sublime? Does she duplicate the claims of the masculine sublime, i.e. empowerment? and finally, Is the sublime an “outmoded genre that has little relevance for modernist poetics?” (Yaeger 196) .

These are some of the questions I will be answering in this and the next chapters. For the time being, I will begin this study on H.D.’s presentation of sublimity with poems from Sea Garden mainly. Some of the poems have been chosen because they show a clear sublime structure or specific ways of dealing with sublimity. Also, I have chosen poems selected by Eileen Gregory in “Rose Cut in Rock”, so that my observations on the sublime can be read parallel to her analysis of this collection. A

close textual analysis seems necessary to show that sublimity does exist in these poems and to give meaning to future generalizations on this matter. After a brief introduction to the volume, I will consider the following poems: from the sea flower poems, "Sea Rose" and "Sea Lily"; from those poems dealing with the central image of a garden, "Sheltered Garden", "Garden"; from those poems which deal with the figure of a god or goddess, "The Shrine" and "Cliff Temple"; and finally two poems from "The God" (1913-1917), reviewed before the publication of Sea Garden: "The Pool" and "Oread".

Throughout the Sea Garden poems (1916), there is a complete lack of characterization. We move in a world inhabited by objects, by natural primal forces, and yet, for poems which are so "dehumanized" we get deep human responses. A disembodied voice runs through them, a speaker whom we do not see but whom we hear. It is not a speaker *in* the poems, but the speaker *of* the poems. Sometimes it is the voice of a woman, other times it is an anonymous voice or the collective voice of a chorus. This voice calls ("Hermes, Hermes / the great sea foamed", "Hermes of the Ways"), commands ("Whirl up, sea", "Oread"), implores ("Spare us from loveliness", "Orchard"), desires ("O to blot out this garden / to forget", "Sheltered Garden"), hails ("You are useless, / O grave, O beautiful", "The Shrine"), or prays ("For you will come, / you will come / you will answer our taut hearts", "Sea Gods"). It is this dramatic voice that confers sincerity to the poems: "Respect for the essence of the thing makes expression simple".<sup>4</sup> The printed letter is not in this case the conductor of the poems, but the spoken voice, whose presence justifies its speech beyond argument and question. H.D. brings back the authority of the spoken word, and with it, like in ancient dramas or epic poems, the primal connection between word and object. The sort of world that emerges in the Sea Garden poems is, accordingly, an elemental natural world dominated by the elements with which the speaker blends. The voice might wish or desire, pray or implore, but it remains close to that world and follows its rhythm.

There are some constant qualities about the voice of the poems—its desire for consummation and dissolution ("The Helmsman", "Oread"), when it is an active part; its celebration of the disruptive and destructive power of the natural elements, when it is a witness ("The Shrine"); or its reverence for the sacred and spiritual ("Orchard").

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<sup>4</sup> Marianne Moore, "Hymen", The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore, 79.

There is, on the other hand, the desire of this voice to run away from the sheltered, quiet, safe realm of orchards and flowers and fuse with the vital and dangerous. It would rather get lost in the drift of the sea and rocks, or on the crossways of sea and land than remain in the sheltered quietness of a garden. The drive for the experience of sea and salt, with its attending meanings of pain and wisdom (Gregory) is far too alluring. The voice is, most times rebellious, moved by an escapist desire—physical, sexual and spiritual. Hence the urgent tone, the quasi-fatalistic errands, the loneliness and fear. In this sense, the poems in Sea Garden appear as sublimation of inner desires and anxieties. Objects recall, awaken memories, bring up echoes. Primal objects perform such operation: sea, wind, salt, cliffs, boughs, trees, grass tangles, wood, frost, etc. The image “cover us with your pools of fir” does not need to be decoded by the mind: object/desire/ anxiety are one and the same. In their simplicity, objects propose an unconscious riddle to the mind:

The boughs of the trees  
are twisted  
by many bafflings;  
twisted are  
the small-leafed boughs

But the riddle is instantly answered with psychological resonance. As Marianne Moore put it, there is a mind behind the poems that “find[s] its counterpart in the elements” (“Hymen” 80).

In her recently published work, Classic Lines, Eileen Gregory goes back to the voices of Sea Garden, giving special attention to the calling voice, or apostrophe. Gregory notices that in this volume, there is an outstanding predominance of poems addressing directly natural objects or a “you”, a present or absent god or lover (134). Such direct address to a second other marks the presence of the poetic trope known as apostrophe. As this rhetorical device is characteristic of lyric poetry, Gregory sees its presence in H.D.’s early poetry as proof of lyric status. The use of the apostrophe in H.D.’s early poetry would also be part of the poet’s Hellenic project. Thus Gregory traces the influence of Sappho’s erotic fragments, the Greek Anthology and Euripides’ choruses in H.D.’s address to an imagined other or god (136). My interest on Gregory’s observations on the apostrophe has to do not with the lyric status of H.D.’s poetry, but with the role and presentation of sublimity in her early poems. Gregory subscribes to Jonathan Culler’s exploration of the function of the apostrophe: that the

apostrophe does not just reflect an intensity of emotion but contributes to the constitution of the poetic voice in an oblique manner. It “emphasizes that voice calls in order to be calling, to dramatize its calling, to summon images of its power so as to establish its identity as poetical and prophetic voice” (Culler 142). Hence Culler’s depiction of the apostrophe as a pretentious and embarrassing trope (137). This, indeed, can be said of the Romantic apostrophe, in which the invocation to the supreme other gives way to a desire for poetic power. “Ode to the West Wind”, for example, begins as a chant and prayer to the mighty entity, singing the greatness and power of the natural element:

... Thou  
 For whose path the Atlantic’s level powers  
  
 Clear themselves into chasms, while far below  
 The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
 The sapless foliage of the ocean, know  
  
 Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,  
 And tremble and despoil themselves : O hear! (l.36-42)

The recognition of the West Wind’s power is followed by a request for help. The tone of awe and reverence increasingly dilutes into one of urgency as the poet starts to look for identification. The poet is also “tameless, swift and proud” and the implication is that he is asking for help from an equal: “Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud” (l.53). As the need for power increases, so does his call become more intense, now reclaiming, demanding power: “Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one” (l.61-62). There is a desire for inclusiveness, prayer for aggrandizement, for powerful illumination: “Be through my lips to unawakened Earth / The trumpet of a prophecy!” (68-69) that ends with an inclusiveness similar to that of Emerson: “by the incantation of this verse, / Scatter ... my words among mankind!” (65-67). So we see that the Ode as an apostrophic poem is just a means for the poet to summon his own poetic power. It appears finally not as a prayer or song but as incantation or spell that has in reality little to do with the West Wind and a lot to do with the poet’s need for poetic power.

The use of the apostrophe, according to Gregory, would also refer H.D. to a poetic tradition, namely that of sublime poetry. In Culler’s words “The *O* of apostrophe refers to other apostrophes and thus to the lineage and conventions of sublime poetry” (143). In the following discussion of specific poems from Sea Garden

we will be able to test how far does H.D. follow the tradition of the Romantic sublime and with it, the claims of the Romantic apostrophe.

The sea flower poems, among them, "Sea Rose" (CP 5) and "Sea Lily" (CP 14), are good examples of the use of the apostrophe. There is a direct address to two small natural objects of which some qualities are not just predicated but intensified through exaltation. However, the constitution of the poetic voice through the exaltation of second elements is to be questioned. Both poems break the Imagist economy principle that established: "To use absolutely no word which does not contribute to the presentation". The images are clean-cut, yet repetitive. It is obvious H.D. is not after economy but after exaltation, a first proof, perhaps, of the Imagist myth in relation to her early poetry. In "Sea Rose" she creates a layer of similar images which saturate both the text and the reader. The saturation of signifiers finally collides with an explicit movement upward. It is what Weiskel calls a metaphorical sublime. The poem itself pulls us out of the overwhelming presence of the object after a continuous crescendo with a final suspension added by the last stanza: "Can the spice-rose / drip such acrid fragrance / hardened in a leaf?". Yet it should be noticed that the distance between speaker and object is minimal, that the poem seems to act as a close-up and that the voice acts as vehicle of the object rather than the other way round. The poem reveals nothing about the speaker except a veiled identification with the sea-rose. As a result, the object of the poem becomes also the actual subject of the poem and the poetic voice is hardly felt or present. The Romantic use of the apostrophe is certainly changed and the sense of sublimity, structurally achieved, brings in no expansion to a self which does not exist in the poem.

In "Sea Lily", H.D. manages to modify another crucial feature of the traditional sublime by incorporating to this mode the aesthetics of the beautiful. According to Burke and Kant and the practice of Shelley and Wordsworth, the aesthetics of the beautiful and of the sublime are radically different. In this poem, however, the objective correlative fuses together the aesthetics of the small and beautiful and of the grand and sublime. The sea-lily is far from being the powerful entity of the Romantic sublime. If it is exalted it is precisely for its opposite characteristics, for its deprivation and smallness, for its vulnerability before the natural elements. The "doubly rich", and even more beautiful for being torn and shattered by the wind, sea lily can be read in two



ways. As a limited object, it can be comprehended and represented by the imagination, but, in so far as it acts also as a vehicle of meaning, that is, a window toward limitless psychological associations, the sea lily acquires sublime resonance. Like in "Sea Rose" there is a crescendo, a linguistic blockage, and an actual moment of flight or exaltation ("Yet though the whole wind / slash at your bark, / you are lifted up"). By opposition to "Sea Rose", here a potential threat shadows the triumphant achievement: "though it hiss / to cover you with froth", the shadow of what Patricia Yaeger calls *failed sublime*.

"The Shrine" (CP 7-10) revises the most crucial characteristic of the traditional Romantic sublime. Out of the sublime experience, the collective "we" receives wisdom, which does not bring aggrandizement, but understanding—a reconciliation with the superhuman which still remains above, but is no longer threatening.

For Eileen Gregory, the poem "imitates a rite of passage into the sacred place of the goddess" ("Rose" 143). The goddess is "She [who] watches over the sea". However, judging from the attributes given to the goddess, and more importantly, from a couple of Greek epigrams that resemble this poem in subject matter, we can identify the goddess as Aphrodite.<sup>5</sup> In H.D.'s poem, the goddess has power over the elements, which appear as natural manifestations of herself. Outside voices portray the goddess as destructive and engulfing. However, it seems that it is the wrong approach to the goddess, the lack of wisdom, that destroys the ships. Those who approach her without fear and cross the threshold are allowed to contemplate the goddess as she really is. The final revelation is a discovery of difference.

"The Shrine" follows a sublime pattern and dramatizes a sublime experience. Here, even the structure in four sections segments the sublime experience. Section one precedes the approach to the shrine and the goddess, who is addressed from a safe distance. It corresponds to the first phase of the sublime moment, that in which there is still balance. The goddess is regarded as both an attractive and fierce power, causing

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<sup>5</sup> See Mackail's Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology (1911), 211. In this selection there are two epigrams titled "The Shrine by the Sea". The first one is by Mnasalcas, the second one by Anyte:

"Let us stand by the low shore of the spray-scattering deep, looking on the precinct of Cypris of the Sea, and the fountain overshadowed with poplars, from which the shrill kingfishers sip their draught".

"This is the Cyprian's ground, since it was her pleasure ever to look from land on the shining sea, that she may give fulfilment of their voyage to sailors; and around the deep trembles, gazing on her bright image".

awe and fear, a sort of Medusa: “are you full and sweet, / tempting the quiet / to depart in their trading ships?”, “Nay, you are great, fierce, evil”. The traditional features attached to the sublime object are all present. She is not only an unattainable magnitude whose limitless power cannot be comprehended—although its effects are perceptible—but it is also that limitlessness that inspires pleasure and repulsion. The inability of the human mind to grasp this transcendent object is reflected in the series of questions opening the poem. In this case, the mind, or imagination, debates between the attractiveness and the monstrosity of this natural deity: “Are your rocks shelter for ships— / have you sent galleys from your beach, / are you graded—a safe crescent— ... ?”. Dashes overrun the mark. They seem to stand for the silence kept by the goddess:

But you—you are unsheltered,  
cut with the weight of wind—  
you shudder when it strikes,  
then lift, swelled with the blast—  
you sink as the tide sinks,  
you shrill under hail, and sound  
thunder when thunder sounds.

(notice alliteration and its particular effect to convey the sense of cataclysmic force)

Even the silence from the deity seems to accentuate the chasm that separates the two minds, the supernatural and the human. As Eileen Gregory puts it, “the goddess does not answer profane questions” (“Rose” 143); the assertiveness of the questioning mind does not seem to be the right vehicle to approach the goddess.

The second section initiates the actual approaching to the shrine, the voyage toward the engulfing overwhelming goddess. There seems to be an anticipation of the real nature of the goddess. For Eileen Gregory, the goddess embodies sensual and spiritual ecstasy. She is an exponent of the Sea Garden experience, where love is mixed with bitterness and pain (Gregory): “the salt stretch of your beach”.

Part III corresponds to the second phase of the sublime structure or blockage, as identified by Weiskel. The actual confrontation with the natural realm of the divinity takes place. The boat seems to enter into another dimension that tears the mind apart—the unattainability of an immense magnitude is in full blast here. The mind loses ground and falls into the abyss:

... terror has caught us now, ...

Flame passes under us  
and sparks that unknot the flesh,  
sorrow, splitting bone from bone,

splendour athwart our eyes  
and rifts in the splendour,  
sparks and scattered light.

Rhythm in this stanza quickens and with it, a saturation of both signifiers and signifieds occurs. The metaphor of falling, which characterizes the Romantic sublime, is well reproduced here. The fall is detained in the next stanza by the writer herself, or the speaker escaping “death by plenitude”. Discourse is brought back into time by reordering the grammatical sequence and bringing it to its normal pace, spreading meaning: “Many warned of this, / men said: / there are wrecks on the fore-beach, / wind will beat your ship, / there is no shelter in that headland ...”

However, although the linguistic sublime is over, through the recovery of the initial balance, the sublime experience is not resolved until the next section. The resolution of this third phase of the sublime takes place conventionally through appropriation, so that the object no longer has autonomy of existence but is incorporated to the newly aggrandized self. H.D., however, breaks up here with the Romantic tradition she has so far followed, to construct her own version of the sublime experience: the natural object survives the confrontation with the human mind. In fact, it retains its superiority and prevails over the collective chorus. Instead of opposition, there is union. The use of the apostrophe “But hail /... we sing to you” is the clearest mark of acknowledgement and respect for the divinity. The passage seems to take place at another level of experience—that of spiritual discovery matched by physical reconciliation—now a reaffirmation of the bodily and spiritual ecstasy anticipated in section II. Aphrodite reveals herself to those who have dared to fight fear and approach her. Unlike the fearful picture that was advanced before the journey, the goddess appears as a protective mother giving warmth and kindness to those who have landed on the shore:

your eyes have pardoned our faults,  
your hands have touched us—  
you have leaned forward a little  
and the waves can never thrust us back  
from the splendour of your ragged coast.

The reconciliation with the maternal takes place and the Romantic quest is reversed into a *pre-oedipal* journey. It is the “you” in the poem rather than the “we”

that prevails. "The Shrine" thus offers a radical revision of the traditional Romantic sublime in the sense anticipated by Patricia Yaeger.

"Sheltered Garden" (CP 19-21) and "Garden" (CP 24-25) can be taken as representatives of a group that we could denominate "unresolved quests". They are structured according to the Romantic strategy which Cassandra Laity calls "dialectical landscapes of romantic quest".<sup>6</sup> This pattern, which, according to Laity, underlies the whole of Sea Garden is also present in poets like Keats ("La Belle Dame Sans Merci") or Shelley ("Epipsychidion") and would have been learnt by H.D. from Swinburne through his Poems and Ballads (114). Such device structures the poems linguistically and thematically into polarities, bringing in elements which belong to two radically different realms. In the traditional Romantic pattern, the quest involves "a journey or movement from a fallen paradise of sexual thralldom to a redeemed or regenerate "paradise of love" "where eros and creative autonomy are triumphantly reunited" (Laity 111). Such pattern, however, as developed by male Romantic poets, may have appeared to H.D. rather inadequate, as it answers a poetics of masculine desire, whereby the quester occupies a subject position and the quest is completed by union with a female muse as object. H.D.'s dialectical landscapes seem to revise such poetical paradigm. The woman or female poet sets off, even if it is only in her imagination, in search for her own identity and sexual and creative freedom. The subject and object in this set of poems are one and the same.

"Sheltered Garden", as most critical studies on this poem have already marked, establishes a dialectic between the "sheltered garden" and "some terrible / wind tortured place". Each locus acts as an objective correlative for a different conception of gender and sexuality. The sheltered garden, in which the speaker is trapped, is marked by the depravity of a claustrophobic green house. There is in the air the sweetness of carefully grown plants, "border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies, / herbs, sweet-cress", that numbs the senses to the point of paralysis. The safety and protection it provides appears as somehow artificial and deadly, a sort of snare that finally "chokes life out". By contrast, the speaker longs to break out for a landscape bitten by the wind and exposed to the elements.

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<sup>6</sup> Cassandra Laity, "H.D.'s Romantic Landscapes: The Sexual Politics of the Garden", Signets: Reading H.D., 111.

If we take the poem to be encoding issues of female identity (floral/natural world) and creativity, we can say that the sheltered garden recreates the indoors world of Victorian life with its fixed codes on sexuality (physical constraint of the fruits and set gender categories). There is a suggestion of danger and limitation which threatens to blot out the vitality which is needed in creativity. There are also suggestions of psychological collapse in the passionate, although impotent questions of the speaker (“Why not let the pears cling / to the empty branch?”), in the dashes that contain non-spoken thoughts or in the powerful opening images:

Every way ends, every road,  
 every foot-path leads at last  
 to the hill-crest—  
 then you retrace your steps,  
 or find the same slope on the other side,  
 precipitate.

An open air setting appears, by contrast, to the female imagination, as a state of mental release which propitiates creativity and brings autonomy.

“Garden” dramatizes in fewer lines similar dualities. Here the poem begins with a celebration of the wild and harsh exhilarating freedom represented in the unusual rose, an unyielding object that rejects possession. For Eileen Gregory, the “rose cut in rock” stands for the ‘image’, the vehicle of the poet’s craft. The second part reproduces the same suffocating atmosphere of “Sheltered Garden”, equally detaining the process of creation. The poet seems to be caught up (“Fruit cannot drop / through this thick air”) in the longing for release which will be conveyed in “Storm”.

It is worth observing that in the poems of “Sea Garden” which present a similar construction, there is a shift—or quest—from one member of the duality to the other, but such movement is always worded in terms of desire and longing and never of actual achievement or resolution. Such process comes to confirm Gregory’s view of Sea Garden as a place where intense desire is felt and the sea/salt experience brings bitterness and wisdom: “to experience sea/salt ... is to feel open wounds, to suffer desire without fulfillment, to be made aware of vulnerability and fear” (Gregory 140) .

The strategy of “dialectical landscapes of Romantic quest” here employed is, like the sublime mode, dynamic. In structural terms, we could say that it involves a term ‘where from’, experienced by the subject as undesirable, with which the mind is at odds, and a term ‘where to’ which signifies a new subjective state in which the subject wants to be. Mediating the two terms, there is the actual movement and exchange of

energy. Viewing the dialectical landscapes in this light, we can subsume them into the sublime pattern, whereby the term 'from' acts as blockage and the destination term as the newly achieved balance. Thus, we confront a new modality of the sublime at work in the Sea Garden poems: an experience which remains wholly subjective because it is incomplete and, hence, does not bring the expected results—of fulfilment or strengthening of the self—for which the whole sublime construction has been devised. The sublime appears in these poems as a means to voice will and desire and not as end to a quest.

"The Cliff Temple" (*CP* 26-28) bears thematic and structural resemblance to "The Shrine". Again the divinity occupies a realm of his own, isolated and of difficult access:

High—high—and no hill-goat  
tramples—no mountain sheep  
has set foot on your fine grass;  
you lift, you are the world-edge,  
pillar for the sky-arch.

The initiate or follower of the god first contemplates the divine domains from a distance, then, she initiates a long arduous journey towards the god's temple. Gregory identifies this god as Apollo/Helios because of the "clarity and perfection of form" of the temple and its relation by emplacement, with the "Gate of the Sun" ("White Rock" 149). The quester is a woman, who like Aphrodite, threatens to throw herself down the cliffs for the love of Helios/Apollo (149).<sup>7</sup> The first section of the poem is dominated by images of height, which increases as the seeker ascends: "The world heaved— / we are next to the sky... / the terrible breakers are silent / from this place". Sublime/mystical experiences often present physical height and ascent as a correlative of the elevation of the spirit towards the beloved—an experience which in H.D. is usually accompanied by intense eroticism. Weiskel marks the Longinian *hypsos* or height as one of the most common metaphors of the sublime. However, height in this poem is more a part of preparation rather than a feature of the sublime moment itself.

The second section corresponds accurately with the blocking moment when suddenly there is "an intuition of a disconcerting disproportion between inner and outer" (Weiskel). There is an excess on the part of the object (god) which the subject finds difficulty to grasp. The disproportion between the divine and the human becomes apparent in the harshness of the ascent. The god, each time more elusive, flies ahead of

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<sup>7</sup> For a further explanation of this myth, see Eileen Gregory's "Falling from the White Rock".

his follower through a very accidental geography; the quester struggles for keeping up pace with the god: "I said: / for ever and for ever, must I follow you / through the stones? / I catch at you—you lurch: / you are quicker than my hand-grasp". The superiority of the god over the quester also provokes an ambiguous response on his quester; pain and pleasure are mixed inevitably in a sea/salt experience. Now the quester sees the beauty of the object of her pursuit; now she is overwhelmed by rage against the god's swiftness: "I shouted—dear—mysterious—beautiful—", "O evil, / follow this god, / taunt him with his evil and his vice".

The third section extends the moment of blockage into verticality; the moment in which the object takes complete possession of the subject. Her perceptual faculties are suspended, reason recedes before the overwhelming presence. The woman follower not only experiences stasis or suspension in a metaphorical way but also a kind of "death by plenitude", "a variant of the abyss" (Weiskel). However, this moment of loss does not lift her up, it does not end with a reinforcement of her own self, as in the conventional sublime model, but on the contrary, brings a desire for self-destruction:

Shall I hurl myself from here,  
shall I leap and be nearer you?  
Shall I drop, beloved, beloved,  
ankle against ankle?

There is equally a linguistic blockage provoked by a saturation of meaning in that stanza. That saturation begins to resolve or move towards balance in the next stanzas, where meaning is spread along the syntagmatic chain. Finally, the mind recalls itself and achieves balance. There is, however, no self-affirmation, no sense of authority. All what is left is a feeling of bitterness and loss: "I know— / you are farther than this, / still further on another cliff". This version of the sublime could be considered to be the antithesis of the sublime genre, a sort of anti-sublime by reversal. By contrast with "The Shrine", there is no final union with the other, no pre-oedipal experience of the sublime. One wonders whether, in fact, the gender of the protagonists is significant in the way the sublime experience develops. In "The Shrine", the goddess makes a gesture of kindness and tenderness towards the initiate and accepts him/her into her realm, thus creating an "intersubjective dialectic of grandeur" (Yaeger 209). In "The Cliff Temple", the god remains aloof and elusive, separate from the initiate at all times. Thus, he seems to assert and keep an unyielding superiority. Nearness and separation define each of these versions of the sublime, here linked to the polarity of mother-

father. In the pre-oedipal sublime the final phase ends with union, whereas the traditional Romantic sublime establishes final separation and differentiation.

“The Cliff Temple” can also be read as a poem on the quest for poetic power. Under this interpretation, the poem revises the myth of poetic creativity from Milton to the Romantics. In “Ode on the Poetical Character”, William Collins, a transition poet between both poetic periods, employs man’s grace and subsequent fall in the Genesis as a metaphor to compare the position of the contemporary poet in relation to Milton. Milton, in Collins’ poem, appears as a poet whose inspiration comes to him “unmixed”, in a state of paradisiacal innocence, that is to say, directly without the intervention of a muse. This, we know, is not entirely accurate as Milton does invoke a muse (Urania), but it is a licence Collins takes to emphasize what in his view is Milton’s unproblematic access to poetic inspiration. By contrast, the contemporary poet, Collins and the Romantics who would follow, has lost his innocence and, therefore, has no longer direct access to poetic power; he now needs the mediation of the muse. More importantly, Collins’ poem reveals the divine origin of inspiration, the link between God and the poet. For this reason Milton appears in an enviable state of grace, as he can communicate directly with the deity. In the Ode, Collins presents an Eden in which Milton is engaged in virtuous conversation with Fancy, or divine inspiration. Such an idealized view of his predecessor will take Collins to carry out a final identification. Thus, Milton becomes Collins’ forefather, his own source of inspiration, and hence, his poetical god, whom he tries to reach without much success.

It appears that the reversal of roles in H.D.’s poem, that is, the introduction of a female (poet) chasing Apollo, the god of song, radically challenges the myth of the masculine nature of poetic power on which Collins and the Romantics rely. Such disruption of a long-venerated masculine myth appears to be intentional as H.D. closely reproduces in her poem Collins’ allusions to Milton’s Eden. Compare for example H.D.’s images of height and difficult accessibility with these:

High on some Cliff , to Heav’n up-pil’d,  
Of rude Access, of Prospect wild,  
Where, tangled round the jealous Steep,  
Strange Shades o’erbrow the Valleys deep,  
And holy *Genii* guard the Rock ... (1.55-59)

Similarly, in Collins’ Ode, the poet tries in vain to reach the heights where Milton rests:



With many a Vow from Hope's aspiring Tongue,  
 My trembling Feet his guiding Steps pursue;  
 In Vain—Such Bliss to One alone,  
 Of all the Sons of Soul was known ... (l.70-73)

We can conclude, therefore, that "The Temple Cliff", revises both the Romantic sublime and the myth of masculine creativity, showing the connection that exists between both.

In "The Pool" (CP 56), H.D. manages to develop in five lines the sublime mode with all its shades and transformations. Here she writes once more against the masculine tradition that smothers the object to assert the self. Empowerment is rejected for the advance of nearness. Writing on "Mont Blanc", Patricia Yaeger shows how there is a moment which the male quester cannot resist: the letting the other go. He encounters and identifies with the mountain to receive his own reflection back. The poet cannot help incorporating that experience, the recognition of the power of his own imagination. In "The Pool", it is the subject in a power position who moves towards the helpless other—"Are you alive?"—. The approach is gentle though; there is no mental measure of antagonistic forces but touch instead—"I touch you"—. The 'other' faces the superiority of the speaker and it is possibly a moment of blockage for it—"You quiver like a sea-fish"—. There is then an ambiguous moment in which the subject of speech and agent seems to take over, indeed makes a movement of annexation—"I cover you with my net"—, which is immediately resolved in an unexpected way—"What are you—banded one?". The speaker, then, has come into contact with the other only in order to discover its identity. The final question allows the other autonomy of definition and speech. In other words, the speaker refuses naming and controlling the other and allows it to be something other than his/her perceptual conception of it. There is a play of intersubjectivities, whose appropriate image is rather horizontal than vertical, a gesture of the female sublime. Yaeger identifies this instance as *sublime of expenditure*.

To include a poem that was presented by Pound as a model of Vorticism, "Oread" (CP 55), in a study of the sublime, brings in controversy. However, if we follow Pound's definition of the "image as vortex", we will find that such attempt is not completely unviable. In "As for Imagisme", Pound wrote: "the image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy". For Brendan

Jackson, a Poundian supporter of H.D.'s perfect Imagism, "Oread" owes its striking qualities precisely to that obedience to the image as defined by Pound, to "its projection of contained energy". He writes: "It is vibrant, yet reaches stasis. The stasis is achieved in part by the poet's refusal to extend her compass".<sup>8</sup>

Now, we know that the "image as vortex" entails both dynamism and energy, elements both present in the sublime. Even Kant's sublime is dynamic. It implies movement of the mind and "a series of changes in the distribution of energy within a constant field" (Weiskel). Coming back to Jackson, he consciously follows the anti-vital Poundian vocabulary, when defining "Oread" as "contained energy", but he unconsciously falls into the realm of the sublime in mentioning 'stasis'. What we seem to have here is the substitution of a mechanistic/impersonal concept, 'energy', for a humanistic one, 'desire'. Whether one or the other, both fall into the dynamics of the sublime: a 'desire' on the part of the speaking subject for transcendence—a desire that is heightened by the tension of condensation which applies to the poem—and which Pound chose to select as mark of his Vorticism. The stasis mentioned by Jackson is nothing other than a moment of metaphoric saturation—"Whirl", "splash", "hurl", "cover"—which coincides with that phase in the sublime moment when the subject metaphorically falls. The sublime is here, nevertheless, represented only by its middle sequence, that of blockage—it is only the longing that is being voiced—and as Jackson says, it is heightened by the poet's refusal to show its resolution. 'Stasis', suspension, occurs, but ecstasy, and with it transcendence, is not reached. The sublime sequence is left opened.

A detailed study of the poems shows how H.D. makes use of the sublime genre to structure her poems and voice instances of bodily and spiritual desire. Using a controlling technique, she stills manages to encode gender and identity issues which achieve a heightened expression through the use of objective correlatives and the sublime pattern. As we have seen in the poems, the so called "presentation", to which the objective correlative device answers, is not a handicap for the expression of the sublime. Its working in two directions—the physical image itself and the psychological motion it starts—makes possible to introduce the moments of blockage and resolution

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<sup>8</sup> Brendan Jackson, " 'The Fulsomeness of Her Prolixity': Reflections on 'H.D., Imagiste' "

which characterize the pattern of sublimity. H.D. also injects 'desire' into the conception of the sublime. Her poems reveal, in fact, that an element of desire is relevant to the explanation of sublimity.

H.D., nevertheless, does not employ the sublime mode in the way that her Romantic male predecessors did. She appropriates it in order to revise it, or, creates a completely different model. It is obvious that the sublime, as cultivated by some Romantic poets (Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron) corresponds to a poetics of masculine desire and identity, rather inadequate for female needs. It incorporates the object to the subject and obliterates the 'other' in order to gain self-affirmation. In so far as it does not respect difference, the Romantic sublime is, at a deep level, a "sublime of domination" (Yaeger 191). The poems we have looked at reveal different female versions of the masculine sublime. The pattern may be sometimes faithfully employed as a form of exaltation of an object (i.e. sea flowers), in which case the dynamics of the sublime rely more on language (i.e. metaphorical/metonymical sublime) than experience. But even then, the exaltation of female difference, masked in the sea flowers, gives the masculine pattern a different meaning and purpose. In other instances (i.e. "Oread"), the sequence is never completed, closed. The linear structure of the sublime is broken by omission of phases, or, final suspension without definite resolution. The masculine need for reaching a consequential end is missing. In this case, the sublime is employed to voice desire without fulfilment, what Gregory calls the "sea/salt experience". In other cases (i.e. "Sheltered Garden", "Sea Lily"), powers external to a female voice interfere with her efforts for personal fulfilment in a manner that turn the pattern of sublimity into a *failed sublime*. More interestingly, we find versions which radically revise the genre, an instance of *pre-oedipal sublime*, whereby H.D. seems to be following the Romantic pattern in a faithful mimetic way but introduces a major alteration in the last moment (i.e. "The Shrine"). Here, there is a play of intersubjectivities and "[n]either the self is obliterated nor is the object swallowed up" (Yaeger 207). There is, on the contrary, closeness and maternal presence. As an alternative to verticality, H.D. offers a horizontal model in other poems (i.e. "The Pool") where there is actual contact with the object but there is no domination or re-enforcement of the self. The subject is in a position of power but spills it. This type of sublime is called by Yaeger *sublime of expenditure*. Finally, H.D.

creates an inverted version of the Romantic sublime, an 'anti-sublime' ("The Cliff Temple"). The sublime experience rather than bringing strengthening of the self, ends up provoking a desire for self-destruction.

It is worth noticing that in none of the instances of the sublime which I have found there is a single example of empowerment or aggrandizement of the self at the expense of the 'other'. In H.D., the sublime experience is not a means for the achievement of power but for contact with an 'other' at a physical, spiritual or aesthetic level. In this sense, H.D. is offering an alternative sublime that seems to derive from the difference of female experience. Thus, Yaeger's call for female appropriation of the sublime in order to "create a new architectonics of empowerment" (181) appears as a reproduction of masculine poetics in a female form, an appropriation of a model that reproduces the dynamics of patriarchy.

H.D.'s use of the sublime throws into a new perspective critical evaluation of the Sea Garden poems and reopens once more the arduous task of redefining Modernist poetics—in relation to both a woman poet and a Romantic category. In the next chapter, I will look into H.D.'s parallel poetics to these revisions of sublimity. The intersection of poetics and the sublime will allow me to continue analysing H.D.'s versions of sublimity in Chapter IV.

## Chapter III

### H.D.'s Poetics: Vision, Creativity, Eroticism and Gender

For every word, each cadence, each posture, the tone, the range of voices, the nature of plot, the rhythm of structures, the things that happen, events excluded, the reasons for writing, the ways she's impeded, the noises around her, vocabularies of feeling, scripts of behaviour, choices of wisdom, voices inside her, body divided, image of wonder

all must be re-made. (Rachel B. DuPlessis)

How do poetics and sublimity relate to each other? In the previous account of the sublime, I pointed at the connection between the two. The sublime, at the time when it reappeared, became not just a matter of aesthetics but also a theory of creativity in itself, first pointing at Nature as origin and perfect model for art, later pointing at the imagination of the poet and artist, powerful enough to project meaning into Nature or realize the connection between the creative power of the mind and that of Nature. I also made reference to the different treatment that sublimity may acquire according to the gender of the writer and the tradition he/she comes from. I pointed at recent critical studies that reveal how the greatest bulk of Romantic renderings of the sublime is dominated by masculine poetics and a masculine understanding of the poetic self: the poet as the "central man", Nature as his antagonic/complementary 'other'. In this chapter, I will maintain this elemental idea that a different view of poetics, comprehending the origin of creativity and the position of the artist in relation to the 'other', corresponds to a different version of sublimity. In particular, I intend to study H.D.'s poetics in "Notes on Thought and Vision" to see whether, effectively, her notions of sublimity are affected in any way by her vision of poetic creativity. H.D.'s "Notes" appear very strongly against a Modernist male background of influence. This study of the "Notes" will develop in that context, although the conclusions derived from it will be referred back to the issue of sublimity and H.D.'s use of this aesthetics.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis characterizes H.D.'s literary career as a struggle to "take control of her story" ("H.D. and the Muse of the Woman Writer" 141). Such struggle includes both H.D.'s resistance to conform to traditional feminine roles as well as her determination to be a woman poet instead of a voiceless muse. "Notes on Thought and Vision" is part of H.D.'s personal history of struggle for the defence of her own poetic powers and her own sources of inspiration. It is from this perspective of male cultural influence and censorship, personal conflict, gendered ideas on creativity and metaphors of inspiration that the questions posed internally and externally by these "Notes" can be answered.

Most critics emphasise H.D.'s stay in the Scilly Islands with Bryher in July 1919 as the background for the genesis of this text. Less importance is given, however, to H.D.'s friendship with Havelock Ellis, the famous sex therapist whom H.D. and Bryher consulted during the spring and summer of 1919. Ellis is mentioned only as the receptor of the "Notes" and the censor who prevented H.D. from publishing them. Although there is no doubt that the Scilly Islands meant physical and mental repose for H.D. after the stressing war years, and although her psychic experiences, described in "Notes on Thought and Vision", were directly associated to a sense of rebirth fostered by that tranquillity, I would like to put this background side by side with H.D.'s friendship with Ellis as generators of the "Notes".

In spite of the secure tone of the beginning of the "Notes", which corresponds to H.D.'s belief in the ideas she is exposing, as well as a newly achieved poetical and personal confidence, the "Notes" move toward a conflictive core to which that initial self-confidence seems to be both a response and a resistance. This conflictive core I am referring to is the only echo we find within the "Notes" of H.D.'s relationship with Havelock Ellis. H.D. writes:

I spoke to a scientist, a psychologist, about my divisions of mind and over-mind. He said that over-mind was not exactly the right term, that sub-conscious mind was the phrase I was groping for.

I have thought for a long time about the comparative value of these terms, and I see at last my fault and his.

We were both wrong. I was about to cover too much of the field of abnormal consciousness by the term over-mind. He, on the other hand, would have called it sub-conscious mind.

But the sub-conscious and the over-conscious are entirely different states, entirely different worlds. (48-49)

I am not suggesting that this passage constitutes the centre of the "Notes" but I do see in it a conflict of ideas and terminology, covering, on the one hand, Ellis' intellectual domination and, on the other, H.D.'s effort to break free from it and assert her own ideas. This conflict remains, and is only superficially resolved in the last assertion, when H.D. insists that for her, in spite of Ellis' authority as a well known psychologist and scientific writer, "the subconscious and the over-conscious are entirely different states". What interests me most in that passage is not just its conclusion but the series of negotiations that H.D. develops to be able to accommodate both her thesis and Ellis'. She certainly acknowledges this man's intellectual superiority and knowledge of the matter she is dealing with. There is both strange belief and faith in him, some sort of admiration. H.D. was not only a patient of Ellis. She also discussed with him intellectual matters and even took part in his curious erotic practices. In the "Notes", H.D. seeks his advice, but once more, she cannot conceal disappointment when, instead of dialogue and support, she meets censorship: "He said that over-mind was not the right term, that subconscious mind was the phrase I was groping for". She is not, nevertheless, discouraged by negative criticism. It only moves her to revise her terms again. However, she does not come out with a clean statement but instead writes in an apologetic tone: "We were both wrong". She then continues making an assertion by pointing that the two of them were talking about different things, but, gets drawn back again into the circle of male approval and recognition when she shows her "Notes" to Ellis:

When I returned to London, I sent my *Notes* to Dr. Ellis. I thought he would be so interested. But he appeared unsympathetic, or else he did not understand or else he may have thought it was a danger signal. (Tribute to Freud, 130)

H.D. must have thought that her "jelly-fish" experience and the creative context in which she placed it, within her person and her psyche, together with her own interpretation of the phenomenon, may have interested Ellis: "all the time I was thinking that this would be an interesting bit of psychological data for Dr. Havelock Ellis" (Tribute to Freud 130). He was quite indifferent instead. H.D. was deeply hurt by his response and made no effort to publish the "Notes". Norman Pearson reiterates once more Ellis' response to the "Notes" in a short note written in one of the drafts: "This under the influence of Havelock Ellis, and also was hurt by his indifference to

it".<sup>1</sup> This comment corroborates the idea that the "Notes" were as much the result of the Scilly Islands experience as H.D.'s discussions with Ellis.

H.D.'s ambivalent attitude towards Ellis, the need for closeness and distance, her need to win his approval and, yet, defend her own intellectual power, is just one example within a long spiral of male influences in her life. L.M. Freibert, in "Conflict and Creativity in the World of H.D." revises those aspects that the writer had to overcome in her life to finally come to her own artistic and personal identity. Together with a process of reconciliation with her mother, which she would achieve with Freud's help in the 1930s, Freibert mentions the writer's long fight to break free from male domination. In a psychoanalytic interpretation of the facts of H.D.'s life, Freibert argues that "the awe and admiration which H.D. had for her father carried over into her later life in her dependency upon the inspiration, guidance, and approbation" of the significant male figures she encountered in her life (262). Ellis was one of them. Among others in this early period were Ezra Pound, R. Aldington, D.H. Lawrence and John Cournos. Although there is no doubt that H.D. profited from her collaboration with those writers, she eventually felt that their creative power and self-confidence in writing matters threatened to crush and paralyze her own production and her own notions on writing. As DuPlessis suggests, H.D. had to struggle to overcome those powerful influences, which were still stronger because of the emotional ties that existed between H.D. and her male colleagues. There is a sense of loyalty to them, as we can appreciate in End to Torment, the letters to John Cournos (1916-1919) or Bid Me to Live, alongside the knowledge that so long as she keeps under their paternal and authoritative advice, her real self and artistic personality will never be completely her own. Musing over those conflictive attachments, H.D. wrote: "Will the Lion devour me or redeem me—or both?" (End to Torment 7). As far as the "Notes" are concerned, we know that they were written in spite of a series of comments that tried to persuade her not to write prose. In August 1917, Pound wrote to Margaret Anderson: "H.D. is all right but shouldn't write criticism". Equally, in 1918, R. Aldington and John Cournos tried to discourage her from so doing (Friedman, Gender of Modernism 87). The influence of male opinion did not stop her in this case, but the

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<sup>1</sup> This note by Pearson appears on the left top corner of the 4th draft of the "Notes". The draft is not dated. H.D. Papers, Box 44, Folder 1129.



security that she was about to win for herself was crashed by Ellis' indifference. Ironically enough, years later, another important male figure, Freud, would be the catalyst that enabled H.D. to free her self from that long series of influences.<sup>2</sup> Tribute to Freud seems to me to stand parallel to the "Notes". It is history repeating itself. However, this time H.D. was dealing with a wiser man than Ellis, who acknowledged her creative and visionary power and her own achievements in psychoanalysis. About that long struggle and final arrival to safe port, H.D. wrote:

... and with the Professor, I did feel that I had reached the high-water mark of achievement; I mean I felt that to meet him at forty-seven, and to be accepted by him as analysand or student, seemed to crown all my other personal contacts and relationships, justify all the spiral-like meanderings of my mind and body. I had come home, in fact. (Tribute to Freud 43-44)

The context of ambiguous conflict between H.D. and her male colleagues, which I have just outlined, and in which Havelock Ellis plays an essential part, seems to me to offer the most appropriate perspective from which to approach the study of "Notes on Thought and Vision" and the poetics articulated by the poet in this essay.

### 1. An Essay on Poetic Vision

In writing an 'essay' on poetic principles, H.D. defies a genre traditionally monopolized by male writers, as well as the traditional role of woman as muse or means of approach to a higher reality. In the "Notes" she asserts that the prerogatives of poetic thought and vision are not only limited to men. Writing her own poetics forms part of that fight for recognition as a woman writer—an assertion that there is no biological reason why women cannot be great artists, in fact, that their sexual difference can be their source of creativity.

Looking at the genre of the "Notes", it is clear that they delineate a set of principles in relation to aspects of creativity, its origins and the necessary conditions of the poetic imagination. Poetics have been written throughout time in different literary forms, whether in prose or in verse; their makers have been usually men. That is why this poetics written by a woman is a precious item in the history of the genre.

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<sup>2</sup> As we know, this only occurred partially considering her later attachments to figures like Lord Dowding.

However, I will not be dealing with the specific contents of H.D.'s poetics until I have paid attention first to the writing technique which shapes those poetic principles.

The form of the "Notes" is important in relation to their own internal structure and also in relation to the antagonistic male background I have been making reference to. H.D. not only writes her own poetics but she does so in her own way: creating and choosing her own origins, articulating her own concepts and adopting a form of her own. One of the reasons, if not the main one, why the "Notes" seem to baffle critical capability has to do with the form and technique employed. "Notes on Thought and Vision" has been described, for instance, as a "prose-poem" (Friedman), which seems, in my opinion, a rather misleading critical description. Considering the "Notes" as a prose-poem, undermines H.D.'s experimentation on essay writing. I would rather agree with Janice Robinson who considers the "Notes" as an "experimental meditation". The "Notes" are not only on 'vision', on poetic creativity and the moment of revelation or discovery; they are themselves a vision, and most particularly, the vision of a female poet. This vision of creativity and its origins is metaphorically described by H.D. as the "jelly-fish" experience. The experience which took place at the Scilly Islands is more widely told in Tribute to Freud:

I tried to write a rough account of this singular adventure, *Notes on Thought and Vision*. There was, I explained to Bryher, a second globe or bell-jar rising as if it were from my feet. I was enclosed. I felt I was safe but seeing things as through water. I felt the double globe come and go and I could have dismissed it at once and probably would have if I had been alone. (130)

The "Notes" are built around that personal key experience, which later on expands as the poet looks for interpretation and weaves with it other thoughts. The "Notes" form, as a whole, a single vision somehow mediated by language itself to constitute a poetics. The vision comes to the woman poet in fragments as she thinks around that basic metaphor from which a diversity of thoughts derive. Each fragment reaffirms or transforms the previous one. The main contrast with male Modernist texts is that the argumentative engine here is not the logical mind. H.D. consciously avoids developing a logical sequence of ideas. There is no argument or statements to be progressively developed, there is no exposition of premises or assertion of conclusions, there is no climatic point in the argumentation (we take the "jelly-fish" experience to be at the origin of the "Notes", but in the "Notes" themselves it is not the only focus of attention), there is no sense of unity and compactness, from which authors like T.E.

Hulme (Speculations), Eliot ("Tradition and the Individual Talent"; literary essays) and Pound ("A Few Dont's"; "Affirmations...II, IV", "Vorticism"; literary essays) derive their ability to convince and to construct self-evident texts. The "Notes" lack a centre and, as traditional critics would say, a structure. The result is that any criticism built following the requirements shown, for instance, in T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) will be negative toward the "Notes". Here, we find a diversification of meaning, insertion of poetic fragments and no fixed ideas. H.D. was well aware that her text differed from logically constructed essays. It is my opinion that she developed her own alternative essay form in the "Notes" according to a different rational procedure. The problem critics face here is that of the essentiality of a genre versus creative innovation. In H.D.'s case, she remakes the essay genre to meet the requirements of her vision.

It is interesting to compare the "Notes" not only with other contemporary literary essays but also with more scientific ones. Given her relationship with Ellis as a patient and friend, it is quite possible that she read some of his work. In Views and Reviews, for example, there is a sense of finality. The writer, in this case, Ellis, knows exactly where to take the reader. There are key ideas, subordinate ideas and third rate ideas that could lead into other fields of discussion. There are particular cases, selected only to meet an *a-priori* formulated thesis. The degree of impersonality varies, concealing what is a personal opinion, rendered impersonal to make it more universal. In that context, structure means linearity or causality. The "Notes" certainly lack that type of structure but they have, nevertheless, their own. Each section contains a thought, or a vision which is added onto the previous one, transforming it. Instead of causality, there is an addition of one layer upon another. Eventually, the "Notes" become repetitive and acquire a sort of spiral-like structure. Repetition is never mechanical but, rather, it brings vision into thought, clarifies it and takes it further.

A look at the first draft of "Notes on Thought and Vision" shows that H.D. was quite aware of what she was doing.<sup>3</sup> In this first draft, there is a section called "Conversation #1", left out in the final drafts, in which she actually holds a dialogue

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<sup>3</sup> The supposedly first draft of the "Notes" is in a bound volume which also contains typescripts of poems from Hymen and a typescript from "Responsibilities". H.D. Papers, Box 35, Folder 915. The typescripts are not dated. The 2nd, 3rd and 4th drafts of "Notes on Thought and Vision" are in Box 44, Folders 1126-1130. 2nd and 3rd drafts are dated 1919.

with an ironical, sceptical and rational 'you' who inquires about her "over-mind" and the meaning of the body in relation to it. It would not be difficult to see that 'you' as an imaginary Havelock Ellis who listens in a patronizing mood to what "the poet" has to say. It could also be an anonymous critical voice on which H.D. projects and anticipates the sort of criticism that the "Notes" would meet:

I say:

I have been trying to tell you about it. I have wrought for myself an image that can easily be turned to ridicule—the "jelly-fish" I mean, I have plodded along wearily excavating, digging out sentences or thoughts. I have been exploring new regions of thought and revisiting old ones. I am happier than you will ever be. But one thing could add to my delight in the maze and marvel of the human brain. That would be the discovery of a brain that could invent some adequate phrase for the world of thought, I [?] term over-mind and picture as a jelly fish.

It seems that it is that search for the adequate expression that could clearly explain the state of "over-mind" or "jelly-fish" that originates the dynamic fluidity of the "Notes" beyond a preconceived frame. That search involves as much struggle with the terms employed as with the layers of thought which accumulate one on top of another. If the rational method traditionally employed in essay writing is logic, based on linearity and causality, the method suggested by the "Notes" is dialectic. H.D. draws notions derived from psychoanalysis into a dialectic method orientated toward the search of a more precise definition of her over-conscious state. This search is both linguistic as well as notional. Plato defines the dialectic method as "that which aims to reach the thing in itself with the only help of reason and without intervention of the senses ... The dialectic method is the only one that brings down one hypothesis after another and moves toward the Principle itself to finally stand on firm ground" (*La República* 400, 402).<sup>4</sup> H.D.'s use of Platonic dialectic is again personal. To start with, the method must only use reason or intelligence as means to reach Truth and there must be no intervention of the senses. The exclusion of the world of the senses, is due to the basic dichotomy body-soul in Plato's philosophy. All that is irrational, namely "passions", and sensation, belongs to the body, which can only know imperfectly. The soul is usually associated with 'reason' or the 'intellect' and it is the only way towards knowledge of Truth or reality. H.D. seems to be using this method to rework her concepts and shape them into clearer meaning, but she only keeps the dynamics and not the basic principles on which the method stands. Her starting point is, in fact, not

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<sup>4</sup> My own translation.

the soul, not the intellect, but physical experience. Her “jelly-fish” experience, although a psychic phenomenon, is described in physical terms: “That over-mind seems a cap, like water, transparent, fluid yet with definite body, contained in a definite space” (18-19). Although she initially locates the over-mind in the head, she later shifts the centre of consciousness to the womb and visualizes it as the foetus in the body. This is certainly a revision of the Platonic principle of knowledge. It is not that she deprives the intellect of its power to reach Truth, substituting its traditional location, the head, for the body. She simply states that although the intellect is necessary in the process toward that exceptional state of consciousness, which she has defined as over-mind, it is not sufficient to reach over-consciousness. The spirit cannot grow “by the strength and power of [the] intellect” only (52). The physical, she states, must precede as a bedrock for the spirit or “over-mind”. H.D. does not privilege the body over the mind, although she does initiate a process of revaluation of the physical in order to bring the two into balance. This emphasis on balance between the mind and the body, seems to be the contribution she makes to Platonic philosophy and Christian thought from personal experience and her understanding of modern theories of psychoanalysis.<sup>5</sup> It is in this fusion of sources that the “Notes” are a typical Modernist text.

The other way in which H.D. deviates from the orthodoxy of the Platonic method is in the manner she deals with her ‘hypothesis’. She does not discard the initial ‘hypothesis’ with which she begins the “Notes”: “Three states or manifestations of life: body, mind, over-mind” (17) in favour of other notions. The initial ideas presented in the “Notes” are essentially the same as the ones at the end. However, what has been changing throughout the text is the terminology and the way those notions relate to each other. In other words, H.D. has kept the Platonic method as a framework because it has a dynamic quality that allows her not to search for meaning, or concepts, but to bring meaning and concepts into the right focus via the right expression. Her dialectic method thus affects language, which proves itself too rigid and economic to express H.D.’s notions and structure, which has to be submitted to experimentation, circularity, repetition, insertion of poetical passages and discursive alterations to cope with the limitations of language. One could suggest that the fluidity of the terminology

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<sup>5</sup> H.D. seems to have some knowledge of psychoanalysis by the time she writes the “Notes”. That knowledge would have come via Ellis and also Pound and D.H. Lawrence.

employed throughout the "Notes" obeys the attempt to avoid conceptualisation and fixed terms. It has been argued that H.D. employs tactics identified as specifically feminine (Friedman), or pre-oedipal (Kristeva).<sup>6</sup> However, such writing technique is also, as I have suggested above, a means of finding the right expression and recognize the relation of certain notions.

## 2. The Body-Mind Balance

H.D. initiates her poetics from a tripartite division of life: "body", "mind", "over-mind". Each manifestation of life, she claims, must be in equilibrium with the others. The body, she argues, is in need of the brain as much as the brain is in need of the body, of physical experiences. Echoing in part psychoanalytic theories as well as her own personal experience, she emphasizes how denial of the body in favour of a pure rational or spiritual being creates mental unbalance and results in "madness". It is interesting to notice that, at this stage, H.D. is managing her ideas in common terms, avoiding scientific names such as 'libido', 'consciousness', or 'neurosis'. The use of common terms seems to show that H.D. is taking her own experience as departure point for her "Notes".

The emphasis H.D. puts on the importance of the body comes from her awareness that even her effort to put it at the same level as the mind, or the soul, will not be

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<sup>6</sup> The pre-oedipal, or, in Kristeva's terms, "semiotic", refers to "primary processes", drives, energy, which control the infant's body functions and its relation to objects and the "members of the family structure". Voice, gesture, rhythm and colours are more specific semiotic elements to which the infant relates at a pre-verbal stage. The semiotic acquires a more defined and recognisable 'definition' in Kristeva when in opposition to "the symbolic" (Revolution in Poetic Language). The symbolic makes reference to language as a sign system which involves syntax, signification, time and space. Through the acquisition of language, the infant becomes part of a new system which organises the world outside him/her in a specific socio-historical way. Linked to the acquisition of language there is the introduction of difference, and the constitution of the individual as subject. In contrast, the semiotic appears as an asystematic, non-differential, primal layer that precedes language, law, social structures and sexual difference. Once the individual becomes part of the symbolic order, the semiotic recedes to the background of the unconscious. The point made by Kristeva in Revolution in Poetic Language is that the disruptive, anarchical capacity of the semiotic is an element of change and transformation and that the arts, and poetry in particular, can find ways of disrupting the prevalent symbolic/social order by employing tactics that allow the semiotic and unconscious to break through. Hence the revolutionary capacity of modernist poetics for example.

It should be born in mind that while for Kristeva the semiotic, or pre-oedipal, is a realm to which both male and female writers have access equally, for the critics who defend an *écriture féminine*, this may not be solely the realm of females, but its use is a sign of *difference*.

sufficient to fight the long devaluation that the physical has had in Western Christian thought, imbued in Platonic philosophy. She argues, against the traditional hegemony of the mind or the soul, that, as far as creativity goes, poetic and artistic creation cannot take place by sheer development of the mind/soul. The soul, which in Plato is the only vehicle to reach the transcendental world of Ideas, is not for H.D. an independent entity from the body and, therefore, it is not able to achieve the transcendental world of creativity on its own.<sup>7</sup> H.D. names a third term to designate the actual state of artistic creation: the "over-mind". She says of it that it is a "state of consciousness" (18) above normal consciousness. Such a state is exceptional and it only comes over when there is a perfect balance between the mind and the body (18). That is why physical relationships are needed for the development of "talent": "To shun, deny and belittle such experiences is to bury one's talent carefully in a napkin" (17). When there exists a development of the physical in the same proportion as the intellectual, perception and reception can increase to an abnormal point ("grinding discomfort of mental agony", 19) that brings in creativity. This state is a psycho-physical experience which H.D. summarizes in the "jelly-fish" metaphor. Such image, derived from her own experience, is absolutely personal but she needs it as evidence to ground her poetics and the way body/mind/over-mind relate to each other.

H.D.'s licence to put forward a 'thesis' which is not supported by anything else than her experience (18-19), her avoidance to move toward the general and remain instead in the particular pseudo-scientific explanation of a common person, and finally, the specific reference to the powers of the female body to have access to the over-mind world, mean a direct challenge to the poetics of some of her male contemporaries: to objectivity and disgust for the female body, the vital and organic; a charge against what she describes in "Notes" as "the new schools of destructive art theorists" (24). Pound, Eliot, T.E. Hulme and the Futurists fall under such description. Common to the artistic principles and poetics of those poets and artists, there is an apocalyptic vision of the female as the destructive pull of nature, and of her body, as a swamp of death and decay. As a reaction, they all devise a vision of creativity that pivots, metaphorically, as well as realistically, around the phallus and the male body. Pound's and Eliot's

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to notice that H.D.'s world of creativity and Beauty exists at the same level as Plato's world of Ideas. However, in Plato, creativity does not have a metaphysical status.

'objectivity' is essentially an attempt to liberate poetry from the blandness of femininity and, in reality, from female eroticism.<sup>8</sup> On his part, T.E. Hulme also calls for hardness and concentration, abandoning the quintessentially organic and effeminate poetry of Decadence, while the Futurists deviate from the natural by celebrating self-sufficient masculine creativity in the form of the machine. All such contemporary instances show how the female body is regarded with repugnance. Consequently, it becomes the 'abject', lurking behind those artists' productions.<sup>9</sup> H.D.'s defence of the body in general, and of the female body in particular, brings into this discussion the notion of abjection, as put forward by Julia Kristeva. In Christian tradition and Platonic thought, the body is the abject, the element that challenges to break up law, order and morality and defies a higher system of values. The body is impure, unholy, source of evil and sin. For this reason, it has to be put down, rejected, excluded and concealed. Such view is also maintained, as I have mentioned, by the "new schools", although, in this case, it only extends to the female body. In H.D., by contrast, the body (male as well as female) is redeemed from the condition of abjection by transforming it into the "bedrock" of creativity. The body, like the mind, is now capable of vision; it is the site of the divine presence of creation. The opening of "Notes on Thought and Vision" acknowledges the traditional view of body as abject: "body without reasonable amount of intellect is an empty fibrous bundle of glands as ugly and little to be desired as body of a victim of some form of elephantiasis or fatty-degeneracy" (17) but moves away gradually from such picture as the body-mind balance unfolds. Similarly, the female body benefits from such development as it is seen in an aura of creativity, physical as well as intellectual. Such recovery of the body from the pit of abjection will have major consequences on H.D.'s presentation of sublimity, as the sublime stops being a matter of the mind, and the masculine realm, and becomes part of the realm of physical sensation and female experience.

A further study into H.D.'s understanding of the "over-mind" will clarify the possibility of the body as a source of creativity. The over-mind, as a "state of

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<sup>8</sup> On this point of intersection between gender, poetics and eroticism see Cassandra Laity's introduction and first chapter in H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism and Decadence.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the "Doggerel section" of Pound's "Letter to Marianne Moore" (Feb., 1919); Eliot's "Waste Land"; Hulme's Speculations and the Futurists' "Manifesto Futurista".



consciousness", has been traditionally located in the head as one function of the mind. However, as a 'state' it does not necessarily need to be located in the head. H.D. presents the possibility of shifting the centre of over-mind consciousness from the mind to the body. Such possibility was revealed to her during pregnancy, when the over-mind state was located "into the field or realm of the intellect or brain" (20), and after giving birth, when the centre of that consciousness shifted toward her womb. Thus she states that "the centre of consciousness is either the brain or the love-region of the body" (20). So far, terms have been changing. At the time of creativity, she states that "the mind often takes on an almost physical character", "his mind becomes the real body", "his over-mind becomes his brain" (18), the over-mind moves to the brain or to the womb (20) creating "vision of the brain" and "vision of the womb or love-vision" (20). This scrambling of zones that can be sources of over-mind states, or "jelly-fish" states, or vision—and which, as a woman, H.D. attains through her body—introduces the possibility of breaking traditional as well as gender differences when it comes down to creativity:

it easier for a woman to attain this state of consciousness than for a man? ...

Are these jelly-fish states of consciousness interchangeable? Should we be able to think with the womb and feel with the brain?

May this consciousness be centered entirely in the brain or entirely in the womb or corresponding love-region of a man's body? (20)

After an essentialist ascription of women-womb, man-mind, H.D. points at the simplistic account of such association: her creativity may spring from the womb but it is received and transformed by her mind. Hence, she has put forward the possibility of exchanging the location of functions: "think with the womb" and "feel with the brain". She does not create a gendered poetics as critics like Friedman have suggested (Gender of Modernism 88), although it is true that she departs from her own experience as a female. She addresses the possibility of men also leaving their traditional centre of consciousness—the mind or intellect—and using their bodies as a source of artistic creativity. Presenting the possibility of vision being originated either in the womb/love-region, or, the brain, H.D. seriously scrambles gender differences regarding creativity and brings women to the same artistic possibilities as men. Equally, all those shifting terms (from body to womb to love-region; from mind to brain to

intellect; from mind and body to love-brain, love-mind, over-brain, womb-brain) not only tend to make the geography of over-consciousness changeable but show how the primal distinction body-mind is, in fact, a matter of conceptual abstraction since these form, in reality, a continuum. By breaking up the dichotomy mind-body, H.D. also dismantles that of the feminine and the masculine. It is quite possible that she was directly answering Havelock Ellis' theories on gender differentiation as being biologically determined. She only keeps terms like man and woman, male and female, who, she insists, are equally able of artistic creativity.

H.D. weaves those notions and terms with examples that illustrate and clarify them. These examples are taken from the historical artistic past, especially from her favourite periods, classical Greece, Italian Renaissance<sup>10</sup> and Chinese poetry, as well as Greek mythology. So, as she is struggling to design her terms, different flashes or visions come in association with the subject in question. The ordered construction she delineates of body, mind and over-mind finds an echo in the Eleusinian mysteries, for instance. Anyone introduced into the mysteries had to pass three different stages of initiation commencing with physical initiation and moving toward higher levels of abstraction until reaching *autopsia* or contemplation of the Truth. H.D. sees in the Eleusinian mysteries a parallel to her own poetics, herself a descendant of Demeter, goddess of fertility.<sup>11</sup> Similarly the worlds of knowledge and feeling find a counterpart in mythological figures: the Sphinx and the Unicorn. Finally, these three original worlds she named at the beginning of her "Notes" find corroboration in mythical Greek hierarchy and pre-Socratic philosophy:

Three Worlds:

1. World of abstraction: Helios, Athene.
2. Intermediate or Nature World: Pan, the Naiads.
3. World of the uninitiate men and women.

All these worlds are important ... But we are important only insofar as we become identified with the highest in ourselves— "our own familiar daemon".<sup>12</sup> (37)

<sup>10</sup> Under the influence of Walter Pater's The Renaissance, as has been pointed out by Eileen Gregory in Classic Lines, 81.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory has traced H.D.'s familiarity with the Eleusinian mysteries to Walter Pater's essays on Demeter and Persephone in Greek Studies. However, H.D.'s Demeter is not purged of her fertile capacity as she is in Pater.

<sup>12</sup> H.D. writes extensively about "daemons" in her letters to John Cournos (1916-1919).

Pound's "Religio" (1918) could be compared with the type of writing and notions in this particular passage. Like H.D., Pound speaks of three similar worlds: that of the gods, that of "elemental creatures" and that of human beings. Another interesting common feature of both texts is the definition of god as a "state of mind" (Pound)—an abstraction that either takes the physical form of



By introducing those passages among her more 'theoretical' sections, H.D. not only offers examples but also creates a sort of map of her own poetics; the elements that constitute it, their place and the related associations they have for the writer.

One final matter is left regarding the over-mind consciousness. How does the individual achieve it? For H.D., the link between poetics and *eros* is undeniable. The mystic, the philosopher or the artist have only access to the world of vision through love. H.D. writes: "There is no great art period without great lovers" (21) and "Socrates' whole doctrine of vision was a doctrine of love" (22). She states that in order to create, one must love things as well as people. What H.D. calls love involves as much eroticism as spiritual love.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, at times, she does not distinguish them any more than body and mind. Creativity comes along in the sublimation of love, which is not a contradiction with her previous defence of the need of physical relations. She summarizes the process in the following manner:

We begin with sympathy of thought ...

The brain, inflamed and excited by this interchange of ideas, takes on its character of over-mind ...

The love-region is excited by the appearance of beauty of the loved one, its energy not dissipated on physical relations, takes on its character of mind ...

The love-brain and over-brain are both capable of thought. This thought is vision. (22)

Those who have the gift of vision are in love with the things or the people from whom the vision derives. She names numerous instances in which the world of vision is

beauty or remains formless as "thought". Both beauty and thought constitute aspects of that divine, higher state that H.D. denominates "over-mind". H.D.'s cult of beauty will be explained more prominently in Chapter V.

<sup>13</sup> H.D.'s mentioning of Socrates's "doctrine of love" seems a direct reference to Plato's Symposium. In this work, Socrates discusses with his friends the nature of love. The setting is a dinner party, and to match this relaxed atmosphere, Socrates does not use his traditional method of discussion, but draws instead on a conversation he had with a woman, Diotima, who revealed to him the different forms that Eros can take. Thus he reports the following distinctions: physical love, which leads to procreation, or to the satisfaction of sexual desire; spiritual love, which, combined with the physical beauty of the beloved, brings forth spiritual creation (arts, laws); and finally, the highest form of love, the love for wisdom, which takes man away from the world of sensible things to the contemplation of Truth and Beauty.

It is possibly thinking of this exposition that H.D. brings our attention to Socrates, and to the fact that his "doctrine of vision", was indeed, constructed around love. Here she finds an authoritative source for her own ideas, although in these "Notes" she also redefines that world of "vision" and notion of love: Beauty springs from creativity, and love never abandons the world of sensible things. Her understanding of creativity, however, as a process that involves both the physical and the spiritual does coincide with the second form of love described by Socrates.

opened up through love with the contemplated thing: in philosophy, Socrates and Plato; in painting, Leonardo; in poetry, Melager and Lo-Fu; in drama, Euripides, Aristophanes; spiritually, "the Galilean".<sup>14</sup> She seems to suggest that love creates a particular type of receptivity, opening the senses as much as the intellect:

It is said that da Vinci went mad if he saw a boy's face in Florence or a caged bird or a child with yellow hair ... because the lines of the bird's back or the boy's shoulder ... acted on him directly ... (26-27)

That receptivity in love, creates a union between the thing or person loved or contemplated and the lover. That union can be either physical or aesthetic. Those two realms are no longer differentiated as the physical in true contemplation acquires a spiritual dimension identical with aesthetic perception/reception. Out of that union, vision is born.

Traditionally, male poets achieved 'inspiration' through a female muse. The muse was a path toward vision, but she herself did not have the power to bring out vision by herself. She was passive and quiet. H.D. recreates this myth in the section she dedicates to Lo-fu, a Chinese poet from the Ming Dynasty. Here, the mistress is metaphorically presented as the branch of an apple tree. Lo-fu loves this branch for its beauty; he loves it physically but also he loves it with his mind and it is finally from this physic-intellectual love that he gets the vision for his poetry. H.D. characterizes that branch as "the means of approach to something else" (45). However, the Lo-fu passage is only showing one point of view: that of the poet and his muse. We would be puzzled if H.D. had left it there: woman muse as means to reach beyond. The next sections, however, come to complete the picture and create a coherent thought with H.D.'s initial argumentation about female creativity. Women can also be active and find their own means of vision. The muse can also become a poet. This is precisely what H.D. is doing by writing her own poetics. In a more general statement she writes:

The body of a man is a means of approach, or can be used as a means of approach to ecstasy. Man's body can be used for that. The best Greek sculpture used the bodies of young athletes as Lo-fu used the branch of the fruit tree. The lines of the human body may be used as an approach to the over-mind or universal mind.<sup>15</sup> (46-47)

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<sup>14</sup> This is one more example that H.D. does not distinguish, as Plato does, between artists and philosophers. She brings down to the level of creativity Plato's metaphysical world.

<sup>15</sup> Later in this research, Chapter V, I will be showing the relationship between H.D.'s love of Greek sculpture and the Hellenism she inherits from Walter Pater.

The woman poet can also have her muse. We may find problems with the terms used by H.D. considering our present awareness for political correctness. The words “means” and “use” suggest to us an approach to the ‘other’ as object rather than subject. In my view, H.D. is thinking here not about the actual form of the relationship between men and women, but about the possibilities that such relationship opens and which is beyond the relationship itself. The vision is not the relationship but is beyond it. That relationship, H.D. insists, does not even need to take place. It can work as a mental sublimation of physical energy and keep on rising until reaching the over-consciousness state:

So with the body. It may burn out simply as heat or physical love. That may be good. But it is also interesting to understand the process whereby the heat of the physical body is transmuted to this other, this different form, concentrated, ethereal, which we refer to in common speech as spirit. (48)

H.D. does not limit the prerogatives of creativity to heterosexual artists only. In fact, her references to Greek artists and Leonardo da Vinci are imbued with homosexual eroticism. The over-mind state can be achieved by both men and women independently of their sexual inclination. It is however intriguing that H.D. does not mention any women artists beyond herself (Sappho, for instance). Perhaps, it is here that we see that, unlike the rest of her ideas which challenge Ellis’ biological determinism, H.D. is being influenced by Ellis’ studies on homosexuality, dealing mainly with men and hardly with women, as well as Ellis’ collaboration with Symonds regarding homosexuality in ancient Greece.<sup>16</sup>

Metaphorically speaking, we could visualise H.D.’s theory as a movement upward, an elevation from the body to the spirit. This last term is one that she has avoided until the very end of her exposition because she needed to work her thoughts towards it. This spirit, which can be identified with her initial “over-mind”, is similar to the Platonic spirit, in that it is also capable of vision, but it is different in the sense that it is not independent from the body. As H.D. has explained, the spirit is rooted in the body, and cannot exist, nor develop, without physical experience. It is precisely that dependence of the spirit on the body that led Ellis to correct H.D.’s terminology. As a scientist and psychologist, Ellis would place the spirit below the sub-conscious level

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<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, their joint work: *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, especially the volume on “Inversion”. Walter Pater’s Hellenic influence could also be a reason for only mentioning male examples.

and dependent on it. His is a movement downwards. For H.D., as a poet, and as a poet who still believes in the aristocracy of creative vision, opened to everyone, yet only to those who are perceptive enough and have succeeded in the "Eleusinian mysteries", the spirit is far beyond the subconscious (which includes the physical) and above the conscious level (46, 48, 49). Of course, the terms 'above' and 'below' correspond to an arbitrary system of representation of the mind. The subconscious is said to be 'below' consciousness level, that is, underlying it; the conscious above, on top of the subconscious. In reality, such distinction does not exist since both states seem to overlap and continuously interact with each other. The spirit would be 'below' the subconscious level for Ellis, because it constitutes the rudiments of the subconscious, whereas for H.D., it is 'above' the subconscious, because it does not belong to that realm and represents a state beyond consciousness. The distinction between 'up' and 'down' is, therefore, important since it is the only way in which we can verbally distinguish and discuss states which, although being different, still overlap each other.

It is possible that, in order to illustrate that elusive margin beyond the physical (a margin not contemplated in psychoanalysis, which makes of extra-normal phenomena functions of the mind/body) H.D. has drawn in actual states of vision. The Lo-fu section, the section on the Galilean and Meleager of Gadara, the section on Greek mythology; all these sections, written in a rather poetic prose and apparently unrelated to the rest of the text, are visions that try to explain visionary poetics. Because H.D. has a special predilection and affinity with those characters and subjects, she actually experiences that "sympathy of thought" and love for what they represent and mean to her. It is such empathy that actually allows her to walk into those worlds and recreate them; to be able to speak for Lo-fu's thoughts and tell the story of Meleager.<sup>17</sup> Poetic language is the only means of transposing those visions and sets a difference within the text between explanatory prose and poetry, parallel to the difference existing between consciousness and over-consciousness. The end of the "Notes", the final two sections, are a reaffirmation of the poetics H.D. has developed throughout. She reclaims the authority of the body and the dependence of the spirit on it. In a characteristic H.D. technique, she superimposes images that assist those ideas: Demeter or Earth Mother as female principle is to the body what Zeus father is to the mind. Christ represents the

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<sup>17</sup> H.D. will go back to Meleager in her "Notes on Euripides, Pausanius and Greek Lyric Poets".

reconciliation of the feminine/masculine dichotomy and the achievement of a state beyond gender difference.

I would like to expand next into the relevance of personal experience for the formulation of the "Notes". We can argue that more official sources, such as Platonism, percolated in part through the works of Walter Pater and early psychoanalysis, play an important role in the "Notes" and provide frameworks as well as departure points for the development of the poet's ideas. But the backbone and originality of thought of the "Notes" seems to me to originate elsewhere. They have the clarity and, at the same time, the simplicity of statement which is only achieved through actual experience of what is being written. The poet revises, studies and explores her own creative process and the conditions that have brought it into being. It is from reflections on those conditions that she distils some of the most complex notions in the "Notes".

### 3. Personal Contexts of "Notes on Thought and Vision"

Besides the initial relationship between H.D. and Ellis, outlined at the beginning of this chapter, there are three other personal backgrounds in the life of H.D. in which the ideas of the "Notes" seem to have gestated. Two of these backgrounds are embedded in the more collective background of the Great War and they refer to the years 1916 and 1917. I would like to start dealing first with the time H.D. spent at Corfe Castle, after Richard Aldington volunteered in 1916, and to move later to H.D.'s friendship with D.H. Lawrence. Finally, I will deal briefly with the most immediate background in time to the composition of the "Notes": H.D.'s relationship with Bryher.

Just before Aldington volunteered in 1916, H.D. and Aldington moved to Devon encouraged by John Cournos. Richard Aldington started an affair with Flo Fallas, one of Cournos' friends. H.D. did not blame Aldington but she wrote extensively about this affair to John Cournos. The situation seems to have been less tense when Aldington left for the war.<sup>18</sup> From July 1916 to October 31st 1916, H.D. stayed at Corfe Castle to be close to Richard Aldington's army camp. During this period of time, H.D. wrote

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<sup>18</sup> Barbara Guest is not reliable in her account of those years. See instead Zilboorg's Richard Aldington and H.D.: The Early Years in Letters.

regularly to John Cournos looking for emotional support or for a confidant, perhaps, who could understand her highly strained state of mind and spirit. The 1916 letters to John Cournos constitute a valuable source for the understanding of "Notes on Thought and Vision" as they delineate in detail the intersection of creativity and personal relationships, dissecting the multiple sides to each and creating counterparts between emotional strain and spiritual vision in a context of heightened intensity.<sup>19</sup> The war is omnipresent in these letters and is responsible not only for the state of things described—H.D.'s stay at Corfe Castle, Aldington's conscription and material hardship—but also for the intensity that tinges emotions. In a way, the wrecked state of body and mind during war time makes H.D. bring to the surface a whole range of emotional relations whose connection may have otherwise remained hidden in peace time. On the other hand, the extravagance of relationships which unfolds in these letters seems to be another side effect of the extravagance of the war itself.

The emotional demand on Cournos is strong but not one sided. H.D. writes to him sometimes as a very close friend, sometimes as someone who is on the line between intimate friendship and love: "Korshune, I think of you. I spoke of you to R. He loves you dearly: Do not be afraid of anything: Go on with your work. I will not forget—I do not forget—" (Sunday, [July 1916]). She asks for Cournos' support in the midst of personal and general calamity: "You are wonderful to me. It is your help that has given me strength" (Sunday Evening, [July 1916]), but she continuously sends words of comfort to him as well. She is especially concerned for his physical well being, afraid that material hardship will finally have an effect on his creative drive: "Be brave ... Do not hurt your beautiful mind with neglect of your body" (Sunday Evening, [July 1916]). However, the centre and main focus of her letters to Cournos is not herself or Cournos, but Richard Aldington, as omni-present as the war itself. H.D. often asks for strength and support from Cournos so that in turn she can comfort Aldington: "It is hard for me to face this spiritual loneliness of R. alone: I give him my

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<sup>19</sup> See Pondrom's "Selected Letters" in Contemporary Literature and also the unpublished letters of H.D. to John Cournos at Beinecke Library, Yale University. A note on the dating of these letters seems necessary. The letters kept at Beinecke Library are transcripts of the original letters. Those transcripts were not typed by H.D. H.D. did not always date her letters. In many of them she only marked the day of the week (e.g. "Monday"). The dates given in the transcripts in brackets may have been taken from the stamped envelopes. For these reasons, the order of the letters may not be accurate either. I have kept in brackets the dates of the transcripts of the letters I quote from.



utmost strength but it seems little ... I want you all to help—just to give him hope—that is all” (Sunday [July, 1916]). On the other hand, H.D. seems to find in Cournos another Richard Aldington, the poet, not the warrior in the front. This sort of identification may well account for her trust in Cournos and her hope that he will understand her own emotional conflict. It is also possible that such identification may explain the closeness she feels for Cournos. In numerous letters there is a juxtaposition of Richard-Cournos’ name that seems to indicate this: “Korshune, I think of you. I spoke of you to R.”; “I have your two last letters near me and a beautiful letter of Richard which has given me great hope” (4 Aug. [1916]).

A long letter dated Tuesday 5, September [1916] unfolds for us the core of her emotional anxiety and concern, physical as well as spiritual, for Richard Aldington. This letter also throws more light on her relationship to Cournos. Part of the emotional block about which H.D. would try to write in the Madrigal series is laid down here. The core of her tangle is her love for R. Aldington. She is basically torn between her love for him and his infidelity. Aldington, on the other hand, as H.D. understands, is living his own tragedy. Her love for him is tragically unselfish.<sup>20</sup> She is wrecked, tortured, divided, but she stills wants to do something that would bring him back to the person he was before the war. In this drama, she has taken up “an intolerable burden” out of her love for him: “I am ready to give my own life away to him, to give my soul and the peace of my spirit that he may have beauty, that he may see and feel beauty so that he may write—as that is the ultimate desire of all of us”. She has decided to help him anyway she can. This involves the question she brings to Cournos, what she refers to as “a good and wise sacrifice”. She is the sacrificial victim. The sacrifice consists in asking Flo to live with them, so that R. Aldington can have “a taste of her”. H.D. thinks that may bring Aldington out of spiritual apathy. On her part, H.D. is deeply hurt by his lack of understanding of her love for him. At some point Aldington had said to her that “I have been nothing but a brother to you always”. We may infer from that comment that Aldington would have expected her to be more physical, to be more a ‘woman’ than a ‘sister’. Later on, Aldington wrote to her “I love you but I desire

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth noticing that the intensity with which H.D. writes about her love for R. Aldington is not only the result of her true passion for him but of the high degree of idealization with which she viewed her husband. Equally, we should keep in mind that H.D.’s portrait of her love for Aldington is always subjective and, therefore, it may not be an objective description of the way things actually happened and developed.

l'autre". H.D. would write about the traumatic effect of such words in some of her roman-à-clef. In "Hipparchia", for instance, Aldington is portrayed as the highly sensual Marius, spiritually in need of Hipparchia (H.D., the "exotic high-strung girl") but physically in need of someone else. John Cournos, on the other hand, seems to love H.D. In the same letter, H.D. writes: "I will not say I love you. I say, I might love you with intensity". She even thinks that if she told R. Aldington of Cournos' passion for her, Aldington would not worry about her, would not think "he is hurting [her]". Aldington remains, nevertheless, the central point of attention. Her wishes, her thoughts, her letters, her feelings for Cournos, everything is bent and shaped to meet Aldington's needs. She is Apollo's worshiper, "that he may live out his life as the light". The rest of the correspondence H.D.-Cournos during this year turns around the conflicts outlined above. On [16 Sept. 1916], H.D. writes "How beastly complicated all this seems".

How do these relationships connect with H.D.'s notions on creativity? In "Notes on Thought and Vision", H.D. wrote: "There is no great art period without great lovers" (21) and described the Athenian group as: "The dramatists, Socrates, the craftsmen and the men and women, their followers and lovers" (21) H.D. may well have been thinking of her own group, the artists and lovers who surrounded her during the war years. She must also have realized the close connection that existed in her life between love and creativity. In her letters to Cournos, she makes that relation explicit. Her love for R. Aldington constitutes the driving force that compels her to write:

I love Richard with a searing, burning intensity. I love him and I have come to this torture of my free will ... of my will, I have come to this Hell. But beauty is never Hell. I believe this flame is my very Daemon driving me to write. I want to write. (Sept. 5, [1916])

But very often when H.D. writes about love she means both the rose and the thorns. In this case, that love carries along both the burning and the pain: H.D.'s selfless love for Aldington and the pain of his betrayal. Also, the particularities of her tangle tend to emphasize the "torture" in which she lives, but also heighten her creativity simultaneously:

I am very busy with this long series of poems ... Of course, I never knew what inspiration was before, though I had had a taste of it. I know now. These poems are absolutely dictated from without. I am burning like a mad fanatic in the desert, well, like a poet. [Sept 6, 1916]

Aldington's physical passion for Flo, but spiritual love for H.D., makes H.D. feel split between two identities, the physical and the psychic/spiritual. This adds to her pain, not

only because she sees her love as insufficient for him but experiences her self disintegrating and unable to confront reality. This *state of being*, however, is itself a generator of creativity. H.D. speaks equally of the “burning” of love as the “burning” of writing and she equally uses the metaphor of “flames” to refer to love but also to spirit or creative energy. H.D. would describe this love in several poems (“Eros”, “Amaranth”, “Envy”) as bitter-sweet (following Sappho’s term).<sup>21</sup> Such state of heightened psycho-physical emotion disposes the self to absolute perception and reception, to a specific state of mind, and to an incomparable opportunity for artistic creativity (“I seem to be a spirit now”). It is interesting to notice that she not only experiences all this, but actually turns that experience into knowledge and belief about the origins of writing.

However elusive those relations may seem to us, they had already found a similar formulation in Walter Pater’s work. H.D. knew well Pater’s essays on Hellenism and may have found there corroboration of her own writing experience and the processes that encouraged it. In particular, Pater’s notion of *ascesis*, as a process of purification and asceticism that should be cultivated by the artist (Classic Lines 76, 85), seems to find an echo in H.D.’s letters to Cournot. On the other hand, the events recorded in those letters also lay at the bottom of her own psychoanalytic insights, developed independently, but at the same time as some aspects of Freud’s theories. Years later, H.D. would gain the respect and admiration of the Professor: “You discovered for yourself what I discovered for the race” (Tribute to Freud 18). Freud would have possibly described such relationship between emotion and creativity as ‘sublimation’ of the ‘libido’, but such explanation would only standardize the specifics which are being described here and which are, after all, our main concern.

Apart from the connection between love and creativity, what interests us for the genesis of “Notes on Thought and Vision” is the ascendant gradation in which H.D. seems to experience the whole process. The “searing burning intensity”, which I take to be as much physical as spiritual, is followed by pain, which acts as a sublimating element. There is a sort of purification, through pain, which transforms passion into some sort of pure bodiless energy or spirit. In this state, the writer lives submerged in

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<sup>21</sup> See Louis Martz’s introduction to Collected Poems (xiv) for a history of these poems, dealing with Aldington’s betrayal.

the intense imaginative life propitiated by heightened perception. In "Notes on Thought and Vision", H.D., will use the metaphor of alchemy to illustrate such process:

But the body, I suppose, like a lump of coal, fulfills its highest function when it is being consumed.

When coal burns it gives off heat.

The body consumed with love gives off heat.

But taken a step further, coal may be used to make gas, an essence, a concentrated, ethereal form of coal.

So with the body. It may burn out simply as heat or physical love. That may be good. But it is also interesting to understand the process whereby the heat of the physical body is transmuted to this other, this different form, concentrated, ethereal, which we refer to in common speech as spirit. (47-48)

We see that the experiences of Corfe Castle gain in the "Notes" a more formal presentation. There has also been a development since 1916. The letters focused on the asceticism enforced by material hardship and self-imposed isolation, and the distillation of physical passion into bright inspiration. The result was, in effect, a process of purgation from the physical toward the spiritual. The emphasis we now find in the "Notes" is slightly different:

It is all spirit but spirit in different forms.

We cannot have the heat without the lump of coal.

Perhaps so we cannot have spirit without body, the body of nature, or the body of individual men and women. (47-48)

What has occurred in the development from the letters to the "Notes" is an incorporation of the body to the process of creativity, so that physical passion is not purified and transformed into spirit, but it is fully incorporated. In this respect, we can say that H.D. modifies Pater's notion of *ascesis*, which echoes in the letters to Cournot.

We can still find another layer of meaning next to the process of distillation or *ascesis* which I have mentioned. In the letters to Cournot H.D. employs one more term to refer to the process of creativity, which she has described as a spiritual state. H.D. refers several times to her "daemon" as an equivalent of creative force or 'inspiration' driving her to write:

I love Richard with a searing, burning intensity... I believe this flame is my very Daemon driving me to write. I want to write. (Sept. 5, [1916])

I never knew what inspiration was before, though I had had a taste of it. I know now. These poems are absolutely dictated from without. I am burning like a mad fanatic in the desert, well, like a poet. [Sept 6, 1916]

Do not let ought and ought not, two evil spirits, torment you. With the Daemons there is no conscience. At the same time, I know our daemons act with calm, with dignity. There is, nor will be ever, anything petty or sordid about us, as long as love is a flame—a Torture—not a means toward forgetfulness and sloth. [Sept. 8 (?) 1916].

So your daemon and my daemon and dear Richard's daemon, stand beautiful, each with its own sacrifice. [Fall 1916].

H.D. uses this term as either a force inside her: “this flame is my daemon” or as external to her: “These poems are absolutely dictated from without”. In any case “daemon” becomes the personification of a third element, an intervening agent that is the cause and origin of creativity. H.D.’s understanding of the term points at the literary sources from which she is borrowing the term: classical and biblical. In Homer, the word *daimon* names a power of divine origin which acts upon men’s lives. Thus, in his epic poems, characters often may act or speak under a spell of divine origin, a *daimon*. The *daimon* provides a bridge between gods and mortals, so that communication between both worlds is never direct, but takes place through the action of the *daimon*. The same understanding of this word reappears in Plato’s Symposium. Here the notion of *daimon* retains the same meaning it had in Homer although it has also acquired a more vivid and concrete existence by being identified with *Eros*. This transformation is part of Plato’s effort to integrate various aspects of life into a harmonious system of ideas. In the Symposium Plato brings together his theory of knowledge with different forms of beauty and love. Thinking probably of this work, where Plato speaks through Socrates, H.D. calls Socrates’ philosophy a “doctrine of love”. On the other hand, Plato shows that the identification of *Eros* with *daimon* is justifiable. He establishes *Eros*’ status not as a god but as a *daimon*, or spirit: a being “of an intermediate nature”, “half way between mortal and immortal”, “half-god and half-man” (203b). This state of being makes *Eros* neither good nor wrong, neither beautiful nor ugly, neither wise nor ignorant, but caught between two levels of existence. Plato describes the role of this spirit as follows: “to interpret and convey messages to the gods from men and to men from the gods”; “it is by means of spirits that all the intercourse and communication of gods with men, both in waking and in sleep, is carried on”, and finally, “through this kind of being come all divination and the

supernatural skill of priests in sacrifices and rites and spells and every kind of magic and wizardry" (203b). It is not difficult to see the similitude between H.D.'s daemon and Plato's. H.D. has linked love with creativity, and has presented a state which is half-physical half-spiritual as conducive to writing. The daemon in Plato is equally identified with love and occupies an intermediate state. H.D. chooses this term to articulate the moment of vision or inspiration, and in this too, she is following Plato's description of the function of the *daimon*, recreating the idea that artistic inspiration has a divine origin and comes from a higher order of being. Hence the special status H.D. gives to poets and artists in society as intermediaries between the vast majority and a higher moral realm. Hence also the identification of poets with prophets, and the fusion of the religious with the artistic. H.D.'s participation in resurrecting the Hellenic spirit in art and recovering a sense of the sacred in life echoes in her understanding of that term.

Spirituality, as a plane of existence, has as much presence in the letters to Cournos as passion and pain; it is correlative to them. It emerges as a direct answer to the destruction of war and war's denial of hope and life. These writers' spirituality, tinted with syncretic Greek paganism and Christian sensibility, is often linked to an ideal of beauty. As I hope to explain in Chapter V, beauty acts as catalyst of hope, embodiment of the spirit and citadel from which to fight against war destruction. The 'escapism' which some critics have attributed to the poetry H.D. writes during these years is a completely mistaken appreciation.<sup>22</sup> For H.D., as well as for Aldington or Cournos, work is a refuge from barbarity. Spiritual isolation from war, as these letters show, helps to create a poetry that fights and questions war by asserting beauty and ensuring continuation and cultural heritage.

In "Notes on Thought and Vision", the notion of *daimon* is newly reinvented within a Modernist context, as the "over-mind". Yet, the concept of daemon should not be assimilated with the concept of muse. In "Notes on Thought and Vision" H.D. speaks of both male and female muses which help the male or female poet to 'go beyond': "a means of approach to ecstasy" (46), "an approach to the over-mind or

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<sup>22</sup> Some of the reviews I examined to uncover the myth of H.D. as an Imagist poet (Chapter I) also revealed that the word 'escapism' was often used by critics in relation to her early poetry (i.e. Hughes, 124). On the issue of escapism, see for example E.B. Greenwood's essay: "H.D. and the Problem of Escapism".

universal mind". In the letters to Cournos, it is not difficult to see how both Richard Aldington and John Cournos play the role of H.D.'s personal muses. Aldington provokes the "searing burning intensity" that she needs to write and Cournos provides the support and encouragement that help her to keep on writing. Yet, in the same way that the 'muse' is means or *via* to reach an over-mind state but is not the state she/he has helped to bring forth, so it is with 'daemon', which can be identified with the "over-mind" at the moment of actual creativity but not with 'muse'. Daemonic force is energy, inspiration, springing from the presence of a muse, made possible by his/her very presence but distinct from it. In "Notes on thought and Vision", H.D. will speak about the need of each one to be faithful to his/her own daemon, "the highest in ourselves" (37). H.D.'s early reference to daemons in her letters to Cournos and "Notes on Thought and Vision" will reappear in a later stage of H.D.'s writing (Tribute to Freud, Trilogy, Helen in Egypt), thus showing a lifelong interest in the processes that intervene in the creative act, the origins and manifestations of poetic and artistic inspiration. In Trilogy in particular the spiritual nature of the daemon fully grows into the power of prophecy and vision. Once more, the poet will burn "like a mad fanatic in the desert", indeed like a biblical prophet, to reveal to the world at war a narrative of destruction and renewal, of death and rebirth. H.D.'s vision, aided by biblical references, sacred images, invocations, prayers and chants, will again present the poet as an intermediary between the profane majority, unable to make sense of the past and history, and the sacred mysteries that are fundamental for the survival of humanity.

As we have seen, the gradation from the physical to the spiritual, present in the letters to Cournos, will be formalized in "Notes on Thought and Vision" as the three states of consciousness or being: the body, the mind and the over-mind, the latest identified at the end of the "Notes" as the 'spirit'. The role played by Greek mythology in the latter text can be explained in the light of the spirituality outlined in the letters to Cournos. We can conclude therefore, that H.D.'s correspondence to John Cournos during 1916 clarifies numerous aspects of the "Notes" and shows personal experience as an important foundation for her theories on creativity.

The second personal background I would like to point at as contributor to the genesis of the "Notes" is H.D.'s relationship with D.H. Lawrence.<sup>23</sup> Although H.D. and D.H. Lawrence met only a few times in life, they shared a very close and intense friendship, which developed mainly through correspondence and mutual exchange of poetry and manuscripts. This friendship may be said to have been very strong between 1914 and 1917. Barbara Guest interprets the story in Bid Me to Live (A Madrigal) as autobiographical in so far as H.D. and D.H. Lawrence are concerned. It is quite possible that H.D. lived with great intensity the few days that D.H. Lawrence spent at her flat in 1917, but there is no evidence that we should take as facts the events that H.D. tells in the book. Again, in relation to the autobiographical veracity of Bid Me to Live, it is important to consider that H.D. wrote the final version of that book after her psychoanalytic sessions with Freud, when she actually may have discovered D.H. Lawrence's influence on her as being much stronger than she had ever admitted.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly enough, D.H. Lawrence is absent from another roman-à-clef dealing with the same period covered by Bid Me to Live: Asphodel (1921-22). Here, H.D. focuses exclusively, in the second part of the novel, on Aldington's periods of military leave, his affair with Dorothy York and, finally, her own escape to Cornwall with Cecil Grey. There is no reference, however, to a character that we could identify with D.H. Lawrence. As a pre-Freudian fiction, and earlier version of Bid Me to Live, we can consider Asphodel as a roman-à-clef dealing with the conflictive cores that are troubling the writer in the 1920s, and Bid Me to Live as the novel in which H.D. concentrates her four years' friendship with D.H. Lawrence in just a few days, choosing for fictional setting her flat at Mecklenburgh Square. Nevertheless, the fictitiousness of Bid Me to Live does not invalidate the recording of the discussions between D.H. Lawrence and H.D. on writing and creativity, or H.D.'s (Julia Ashton) effort to avoid being absorbed by D.H. Lawrence's (Rico) intellectual magnetism.

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<sup>23</sup>Again, Barbara Guest is absolutely inaccurate and unreliable in her account of the relationship between H.D. and D.H. Lawrence.

<sup>24</sup>As Louis Martz points out, Bid Me to Live was rewritten under Freud's advice to write about that period of her life. In a letter to Bryher (May 15, 1933), H.D. wrote: "I've been soaking in D.H.L. letters, not too good for me, but Freud seems to agree with me for once. Evidently I blocked the whole of the 'period'". H.D. seems to have written the first version of Bid Me to Live in 1927, the same year as HER (Helen McNeil, "Introduction"). We know, however, that H.D. went through several drafts and that the novel did not start taking its actual shape until much later. H.D. worked at it intermittently from 1939 to 1950 (See Friedman's chronological table in Signets, 49).



Again, it is quite possible that if those discussions did not take place face to face, they did unfold through their correspondence, exchange of work, and via mutual friends. The contents of Bid Me to Live, in relation to poetics and the intersection of gender, run parallel to some of the questions H.D. touches in "Notes on Thought and Vision". That seems to point at the exchange of ideas between the 1914-1917 period and the verisimilitude of Bid Me to Live regarding this matter. Having been written many years after the events occurred, Bid Me to Live runs smoothly and with incredible precision along the questions catalyzed by the "Notes", not only in terms of ideas but also words and images employed. In fact, H.D. creates the impression that the book was written right after the period that is dramatized—except for the insistent presence of D.H. Lawrence, who as we know, is completely absent from her 1920s fiction.

Both H.D. and D.H. Lawrence hold in common a fight against the traditional hegemony of the mind in Western culture, with the subsequent despise and devaluation of the body and physical experience. H.D. makes reference, in particular, to orthodox Christian tradition, Platonism and recent Modernist theories on art. Lawrence equally attacks Idealism and writes extensively in essays and fiction about the obsession of modern man (i.e. post-Renaissance) with 'knowledge' and 'understanding' (see, for instance, "Education and Sex", "The Birth of Sex", "A *Propos* of Lady Chatterly"). As a result, the two writers initiate a process of reevaluation of the physical, in line with their modern concern for sexuality. They do not privilege physical experience over the mind but they do state that there cannot be a fertile development of the intellect without a proper exploration of our own physical possibilities (sexual, emotional and affective). In "Notes on thought and Vision", H.D. writes that the spirit cannot grow "by the strength and power of ... intellect" only (52). On his part Lawrence writes in "The Birth of Sex": "Assert purposiveness [associated with consciousness] as the supreme and pure activity in life, and you drift into barren sterility" (108). The physical must precede as a "bedrock" (H.D.'s term) for the spirit. Both H.D. and Lawrence use this vague term, spirit (D.H. Lawrence talks about the 'dynamic soul' in "Education and Sex"), to identify knowledge or activity resultant of a psycho-sensorial experience. H.D. explains the term in "Notes on Thought and Vision" more clearly than Lawrence, who prefers to keep one dimension of human beings linked to the "unknowable".

The physical is not a condition for the intellect only but also for creativity. As I have shown, the state of super-consciousness or vision in which creativity occurs, cannot be achieved, according to H.D., unless there already exists a balance between the development of the body and the development of the mind. Equally for Lawrence, social activity and creativity (I take this last includes for him the social as well as the artistic) cannot endure, nor be satisfactory, if it does not feed on sexual fulfilment. In that respect, the recovery of the abject—sexuality and eroticism—is a project common to both authors. We can still find another important meeting point between H.D.'s ideas and Lawrence's. They both talk about the power of the 'love-region' (H.D.) or 'lower-body' (Lawrence) as a centre of consciousness and a well of creative energy. For H.D., creativity can spring directly from this centre. For Lawrence, the lower-body is capable of knowledge, although of a different kind than rational. It is instinctual, dynamic and unspoiled by social codes. He calls it at times 'awareness'.

We see then that both authors share similar concerns regarding the connection between the mind and the body, the relation of creativity to the body and the recovery of physical experience for the modern man and woman. The resolution that each writer gives to those common concerns is, however, different. Those differences seem to me to spring from their personal circumstance, their sexual tendencies and their gender. For D.H. Lawrence, 'physical' means 'sexual' and sex means intercourse between man and woman.<sup>25</sup> D.H. Lawrence chooses to be blind to the sexual realities of his own time, or otherwise he is making a desperate last effort in defence of masculinity with the pretentiousness of claiming this point of view universal. The simplification he makes of the 'physical' and 'sexuality' is enormous and if it were not for the major claims he makes for sexuality in his essays and fiction, one would consider him a new Victorian. But such simplification comes from another basic one on which D.H. Lawrence builds his entire cosmology: the complementary polarity man-woman.

In "Education and Sex" Lawrence defines man as thinker and doer (94) and woman as emotion and feeling. Man is the "initiator in action" and woman the "initiator in emotion". In other words, man belongs to the realm of activity and society; woman to emotions, sensuality and the home. D.H. Lawrence takes these

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<sup>25</sup> See the introduction to *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (published in 1921), 11, and "The Birth of Sex" in *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*.

characteristics to be natural and innate. Hence, that in spite of the change of roles which was already taking place in modern society, he will still write: “man is male and woman is female”<sup>26</sup> (97), implying the impossibility of changing nature’s laws and how denial of the sexes’ determinism can only lead into a sense of failure and unfulfilment, as we can conclude from some of his famous fictions Women in Love and The Rainbow. This basic dualism extends to the rest of Lawrence’s cosmology (see the “Two Principles”) and applies also to the human body and psyche. Thus he distinguishes between the upper and the lower body. The upper body is the centre of activity and consciousness and it is essentially associated to man. The lower body is the centre of sensual/sexual life around which women’s lives turn. This dual differentiation has important consequences when it comes down to creativity. Because the primary nature of women resides in the lower body, they will always be tied up to the physical/erotic realm and, only in a secondary way, will they be able to elevate to the upper body. The case is very different for men, who acquire their necessary balance from having sexual intercourse with women.<sup>27</sup> As Lawrence describes it in the “Birth of Sex”, it is from that released energy in sex that men can then turn into action and creativity: “Men learn their feelings from women, women learn their mental consciousness from men”, “And women, when they speak and write, utter no one single word that man have not taught them” (95). For D.H. Lawrence then, creativity is a privilege of men only. To ensure that this is so, he makes a further distinction checking Freud’s assertion that a sexual motive is to be attributed to all human activity. Activity itself, or “religious or creative” motive is for Lawrence a distinct impulse from the sexual drive (Fantasia of the Unconscious 12). It is an impulse that springs from the upper consciousness and explains the strong desire of man to join efforts with other men in the creation of “something wonderful” (Fantasia 12). The distinction between those two instincts, the sexual and the creative, is paramount for Lawrence. If sex were the main instinct and creativity a derivative or outcome of it, then the basic distinction between the sexes would crumble because such distinction implies two different

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<sup>26</sup> In Bid Me to Live those words become Rico’s “man is man and woman is woman” (136). As Lawrence is an essentialist, he makes no distinction between sex (male, female) and gender (masculine, feminine). In his system both terms are interchangeable. In contemporary discourse Lawrence’s quotation would read as: “man is masculine and female is feminine”.

<sup>27</sup> From Bid Me to Live: “Rico was able to dart out, make his frantic little excursions into any unknown dimension, because there, firm as a rock, was Elsa” (89).

impulses to be ascribed to each sex, or else, woman would be more fit than man to create and to act in society—a terrifying conclusion for Lawrence.

The multiple ways in which Lawrence's resolutions of the 'physical' differ from H.D.'s interest me, not because of the obvious contrast that emerges from the comparison, but because Lawrence's ideas create a background against which H.D.'s become clearer and more outstanding. To start with, the beginning of the "Notes" works in a revisionary way and, at the same time, in an attempt to go beyond the dangerous body/mind duality which Lawrence exemplifies. One of the first things that H.D. writes about is the mind/body balance, something which is completely absent from Lawrence's women. Also unlike Lawrence, she makes a specific reference to the powers of the female body to have access to the over-mind state. She believes that it is possible for women to "think with their womb"—i.e. womb as centre of consciousness. She believes in the actual creative energy that originates in this part of the female anatomy. But what she is also stating is that the energy initiated here is actually responsible for creativity. H.D. is also willing at the same time to avoid essential dualism and to acknowledge the creative power of women as lodged only in the womb. For this reason she spreads 'the physical' beyond the sexual and develops the image of the jelly-fish with feelers that spread all over the body. She appeals not only to sexuality but to sensuality and eroticism and de-locates at the same time sexuality from the sexual organs, clearly contravening Victorian as well as Lawrencian standardization of sex. She also states that "the centre of consciousness is either the brain or the love-region of the body" in clear opposition to Lawrence, who attributes consciousness only to the upper-body (his 'love-region' is centralized in the sexual organs). So basically, H.D. scrambles the zones that can be sources of over-mind states and creates a mind-body continuum which not only unifies creative activity but introduces the possibility of breaking gender differences in a way that Lawrence rejects. Before such plurality of choice and expansion of the physical, Lawrence's "man is male and woman is female" seems quite reductive and not very meaningful. To finally crush that statement, H.D. also goes beyond heterosexuality, as I have pointed out before, introducing, in fact, most examples of outstanding creativity as coming from homosexual male artists and thinkers like Leonardo, Socrates and Plato.

One idea that seems to me crucial in the “Notes”, and whose importance can easily be overlooked in the midst of the fluidity of terms employed by H.D., is the singularity of the creative act. H.D. does not gender the ‘physical energy’ released “in love”. It is one singular drive whether in men or women homo or heterosexual which opens up the senses as much as the intellect and brings in ‘vision’, or, the necessary state for ‘vision’. H.D. makes it clear that it is the same physical energy originated in the body which is “transmuted”, “concentrated” into a different form “which we refer to in common speech as spirit” (48), the originator of creativity. This energy is transformed or, in psychoanalytic terms “sublimated” but remains basically the same throughout the process. This unification of creative energy is important in so far as it does not give ground for sexual/gender differences. D.H. Lawrence, on the contrary, is forced to split the creative process into two, to justify men’s creative impulse as feeding on physical energy but distinct from it.

The last background to mention in relation to the composition of the “Notes” is the most immediate in time: H.D.’s relationship with Bryher. In July 1919, the two women spent some time in the Scilly Islands—H.D. recovering from giving birth and the war. It was with Bryher by her side that H.D. had the “jelly-fish” experience and it was thanks to Bryher’s presence that H.D. risked to have such visions. H.D. writes about it in Tribute to Freud:

We were in the little room that Bryher had taken for our study when I felt this impulse to ‘let go’ into a sort of balloon, or diving bell ... that seemed to hover over me ... When I tried to explain this to Bryher and told her it might be something sinister and dangerous, she said, ‘No, no, it is the most wonderful thing I ever heard of. Let it come.’ ... I could have dismissed it at once and probably would have if I had been alone. ... It was being with Bryher that projected the fantasy ... (130)

Bryher, we could say, plays the role of muse in the “jelly-fish” experience, or medium toward ‘vision’. In this sense, such role fits within H.D.’s views in the “Notes” where she marks that men and women, both can be muses (45-46). As I have pointed out before, H.D. does not limit the gift of creativity to the heterosexual artists only, and, in fact, most of the examples she chooses are those of male homosexual artists. Nevertheless, there are two things that call out attention once we start thinking in terms of homosexual patterns: one is the absence of women artists from H.D.’s “Notes” and, secondly, and explicit reference to women as muses for other women. It is true that, given the openness with which H.D. elaborates her poetics, we can infer

that what she writes in relation to homosexual artists equally applies to lesbian writers, but the overt formulation is simply not there. Similarly, H.D. presents herself as the sole example of female writer, but her muse, Bryher, is not there, nor any slight reference to her is in the text. Women critics tend to make reference to H.D.'s stay with Bryher in the Scilly Islands as the most important background for the genesis of the text but, ironically enough, there is no sign of this in the text. There may be two reasons for this: one, that the very immediacy of Bryher makes H.D. forget her and move to deal with notions that originated years before, or secondly, and more likely, that H.D. is writing under and *against* a more psychologically powerful influence: Ellis' and her male friends/lovers. As I pointed at the beginning of this discussion on "Notes on Thought and Vision", this text was born as an answer and a defence of female creative/artistic power against antagonic male influence. It is basically H.D. counter-acting Lawrencian "man is man and woman is woman" kind of essentialism, as well as Ellis' most immediate and direct notions on sexuality, and nearly exclusive focus on male homosexuality. In this last case, H.D. does not completely succeed in breaking free from singleness of focus, unless she is choosing to remain at that level to answer back and settle, point by point, her ideological differences and similarities with Ellis. On the other hand, H.D.'s next volume of poetry, Hymen, seems to incorporate the overt importance that physical experience and the body has gained in the "Notes". H.D. dedicated that volume to her muse, Bryher, and her now born daughter, Perdita.

H.D.'s poetics emerges as a powerful statement on poetical inspiration and its origins against the background of Modernist male influence. As we have seen, H.D. initiates her poetics from a fundamental position which places the body at the centre of the creative artistic act. Such recovery finds inspiration in H.D.'s personal physical experiences, her relationships and her pregnancy. Her poetics are unmistakably formulated from the position of the female writer. Thus, she challenges a series of contemporary ideas on the origin of poetry and art: the hegemony of the mind, the masculine nature of creation, the abomination of Nature and the desecration of the female body. At the same time, H.D. proposes alternative organic and vital poetics which find in eroticism, beauty and physical experience its own dynamics. Indeed, words like vision, inspiration, beauty and the sublimity of the creative moment appear

once more drawing H.D. back to a Romantic field of influence, which, in return, is redefined into a Modernist key by the modern views of this female writer.

What are the conclusions to be drawn from the study of H.D.'s poetics in relation to the notion of sublimity and the way in which the poet conveys sublimity in her poems? To start with, the revaluation of the physical explains the presence of emotional intensity and eroticism in H.D.'s early poetry. The body and with it, the senses, enter the realm of the sublime and actively participate in the experience of sublimity. At the same time, sensation opens the receptive individual to the outside world and hence to the presence of the 'other'. H.D. leaves behind Kantian understanding of sublimity, which is confined to the isolated mind of the individual. It could be argued that her understanding of sublimity comes closer to Burke's empiricist position but even this idea has to be dismissed. As her poems show ("The Pool, "Oread"), there is a very close approach to the 'other' that challenges negativity or opposition in the experience of sublimity, as depicted also by most Romantic poets. H.D.'s approach to the 'other' tends to be a moment of vision and revelation, a moment of union. Such displacement of power and fear, which has been traditionally associated to the aesthetics of the sublime, seems to be the direct result of the fluidity and unity present in her understanding of the male and female body, of the relationship between body, mind and creativity and, finally, of the connection between the physical and the spiritual.

In the next chapter, I will expand and illustrate further the effects of H.D.'s poetics in her presentation of sublimity. Similarly, I hope that the role played by eroticism and the body (male, female, gender-free, homo/heterosexual) in H.D.'s poetry will become clearer. Hymen seems to me the vital text for such investigation.

## Chapter IV

### HYMEN: Sublimity and Eroticism

In my previous study of the sublime in relation to H.D.'s earlier volume of poetry, Sea Garden, I showed the multiple ways in which H.D. revises the masculine pattern of sublimity and modifies it for her own use. In Hymen, H.D. continues the revision of the Romantic sublime. Here those revisionary tactics gain more complexity as the disembodied voices of Sea Garden are fleshed into specific mythic characters and myth-making and the Romantic quest are openly addressed. In this chapter, I will give answer to some of the questions I left open in Chapter II, such as the relation of the sublime to power, and will continue my investigation about the ways in which H.D. rewrites the Romantic sublime. I would like to initiate this discussion on Hymen by recapitulating the implications that the Romantic sublime, as explained by Weiskel, has for the woman writer as both female and artist.

As I showed in Chapter II, Weiskel takes Kant's definition of the sublime as starting point in his search for the structure underlying the Romantic sublime. Thus, he isolates three stages in the experience of the sublime: balance, blockage and resolution (transcendence). Later on, Weiskel discovers that the structure underlying the dynamics of sublimity in the Romantics is the same as the pattern of romance<sup>1</sup>, also present in Romantic poems. Therefore, Weiskel realizes the possibility of reading the structure of sublimity in psychoanalytic terms. In fact, there are other clues that seem to point in such new direction: the subjectivity with which Kant invests the sublime and the language he employs to describe its mechanisms suggest a mental crisis very close

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<sup>1</sup> In general terms, and in relation to the present discussion, 'romance' can be defined as an emotional/sexual relationship between man and woman. The dynamics of this relationship is determined by gender polarity and role distinction. Within the frame of romance, the masculine has become identified with strength, confidence, independence, public life, intellect and reason. The feminine with dependence, frailty, family life and emotion. Hence, the fictitious complementariness attributed to the masculine and the feminine and the actual subordination, within this frame, of the woman to the man. Patriarchal societies display and cherish this mode of relation, which forms the psychological and emotional make-up of their individuals. Freud associated romance with the Oedipal narrative, to which he also referred as 'family romance'.



to the Oedipal one. Freud himself saw the parallel between Kant's categorical imperatives and the super-ego. Hence, the possibility of seeing one as the reflection of the other.<sup>2</sup> We see then that the three moments of the Kantian sublime, and hence of the structure of the Romantic sublime, can be read in psychoanalytic terms, corresponding to the Oedipal narrative, as follows: the first phase, the moment of balance, appears as union with the mother and the wish to be "inundated or engulfed" (104). The second phase is followed by fear of injury which points to castration anxiety. Such fear is not objective but operates subjectively as a real fear. The ambivalence of this stage is accompanied by the realization of defeat in case of aggression, or resistance against the superior power, and is resolved through identification with the superior power (super-ego, father figure).<sup>3</sup> The third stage is marked by ambiguity in the sense that identification with the father implies repression of the ego's wishes (union with the mother). Indeed, there is a parallel between the Kantian operations of reason and the super-ego. Reason is beyond the mind (beyond its empirical exercise), but operates within the mind with rules that cannot be derived from the empirical. Likewise, the superego is a power within the psyche but also beyond it. Equally, there is a resemblance in terms of operation between the ego and imagination. The latter must give way to reason if it is to comprehend an overwhelming object. Similarly, the ego gives up its freedom, through identification with the super-ego, but, in that way, it also gains a power greater than its own (Weiskel 100). It is in this manner that participation in an ideal, which is within the psyche but also beyond it (greater than the psyche), takes place and how the characteristic feeling of transcendence overcomes the ego. Weiskel concludes that "the sublime moment recapitulates and thereby re-establishes the Oedipus complex" (94). This equation brings to the fore the role of power within the workings of sublimity.

Weiskel's expansion of his theory of the sublime has two major consequences. It is now apparent that the structure isolated by Weiskel is clearly gendered, not only because it underlies masculine Romantic poetry, but also because of its correspondence with the Oedipal crisis and its resolution. In addition, in rooting the structure of the sublime on the Oedipus complex, Weiskel puts his theory at risk as it becomes clear

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<sup>2</sup> Weiskel echoing Freud, 94.

<sup>3</sup> Identification, introjection or incorporation are interchangeable terms.

that criticism against the Oedipal pattern, as a theory of subjectivity, will make his own theory crumble. Weiskel, nevertheless, assumes the Truth of the Oedipal pattern, making it the fundamental basis of his exploration. As a structuralist critic, Weiskel makes a huge assumption. He takes for granted the universality of Kantian theory and Freud's theory of subjectivity (organized around the figure of the father), and consequently, the universality of his structural pattern as well. Weiskel's analysis seems an ad-hoc critical tool because, like the poetry it sets to analyze (Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Keats and the transition poets between the Augustan and Romantic period), structural and Freudian views have also been shaped by male perception and male subjectivity. Yet, as it stands, Weiskel's work presents numerous problems for the female writer, who is absent from his study. There is not one single reference to her in his book. This is understandable to some extent considering that the Romantic tradition of the sublime is a field dominated exclusively by male poets. But the sublime, as experience, reaches beyond a 'genre' and it is not exhausted by its Romantic expression. The fact that it was in full swing during the Romantic period and fell later in disuse, as a result of social, ideological, as well as aesthetic changes, does not mean that the equation of the sublime with the Romantic sublime is a necessary and exclusive one. The treatise On the Sublime that would be responsible for the rebirth of this aesthetic category in Europe, pays due recognition to Sappho, and presents her as one of the highest representatives of the sublime. The absence of Sappho in Weiskel's book is indeed unpardonable and his notion of the sublime has lost much by the absence of the woman poet. Sappho is, ironically, an epitome of sublimity for whom the carefully delineated theories of the structuralist would not work. She sets the example in pointing at the limitations and partiality that Weiskel's views have for other women writers. Although we only have fragments, we can still perceive the qualities that the author of the famous treatise marked as sublime, in terms both of diction and the experience conveyed: the passion and intensity of her diction, the eroticism of her words and images, the sensuality of the world she depicts. These qualities are often addressed to a female lover and appear often spread over the poem rather than arranged toward a climax. It is often the climax, the moments of highest intensity that occupy Sappho's poems from beginning to end.

The sublime, as it stands in great part of Romantic poetry, and in Weiskel's theory, is a masculine genre responding to the dynamics of masculine subjectivity. An explanation of sublimity based on the Oedipal narrative, offers problems to the woman writer who will not be able to identify psychologically, with a process which is alien to her. The ambivalent feelings of fear and desire towards the mother, the castration anxiety it generates and its resolution, through identification with the father, describe a psychological development to which women cannot relate. Entering a critique of female subjectivity, as described by Freud, or discussing alternative psychological theories of subjectivity which may account more satisfactorily for the conformation of female identity, falls outside this study. However, it does seem an imperative to look for a model of female subjectivity that will account for the particular features that the sublime adopts in female experience. I have found Nancy Chodorov's account of the configuration of the female psyche very suggestive, despite the shortcomings that a sociologically rooted theory may have. Her theory of the relevance of the *pre-oedipal* phase in female development offers a satisfactory psychological theory to deal with women writers, parallel and independent from the Oedipal narrative applicable to some male authors.

As a theory that gives protagonism to the *pre-oedipal* phase, Chodorov introduces a change of emphasis regarding the role of the mother. In the Oedipal narrative, she is only the object of dispute between father and son and the goal and prize of that rivalry. Clearly, the female writer cannot feel at ease with a genre that vanquishes the mother figure and leaves women in the object/passive position. If men need to think through their fathers, women have the same need to "think back through [their] mothers" (A Room of One's Own 114). For this reason, the myth of familial romance (in the context of creativity), as a way to explain the issue of literary influence and closely connected with the sublime (Harold Bloom) is not a valid one for the woman writer. In his analysis of the phallic poet (i.e. caught in the Oedipal crisis), Weiskel shows concern about the alternatives that this poet has and the myths of creativity which can be offered as an alternative to family romance: father (precursor); mother (muse); son (new poet). Is absolute originality possible?, or, will the phallic poet have to turn into a "man talking to men" and give up all claims to divine origin and to transcendence? (Weiskel 134); can the phallic poet do without tradition and attempt a fresh start? And

finally, very timidly, Weiskel passes by what might be a solution: "Perhaps objects (as objects) only begin to be redeemed into an essential vitality when we see that they do not need that redemption, as we do" (161). He thus suggests the range of possibilities opened to the poet when he acknowledges that objects are, in fact, subjects, and that there is a possibility of moving out of gender polarity through that recognition. Ironically, the questions on which the future of Weiskel's phallic poet depends are the actual questions that women writers have had to confront and for which they have, sometimes painfully, tried to find answers: how is a woman to articulate her own creativity in the absence of foremothers?<sup>4</sup>, how is she going to gain authority for her own writing without a female tradition that will legitimate her work? Some women writers have tried to give way to their creative drive adopting a model of masculine subjectivity, that is, writing to a male canon and according to male literary models. Other women, on the contrary, have realized the dependence and lack of creative autonomy in doing so and have begun to write beyond the male canon, beyond romance, refusing to be appendices. Her precursor then is not male but female, and creativity is not external to her, or appropriated. She carries it within herself; she is her own muse, or her muse is identical to herself. But, which narrative of origins can she follow if she decides to write outside romance? And which pattern will her poetic sublime adopt?

As I showed in my analysis of "Notes on Thought and Vision", H.D. is a classic example of woman writer trying to break free from masculine definitions and masculine literary and ideological influence. In "Notes on Thought and Vision", H.D. partially achieves this by writing her own poetics. Here, she offers alternatives to romance, as well as a model of creativity, by presenting women as active creators and either men, or women, as their muses. Furthermore, she finds even more radical options by going beyond a heterosexual conception of artistic creation to present homosexual identity and homosexual relationships as equally valid sources of creative power. Thus, women stop being the passive objects of romance (muses) to become (homo/heterosexual) subjects who retain creative inspiration for/in themselves. As I also mentioned, in discussing "Notes on Thought and Vision", the absence of the female muse for the woman writer in the "Notes" can only be explained by the fact that H.D. is answering

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<sup>4</sup> On the anxiety of the female writer see Susan Gubar's "Sapphistries".

back Ellis' theories, mainly focused on male homosexuality in relation to creativity. However, around the same time of composition of the "Notes", H.D. wrote an essay exclusively devoted to Sappho, whom she takes as literary foremother and female muse.<sup>5</sup> In "The Wise Sappho", H.D. explicitly pays tribute to this woman poet, revealing simultaneously identification and kinship with her. In line with "Notes on Thought and Vision", H.D. praises the "emotional wisdom" ("Wise Sappho" 64) that drove Sappho to write, the "overpowering sensuousness" of her poetic diction (63) and the simplicity, yet magnetic, inhuman quality (57) of her love for her private muses. Analysing the contents of "The Wise Sappho", it is difficult not to think of the direct influence that Sappho may have had on H.D.'s own poetics and compositions. There are at least seven poems directly inspired by Sappho's fragments: "Neither honey nor bee for me" (Fragment 113); "I know not what to do" (Fragment 36); "thou flittest to Andromeda" (Fragment 41); "...even in the house of Hades" (Fragment 68); "And thou thyself, Calliope" (Fragment 82); "Love ... bitter-sweet" (Fragment 40); and "Dream—dark winged" in the "Choros Sequence" from *Morpheus*.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, besides the most clear canon of H.D.'s Sapphic poems, there are many other instances in which the Sapphic influence can be felt. As Robert Babcock has pointed out, H.D. did not acknowledge her sources initially (44). This is especially true for her first two volumes, Sea Garden and Hymen. There, the influence of Sappho can be noticed in the images, colours and eroticism. Eileen Gregory has studied widely H.D.'s intertextuality with the Sapphic fragments and has detected their influence in seventeen other poems besides the ones already marked.<sup>7</sup> Her investigation has tried to put straight what Babcock describes as the critics' "failure to recognize the sources of [H.D.'s] work or to treat her writing as a serious engagement with a literary tradition" (44). According to Babcock, recognizing the presence of Sappho in H.D.'s poetry

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<sup>5</sup> According to Eileen Gregory, "The Wise Sappho" was written in 1920 in California (Classic Lines 67).

<sup>6</sup> In The Classical World of H.D., Thomas Burnett Swann analyzes the six poems that bear explicit Sapphic influence. Swann's study of these poems is quite superficial and limited by the avoidance of sexual and gender issues. He also describes H.D.'s turn toward Sappho's poetry as a result of her classicism and interest in the same type of poetic diction without recognition of the actual need of the female writer to have a literary model, or H.D.'s sexual affinity with Sappho.

The seventh poem has been marked out by Eileen Gregory.

<sup>7</sup> See Gregory's chapter "H.D. and the Classical Lyric" (148-161) and the "Appendix" (256-257) in Classic Lines. A further investigation on Sappho's influence on H.D.'s poetry is forthcoming from Diana Collecott.

would suggest that “other way” of approaching her early poetic work.<sup>8</sup> Not only this. Sappho’s presence is important since she offers alternatives to creativity (female writer and female muse) and sexuality beyond romance. She also represents the most radical alternative to the masculine sublime. H.D. may have learnt from Sappho a different way of dealing and expressing sublimity and thus, how to subvert the Romantic genre.

It is in the series of poems that compose Hymen, where H.D. first acknowledges Sappho as a poetic model and where the ideas exposed in “Notes on Thought and Vision” take a poetic form. As I mentioned earlier, the first draft of that essay is bound together with the first version of some of the poems which compose the series such as “Hippolytus Temporizes”, “She Rebukes Hippolyta”, “Phaedra”, “Song”, “Evadne”, “At Baia”, “The Islands”, “Sea Heroes”, “Thetis”, as well as poems that would be included later on in Heliadora (1924). This seems to point at the close connection existing between Hymen, “The Wise Sappho” and “Notes on Thought and Vision”. They form one single bundle of poetic practice that reveals the new creative consciousness H.D. is coming to.

The dialectic I have outlined above in relation to poetic tradition and the pattern of romance, is a dialectic between two different points of view, male and female. In my view, Hymen dramatizes precisely the relationship between the two principles. The ambiguous title, pointing to the god of marriage, but also to female sexuality, suggests that duality. But as the series show, H.D. favours the voice of female characters from Greek mythology or Greek literature, who will eventually reveal an uneven, asymmetric relationship with their male counterparts. Thus, H.D.’s adoption of a female point of view finally reveals the need for a balance of power. Of course, she does not present this conflict in such blatant terms, but through the exploration of myth-making. The introductory poem to the series provides a critical frame from which to approach the poems of this collection. The disparity of opinion between “they” and “I” in relation to the object of the poem (“her”) sets the tone for future poems like “Circe”, “Demeter” and “Phaedra” and for the revisionist character of the series in general. We are invited to contemplate “her” from different viewpoints and according to different narratives. Each of them will offer us a different idea of “her”. Whereas

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<sup>8</sup> In “Notes on Recent Writing” H.D. wrote: “I grew tired of hearing these poems referred to, as crystalline. Was there no other way of criticizing, of assessing them?” (206)

“they” perceive “her” as a legend by sheer repetition of heard-of story: (“They say: / she is high and far and blind / in her high pride”), the speaking voice puts an end to unfounded myth by approaching “her” and confronting her real nature (“but ... I find / she is most kind”; “... could they know / how violets throw strange fire”). The shift of personal pronouns emphasises the easiness with which subjects and objects are given an active or passive form depending on the angle from which they are observed and the prejudices of the mind that observes them (“they say” vs. “I know”). When the real “her” is discovered, she moves from the object position to the subject position and she stops being myth, text to write legend upon. In “The Shrine”, similar concerns with identity were developed between the outside voices, the landsmen, who portrayed the goddess as Medusa, and the (sublime) experience of the collective “we”, which came close enough to the goddess to discover her warmth and kindness. Such a change of view, as developed in “The Shrine” and in the introductory poem, is essential for the revision of the traditional Romantic sublime. What this collection of poems shows is the direct relationship between sublimity and power.

Eileen Gregory’s paper, “Scarlet Experience: H.D.’s Hymen”, contains many interesting insights into this collection of poems and many of my own thoughts have emerged in response to it. However, I have also found it at times too constraining. Its insistence on a well structured whole according to a ritualistic pattern seems somehow superimposed. To me, Hymen is a mosaic of erotic experiences interconnected by imagery, colours and theme, but not necessarily subject to the rigid structure that Gregory suggests. While I see the initial poem and “Hymen” as guides toward the reading of the other poems, I cannot find parallel compositions at the end of the series. Similarly, I cannot recognise the “sense of quest” toward “wisdom gained only through passion and even bitterness and destruction” (89) underlying the structure of Hymen, nor do I register the “collapse of erotic illusion” or the shift “from physical sensuality to a more spiritualized or subtle eroticism” (85,86). The whole volume is, in my opinion, immersed in bright eroticism from beginning to end and contains poems that are complementary to others. On the other hand, the “scarlet experience”, even as a metaphor of entry into the erotic realm, only applies to part of the volume. The shift marked by Gregory may not necessarily be toward a more spiritual or subtle eroticism, but toward another mode of sexuality and eroticism.

In the next pages, I will analyze in detail some of the poems of the series. They have been grouped according to their treatment of sublimity and how the poems relate among themselves in the interaction between sublimity and power. The first poem I will study is "Hymen", for setting the tone of diverse eroticism for the next poems in terms of imagery and sensations. Next, I will introduce a group formed by "Demeter" and "Circe", both dealing directly with power and sublimity. "Sea Heroes" appears as complementary to this group. The next group includes poems of completion and fulfilment: "Evadne" and "Leda". These poems will be followed by another group devoted to homoeroticism and of clear Sapphic influence: "The Islands", "At Baia" and "Fragment 113".

"Hymen" (*CP* 101-110) contains most of the elements that in one way or another will be present in the series. It stands out in this volume of poetry not only because of its all-embracing qualities but also because of its peculiar form. Critics like Susan Gubar ("Sapphistries" 56) see it as a chain of lyrics linked by prose passages that act as "stage directions". Such prose sections would have helped H.D. to sort out the problem of brevity of "Imagist" poems to create a longer poem. I see this poem differently. To me, performance is an essential key for the understanding of the poem and, for this reason, I would rather consider it as a short lyric drama where action and non-symbolic language predominate over speech. What Susan Gubar denominates "stage directions" is poetic prose, whose aim is not to direct action and scenery, but to present action itself to the reader, since the reader cannot see it—except in his/her imagination.<sup>9</sup> So, I take that the prose fragments are movement, colour and music and not verbal language. As we read, the language of description, of representation, dissolves, and instead, we witness the unfolding of a ritual of passage at the entrance of the temple of Hera, Zeus' wife.

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<sup>9</sup> H.D.'s descriptive passages bear great resemblance in theme and manner to Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn". The ritualistic procession of women in frozen movement and hieratic majesty, unfolding gradually before the reader's imagination, echoes in the static scenes of the Greek urn. At some point H.D. compares the procession to Tanagra reliefs. The urn, although capturing permanence in marble rather than in ritual, celebrates an identical theme: "a moment of intense experience in attitudes of grace": a lover waiting for his maid and the "celebration of communal pieties" (*Norton* 827). The pastoral setting of pipes that leads from one scene to the other in the urn also acts as leitmotiv in H.D.'s poem. Moreover, Keats describes the reliefs of the urn as a "flowery tale" (l. 4) and marks: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter" (l.11-12).



The ritual performed in "Hymen" is a ritual of initiation of a virgin into married life. Such ritual involves both celebration of virginity and lamentation of its loss ("Scarlet" 93). The accompanying rituals are carried out mainly by the train of attendant women to the bride. Among them, there will be the bride's mother and female relatives, her playmates and perhaps first loves. The matrons celebrate the passage of the virgin into wife and sing propitiatory chants for the new couple. Other maids, of the same age as the bride, lament on the contrary, the loss of their friend who now leaves them to enter a different mode of life: marriage. The bride's initiation implies then passage from one state of mind and body (virginity) into another (heterosexual love), as far as the individual is concerned, and socially, passage from one emotional/cultural world (female community) into another realm—male world, public life, marriage. As a bride, she is at the threshold of a new state but also on a borderline, as the title indicates. She stands on a demarcation line between two worlds, female and male. The transit from the female community and virginal state into heterosexual love and men's world is smooth, in spite of the necessary break that transition involves. Music increases, purple becomes crimson and a youth takes over the female voices to sing of Eros' love-making to the young bride. After a "crash of cymbals", music goes back to its "calm, wave-like rhythm" and vocal accompaniment, now, of boys. The new emotional state takes the place of the previous one but both remain equal: dark and silent, out of representational systems.

The interpretation I make of this poem, in terms of the nature of the transition from female community into male world, is not shared by other critics. Susan Gubar, for instance, talks about "the bride's impending fate" ("Sapphistries" 55-56) and echoes Alicia Ostriker, for whom the poem is "a sombre meditation on the predatory pattern of heterosexuality, a pattern explicitly associated with the simultaneity of the bride's marriage and her divorce from the female community" ("The Poet as Heroine"). Certainly, in the Greek literature of the fifth century B.C., and later literature, marriage is surrounded by negative images. Maids cry when they are separated from their mothers and related images are those of kidnap, rape and death. This is indeed the myth of Persephone, kidnapped and raped by Hades and obliged to stay away from her mother, Demeter. Persephone descends to the world of the dead and comes back from it as a wife, thus mimicking marriage in a Greek fashion: as a rite

of passage involving separation from the family and later return to it holding a different status. A revision of this myth appears in “Demeter”, but I cannot find it in “Hymen”. In my view, that transition does involve separation but I do not see it to be explicitly or metaphorically characterized in this poem as violent or negative. The silence of the bride, the only figure who remains quiet in the poem, is no doubt a sign of her sorrow, having to leave behind one part of her life, but it is also a sign of her power. The veiled silent female image is a symbol of the enormous sexual and as well as personal power that the virgin hoards.<sup>10</sup> As a virgin, she is a companion of uncompromising Artemis, a goddess that stands for the woman who is her own mistress. She possesses the power that her autonomy confers her and she keeps it while she remains in the female community. Losing her virginity is, certainly in this context, a major loss, an actual loss of her power, lost with her cry. Yet, H.D. has chosen not to stop in the social implications of marriage for women—in ancient Greece, in her own time—and has focused instead on the female experience of heterosexual love as a sacred rite of passage, rather than on its socialized form (marriage). As Eileen Gregory writes, “The threshold of the bridal moment (hymen) is sacred to Aphrodite and represents a moment of fullness in beauty, of openness to the demands of Eros” (“Rose” 135). This interpretation fits within the tradition of Sapphic epithalamia, which H.D. follows, and in which the entrance into the realm of love and desire constitutes the brightest moment of experience.<sup>11</sup> Gregory identifies this ritual as the *hieros gamos* or “sacred marriage of the Eleusinian mysteries”. In the Eleusinian rite, the bride descends into the bridal chamber to be united with Eros. At that moment, the torches go out, as in the end of this poem, and the union takes place in darkness (Classic Lines 160). As I will show later, “Leda” is another poem in which H.D. has avoided the politicization of its subject, and has developed instead heterosexual union in a sublime form absolutely devoid of negativity or violence. Similarly, in “Hymen”, H.D. presents heterosexual love as an alternative love to the female intimacy that the young bride leaves behind.

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<sup>10</sup> See Eileen Gregory’s comment about the power of the silent bride in “Rose Cut in Rock” (135) and her even more illuminating instruction in “Scarlet Experience” (95).

<sup>11</sup> Gregory explains the difference between Sappho’s epithalamia and those written later by Latin poets like Catullus. While marriage in Sappho is the blooming moment of the flower, for the Latin poets it is a stage in life full of social implications. Sappho sings of virginity but also celebrates its loss in relation to female erotic experience rather than its social import. (“Scarlet” 91-92)

My legitimisation of heterosexual love in the poem leads me to see two alternative sublime patterns. The first one is possibly the most obvious one since it reads the sublime as heterosexual love. What is new in this pattern of the sublime, in relation to the traditional treatment of the sublime, is that the process is presented from a female point of view and culminates in erotic ecstasy, in a climax left in suspension without resolution. The physical union between the bride and an unseen bridegroom presents no disparity between them. Even if Eros' song relates the union from *his* point of view, the chorus has already expressed the bride's passion. Each participates in his, her own way of making love. He is "the bee" "with his honey-seeking lips" seeking "[to] drink the very flower away" and "plundering" between the "flower-lips". She is the flower "drawing back" "[her] petals" and "her shoulders". "Crash of cymbals" announces the union of the lovers in a sublime expression of excess (metaphorically, of sound).<sup>12</sup> Such climax is marked by absolute suspension of desire and time, translated here in "a momentary pause". The lovers are left in the darkness ("torches flicker out") and silence of perfect union ("Where love is come ... / Our limbs are numb ... / Rapture of speech unsaid"), in a moment that has taken them back, psychologically speaking, to primal oceanic union with the mother, the source of life. Weiskel identifies inundation with horizontality or the image of the wasteland: "we are confined to the second phase and await futilely the restorative reaction"(26). It is a form of sublimity without resolution. Weiskel's approach is clearly gender biased, seeing this phase as a trap, by opposition to the more favoured pattern that he has isolated in Romantic poets: ending always in separation and restoration of individuality—vertical fall and subsequent uplift. By contrast, Gregory describes this moment of suspension and ecstasy as "entrance through desire into an unconscious emotional element" ("Falling from the White Rock" 117). This other dimension is "a chthonic realm of transformation", a zone of regeneration associated with the binding and primary power of the female/mother figure. Hence, ecstasy is united with the female principle (mother, nature, earth).

The second apparition of the sublime, is embedded in the community of women. This other presentation of sublimity is not always easy to identify because it does not appear as a revision of the masculine sublime. In my first study of the sublime, I made

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<sup>12</sup> See Edmund Burke on the excess of sound as a source of sublimity, 82.

reference to the multiple ways in which H.D. revises the Romantic pattern by subverting its last stage (defined and determined by male anxiety) into a journey back to a *pre-oedipal* world; by avoiding climax (echoing frustrated desire), or focusing only on the central phase, thus favouring horizontality. In this new expression of the sublime, the characteristic tension of energy/desire disappears to the point of dissolution but remains latent in another form, not dynamic, but static: in the simplest music of flute or wood-wind, in sheer rhythm without melody, in the display of colours (purple, gold, deep blue), in ritualistic majestic movement approaching hieraticism, in fragrance of flowers and texture, in the sensuality of forms and shapes standing against the purple background like reliefs on a frieze or a vase. Such richness of sensory impressions, such extremes of sensation suggest calm and stillness, charged, however, with intense eroticism. In the context of the female community, the latent sensual calm of sensations, rhythm, and music reduced to its most economic expression (the simplicity of lyric chants) are elements associated to a non-symbolic world in which language is ritualistic, non-representational, non-verbal.<sup>13</sup> The sublime is usually represented through verbal language, through metaphors of fall, immersion, union, destruction or death, and very rarely by silence, itself *pre-oedipal*. In previous revisions of the genre, H.D. has already presented sensations of touch or texture, although still relying on rhetorical images, as 'desire' appeared as dynamic energy experienced by the desiring female subject. Here, by becoming latent, desire has other ways of manifesting itself beyond verbal language. Notice also that in the procession of women there is an absence of difference, not only because of their same sexual identity but also because all of them represent "femaleness" at different stages of life: there are the little girls, their gender undefined by hair that "curls at the back of their heads like the hair of chryselephantine Hermes" (102); there is a second group of older "children", "slight" and "fragile" (103), followed by "free and wild" adolescent girls "boyish in shape" (104) and "gesture", forming a kind of Sapphic "thiasos"<sup>14</sup>; finally there are older women (105), possibly recently married, and the matrons like "queens"

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<sup>13</sup> This is a semiotic mode of communication, a "chora", as Kristeva has described it (Revolution in Poetic Language).

<sup>14</sup> The Greek term *thiasos* is used by Gregory in "Rose Cut in Rock" to describe a "group of young girls" (135). In Classic Lines, Gregory employs the term to refer to female relations within a community of women. The notion of *thiasos* comes from Sappho's lyrics.

(101), representing motherhood. The procession of women is also symbolically accompanied by “a sequence of flower-gifts” pointing at the different moments of female erotic experience (Classic Lines 156). Gender ambiguity belongs to this realm thus pointing at emotional ambivalence between familiarity, friendship and intimacy. It is interesting to see how the emotional and gender ambiguity of this realm of sameness, of this Sapphic community of female relations set apart from the male figure, finds resolution (entry of difference) in heterosexual love as presented above.

This other manifestation of the sublime illustrates the distinction between a *static sublime* and a *dynamic sublime*. Such distinction relies on the nature of desire—latent or dynamic. The first originates the *pre-oedipal* sublime, the second, the sublime in its traditional Romantic form, as well as in its revised versions. Such distinction, however, should not lead into wrong conclusions. To associate the static *pre-oedipal* sublime to a female sublime and the dynamic sublime to a masculine sublime is a great simplification that denies the evidence provided by H.D. Her revisions of the Romantic sublime are as legitimate expressions of a female sublime as the static form can be, yet they are inscribed within what I have come to call dynamic sublime, because here desire moves, unfolds, seeks and looks for fulfilment. On the other hand, to identify a female sublime with the *pre-oedipal* sublime only is a major simplification of the ways H.D. deals with this genre and denies dynamic desire to women. In fact, the heterosexual sublime pattern, with which I started the analysis of “Hymen”, presents a phase of union of the lovers which is verbally represented by means of metaphors (bee, flower, etc.) but achieves a climax (ecstasy) which is outside representation and is marked by *pre-oedipal* elements, such as silence and rhythmic music with no melody and darkness. I pointed at the *horizontal metaphor* that would summarize this moment and which is shared by the *pre-oedipal* static sublime. To finally clarify these distinctions, I would add that in the same way that ‘static’ and ‘dynamic’ sublime should not be identified with female/masculine sublime respectively, neither should dynamic sublime be seen as exclusive to heterosexuality. H.D. also uses it for poems that voice homosexual desire. So the use of a ‘static’ or ‘dynamic’ pattern to express either homosexual or heterosexual love is, finally, the poet’s choice.

The next poems which I will analyze deal with the relation of sublimity and power. “Demeter” focuses on the power of this female myth and draws us into the conclusion

that the subject needs to have the power conferred by autonomy in order to have access to the experience of the sublime. Myth-making will be in that context related to the dispossession of power. “Circe” comes to illustrate those points while “Sea Heroes” reveals an interesting twist to masculine narrative.

“Demeter” (*CP* 111-115) brings us to the field of myth-making, in this case, Greek myth-making, or adaptation of ancient earth-centred myths to a male warrior culture. There is a direct relation between myth-making and power. We know that power is part of some sublime patterns, that in the experience of the sublime there is a circulation of power (influx or otherwise), and even more, that the possibility of sublime experiences depends on the power which the subject must have to have access to such experiences. To revise this myth, H.D. needs to bring Demeter to the subject position. This is what the introductory poem to the series advocates. Demeter could be the “she” over which the myth predicates pride and highness beyond reach, the “she” that treads on flowers and about whom the poet has found a very different reality. This new reality about Demeter is brought by the poet to the fore by allowing Demeter to speak by herself. What the Greek myth says about her confirms the goddess, on the contrary, into object, as the disparity between herself speaking and “her” as myth reveals.

Demeter sees herself trapped within the myth that men have forged for her: “perfect the shell they have / fashioned me, these men!” (112). This myth institutionalizes her as goddess of fertility of the land, of crops and cereals: “strong to protect, / strong to keep back the winter / when winter tracks too soon / bleach the forest ... till fire shatter the dark / and hope of spring / rise in the hearts of men” (114). On her depends the survival of the people and, for this reason, she is considered to be a powerful goddess: she has power over life and death. To propitiate her kindness, the myth has it that Demeter herself, after punishing humanity—and thus Zeus, as a revenge for her daughter’s rape by Hades—, explained to mortals the rites that they should celebrate in her and her daughter’s honour. These rites would become the Eleusinian mysteries, to which Demeter makes reference at the beginning of the poem:

steps of temple, fore-stone, lintel,  
 step of white altar, fire and after-fire,  
 slaughter before,  
 fragment of burnt meat,  
 deep mystery, grapple of mind to reach  
 the tense thought ... (*CP* 111)

The myth represents her in an archetypal way: fully dressed, of big proportions, maternal, carrying a “spray of wheat” and poppy. However, Demeter rejects the tributes paid by men to her—“useless”, says the goddess. She can certainly not identify with the classical iconography of her. She has now become a matron: “wide of shoulder, great of thigh, heavy in gold”, and compares this representation with that of Aphrodite: “she is slender of waist, / slight of breast, made of many fashions”, an equally archetypal male creation. Demeter reveals against such mythic fate: “I will not stay in her breast, / the great of limb” and brings to the very surface the mechanisms of male myth-making applied to her: by turning her into a powerful goddess, men have in actuality disempowered her. Her original powers have been diminished and submitted to control through myth and representation. Hence, that she will refer to all the paraphernalia surrounding her cult as: “the flattery / of the mighty power / they have granted me”.

The oldest version of Demeter as goddess of fertility of the fields, dates back to the seventh century B.C., as can be found in the “Homeric Hymn to Demeter”. The myth is probably as old as Greek civilization itself. Another part of the poem tells us, about the origins of this myth. In part II, Demeter talks about rites of initiation and “measured utterance or the mystic trance”. She refers, no doubt, to the Eleusinian mysteries, but these themselves take her to other “mystic trance”: the oracle of Delphi. Delphi was dedicated to Apollo, the god of light and the arts. The myth tells that the temple was built to commemorate the god’s victory over the she-dragon guardian of the place. The oracle belonged originally to Ge or Gea, Mother Earth, the serpent being a sacred animal to her. Thus, we find that Demeter whose name means, in fact, mother Earth, is a myth born with the Apollonian appropriation of the oracle and the triumph of a male warrior culture over a society that, until then, had worshipped Mother Earth as highest goddess and as mother of all the gods. In the transition from a matriarchal to a patriarchal culture, which is what the history of this myth indicates, the powerful Mother Earth needs to be exorcised or tamed. Her chthonic power (Medusa) needs to be transformed in order to make it harmless. Thus, the principle of all things is turned into a matron second to Zeus, deprived of her original power and left only with a shadow of it.

The third part of the poem makes explicit reference to that disempowerment, exercised through the confining qualities of myth-making: "Enough of tale, myth, mystery, precedent" (113). Here Demeter is pointing not only at her loss of primal power. She reclaims the power of motherhood from another myth. This relates to Dionysus, or, Bromios' birth and his parentage: "strange tales of a shelter / brought to the unborn".<sup>15</sup> This myth wrests once more protagonism from Mother Demeter to pass it to Father Zeus: Semele (which in Thracian dialect means Earth) was struck dead by Zeus who revealed himself to her as lightning. As Semele was pregnant, Zeus took the unborn baby out of the dead woman's body and inserted it into one of his thighs until it was born. Equally revisionary of Dionysus' myth is Demeter's question: "who begot you and left?", an aspect never considered by Greek myths. It belongs, obviously, to a woman's point of view. This question relates to a third myth brought into the poem: that of Kore or Persephone, Demeter's daughter. Zeus often forgets about his sons and daughters by leaving the women he has impregnated to their own luck. Thus, Dionysus is handled first to Persephone, then to the nymphs to take care of him. In the myth about Persephone, revised in part IV of the poem, "*What of her— / mistress of Death?*", Demeter cries the fate of her daughter, kidnapped and raped by Hades. Demeter laments how in her present condition as goddess "wrought of iron" was implied her own impotence to protect her daughter—Demeter's myth and Persephone's story are one: both made by the same forger. In the background of Persephone's story there is Zeus' approval of the events, since he did not stop Hades from committing such crime. Demeter bitterly resents Zeus' indifference "who begot and left" and questions the myth that Persephone represents—that of marriage as rape and violent separation from the mother, a common view throughout all Greek mythology—: "Ah, strong were his arms to wrest / slight limbs from the beautiful earth, / Ah, strong were the arms that took / (ah, evil the heart and graceless), / but the kiss was less passionate!" (115).

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<sup>15</sup> I disagree with Eileen Gregory's interpretation of "Demeter" in *Classic Lines* (101, 104-105). Gregory argues that in the poem the bond between Demeter and Persephone has been shadowed by that between Demeter and Dionysos. This would be the result of the influence of Pater's essay on Dionysus, in particular, and of Pater's fictions in general, which emphasize the relationship mother-son, rather than that of mother-daughter. H.D.'s recovery of Demeter as a powerful goddess is in my opinion a reaffirmation of female presence, and hence a dissension from Pater's male models. Demeter reclaims in this poem primacy for herself and her own daughter.



Finally, what revision of all these myths, closely interrelated, brings into light is Demeter's realization that not only has she been disempowered by being turned into a myth but also by having been fragmented. Persephone, as daughter, is not but a young Demeter ("Form of a golden wreath / were my hands that girt *her* [mine] head / ... small circlet and slim / were *my* [mine] fingers then" (114)). Demeter is also Gea, Mother Earth, Semele and finally Aphrodite, goddess of love. By attributing different aspects of her female/maternal power to different female myths, her power is spread and rendered harmless to the male mind. The great Mother Earth has been Apollinized.

"Circe" (CP118) bears witness too to that disempowerment, bringing explicitly together the connection between power and sublimity. The poem has a clear structure. It is divided into three parts, but division hardly counts as each part repeats, with very little variation, the previous one. The first two stanzas set the pattern for the following ones. Here sublimity is marked by repetition, by saturation of signifiers:

It was easy enough  
to bend them to my wish,  
it was easy enough  
to alter them with a touch. (CP 118)

Cedar and white ash,  
rock-cedar and sand plants  
and tamarisk  
red cedar and white cedar  
and black cedar from the inmost forest,  
fragrance upon fragrance ... (CP 119)

Although repetition and excess build up toward a climax, as it happens in the Romantic structure of the sublime, resolution or recovery of balance takes place in a negative form: "and all of my sea-magic is for nought", which certainly does not bring self-affirmation but personal frustration instead. Here, the sublime pattern, adopting a regular Romantic form is reversed at its very end and transformed into means to indicate intensity of desire and emotion and its frustration: "how shall I call you back?" (118).<sup>16</sup> The repetition of frustration, embodied in a sublime form in the following stanzas, contributes to increase the tragic tone of the poem. In the background of the poem, a question remains latent. Why is Circe's desire frustrated and how is it that her charms do not work on her beloved Odysseus? Indeed, all the dramatic qualities

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<sup>16</sup> Desire is defined by Freud as "uneasiness in the want of an element that is absent". A similar pattern appears in "Cliff Temple".

inherent in this poem emerge from the difference between her power to attract men and her impotence to bring Odysseus back. She is a powerful woman, impotent against the hero character on whom her magic does not work. The answer seems to be related to the role that each of these mythic characters plays in the Homeric epic and in this poem.

In the *Odyssey*, Circe, in spite of all her magic charms, is a recipient object. It is not her sorcery that brings Odysseus to the isle of Egea, but a wreckage, devised by the epic poem so that the hero can continue his journey and quest. Once there, the hero is protected against this woman's power by the gods, who give him an antidote. In this way, he not only remains neutral to Circe's drugs but regains a power that neutralizes hers: afraid of him, she invites him to her bed. After spending some time in the island, Odysseus leaves. The myth itself has left out from its beginning the possibility that Odysseus will stay with Circe since, otherwise, his nature as hero would crumble. Having gained this experience as part of his searching quest, he leaves Egea for his next destination. H.D. chooses to modify that story by allowing Circe to speak by herself and tell her mind and feelings. Thus, she tells her own narrative: she is not a seduced woman, she uses her magic and power instead to bring Odysseus back. She is pursuer, questing subject in her own way. She has a critical eye. She can see now, as subject, the sublime masculine quest from the other side, from the side of the object: "a thought called them / from the sharp edges of the earth; / they prayed for a touch". But deluded by their own myth the men do not find a passive object of desire but confront female power: "they entreated me /... / I turned each to his own self" (119).

Is H.D. pointing at the Homeric narrative as embodying a masculine point of view about powerful women like Circe?, or is it that the real Circe is discovered only by doing without the Homeric tale?, is Circe's power real or mythical? The truth is that a positive answer in any direction about the nature of Circe's power, whether she hoards it herself or she is a sort of *femme fatale*, a masculine projection, does not change the fact that she has nothing to do against the hero's power. The origin of her frustration is in the heroic cultural background that has forged her myth. The Circe figure, has no power within a heroic society because in such society female power is associated to the chthonic/natural which has been defeated by heroic/Apollonian culture. In "Circe", as in "Demeter", female power is inoperative in a society that denies real power to

women. Odysseus, on the other hand, represents the hero *per excellence*. It is the hero's nature as permanent wanderer, always seeking, always unsatisfied, that blocks any possibility for Circe to be an active subject in the relationship—that she will have the power to call him back. The survival of the hero depends on the passivity of women. Circe's frustration has then at its origin the realization that her power is useless.

Consequently, in this poem, rather than revision of heterosexuality, there is a revision of the two pillars on which it has traditionally rested—the masculine (hero figure) and the feminine (object, passive). In such context, a reversal of the sublime as Romantic quest, i.e. female as questing subject, can only end up in frustration. Sublimity in such a manner becomes impossible for the female figure. Still, H.D. insists in the difference of a hypothetical resolution: Circe would be ready to spill her power for Odysseus's "glance" (120). The sublime, from the hero's point of view, brings, on the contrary, self-affirmation and empowerment. We see then how the pattern of sublimity not only reveals its connection to romance but also shows its relation to power or, what is the same, powerful identities.

"Sea Heroes" is a poem that complements "Demeter" and "Circe" because the argonauts are part of the heroic background that is subject to revision in this series. Interestingly enough, the poem is a reversal of the traditional end of the Romantic sublime. The power of the sea-heroes over the sea is developed throughout the poem. A string of epithets and attributes sing the glory of these intrepid sea-tamers: "god-like", "valorous", "men as great as the sea", "greater even than the sea". That relationship with the sea is described in terms of lover and mistress in a Romantic, heroic sense: the sea heroes control, tame the irrational natural element; "the sea is swept, / baffled by the lordly shape", "to love, to mate the sea? ", while the sea itself is described as a mistress that hails the heroes: "leap, swift to kiss, to curl, to creep" with a sense of dutiful submission. The last stanza introduces a reversal of the previous accumulation of power attributes: "what would they be, / the very gods, /rearing their mighty length / beside the unharvested sea?" (CP 130). Unlike Shelley's "Mont Blanc", where the power and greatness of nature becomes nil without the poet's mind to comprehend it, here the opposite process occurs: it is the heroes' power which is undermined by showing the dependence of their apparent greatness on a greatness

bigger than themselves: their power truly belongs to the sea, a chthonic female force associated to the mother figure.

If we wondered what is H.D.'s positive alternative to a poem like "Circe" or "Cliff Temple", we find the answer in "Evadne" (*CP* 132). Here, reversing the quest of Romantic love, the female character tells the experience from her own point of view. Not only that; she does not speak as the object of the relationship, but as an active participant. Certainly, there are moments in love-making when Apollo appears as active lover and Evadne as passive, somehow rescued or redeemed by his love: "I first tasted under Apollo's lips / love and love sweetness", "between my chin and throat / his mouth slipped over and over". But she is not less active: "His hair was crisp to my mouth" and "my hands keep the gold they took / as they wandered over and over / that great arm-full of yellow flowers"—which shows reciprocity in love. It is interesting to notice the things that Evadne, as a woman, remembers of her moments with Apollo. She remembers the closeness of the lover in her arms, the tenderness of the embrace and kisses and a whole range of sensations of touch, some of them emerging from the simplest gestures yet, more sensually charged for that: Evadne *tastes* love; "the wind combs back" her hair; "his hair [is] crisp to my mouth ... cool"; his mouth slips "between my chin and throat"; "between my arm and shoulder, / I feel *the brush* of his hair, / and my *hands keep* the gold they took / as they *wandered over and over* / that great *armful* of yellow flowers" [*italics mine*]. This not only may describe female subjectivity but it certainly points at the aspects that H.D. attributes to a female experience of love. There is intense eroticism in that scene, which relates to an experience of sublimity, similar to that described in "Leda". Such presentation of the aspects of love-making best remembered by this woman takes us back to the ways in which the poet revises the masculine experience of the sublime. On the one hand, she presents sublimity as reciprocity between the subjects. On the other, she favours sensuality and a whole range of sensorial sensations, especially the tactile over the visual. Burke already wrote about the senses being a source of sublimity, but the truth is that most renderings of the sublime in Romantic tradition are dominated by sight.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> We can recall here the difference I made reference to in Chapter I between masculine perception in Pound's "The Dancer" and female perspective in H.D.'s "The Contest".

H.D.'s consciousness of all these aspects shows more clearly as we go back to earlier versions of this poem. The oldest version kept is a longer poem with little variations in relation to the published one.<sup>18</sup> H.D. cut it right where the version we now have finishes. The section she left out is sexually explicit:

wandering across my thighs  
 his two hands hollowed beneath me,  
 and he lifted me  
 and my heart broke  
 [its] rayed petal from petal  
 pressed far down in the                      [page torn here]

As it stood, the poem presented a clearer expression of sublimity ("my heart broke") but diminished Evadne's protagonism. It also clashed, stylistically speaking, with the tone that the poem had developed until then, since in this stanza action dominates over the previous sensuality and latent desire. The choice of one version for another is significant. As it is, the poem presents exclusively a female point of view and has the female experience of love at its centre.

"Leda" (CP 120-121) is quite an anomalous poem within the collection, in terms of the approach that the poet takes in the recreation of the myth. As I already mentioned in the analysis of "Hymen", H.D. does not make a case about seduction or rape in this poem. Instead, she focuses on the aesthetic beauty of the myth. As Helen Sword remarks in her study, "Leda and the Modernists"<sup>19</sup>, this seems rather strange, coming from a female poet who is particularly sensitive to the victimization of women, both in life as well as in literature (314). In *Hymen*, for instance, we have seen how H.D. addresses the inequality underlying the duality masculine-feminine, and gives voice to her female characters, to allow them to present their case outside the confinement of masculine myths. Sword suggests two reasons for this. The first one is that H.D. is writing in the fashion of *fin de siècle* aestheticism, inheriting the portrait of "Leda's story not as violent drama but as peaceful idyll" (306). The other explanation, more likely for Sword, is that "H.D.'s poem is not as benign as it appears" (314) and that H.D. addresses the dark sides of the poem through her very refusal to deal with

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<sup>18</sup> Typescript with corrections by H.D. n.d. H.D. Papers, Folder 915, Box 35. Beinecke Library, Yale University.

<sup>19</sup> It would be impossible to paraphrase here Helen Sword's excellent study of the literary history of the myth of Leda. She dates this poem 1918. Yeats dealt with the same myth in his 1920 sonnet "Leda and the Swan" and so did D.H. Lawrence in his swan poems (314).

them. In this way, she would exorcise, through denial and avoidance, the very possibility of the myth being used as a metaphor of inspiration at the expense of pain and violence (as Yeats did later in "Leda and the Swan"). I am more inclined, however, towards the first proposal. Surprising as it may be, this is not the first time that H.D. would favour aesthetics over politics. In fact, she often did in her view of classical Greece. "Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets", for instance, contain some examples of what seems to be an inherent contradiction within H.D.'s work.

In this poem, H.D. seems fascinated with the potential beauty deriving from the union of nymph and swan. Such beauty seems to ask for a focus on the union of Leda and Zeus, and the bliss of such union. There is no violence, no strife. An intense sensuality pervades the scene: "the gold day-lily / outspreads and rests / beneath soft fluttering / of red swan wings / and the warm quivering / of the red swan's breast" (121). Here the poem emphasizes the closeness of the moment: touch and contact seem to occupy an important place in H.D.'s creations of sublime scenes ("Leda", "At Baia", "The Pool"). In "Leda" it is "his soft breast", "the level ray of sun-beam" "caress[ing] the lily", the "soft fluttering" and "warm quivering" and the slow meeting of river and tide. Even visual images are tinted with tactile sensations like the "dying heat / of sun and mist", displaying a skilful use of synaesthesia.

These features, together with H.D.'s choice to focus on the ecstatic moment of sublimity, are characteristics that, as I have mentioned earlier, can be ascribed to the female sublime. It is interesting to remember that Weiskel, when dealing with the male Romantic poets, pays attention to the structure of the sublime as a whole, but never spends time on this specific moment. He does explain 'falling' as a moment that culminates in the extinction of time and characterizes it as contradictory feelings looking for resolution, but there is no word about the ecstatic moment—perhaps because in the Romantic poets resolution is more important than the immersion. In Leda, the poem focuses on that specific atemporal phase—there is no 'fall' since there is no desire, only pleasure. The anxiety that accompanies desire is no longer here. It is oblivion, forgetfulness of time and self-consciousness: "no more regret, / nor old deep memories / to mar the bliss" (121). Notice the sublime calm that dominates the poem and how the extinction of time is represented here by the slow rhythm of the verses. Weiskel only mentions the possibility of such moment in gender-biased terms, as we

have seen, but correctly marks, though, that the appropriate image for this type of sublimity is horizontality. Irigaray has also spoken of this metaphor in relation to women's experience of sublimity. She writes: "Why aspire to the heights of a worthier discourse? Erection doesn't interest us: we're fine in the lowlands. We have so many spaces to share. Because we are always open, the horizon will never be circumscribed".<sup>20</sup> Weiskel also recognizes that: "Silence or attenuation of the signifier or text to the zero degree ... can also be a source of sublimity"; I add: or a manifestation of it. In this poem, for example, there is only sensation and absolute silence in the scene presented to us.

"Evadne" and "Leda" appear as poems of completion or fulfilment by contrast with "Circe", which turns upon frustration. H.D., following the ideas she exposed in "Notes on Thought and Vision", and perhaps, directly influenced by her relationship with Bryher, produces duplicates of sublime patterns for a heterosexual as well as a homosexual experience of love. In the following group of poems, "The Islands", "At Baia", "Fragment 113", she presents instances of unfulfilled longing as she did in "Circe". The difference resides, however, in the uncertain gender of the speaker, and as a result, in the absence of a power dialectic between a male and a female character. The voice of Sappho's fragments seems to resonate through.

"The Islands" (CP 124-128) brings back into this series of poems an echo of Sea Garden.<sup>21</sup> Like in that volume of poetry, desire is naked, disembodied, without a defined speaker or addressee. Similarly, elements that characterized that volume such as the presence of the sea, rocks, wind, garden and flowers and the opposition between land and sea, reappear here. There is a similar desperate frustrated tone as in "Circe" and also a similar questioning of power: "What are the islands to me ?" (124). It is difficult to establish the sex of the speaker. Given the context of female voices in this series, the elements touched upon (flowers, rocks) and the similitude the poem presents to the Sea Garden series, where frustration of desire often corresponds to a female voice, the speaker seems more likely to be female: "What can love of land give to me / that you have not?" (125). Louis Martz, supports this hypothesis, and argues

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<sup>20</sup> Luce Irigaray, "When our Lips Speak Together" (75).

<sup>21</sup> According to Eileen Gregory this poem was written in 1916 or 1917. Classic Lines, 33.

that the poem evokes the legend of Ariadne and “enact[s] the anguish of a deserted woman” (“Introduction” xiv). Such context certainly fits in with the rest of the poem.

The addressee’s identity is also difficult to discover. As Gregory has marked, the “you” is never “identified or located in any way” but “repetitively evoked” (Classic Lines 34). It can be either man or woman since the few elements present in the poem point in both directions. The epic context of “Sea Heroes”, the presence of Odysseus and Theseus in the series, the heroes’ relationship to ships (instruments of masculine search), sea, islands, wrecks, and finally, the feelings of both fear and attraction exposed in section VII, followed by fleeing—aspects of the masculine Romantic sublime—suggest a male lover. This could be further backed up by “What can love of strife break in me / that you have not?” (125). “Break” could not be literal but metaphoric, but the context of “Hymen” may well indicate heterosexual love. Still, there are elements that could be associated to a female lover. Section V, for instance, brings together beauty and rocks. In the “Wise Sappho”, H.D. sees Sappho’s fragments as rock shelves (58) and later identifies them to islands “differing entirely from any present day imaginable world of emotion” (58). Section VII ends pointing at “cold splendour of song and its bleak sacrifice” which brings us again to Sapphic song with the qualities of hardness and waning fire that H.D. associates to it. It is then likely that the female speaker is addressing a woman lover, or that H.D. has given voice to Sappho, who in this poem would lament the powerlessness of her poetic gift and of her poem—the islands—to attract her beloved. This interpretation would be supported by the following poem, “At Baia”, a poem of lesbian love. In any case, the poem is open to different interpretations and whether, male or female lover, the sublime form that the poem acquires remains the same. For Gregory, the poem is not “about eros directed at an ‘object’” but “about the lover’s mind in the act of constructing desire for itself” (Classic Lines 35).

The questions posed by the poem are strictly rhetorical; they expect no answer but help to give free voice to the speaker’s emotional urges. Before unanswered love, the speaker’s erotic and poetic power are rendered useless. The poem is highly repetitive with hardly any variation except for section IV, V, VI. Instead of gathering momentum, the excess of signifiers achieves a fall, or negative climax, expressed in similar language to that which should assist the characteristic peak of the sublime



pattern: a landscape of desolation is the objective correlative to the inner state of emotion of the speaker: “beauty is set about / with wrecks of ships, / upon our coast, death keeps / the shallows” (section V); “In my garden / even the wind-flowers lie flat, / broken by the wind at last” (section VI). After such anti-climax, the repetitive pattern starts again, pointing at the obsession that characterises the anxiety of loss and absence. The poem becomes a manifestation of sublime structure to voice desire and its frustration.

“At Baia” (*CP* 128), seems to be a poem about the possibility of lesbian love in another, imaginary or dream world. There is no critical consensus on such a point since, as in “The Islands”, neither the sex of the speaker nor of the addressee is explicit. We need to turn to the elements of the poem and search among H.D.’s personal codes to find out. The speaker has a dream fantasy in which she would receive a great bunch of orchids from the woman she loves as a declaration of her love for her. Orchids are symbolic flowers.<sup>22</sup> If the speaker of these verses were a woman, she might send flowers to her male lover, but she would rarely send orchids.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, a male lover would choose another kind of flowers, unless the recipient had a special liking for orchids. This seems to point at the symbolic use of these flowers within the context of the poem and is the first indicative that reveals the female identity of both characters. In this dream, it seems, there would have been little contact between the two women, or no expression of affection. For this reason, when the speaker received that message she would experience great delight; the flowers would become a highly sensual symbol, hence “perilous”. They would convey in an encoded form multiple messages that would do for all the chances that the lovers did not take: “I send you this, / who left the blue veins / of your throat un-kissed”, “Lover to lover, no kiss, / no touch, but forever and ever this”.<sup>24</sup>

Additional elements in the poem support the thesis of the characters involved being women. I have already made reference to orchids. Flowers, generically, have

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<sup>22</sup> Their shape makes them reminiscent of female genitalia. However, they are also associated with male homosexuality: *orkhis* in Greek means ‘testicle’.

<sup>23</sup> Many years later, H.D. did send orchids to Freud for his birthday (*Tribute to Freud* 9). Freud liked these flowers.

<sup>24</sup> These lines resemble an epigram by Nossis, “Perfume”, recorded in Wright’s *Garland*: “Perfume I send fresh perfume to derive, / For you to perfume sweeter perfume give”.

been traditionally associated with the female world. In Hymen they constitute a *leit motiv* and H.D. presents them as symbolic of female genitalia. ("Hymen", "Fragment 113", "Evadne" (unpublished draft) ). Finally, flowers are one of Sappho's sets of images, which she uses for the young girls of Lesbos (Gregory, "Rose" 135). In fact, H.D.'s use of flowers in Sea Garden, and especially in Hymen, seems to be the result of Sapphic influence. Moreover, flowers also play an important role within a homosexual artistic tradition. In Asphodel, Hermione finds a predecessor for her relationship with Fayne in Oscar Wilde and his "talk of Greeks and flowers" (53). The specific senses that prevail in the poem also indicate female presence. As I have mentioned before, H.D. favoured other senses besides or beyond sight. H.D. associates the experience and expression of varied sensory impressions to female sensibility (of course, it is debatable whether by doing this, H.D. is affirming female essentiality). Here touch prevails: "your hand that I could see / drift over the orchid heads / so carefully, / ... sure to lift / so gently, the fragile flower stuff". The combination of touch with the metonymic delicacy of hands and the whiteness of the neck, emphasized by blue veins, encodes female homoeroticism in a tradition that goes back to Walter Pater's Dorian eroticism.<sup>25</sup> All these aspects seem to provide evidence regarding both the identity of the characters and their sexuality. The speaker, nevertheless, will not see, even in a dream, her fantasy happening. "At Baia" remains a poem about the possibility of a sublime experience which did not take place. Preceding "Sea Heroes", this poem stands in great contrast. It breathes gentleness and intimacy. "Sea Heroes", on the contrary, speaks of war, heroic quests, male projection toward the outside world. The images it employs involve conquering energy. All these are features that make possible the Romantic quest of love. We could ask ourselves which form would the lesbian sublime take as the most radical alternative to the Romantic sublime. It would possibly be characterized by presence of the senses, especially touch. It would also favour horizontality. But as I wrote in relation to "Hymen", it very much depends on the poet's choice and we cannot say that there is one specific lesbian sublime, in the same way that there is not just one form of female sublime.

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<sup>25</sup> For a detailed explanation of Walter Pater's Dorian model of beauty and eroticism, and the codes employed to convey them, see Gregory's chapter in Classic Lines, "Pagan Mysteries".

Finally, the last poem I will analyze, "Fragment 113" (*CP* 131) appears as H.D.'s first explicit use of Sappho as muse and foremother in this collection.<sup>26</sup> Here H.D. explores Sappho's fragment "Neither honey nor bee for me". These two images, "honey" and "bee" are common in H.D.'s poetry, but it is here, in the context of Sappho's line, that their origin is revealed. Both are related in H.D.'s poems to heterosexual love. In "Hymen", they constitute the central metaphor for the union of Eros and his bride. In "Fragment 113", the first stanza rewrites in very similar terms the scene in "Hymen" (*CP* 109). The speaker rejects the kind of love offered there: "honey", "the plunder of the bee", "the sweet / stain on the lips and teeth", "the deep / plunge of soft belly", "the clinging of the gold-edged ... feet". In the next coming stanzas, the speaker continues denying her desire for heterosexual love—in spite of being burnt by violent desire—and prefers to be consumed to the point of death than give in to a male lover: "though rapture blind my eyes, /and hunger crisp /dark and inert my mouth". There are a few phallic images such as "the tall stalk", and heterosexual sex recurs in images already used in "Hymen" and "Leda": "fleck of the sun's fire, / gathers such heat and power, / that shadow-print is light, /cast through the petals / of the yellow iris flower". Heterosexual love describes for this speaker a pattern in which she no longer wants to take part: "old desire—old passion— / old forgetfulness—old pain.". In the last line of the poem, she turns instead to another kind of love. She addresses love directly: "if you turn again" and gives the indication of the different frame it should look for.

Love poetry and song have traditionally gone together and associated images of music have been used in relation to lovers (i.e. Shakespeare's "if music be the food of love" in *Twelfth Night*). Thus traditionally, the male lover was a player of a music instrument, a lyre or a string instrument. Apollo is also represented playing a lyre as protector of poetry and music. For this reason, the speaker will ask love to "seek strength of arm and throat" and "touch like the god". But at the same time, love is invited to play not the traditional Apollonian song, but the Sapphic song. Hence, it will find not the "trembling of string" but instead the "heat, more passionate / of bone and the white shell / and fiery tempered steel". These last images point to a love of different

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<sup>26</sup> I share with Diana Collecott the opinion that Sappho's influence is likely to be present already in the *Sea Garden* poems. Eileen Gregory also writes specifically on this point in "Rose Cut in Rock".

quality and intensity. The same alternative is present in "The Wise Sappho", where H.D. compares Sappho's poems not to roses—which only fit "to the superficial lover"—but to "heat ... magnetic, vibrant ... white, unhuman element ... as if the brittle crescent-moon gave heat to us, or some splendid scintillating star turned warm suddenly in our hand like a jewel, sent by the beloved" (57). As in "At Baia", "Fragment 113" sets the foundations for a sublime experience which revises the Romantic sublime, since it does away with the complementary nature of gender (masculine-feminine), on which Romantic sublimity relies, and the hierarchy it entails (male subject-female object). The pattern that accompanies the masculine experience of the sublime will appear clearly to be the result of such gender polarity and hierarchical relation (power relation).

Detailed analysis of the poems which constitute Hymen has shown how the treatment of the sublime has become more complex through the inclusion of specific female characters, myth-revision and an invasion of sensory impressions. All these aspects seem to be related. In Sea Garden, sublime patterns and sublime experiences were easier to detect, since the absence of specific characters excluded a specific cultural background and explicit issues of gender and power. Poems were often the voicing of a voice's desire without addressing a particular 'you'. Hence intense eroticism appeared as an energy, a naked drive, pure dynamism. This seemed to reduce the chances of inclusion of a wide sensorial spectrum and nouns and verbs seemed more necessary than adjectives. Somehow, the presence of the sea favoured the presentation of life at a very elemental level: bitterness, pain, frustration, unfulfilled desire, making the physical adopt a spiritual dimension. In Hymen, desire is also present and keeps on being the moving force of the poems and the images employed. Yet, it is somehow cushioned, toned down as it reaches through a specific mythic character. The historicity of the myth necessarily brings in circumstance and additional issues which flesh and wrap up desire. Thus, the Hymen poems become love poems as voices become characters. A direct consequence of this seems to be the loss of the spiritual dimension that existed in Sea Garden and an intensification of the physical and the sensory.

In Hymen the senses prevail. Colours are bright and overwhelming—especially purple and red. Present in nearly all poems, they create a unifying thread throughout

the series, as they are the bride's colour. There are also music sequences ("Hymen", "Song", "Cuckoo Song"), textures, fragrances (flowers) and tactile impressions. All together create an erotic atmosphere and suggest a sensuality which may well be Sappho's influence on H.D.'s poetry. Senses contribute to the avoidance of conceptualization as they speak by themselves. Sensuality is, nevertheless, also achieved by other means, by the suggestiveness of language and the images employed. All this seems to indicate that H.D. is writing this series in line with the ideas that she exposes in "Notes on Thought and Vision". As I showed in the previous chapter, besides the importance given to sensuality and physical life, H.D. deals with gender and its relation to sexuality. In Hymen, as I have tried to show, gender is directly addressed, beginning with the very title of the volume. Hymen is a name that is sexually ambiguous as it makes reference to Hymen, the god of marriage, but also to a part of sexual female anatomy. Such double sexuality, brought together in the ambiguous title, indicates an attempt to transgress the gender opposition that has been built around that sexual difference. Hymen points then at a female who gender-wise is androgynous or, beyond gender. Free from gender—like her Artemisian virgin friends—, she could equally orientate her sexuality toward men or women. While Hymen belongs to the female community she may have a female friend-lover, whereas once she marries she will have a male lover. It is well worth noticing that Hymen remains beyond gender while she stays within her community, but she is gendered once she steps into the male world through marriage. Simultaneously, her sexual choice is limited officially to heterosexuality, unless she decides to keep her bisexuality (like Sappho). Hymen favours both heterosexuality and homosexuality indistinctively. Thus she sets a sexual pattern for this volume of poetry which contains poems about homosexual love—inspired by Sappho—and poems about heterosexual love. In this case, H.D. has revised traditional Romantic love ("Demeter", "Leda", "Sea Heroes") and in some poems she has presented a model where women are subjects and active lovers (Circe, Phaedra, Evadne). In "Notes on Thought and Vision", H.D. tried to fight gender polarity by reclaiming artistic creativity for women and presenting men and women as their muses. Ignoring the restrictions imposed by traditional gender roles—on women's intellect, artistic possibilities and their sexual choice—H.D. added, to the ignorance of gender, a revaluation of the female body and all its related

processes, and the expansion of sexual choice to homosexuality. I mentioned the explicit absence of this choice for women in "Notes on Thought and Vision" but here in Hymen, H.D. does develop it.

This discussion on gender and sexual choice is relevant for the understanding of the poems that form Hymen as well as H.D.'s myth revision scheme. Some of the most famous Greek myths are revised here: "Demeter", "Thetis", "Circe", "Leda", "Hippolytus Temporizes", "Sea Heroes", "Phaedra", the two "Hippolyta" poems and "Helios". They are all changed in one way or another. In my analysis of the poems, I showed how the major revision that H.D. carries out is the transformation from myth into life, from object in a heroic pattern into subject. This transformation affects the mythic women of these poems. In relation to the introductory poem, I mentioned how H.D. saw that the characters of Greek myths were subject to a specific view point and that myth making is dependent on a specific way of looking at people and things. Therefore, it is enough to change the point of view to change the myths, to bring to the surface aspects that remained concealed: this is the case of "Helios" and in a much greater proportion of "Demeter", "Circe" and "Sea Heroes". H.D. gives an unexpected turn to each of them to recover female protagonism in history (Mother goddess as Principle of life) and in personal life (Circe and Demeter speak by themselves according to themselves). By transforming women from patient objects into active subjects, H.D. not only gives those mythic female characters a power of which they were dispossessed at some point in history, but also, she cracks the heroic quest of classical times, which would remain a model for the Romantic code, in so far as gender roles are concerned. In this sense, I should mention the specific meaning that the use of myths has in this volume of poetry.

H.D.'s use of mythical figures differs, in my opinion, from that of her contemporaries (Eliot, Pound, Yeats).<sup>27</sup> It is true that the use of myths is a characteristic Modernist technique, but the way H.D. employs mythical characters points beyond the mere desire for objectivity. The transformations they undergo show a preoccupation with the story of such myth as well as with the process of myth-making itself. H.D.'s choice of female myths reveals the complicity of the author with the characters. Also, a transposition of elements from poetics ("Thought and Vision")

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<sup>27</sup> See Carol T. Christ's Victorian and Modern Poetics for a study of the use of myth in those writers.

into poetry (i.e. beauty, eroticism, gender and sexuality) points at a *personal* continuity between text and context which does not leave 'objectivity' out but renders it inoperative as a concept to explain Hymen. Maybe this has to do with the specific way H.D. conceives myths, not only as archetypes of states of mind, body or circumstance—but as abstractions of personal states. Thus, myths are for her ready made speakers, waiting for the slightest modification to speak for themselves. When myths speak, they often tell a story different from the one we have traditionally heard. Subjectivity gives back individuality to the myth (archetype), thus revealing mythical characters as individuals trapped in their desires and surrounding circumstances. It is at this level that they can speak of their own power, desire, frustrations and become convincing revisionists of their own myths. Freud would see myths too as both personal and universal, subjective and objective. Thus, Eliot's, Pound's or Yeats's desire for objectivity can only be illusory and artificially constructed.

All the aspects I have mentioned so far in relation to Hymen contribute to make sublimity in these poems far more difficult to detect than in Sea Garden. As I pointed in the introduction, and will have become clear by now, most instances of sublimity in H.D. emerge from the revision of the Romantic sublime and romance. It is worth noticing that, according to the exposition I gave at the beginning of this chapter, there is no point in distinguishing between a psychical and a physical sublime since both obey to the same profound pattern that organises desire. Hymen also challenges traditional gender distinctions by creating sublime instances in which dualism is deterred, for example in poems of homosexual love and revised heterosexuality. Although not all the poems show a sublime experience or suggest its possibility, they can intertextually modify or strengthen the position shown in one single poem of the series. "Demeter" for instance, does not deal directly with sublimity but its central issue of female power throws light on "Circe" and introduces the interesting question of the relation between sublimity and power.

Next, for clarity's sake I will sketch a summary of the different versions of the sublime which I have found in Hymen. These versions, in addition to the ones I exposed in Chapter II, can be considered as forms that the female sublime may take:

- *Pre-oedipal* sublime (female community in "Hymen"; non-representational, silence and senses).

- Sublimity as ecstasy (“Leda”, “Evadne”). Union and touch. Reciprocity.
- Sublime pattern from female point of view (“Hymen”) with absence of resolution (ecstasy).
- Failed Sublime: The sublime pattern as means to voice female frustration (“Circe”, “The Islands”).
- Sublimity in poems of homoerotic love (“At Baia”, “Fragment 113”, “Why Have You Sought?”)

I have given the name of *static sublime* to the first version because desire at that level is latent rather than dynamic. The three following instances of sublimity would fall within a dynamic sublime but share with the static version the metaphor of horizontality, for the absence of resolution in a Romantic fashion. When ecstasy occurs, it is accompanied by a descent to the *pre-oedipal* level, a level of original union, which is also a mode of sublimity in itself. The homoerotic sublime can adopt either an static or dynamic form. All these instances of sublimity revise the Romantic sublime in one way or another. The terminology I have employed to name those different versions of sublimity is not all-important but it does provide a metalanguage that will enable us to discuss this subject. My aim has been to try to isolate the peculiarities of a female treatment of the sublime and show the possible differences from a masculine counterpart. As we have seen, there is no fixed pattern or just one single mode of representing the female sublime and it very much depends on the requirements of the poems. This is in itself a sign of revision and reinvention. Absolute horizontality, as in those poems built exclusively on ecstasy (“Leda”; “Evadne”, “The Pool”), is indeed the most extreme form of female sublimity, but it does not constitute the female sublime *per excellence*. We should not forget that images associated to verticality, such as the “fall” as well as the “lift up” are also part of a female sublime, as H.D.’s poems show (“The Shrine”, “The Cliff Temple”, “Sea Rose”)—although these metaphors will be identified with different moments from those in the masculine sublime. My view is that in the female sublime transcendence occurs at a different moment than in the masculine version: in ecstasy, in the fall and immersion, rather than in resolution. Thus, modifications of the Romantic pattern are not as partial as they might seem. Avoiding resolution of the sublime moment, for instance, implies a prolongation of union and suspension which is alien to the



masculine sublime. Similarly, dwelling in the ecstatic moment is not a widespread practice among Romantic poets since absence of time and difference is to be avoided. One aspect, nevertheless, unifies all these gestures of female sublimity: the absence of self-affirmation at the expense of the 'other'. The Romantic sublime puts on stage union with an other (Nature/female) only to gain at the end of the process self-knowledge, aggrandisement. Such operation involves wresting power away from the 'other' by rending it object (of perception: Nature; of desire: woman). The Romantic sublime in poetry corresponds to a similar pattern in patriarchal society, in relation to woman, and in Western culture (inaugurated by classical Greece), in relation to Nature.

I closed my study on Sea Garden leaving open a question about the relation of power and sublimity. Hymen seems to deal with such relation in poems like "Demeter" and "Circe". The last poem has shown how a reversal of terms in the sublime (i.e. female as questing subject) is bound to fail if still enclosed within a background which does not accept such reversal. We saw how Circe, even as a subject, had nothing to do against the hero character, since the society around her was intrinsically heroic; her personal power is nought if unrecognized. A lack of actual power is, therefore, the reason that frustrates the possibility of a sublime experience (*failed sublime*). If we wonder why many of the poems in Sea Garden and a few in Hymen sing frustration and unfulfilment, the reason seems to be this: that to experience sublimity, and with it, transcendence, an individual needs to be recognised as subject. The triumphant lyric 'I' of Romantic poetry is a subject and, because of that, he can experience sublimity and can even appropriate for himself the experience of the 'other'. It is precisely for this reason that Patricia Yaeger's project to "create a new architectonics of empowerment", through the reinvention of the sublime from the perspective of female difference (191), seems to me a project worked out in the abstract. She identifies the most characteristic "feminine mode of the sublime" as *pre-oedipal* (204).<sup>28</sup> By this she means a gesture similar to that in H.D.'s "The Shrine", where the structure of sublimity does not lead to final separation, or incorporation of

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<sup>28</sup> My understanding of the *pre-oedipal sublime* is wider than Yaeger's. For me, it is not only a female revision of the Romantic sublime, whereby the experience of sublimity ends with the staging of fusion and closeness to the 'other', but it also refers to a realm in which desire is latent and manifested through non-representational marks.

the other entity, but to reconciliatory union. Such mode of the sublime, cannot help female “empowerment”, as Yaeger argues, as it defies the dynamics of power (hierarchy, struggle, opposition). In my opinion, Yaeger is a victim of the loose use of language in critical discourse in the eighties and nineties. When discussing female ‘empowerment’ she uses the term as if the acquisition of power by women could be sought in a sympathetic way, without the need of struggle, that is, from the difference of female experience. Such an understanding of the term ‘empowerment’ involves contradictory experiences. On the other hand, real empowerment, not the intellectual notion that Yaeger puts forward, can only occur within society, not in the confined world of artistic expression. By contrast, the affirmation of female identity, rather than “empowerment”, seems to me an entirely different thing, and one that the female poet can indeed execute through the revision of the sublime mode. It is in writing from the strength of female difference and self-knowledge that the female writer can alternatively be confident and self-reliant. Otherwise, she will have to give up her claims for difference and write in a fashion that resembles the masculine mode. H.D., like her American predecessor, Emily Dickinson, seems to have understood that dilemma. While being aware of the importance of power to have access to a fulfilling experience of sublimity, rather than a failed sublime, of which H.D. offers several examples, she remains faithful in her writing and poetics, as well as in life, to her difference as female writer. That is precisely why in “Notes on Thought and Vision” she reclaims that authority as being of equal value as that of male artists, without compromising it in any way. Her poetry, as we have seen, offers a multiplicity of sublime gestures from the difference of female experience with a realistic and consistent approach.

## Chapter V

### Beauty in H.D.

H.D.'s early works, her poems and her essays, are not only pervaded by numerous instances of sublimity, or poetic ideas that shape specific presentations of the sublime, but are also particularly defined by the presence of beauty. Indeed, this rather abstract aesthetic concept dominates H.D.'s early artistic production, playing a role that is as essential to her poetics as is the idea of the sublime. In all the preceding chapters, I have deliberately avoided any reference to 'beauty', trying to deal with H.D.'s presentation of the sublime with as much clarity as such a complex issue allows. Bringing in H.D.'s varied forms of beauty would have blurred my investigation of sublimity. In this chapter, I will try to gain some insight into H.D.'s specific understanding of beauty and the role played by this dimension of aesthetics within H.D.'s early poetry, essays and poetics. As I did in Chapter II, I propose to start such investigation by introducing some philosophic and aesthetic notions of 'beauty' that will not only allow for a fruitful comparison between H.D.'s understanding of beauty and past Romantic interpretations, but will also give this discussion a theoretical frame analogous to that I used in relation to the sublime.

In Chapter II, I showed how part of the revival of the tradition of the sublime is to be found in the publication of the treatise ascribed to Longinus, On the Sublime. There, sublimity appears not just defined by itself, but closely related to beauty. Longinus states that the effects of sublimity are "beautiful" and "genuine" (12). Such description is not just qualitative but reveals a Platonic baggage behind Longinus' own description of the sublime. Sublimity, he writes, achieved through intensity and concentration of diction, "breathes the vehemence of frenzy and divine possession" (14). The soul is not only lifted up but answers at that moment its natural tendency to return to a transcendental world. The uplift of the soul is associated in Longinus, as in Plato, with the notion of Beauty—a sudden glimpse of revelation of what is beautiful and good. Thus, beauty is a necessary correlative of sublimity. Another conclusion

derived from such a Platonic conception of sublimity is the association of the sublime with that which is beyond the common and ordinary (65) and is related to “greatness” (27) in style or in Nature.

This early account of the sublime and its relationship to beauty will change in the eighteenth century. A sharp distinction between sublimity and beauty will be introduced through Edmund Burke’s Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful. Burke considers magnitude only, whether for the sight, ear, smell, taste or touch, as a source of the sublime, while he saves for the experience of beauty small comprehensible objects. Thus, the transcendental union of sublimity and beauty is broken up by ascribing each experience to objects which possess opposed qualities and by describing the experience of sublimity in quite different terms to the experience of beauty. As I noted in Chapter II, the sublime for Burke resides in mixed feelings of fear, danger and delight before great objects. But whereas sublime objects move us mainly through awe and fear, beauty operates in the opposite manner. Burke writes: “By beauty I mean, that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it” (91). Burke sees beauty as a source of love. In this respect, Burke has kept the Platonic notion of love for beauty, which is also one of the fundamental ways in which H.D. understands beauty: as a generator of love or as a discovery that springs from love. Burke enumerates some of the qualities that make objects beautiful, as he does with objects which would provoke sublimity. But whereas sublime objects are supposed to be “vast in their dimensions”, “ragged and negligent”, “dark and gloomy”, and present straight lines and “strong deviation” (124), the features that define the beautiful are just the opposite: “comparatively small”; “smoothness”, “absence of angularity” (“I do not find any natural object which is angular, and at the same time beautiful”) and frailty:

An air of robustness and strength is very prejudicial to beauty. An appearance of *delicacy*, and even fragility, is almost essential to it ... I need here say little of the fair sex ... the beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness, or delicacy, and is even enhanced by their timidity, a quality of mind analogous to it. (116)

Burke continues: “to have its colours clear and bright; but not very strong and glaring” (117). Even though Burke does admit that both sublime and beautiful qualities may meet in the same object (124) he still believes that the “affection” these qualities will produce will be more perfect and uniform the more unified and similar those qualities are.

Precisely because standards of beauty have varied throughout history, we become aware of the relativity of Burke's illustration in respect to beauty and, by extension, in relation to sublimity too. Burke presents as fixed and universal qualities for beauty and sublimity which can surely be subject to debate and individual taste. We can perceive Burke's effort for universality as a forced and arbitrary one. The same can be said of sublime standards, since they are defined in relation and in opposition to the beautiful: "the ideas of the sublime and the beautiful stand on foundations so different, that it is hard, I had almost said impossible, to think of reconciling them in the same subject" (114). H.D.'s poetry, we have seen in the previous chapters, does reconcile in the same object both sublimity and beauty. Small objects with ragged contours and bright colours, such as her sea flowers, or the beauty of her androgynous women, strong and independent, turn Burke's carefully drawn distinctions upside down. In this chapter, we will see how H.D.'s standards of beauty are changed in relation to the Romantic model introduced by Burke and adopted by Shelley and Wordsworth. It is only through subversive Decadent Romantics, such as Swinburne, that we get an anticipation of H.D.'s revision of the features ascribed to beauty (as we also get in her poetry an analogous revision of sublimity).

The same relationship of the sublime to magnitude and of the beautiful to small objects was kept by Kant. For him, the difference between these two aesthetic categories lies in the different response of the mind to the objects presented to it. While greatness of dimension provokes the response of the mind to acknowledge its own superiority in relation to the object confronted, beautiful objects engage intellectual faculties other than reason (understanding), and hence, bring to the individual no sense of superiority. As I explained in Chapter II, such complex distinctions were designed to save the notion of transcendence from the realm of the senses (Burke) and subject it to universal ethics. However, although the sublime cuts in Kant all links with the object itself and the realm of the senses, the beautiful maintains a bridge between subject and object, although the final judgement on beauty will also be subjective (not empirical). Among the Romantics, both Shelley and Wordsworth inherit the Burkean and Kantian distinction between the sublime and the beautiful. Keats is possibly the only one that manages to incorporate simultaneously the sublime to the realm of the beautiful. The distinction between the two aesthetics can be illustrated by two well-known poems by Shelley: "Ode to the West Wind" and

the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty". Each poem acts as a counterpart to the other, evoking opposite feelings and images related to the dichotomy of the sublime and the beautiful. The first one is addressed to a mighty power in Nature that commands other natural elements. There, the poet marks a difference between him and the wind, asserts himself in a rather bold manner and demands poetic power. The second, however, is marked by a reconciliatory tone with no aspirations for the individual self. Instead of images of power, the images here evoke love and harmony, are soft, melodious and gentle. Beauty is a 'spirit', "shadow of some unseen Power", which inspires feelings of love, hope, peace and kindness. It is related to gentleness in the human character ("love of oneself and human kind") and Nature and operates precisely at the level of human understanding. To this human realm, a higher one is opposed, a "sublimar world" that transcends and is beyond humans. In "The Sublime and the Beautiful" Wordsworth too relates these two aesthetic experiences to two different laws: "the law of sublimity" and "the law of beauty". Both laws act upon the mind, so that there are no objects sublime or beautiful in themselves but in relation to the mind that perceives them. As a result, he concludes, the same object can be perceived now as beautiful, now as sublime, but each experience, remains distinct and opposite to each other (349).

What these sources on the nature of beauty and sublimity have in common is the outstanding importance attached to the experience of the sublime in comparison with the experience of beauty. Burke's explanation of sublimity is much more interesting than his rather bland explanation of beauty, in itself presented as being more self-evident. Similarly, Kant's efforts to save the sublime from the realm of relativism reveals not just the enormous value given to reason over sensitive experience, but the urgency of universal ethics over the purely aesthetic. As for Wordsworth, his essay is mainly devoted to a discussion of the sublime, as if it were a much more complex experience than the perception of beauty. Overall, we find a greater interest and fascination with the notion of sublimity linked to transcendence, or to power, than with the operations of beauty. In my view, the preference and emphasis placed by these writers on the sublime over the beautiful reveals a partly unconscious gendering of these aesthetic categories. From a masculine point of view, transcendence through power, may appear as more appealing to the masculine self than beauty. Hence the sympathy for and reference to the sublime in terms and features traditionally related to

the masculine gender, and by opposition, the lesser emphasis and feminine qualities attached to beauty.

Burke clearly qualifies the sublime in masculine terms and the beautiful in feminine ones. A similar gendering of those notions, although quite unconscious, seems to appear when examining Kant's conception of sublimity. The sublime is presented in Kant's philosophy, as the exclusive operation of the mind against a presentation of the objects of Nature. The mind is invested with the greatest imaginable autonomy and power, qualities associated with masculinity, and doubly gendered through the conviction of human domination of Nature. A confirmation of such correspondences can be found in Shelley's poems to Jane, where love and beauty are associated under a female presence and a gentle landscape contrasts with the mighty images of "Mont Blanc" or the "Ode to the West Wind".<sup>1</sup> In Wordsworth, we find the explicit gendering of Nature as female as well as the union and identification between the mind of the subject and the natural world. Thinkers like Hegel, who share with Kant a similar conception of the sublime, would see the lack of distinction between spirit (mind) and matter (nature) as "primitive" (Weiskel 54) and would not accept it as a true manifestation of sublimity. In other words, there seems to be a recognition that the mind must maintain its autonomous—masculine—status against a reality perceived as female. Just to link up with the psychological frame that I have adopted in this thesis for the explanation of the Romantic sublime I suggest that such characterization of Wordsworth's sublimity as "primitive" seems to take us to an idea of regression, of union with the mother/female figure which generates the anxiety that determines the structure of the masculine sublime. It seems to me that Wordsworth's alternative—called by Weiskel the "positive sublime"—to that of Kant or Hegel—the "negative sublime"—shows more clearly the gender implications of the distinction between beauty and sublimity. Having said that, and recognizing a gendered quality in those influential writers of the opposition between those two aesthetic categories, I believe there is a risk in concluding that sublimity (and with it the notion of transcendence) is masculine and beauty is feminine. For one thing, we do not find such distinctions in Plato or Longinus. Secondly, beauty belongs to the realm of aesthetics and this

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<sup>1</sup> The landscape in the poems to Jane contains numerous elements present in H.D.'s *Sea Garden*, such as flowers, "Ocean woods", downs, plains, the combination of pine forests and ocean foam and "tree-tops" related to "green waves".

domain, no one could deny, was exclusively controlled and defined by male figures at the time when Burke, Kant and the Romantics wrote. Finally, there would be little point in discussing sublimity in relation to women writers if I believed that the experience of the sublime and with it some sense of spiritual or physical transcendence, was a strictly masculine experience. The distinctions established by those authors do not apply, for instance, to H.D.'s understanding of beauty. Beauty in H.D. is not just intellectual nor is it relegated to small things. Her understanding of beauty goes back to Plato and Longinus and thus re-establishes the indissoluble link between beauty and sublimity. An insight into H.D.'s notion of beauty will help to understand that connection.

Given the variety of experience covered by beauty in this writer, I will be analysing individual texts rather than issuing generalisations that would only blur that variety. I will study different but related texts: reviews such as "Responsibilities", and extensive essays such as "Notes on Thought and Vision" and "Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets". Although looking at the texts individually, I will point at the intertextual relations between them in an attempt to show the development of H.D.'s aesthetic ideas. Given the absence of a definitive chart on the composition of H.D.'s work, I will be using Susan Friedman's chronological table as a guide.<sup>2</sup>

Beauty, beautiful objects and a sense of beauty are continuously present in H.D.'s early poetry as well as in the reviews and "Notes" that she wrote around the same time. However, there is little clue in her writing about her precise definition of beauty. She seems to employ the term in the same vague way as it has traditionally been employed, as if by using it the writer would already assume that the reader shares with her the same feelings about what is beautiful and what constitutes beauty. In spite of such vagueness, beauty has a definite value in H.D.'s writing: it is a precious touchstone, embodiment of spiritual experience; it stands for artistic or personal perfection; it is an aim and an ideal and the key to interpret a work of art. Beauty has with H.D. a value and a meaning. If beauty does not exist in H.D. as a notion, it does exist in relation to specific contexts within which it finds multiple meanings. In this sense, I find that for H.D., beauty is not a singular thing, but rather a generic term for a number of varied experiences. In her poetry, there are not only objects which are

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, "Dating H.D.'s Writing", 46-51.



beautiful—wild flowers, rock-shelves—but mainly objects which are recognized as such: scenes (as the opening of “Helen in Egypt” from her “Notes on Euripides”); styles (Anacreon’s, Sappho’s); virtues, such as virginity; physical descriptions of sculptures or people, gestures, ruins, rituals, myths. What all these elements or experiences hold in common is the arbitrary way in which they are qualified as ‘beautiful’. The motto “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” applies to H.D.’s sense of personal beauty. What distillation of numerous instances shows is that H.D. sees as beautiful those elements which fall within certain realms of personal and artistic experience and the complex net of her own cultural world. For H.D., there are objects, experiences or narrations which are beautiful and stand for beauty because they have a very special and specific meaning for her, as a woman and as an artist.

Perhaps the first direct statement made by H.D. in defence of Beauty is to be found in “Responsibilities”, a review written *à propos* of Yeats’ volume, Responsibilities and Other Poems (1914).<sup>3</sup> In this review, H.D. presents Yeats mainly as a beauty-maker, one of the survivors of the ‘old world’ of the nineties. H.D. laments the aesthetic fragmentation of the new artists, by comparison with the nineties where the pursuit of beauty acted as a common goal. In the new generation not only has beauty been banned but some of the artists are working on the kind of aesthetics which, according to H.D., undermines the very basis of art and has played a role in the road to war: the aesthetic principles of Futurism, Vorticism and abstract art: the praise of the mechanical world, guns and machine-man: “our generation did not stand against the enemy—it *was* the enemy” (129). What H.D. praises and tries to recover from the nineties for a world at war, but also for art, is the “worship of beauty” in opposition to “the grace of the steel girder”. The nineties: “never condescended to the worship of material efficiency”; “the nineties, thank God, were not efficient” (129). H.D.’s idealistic view of art and its high social responsibility speaks of both Platonic

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<sup>3</sup> The exact date of composition of this review is unknown but related sources seem to indicate that it was written the same year as the publication of Yeats’ book. In “A Poetics Out of War: H.D.’s Responses to the First World War”, Burnett establishes 1916 as the earliest date for this review (56-57) on the evidence of the dates of composition of other material found in the same volume of typescripts (1918-1919). Ezra Pound wrote a review of Yeats’ Responsibilities (Poetry 4, May 1914). It is quite possible that H.D. wrote her own article in response also to Pound’s. Stating the year of composition with as much precision as possible is not just a scholarly exercise. If 1914 is correct, it means that H.D. was answering the war, just started, with a statement on aesthetics and the relevance of aesthetics for society. Also her attack on the dehumanization of art would be much more meaningful in 1914 (the year of the official launching of Vorticism) than two years later, the date suggested by Gary Burnett.

conception as well as Romantic and Decadent remnants. H.D. sees the role of art in society to be that of preservation of the sacred, a spiritual reservoir, a link to the past. Art becomes for her a religion, not to be dealt with lightly but responsibly, a form of spirituality, involving not didacticism but the preservation of beauty in one form or another. She appears as a humanist artist, in close touch with the previous generation in which art is still representational and human. The notion of the beautiful and the ugly are explicitly connected with good and evil (“mechanical daemon”; “devil of machinery”; “evil of ugliness”), which points once more to the Platonic conception that H.D. has of beauty and emphasizes the idea of responsibility in artistic creation. At the end of this review the project of reconstruction and hope for a better future brings in a vision of spiritual renewal and a golden city, wrought not on steel and “iron girders” but, more firmly, on beauty.

With “Responsibilities”, H.D. connects with the Romantic tradition represented by Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats and Blake. These poets share the belief in poetry as a vehicle of truth, values and experiences common to all human beings. It is that permanent feature of poetry, its transcendence through time, that gives it its spiritual dimension. More specifically, that review touches, like the works of the Romantics, upon the role of poetry in a society in crisis. Blake saw his poetry with the same urgency as H.D. may have seen her own. He warned about the fragmentation of human faculties under the emergence of industry and liberalism, the empire of Urizen or reason, the alienation of imagination and passion and the birth of the material unidimensional man. Wordsworth in his “Preface” (1802) also presents poetry as the realm of truths that are universal for all human communities and opposes the truth of poetry to the reductive truth of science. Again, there is the sense of an imminent dehumanisation of humankind by the effects of the industrial world. He writes that poetry acknowledges “the beauty of the universe” (516-517) and that the poet “is the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love” (575-577). On his part, Shelley in his “Defence of Poetry” seems to have been a direct source for H.D.’s specific emphases. Touching upon the influence of poetry in society, Shelley writes: “poets have been challenged to resign the civic crown to reasoners and mechanists”; “it is admitted that the exercise of the imagination is most delightful but it is alleged that that of reason is more useful”. Indeed, Shelley’s defence of poetry is an argument against growing utilitarian theories

that will also be fought by the Decadents. H.D. seems to have had the anti-utilitarian argument in her mind when writing "Responsibilities", especially when her own poetry was being qualified as 'escapist'. Her point of view is again that of Shelley, that poetry provides not material but spiritual pleasure and that the wisdom preserved by poetry is most needed in times of spiritual crisis. Keats's devotion to the eternal qualities of beauty and its spiritual connections may have been another source for H.D. to write in defence of beauty in poetry.

Such ideas acquired a poetic form in two of H.D.'s poems: "Cities" (Sea Garden, CP 39) and "The Tribute" ("The God", CP 59).<sup>4</sup> "Cities" is a reflection about two different types of worlds and values captured in two different kinds of cities. The city of the present is the city of the modern industrial world, "crowded", impersonal, ugly and claustrophobic, with no redeeming feature about it: "street after street, / each patterned alike, / no grace to lighten / a single house of the hundred / crowded into one garden-space". This city is no longer inhabited by humans but by "disfigured", "defaced" people turned into "larvae". By contrast, the city of the past, outruled by the delusion of the "maker of cities", is ample, fair and proportionate: "... the beauty of temple / and space before temple, / arch upon perfect arch, / of pillars and corridors that led out / to strange court-yards and porches / where sun-light stamped / hyacinth-shadows / black on the pavement". H.D. depicts the city of the past through images that she often uses in the depiction of beauty: Greek porticoes, golden light, secret gardens. The two types of aesthetics that H.D. contrasts in "Responsibilities" respond to the same standards that have shaped these cities. On the one hand, the aesthetics of the industrial, imperialistic world involved in global calamity and strong individualism ("We await great events. / We are spread through this earth. / We protect our strong race.") has been taken to be a more 'modern' fashion, better fit to meet the necessities of modern times. This is the aesthetics of irresponsible creativity working against humankind in praise of ugliness, impersonality and resulting denial of spirituality. On the other hand, there is still the aesthetics of the defeated past, of those few "grains of honey", "old dust of stray pollen" working against the mainstream of art and world politics, who preserve in their "old cells", beauty, spirituality, and ultimately, hope of

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<sup>4</sup> "Cities" in its actual form appeared for the first time in the 1925 edition of Collected Poems. In Sea Garden (1916) it was divided into two poems, "Cities" and "The City is Peopled", with no variation except for the opening lines, which were added later to allow fusion between the two poems. The meaning, however, remains the same.

renewal of “flowers in this waste”: “is our task the less sweet /—who recall the old splendour, / await the new beauty of cities?”. H.D. has kept in this poem the same radical parallels that she has defended in “Responsibilities” and, no doubt, she aligns herself with those few who work against the grain.

“The Tribute” strikes the same note. Opening stanzas of spreading squalor, war and death take over temple and life; ugliness, hardship, destruction and meanness have displaced songs, have hardened hearts; only Mars is left to conquer. An imaginary Greek setting is chosen by H.D. to articulate in a lyric voice the poet’s song (a lament for the loss of beauty and the young fallen in combat) and the feelings of emptiness and desolation left by the departure of the gods. Among the crowd, only a few turn to the temple, invoke the gods and ask for peace and spiritual renewal (“O heal us—bring balm for our sickness, / return and soothe us with bark / and hemlock and feverwort”, *CP* 63). This landscape of war and squalor is the same as that of the new city. The same distinction is made between those following the dynamics of a spiritually impoverished society—of which havoc and war result—and those who cling with difficulty, but resolution, to a past that informs a better future—to beauty, kindness of heart and, why not, humanitarian values set apart from an industrial, imperialistic, money-making society.

Beauty as portrayed in “Responsibilities”, stands for an artistic as well as spiritual value, which is the contribution of the artist to society. H.D. is a poet and artist, not a politician, and as such, she offers solutions within her trade and domain. Perhaps her belief in the role of art, in so far as it can make a difference in society, is an idealistic one, yet not quite absurd. It certainly needs to be looked at in the context of contemporary artistic trends, which fed on and perpetuated the destruction of the past without offering a constructive alternative. Cubism, Vorticism or Futurism also believed in the power of art to change society, through diffusion of ideas and a new sensibility. It is to these movements that H.D. offers an alternative. It is also through that response that H.D. gives us a glimpse of her own personal political choice—anticipating her later cry against militarism and imperialism (*Trilogy*, *Bid Me to Live*, *Tribute to Freud*). Critics sometimes seem to forget that “Responsibilities” alongside with poems such as “Cities” and “The Tribute” are direct responses to war and that, perhaps, H.D.’s cult to beauty would have not developed any further, nor with such strength, if it had not been for the war experience. H.D. will come back to this subject

in "Notes on Thought and Vision" (1919) and later on in "Songs of Anacreon" and "The Garland of Meleager".

In "Notes on Thought and Vision", H.D. shows that her aesthetic commitment to Beauty has not dissolved in the face of negative criticism and the artistic fashions of the moment.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, in that time between the publication of "Responsibilities" and the writing of "Notes on Thought and Vision", H.D.'s ideas on Beauty have refined and deepened, becoming part of a wider frame. H.D.'s letters to John Cournos (1916), which I introduced in relation to the making of "Notes on Thought and Vision", show a transition toward the complexity that Beauty acquires in "Notes on Thought and Vision". Here it becomes something other than an aesthetic category, an invocation of the divine or a spiritual realm. It designs the spiritual dimension of creativity not in an abstract way, but in a thoughtful manner that involves the body, the physical and erotic.

H.D. mentions beauty in her "Notes on Thought and Vision" in a few occasions but its meaning is never clearly explained. Beauty in H.D.'s private visionary poetics appears to be a matter of both "over-mind" consciousness and empathy with the object from which vision, or inspiration, springs. H.D. does not refer to objects which are beautiful and objects which are not, and does not either state which features define beauty. Beauty is not so much a quality inherent in objects but a *creation* emerging out of the encounter between the artist/seer and the object which is seen. Such conception of beauty derives invariably from H.D.'s tripartite division of life into 'body', 'mind', and 'over-mind' and the relationship existing between these three parts.

As I already showed in my analysis of "Notes on Thought and Vision", poetic and artistic creativity cannot be achieved by sheer development of the mind. A perfect balance and development between the body and the mind is necessary before achieving the exceptional state of artistic creation: the "over-mind". Now, to pass from that balance of body and mind to an over-mind consciousness the artist, states H.D., must

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<sup>5</sup> H.D. shows that she has not retreated from the views she expressed in "Responsibilities" in a review on Marianne Moore ( *The Egoist* 3 (August 1916): 118-119), and in a letter to Amy Lowell dated July 19, 1919. In the latter, contemporary with the "Notes", she writes: "everyone seems somehow tainted with the desire for originality and cleverness. I mean by everyone, the 'young' people for whom one has hopes. It's two [sic] discouraging: I confess to being 'old-fashioned'. I cannot keep up with new ideas & must just come along my own way & at my own pace ... of course, (I fear I must confess it) I have grown too unutterably sick of all this modern cult of brutality". Correspondence with Amy Lowell, 1917-25. Box 56, folder, 1416. H.D. Papers, Beinecke Library.

love things as well as people. The mystic, the philosopher and the artist have only access to the world of vision through love. She writes: "There is no great art period without great lovers" (21) and "Socrates' whole doctrine of vision was a doctrine of love"(22). Love, she suggests, creates an intimate union between the thing, or person loved or contemplated, and the lover. Out of such union, vision is born. Such moment of union and vision implies also the *creation* and *discovery* of beauty. H.D. seems to imply that any over-conscious state will catch the singularity and essence of an object or person and that beauty resides in such discovery, which the artist will later on communicate to us. It is no coincidence that H.D. uses a parallel between love for a man, or a woman, and love for an object of inspiration (Lo-Fu and his apple-branch). In both cases, such deep admiration is a means to approach ecstasy or to reach the "over-mind" state. On the other hand, the process, although not quite clearly explained, is much more complex if we read attentively each line:

The fruit tree and the human body are both receiving stations, capable of storing up energy, overworld energy. That energy is always there but can be transmitted only to another body or another mind that is in sympathy with it, or keyed to the same pitch. (47)

In other words, any element can effect the uplift of the soul, ecstasy, "over-mind" state, provided both object and seer are tuned to each other. Lo-fu's sympathy with the apple-branch becomes visible in his close study and knowledge of it; its shadows of gradual colours, its skeleton and nerves and its relation to its surroundings. In that passage it is difficult to tell if the beauty of the branch comes from the specific way Lo-Fu examines it, or just as recognition of something which is already there. In any case, empathy seems to be key to the discovery of Beauty. Another illustration of creativity being linked to an "over-mind" state is offered in "The Opening Scenes of Ion" ("Notes on Euripides..."). There, creativity, mystical ecstasy and entrance into a different realm are all combined into one single experience:

Then as if the god himself had touched him, as he rings from his own phorminx his own most lovely music, the boy is caught, torn from his quiet worship. He has become enraptured, one with the God, merged into him, fire of song, spark of a greater fire. He is Hyacinth whom the god loved. We close our eyes to shut out sound and the vision of our fellow-beings dark beside us, inert and stagnant, in their circle of stone-benches. But most of all to escape this vision, the boy caught, struggling, a white bird in a great wind, a flower, exposed to the sun. (8)

As is it the case in "Notes on Thought and Vision", there is a shift from prose to a gradual increase of intensity. Poetry marks the boundary between conscious writing and "vision". The same applies to the opening lines of "Helen in Egypt". The appeal of this topic to H.D.'s imagination is revealed in the lyrical quality of the text. The poet

seems to fall in a state of dream or vision, as she recreates this encounter with Helen in a setting H.D. loves: the point where sea and river meet. After having been carried away for about eight pages, the poet paces down her prose, comes down to a more conscious writing, recognizing: "Perhaps in the opening of this study of Helen, I have been carried away too much by my own imagination, been unbalanced, intoxicated a little with my own idea" (8-9) and paying tribute too to the equally visionary quality of Euripides' "poetry".

H.D.'s notion of beauty is deeply shaped by Platonism. This background lends depth and complexity to many lines in "Notes on Thought and Vision" and plays its part in the perception of beauty as a moment of union and discovery.<sup>6</sup> H.D. identifies "passionate love for", or metaphorical madness, with love of beauty: "It is said that da Vinci went mad if he saw a boy's face in Florence or a caged bird or a child with yellow hair that fell or stood up in tight whorls like the goldsmith work he had learned with Verrochio." (26). In his *Phaedrus*, Plato distinguished four forms of *mania* or madness: that of love, that of prophecy, that of poetry, and that of Philosophy (249 D), establishing a parallel between the love of lovers and the love for knowledge and Beauty.<sup>7</sup> He calls the philosopher, "lover of the beautiful", who recognizes and is attracted to the idea of Beauty, as a lover is to the beloved. H.D.'s passage suggests a mingling of pure passion and love of beauty, which acquire the same status as that of the madness of Philosophy: both love of beauty, or beauty provoking love, prepare the over-mind consciousness for artistic creativity or vision. In *The Symposium*, the necessary connection between love and beauty is made even more explicit by relating different modes of love to different types of beauty. Thus, physical love will be directed by physical beauty; physical beauty matched with beauty of the soul, will originate a spiritual type of love, which Plato makes responsible for creativity; and

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<sup>6</sup> The presence of Platonism behind H.D.'s text not only seems quite likely to anybody familiar with Plato's philosophy but can be substantiated with some degree of certainty. H.D.'s knowledge of Plato, at the time when she wrote "Notes on Thought and Vision", can be supported by H.D.'s wide knowledge of classical literature, materialized in her translations of Euripides and the Greek Anthology, as well as the vast number of volumes on Greek literature, culture and history that can be found in Bryher's library, without forgetting H.D.'s own references to classical sources. I have found one book in the list of references elaborated by Virginia Smyers which is contemporary with the "Notes": Plato, *Plato*, trans. H. N. Fowler (London: Heinemann; New York: Putnam's, 1917). It has H.D.'s bookplate.

<sup>7</sup> Plato borrows images of love from Greek poets, in particular Sappho and Anacreon. On this point see the "Appendix" in *Phaedrus*, with introduction and notes by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995).

finally, love for absolute spiritual beauty will lead to the contemplation of Beauty. Plato also devises a gradual ascent from physical love directed to another human being to spiritual love directed to the world of Ideas. Thus, he will describe the philosopher as the man who has encompassed all those modes of love, starting with the lowest and rising to the highest. In H.D.'s passage, Leonardo also raises to the level of contemplation of Beauty, but through a different channel, that of artistic vision, brought forth by the passion of physical beauty and spirit which define the artist. Thus we can perceive the subtle, though important way in which H.D. both meets and departs from Plato. Although Plato gives each form of love a right on its own, there is no doubt that as the philosopher progresses in his quest, he sheds the previous modes of love as imperfect and base in comparison with the final highest kind of love that leads to contemplation (Symposium 92-95). In H.D., by contrast, the world of Beauty is not cut off from the world of sensible things, and for that reason, neither is physical love discarded in the ascent for a higher spiritual love, nor is the artist considered inferior to the philosopher. In fact, in "Notes on Thought and Vision", H.D. brings Socrates and Plato to the level of the artists, who in turn rise to the world of beauty, vision, or over-mind through the conjunction of the physical and spiritual. It is bearing that distinction in mind that H.D.'s lines acquire a different emphasis from a Platonic discourse: the physical ("dung", ugliness, sex, the abject) is presented as the first necessary step toward spiritual development ("rose", beauty, vision): "one must understand a lower wisdom before one understands a higher" (31); "Is the dung greater or less than the rose?" (32). Meleager, to whom H.D. devotes a whole section in "Notes on Euripides...", is an example of that combination of body and mind, and, of sensual as well as spiritual love, which, in her view, constitutes the key to Ancient Greece (i.e. Eleusinian mysteries; Athenas-Sparta; Athena-Aphrodite): "Meleager illustrates the perfectly balanced duality of the more cerebralistic [sic] of the Greek writers, in his earlier poetry" ("Garland" 2); "... it is significant that his concern seems always with the spiritualization of emotion, the white-hot that exceeds in intensity the mere flame-red" ("Garland" 5). A similar idea to the "white-hot" is central also to "The Wise Sappho". The spiritualization of love, transforms passion into a more powerful element still which brings vision to the poet.

Moreover, it is not only the influence of Plato that can be traced in these "Notes", but also that from the Victorian aesthete Walter Pater, through whom H.D. may have



achieved a better understanding of Plato. In particular, H.D.'s emphasis on love as a form of madness, similar to that of philosophy, is an idea that Pater rescues from Plato and presents in his book Plato and Platonism.<sup>8</sup> Some of the examples chosen by H.D. to illustrate a state of vision or "over-mind" have also been drawn directly from Pater. In Classic Lines, Eileen Gregory has shown that H.D. has Pater's essay on Leonardo da Vinci in mind when she presents Leonardo as a model of over-mind consciousness (81).<sup>9</sup> Gregory points at the tradition of *hermeticism*, that Pater learnt through Renaissance texts, and which he incorporated to his own configuration of Hellenism. The hermetic tradition imagines a universe of hidden correspondences between all orders of life and things and an immanent spirit that pervades it all (79-80). That reality can only be discovered by those who have received a disciplined initiation combining divination with acute perception. In The Renaissance, Pater develops the notion of hermetic or visionary art and the artist as a clairvoyant (80-81). His essay on Leonardo examines this artist in the light of hermeticism and the revival of the occult wisdom of antiquity. Therefore, when H.D. writes in the "Notes" about Leonardo's ability to see beauty and represent beauty, she is indirectly making reference to the artist's clairvoyant talent: "[Leonardo da Vinci] saw the faces of many of his youths and babies and young women definitely with his over-mind. The *Madonna of the Rocks* is not a picture. It is a window. We look through a window into the world of pure over-mind" (18). That is to say, that *The Madonna of the Rocks* is not just a means in itself, but opens views onto another world of which the painting gives an

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<sup>8</sup> See especially, "The Doctrine of Plato", Part I, where Pater quotes extensively from the Phaedrus.

Among H.D.'s books at Bryher's library we find Pater's volume: Plato and Platonism: A Series of Lectures, (London: Macmillan, 1917). It has H.D.'s rose bookplate.

<sup>9</sup> Among the books owned by H.D. and kept at Beinecke library, there are two volumes on Leonardo da Vinci. The oldest one, The Forerunner: The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci (1905) by Dmitri Merejkowski, is a novel that turns around the Renaissance master's life and genius. It links Renaissance art with classical Greek art, as it tells of the discovery of Greek sculptures in the city of Florence. The first Chapter, in particular, turns around the discovery of a statue of Aphrodite and the return of the gods after centuries of Christian oblivion. This book presents some of the central themes of H.D.'s poetry, correspondence and "Notes" during the period 1912-1925. The second volume, Leonardo da Vinci's Note-Books, is a compilation of some of Leonardo's essays and records on a great diversity of matters, compiled and translated by Edward McCurdy (1908). Here we find essays with very suggestive titles such as "Of the soul and the body", "Of the renewal of the body", "Of the mystery of life", "Of painting and poetry", "Of painting and sculpture" and "The mind of the painter" among others. It is not difficult to see how such a book may have contributed to the formulation of some of the ideas of "Notes on Thought and Vision", especially the roundness of character and spirit, derived in this case from Leonardo's, as basis of creativity. This volume seems to have been much read judging from its state and has an inscription on the front page: "Hilda Aldington. Kensington (?) 1918".

insight. This is also the Platonic idea of an object as shadow of a higher reality—a window into a “world of pure over-mind”, which Plato himself describes as “mystic sight” or “blissful vision”, as recorded by Pater (Plato and Platonism 173).<sup>10</sup>

The same Paterian influence can be said to be behind H.D.’s language of “dots and dashes”, that sort of telegraphic language going straight from the sending station to the receiving station. A language indecipherable for the uninitiated but with an electric effect for the tuned mind. H.D. argues, for instance, that in order to understand major works of art, which are the result of an over-mind intelligence, one also needs to have access to the over-mind. In other words, inspirational communication between one work of art and the seer requires the same level of understanding:

Certain words and lines of Attic choruses, any scrap of da Vinci’s drawings, the Delphic charioteer, have a definite, hypnotic effect on me. They are straight, clear entrances, to me, to over-world consciousness. (24)

If we had the right sort of brains, we would receive a definite message from that figure, like dots and lines ticked off by one receiving station, received and translated into definite thought by another telegraphic centre. (26)

The same idea is also present in Oscar Wilde. In the “Critic as Artist II” he writes: “Yes: and as art springs from personality, so it is only to personality that it can be revealed, and from the meeting of the two comes right interpretative criticism.” (170). Accordingly, the work of art will not pass on future inspiration unless the visionary level of the over-mind is reached:

... the world of the great creative artists is never dead. The new schools of destructive art theorists are on the wrong track. Because Leonardo and his kind are never old, never dead. Their world is never explored, hardly ever entered. (24)

The ideas expressed in “Notes on Thought and Vision” in relation to beauty and creativity are also central to another extensive essay: “Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets”.<sup>11</sup> Shared ideas on beauty, spiritual as well as physical; the

<sup>10</sup> Although the translation of the terms employed by Plato varies according to translators, the sense of spiritual mystery and blessing prevails. The translation above comes from Pater.

<sup>11</sup> “Notes on Euripides, Pausanias [sic] and Greek Lyric Poets”. Beinecke Library, Yale University. In the absence of an edited version of the whole text, I will be quoting from the first complete typed draft (undated). Part of it was corrected by H.D. in 1918-1920, according to a note on the margin. Box 43, Folder 1115, 1117. Page numbers according to typescript.

The exact dating of this text is not an easy task, since each of the sections that compose it are independent from each other and were written at different times within a period that goes from perhaps 1916 (Friedman) to 1925. The author’s chronological note at the beginning of this typescript

beauty of the body as a source of spirituality; the need for a primary physical level to make creativity possible; all this conveyed through references to the Renaissance period or the Greek poet Meleager. Similarly, these “Notes” offer the same writing style as the “Notes on Thought and Vision”. Passages in prose lead into flights of poetry as the writer finds meaning in the Greek fragments or myths. These poetic episodes, sometimes accompanied by sections of true poetry (such as “Ion”), illustrate the movement of the mind into the “over-mind” state, or, vision. In the following lines, I will focus on specific sections and passages in this long series of essays. Eileen Gregory has written extensively on the essays on Euripides, Pausanias, Sappho and Theocritus in her groundbreaking work Classic Lines. My views on the “Notes” on “Pausanias” and Anacreon, as well as other general references to the essays, will be in close dialogue with that outstanding study.

Greece stands for beauty in H.D.’s poetic imagination. Which Greece is this? It is the Greece of Pausanias dotted with temples, shrines and towns of which no trace exists any longer. It is a whole civilization coming to light in Pausanias’ “dry-as-dust museum-catalogue” (“Pausanias” 3). It is a whole spiritual world in search of spiritual betterment and enlightenment, projected onto its shrines, its arts, even, its landscape. It

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does not help much since it is incomplete. The author specifies that “The Pausanias section and most of the lyric Garland were written in the autumn of 1920, at Carmel Highlands, California”.

Friedman gives for dates of composition the autumn of 1919 and 1920, but she estimates that work on the “Notes” may have started in 1916 or 1918. Eileen Gregory in Classic Lines estimates that these “Notes” were “probably begun in 1920 during a trip with Bryher to California”. She thinks that H.D. wrote in California “some of the five essays on Pausanias ... and probably also the essays on Sappho, Anacreon, and Theocritus”, while the essay on Meleager and the four on Euripides were written at undetermined times in the early twenties (67).

In relation to “Garland” of Meleager, one part was written, according to the author, in 1920. The rest seems to have been written years later under the direct influence of F.A. Wright’s introduction to his book: Greek Anthology. English. The Girdle of Aphrodite (London: Routledge, 1923) and Greek Anthology. English. Sections. The Poets of the Greek Anthology: A Companion Volume to the Girdle of Aphrodite (London: Routledge, 1924).

F.A. Wright’s introduction to The Girdle of Aphrodite pays considerable attention to Meleager’s Garland as the first poetic anthology that we know. It also outlines the importance of Meleager’s poetry within the evolution of Greek poetry. H.D. echoes these points in her “Garland”. On the other hand, The Poets of the Greek Anthology is also directly addressed at the beginning of her essay. H.D.’s account of Meleager’s life is taken directly from Wright’s reconstruction of the life of the poet in this volume. H.D. owned both volumes. The second is pencil-marked on some of the passages that she comments on in her own essay. The dates of publication of Wright’s volumes suggest, therefore, that a part of “Garland” was written around 1923-1924.

Similarly “Winter Roses”, a sequel to “The Island: Fragments on Sappho”, seems to have been written around 1924 on the evidence of the volume that H.D. reviews here: The Poems of Sappho: with Historical and Critical Notes, Translations and Bibliography by Edwin Marion Cox (London and New York, 1924).

is the dramatic world of Euripides, the love world of Sappho and Meleager's lyrics (5-6) and the sensual world of Anacreon and Theocritus. Finally, superimposed on all those fragments which have survived till our days, there is the Greece of the Victorian Hellenists—Pater and Wilde—softened by eroticism. This somehow personal view of Ancient Greece is, for H.D., the beauty that was Greece, a landmark—Hellas—for poetical as well as spiritual guidance. In these “Notes”, H.D. has followed the steps of two contemporary scholars, J.W. Mackail and F.A. Wright, whose work has influenced not only some of her views of classical Greece, but has determined too the purpose and structure of the work at hand. Mackail's Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology classifies the Greek epigrams by themes (Love, Prayers and Dedications, Epitaphs, Beauty, Nature...) and contains introductions to each topic as understood and dealt with in classical Greek literature. Besides, Mackail elaborates a very illustrative explanation on the origins of epigrams and a historical introduction on the evolution of Greek literature, regarding the *treatment of love*.<sup>12</sup> It is Mackail's classification of the different periods of Greek letters that H.D. has in mind when she writes “Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric poets”. She covers all the different stages that Mackail has distinguished in Greek literature, with the exception of the Homeric period, indirectly dealt with in “Helen in Egypt”: the period of the lyric poets (Sappho and Anacreon); the Athenian period of philosophers, historians and dramatists (Euripides; Plato, indirectly); the period of Attic decadence (Theocritus); the Alexandrian period (Meleager) and the Roman domination (Pausanias). This periodization of Greek literature from the point of view of love reappears in F.A. Wright's Garland of Aphrodite and its companion volume. Wright's observations corroborate Mackail's points and may have added the final gloss to the “Notes”. Overall, what we find in those two sources is an explanation of the purpose, and more importantly, of the structure of these “Notes”.

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<sup>12</sup> H.D. owned three different editions of Mackail's Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology (London and New York: Longman, Green and Co.), the 1911, 1915 and 1917, kept now at Beinecke Library. We know that Mackail's 1911 edition of the Greek epigrams is a text that she read and used. It possibly supplied the Greek models for “Priapus”, “Hermes of the Ways” and “Epigram”. Some other poems are pencil-marked on the margins. She also marked a few sections of the “Introduction”, which echo in these essays (“Euripides”, “People of Sparta”, “From Medara to Corinth”, “Fragments of Sappho”, “Garland”, “Theocritus”) and provide even the nostalgic emphasis that H.D. reproduces in those meditations of classical Greece.

The purpose is simple. As Gregory has pointed out, H.D. is following a long history of scholarly studies on classical Greece, of which Pater, Mackail and Wright are part (Classic Lines 68). However, her claims are not historical but poetic. Her knowledge shines, but shines through her poetic imagination, so there is as much creation as recreation of the Greek authors. At a personal level, what matters is the process of selection of passages, their interpretation and their emotional impact. At a literary level, it is in that collision of scholarly knowledge and imaginative creation, of distortions and idealizations practised on the original texts, where the "Notes" acquire their interest and value. As for the structure, H.D. has covered the different periods of Greek literature, as outlined by Mackail and Wright, with authors referred to by the two scholars (except Pausanias); authors to whom we know H.D. felt very close poetically and intellectually. However, H.D.'s design is not chronological but seems rather to obey an aesthetic and intellectual pattern influenced by the treatment that love received, in poetry mainly, in the different Greek periods. Both Mackail and Wright agree that love was not central in the Homeric poems and that it only enters obliquely through Helen's beauty or Odysseus' affairs with Calypso or Circe. "The direct poetry of passion belongs to the next period" writes Mackail, "the period of the great lyric poets of the sixth and seventh centuries B.C." (Epigrams 33). This is the period of Sappho and Anacreon, characterized for the direct expression of passion with "unsurpassed fullness", "delicacy" and "freshness" (33). The next period, the Athenian, is by contrast, one in which "emotions have no chance" (34) and love enters in the work of the dramatists as a "subsidiary motive", "conventionally treated", developed in "quite abnormal surroundings, complicated with jealousy or crime". Both scholars agree in seeing at the roots of the absence of genuine passion the degradation of women in the Attic society and "the hardening of Greek life" under the rule of the city over individual emotion. Euripides is the exception to such lack of emotional inspiration, of which Sophocles is an example. "Subject to these conditions", writes Mackail, "Euripides has left in his Phaedra ... a study of passion unsurpassed in fidelity to nature and brilliance of handling. But Euripides, in this as in so many other matters, represents an intellectual sympathy with all the movements of the human heart far in advance of his time" (34).<sup>13</sup> As the tension, the rigidity and

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<sup>13</sup> Original text pencil-marked by H.D.

control exerted by the city on the individuals gave way, "feeling grew more humane". It is on the edge of the Athenian period that Theocritus' idylls flourish with "a passionate sense of beauty in nature" (34). The Alexandrian period will bring a new life to Greek art, "no longer restraint and severe". It is during that period "that the epigram of love flowers out; and it is at the end of that period, where the Greek spirit was touched by Oriental passion, that it culminates in Meleager" (35).<sup>14</sup> This is Mackail and Wright's account of love in Greek literature. In "Notes on Euripides..." , H.D. has arranged her essays in two groups. The first seems to correspond to the classic period of classical Greece, reconstructed through Pausanias; a period, according to Mackail, deprived of passion, ruled by restraint and discipline with only one exception: Euripides, singled out and given an independent section in the "Notes". The second group of essays represents the poetry of love before and after Athenian hegemony: poetry of feeling, intensity and sensuality, counterbalancing Attic astringency.

H.D.'s vision of two complementary Greek worlds in poetry, beauty and ethos, corresponds to the dualities we encountered in "Notes on Thought and Vision": on the one hand, the intellect, the world of Helios and Athena, the world of abstraction; on the other, the body and its irrational passions, the world of Pan and the Naiads. Yet, in the same manner that those two realms of existence were integrated into each other, to form a third, the spiritual, so in "Notes on Euripides..." the complementarity of the Attic and the Oriental/Alexandrian is necessary to depict H.D.'s imaginary landscape and her clusters of images, as well as her position as a female lover and artist. Before dealing more specifically with aspects of the essays on "Pausanias" and Anacreon, it is necessary to make reference to a source that H.D. followed quite closely in her understanding of classical Greece: Walter Pater. Pater's configuration of Hellenism was shaped, among other notions, by the distinction between "Dorian" and "Ionian" tendencies in art, arguing that the best works of art are those in which both elements are united (Appreciations).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the Athens of the fifth century B.C. is a good example of what happens in art when both tendencies meet. The Ionian

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<sup>14</sup> Text marked by H.D.

<sup>15</sup> The distinction was borrowed by Pater from Karl Otfried Müller, who in his work History and Antiquities of the Doric Race defined the art of Greece in terms of subjectivity and objectivity (Monsman 7) and a model of racial purity (Gregory). For Müller, the Ionian, represented by Athens, is Asiatic and racially impure. The Dorian, represented by Sparta, is racially pure and defines the Hellenic spirit (Gregory 91).

is centrifugal, Asiatic, spontaneous, changing, colourful, versatile, individual and subjective. The Ionian spirit is for Pater embodied in Heraclitus' philosophy of change and multiplicity of things (Monsman 7-8). The Dorian is, by contrast, centripetal, orderly, unifying, simple, objective, calm and singular, represented in philosophy and politics by Plato (Monsman 9).<sup>16</sup> Pater, in his "Postscript" to *Appreciations* also extended that distinction to the terms 'romantic' and 'classic', arguing that they are, in fact, variants of the old opposition Doric-Ionian. He also characterizes the romantic in terms of 'matter' and the classical in terms of 'form' (Monsman 9-10). Both tendencies, when combined, are responsible for cultural rebirths, like that of the Renaissance, and originate the best works of art. However, in spite of Pater's emphasis on the need to find a balance between those two sets of tendencies, in practice, he remains eminently Dorian. In *Greek Studies*, as Eileen Gregory has noticed, Pater praises the classic period of Greek art (under Dorian influence) above its archaic beginnings, the aesthetics of marble statues above terracotta and metal works, and the ascetism of the Olympic athletes. Moreover, he comes to identify the Ionian with moral laxity, and racial impurity, the Dorian with strength and the "genuine Greek" (228). In "Notes on Euripides...", the complementarity between classic Athenian ethos and literature and the Oriental/Alexandrian can be said to reflect roughly Pater's distinction between the Dorian and the Ionian. However, although H.D. understands that duality in a Paterian way, she does not praise one type of aesthetics and ethos over the other but gives them equal weight in her poetics and in her notion of beauty. Her essays on Athens and Sparta, from the "Pausanias" series, and the one on Anacreon will illustrate my point.

I already mentioned that H.D.'s recreation of the classic Greek period, that when the city states of Athens and Sparta were in their full splendour and competing with

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<sup>16</sup> See the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and *The Times Atlas of World History* on the historical origin of the terms 'Dorian' and 'Ionian'. A historical account shows that Pater, following Müller, deviates from the historical significance of those terms. Historians associate the initiation of Greek civilization with the Ionians (750 B.C.). Athens had the claim of being the 'eldest Ionian city' although it was not until the fifth century B.C. that Athens began to exert its hegemony upon other city-states. By contrast with Pater's claims that the Dorians were the original Hellenic people, re in fact, the last of the northern invaders into Greece. They settled at Elis, Corinth, Megara, Laconia and Aegina. It was not until the fifth century B.C., that the hegemony of Sparta began to rival with that of Athens. Herodotus and Thucydides explain that it was under the Athenian rule that the depreciation of the Ionians as unmanly came. Greek theory of the fifth century associates the Dorians with 'steadfastness', the Ionians with 'intelligence', a similar distinction between 'Nordic' and 'Mediterranean' in modern Europe. Artistically speaking, it has been argued that Dorian restraint and architectonic power, merged with Ionian grace, produced in Athens the best of Greek art.

each other, takes place through Pausanias. Pausanias, as an “objective” historian, acts as H.D.’s medium to the classical world. In “People of Sparta”, H.D. compares the different ethos and philosophy of life governing each city. The comparison takes place in terms which are familiar to the reader of “Notes on Thought and Vision”. Behind the specific ethos of Athens or Sparta, there is a different state of mind. Athens stands for the life of the intellect and consciousness, in comparison to Sparta, passionate and irrational in many ways; but above all, H.D.’s praise of Athens is for the balance that it has achieved and represents between the physical and the intellect, for its “sanity” and “moderation”:

Athens forever remains centre of the Greek world, suave, civilized, maker of finished warrior, statesman and poet, ... Athens is forever set in a ring of amethyst. Athens, like strange worlds scientists tell us of, seems to be lighted of another sun; dawn flows violet, at noon the rocks on Hymetus cast violet shade, at evening the whole is one flower; the jagged peaks of the mountains, not only in colour but in shape, are obvious violet-heads cut in stone and granite, a rock-wreath of purple flowers. (1)

It is worth noticing the words and images that H.D. has chosen to describe classic Athens. It seems clear, given the title of the essay, that the point of comparison is Sparta:

Laconia bred few poets. Its spirit was essentially the spirit of action, but action technically perfect, the war-dance, the dance of maidens, the marching to battle, the meeting and the slaying of the enemy, even the mode and manner of death were self-conscious, dramatic, trained, perfected actions, technical actions; a life lived as a poem is written, a death met as the hero in the Athenian drama meets it, with stately posture, with inevitable grace, with enviable reserve. (3a-4)

Set one by the other, Athens appears less hard and more gentle than Sparta. The light that falls on the Acropolis and its surroundings is not the sharp, bright day-light that we can imagine lights up Sparta, but the softer light of dawn. The rocks of the mountains surrounding Athens are not just “jagged”, bare, solid; they have upon them too the touch of the artist, the light that turns them into a wreath of flowers. In Athens, Ionian gentleness and softness are perfectly combined with the austere Dorian touch. In this respect, Athens has also achieved a balance between the more Asiatic influence and the influence of her neighbour city-state; Athens is indeed, in spirit and taste, and even geographically, “at the centre of the Greek world” (1). And yet, next to Sparta, Athens appears “suave”, “fragrant”, “civilized”, in other words, Ionian. Sparta is also outstanding but in a different way. The Spartan avoids colour and the slight decorative touch added by a conception of art different from life itself. The Spartan makes the way he lives and fights into an art. Life and death are his dramas, the



battlefield, his stage. Athens diversifies and multiplies. It produces warriors (physical), statesmen (intellectual) and poets (spiritual). Sparta, on the contrary, unites in its warriors, fighters and artists.

H.D.'s comparison between the Ionian, yet balanced classic Athens, and the Dorian Sparta, is reinforced in other passages. Those comparisons reflect the poets' strife to identify the cultural manifestations of each city with a state of body or mind and find where those two levels of existence come together. Earlier, H.D. remarked the intellectual and different artistic dimension of the Athenians by comparison with the more physical, but also more disciplined Spartans. She will also come to identify Athens with the light of reason, and Sparta, for all its mentally controlled and "law-abiding" citizens (2), with "a region of blank terror and unexploited beauty" (3a). H.D. explores the apparent contradictions at work in Spartan life, the observance of law and discipline, on the one hand, the irrational sacrifices of young boys to Apollo, on the other. Those two extremes somehow complement each other, she concludes, as if the extreme control of life would also need extreme outbursts of violence (2). There is also another type of beauty cultivated by Spartans: "the beauty expressed and dying to be worshipped dead, a beauty beyond the ecstasy that makes song" (3a). This is the beauty of the undaunted warriors, ready to die in a dignified manner for Sparta, as the hero of an Athenian tragedy does:

Leonidas, a citizen of Sparta with three hundred men of Lacedaemonia met the entire strength of Persia in a mountain pass below Thessaly.

Beyond reason, beyond the technical expression of dramatic poem or music or chiselling of statue, this action remains part of the realm of the sublimely inexpressible ... the three hundred and their leader slain! (3a)<sup>17</sup>

The army of men died for an ideal, for "Lacedaemonia", their mother-land. But H.D. does not pass judgement on the political correctness of these events. She tries to look at them in the same way Spartans would: the beauty of the act, of the ideal behind it. And H.D. shares that sense of beauty these people had, although not necessarily the means to create it. We could argue that what H.D. loves too is the narrative of the events, the way that ancient history spreads before her eyes as she reads Pausanias: the revelation of a world moving and working through sheer ideals, the particular aestheticism that filters through the narration, the echoes of the battle, the legend built

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<sup>17</sup> H.D. is echoing here one of Simonides' sepulchral epigrams. Mackail records it in Select Epigrams (1911) and comments on it.

on it—dwelling more on the beauty of that death than on the real slaughter. This is one of those instances where politics and aestheticism are in conflict in H.D.'s work, and where the aesthete conquers over the humane poet.

Nevertheless, Athens and Sparta are presented as sister cities, sharing restraint of mind, the Dorian touch, before the invading Persians. They are the spiritual "West", which keeps within balance body and mind, against the sensual "East":

For one moment, for one second ... the living organism of the world or the spirit of the world seemed in jeopardy, as if beyond this earth and the spirit or daemon of this earth, another was watching, questioning: shall this our earth be a creature of sensuous, high strung, feminine, changable [sic], fluid character ... a creation of the sun but of an Eastern sun, myrrh mingled with spices, men beautiful, with the half-male, ringed and braceletted beauty ... , or shall the West prevail?. (2-3)

Indeed, this comparison shows that the terms Dorian and Ionian are rather shifty, depending on the perspective taken. H.D., as she already showed in "Notes on Thought and Vision", does not define terms in themselves but within a net of relationships, thus subject to change their meaning continuously. In this essay, H.D. celebrates the Greece of the mainland that expands towards the West, to the colonies in Sicily and Southern Italy, and towards the East, to the coast of Asia Minor. Athens, "standing mid-way" (3) is a favourite with H.D.. It stands at the cross-roads between West and East, between Dorian and Ionian proper. The beauty of Greece becomes in this essay the moderate, balanced beauty of Athens. Athena, the goddess that watches over the city, is both warrior and patron of the arts. She represents within H.D. iconography, the goddess that saves the physical from the irrational, the intellect that gives physical beauty its spiritual touch. "People of Sparta" ends with Athena "join[ing] hands with the beautiful one" (6), Aphrodite.

In "From Megara to Corinth", Athena, in this case *Niké*, reappears as goddess of sanity and balance. Reading Pausanias, H.D. recalls that the Athenians did not represent their gods, not even their "infernal deities" with a moral intent. To the Athenians all gods, good and evil, were equal, and equally accepted.<sup>18</sup> This in itself, writes H.D., shows "the sanity of the Athenian sculptor and the Athenian people" (1).

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<sup>18</sup> For all the Platonic influence that we find in H.D.'s essays, here she is maintaining the Homeric view of the gods. Plato in The Republic criticized Homer's amoral presentation of the gods. On the other hand, Mackail, might be informing H.D. in this passage. In his "Introduction" to Select Epigrams (1911), containing a section on "Religious Greek Temper", he writes: "The deeper and more violent forms of religious feeling were indeed always alien, and even to a certain degree repugnant, to the Greek spirit ... The gods of the Hellenic peoples were in the likeness of men; demons and monsters were rejected from their humane mythology" (43).

Phidias' Athena Parthenos-Niké shows in her own attributes the same balance, with the serpent, symbol of the irrational and the unknown, at her feet, and Niké, symbol of vision, ecstasy and beauty, on the palm of her hand. Both are "subject alike to the mind of Athené" (1).<sup>19</sup> Also, connecting with the previous essay, H.D. stresses again the sisterhood between Athena, patron of Athens, and Aphrodite, goddess of Corinth. H.D. uses the historical relationship between those two cities for her own symbolic iconography. While Athens was an artistic and political centre, Corinth, a Dorian city itself, was a city of pleasure, reknown also for the Isthmian games—patronized by Athenians (*Oxford Dictionary*). Therefore, H.D. writes, that in arriving to Corinth, one cannot forget the "patronage of the Grey-Eyed Athenian" (2). Towards the end of the essay, after a detour through Corinth and other significative spots on that road between Medara and Corinth, H.D. goes back to the relationship between Athena and Aphrodite, apparently opposed in what they represent. Instead of opposition, what H.D. remarks is the identity of the two goddesses, for they are complementary to each other. Before the "porches of the holiest Aphrodite", H.D. writes:

No voice of syren tempts us but a stronger voice, the voice of the real lover who cannot pause to kiss eyelid or wave of hair or subtle line of throat or ankle, loving it all so much, loving the spirit set within the body no less and no more than the body sheltering the spirit. Is not all Corinth the body of Aphrodite, all Greece, the beauty of Athené? Where can we pause, how differentiate? (7).

And from there, H.D. takes us to a living example of that union in the unknown Telesilla (7), a girl from Argos who defended her city against the men of Sparta.<sup>20</sup> She was woman, warrior and poet:

Beyond the theatre in front of the temple of Aphrodite, was later placed a statue; Telesilla; at her feet the scrolls of her love-poetry, in her hand, a helmet. (8)

Eileen Gregory's global interpretation of the essays on "Pausanius" is quite different. Gregory explains Athena's presence as H.D.'s amulet against her immediate personal history, at the same time that she underplays the role of Aphrodite and ignores the sisterhood that H.D. creates in the essays between the two goddesses. Gregory also takes the protection of Athena, in her many manifestations ("Those Near the Sea"), as a sign of H.D.'s choice to maintain her writing and poetics within an intellectual and spiritual realm, rather than an erotic one. This interpretation (quite

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<sup>19</sup> H.D. deals with the same images in a poem that she may have written at the same time as this essay: "Helios and Athene" (1920).

<sup>20</sup> Telesilla reappears in a poem bearing her name in *Heliadora*.

conflictive if we consider that by that time H.D. had already defended the role of the emotional and erotic within creativity and had written part of Hymen) is determined by Gregory's view that H.D.'s "early hellenism" is under an overwhelming Paterian influence (Classic Lines 85-107).

For Gregory, H.D. adopts important aspects of Pater's Hellenism, such as the notion of *ascesis* and the "Dorian model", which become an integral part of her aesthetics. *Ascesis*, explains Gregory, refers to "a regimen of austere restraint that the artist, like the athlete must cultivate" (85). Pater used this term throughout his writings aware of its meaning in chemical terms: a process of distillation and evaporation out of which crystal emerges (85). Therefore, when the process of *ascesis* is applied to art what Pater implies is the casting off of all unnecessary elements; when applied to the artist himself, ideas and inspiration beaten into perfection by sheer hard work. Images of crystal, whiteness, light, or "diaphaneitè" are, according to Gregory, indicators in Pater's writings of *ascesis* (85). Pater shows this discipline being at work in the male athletes of classic Greece (85) and reflected in the marble sculptures of the classic period. Commenting on "H.D.'s Letters to Cournois" (1916) and "Notes on Thought and Vision", I showed how indeed H.D. sees creativity as a process that requires personal asceticism and how she even applies a chemical metaphor to the shaping of passion into vision. In "From Megara to Corinth", H.D. also devotes a passage to comment on the discipline of the athletes of the Isthmian games. First she marks the physical excellence of the athletes:

...there is wind and rough sea, there is strength to greet us, devotees of Niké, victors in the Isthmus games, young men, powerful in frame ... sacred beings set apart forever for some strength of thigh or dexterity of wrist or swiftness of glance, for daring or fortitude... (2-3)

Then, she notices that it was through the perfect balance of mind and body that the athletes achieved glory: "with intellect of brow shared equally, with intellect of hand and shaft of shoulder-blade and ankle and turn of knee, winners in the Isthmian Games" (3). H.D.'s observations are not only directed by the presence of Athena in the essay, but come directly from Pater's descriptions and emphases in Greek Studies.<sup>21</sup>

In "The Age of Athletic Prizemen", Pater reflects on the evolution of Greek art through the development of Greek sculpture. He qualifies such evolution as a

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<sup>21</sup> H.D. owned a copy of this work: Walter Pater, Greek Studies: A Series of Essays, (London: Macmillan, 1914). See Virginia Smyers' list of H.D.'s classical books in the Bryher Library.

development from the “hieratic, stiff and formal” into a deeper knowledge of the human body and of the soul in it (270). Pater names the period of classic Greek sculpture “the athletic age of Greek sculpture” (279), developed at a time when Athenian democracy has been achieved and there is room for the “national games”: the Isthmic and Olympic games (279). Two masterpieces represent for Pater this period: Myron’s Discobolus and Polycleitus’ Diadumenus. The first, he writes, captures the essence of movement, the second, the stillness of the body after it. What constitutes the peculiar value of these works, besides the mastery of their execution, is their “pure humanity” (298). This is in itself a major achievement, according to Pater, because nothing is left to symbolism or to the imagination of the observer, as in more archaic (religious) art. Here, there is simply the body, and the body without suffering any antagonism with the soul or the mind. The perfection of the body, the rules of abstinence and “keeping under one’s self” are considered in themselves a form of religion (295). As a result, there survive the bodies of young men with “uncontaminated purity of form” (294). If these lines help us to understand better the spiritual dimension of physical beauty, which we often find in H.D., they also help to explain Pater’s Dorian model.

Pater’s Hellenism is Dorian. He sees Sparta as the true representative of the Greek world and its spirit. Aesthetically speaking that means praise of austerity, constraint, and form. Socially, a society eminently masculine in which sexual relationships between men are condoned (Classic Lines 92). Pater links Hellenism and male homoeroticism and from this combination the fascination with marble sculptures and the athletic model emerges. In other words, Pater’s Dorian model is masculine and homoerotic (90). However, the most puzzling feature of what Gregory calls “Dorian eroticism”, is its spiritual qualities, its purity and sexlessness. As Gregory has pointed out, Pater follows other German scholars who defend the idea that male love is superior to female love, and therefore, “it represents a higher eros” (90). What that really means for Pater and his precursors is that the masculine body and its sexuality are safe from the baseness of the female body and its desire. Therefore, by principle, the masculine body is invested with a spirituality that its female counterpart lacks. Hence, the “uncontaminated purity of form” that Pater sees in the marble statues of male athletes. Gregory has argued that H.D. not only knew this Dorian model of masculine homoeroticism but engaged with it in numerous occasions (92).

My question at this point, in relation to the analysis of beauty in H.D.'s work, is: to which extent is H.D.'s aesthetics Dorian? And to which extent is her model of beauty Dorian too? So far, we have already seen a few examples that show that H.D. is familiar with Pater's Dorian aesthetics: her praise of the Spartans and their heroism ("People of Sparta"), her praise of the conduct of discipline of athletes ("From Megara to Corinth"), and her praise of the austere and contained touch that brought Ionian beauty into the golden period of Athenian art. Besides those examples in the "Notes on Euripides...", we could find some others: her admiration of the Delphic charioteer ("Notes on Thought and Vision"), which, although archaic in fashion, represents for H.D. Doric accuracy and simplicity, and its poetic counterpart "Charioteer", which shares Pater's notion of asceticism in creativity, as described in "Notes on Thought and Vision". Gregory selects a few more examples, taken from both H.D.'s fictions and poetry, such as the image of the virgin (Artemis, 95) or white mother (Thetis, Hippolyta, Athena, 101-102); "the guardianship of Athena" (essays on "Pausanias") and H.D.'s tribute in "Helios and Athena" (86-87); "The Contest" (86); "Hyacinth" (96-97) and the "astringency" of Sea Garden (105). However, it is very debatable that these examples express H.D.'s commitment to Dorian aesthetics only. I shall argue that H.D.'s beauty and aesthetic model is both Dorian and Ionian, masculine and feminine. As we have already seen in the essays on "Pausanias", H.D. praises Sparta and its heroic men, but it is Athens, with her combination of Ionian and Dorian ethos, that remains her favourite. Similarly, it is not the patronage of the Spartan Helios/Apollo that is invoked in "People of Sparta" and the other essays, but that of the female goddess Athena, who combines darkness and light, serpent and Nikè, Demeter and Apollo; the goddess who is "doubly passionate" ("Helios and Athena") and is sister to Aphrodite. As for the masculine dominance implied in the Dorian model, H.D. counterbalances Apollo's power with that of Athena. Again, in "Contest", it is indeed the sculpture/body of an athlete to which the poem is dedicated, and yet, the approach is close and intimate, from a female point of view—from the poet's point of view who pays tribute to the achievement of the winner with flowers. There is also the long wreath of flowers collected in Hymen, and the marble sculptures not of masculine athletes but of girls and matrons, among them those of Persephone and Demeter. This search for balance between those elements that can be grouped to each side of the duality Dorian-Ionian, can be perceived in the overall structure of

“Notes on Euripides...”. As I began to argue when introducing this set of essays, the “Notes” seem to have been written and arranged following an aesthetic and intellectual principle: a distinction between Attic on the one hand, and Oriental/Alexandrian on the other, which is reproduced again in the fluid duality Dorian-Ionian. H.D. has also reproduced within these essays parallel relations at each level: within the essays on Pausanias, H.D. presents (Dorian) Sparta and (Ionian) Athens as a Dorian set on the whole, opposed to the Ionian Persians; in her “Notes on Euripides”, she deals with an Athenian (Attic) dramatist who writes about an Ionian poet and an Ionian god (Dionysus). Looking at the “Notes” as a whole, the Attic group (Sparta and Athens) appears as Dorian, set against the Ionian Sappho and Anacreon, the Decadent Theocritus and the Oriental Meleager. The patronage of the goddesses also shifts: from Athena, representing moderation and the light of the intellect, to Aphrodite, representing the life of the senses and passion.<sup>22</sup>

The presence of Aphrodite in the second part of the “Notes on Euripides...” is crucial for H.D. as a female writer, and one that cannot be underestimated. Much as H.D. may be in love with the Dorian touch (simplicity, ascetism, physical spirituality and the homoerotic), this model excludes the female body and the female mind. As Gregory herself has noticed, Dorian eroticism, combining an aesthetic and erotic model, presents serious problems for the female writer (78, 105). Indeed, when Pater deals with a female figure such as Demeter, for example, she is purified, purged of her bodily presence and fertile capacity, transformed into a maternal spirit. Indeed, only as a white body do female figures find their way into Pater’s Hellenism. Aphrodite, “the holiest one”, Sappho’s Aphrodite, is too physical, but above all, is too female for Pater’s world. H.D. is in search of white/pure eroticism like that represented by the body of the athletes, yet, she needs it to originate in the female body. She finds the answer in Sappho.

Given the centrality that Gregory gives to the Dorian model, everything else within H.D.’s poetics becomes peripheral: Sappho and the other lyric poets, with their

<sup>22</sup> A chart will graphically expose the fluidity of the opposition Attic-Oriental, and Dorian-Ionian:



sensuality, their passion, and the eroticism they suggest. Gregory will agree that "H.D. was very much Ionian in disposition" (105) but will not pursue this interesting path and will go back to assert how "female homoeroticism is predominantly figured in H.D. within models borrowed from Dorian hellenism" (107). Thus when she comes to discuss H.D.'s essay on Sappho, the figure of Aphrodite becomes problematic. Perhaps, the question we should ask ourselves is, which Aphrodite is this? Is it the vulgar Aphrodite of "Hyacinth", a sexual predator, or a romantic Aphrodite, or is it on the contrary the Kyprian of Sappho, for whom the realm of love is sacred? In "The Wise Sappho", H.D. makes clear that it is the last one who offers her the model of eroticism she is looking for: a model which combines the physical spirituality of the Dorians and the space to exist as a female writer and lover. Hence the genderless metaphor of ascesis, which she was already using in her letters to Cournot, is modified to include the female body, the organic, the earthy and vital. In "Notes on Thought and Vision" she already places the origin of the spirit in the body, not only of man, but of woman, and not in the physical pre-empted of its ugliest sides, but in the abject, in the "matrix" from which all energy derives. In "The Wise Sappho", H.D. may be using images that she learned reading Pater (such as white heat and crystal), but they acquire a different meaning within the female context of Sappho's poetry, and by extension, within H.D.'s own system of images. It is only from the perspective of the Dorian model, that Sappho needs to be "redeemed", as Gregory puts it, and H.D. appears to be "apologizing" and trying to transform Sappho's Aphroditic heat into Artemisian cold heat (105-106).

To conclude this discussion on H.D.'s model of beauty and the elements where it manifests itself, it should be acknowledged that both Dorian and Ionian are central to her poetics. They constitute one of the many dualities within H.D.'s work, resolved through the fusion of both. It can also be argued that H.D. inherits a Dorian framework that allows her access to a tradition (Hellenism) and ways of encoding homoeroticism (Gregory). Yet, H.D. always transforms her models to allow female identification. These transformations are usually performed not directly, changing elements of the model inherited, but through juxtaposition, that is, presenting next to the model, its counterpart or alternative. Thus she incorporates in one fragment and revises in another.



In the next lines, I will discuss one of the essays in "Notes on Euripides..." which revises the Dorian model in the way suggested above: "Songs of Anacreon". This section on one of the Greek lyric poets, contemporary of Sappho, is a celebration of a type of poetry which counts with much of H.D.'s admiration. The qualities that she praises and chooses to write about are the humanity, sensuality and earthy dimension of Anacreon's poetry. It is difficult not to see in such praise an open defence of poetry with feeling, meaning and intensity. The attack she openly directed in "Responsibilities" against the new art theories is retaken here. The ideas of the early essay are substantially the same although argued from a different point of view. H.D.'s defence of Anacreon's poetry is also a defence of her own. She dismisses the criticism of her poetry and her Hellenism being escapist and nostalgic, committed to a past which does not partake in present artistic or social concerns. She equally rejects her being an old-fashioned writer disconnected from the path of modern art. She does so from the belief that she is, in fact, ahead of her own time, searching for a type of poetry that is constructive and preserves for the modern world some of the old wisdom of the past. This wisdom, although never specified, is Beauty, a recovery of the belief in a spiritual world. It is the in the poetry of Anacreon where she finds it.

H.D. sees Anacreon's songs as a combination of "Ionic volutes" (2) or "Ionic columns" (5) and "faint, exotic perfumes, pungent and stimulating" (2). Such metaphorical combination comprises both Athenian frame, precise and hard, yet radiant, and Oriental sensual beauty. The first confers to this poetry some sort of austere spiritual beauty, which we have seen H.D. is fond of. The second provides humanity and an earthy quality. Such fusion is to be explained by the cultural origins of the poet, born on the coast of Asia Minor, as H.D. specifies, and widely educated in Samos and Athens. H.D. is powerfully attracted to those Greek poets who lived and profited from a borderline existence between two cultures. It is precisely such duality that H.D. continuously seeks.<sup>23</sup> It is the duality of Athena and Aphrodite, Athens and Egypt, body and spirit, which appears over and over in these "Notes" and in "Notes on Thought and Vision". However, we have seen that H.D.'s dualities are not correlative but palimpsestic. One cannot have access to a spiritual world unless it is through the physical world; the intellect is dry and sterile without the excitement of the senses and

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<sup>23</sup> H.D. praises Meleager for the same reasons. See "Notes on Thought and Vision", 33-34, and "Garland", 1,4.

beauty is simply not possible without the aid of love. For such reason, as part of her program of reevaluation of a primary fundamental layer, H.D. sets off in "Songs of Anacreon" "to make his humanity as important as his divinity" (5). Indeed, having perceived the "divine" or spiritual quality about his poetry initially, she turns round to "get down, underneath things" and "learn in true humility, true greatness" (5). Thus, we find that the kind of Greek world evoked by Anacreon's songs is not the steel white world of spirited Athens or Sparta, but rather, a world softened with eroticism and tender humanity (5,6).

There are in H.D.'s essay numerous instances of the way in which she privileges the human and sensual dimension of Anacreon's poetry over poetry more committed to the spirit. In fact, the text shifts continuously between the greatness of the natural world—the "wilderness"—and the gods which inhabit it, and the more intimate sensual world offered by Anacreon. She describes the world outside in terms that fit a traditional sublime sight: there is magnitude, greatness, harsh contours, luminosity, and a sense of permanence. As a whole, the picture of the world inhabited by the gods comes across as frozen and static. By contrast, the poetry of Anacreon strikes home. It communicates a feeling of warmth and of exuberant sensuality and takes the reader not into an open unprotected space, but into a garden:

I draw a strip of curtain across the too insistent greatness of the world without, the mountain and its peak on peak of green that drops with all its dramatic, forceful, barbaric grandeur, sheer into a jagged hill of granite; granite, out into fine, perpendicular lines of irregular pointed lights ...

I draw my curtain across my window, across them [the gods], their impertinence and their greatness. ... But with my fingers stained with moss and scratched with wortleberry and oak-tangle, I open a little Tauchnitz volume. (1-2)

Such distinction remains until the end:

This poet is the tenderest of lovers!

There is no strife—no wavering—no gauche or awkward gesture—only in our ears, this one low, insistent, ceaseless rhythm—in our hands rose-leaves—in our minds, the vision of that lovely goddess and of her sulky baby.

Above all, there is no searching after the great majestic beings whom philosophers have said, govern the universe... Let the great keep their hilltops. (6-7)

From the sensuality and intimacy that H.D. perceives in the Greek poet, an intense eroticism derives. H.D. is attracted to a snug little world full of sensual beauty, cut to human measure. Such eroticism reflects in the way H.D. refers to this poetry. It is not poetry to be seen or read, but to be felt and touched: "With my fingers too, rather than with my eyes, I read these poems" (2), "I close my eyes and with my fingers like o

[sic] blind, would find my way about this poetry" (2), "I should have liked to touch his hands, to have counted his imperfections" (5). Looking at the images that Anacreon's poetry evoke in H.D. we can perceive how much H.D. reads into it. Her reading leads into a recreation of the classical pastoral world smoothed by Victorian Hellenism. Thus, Anacreon's poetry takes us to "a garden" in springtime, a classical topic for love poetry:

Spring has come. (...) See the baby (we call him Eros) under the great white rose-tree. An enormous bee has pricked his finger—stupid, silly adorable surprise—ah—she stoops to soothe him, —the curve of the white back—and the white rose leaves, brushing the soft shoulder!

Ionic capitals, washed in honey and white rain—gold and marble and honey and tints of yellow-grapes.<sup>24</sup>

Always the baby whom we call Eros—always the roses—red and yellow, and tints of cream and tea-rose colour—and a swallow who breaks from a low dwarf-laurel bush (just now in the rosebud-stage of a flower) with almost too insistent shrill a song to match the far, simple murmuring of the lyre-string.

Too blue a swallow with too sweet a note! (6)

Everything is soft and perfumed, round contours. Here there is none of the Dorian hardness H.D. is so fond of; it is more "Orchard" than "rose, cut in rock". We seem to find ourselves before some painting by a Pre-Raphaelite rather than the actual Greek world of mythology. H.D. comes very close to the Hellenic recreations of Victorian Hellenists, particularly, Oscar Wilde in "The Critic as Artist"<sup>25</sup> which might have been indeed a model for H.D. Describing the Greek artist at work, Wilde wrote:

The hyacinth-like curls grew crisp beneath his graver.<sup>26</sup> And when in some dim frescoed fane, or pillared sun portico, the child of Leto stood upon his pedestal, those who had passed by, (...) became conscious of a new influence that had come across their lives, and dreamily, or with a sense of strange and quickening joy, went to their homes or daily labour, or wandered, it may be through the city gates to that nymph-haunted meadow where young Phaedrus bathes his feet, and lying there on the soft grass, beneath the all wind-whispering planes and flowering *agnus castus*, began to think of the wonder of beauty, and grew silent with unaccustomed awe ...

On a wall of fresh plaster, stained with bright sandyx or mixed with milk and saffron, he pictured one who trod with tired feet the purple white-starred fields of asphodel ...<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Notice how similar images are employed in "Why have you Sought" (*CP* 133) to describe Aphrodite's world. A possible source can be found in Moero's epigram: "To Aphrodite of the Golden House" (*Select Epigrams*, 137). There, Aphrodite inhabits a "golden portico" which is also associated to Dionysus' "grape-cluster".

<sup>25</sup> "The Critic as Artist" I, 246-247.

<sup>26</sup> Compare with "my hair is made of crisp violets / or hyacinth ... / His hair was crisp to my mouth" in "Evadne" (*CP* 132).

<sup>27</sup> This might well be one of the possible sources for H.D.'s title and subject in *Asphodel*. The editor explains in her notes to the text that asphodels are in Greek mythology the flowers of the dead (601). On the same page, Oscar Wilde also mentions Tanagra or "terracotta statues found in tombs in the city of Boeotia". H.D. makes reference to Tanagra in "Hymen" (*CP* 105).

He drew with silver-point and charcoal upon parchment and prepared cedar. Upon ivory and rose-coloured terracotta he painted with wax, making the wax fluid with the juice of olives ... (246)

Sometimes he would etch in thin vermilion lines upon a ground of white the languid bridegroom and his bride, with Eros hovering round them—an Eros like one of Donatello's angels, a little laughing thing with gilded or with azure wings. (247).

There, the classical Greek world is imbued with the same eroticism with which H.D. views Anacreon's poetry. The beauty she displays before us is not that of the spirit, as represented by Athens/Athena, but rather that of the senses. This is the beauty of Aphrodite and Eros, human rather than divine. H.D. finds in Anacreon, as she did in Sappho, a fore-poet, a model for her own humane love poetry.

## Conclusions

Beauty and sublimity are inseparable in H.D.'s poetry. Very often it is beauty, slight (flower or rock-shelf) or overwhelming ("The Shrine"), that provokes a sublime moment or a glimpse of sublimity. Such blending of beauty and sublimity appears in numerous poems and can be explained in theoretical terms as the result of the same mechanisms of desire. In "Cliff Temple", for example, what generates the experience of sublimity comes down to two interrelated aspects: one is the unattainability of the god, his excess and divinity (traditionally responsible for sublimity), which makes him an object of heightened desire. The other is the beauty of the god, which is the reason for the quest. Yet, those two distinct aspects are related. The god's beauty provokes the quester's desire, while at the same time desirability itself constitutes beauty. In such case, we have to admit that it is beauty as such, or as a symptom of desire, which originates the experience of sublimity. In "Loss" (l. 33 and ff.), beauty appears as a manifestation of desire. In "Adonis", inversely, the beloved youth of Aphrodite embodies both beauty and love of beauty and his death is taken as a metaphor of love and its sublimity. Thus, when beauty appears in H.D.'s poems, it will be accompanied by a sense of sublimity. To put it simply, beauty is sublime for H.D.. Sublimity, on the other hand, may be directly connected to beauty, or intertwined with love and erotic patterns. Of course, only at a first glance this may seem to be a distinct form of sublimity from that originated by beauty. As detailed analysis of the poems has revealed, certain types of love and eroticism are always associated or imply certain types of beauty (i.e. androgyny—male or female—and homoeroticism). The truth is that it is impossible to explain many of the poems without a joined consideration of beauty, sublimity, love, desire, sensuality and gender and the way these aspects relate to each other. This can be seen as a consequence of the collapse of the Romantic distinction between the beautiful, associated with love, and the sublime, associated with transcendence, as expressed by Burke and Kant and perpetuated by some Romantic poets. Aspects of both dimensions are bound to mix when barriers fall, small common objects may count as much as incomprehensible rare magnitudes and pleasure can bring as much sublimity as awe and fear. When these aspects become personal, rather than universal, it is up to the writer to decide how they will mix and relate to

each other. It is precisely because of the always personal and intimate way in which H.D. deals with beauty and sublimity that she can rewrite past correspondences and introduce revisions inside a genre that has for a long time been thought to be an immobile literary institution.

The specific instances that have emerged out of the study of H.D.'s revision of the Romantic sublime and its mechanisms, and which we have identified with a female sublime, present a new way of looking at the genre of sublimity. What they have revealed is that the sublime is not just an aesthetic mode with determining characteristics but a mode that reflects a way of thinking about the 'self' and the 'other'. In this respect, the Romantic self faces an unresolved conflict. On the one hand, he needs to advance himself as an autonomous being, on the other, he is in constant need of the 'other'. As a result, the Romantic self and masculine hero moves in two different spheres: one of individualism and pursuit of his own possibilities; another of creativity, love and sociability. Those two realms are necessarily complementary and permanently in conflict. The first finds its expression in sublimity and loneliness, the second in beauty and love. In sublimity, he achieves transcendence; with beauty, he achieves creativity. On one level he celebrates the self and his independence of mind. On another, he needs union with the muse to achieve poetic power. Such distinctions inevitably affect the relation of the lyric 'I' to the 'other'. The 'other' appears as an entity that the poet is in need of, yet that element of need may often be concealed by the presentation of the other in an object position. As a result, it appears quite clear that the Romantic self will never achieve a genuine discovery of the other because the premises of Romantic selfhood already dictate the unredeemable position of the other. Such ambiguity, can only be resolved with a different mode of thinking, one that does away with antagonic dualities (the feminine object and the masculine principle, the muse and the self's wishes for transcendence). H.D.'s revisions of the Romantic sublime show her awareness of that problem. Firstly, she shows that power is a key to the experience of transcendence by writing from the position of the object: the muse, whose desires for transcendence are frustrated by an actual lack of power determined by external forces and the power of the hero. More importantly, H.D.'s main revision comes from the presentation of sublimity without ambiguity: in reciprocity, allowing objects to become subjects, and presenting the

objects of love not as narcissistic projections but objective 'others'. Allowing the 'other' to exist is the only real solution to Romantic ambiguity. As a result, the two grounds of sublimity and beauty merge and the elements traditionally associated to each mix. The frame that allows the equality of subjects as both perceiver and perceived is one that transcends duality and finds a reconciliatory third. Thus, the dichotomy between mind and body is solved through the "over-mind", which relies on both; the gender distinction masculine-feminine resolves in the figure of the androgynous male/female; the decorum that separated the high (divinity, nature) from the low (human and common) breaks down by the presentation of the physical as spiritual and the reconciliation, in creativity, between the emotional and erotic, and the mental. It should be remembered, nevertheless, that such operations are complex and manifold and they are not free from incidental gaps, difficult manoeuvrings or apparent contradictions. Those instances also need to be explored to complete the picture of H.D.'s poetics.

The sublime, seen under the perspective of the dynamics between 'I' and 'other', is a perfectly contemporary genre which can only be seen as outmoded if thought of in terms of fixed formulae. It is certainly contemporary for female writers like H.D., for whom the analysis of sublimity is a new poetic terrain that immediately raises questions about the position of the writer, her use of poetic sources and images and her identity as a poet. On the other hand, H.D.'s use of the sublime is clearly modern. Her revision of the rhetoric of sublimity and its traditional resolutions is executed from the perspective of a female writer living in a world where traditional aesthetic and social distinctions are collapsing, universals are proved relative, and individual rather than collective experience is valued. Precisely because of that, she sets out to save the last bastion of transcendence, concealed in a world of human size and human passions, in precarious beauty and eroticism.

On the whole, H.D.'s commitment to beauty and the sublime place her aesthetically in the borderland of a triad: between early Romanticism, Victorian Hellenism, and the classicism of Pound and T.S. Eliot. H.D.'s revision of Romanticism at the level of 'I' and 'other' allows her also a criticism of Modernist classicism ("Responsibilities"). From that perspective, classicism appears as the natural son of the Romantic self, rising up against his father, yet retaining a certain resemblance:

misogynist, masculine and self-centred. Hulme, Pound and Eliot portray classicism as antithetical to Romanticism, yet, from a historical perspective, and H.D.'s, they appear not as radically different but as derivative one from the other, carrying similar anxieties in relation to creativity and the female muse and writer. The Romantic sublime is an example of the classical refusal to be incorporated: it is resistant rather than receptive. Classicism, as H.D. shows, contains much more than the seeds of an artistic programme. It is to be linked to the last Romantic war, the Great War, welcomed by classicists and detonated by the assertions of the Romantic self (nationalism and imperialism). After the War, as classicism hardens up and cultivates "the ideology of return to 'authentic' cultural ground" (*Classic Lines* 12), or an imagined order, we begin to appreciate better the reactionary aspects of classicism: an exacerbated Romantic ego that, disappointed with democracy, now seeks absolute order and power. Thus, T.S. Eliot develops cultural and social elitism and Pound commits himself to fascism. By contrast, H.D. creates a discourse that runs parallel to early Romanticism and Modernist classicism all the way through the years of World War I to World War II. From her early poetry and fiction to her later work, she keeps a singleness of mind.

H.D. also occupies a borderland between Victorian Hellenism and Modernist classicism. As we have already seen, H.D.'s affinity to Victorian Hellenism and its sensibility has to be found in her own personal and also artistic revision of gender, beauty and sexuality. This affinity was noticed by Pound and Eliot who saw her Hellenism as the wrong type. While Hulme, Pound and Eliot project on the Classic everything that is anti-Romantic, H.D. projects everything that is Romantic, in the wider sense. Hence that their view of the classical world seems to evoke two different worlds. For the Modernist classicists the classical stands for masculinity, the Apollonian, the controlling force of the intellect and form. It is a vision closer to the Roman than the Greek world. For H.D., the Classic stands for opposite characteristics. It is the light of the intellect too, but combined with erotic sublimity, homoeroticism and pagan spirituality. Nevertheless, we should not consider H.D.'s work as a mimetic exercise. There is no question that H.D. knew her Victorian sources and shaped many of her images in a manner reminiscent of them. In borrowing elements from her literary precursors, she creates for her own writing a sense of literary continuity, so that her



own artistic practice not only comments on contemporary incidents, thought and aesthetics, but also on literary consciousness as it is inherited by readers and writers. Nevertheless, it is ultimately her condition as a female writer and artist that dictates the crucible of transformations and revisions that take place in her imaginative world. She has created a style of her own.

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