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A Sublime Blending: H.D.'s Trilogy as Memoir, Quest, and Alchemical Allegory

BY

Deanna L. Polson

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Department of Critical Studies for acceptance the honours thesis entitled “A Sublime Blending: H.D.’s Trilogy as Memoir, Quest, and Alchemical Allegory” submitted by Deanna L. Polson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English (Honours).

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Supervisor

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Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## Introduction

Hilda Doolittle is one of the central figures of the Imagist movement of modern poetry. She became H.D. in 1912 when Ezra Pound scrawled “H.D. Imagiste” at the bottom of the page of her first “Imagist” poems and sent them off for publication, along with a letter praising her poetry. Prior to this, Pound, Richard Aldington and H.D. had been meeting regularly to discuss poetry. H.D.’s earliest poems, both she and Pound believed, were a recovery of the ancient mode of Greek poetry, but H.D. insisted that her poems did not belong to any recognizable time or place. Although the imagist movement lasted only a few years, and H.D. also produced several prose writings, the imagist poems are her most well known works. During and after WWII, H.D. produced several long poems: Trilogy (1944-1946), Helen in Egypt (1961), and Hermetic Definitions published posthumously in 1972. Trilogy, her long poem composed from 1942 to 1944, has been ranked alongside Pound’s Cantos, Eliot’s The Waste Land, and William Carlos Williams’s Paterson. H.D.’s quest for universal spirituality, religious syncretism of pagan gods with Christian and Egyptian deities, interest in the occult, and testing of patriarchal ideology coalesce within Trilogy.

H.D.’s Trilogy poems engage with world history, but they are also poems about H.D.’s personal history, both as a poet struggling to free her creative spirit and as a woman struggling with personal loss and the traumas of the past. In 1933, the growing threat of Nazism in Europe, like World War I, promised chaos for England, her adopted country, and the terror of loss for H.D. At forty-six she had written translations, essays, prose, had been recognized for her role in the imagist movement, and had won several prizes for her poetry. Yet her creative energies had been brought to a halt by memories

of her personal losses that included the loss of an anticipated first child, the death of her brother who was fighting in France, the stroke and subsequent death of her father from the shock of her brother's death, and the end of her marriage to Richard Aldington—all of which occurred during or after World War I—and by fears about the impending war in Europe. H.D. was in desperate need of an emotional and creative regeneration when she began psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud.<sup>1</sup> Her sessions with Freud became as important a part of her personal history as her childhood memories and family history that they discussed as part of her analysis. Her psychoanalysis was successful, and by the early 1940's H.D.'s creativity had returned and she produced some of her best-known works. H.D. came to revere Freud and her Tribute to Freud was published in 1956.<sup>2</sup>

“The Walls Do Not Fall” is the first of the three book-length poems—published separately but eventually brought together as Trilogy—and was written in London amid the terror of the Luftwaffe bombings of World War II. The second volume, “Tribute to the Angels”, was written as a continuation of “The Walls Do Not Fall” and was as H.D. said, “a premature peace poem” and a more personal revelation. “The Flowering of the Rod” is the final book of Trilogy, and was written in the last weeks of 1944 when peace was imminent, and the promise of rebuilding and spiritual resurrection seemed possible.

Many of the images and themes found in the unexplored corners of Trilogy are spiritual in nature. H.D. critics have analysed Trilogy from many perspectives, but the

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<sup>1</sup> H.D. was psychoanalyzed by Sigmund Freud for three months in 1933 and then again for five weeks the following year. During these periods, her almost daily correspondence with Winnifred Ellerman (Bryher) is largely chronicled in Analyzing Freud: letters of H.D., Bryher, and their circle, edited by Susan Stanford Friedman. Friedman notes that at the time, “Psychoanalysis wavered between being an expanding revolutionary science and an ingrown fundamentalist sect” (xiv). The letters between these intimates reveal the depth of their commitment to this revolution in scientific thought and the surprising number of their “circle” who were either “taking the leap” into personal psychoanalysis or analyzing others.

<sup>2</sup> In his “Dreams and Occultism”, Freud wrote “It may be that I too have a secret inclination towards the miraculous which thus goes half way to meet the creation of occult facts” (See Friedman’s Analyzing Freud, p. 119).

sublime blending of religion and the occult has largely been overlooked. This source study of the poems addresses that oversight. The occult art of esoteric alchemy provided H.D. with a storehouse of existing symbols and a model of dissident belief that merges mystery with science, though usually obscured in allegory. There are several explicit references to alchemy within Trilogy that receive, on occasion, a brief comment by critics, but H.D.'s incorporation of esoteric alchemy within these poems goes much deeper than her explicit references. In addition to the alchemical spiritual speculation, within Trilogy there is a religious stratum (to use Sir Arthur Evans' term) that includes the dissident religions of H.D.'s Moravian and Puritan heritage, blended with Freudian psychoanalysis and a matriarchal monotheism with its roots in antiquity<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, this project focuses on H.D.'s sublime blending of Moravianism, Puritanism, Freudian psychoanalysis and alchemy and how they fit into her use of mythologies and religious syncretism. Study of H.D.'s long poem Trilogy reveals a palimpsest of autobiography, hidden inner language, and heretical revision of patriarchal monotheism using the subversive tradition of alchemical allegory to illustrate the poet's quest for spiritual transmutation and regeneration of the psyche.

Chapter One of this study examines the ways in which personal conversion narratives from the historical religious traditions of H.D.'s family influenced her fashioning of a modernist spiritual narrative through which she explores her own syncretic spiritual fascinations and charts her journey of emotional crisis, visionary experience, and optimism about regeneration. The scenes of ruin she witnessed at the

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<sup>3</sup> H.D. was fascinated with antiquity. Bryher, who was H.D.'s companion of many years and with whom she shared most of the details of her psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud, replied to a March 1933 letter from H.D.; "Personally I am a bit inclined to agree with Papa [Freud] you ARE more interested in antiquity than anything else..." (See Analyzing Freud: Letters of H.D., Bryher, and Their Circle, p. 39)

tombs in Karnak and wartime London inform H.D.'s layered images of destruction and survival within the "The Walls Do Not Fall" poems, and their blending of antiquity with world and personal history. Chapter two discusses H.D.'s interest in heretical causes and religions, the philosophical alchemical tracts of Hermes Trismegistus, and the early twentieth-century popularity of occultism with H.D.'s fellow poets Pound and, especially, Yeats. Also examined in this chapter are Trilogy's palimpsestic qualities and H.D.'s attraction to alchemical allegory as the ideal vehicle with which to present a new religion that challenged the bounds of traditional knowledge while chronicling her psychoanalytic journey. Chapter Three looks at "Tribute to the Angels" and the ways H.D.'s heretical allegory reverses the Christian Church's practice of modifying pre-Christian ritual practices. Also considered are H.D.'s alchemical allegory of her poetic quest for regeneration that also represents her psychoanalysis with Freud, the invoking of Hermes Trismegistus—the patron of poets—and the way in which H.D. addresses the problem of male appropriation of the female voice in patriarchal religions.

## **Chapter One: A Modernist Conversion Narrative**

### **"Baptized Moravian"**

In Trilogy, H.D. explores her own syncretic spiritual fascination with myth, psychoanalysis and the occult by developing a generic frame from her family's historical religious traditions. The personal conversion narratives favored by both her father's Puritan ancestors and her mother's Moravian community prompted H.D. to write a modernist spiritual narrative. She develops the long poem to chart a journey from emotional crisis, through visionary experience, to optimism for the reconstruction of the war-torn western world. Different Protestant traditions within her immediate family each contributed to H.D.'s religious understanding. H.D.'s father was descended from New England Puritan settlers, but her mother's family were direct descendents of the Bohemian brotherhood who in 1741 founded the Moravian settlement of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. When the new community of Bethlehem was founded in America, it thought of itself as representing the apex of Moravian Church development. Beverly Prior Smaby says that an official account of this Moravian community's activities and membership was recorded in a book called the Bethlehem Diary (24). In H.D.: The Life and Work of an American Poet, Janice S. Robinson notes that H.D. spent many years researching Moravian history and doctrine and wrote a great deal about them. Robinson sums up H.D.'s Moravian heritage:

The Moravians, [...] were survivors. Mamalie and Papalie [H.D.'s maternal grandparents] filled Hilda's young mind with Moravian history and lore about the 'hidden church,' which some called the Invisible Church. The church was 'hidden' because its members had been persecuted for centuries. 'We were driven underground by the Inquisition,' writes H.D. 'Protestant intolerance, no less than Papal intolerance,' had compelled 'a sublime blending of the faiths'. (5)

At the age of nine, H.D. realized that there were religions besides the ones with which she was familiar. When the family moved, and life became centered on the University of Pennsylvania rather than the Moravian church, Mrs. Doolittle had to

explain Moravianism to the university ladies (Robinson 7-8).<sup>4</sup> Also, her father did not attend the Moravian church, and she was troubled that her father's childhood memories of Sundays were not happy (Robinson 7-8). H.D.'s early education about Moravian and Puritan religious traditions and information describing the importance of those traditions throughout H.D.'s life contributes to an understanding of some important themes in Trilogy: persecution, dissident religions, and hidden knowledge.

Despite the religious persecution experienced by the Moravian Brethren historically, Smaby says there remain many written works spanning all but the first few decades of the Moravian Church. These documents “constituted a record and a testimony that helped the church survive the century of underground activity known as the ‘Hidden Seed’ (1620-1722)” (5). A part of that persecution meant Moravian ministers were exiled and their books burned. The few who managed to preserve the old faith were the people of the Hidden Seed. They practiced Catholicism publicly but secretly gathered to study their forbidden bible, sing their old hymns, and read from carefully hidden unauthorized books (5-6). In Trilogy, H.D. recalls this type of persecution when she says the burning of books is still “the most perverse gesture” and “though our books are a floor / of smouldering ash under our feet” the destruction doesn't stop there (WDNF 9)<sup>5</sup>. In wartime, “folio, manuscript, old parchment / will do for cartridge cases” (WDNF 9). The image of past persecution—the burnt unauthorized books—shifts to a contemporary situation where a portion of humanity, still ignorant of the value of the written word, clamors for yet more destruction. H.D. likely had in mind the London Blitz of 1940

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<sup>4</sup> Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf became the leader and spokesman for the Moravian brotherhood (remnants of the Unitas Fratrum, and originally part of the Hussite movement in fifteenth-century Bohemia and Moravia) after he welcomed them onto his estate in Saxony (Smaby 3, 6).

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that because of the absence of line numbers, subsequent references to poems in Trilogy are parenthetically indicated by capitalized initials of the volume followed by the number of the poem.

when the incendiary bombs rained down. The British Museum, the site of H.D.'s early studies in Greek poetry with Pound and Aldington, was destroyed during the air raids (Robinson 306). Robinson writes: "During the air raids H.D. had many visions and dreams which informed her writing of "The Walls Do Not Fall" [...] including one she had during the big air raid on [...] May 9 and 10, 1941, which destroyed the library of the British Museum" (307). In Trilogy H.D. writes about the revelations that follow destruction (WDFN 12).

The shattered buildings H.D. saw in wartime London converged in her associative imagination with the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen and her own personal experience of psychoanalysis in the previous years. Each of these events combined an invasive opening, but provided opportunities for the renewal of civilization, the acquisition of long hidden knowledge, and the healing of a troubled psyche. The epigraph to "The Walls Do Not Fall" signals this conjunction: "*for Karnak 1923 / from London 1942.*"<sup>6</sup> Here, H.D. has merged her inherited history with current events. When she states in the first Trilogy poem "there, as here, ruin opens / the tomb, the temple; enter, / there as here, there are no doors" (WDFN 1), H.D. is telling readers that "there are no doors" between antiquity and the time in which she is writing these poems. It is an indication that the poems are a palimpsest in which antiquity, world history, and personal history continually shift. Time is circular rather than linear in Trilogy, where "the shrine lies open to the sky, / the rain falls, here, there / sand drifts; eternity endures" (WDFN 1).

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<sup>6</sup> H.D. wrote to Pearson, "The parallel between ancient Egypt and 'ancient' London is obvious—in I, one, the 'fallen roof leaves the sealed room open to the air' is of course true of our own house of life—outer violence touching the deepest hidden subconscious terrors etc. and we see so much of our past 'on show,' as it were 'another sliced wall where poor utensils show like rare objects in a museum.'" Egypt? London? Mystery, magic—that I have found in London!" (Hollenberg 32).

Survival and shifts in religious traditions are themes that provide continuity throughout Trilogy.

She found a horrific contemporary analogue for the historical persecution of the Moravians in Freud's experience of anti-semitic violence in Germany. Robinson's biography says that at the end of May in 1933, the Nazis burned Freud's books in Berlin (283). In light of the deteriorating political situation, H.D. unwillingly left Vienna on June 15, 1933. The events in Europe before WW II, and H.D.'s wartime experiences had made her even more aware of, and opposed to, religious persecution. She writes, "so, in our secretive, sly way, / we are proud and chary / of companionship with you others" (WDNF 12). The "we" in this poem represents the victims of war—a community persisting in the face of disdain of you others—while the "you others" seem to represent the perpetrators of war who actively desire their extinction, due to a doctrine of pacifism that conflicts with that of the "others" who are swept up in support of the war effort, or possibly because some particular knowledge has been bestowed upon these victims of war. The next poem in the volume talks about survival, but acknowledges the lasting effects of the traumas: "peril strangely encountered, strangely endured, / marks us" (WDNF 13). Other lines appear to invoke the people of the Hidden Seed, and the survival strategy of subterfuge: "we know each other / by secret symbols, / though, remote, speechless" (WDNF 13). Nevertheless, there is acknowledgement of a shared history or doctrine: "even if we snarl a brief greeting / or do not speak at all, / we know our Name," (WDNF 13). As "The Walls Do Not Fall" concludes, survival is again emphasized: "*Still the walls do not fall, / I do not know why*" (WDNF 43). London, and

H.D., have survived the bombing and refuge is sought: “*possibly we will reach haven, / heaven*” (WDNF 43).

Norman Holmes Pearson confirms how important her religious heritage, with its history of religious dissidence, was to H.D. She returned to Bethlehem with Pearson in September 1956—shortly after the publication of Tribute to Freud. Robinson says Pearson recalled their visit to the old church: “‘She was fascinated by Zinzendorf and his re-establishment of a ‘branch of the dispersed or ‘lost’ Church of Provence, the Church of Love [...].’ It was not casual when, as we left the Church, she signed the Register and added ‘Baptized Moravian’” (6). H.D.’s September 28, 1956 letter to Pearson is an expression of the deep pleasure she found in the visit to Bethlehem, and her gratitude: “‘You seem to have given them to me, ‘Dad’ & all...’” (Hollenberg 188). In an October 6, 1956 letter, H.D. makes a reference to the Puritan religious heritage which she and Pearson shared, and encloses a newspaper clipping about the oldest congregational church in Britain, where the Pilgrim fathers prayed before departing for America<sup>7</sup> (195).

Part of the complexity of the Trilogy poems is their “sublime blending” that Robert Duncan acknowledges in The H.D. Book where he likens Trilogy to a landscape with multiple images of historical, personal, divine, and poetic imagination blended with one another. As early as the 1920’s, H.D. viewed this multiplicity “as a palimpsest” (45). Duncan also believes:

H.D.’s apocalyptic vision in the War Trilogy [...] provides an historical perspective in which the experience of London under attack in the Second World War becomes meaningful in relation to depths and heights of personal reality, depths she had come to know in her psychoanalysis with Freud and then in new terms with the study of occult and hermetic lore. (59)

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<sup>7</sup> Hollenberg says Pearson used the code name “Puritan” in his Office of Strategic Services war activities in X-2, the counter intelligence branch in London, during WW II (19).

Religious persecution, necessitating subterfuge for survival, was a part of both H.D.'s Puritan and Moravian heritages. Her wartime experiences, especially in Vienna and London, further magnified the consequences of religious persecution for H.D.<sup>8</sup>.

### **Autobiography**

Trilogy is a spiritual autobiography which parallels the regeneration of H.D.'s severely stressed and fragile psyche, to that of western culture, both of them having suffered, and survived, the trauma of war. Her coded discourse in this long poem, though not necessarily autobiographical in form, layers images of survival from H.D.'s personal history and the history of humankind, which H.D. discovered in the traditions of her Moravian and Puritan religious background. In the modernist long poem, the life of the poet is often used, in the absence of a unified and linear narrative, as a structuring principle. The lifelong poem, such as Whitman's Leaves of Grass, Pound's Cantos, and William's Paterson, develops as a parallel organism reflecting the unfolding of the author's life.

James Goodwin begins his overview of the autobiography in Autobiography: The Self Made Text, by saying that autobiographies are usually prose narratives, although occasionally long poems also belong to the genre (1-2). By definition "autobiography brings into direct association self, life, and writing, with each component in dynamic, reflexive relationship to the other two" (3). While authors of memoir document the social history in which they have played some part, Goodwin says that in memoir personal

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<sup>8</sup>Hollenberg says H.D.'s refusal to return to the safety of America when she reluctantly fled Vienna in 1933, because of her loyalty to her adopted country and the people who had first read her poetry, was an example of what Bryher called 'the Puritan element' of conscience and principle that H.D. also shared with Pearson (17).

recollection of a significant event “is distinguished as a narrative mode in which the individual uses the incidents of an active public life as a guide to understanding the cultural or political tenor of the times” (6-7).

Suzanne Nalbantian’s comprehensive study Aesthetic Autobiography chronicles some notable shift in the autobiography genre. Nalbantian says formal autobiography developed from religious into secular and poetic narratives (1). In the early twentieth century, Edmund Gosse, the author of a notable scientific autobiography, chronicled psychic moments objectively, factually, and without sentiment or self-pity, and presented them as “a sociological document, ‘as the diagnosis of a dying Puritanism’” (14-15). In this form of autobiography, traumatic experiences generate psychic facts, and ideas about identity formation reflect the developing psychological theories of the times, most notably those of Freud (15-16). These autobiographies, with their psychic concentration on significant moments, replaced linear and chronological narratives (17).

Writing specifically about aesthetic autobiography, Nalbantian says autobiographical fiction “has been regarded as a blurry hybrid genre not easily depicted or delimited”, and she forms her theory of aesthetic autobiography using the models of Proust, Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Anais Nin (43). These innovators of early twentieth-century modernism focused on their interiority rather than an outer world focus, as had been the case previously (43-44). Also, the chronological progression of narrative in conventional book-length autobiographies gives way to works where chronological time is transformed (59). Nalbantian concludes:

Ever close to the life material, they construed literary methods to distance themselves from it. This genre of fictional autobiography was creating techniques of artistry used for the simultaneous revealing and concealing of the self. And

within this mode there lies the heart of the creative process whereby the truths of fact were becoming truths of fiction. (61)

H.D. signals her fracturing of chronological time and her inner turmoil in both the preface to “The Walls Do Not Fall” and within that volume’s first poem.

### **Moravian Memoirs in the Autobiographical Genre**

Among the autobiographical details H.D. reveals in Trilogy is her fascination with religions. As Pearson recalled, H.D. was particularly fascinated with Zinzendorf, who was a part of her Moravian heritage. Zinzendorf supported the Moravians in their efforts to maintain the Christ-centred theology of the Unitus Fratrum when he realized that the traditions of the Unitus Fratrum had been remarkably well preserved among these immigrants. The renewed church continued to develop its theology until Christ’s sacrifice on the cross became the church’s entire focus. Moravians believed Christ offered them a path out of their state of natural degradation, for which they owed their unending gratitude (7-8). The Moravians called Christ “the Savior” and “the dear little lamb”, and were committed to developing individual relationships with him. The conversion process was “long, agonizing and intense”, but the reward of salvation, joy and peace of mind only possible through a personal relationship with and dependency on Christ took precedence over all others (8-9). Smaby says that in the theology of the Moravian Church, Zinzendorf created a concrete religious vocabulary that built on the Savior’s self-sacrifice. Zinzendorf achieved new mystical heights when he emphasized the “healing and redemptive powers of the ‘juices’” which flowed from the spear wound in the Savior’s side: “Believers were portrayed as little bees or little worms who sucked

the juices from the Sidewound” (28). Death, which had formerly been described as the journey home, was now the journey into the sweet Sidewound (29).

Moravians charted their own process of conversion through written memoirs such as those studied by Katherine M. Faull in Moravian Women’s Memoirs. Faull believes these Moravian memoirs from the eighteenth century, kept in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, have value for studies of “social history, history of religion, women’s studies and literature” (xii). Based on her experience transcribing and translating Moravian memoirs, Faull claims that they “provide not only some of the earliest examples of women’s autobiography in North America but their authors are also from a far more diverse social and ethnic background than the contemporary Colonial Quaker or Puritan journals” (xii). She decided to translate and publish only women’s memoirs to provide a rare insight into the internalized world of the women of an eighteenth-century intentional community. Invariably, it was the founding fathers and leaders of these types of communities who published memoirs. All Moravians shared their personal memoirs with others of the faith as a part of their regular devotions. Faull says the form of Moravian memoirs became highly stylized, but the early documents reveal “what the writer thought about herself, what she chose to include in her account of her life, which events she considered to be significant, and which she chose to omit” (xii-xiii).

The Faull and Smaby books both explain how these periodically revised autobiographies were, in part, evaluations of the author’s life. Smaby’s research indicates these documents were read in both church and community settings, and by individuals as a part of daily meditations (21). As didactic memoirs these “edifying” biographies subtly

conveyed Moravian family, community, and religious values, especially for the early settlers focused on religious practice and missionary work, and more isolated from the “world” than later generations who lived in a more secularized community (126, 198-199).

Faull believes that in the eighteenth-century Moravian memoirs, women write about themselves in a way that “expands the concepts of both female subjectivity and spiritual autobiography” (xiii). Zinzendorf’s theology allowed women to be spiritual leaders within the church (xiii). The Moravian memoir genre has received little scholarly attention as an example of spiritual autobiography, even though these personal and frank autobiographies are responses to both faith and life events (xxxii-xxxiii). Faull notes that, compared to the Quaker journals and Puritan narratives, from which it is difficult to glean personal emotions and experiences, the Moravian memoirs interweave secular experience, personal detail and spiritual narrative (xxxii). She writes,

This self-scrutiny reflects a radical shift of perspective in the spiritual autobiography in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century in Europe where the object of interpretation in the early modern period changes from the traditional one, the Scriptures, to become the scrutiny and interpretation of the self. Samuel Preus writes: “that all-embracing biblical framework is becoming too narrow to account for what people are coming to know about space (geographical and cosmic) and time (chronology). The known world is bursting its scriptural containment. The overarching biblical narrative is being eclipsed in favor of new competing narratives.” (xxxvii)

Faull cites Ian Watt who believes self-scrutiny transforms the religious narrative into a secular one where the individual moves outside the text of his or her life. In the move away from the Protestant religious tradition of using the Bible as a text from which to divine God’s word, there is a move toward a spiritual narrative where God’s will is divined from the events within the individual life. Moravian memoirs exhibit both a

personal contemplation of a relationship with God and detailed descriptions of worldly experiences. In keeping with a movement towards self-scrutiny, the narrative voice in the Moravian memoirs shifts from a third- to a first-person narration (xxxviii). This incorporation of secular experience with spiritual introspection provides unique narratives in eighteenth-century women's autobiographies. These records of the spiritual past most often "challenged the bounds of knowledge inherited from an individual's parents" and the authors began to develop new versions of Zinzendorf's "vocabulary of faith" (xiii). The Moravian memoir genre, Faull says, is familiar to scholars of German Pietism, but has been "virtually untouched by the scholar of North American spiritual autobiography" (xxi). The pattern of Moravian memoirs begins with a description of childhood innocence and chronicles an individual's journey through community and spiritual life up until the time of death. The original memoirs, either dictated or written by individuals, are recorded in the Bethlehem Diary (xxxvii). Often, they include dreams and visions as indications of either a troubled soul or immanent grace (xxxvi).

In contrast with the Moravian memoirs, Puritan spiritual autobiographies followed strict conventions that conformed to an already established pattern. Puritans read the treatises on spiritual journeys offered by the male clergy in order to gauge the state of their own souls as they strove for salvation. In *Autobiography*, Linda Anderson notes Peter Carlton's observation that Puritans, in general, were taught a pattern which they then sought: "the pattern they sought, they experienced" (32). This secularized private self later served the needs of a newly emergent middle class. Anderson says the seventeenth-century conversion narratives of women were, like those of men, thought of as attempts by the individual to assess her progress in the quest for salvation, or they were

published, often posthumously, “as models and as example or treatise” (33). Therefore, only “within a framework of already prescribed experiences and emotions” could a writer find validation or importance for herself (33). Autobiographical writings “constructed the subject through strict narrative and linguistic conventions in order to create a conforming, if transcendent, version of selfhood, for women they could also offer an alternative space, a place from which to contest their socially sanctioned position of silence and submission” (33).

In The Work of Self-Representation: Lyric Poetry in Colonial New England, Ivy Schweitzer notes that Puritan clergy used the metaphor of the soul’s betrothal in marriage to Christ in all of their spiritual relations (5-6). Schweitzer says that between 1633 and 1635 New England Puritan clergy required all candidates for church membership to produce an account of their conversion experiences. Based on lengthy study of Paul’s epistles, detailed descriptions of the stages of conversion were produced with which to discern an individual’s eternal condition using a set of recognizable signs (21). Schweitzer says seventeenth-century Puritan child rearing practices encouraged breaking the will of children and demanding strict obedience to parental authority as preparation for the conversion experience when self-will and self-reliance must be resigned. Isaac Pennington described his spiritual experience thus: ““The Lord has broken the man’s part in me, and I am a worm and no man before him”” (25-26).

### **Survival and Regeneration: Worm Cycle and Silkworm Metaphor**

A central theme of “The Walls Do Not Fall” is survival of both Western civilization and H.D. personally. Hope that the poet will be delivered from her crisis of

creative inactivity is stated in the first poem: “so through our desolation, / thoughts stir, inspiration stalks us / through gloom” (WDNF 1). Seeking deliverance, H.D. embarked on a journey of psychoanalysis with Freud. In the concluding poem of “The Walls Do Not Fall” H.D. identifies herself as a questing pilgrim: “*we are voyagers, discoverers / of the no-known, / the unrecorded*” (WDNF 43). As she begins her journey into the unmapped regions of her unconscious, H.D. realizes “*we have no map;*” but hopes that with Freud’s help “*possibly we will reach haven, / heaven*” (WDNF 43).

In one of the first poems of “The Walls Do Not Fall”, H.D. borrows the Moravian practice of using a worm metaphor to chronicle a significant event in her life journey: “In me (the worm) clearly / is no righteousness, but this— / persistence; I escaped spider snare” (WDNF 6). She then describes narrow escapes from life threatening events: “bird-claw, scavenger bird beak, / I escaped, I explored / rose thorn-forest” (WDNF 6). H.D. then expands this key image into the worm-cycle, one of three symbolically important extended metaphors of the poet’s spiritual journey: “walk carefully, speak politely / to those who have done their worm-cycle,” (WDNF 8). H.D.’s choice of the extended silkworm metaphor to compare poetic resurrection to the life cycle of a silkworm, besides the previously noted centrality of the worm as part of the Moravian and Puritan religious vocabularies, draws upon her knowledge of the Moravian history of domestic silkworm sericulture in Bethlehem<sup>9</sup> when she chooses the silkworm as the vehicle of her worm cycle:

for I know how the Lord God  
is about to manifest, when I,

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<sup>9</sup> Once the centuries-old secret of the source of silk fiber and its production were known to the Western world, there followed a mania to produce and export silk in which America, and Bethlehem Pennsylvania, figured prominently. The marker text for the Brethren’s House states that this building was an early industrial center for silkworm culture. ([ExplorePAHistory.com](http://ExplorePAHistory.com)).

the industrious worm,  
spin my own shroud. (WDNF 6)

Although all butterfly and moth pupae encase themselves in a chrysalis, several lines throughout *Trilogy* specifically point to a silkworm<sup>10</sup>: “I eat my way out of it; / gorged on vine-leaf and mulberry” (WDNF 6); “we are the keepers of the secret, / the carriers, the spinners / of the rare intangible thread” (WDNF 15); “little boxes, conditioned / to hatch butterflies....” (WDNF 39); “she is Psyche, the butterfly, / out of the cocoon” (TA 38); “a fact: I am an entity / like a bird, insect, plant” (FR 9). These last two lines are especially symbolically important. There is a unity between the silkworm, an insect capable of metamorphosis, and the phoenix, a mythical bird, symbolic of—especially in alchemical allegory—with regeneration, and also the myrrh plant which is often associated with resurrection. H.D., a baptized Moravian and proud of her religious heritage, would be conscious of the resonances of the silkworm image for that community as well as for her own symbolic purposes.

Janice Robinson simply explains H.D.’s “worm cycle” as a metaphor for menopause: “H.D. was going through the change of life, and her own particular cycle (her ‘worm cycle’ as she calls it in *The Walls Do Not Fall*) has a psychic parallel in the destruction of London” (307). Susan Gubar, however, devotes several pages of “The Echoing Spell of H.D.’s ‘Trilogy’” to a feminist interpretation of H.D.’s use of the worm

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<sup>10</sup> In the silkworm life cycle, called instar stages, caterpillars feed exclusively on mulberry leaves until they begin enclosing their bodies in a cocoon where they are protected from predation by birds and lizards. At this time “hollow cubes may be placed in trays to encourage the silkworms to form the cocoons in a concentrated area”, and although inside the cocoon the worm remains torpid, it soon changes its skin, and appears in the form of a chrysalis. When the process of *metamorphosis* begins, the moth, ready to emerge, breaks out of the cocoon in which it underwent its transformation (The Cleveland Museum of Natural History).

symbol. She, too, interprets the worm cycle as a female reproductive cycle<sup>11</sup>, and also notes H.D.'s emphasis on survival in relation to the worm. Gubar, however, goes on to include Denise Levertov in her feminist interpretation of H.D.'s worm metaphors: "Both H.D. and Levertov emphasize the ways in which the worm, like the woman, has been despised by a culture that cannot stop to appreciate an artistry based not on elucidation or appropriation but at homage and wonder at the hidden darkness, the mystery" (204).

It seems plausible that H.D. fixed on the worm as a particularly feminine extended metaphor. Equally plausible is the possibility that birds are an extended metaphor for the male in these poems. At times birds (men) prey on worms (women), but the mythical phoenix, which in its cyclical life cycle grows from a worm into a bird, is a symbol of regeneration<sup>12</sup>. In the context of the symbolic importance of the silkworm, phoenix, and myrrh noted above, in Trilogy, the phoenix metaphorically represents Freud and his role in H.D.'s poetic resurrection<sup>13</sup>. Nonetheless, given H.D.'s explicit references within Trilogy to the worm gorging on mulberry leaves, the sericulture apparatus of frames containing small boxes in which silkworms spin their cocoons, and Bethlehem's role as a participant in American silk industry, there is clearly a basis for an autobiographical

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<sup>11</sup> A few of Gubar's other feminist biological interpretations include "Both [H.D. and Levertov] emphasize the worm's ability to provide another womb for its own death and resurrection [...] the abrupt and total biological shifts that distinguish female growth from the more continuous development of men is surely one reason why the worm cycle has always fascinated women. In describing the fears of growing girls, Simone de Beauvoir says, 'I have known little girls whom the sight of a chrysalis plunged into a frightened reverie'" (204).

<sup>12</sup> The worm is also associated with the Phoenix in alchemical symbolism. In his article "Birds in Alchemy", Adam McLean says the Phoenix symbolizes the "freeing of the spirit from the bounds of the physical." With alchemy, in the cycle of soul development the image of the self is changed, transformed, and sacrificed to the developing spiritual self (The Alchemy Web Site: The Birds...). The Phoenix has its home in Paradise, and after 1000 years, it becomes oppressed with the burden of its age. Before it can die and be reborn, it flies down to the mortal world where it builds a nest of frankincense, myrrh, and other spices, and there it dies. Out of the ashes of the Phoenix's dead body a worm emerges which eventually develops into a new Phoenix, and its immortal existence continues (The Alchemy Web Site: The Birds...).

<sup>13</sup> H.D.'s painful personal relationships with several men and Freud's positive role in H.D.'s life have been thoroughly examined by H.D. scholars.

emphasis in the interpretation of this extended metaphor of the poet's spiritual journey of survival and resurrection.

H.D.'s extended metaphors create a new vocabulary of faith which includes psychoanalysis, "the most profound philosophy," or, a new religion, that can explain symbols from the past "in today's imagery" (WDNF 20). As her forebears did in the Moravian memoirs, H.D. uses her own "vocabulary of faith" when she writes, "that the Holy Ghost" from her "childhood's mysterious enigma" today "is the Dream" (WDNF 20). Here H.D. presents the interpretation of dreams, and Freud's theories of psychoanalysis as a new religion. H.D. says "that way of inspiration / is always open, / and open to everyone" (WDNF 20). H.D. says "it acts as a go-between, interpreter, / it explains symbols of the past" (WDNF 20). For H.D. "It merges the distant future / with most distant antiquity," (WDNF 20). Here, again, are cyclical time and a palimpsest of past and future. As H.D. points out in this poem, the inspiration of dreams is open to everyone, just as it was in the Moravian memoirs.

Dream visions are an important part of three poems in these first two volumes. The first dream vision of the male deity Ra or Osiris takes place "in a spacious, bare meeting-house; / in that eighteenth-century / simplicity and grace" (WDNF 16) before the dreamer awakes with a start. The poet's second dream vision is of a Lady who is present throughout the second volume of poems. H.D. wants it to be understood that "this was a dream, of course" (TA 26). This dream vision of the Lady continues throughout the second volume of poems as the dreamer, by process of elimination, tries to identify her.

The most significant thing about the Lady is that she carries "the book of life" (TA 36). Nevertheless, the book she carries is not "the tome of the ancient wisdom" (TA

38). The pages are the blank, and “of the unwritten volume of the new” (TA 38). Following the example of the Moravian memoirs, it seems clear that H.D.’s dream-vision of the Lady who holds a blank Book of Life is an invitation, or suggestion, that the dreamer autobiographically record her quest to resurrect the creative spirit of the poet. H.D. wrote in Tribute to Freud, “I purposely and painfully dwelt on certain events in the past about which I was none too happy, lest I appear to be dodging the analysis or trying to cheat the recorder of the Book of Life, to deceive the Recording Angel” (43-44). For H.D., the new religion of psychoanalysis required a new Book of Life, not the Bethlehem Diary, but the London Diary: Trilogy. H.D. says although this new book has the same attributes, it is “different yet the same as before” (TA 39). Trilogy includes a new vocabulary of faith, and like Moravian memoirs, it reveals incidents from the author’s life: “her book is our book; written / or unwritten, its pages will reveal” (TA 39). Trilogy chronicles H.D.’s personal history as a poet whose spiritual condition is very fragile. The new vocabulary of faith H.D. discovered through psychoanalysis proved invaluable to her creative spirit struggling in a world very different from the one in which she had been raised.

Duncan says in psychoanalysis H.D. again found a cult under attack, a cult that Freud felt was to replace conventional religion. It seemed to Freud that his contemporaries were unwilling to understand or recognize his discovery of the unconscious (60). He asked that H.D. not defend his philosophy because it would only drive the hatred, fear, or prejudice deeper and it might prove damaging for her (Tribute to Freud 130-131). This would seem a logical conclusion to reach after the Nazis burned his books. Like the ancestors who had disguised their religion in the face of prejudice

and persecution, H.D. found a wealth of symbols in the complex language of alchemical allegory with which to encode meaning that would be understood only by an initiated few. In the hermetic symbolism of alchemical allegories, H.D. discovered the means with which to recast the traditional narratives of persecution, hidden knowledge, and transformative conversion that suited her personal, spiritual, and aesthetic needs during the Second World War.

## Chapter Two: Modernism and the Occult Tradition

### Syncretic Spirituality

As Robert Duncan explains, in the “depths and heights of personal reality” H.D. discovered through her psychoanalysis with Freud and study of the occult, that “to be a poet appeared as a challenge to existing things, and poets seemed to form a heretical group, as among poets ‘Imagists’ in turn were viewed as heretical by conventional versifiers” (59). Duncan writes, “Beauty under attack, *Imagism* under attack, pacifism under attack, and, as the Wars like great Dreams began to make it clear, life itself under attack—H.D. had an affinity for heretical causes” (60)<sup>14</sup>. As noted in section one, Duncan explained that H.D. said Freud believed psychoanalysis was a substitute for religion, and this new cult was under attack. For H.D., psychoanalysis offered a new type of religious consolation, and she was one of a new community of believers. Understanding H.D.’s religious syncretism is key to understanding the occult references in Trilogy.

In Literary Modernism and the Occult Tradition, Leon Surette says critical scholarship “has neglected – even suppressed – the important contribution of occult speculation to the theories and practices of the High Modernists” (xiii). Since this

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<sup>14</sup> In an undated letter H.D. writes to Pearson about the “Walls Do Not Fall” poems. To summarize, H.D. says that in England, despite the bombings, poets still cling to their profession. In “a sort of exhilaration of rage at the stupidity of someone who had written to me from USA—[...] someone who did not know and could not, what we were doing, how we had moreover been waiting for this to happen for years and years before it happened—some [...] person, who remarked [...] that it did seem strange to think of anyone troubling to try to express world-issues now, it was really so ‘pathetic.’ It was the word ‘pathetic’ [...] that got me. [...] Writers? Pathetic? [...] the writer is the original rune-maker, the majic maker [sic], his words are sacred [...] the scribe ‘stands second only to the Pharoah’ or ‘stands second only to God’—the Pharoah actually being imbued with god-attributes. But it was an English girl who made me still madder [...] questioning the status of the poet, the writer in the future world-reconstruction. [...] I suppose this book is ‘philosophy.’ [...] ‘Protection for the scribe’ seems to be the leit-motif. And the feeling of assurance back of it in the presence of the God of the Scribe, —Thoth, Hermes, Ancient of Days, Ancient Wisdom, [...] And exactly the place of the scribe in the mysteries of all-time [...] his exact place in the sequence, in the pattern, against his ‘job,’ the keeping-track of the ‘treasures’ which contain *for every scribe who is instructed, things new and old*” (Hollenberg 31-33).

discussion of the occult has been marginalized, “most scholarly discussion of the occult and literature has been pushed to the periphery of the discipline.” (xiii-xiv). Surette gives credit for the scholarly study of the occult to G. R. S. Mead who for many years was an acquaintance of Yeats and also influenced Pound: “Mead’s work typifies the kind of occultism that contributed to the formation of literary modernism in English. It is bookish, nostalgic, and – above all – fixated on myths as a repository of divine wisdom” (xv). According to Demetres Tryphonopoulos, author of “The History of the Occult”, Mead’s writing “reports on the kinds of occult activities modernists such as Pound, Eliot, and Lawrence indubitably encountered in London during the first two decades of the century – activities they would not have failed to notice” (21-22). Surette sums up Tryphonopoulos’s definition of the occult as

the revival of Hellenistic religious speculation together with the discovery or fabrication of a ‘tradition’ by means of which ancient wisdom has been handed down from high antiquity. [...] The belief of most occultists of the day was that the ‘genuine’ or esoteric meaning of these texts was available only to enlightened souls. (xiv-x)

Originating in Hellenistic Egypt, the tracts attributed to Hermes Trismegistus are a synthesis of philosophical writings. In the Hermes writings, alchemy is one of the arts through which humanity can find personal salvation. The *Corpus Hermeticum* impressed Italian intellectuals when it arrived in the western world. It “provided excitement and impetus to the whole occult movement because it seemed to furnish a link with ancient sources of wisdom; and second, in true occult manner, it generated a vast number of analogies which could be used to validate already formulated occult structures” (Tryphonopoulos 36-38). During the Renaissance, the ‘heretic’, Giordano Bruno, claimed ‘the magical Egyptian religion of the world was not only the most ancient but

also the only true religion, which both Judaism and Christianity had obscured and corrupted” (Tryphonopoulos 36-38). The Rosicrucian Hermetic and Cabalistic manifestos, of general and universal reform, were a seventeenth-century attempt to reconcile science and religion through the activities of elite adepts and an “approach to religion and a proclivity for initiation and legitimation through alleged ancestry from ancient mystery cults” (39). In 1618, Michael Mair traced the Brotherhood’s spiritual ancestry to “Egyptian sages, Persian Magi and Indian Brahmins” (40). By the middle of the nineteenth century, the popular Theosophical movement was also concerned with “the acquisition of knowledge through understanding of the mysteries of the divinity itself or of the created universe” (40-43). Madame Blavatsky claimed that theosophy was a scientific movement that offered solutions to the “Nineteenth century debates on Science, Religion, and Philosophy” (47). Although Blavatsky herself was later shown to be a fraud, the movement was instrumental in the “‘rising psychic tide’ which modernist writers would have encountered in London between 1898 and 1920” (48).

As Tryphonopoulos mentions, Mead’s scholarly attention to occult traditions was taken seriously by two of H.D.’s contemporaries: Pound and Yeats. Popular interest in the occult increased as a reaction against the modern belief that science represented “the only legitimate access to reality” (21). The occult appealed partly because it bridged the gap between religion and science. Occultism claimed to “provide empirical evidence for concepts and beliefs (such as the immortality of the soul) which religion asks that we accept on grounds of faith” (21). In this atmosphere, in early 1912 Mead wrote, “there is what looks very much like the bringing in of new gods and new saviors and new creeds, the blending of cults and syncretism or religions; societies and associations open and

secret, for propagating or imparting new doctrines” (Mead qtd. in Tryphonopoulos 22). As is plainly evident in Trilogy, religious cults from antiquity, dissident religions, and the new doctrine of psychoanalysis are all part of a central theme of spirituality throughout the poems. Mead states in his book Thrice-Greatest Hermes: Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis, first published in 1906, that one of his main avenues of study is the “theory of plagiarism and forgery” begun by a seventeenth-century Evangelical pastor. This theory, which Mead intends to disprove, is an argument that the writings of Hermes Trismegistus “were wholesale plagiarisms from Christianity” (14-15). By the end of the third volume of this book, Mead has argued that the evidence found in the remains of the Trismegistic literature indicate that the truth of the matter is the reverse of this theory of plagiarism. Given H.D.’s invocation in the first two lines of “Tribute to the Angels”—“Hermes Trismegistus / is patron of alchemists; / his province is thought”—and the numerous alchemical references throughout Trilogy, H.D. would appear to belong to the group of modernist poets who did not fail to notice Mead’s writings.

After the First World War, H.D. sought to develop a religious aesthetic that would remake the broken world. In her article “H.D. and the Poetics of Initiation” Lenora Woodman says that after WW II and the sessions with Freud, H.D. had a conviction that “those empowered by the higher mind could somehow alter the state of human affairs”, an idea that, Woodman believes, “seems to have matured in *The Walls Do Not Fall*” (141). Woodman says H.D. believed “that all religions, however different their surface features, issue from a single unfathomable ground of being which had been widely acknowledged in antiquity but had subsequently been overlaid by derivative and secondary religious forms” (143). In articulating a belief in the underlying unity of all

religious traditions, H.D. is in accord with Mead's position and aligns herself with the other mystical modernists.

### **Religion and Alchemy**

H.D.'s poetry itself manifests a textured quality which derives from the overlaying of different traditions. She favours the metaphor of the palimpsest to convey the layered quality. As Janice Robinson says, the poetry suggests the occult quality of antiquities:

Each of H.D.'s Imagist poems is a palimpsest, and learning to read its image is like learning to read Egyptian hieroglyphs which have lost their meaning to all but the initiated [...] only the poets, know the hidden meaning [...] But it was the hidden inner language of the poem [...] that permitted this new form to serve as a precise poetic language for H.D. (70-71)

Alchemy too has a history of hidden meaning that was accessible only to the initiated, and, like classical myth, astrology, Egyptian cosmology, Moravianism, personal experiences, and antiquities, it provided H.D. with images for her poetic language within Trilogy. Despite some passing references to the occult in scholarly work on H.D., most commentators pass over her interest in the occult, and most gloss over her references to alchemy. This oversight by scholars may be motivated by a concern that her work will become tainted with the charlatanism and nonsense of alchemy, and thus not be given the serious attention it merits.

Laurinda S. Dixon and Petra ten-Doesschate Chu say with the invention of printing in the fifteenth century, copiously illustrated allegorical and practical alchemical tenets were published in books now available to both the intellectual elite and the educated middle class (613). Early alchemists believed their art was a path toward spiritual salvation, and transmutation was seen as a natural phenomenon in the

seventeenth century: “Did not caterpillars become butterflies, ice change into water, acorns grow into mighty oaks, and food become flesh? The Bible provided more elevated examples, and early alchemy relied heavily on Christian imagery for its allegorical models” (613-614). Jehane Ragai, in “The Philosopher’s Stone: Alchemy and Chemistry”, explains that with Eastern ideas about the double nature of alchemy, the esoteric application of the Philosopher’s Stone strengthened the moral nature of man, while the exoteric concern sought the transmutation of base metals (61).

A twentieth-century example of alchemical studies can be found in C. G. Jung’s *Mysterium Coniunctionis: An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*, a detailed interpretation of alchemical classics. Jung’s stated motivation for publishing an earlier book, *Psychology and Alchemy*, was that modern psychology provided clues to the secrets of alchemy, and alchemical symbolism was relevant to the new psychological studies into the unconscious (xiii). Jung goes on to say that alchemists generally did not understand that they were “laying bare the background of the psyche” (xvii), and “alchemy affords us a veritable treasure-house of symbols” (xviii). It is important to note that Jung links alchemy with psychoanalysis, and H.D. chronicles her psychological progress toward creative resurrection with her use of alchemical figurative language in *Trilogy*.

In *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* Susan Friedman says, “for H.D. Freud was ‘the *alchemist si remarkable*’ who ‘guards my room, almost my sanctuary.’” In the alchemy of her memory she returned to ‘my session or my séance’ with Freud in which he had conjured up from the unconscious the dead voices of her mother and father as well as the mother-father symbols they embodied” (157). Friedman also says in *Analyzing*

Freud: “He taught that every fragment of the psyche, every shard of a civilization has meaning, is indeed a link in an endless chain of meanings, a web of connections that need only be touched to set the whole aquiver” (xxxviii).

In the 1940’s, following her psychoanalysis, H.D.’s reading reflected her renewed interest in the occult. Friedman says H.D. studied many different mystical traditions and did “extensive reading about past esoteric traditions” (Psyche Reborn 170). The genesis of these studies was Denis de Rougemont’s Love in the Western World, which asserted that “western mystical sects [...] originated in the mystery religions of the middle east” and have “often been the religious sect driven underground by the Establishment of the times, persecuted as a group, and forced to meet in secret and to pass its wisdom down from person to person, sometimes even orally” (171). This statement could also describe the plight of the dissident religions with which H.D. was personally acquainted. Thus, H.D.’s religious background, psychoanalysis, and study of esoteric traditions culminated in a complexity of poetic images and the integration of alchemical symbolism into her Trilogy poems. In addition to direct references to alchemy, H.D expressed ideas about the occult and through language drawn from alchemical allegory.

### **Alchemical Allegories**

In English literature, the shifts in intellectual thought from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century English literature were reflected in the uses of alchemy as a literary metaphor writes Stanton J. Linden in “Mystical Alchemy, Eschatology, and Seventeenth-Century Religious Poetry.” During its evolution, alchemical imagery emphasised “change, purification, moral transformation, and spirituality” in a blending of Christian

eschatology and alchemy (79). Alchemical authors were concerned with devising complex systems of association between practical experiments and their own spiritual transformations. In both cases the objective was purification and perfection in the form of the philosopher's stone, or the spiritual regeneration of a believer worthy of salvation. Images of the stages in alchemical experimentation were sometimes related to Christ's Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection in seventeenth-century poems, while others borrowed exclusively from spiritual alchemy (80-82). The philosopher's stone or Elixir of Life, which almost become metaphors for Christ, will regenerate and purify the human soul. Seventeenth-century poets combined alchemy and eschatology freely in both Anglican and Puritan verse, all attempting to transmit Christian meaning "through recourse to the splendid obscurities of alchemical allegory" (86). Linden says this synthesis "was common in writings by the so-called Radical Puritans" (86).

Robert M. Schuler, in his introduction to Alchemical Poetry 1575-1700 From Previously Unpublished Manuscripts, concurs with some of the previous statements about the historical importance of alchemy when he says:

Indeed, during the entire half-century leading up to 1700, many of those interested in alchemy—including Newton—held firm to the *prisca sapientia* and attendant beliefs: the secrets bestowed by God on a select few after the Fall; they were lost over time, but preserved in fables and myths truly understood only by the chosen; full recovery was possible in later times by the study of prophecy and by scientific experimentation. At the same time, other alchemists focused their attention more narrowly on the *prisca theologia* (Hermes, Orpheus, Zoroaster, Pythagoras, etc.) and emphasized the purely meditative or speculative side of the sacred art. (xxiii)

In addition, Schuler believes alchemical poems can also be "epic" and "autobiographical" (xxxvii). The epic aspects of alchemical allegories are also noted on the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica website by Adam McLean in his work researching the pre-1800 alchemical book and manuscript collection at the J.R. Ritman Library: "Alchemical

writings, in particular, use the device of allegories, in which the reader is lead on a journey through a symbolic landscape, reflecting some metaphysical transformation process” (Introduction Silent Language Exhibition). These alchemical allegories are very similar to the symbolic illustrations and symbols in alchemical manuscripts.

To a modernist poet like H.D., alchemy offered a rich source of symbols upon which she could draw as she wrote Trilogy. Explicit alchemical references include: “the most profound philosophy / discloses the alchemist’s secret” (WDNF 20), and “here is the alchemist’s key, / it unlocks secret doors,” (WDNF 30). The alchemical references in lines such as these from “The Walls Do Not Fall” are explicit and symbolically significant, but also allegorical interpretations of psychoanalysis. Alchemical allegory was an appealing medium for someone with H.D.’s background of subversive religions. It was an ideal method with which to present a new kind of religion that could challenge the bounds of traditional knowledge and chronicle the psychological battle within. The secret language of alchemy provided H.D. with a new version of Zinzendorf’s “vocabulary of faith”.

As discussed earlier, alchemists were clearly intent on encoding their knowledge. In each of the passages from Trilogy included above, H. D. refers to secret knowledge. Jung says that from earliest times alchemy had either contained or was itself a secret doctrine. When Christianity became the accepted religion, “the old pagan ideas did not vanish but lived on in the strange arcane terminology of philosophical alchemy” (Alchemical Studies 122). According to The Encyclopedia of Religion, “It is significant that the injunction to secrecy and occultation is not abolished by the successful accomplishment of the alchemical work...the adepts who obtain the elixir [of life] and

become ‘immortals’ (hsein) continue to wander the earth, but they conceal their condition, that is, their immortality, and are recognized as such by a few fellow alchemists” (Alchemy 184). H.D. realizes that in the work needed to regenerate her creative psyche she must follow the lead of the immortals who have successfully obtained the elixir. To H.D., Freud is one of these immortals: “The Professor knew, he must have known, that, by implication, he himself was included in the number of those Gods. He himself was already counted as immortal” (Tribute to Freud 96). H.D. also recognizes that there are others on the quest: “companions / of the flame” (WDNF 13), “we know each other / by secret symbols” (WDNF 13). For H.D., these companions are those who enter into the mysteries in the world of psychoanalysis. H.D. may also have recognized that there were other poets who were companions in the mystery of alchemical imagery.

Although the Robinson biography mentions W.B. Yeats only in connection with Pound, he was another companion of the flame who incorporated alchemy into his work. Robert M. Schuler’s article “W.B. Yeats: Artist or Alchemist?” provides a thorough exploration of Yeats’ understanding and use of alchemical imagery in his poetry. Schuler says that Yeats found the analogy between artist and alchemist fascinating, and that his “abiding confidence in the symbols of alchemy as poetic vehicles” is evident throughout *The Collected Poems* (43-44). He writes, “Yeats seized upon the alchemist and his dual quest, not simply because they provided him with attractive poetic material, but because the alchemist’s work was identical to that of the artist who endeavoured literally to transmute ‘life into art’” (51). Transmuting life into art is also what H.D. does in her alchemical allegory of the poet striving to free her creative spirit.

Yeats and Alchemy by William T. Gorski says Yeats found in alchemy “a multifaceted metaphor for transformation, as it applied to both art and the human psyche” as early as 1890 (ix). Yeats’s alchemy, Gorski believes, was “precursive to Jung’s, not only in time but in vision”, and “prefigured the spiritual psychology that Jung had developed with the support of medieval and Renaissance alchemical manuscripts” (x). For Yeats, alchemy was both a “flexible and comprehensive metaphor for illustrating the human quest toward the divine” (161). He feared that the spiritual quest threatened bodily existence, and his early poems suggest Yeats believed Christianity was insufficient for the modern world and would be replaced (68). According to Gorski, “Yeats adopted the ideas of alchemy and translated them to his own creative ends” (161). For H.D., too, alchemy provided multivalent symbols.

Nesrin Eruysal appears to take a Jungian perspective when she writes about H.D.’s use of alchemical symbols. “*In Habentibus Symbolum Factor Est Transitus*” sums up H.D.’s connection to alchemy as: “the personal unconscious differs but the collective unconscious is shared by all of us and the poet has the power to excavate these buried images. H.D. found these images in [...] alchemy” (2). Eruysal also notes, and agrees with, Albert Gelpi’s comment in his introduction to H.D.’s “Notes on Thought and Vision” that H.D. and Jung “could have reached a better understanding” (2). Put another way, H.D. and Jung appear to have similar views on the value of alchemical symbolism even though Jung’s theories about archetypes and the collective unconscious clashed with H.D.’s Freudian emphasis on the need to reconcile the binary oppositions of the male / female, or mother / father, within the personal unconscious. Even though spiritual alchemy provided a common ground, H.D.’s loyalty to Freud, and her dislike of Jung’s

Nazi associations, did not allow for a better understanding between them. According to Robinson, “After the war H.D. lived just down the road from Jung for many years. She never spoke to him, and when asked about his work she dismissed it with the comment: ‘I like to take my alchemists straight’” (Footnote 304).

Eruysal makes a general statement that “in alchemist literature, the two fishes in the sea are Soul and Spirit. Soul is the inward individual spirit; Spirit is the universal soul in all men” (4). Although Eruysal does not expand on either the source or alchemical symbolism of this statement, possibly, she is referring to information found in Jung’s *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. Jung writes about how the opposites of male and female are symbolized in alchemical texts when he says “In Lamspring’s ‘Symbols’ they appear as the astrological Fishes which, swimming in opposite directions, symbolize the spirit / soul polarity. The water they swim in is *mare immensum* (our sea) and is interpreted as the body” (5). Jung’s footnote to the second sentence says the sea is a common symbol of the unconscious and, therefore, in alchemy, the body also symbolizes the unconscious. Likely, the alchemical text Jung refers to is the alchemical manuscript The Book of Lamspring (ca. 1625), published by Lucas Jennis. This small alchemical text contains a preface and fifteen emblematic plates with accompanying mottos, all of which show it to be a work of spiritual alchemy. The first plate bears the motto “BE WARNED AND UNDERSTAND TRULY THAT TWO FISHES ARE SWIMMING IN OUR SEA.” Below an illustration containing two fish swimming in opposite directions is an epigram “The Sea is the Body, the two Fishes are Soul and Spirit”, followed by an alchemical allegory that instructs “And hold your tongue about it: / Conceal your knowledge to your own advantage,” in order to “Only let the discovery remain a closed secret” (The

Alchemy Web Site “Book...”). It is not certain that H.D. was aware of this alchemical text, but she uses a remarkably similar symbol in “The Walls Do Not Fall”: “sub-conscious ocean where Fish / move two-ways, devour” (WDNF 30). With the addition of the words “sub-conscious ocean”, H.D. has placed the alchemical symbol into a psychoanalytic context.

In H.D.’s alchemical allegory, the unconscious has been prepared, the soul and the spirit are reconciled and, in this “age of the new dimension”, or era of modernism, the poet is free to seek further because the old values need to be revised. There is a subversive flavor in the following lines: “this is the age of the new dimension, / dare, seek, seek further, dare more”, and a suggestion of delving into areas, such as unauthorized books, that others would prefer remained restricted: “here is the alchemist’s key, / it unlocks secret doors” (WDNF 30). The secrets of the unconscious, the elixir of life and the philosopher’s stone are “yours if you surrender” your “sterile logic, trivial reason” (WDNF 30), H.D. writes. With logic and reason surrendered, H.D. says, “so mind dispersed, dared occult lore” (WDNF 30). In the sessions with Freud, H.D. “found screen doors unlocked, / floundered, was lost in sea-depth” (WDNF 30). A further discovery was “illusion, reversion of old values,” (WDNF 30). The poem ends with the statement “oneness lost, madness.” (WDNF 30), meaning that when the oneness is lost (the resolution of the binary opposites), madness follows. Put into a Freudian context, for H.D. the mother / father conflict or the binary opposition of female / male within the psyche must be resolved. Using the fish symbols for the unconscious, H.D.’s alchemical images are similar to those of the Lambspring alchemical allegory. In his notes to H.D. Collected Poems 1912-1944, Louis Martz says that in H.D.’s letters to Bryher “Fish” is

“her way of referring to Occult Powers” (613-614). The first four lines in the following poem continue with that theme. The unconscious casts up inharmonious monsters that require a reversion / revision of orthodox interpretations. H.D.’s images in this poem are clearly alchemical. The message of spiritual endeavor from the last poem is repeated in the final lines of the one that follows it: “*reversion of old values / oneness lost, madness*” (WDNF 31), and then continues in a subsequent poem: “Depth of the sub-conscious spews forth / too many incongruent monsters” (WDNF 32).

These following lines from a subsequent poem suggest that others—here addressed as “you”—are dismissive of psychoanalytic innovation: “This search for historical parallels, / research into psychic affinities, / has been done to death before” (WDNF 38). A challenge is then issued: “what new light can you possibly / throw upon them?” (WDNF 38). These last two lines anticipate a challenge to the poet to explain what new insights she can provide about the unconscious.

Although H.D. benefited considerably from her psychoanalysis, she writes in Tribute to Freud: “So again I can say the Professor was not always right. That is, yes, he was always right in his judgements, [...] I was swifter in some intuitive instances, and sometimes a small tendril of a root from that great common Tree on Knowledge went deeper into the sub-soil” (149). Robinson says H.D. believed that great art was always an artistic revolution, and she argued with Freud that the woman artist desired self-expression. Freud did not like this feminist stance and they argued over spiritual (sexual) equality. For H.D., Freud’s concepts about masculinity and femininity were too stereotyped, and H.D. reminded him there were other traditions. H.D. also believed in a tolerance of a wide range of religious differences (293-296). Robinson writes:

Sexual orientation is basically religious orientation in the sense that the religious drama mirrors and defines permitted social relations. H.D. was determined to live according to the laws of her own culture. Like the early Moravian expatriates in America from whom she was descended, she believed in freedom of religion [...]. She could experience Freud's ideas about feminine sexuality only as a logic of oppression. She was not about to be bound to male supremacy. (296-297)

The new light H.D. threw on "the search for historical parallels" and "psychic affinities" was a feminist, and Moravian, notion of a female divinity. Faull says the Moravian Holy Trinity was "God the Father, Holy Spirit the Mother, and Christ the Child" (xiii). Furthermore, Zinzendorf's notion of a gendered Holy Trinity is reflected in the Holy Spirit as Mother (57). Robinson writes that Pearson said H.D. did not get from Freud what is referred to as Freudianism, but rather she got "her own cohesion, her own frame of reference, the rounding out of her own personality and psyche" (298). That frame of reference was grounded in her Moravian upbringing.

The following lines of H.D.'s poetry appear to support Eruysal's statement that the poet has the power to excavate the images that lie buried in alchemical traditions, and that the personal unconscious is unique: "but my mind (yours) / has its peculiar ego-centric / personal approach" (WDNF 38). H.D. also says that her approach to eternal realities is unique, "and differs from every other / in minute particulars" (WDNF 38). In these lines is an acknowledgement of the uniqueness of the individual unconscious. Each mind is influenced by its heritage and has its own intellectual understanding of all humanity. Still, every age influences the subsequent one, and in this time of war weariness healing is needed. That healing can be found "in present-day philosophy," (psychoanalysis) which will ready "as it were, the patient for the Healer;" and "correlate faith with faith," (WDNF 40).

“The Walls Do Not Fall” consists of poems of survival, but before the end of this first volume of poems, H.D. reveals that her search for historical parallels will focus on resurrection. There is also an emphasis on resurrection in the first poem of “The Flowering of the Rod”:

now having given all, let us leave all;  
above all, let us leave pity

and mount higher  
to love—resurrection. (FR 1)

H.D. makes it known that the sweet smell of resurrection is available for those who seek it out: “resurrection is remuneration, / food, shelter, fragrance / of myrrh and balm” (FR 7). The phoenix was briefly discussed in relation to H.D.’s worm cycle, but a further examination of this symbol of resurrection is needed. Jung says the miracle of the phoenix is the transformation of the unconscious (*nigredo*) into illumination (*albedo*), and a “well known allegory for the resurrection of Christ and of the dead in general” though not exclusively. “The phoenix is also the bearer and source of the universal medicine, the ‘remedy against wrath and pain’” (Mysterium Coniunctions 215-216). H.D.’s phoenix (WDFN 25) and worm, like their alchemical interpretations, are symbols of the regeneration of creative energy which, in alchemy, is commonly called the accomplishment of the Great Work. Jung says the leading figure in seventeenth-century alchemy, Michael Maier, took up a study of the Axiom of Maria and discovered “a kind of feminine soul”, or a “female psychopomp” who directed him to the self-regenerating phoenix, the symbolic carrier of the self, also a well known allegory for the resurrection of Christ and of the dead in general (n 529, 213-215).

## Mary the Prophetess

As Maier, Jung, and Schuler note, alchemy was not the exclusive domain of men. One of the better-known alchemists was Mary the Prophetess, a woman whose alchemical text Schuler includes in the book of alchemical allegories<sup>15</sup>. Raphael Patai's article "Maria the Jewess—Founding Mother of Alchemy" explains that the woman known as Maria the Jewess, the divine Maria, or referred to simply as Maria, was a historical figure who lived in Hellenistic Egypt. The doctrines of Maria contain a wealth of enigmatic axioms to describe and recommend her alchemical procedures. As Schuler explains, Jung suggests in his book Alchemical Studies that Maria's axiom "One becomes Two, Two becomes Three, and out of the Third comes One as the Fourth [...]" runs through the whole of alchemy, and is not unconnected with Christian speculations regarding the Trinity" (151). According to Patai, Jung believed Maria's statement is a *leitmotiv* found throughout the seventeen-century lifetime of alchemy. Jung found deep psychological meaning in Maria's axiom (182).

Maria's claim that God had revealed alchemical secrets to her remained unquestioned until the early Medieval period. Jung, however, was the first to follow up on the "Christological interpretation" of Maria's axiom (188). In Schuler's opinion,

Maria's theories of matter are fundamental to virtually all alchemical thinking: all nature is one; body, soul, and spirit exist in metals as well as in humans; base metal is transformed into gold by a process analogous to the conjunction of male and female; the material must 'die' and be 'reborn.' xix

Schuler says the Latin "Epigram" of Maria the Jewess (or Mary the Prophetess) has the most direct links to the early Greek alchemical manuscripts, and her works were preserved in the third century AD. Also, Maria's text, Schuler believes, "provides a

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<sup>15</sup> In Alchemical Poetry 1575-1700 Schuler notes that this female alchemist is also referred to as Maria the Jewess (420).

useful introduction to Western alchemy's tradition, technology, theory, and chief metaphors" (xviii-xix).

A medieval Arabic manuscript quotes Maria as saying the philosopher's stone is a great mystery that is "scorned, and trodden underfoot" (Patai 189). Maria presented her teachings in "a veiled language, enigmatically", and was the only woman included in Maier's "Twelve Chosen Heroes." An epigram describes her: "[...] / She knew the hidden mysteries of the great stone. / Sage that she is she taught us with her words / [...]" (190-191). Patai also says Maria will reveal the secrets of the Vessel of Hermes, which most alchemists have kept silent (191). Maria Prophetissa appears in H.D.'s word play with the name of Mary in the eighth poem of "Tribute to the Angels".

In the "Tribute to the Angels" poems, H.D.'s layering of maternally inherited Moravian religion, Freud's psychoanalysis, and alchemical knowledge is now superimposed upon "The Lady" from the dream vision. Much like Boethius's Lady Philosophy, or Maria Prophetesia, H.D.'s "Our Lady universally" (TA 37) guides Psyche, the poet imprisoned by her war traumas, to "a new phase" (TA 40). In this new phase, representations of female divinity do not conform to those in Gothic cathedrals where female divinity is: "flanked by Corinthian capitals, / or in a Coptic nave, / or frozen above the center door" (TA 37). The Lady is not "a hieratic figure" (TA 37). Nor can she be "imprisoned in leaden bars / in a coloured window" (TA 38). Rather, the Lady is the poet's dream vision generated by the psyche newly emerged from her cocoon and prepared to write her own text (TA 38). This new text, Trilogy, is an alchemical, spiritual, psychological, and autobiographical palimpsest written by a modernist poet fascinated by the occult.

## Chapter Three: Poetic Resurrection

### Transmutation of Tradition

In “Tribute to the Angels” H.D.’s poetic intention to plunder, melt down, and integrate alchemical gems with fragments from ancient religions to allegorically record her poetic quest is made clear in the first poem:

Hermes Trismegistus  
 is patron of alchemists;

his province is thought,  
 inventive, artful, and curious;

his metal is quicksilver,  
 his clients, orators, thieves and poets;

steal then, O orator,  
 plunder, O poet,

take what the old-church  
 found in Mithra’s tomb,

candle and script and bell,  
 take what the new-church spat upon

and broke and shattered;  
 collect the fragments of the splintered glass

and of your fire and breath,  
 melt down and integrate,

re-invoke, recreate  
 [...]. (TA 1)

When H.D. invokes Hermes Trismegistus in the opening line of the first poem in the “Tribute to the Angels” volume, she is reversing the Christian Church’s practice of absorbing and pillaging from earlier modes of worship—most notably pagan—in the development of its own ritual. Now, aided by the patron of poets, H.D. will plunder from Christianity as she forges her own heretical tradition that includes the alchemical

allegories discussed in the previous section. In this volume, H.D. pays tribute to the “angels”, the men from whose patronage she benefited. Robinson believes that with patronage came demands that at times frustrated H.D. (316-317)<sup>16</sup>. In “Tribute to the Angels”, Robinson says H.D. saw herself as the angel Annael, “She felt she had passed through death twice [...] the miraculous birth of her child [following an earlier stillborn one] and now a precognition of her own rebirth. This was transubstantiation” (320). When H.D. writes: “*I make all things new / I John saw. I testify, / but I make all things new*”(TA 3), she pays tribute to male authority while usurping that authority by creating her own reality in which she plunders from the New Testament book of “Revelation”.<sup>17</sup> H.D. also addresses the problem of male appropriation of the female voice in patriarchal religions by commandeering John’s visionary voice. Similarly, in “Flowering of the Rod”, the poet says through her own will and power, “I am Mary—O, there are Marys aplenty, / (though I am Mara, bitter) I shall be Mary-myrrh” (FR 16).

Poems eight, nine, eleven, twelve, and thirteen in “Tribute to the Angels” are all alchemical allegories that figuratively illustrate H.D.’s two sessions of psychoanalysis. As Friedman says, “Where the underlying theme of her first visit was the recovery of the mother, revolving around the maternal transference, the focus of her return was the

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<sup>16</sup> Robinson says H.D. contributed information and rare reference books to her friend Gustav Davidson, as he worked on his book Dictionary of the Angels. In another work “Compassionate Friendship” H.D. wrote about external pressures and “seven ‘initiators’ who seem to conform to the seven angels of Tribute to the Angels. On a deeper level, each of the angels named appears in various religious traditions such as Judeo-Christian and Mohammedan, as well various artistic representations, notably Milton and Rembrandt (316-319). The multiplicity of religious references to these seven angels is more in keeping with the themes in Trilogy, and in H.D.’s December 5, 1944 letter to Pearson she talks about the angel names in Trilogy and how in the weeks before D-day she “really DID feel that a new heaven and a new earth were about to materialize” (See Hollenberg 44-45).

<sup>17</sup> Alike Barnstone’s “Readers’ Notes” which thoroughly annotate the Christian references in Trilogy, notes this reference as Rev. 22.8 (184).

father” (Analyzing Freud 432). Four lines from the ninth poem express how painful this process was and perhaps also the poet’s frustration:

what is this mother-father  
to tear at our entrails?

What is this unsatisfied duality  
which you can not satisfy? (TA 9)

In poems thirteen and fourteen, the alchemical process has produced a pulsating, living, breathing, fragrant unnameable jewel that hypnotises the poet:

with a pulse uncooled that beats yet,  
faint blue-violet;

it lives, it breathes,  
it gives off—fragrance?  
[...]  
I said, I cannot name it,  
there is no name;  
[...] (TA 13)

I do not want to name it,  
I want to watch its faint

Heart-beat, pulse-beat  
as it quivers, I do not want

to talk about it,  
I want to minimize thought,

concentrate on it  
till I shrink,

dematerialize  
and am drawn into it. (TA 14)

Not long after, in the twenty-fifth poem, the dream-vision of the Lady occurs.

“Tribute to the Angels” ends with the transmutation of the jewel and resurrection:

but when the jewel  
melts in the crucible,  
[...]

*This is the flowering of the rod,  
this is the flowering of the burnt-out wood,*

*where Zadkiel, we pause to give  
thanks that we rise again from death and live. (TA 43)*

The first poem of “The Flowering of the Rod” makes clear there is to be a new beginning. The final word in the first poem “resurrection” is repeated throughout this volume. H.D.’s text of spirituality is a chronicle of resurrection that will not conform to the Christian conventions. The following lines from “The Flowering of the Rod” signal a shift in focus that begins in the second book of poems and continues throughout the third: “above all, let us leave pity / and mount higher / to love—resurrection” (FR 1). In the patriarchal Christian conventions women rarely speak and most often interfere with man’s relationship to God. But H.D. rejects that portrayal of women, just as she rejected the patriarchal bias in Freud’s psychological theory:

but this is not our field,

we have not sown this;  
pitiless, pitiless, let us leave

The-place-of-a-skull  
to those who have fashioned it. (FR 2)

The story of resurrection that took place after the crucifixion at Golgotha (Place of a Skull) was recorded by patriarchal religions, but it is on Maria Prophetisia’s mountain covered with the mysterious white herb of transmutation, a feature of her vision of Christ, rather than Mount Calvary where the resurrection of the poet’s psyche will take place. Patai says that in alchemical manuscripts the teachings of Maria, the founding mother of alchemy, are repeatedly referred to. In these manuscripts, Maria says: “Take the white, clear, precious herb which grows on small mountains, and pound it [...] with the Elsaron

gum and the two fumes [...] the aforementioned two fumes are the roots of this Art” (189). The white herb’s healing and magical qualities were a hidden secret (“Maria the Jewess” 189). The white herb depicted in one alchemical engraving has “five branches, each topped with a flower” (191). According to Jung’s Alchemical Studies, in the “Practica Mariae Prophetissae”, the philosophical tree, a “tree (or wonderful plant),” grows on mountains, and the mountain and tree “are symbols of the personality and of the self” (308-309). Most likely this white herb from the philosophical tree is myrrh, the tree associated with the theme of resurrection that is central to Trilogy.

The seventh poem in this final volume of Trilogy reveals that resurrection comes with a reward for the poet: “Yet resurrection is a sense of direction” (FR 7). The symbol of that reward is myrrh, alchemically associated with resurrection, and an important element in the theme repeated throughout this final volume: “resurrection is remuneration, / food, shelter, fragrance / of myrrh and balm” (FR 7). Significantly, myrrh is the essence that surrounds the resurrected poet—the worm who has shed the cocoon / shroud in which her psyche slept.

It has become obvious that this poem is an autobiographical alchemical allegory. Freud is the mage Kaspar, but also an alchemist, whose true gift was the knowledge that allowed H.D. to realize that above all, she was a poet. “You are a poet,” Freud repeatedly told H.D. during their sessions, and the following lines express H.D.’s gratitude to Freud and acknowledgment of his pioneering theories of psychoanalysis:

And no one will ever know  
 whether the picture he saw clearly  
  
 as in a mirror was pre-determined  
 by his discipline and study

of old lore and by his innate capacity  
for transcribing and translating

the difficult secret symbols,  
[...]  
he saw further, saw deeper, apprehended more

than anyone before or after him;  
[...] (FR 40)

As noted above, myrrh, the symbol of resurrection, is emphasised in the final two volumes of poems. Kaspar's offering of myrrh, an alchemical symbol related to the phoenix, itself a symbol of resurrection, sealed in its alabaster jar is not, however, the source of the fragrance of transmutation that surrounds the newly resurrected poet:

And Kaspar stood a little to one side  
like an unimportant altar-servant,

and placed his gift  
a little apart from the rest,

to show by inference  
its unimportance in comparison;  
[...] (FR 42)

But she spoke so he looked at her,  
she was shy and simple and young;

she said, Sir, it is a most beautiful fragrance,  
as of all flowering things together;

but Kaspar knew the seal of the jar was unbroken,  
he did not know whether she knew

the fragrance came from the bundle of myrrh  
she held in her arms. (FR 43)

The fragrant Myrrh branches have also been associated with tribute offerings to monotheistic Mother Goddess cults in antiquity. The article by Sir Arthur Evans

provides some insights into contemporary understandings of the images H.D. borrowed in portraying the resurrected poet and the Lady divinity from the dream vision.

### **Mother Goddess and Mary-Myrrh**

From H.D.'s letters it is apparent that Freud and H.D. shared a love for antiquity. In Tribute to Freud (95-99), and in a March 1, 1933, letter to Bryher, H.D. described her first meeting with Freud, which included a discussion of some artifacts in his Vienna office (Analyzing Freud 33). Then, in a March 21, 1933, letter to Bryher H.D. requested an essay "The Earlier Religion of Greece, in the Light of Cretan Discoveries":

[...] that brochure of Sir Arthur Evans, on the last analysis of some coins he found, on a ring, butterfly and chrysalis? Freud had not seen it. Did I leave it in London? If so, could you order me a new one to take to Freud? He was so excited. He has all Evans on his shelf. We got to Crete yesterday, I went off the deep end, and we sobbed together over Greece in general. (127)

Friedman notes that Evans's article discussed religious syncretism and says it was a source for H.D.'s images of the butterfly as Psyche the goddess, and the concept of words being little boxes from which butterflies hatch (127). However, a few days after the first letter, H.D. again mentions the Evans article: "I wrote you I had found the Crete in the Frazer Book [...] and papa was a bit sniffy, he said he had ALL of [...] Evans, then yesterday he licked his whiskers and thanked me, as he had not actually seen this very last on Minoan butterflies. He loves Crete almost best, I think. He has the book for the moment" (147-147). Almost certainly, the Evans article had, after this, strong associations with Freud for H.D., and her first series of sessions where the psychoanalysis focused on the mother. It appears that in H.D.'s memoir, the Lady whose nurture and guidance assists in the healing and resurrection of the poetic psyche, may also have been

inspired by the Evans article on the Minoan Mother Goddess divinity from Crete.

Friedman notes that H.D. “pursued the mother vibration” through an Artemis mother figure, and speculates that “Perhaps she also surfaces as the Lady of *Trilogy*” (308-309).

An examination of Evans’s article suggests another interpretation of the goddess image, in addition to the explicit one of Psyche the resurrected poet that Friedman has so thoroughly examined in her study of H.D.

“The Flowering of the Rod,” the final volume of poems, was written in the final weeks of WW II, when resurrection on many levels seemed possible. H.D. began the volume with “...*pause to give thanks that we rise again from death and live.*” In his article, Evans explains that during the Second Punic War, the Romans had been warned by the Sibyl to “seek the Mother” and shrines to the Great Phrygian Mother were moved to Rome (263-264). From Knossos, a city in ancient Crete, an artifact called the “Ring of Nestor” depicts the Minoan underworld and the “admission of the departed into the realms of bliss [...] The key to the significance of the whole subject is supplied by the small objects above the seated figure of the Goddess” (273). Evans describes a Goddess with two butterflies fluttering over her head. Above the butterflies are two chrysalises, emblems of resurgence, which are significant to the Minoan conception of their chief divinity. The Greeks retained the practice of referring to butterflies as “little souls” into Evans’ time. In the Minoan religion, however, the chrysalis represents suspended life (273-274). Evans says this “double emblem, of resurgence and spiritual life—the chrysalis with the butterflies above—has an evident significance” (275). Their combination with two other figures on the ring is a symbol of the life-giving power of the Goddess symbolized by this reunion scene in the Land of the Blest (275-276). Another

ring from Mycenae emphasizes the Goddess in a motherly relationship (277). Yet another ring depicts a scene of the adoration of the Mother Goddess and Child, where two male figures in warrior garb approach her, each holding two budding stems (279-280). Evans says “Myrtle shoots with their aromatic odor, connected in their origin with ‘myrrh’, would perhaps be the appropriate gift, especially when it is recalled that Myrrha, the mythical mother of Adonis, was transformed into a myrtle bush” (280). Behind the second worshiper are three vessels, one of which is a tripod cauldron. The vessels represent offerings intended for the Goddess on the Epiphany of the infant God. Evans points out the Christian parallels: “Nothing could be more remarkable than the parallelism that this whole scene presents with the Adoration of the Magi. It is sufficiently exemplified by the typical example of the sixth century A.D. given in Fig. 17 [the Adoration of the Magi on a Christian ring-stone] “(281). On another ring are two Magi that Evans says are consistent with early Christian iconography. The setting in a cave or shelter of rock “inevitably recalls the Grot of Bethlehem—nor can we forget its former association recorded by St. Jerome. ‘Bethlehem’ [...] ‘the truth is sprung out of the Earth’” (281-282). The Ring of Nestor Goddess, however, with the butterfly and chrysalis symbols of resurgence, possesses the power to bestow life beyond the grave to those who worship her (282). Throughout the Minoan world, the paramount Goddess reappears. Evans believes “that we are in the presence of a largely monotheistic cult, in which the female form of divinity held the supreme place” (286). This is the same form of religion widespread, still at a later date, throughout the Anatolian and bordering Syrian regions. The Minoan Goddess form is related to Astarte and the Syrian Goddess. They

are associated with a young male who can be son, paramour or consort, like Adonis (286-287).

As noted earlier, the first volume of poems was mainly concerned with the patriarchal, seen in the invocation of Hermes and the references to Mercury and Thoth. In the search for historical parallels, however, H.D. undermines the patriarchal myths and religions while emphasising reviled and unseemly women. H.D. uncovers a cankerous growth in patriarchal religions that designates women as mother, whore, or agent of humanity's fall from grace. Of course, with resurrection as the focus, the name Mary most often evokes both the Christian Madonna and the Magdalene. In the Moravian trinity the Holy Spirit is female. It is not surprising then that H.D.'s palimpsest sublimely blends a female figure, who identifies herself as Mary, with alchemical symbols and Goddess worship from antiquity: "*I am Mary, the incense-flower of the incense-tree, / Myself worshiping, weeping, shall be changed to myrrh; / I am Mary, though melted away*"(FR 19).

The last poem of this volume re-enacts the end of H.D.'s psychoanalysis with Freud. In her December 2, 1934, letter to Bryher, H.D. recounts the end of her sessions with Freud. H.D.'s gift of an azalea tree had been well received by Mrs. Freud, after which Dr. Freud appeared bearing a gift for H.D.:

Papa appeared, said nothing of mama, but solemnly presented me with one of the orange branches with leaves and oranges, all terribly symbolical. Well—I just managed to get through my hour, but had a very weepy time when I got back. [...] I think you may rest assured that I am well fixated, and prob., for life on the famille Freud, and prob. on the good Moravian town, of Wein. I passed Martin [Freud] on the stairs, he gave me the once-over. I think I would like him very, very, much, too. [...] I will go out now to my last Church concert. (Analyzing Freud 509-510)

Freud's gift to H.D. perplexes Friedman considerably. She devotes the better part of two pages to its possible meaning and the source of this symbolic act: "This gesture was surely a portent and portentous symbol for the end of her analysis with Freud. But what did it signify?" (535). Having reached no real conclusion, Friedman finally declares, "Sometimes an orange bough is just an orange bough. Whatever its meanings, the orange bough remains part of a seemingly endless gift exchange between them" (536). Curiously, in her speculations, Friedman does not make any connections between the Evans article that H.D. shared with Freud, the gift he presented to the resurrected poet, and the last two poems in Trilogy. Moreover, Friedman does not note the alchemical elements in Trilogy, and resemblances between the alchemical engraving of Maria's vision with the five flowering branches, and scent-emitting urn with the myrrh references in the poems.

Robinson says Kaspar in "The Flowering of the Rod" symbolizes the reality that not all men categorize women as either whore or virgin. But, she also states "The legendary patriarch of the trilogy, Kaspar, comes to understand that Mary is an extraordinary person; [...] Freud began to regard H.D. as a Mary figure" (331). Robinson bases these assumptions on Freud's statement that H.D. had come to him to find her mother. As mentioned earlier, H.D.'s first analysis did focus on the mother, but the second series of sessions focused on the father, thus reconciling, as the poems indicate, the unsatisfied duality of mother-father that "tears at our entrails". Robinson's view of Trilogy as a palimpsest of personal experience and Christian doctrine ignores even the explicit alchemical elements in these poems. Furthermore, Robinson says "The gift of myrrh consecrates the Child; the patriarch affirms the Child, and thus the child (and poet)

in Mary” (334). A couple of points in this statement need to be addressed. Firstly, Robinson connects the gift of myrrh to the Christian myth of the Magi’s adoration of the Christ child, even though the only mention of a child in the entire three volumes of poems are statements that there is no child present. As the dreamer attempts to identify the Lady, she says “[...] she bore / none of her usual attributes; / the Child was not with her” (TA 32). Throughout the following poems, H.D. makes it clear the only thing the Lady carries is a book. Again, readers are told “like the Lamb’s Bride, / but the Lamb was not with her, / either as Bridegroom or Child” (TA 39). Furthermore, H.D. cautions readers that words are multivalent and polyvalent: “the meaning that words hide; / they are anagrams, cryptograms, / little boxes, conditioned” (WDFN 39). H.D. also warns readers that there is alchemy in words:

Now polish the crucible  
and in the bowl distill

a word most bitter, *marah*,  
a word bitterer still, *mar*  
[...]  
now polish the crucible  
and set the jet of flame

under, until *marah-mar*  
are melted, fuse and join

and change and alter,  
mer, mere, mere, mater, Maia, Mary,

Star of the Sea,  
Mother. (TA 8)

H.D. makes it clear that names, too, can hide meanings: “I am Mary—O there are Marys a-plenty, / (though I am Mara, bitter) I shall be Mary-myrrh” (FR 16). The Dictionary of First Names shows that the name Mary is an Anglicized form of the French “Marie” and

Latin “Maria”. In most European languages, including English, “Maria” and “Mary” are cognates. Continuing with H.D.’s distillation of the name Mary begun in poem eight above: “Mary” is from the French “Marie”, and from the Latin “Maria.” “Maria” is a New Testament form of “Miriam”, derived from “drop of the sea”, which was later altered to “star of the sea.” In Schuler’s introduction to the book of alchemical allegories, he remarks about the text of Maria Prophetesia included in the text: “If not absolutely the oldest original text represented here, the Latin verse ‘Epigram’ of Maria the Jewess (here called ‘Mary the Prophetess’ text VIII) is the one with the most direct links to the alchemy of the earliest Greek manuscripts” (xviii). Throughout this manuscript, the name Mary the Prophetess is used (423). Apparently, the Marys aplenty H.D. noted also includes one of the earliest and most influential historical alchemists. H.D. makes it clear that myrrh is to be associated with Mary in these poems. Moreover, The Mary in “The Flowering of the Rod” holds flowering branches of myrrh, a symbol of resurrection. This is not the consecration of a child, as Robinson believes; rather, it is an epiphany, the manifestation or appearance of a divine or superhuman being who has survived the ravages of war and personal loss. In the final poem of Trilogy, the young woman speaks to Kaspar: “she said, Sir, it is a most beautiful fragrance, / as of all flowering things together” (FR 43). The Mage Kaspar knows that “the fragrance came from the bundle of myrrh / she held in her arms” (FR 43). Once again, H.D. has layered symbols of religion from antiquity, and regeneration found in alchemy with the personal experience of the offering Freud made to the resurrected poet on the final day of her psychoanalysis.

The history of religion includes many instances of a recognised role for odors. Characteristically, according to Henry Cadbury, in the earlier religions, a sweet smell of surpassing sweetness accompanies the appearance of a deity. Sensory in nature, odors signal “the coming and going of the goddess” (241-242). Cadbury says, “Beauty, strength, and moral character may be suggested by the divine fragrance, [...] References to the fragrance of trees and flowers would be natural to any religion. [...] Neither the Old Testament nor the New signalizes the divine being’s presence by odor” (243). Odors are also connected to survival of death, as seen in the Christian notion that sweet odors signal the immortality of saints after death, or even before (249). The mark of an epiphany, odors facilitate human recognition of the divine presence, as suggested by the story of Pentecost (253). As discussed above, according to the most well known teachings of Maria Prophetisia, the roots of the Art of Alchemy are the two fumes containing the mysterious white herb. An alchemical symbol of regeneration, the worm that emerges from the ashes of the phoenix who has perished in a conflagration, is likely very fragrant, given that the act takes place within a nest built of frankincense, myrrh, and other spices. As noted above, the line “*pause to give thanks, that we rise again from death and live*” begins “The Flowering of the Rod” poems, and this theme of resurrection continues throughout these poems. This theme is evident in the butterfly chrysalis which suggests a suspended life that is followed by a resurgence of the poet’s creative psyche. Similarly, the various associations of myrrh with tribute offerings to the Mother Goddess, and its associations with Maria the founding mother of alchemy, and the manifestation of heroic survival or divine presence are also suggestive of resurrection.

Robinson says it was Freud who restored H.D.: “Freud, H.D. tells us in The Flowering of the Rod (her *real* tribute to Freud), understood more than any of us can imagine; as friend and teacher, he was in touch with the whole secret of the mystery” (334). That mystery was of course his psychological insights into H.D.’s poetic psyche. Within the context of the earlier reference to the men from whose patronage H.D. benefited, Freud is not one of the angels whose authority she intends to usurp. Although “The Flowering of the Rod” is dedicated to Norman Holmes Pearson, the preface which is also repeated in the final two lines of Trilogy suggests H.D.’s gratitude to Freud: *“pause to give / thanks that we rise again from death and live.”*

## Conclusion

Moravianism, Puritanism, Freudian psychoanalysis and alchemy are sublimely blended in H.D.'s Trilogy. This three-volume long poem refigures the Protestant conversion narratives from H.D.'s familial history of dissident religions into a modernist spiritual narrative wherein the poet parallels her own psychological traumas with those of the war-torn western world and the ruined temples of ancient Egypt. The first volume of Trilogy "The Walls Do Not Fall" contains images related to persecution and subterfuge. H.D.'s inner and outer worlds are in chaos and, as in the subversive texts of her mother's Moravian church and those of alchemical adepts, a hidden narrative is used in the quest for spiritual regeneration. In the second volume "Tribute to the Angels", the poet observes the patriarchal world and searches the Spheres where she has a dream vision in which the Lady directs her to write her own Book of Life. The resurrection of the poet takes place in "Flowering of the Rod," the final stage of the quest. With the completion of her worm-cycle, the poet emerges with her creativity renewed, the transmutation is complete, and the essence of regeneration and resurrection, "as of all things flowering together," surrounds her. Through a sublime blending of personal memoir, alchemical allegory, and poetic resurrection, creation is again possible. Trilogy is both a personal memoir of the quest for poetic resurrection and a result of that quest, the legacy of a gifted poet whose synthesis of religions and the occult with personal and world history has not yet received the attention it merits. In these poems H.D.'s explicit references to esoteric alchemy indicate what a valuable resource this body of symbols—with their history of marginalization and dissidence—provided to convey the interwoven themes of Trilogy. Alchemy's sublime blending of science and magic, along with its powers of

spiritual transformation, provided an imaginative model to convey the unique capacities of psychoanalysis from which H.D. benefited so profoundly during her time of crisis. Alchemy also provided a useful analogue of feminine empowerment, and in returning to it H.D. reverses the direction of progress that has resulted in the barbarism of twentieth-century fascism. The themes of regeneration and persistence in Trilogy were also central to H.D.'s early "Sea Garden" (1916), poems where her metaphors of survival and persistence were taken from analogous images in the landscape. The complexity of Trilogy merits more intertextual analysis of these poems.

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