Mythic Metamorphosis: Re-shaping Identity in the Works of H.D.

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Abstract

In section fifteen of the poem The Walls Do Not Fall author Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) address her audience and articulates the purpose of the poet in the following lines: “we are the keepers of the secret,/ the carriers, the spinners/ of the rare intangible thread/ that binds all humanity/ to ancient wisdom,/ to antiquity;/…every concrete object/ has abstract value, is timeless/ in the dream parallel” (Trilogy 24). H.D. mined her own life for charged relationships which she then, through writing, connected to the mythic characters of antiquity whose tales embodied the same struggles she faced. Reading concrete objects as universal symbols which transcend time, her mind meshed the 20th century with previous cultures to create a nexus where the questions embedded in the human spirit are alive on multiple planes. The purpose of this research project is not to define her works as “successful” or “unsuccessful,” nor to weigh the works against each other in terms of “advancement.” Rather it is to describe the way she manipulates this most reliable of tools, mythic metamorphosis, in works stretching from her early Imagist poetry, through her long poem Trilogy, and finally into her last memoir End To Torment, taking note of the way she uses this tool to form beauty from harsh circumstances and help heal her shattered psyche.
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“What need—
yet to sing love,
love must first shatter us.”

H.D., “Fragment Forty” (CP 175)

Chapter One: Introduction

In section fifteen of the poem The Walls Do Not Fall, Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) addresses her audience and articulates the purpose of the poet in the following lines: “we are the keepers of the secret,/ the carriers, the spinners/ of the rare intangible thread/ that binds all humanity/ to ancient wisdom,/ to antiquity;/...every concrete object/ has abstract value, is timeless/ in the dream parallel” (Trilogy 24). H.D. mined her own life for charged relationships which she then, through writing, connected to the mythic characters of “antiquity” whose tales embodied the same struggles she faced. Reading concrete objects as universal symbols which transcend time, her mind meshed the twentieth century with previous cultures to create a nexus where the questions embedded in the human spirit are alive on multiple planes. Similar to the Greek god Hermes, who moved among all three planes of existence—heaven, earth, and the underworld—in order to further the desires of both humans and gods alike, H.D. viewed the creative process as a gift bestowed on her in order to help her make sense of her era. She would adopt the same habit of maneuvering as Hermes—seeking the divine and the damned and merging the characters and stories of those realms with the people and actions occurring in her generation.

Her tactics arose from her turbulent and nomadic lifestyle, with each crisis faced forcing her to incorporate new elements into the ongoing framework that allowed her to
survive in reality. This is not to imply that she was always successful; indeed she suffered several total breakdowns and was institutionalized for various lengths of time. But the crumbling of her psyche was also the catalyst for change, and her creative works were how she healed herself. Mythic metamorphoses allowed her to tweak identities, both hers and those of the complex people who formed her inner circle, by integrating them into universal struggles and seeing them as participants in an ongoing human “quest.” Recycling and reworking personalities created a measure of freedom which allowed H.D. to break the paradigms which sought to define her in a static identity. The purpose of this research project is not to define her works as “successful” or “unsuccessful,” nor to weigh the works against each other in terms of “advancement.” Rather it is to describe the way she manipulates this most reliable of tools, mythic metamorphosis, in works stretching from her early Imagist poetry, through her long poem *The Walls Do Not Fall*, and finally into her last memoir *End To Torment*, noting the way she uses this tool to form beauty from harsh circumstances and help heal her shattered psyche.

Like the work of her contemporaries, Pound’s *Cantos* or Eliot’s *The Waste Land* to name a few, H.D.’s work is *coded poetry*. I use this term to mean works which do not readily offer a complete experience solely within themselves because quite often the way to the emotion embedded in them is reached through an external reference. This is a deliberate act of the authors, one which frequently distances them from acquiring a broad audience. Their poetry cannot be fully appreciated unless the reader is familiar, or is willing to put in the effort to become familiar, with the references the poets use to heighten the implications in their texts. Pound habitually uses Chinese and Italian phrases and does not offer translations. H.D.’s works are coded by her stylistic choice of
continually naming Greek, Roman, and Egyptian gods without recounting their myths. Complicating this is her habit of using the gods’ symbols in her texts and expecting a reader to catch the significance of what might easily be passed over as an everyday object. In other words you must be willing to work to get to the meaning of the poem. You must also be willing to face the prospect that you will never fully understand the author’s original intention.

Yet as society’s taste in poetry undergoes radical changes, many people view such devices as elitist and accuse them of rendering the work useless because it cannot immediately appeal to a wide audience. Many critics, for example, accuse H.D. of escapism, needing to “hide” in Greek mythology because she cannot interpret her life in “modern” terms. With almost eerie foresight H.D. warns against this interpretation of her poetry in section eight of The Walls Do Not Fall:

So we reveal our status

with twin-horns, disk, erect serpent,

through these or the double-plume or lotus

are, you now tell us, trivial

intellectual adornment;

poets are useless,

more than that,

we, authentic relic,
bearers of secret wisdom,

living remnant

of the inner band

of the sanctuaries’ initiate,

are not only ‘non-utilitarian’,

we are ‘pathetic’:

this is the new heresy;

but if you do not even understand what words say,

how can you expect to pass judgment

on what words conceal?  

(Trilogy 14)

The “new heresy” demands poetry that is “utilitarian” and dismisses work such as H.D.’s as “trivial” and “pathetic,” mere “intellectual adornment,” to which she replies “How can you ‘pass judgment’ when ‘you do not even understand what words say’?” The purpose of this thesis is to provide that explanatory groundwork, confident that her use of the “secret wisdom” has direct applicability to her troubled time.

So much of H.D.’s creative process is based on abstract ideas that it is easy to become confused and frustrated. In order to help abate this, I suggest adopting a tactic the
author herself employed: contemplating an image. H.D. notoriously collected small sculptures and used them as meditation devices. Her daughter, Perdita Schaffner, recalls her fixating on a turquoise Egyptian cat and later on crystals (Schaffner 4-5). A frequent traveler, she also collected postcards and clippings of various sculptures which arrested her attention and allowed her to enter a creative state of mind. Art served as a portal into humanity’s potential creativity, as, for example, in these lines on the statue of Helios:

The statue of Helios on the Olympic frieze, as the beautiful personality that once charmed us, acts as a go-between.

The youth is a link between men (let us say) and statues.

The statue is a link between the beauty of our human lovers and the gods.

The statue enflames us. Its beauty is a charm or definite talisman.

... But the Hellene did not throw down his chisel and rest in self-complacent admiration.

His work began when his work was finished.

The priest at Delphi, the initiate, even the more advanced worshipper, began his work where the artist ceased his labour.
The statue was like a ledge of rock, from which a great bird steps as he spreads his wings.

The mind, the intellect, like the bird rests for a moment, in contemplation or worship of that Beauty.

The mind grips the statue as the bird grips the rock-ledge. (CP 327-328)

For H.D., images such as this statue linked the worlds of “human lovers and the gods.” They offered the observing mind places to “rest” and “grip” and eventually “spread [its] wings” as it launches off into free flight and further understanding.

**Chapter Two: The Scrapbook**

An image demonstrating this mental free flight which I wish for the reader to contemplate comes from her personal scrapbook housed in Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and digitally archived at [http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/beinecke. HILDA.con.html#a5](http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/beinecke. HILDA.con.html#a5). In the scrapbook’s photomontages the principle of viewing works of classical art as portals to creativity is exemplified. We can see H.D. and her closest friends gripping and reworking an ancient image, using it to link worlds and open new possibilities of thought. By pasting their own pictures into photographs and postcards depicting Greek sculptures, friezes, and monuments, the individuals are then incorporated into a specific myth while at the same time altering it by infusing it with contemporary elements. Everything within
the collage undergoes a metamorphosis as each element works in conjunction with the
other and therefore alters the way they perform and are perceived.

It is important to note that the scrapbook itself is a collective effort. While most of
the photomontages are attributed to Kenneth Macpherson (H.D.’s lover and the
“husband” of Bryher—who was H.D.’s long-time lesbian lover) he created them using
input from H.D. and Bryher. H.D. selected the cover of the album: as Diana Collecott
notes, the leather depicts “a design of ‘spear flowers’; these resemble the pattern incised
on the outer walls of the Egyptian temple of Dendur, where long-stalked lotuses seem to
stand guard over the mysteries within. A similar motif of ‘a scepter / and a flower-shaft/
and a spear’ is central to H.D.’s poem ‘The Mysteries,’ celebrating the rebirth of Adonis
(CP 301). The spear flower of Adonis and the flower stalk of the Eleusinian wandbearer
thus mark the line between the sacred and the profane” (Collecott 159). However, as also
noted by Collecott, the first page of the album has pencil markings stating Kenneth
Macpherson created the collages (most likely between 1927-1928 and 1930-1931).
Collecott’s research regarding the scrapbook brings to light several other important
elements: Bryher probably dictated the book’s preface inscription (158); H.D. can be
identified as the definite creator of one of the pages (170); and the nude photographs of
H.D. used in the collages were almost certainly taken by Bryher during their 1920 trip to
the Carmel Highlands in California (158).

Each collage within the scrapbook represents a complicated network of ideas
shared amongst Kenneth, H.D. and Bryher. There is no text accompanying them to
explain how they might translate into prose. To illuminate the images’ exact meaning is
impossible since they are visual references open to numerous interpretations. However, I
wish to focus on the collage presented on the second page of the book as I feel it offers intriguing insights into H.D.’s creative process and foreshadows future concepts she wove into her writing process. The image involves a photograph of H.D. inserted into a Greek frieze from Epidauros depicting (from left to right) the partial figures of Nike, Hygeia, and Asklepios:

![Greek frieze from Epidauros](image)

Collecott’s essay “Images at the Crossroads: H.D.’s ‘Scrapbook’” provides insights into the photograph as well as the meaning Kenneth Macpherson’s layout might have meant:

…the cut-out photograph of H.D. seated on a rock is apparently in front of, but actually on top of, the photograph of a frieze from Epidauros depicting Nike, Hygeia, and Asklepios. As a static image, this has a hieratic quality which evokes H.D.’s devotion to Freud, her “blameless physician” (*Tribute To Freud 101*): she seems to have placed her head on his knee. Yet the seated figure in the foreground might equally well be “at the pictures” watching projections on a screen.
above her eye level. The two readings elide with one another when we recall Freud’s discussion of the daydream and its continuing influence on cinematic theory, especially in recent concern with scopic pleasure. We may also recall that Asklepios’ cure, like Freud’s, involved the interpretation of dreams. If H.D. is depicted here as “the dreamer,” then she is also the visionary. The three figures she sees belong literally to the stone frieze; but symbolically they represent the supernatural plane “above her head,” resembling the divine triads of Trilogy. (Collecott 172)

Framed by cinematic theory, Collecott’s essay largely deals with the images in reference to the avant-garde notions Kenneth, Bryher, and H.D. sought to advance through their cinematography-themed magazine Close Up and the films they produced, namely Borderline. She sees the H.D. figure as dreaming, or watching, the world projected before her. However, my own research leads me to link with the psychoanalytic movement, which guides me to another interpretation.

To begin deciphering the frieze, it is important to note the conflicting mythology/history surrounding Asklepios. Scholars are uncertain whether Asklepios was worshipped as strictly a heroic healer or as a god; artifacts lend themselves to either interpretation. His mythology offers him as both a man and a god; like Hermes he transcends the divine and mortal realms. His assimilation by several cultures complicated the issues surrounding his identity as each civilization infused his mythology with details specific to its culture and location. To the Greeks he was Asklepios, and various regions argued that he originated from their area—naturally each location therefore altered his myth to justify their geological specifications. The Romans adopted him as Asclepios; and as their empire spread and came into contact with other cultures, he was often
identified as the Egyptian figures of Imhotep (Fowden 40), Thoth (Farnell 279), or Sarapis (Edelstein 425).

The most common story of his origin asserts that Phlegyas, King of Lapiths, had a beautiful daughter named Coronis with whom the sun god Apollo fell in love with after spotting her by Thessalian Lake Beobeis (Graves 173). As so frequently happens in these tales, the god seduces her and she becomes pregnant. Apollo leaves to perform various duties and bids his bird, a white crow (or in some versions a raven), to guard her. When the bird discovers Coronis fornicating with Ischys, the Arcadian son of Elatus, he takes flight to go and warn Apollo. However, the enraged god has already learned of the infidelity and curses the crow for not pecking out Ischys’ eyes. Crow’s condemnation changes his color to the black we see today (Graves 174). The punishment for Coronis is more severe—in some versions Apollo slays her with an arrow; in others he has his sister Artemis perform the murder. Either way, Coronis is killed; and as her body is readied for the funeral pyre, Apollo mourns and attempts to revive her. But the Fates have cut her life thread, and even the tender caresses of a god can not revive her. As the fire licks her corpse, Apollo (or in the version Robert Graves recounts, the god Hermes under orders from Apollo) reaches into her womb and removes his unborn son, Asklepios. Apollo places the infant in the care of the renowned centaur Chiron, who instills his knowledge of the healing arts in Asklepios. In adulthood Asklepios performs numerous cures and garners wide-spread acclaim as the greatest healer of his time. He fathers several children, the most famous being his daughter Hygeia, who is worshipped as a healing divinity, and his sons Podaleirius and Machaon, who are physicians to the Greeks during the Trojan War. It seems that his death is attributed to his angering Zeus by bringing
mortals back from the dead. Either by using his skills as a physician or magical blood from the Gorgon Medusa, Asklepios upsets the natural order of life and death and for this offense he is struck down by a lightning bolt. Mythology relates that Zeus allows him to be “reborn” as one of the gods and places his image amongst the stars: “This is the constellation which is in Scorpio…It has a sufficient brilliance although it is in the largest star, that is, Scorpion, and it shines forth in clear outline” (Edelstein 121-22).

The small scrawling script at the bottom of the collage: “Fragment of bar Asklepios Hygieia & Niké from Epidauros” offers an important distinction regarding which version of the myth H.D. is manipulating. By choosing an artifact from Epidauros, several factors of the Asklepián myth are altered because the version associated with that specific location varies from the more popular account. Epidaros is located amidst the Saronic Gulf midway along the east coast of the Argolid region in Greece. The temple of Asklepios in the town of Epidauros was the preeminent site for the sick to come and seek a divine cure. The records there claim that the king of Thessaly, Phlegyas, traveled to the town with his beautiful daughter, who was the pregnant beloved of Apollo. She bore the child in the temple of Apollo and left him (the reason is unclear) on the side of a mountain. A goat herder encountered the babe surrounded by divine light, being nursed by a female goat, and guarded by a dog. Realizing that this was no ordinary child, the herder left and Asklepios was subsequently raised by Chiron and fulfilled his destiny of becoming a renowned healer. The event of Asklepios’ death is not recorded within the temple at Epidauros (Kerényi 31).

This version of the myth resides in the stone-carved poetry of an Epidaurian named Isyllos. Isyllos approaches his rendition with a certain amount of trepidation in
regards to the feminine mystique, and his version does not condemn the mother figure.

More importantly, selecting this rendition also embraces the healing techniques practiced at the temple. In fact, the manner used to cure patients echoes ideologies later employed by the psychoanalytic movement. While the cult of Asklepios at Epidaurus had attendants in the temple that functioned as physicians, the belief remained that the actual cure would come only through a healing “incubation” process which forced the sick to rely on themselves and the god/healer Asklepios:

The purpose of the visit to the sanctuary of Epidaurus was to meet this divine power halfway. This was not a visit to a doctor who simply administers medicine; it was an encounter with the naked and immediate event of healing itself, experienced sometimes in sublime and sometimes in more realistic visions. In many of the dreams the god intervened directly… Characteristically the cure is sought in sleep and dreams. In sleep the patient withdraws from his fellow men and even from his physician, and surrenders to a process at work within him. (Kerényi 24-25)

Naturally this description refers to the time period after Asklepios was slain. During the healer’s lifetime patients would go directly to him and recount their dreams so that he could administer treatment according to what the visions told him. After he perished, Asklepios maintained his healer’s position by appearing in the patients’ dreams themselves. If the god did not visit the patients in their sleep, then they would relay their dreams to one of the physicians. The physician interpreted the dream and diagnosed a “cure.” H.D. appears positioned in the photomontage as a dreamer encountering the god of healing.
In 1945 Johns Hopkins Press published a two-part series by Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein in which the authors translated numerous testimonies regarding Asklepios found in ancient literary references and inscriptions. These translations offer a unique glimpse into the healing process: “Someone suffering from a stomach ailment and wanting a prescription from Asclepius dreamed he entered the temple of the god, and the god, stretching forth the fingers on his right hand, offered them to him to eat. Having eaten five dates he was cured. For the excellent dates of the palm tree also are called fingers” (Edelstein 259). Similar to the techniques employed in psychoanalysis, patients relay their dreams to their analyst. The analyst interprets these dreams and uses what he finds to help form his/her diagnosis. Like the fingers mentioned in the testimony, objects often have a double meaning which the patient is frequently unaware of. The analyst is trained to decipher these symbolic references imbedded in the patient’s subconscious and interpret their meaning.

The placement of H.D. in the frieze relates in a very specific way to the healing process performed at Epidauros. As mentioned by Diana Collecott: “If H.D. is depicted here as ‘the dreamer,’ then she is also the visionary” (172). To this sentence I would add and also the patient. My interpretation of H.D. in the collage is of her rising from the incubation period: “[Aklepios] sent up oracles through dreams, especially the cure of diseases, and was consulted by means of the process of incubation, in which the consultant slept on the ground with his ear to the earth, so as to receive a healing dream from below” (Farnell 236). She has initiated her quest for healing by lying on the ground and allowing herself to dream. In the image she has awoken, turned herself towards Asklepios, and is relaying her visions in the hope of receiving his restorative analysis.
That Macpherson placed her partly below the frieze, as opposed to directly in it, is of significance. In this position she is humbled before the god, not placed along side him as the figures of Nike and Hygeia are. This subordinate position hints that she reveres Asklepios, and as he received adoration for his healing powers it is clear that H.D.’s position denotes she is awaiting a “cure.”

While Collecott mentions that the frieze visually represents H.D.’s “devotion to Freud,” I offer the broader suggestion that it expresses her belief in the psychoanalytic movement which garnered a great deal of attention during the time period of the scrapbook’s creation. H.D. and Bryher both sought counseling from renowned psychiatrist Havelock Ellis in 1919. A friendship formed amid the trio and they even traveled to Greece together. Coincidentally, Bryher and H.D. dubbed him “Chiron,” the initiator of Asklepios into the healing cults, and Ellis was the person responsible for securing their future introductions to Sigmund Freud and exposing them to Freud’s writings regarding psychoanalysis. In 1927 Kenneth Macpherson and Bryher visited Sigmund Freud. Bryher had undergone psychoanalysis previously and was a major supporter of the psychoanalytic movement. H.D. and Macpherson shared this interest, and for H.D. it became a consuming passion after she was accepted as both a student and analysand by Freud in 1933. That H.D. dedicated her book Writing on the Wall to “Sigmund Freud / blameless physician” leaves little doubt that she did indeed associate Freud with Asklepios by the time she wrote it in 1944. “Blameless physician” was the handle she attached to Asklepios in her book Tribute to Freud: “Was not the ‘blameless physician,’ Asklepios himself, reputed to be Phoebus Apollo’s own son?” (50). However, her encounters with Sigmund Freud were still at least two years away during the creation
of the collage. Therefore, the primary importance of the images suggests her belief in the Epidaurian methods of dream-healing and the connections between these methods and the psychoanalytic movement. Refusing the barriers imposed by time, H.D. strikes a pose mimicking the patient’s position. In this new form she binds herself, dreaming, to the classical lines of the stone frieze as well as the realm of mythology it represents. She is re-shaping herself into a classical figure in order to then enter and re-shape the myth and to heal herself. These mythical alterations keep the story from becoming stagnant, outdated, and eventually abandoned. As cultures change, so too do the stories they embrace begin to alter. H.D. manipulates the tale of Asklepios by transforming herself into a classical figure and inserting herself into the context, thus making it applicable to her contemporary context. The photomontage suggests that his ancient healing methods could become valid measures for healing trauma induced by current world issues.

H.D. was hardly the first to revitalize the mythology surrounding Asklepios. Just as Asklepios traversed various realms of being, so too did his myth encompass numerous geographical regions: Greece, Rome, and Egypt. As different societies adopted his story into their own culture, the myth inevitably incorporated elements which helped ground it to specific locations and time periods. For example, once it reached Egypt, the figure of Asklepios began to meld with the identities of local gods such as Imhotep. Incidentally, H.D.’s fascination with mythology unintentionally mimicked the same nomadic path as the legend of Asklepios; it was initiated in Greece, grew to encompass Roman ideals, and finally moved to include Egyptian interpretations. As I have mentioned previously, H.D. looked to the Greek god Hermes as a source of inspiration during her entire life. This god’s mythology also follows the same pilgrimage: Hermes of Greece, adopted into
Roman religion and renamed Mercury, and incorporated into Egyptian mythology as Hermes Trismegistus:

Hermes Trismegistus, then, was the cosmopolitan, Hellenistic Hermes, Egyptianized through his assimilation to Thoth, and in fact known throughout the Roman world as ‘the Egyptian’ *par excellence*. To some extent this intermingling of Egyptian and Greek theology and Hellenistic philosophy produced a sum that was greater than its parts, a divinity who could deservedly be placed among the *dei magni* of the pagan pantheon that presided over the Roman world. Yet around and within the Egyptian Hermes there persisted serious tensions, mirroring the peculiarities of the Graeco-Egyptian milieu that had produced him. (Fowden 24)

The line between Asklepios and Hermes blurs in a very interesting manner once the border of Egypt has been crossed: “There was ready to hand a body of philosophical texts which clearly were not produced in the elite milieu of the Platonist circles, but reflected analogous patterns of thought and experience. These were the so-called Hermetica, treaties composed in Roman Egypt and attributed to the god Hermes Trismegistus and to other members of his circle, such as Asclepius. And besides these philosophical texts there is a body of ‘technical’ Hermetica, works on magic, alchemy, astrology, and other branches of what modern scholars are pleased to call ‘pseudo-science’” (Fowden xxi). It is no coincidence that the translations of the Hermetic *Perfect Discourse* were known in Latin as the *Asclepius* (Fowden 5). This text portrays the intricate details pertaining to Hermetism and also functions to fuse the Greek/Egyptian identity of Hermes: “…the two Hermeses in the *Asclepius* now stand revealed as separate embodiments of the divine
Egyptian and the more human Greek dimensions of the composite deity Hermes Trismegistus” (Fowden 31).

H.D. took to heart this odd immigration embodied in the mythology of both Hermes and Asklepios. Her quest for self-healing, her belief in the restorative powers of dreaming, and her method of binding herself into mythological realms allow her to maneuver through time by tracing stories. The self, and thus herself, is not a static identity determined by society. The magic harnessed by the poet is the ability to use words as tools which alter stories, and thereby the self, in order to generate healing and become who one wishes to be.

**Chapter Three: Early Poetry in *Sea Garden***

Having analyzed a visual representation of H.D.’s creative method encompassed by the scrapbook’s second collage, I now wish to examine how her writing demonstrates her development of these creative notions. The chronological order of H.D.’s writing provides the basic structure. Her early Imagist poetry from 1912-1916, particularly the poems “Sheltered Garden,” “Sea Gods,” and “Hermes of the Ways,” offers us a view of the author just beginning her quest. This collection of short poems remarkably demonstrates the properties valued by the Imagist movement:

- It is true that her poems in *Sea Garden* tend to meet the principles set forth by Pound, H.D., and Aldington in 1912: she gives “direct treatment of the ‘thing’ whether subjective or objective”; she tries “to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation”—though sometimes her exclamations overrun the mark; and as for rhythm, she certainly composes “in the sequence
of the musical phrase.” Most of the poems too will meet Pound’s definition of
the “Image” as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an
instant of time,” if we allow the “complex” to hold the psychological overtones
that Pound intends and if the complex is created by the interaction of many
images within an “instant” of considerable duration. (Martz xiii)

But in addition to this, the poems offer clues to the directions her creative voice will
develop along. Even in her first poetry book, it is evident that H.D. is restless, unsatisfied
by the standards of acceptability and beauty which society deemed proper. Take, for
instance, the impulses outlined in her poem “Sheltered Garden.” It begins: “I have had
enough. / I gasp for breath” (CP 19). The speaker of the poem stands in a cultivated
garden frustrated by the plotted beauty, the pink flowers, and angered at the nearby fruit
whose taste has been sacrificed for an artificial beauty:

    I have had enough—
    border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies,
    herbs, sweet-cress.

    O for some sharp swish of a branch—
    there is no scent of resin
    in this place,
    no taste of bark, of coarse weeds,
    aromatic, astringent—
    only border on border of scented pinks.

    Have you seen the fruit under cover
that wanted light—

pears wadded in cloth,
protected from the frost,
melons, almost ripe,
smothered in straw?

(CP 19-20)

The speaker, whom we may assume is H.D., revolts at man’s methods of shaping his environment. Using clean and uncluttered imagery, she attacks the concept of “valuable” beauty through garden metaphors. The beauty of the perfect-looking pear is that it is false to nature—both to the external nature which creates it, sunlight, and in its internal nature, its subsequently flavorless flesh. She vents her frustration in her poetry; she is the speaker rebelling at the prepared “pinks” and “pears wadded.”

The poem continues akin to a prayer of violence, the speaker wishing for the wind to whip through the garden and “scatter these pink stalks, / snap off their spiced heads,” (CP 20). She then calls on the wind to carry great pine branches from a distant wood and smash them into the pampered pears and melons. She understands this means the destruction of the fruit, but this loss is outweighed in her mind by the evidence it leaves behind: “showing the fight was valiant” (CP 20). To H.D. this battle is redemptive; it is the action which cures: “this beauty, / beauty without strength, / chokes out life” (CP 20). The mind dreams the battle, which in turn cures the confined soul.

Yet the true power comes in the last stanza when the speaker assumes a new position in the poem. Thus far everything the speaker felt internally was enacted, using her observations and imagination, through the landscape. In the ninth stanza the language
shifts, the speaker who formerly spoke of herself as “I” and addressed the remarks to the unspecified “you,” seems to retreat into her own mind:

O to blot out this garden

to forget, to find a new beauty

in some terrible

wind-tortured place. (CP 21)

“O to blot out…” this is her self-plea, the actions she realizes she must undertake to escape her false environment. This prayer becomes a personal resolution and guides both the author’s life choices and creative process. H.D. dedicates her strength to searching for new beauty, to rejecting the tight cultivation of a standardized “worth.”

The emotional rebellion occurring in “Sheltered Garden” manifests itself in other poems. The sense of being an “other” seems overwhelming; she does not belong in the world which cherishes false hot-house beauty. H.D. must now discover where true beauty resides. The answer is revealed in “Sea Gods”; beauty lives in the wind-tortured place where the healing gods are housed. She must travel to their habitat, invoke them, and retrieve “the ‘beauty’ that results from the fierce clashing of natural forces” for “Her poetry and her prose, like her own psyche, live at the seething junction of opposite forces” (Martz xi).

“Sea Gods” opens with despair; the once-great gods have collapsed into the sea. They are formless, fragmentary, shifting as the water shifts. They are relics from an ancient culture, like the broken-off piece of stonework in the photomontage, neglected by the new society. According to the authorities, nothing from the human world, not even hurled challenges or accusations, interests their broken beings:
They say there is no hope
to conjure you—
no whip of the tongue to anger you—
no hate of words
you must rise to refute.

They say you are twisted by the sea,
you are cut apart
by wave-break upon wave-break,
that you are misshapen by the sharp rocks,
broken by the rasp and after-rasp. (CP 29)

It is the sea shore, its merger of two mediums, which symbolizes the “tortured place.”
The juxtaposition of water and earth creates the necessary “seething junction of opposite
forces.” The gods do not drift aimlessly in deep sea; they encounter the devastating shore
line during the tide change, “wave-break upon wave-break,” and are thrust against the
sharp rocks to become “misshapen” and “broken.”

H.D.’s speaker learned of the gods’ status. The “They” of the poem informed her,
and in doing so offered their advice against her trying to summon the gods. But the poet
will not listen. She does not approach with whipping words; instead she brings an
offering comprised of the “new beauty” she promised to find in “Sheltered Garden”:

But we bring violets,
great masses—single, sweet,
wood-violets, stream-violets,
violets from a wet marsh.

Violets in clumps from hills,
tufts with earth at the roots,
violets tugged from rocks,
blue violets, moss, cliff, river-violets.

Yellow violet’s gold,
burnt with a rare tint—
violets like red ash
among tufts of grass.

We bring deep-purple
bird-foot violets.

We bring the hyacinth-violet,
sweet bare, chill to the touch—
and violets whiter than the in-rush
of your own white surf.      (CP 30)

It is the natural beauty, the strong beauty, of the simple violet which is offered as
a sacrifice to the gods. Her bouquet holds none of the weakness she learned to see in hot-house, wadded, cultivated plants. They are natural and raw with roots attached and dirt
still tangled in their form. The violets are recorded with their contexts—wood, stream,
marsh, hills, rock, cliff, river—because their grounding in the natural environment is a crucial element responsible for their uncultivated beauty. Think of H.D.’s body in the photograph, its form an exposed offering clinging to the craggy rocks. These untainted violets are beauty in the raw, and this purity transcends all realms of existence; the flower of the earth can suddenly outdo the savage surf: “and violets whiter than the in-rush / of your own white surf” (CP 30). The violets are a pure offering and therefore powerful; they are worthy of the gods’ attention. Moreover, as H.D. carries the bouquet to the shore she associates herself with the flowers; she presents herself to the gods in a situation torn and charged instead of posed and safe. The speaker is so sure of the offering’s acceptance that she courageously ends the poem not with a plea to the gods, but rather with her version of the desired outcome as fact:

For you will come,

you will yet haunt men in ships,

you will trail across the fringe of straight

and circle the jagged rocks.

You will trail across the rocks

and wash them with your salt,

you will curl between sand-hills—

you will thunder along the cliff—

break—retreat—get fresh strength—

gather and pour weight upon the beach.
For you will come,

you will come,

you will answer our taut hearts,

you will break the lie of men’s thoughts,

and cherish and shelter us. (CP 30-31)

Her assumptions prove correct in “Hermes of the Ways.” In part one the speaker stands by the ocean shore confident that the gods reside there. Out of all the gods, she focuses on Hermes, the messenger god, the one she relates to best. She understands that Hermes, “facing three ways,” thrives in this location where the sea and shore unite to form a charged crossroad:

The hard sand breaks,

and the grains of it

are clear as wine.

Far off over the leagues of it,

the wind,

playing on the white shore,

piles little ridges,

and the great waves

break over it.
But more than the many-foamed ways
of the sea,
I know him
of the triple path-ways,
Hermes,
who awaits.          (CP 37)

As she lingers in anticipation of his emergence, she notes the landscape and her
descriptions reveal that it is restored to its natural state. The grass is “salt-crusted” and the
white stream is small, “but the water is sweet” (CP 38). The apples clinging to the boughs
of trees planted near the water are “hard, / too small, / too late ripened / by a desperate
sun /that struggles through sea-mist,” and the boughs are “twisted” and wild (CP 38).
Unlike the Sheltered Garden, there is none of the weak beauty presented by the rows of
“pinks.” In this raw environment, harsh and natural, the god Hermes works and restores.
In the final stanza the drama unfolds; in the first three lines H.D.’s speaker reaches the
shore after being lost, and almost overcome, in the sea. She calls on the god. Then in the
final three lines, much as in “Sheltered Garden,” her voice changes. She responds in
wonder to Hermes, relieved to find the god awaiting her:

    Hermes, Hermes,
the great sea foamed,
    gnashed its teeth about me;
but you have waited,
where sea-grass tangles with
    shore-grass.          (CP 39)
H.D. found the strength to pursue a new type of beauty and her reward is the emergence of Hermes. The last scene in this poem leaves H.D. in the same position we find her in the scrapbook’s second photomontage: her turning her eyes upward to the dreamed god in order to recount the healing dream. This is the moment when the dialog between the visionary poet and the god begins to unfold; it is the initiation of healing.

Chapter Four: The Walls Do Not Fall

However, the conversation cannot be conveyed using solely the Imagist form. It was too constraining for such an intricate process. She had to leave it and explore other methods which allowed for a more extensive contemplation of beauty, vision, and healing. Ezra Pound and Imagism, these were disciplines: “Her poetry of this period is always concrete, never abstract. This kind of poetry exerts a powerful discipline. The brevity it exerted, in H.D.’s case, left the reader tense; there was no relaxation in her poetry. Also—and this is absolutely true of H.D.’s poetry—Imagism obeyed Pound’s (or Hulme’s) doctrine that the image was the center of meaning and this image would carry the energy of the poem” (Guest 42). May Sinclair, a prominent critic and novelist living in London who had befriended Ezra Pound, and through him H.D., recounted in a letter to Charlotte Mew the warning she issued to Richard Aldington about the trap of the Imagist movement: “some of you will have an emotion that the ‘image’ will not carry; then where are you?” (Guest 29-30). It is exactly this problem which H.D. encountered; she was a dreamer, and although she is able to produce the sharp Imagist poetry, it was soon too restrictive a format to carry her full vision.
From 1916 through 1941 H.D. devoted most of her effort to writing novels, novellas, short stories, dramas, essays, articles, an autobiography, and translating the work of various ancient Greek writers. Her published poetry during this period, none of which adhered to Imagism, consisted of *Hymen* (1921), *Heliodora* (1924), *Collected Poems* (1925), *Red Roses for Bronze* (1931), and *The Dead Priestess Speaks* (portions: 1931, 1932, 1933, 1937). The poems did not garner the approval her early work received, and indeed H.D. felt creatively stifled.

It is only after her psychoanalytic sessions with Sigmund Freud in 1933 and 1934 that she fully engaged the creative powers harnessed in her imagination (subconscious). Manifested through her visions and dreams, she analyzes their content and works through it using a new form of poetry. This form, not surprisingly, is epic poetry—the choice of ancient Greek poets to speak of their gods and heroes. Her highly acclaimed book published in 1944 *The Walls Do Not Fall* (published in later years as the first of three poems comprising the book *Trilogy*) is a long poem, a hybrid combining mythology with the contemporary terror she endured while living in London during World War Two. H.D. linked the new form to the presence of the divine: “This is not the ‘crystalline’ poetry that my critics would insist on. It is no pillar of salt nor yet of hewn rock-crystal. It is the pillar of fire by night, the pillar of cloud by day” (Barnstone vii). As Aliki Barnstone notes in her introduction to *Trilogy*, the pillar H.D. alludes to is from the Bible: “She refers to the story of the children of Israel escaping Egypt in Exodus 13.21: ‘And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.’ Her poem, she implies, is an incarnation of God’s words, showing the path. She asks the reader to
venerate both her voice and the figure of the Woman as poet, mystical seer, and god” (vii-viii).

As critics have noted, the three poems which comprise the book (The Walls Do Not Fall, Tribute to the Angels, and The Flowering of the Rod) function as a type of palimpsest. While the literal meaning of palimpsest is a piece of parchment on which writing has been erased and then another layer of writing applied, H.D.’s poems resemble the more figurative definition of reusing something which still bears traces of its original function. As foreshadowed in the Asklepian photomontage, H.D. recycles mythological figures but alters their context in order to create new meanings. In this case she extracts gods from various religions, places them in a “tortured” and charged space combining ancient and modern contexts, and then engages them in a dialogue to receive their healing powers. As Barnstone eloquently states, H.D. has “composed a personal bible; Trilogy is H.D.’s multilayered sacred text…[which] brings together the old and the new, the scientific and pragmatic, and the esoteric and mystical. The differences between people—especially religious differences—ignite war. Trilogy shows that differences are also similarities or affinities that, with enlightenment, can ignite love rather than war, creation rather than destruction—and resurrection out of Apocalypse” (vii-ix). As we will see, that resurrection is bother personal and cultural.

The dedication for The Walls Do Not Fall reads: “To Bryher / for Karnak 1923 / from London 1942.” The importance contained in this simple setting is two fold. First, it alerts the reader that the book is set in two places, at two times, simultaneously. The narrative unfolds with the ancient city of Karnak being superimposed onto the war-torn city of London of 1942. Secondly, by incorporating Karnak into the folds of her
mythological quest she adds various elements, mainly Egyptian deities and Hermetic values, which she picked up during her voyage there. In March of 1923, H.D., her mother Helen, and Bryher set out for Egypt. H.D. enjoyed the trip so much that she cited their visit to Karnak and Luxor as the most perfect day of her life (Guest 156). Not surprisingly Egypt began to impact her view of mythology: “From now on Greece and Egypt will form an axis…This Egyptian trip taught her a respect and admiration for the Egyptian world; the Greeks would remain a constant source with their myths and heroes, yet they would have to compete with Egyptian dynasties” (Guest 157).

The poem’s dedication prepares us for the merger of the cities which takes place in part one. In the first stanza H.D. describes London: the city torn apart by air raids. The rails are removed from the town square in order to supply the raw materials needed to fashion weapons of war. She is grounded in the present time period in her beloved, and beleaguered, city: “An incident here and there, / and rails gone (for guns) / from your (and my) old town square:” (“Walls” 3). Karnak is superimposed on London in the second stanza: it moves in on a mysterious mist which is at once both colorless, gray, and yet encompasses the colored symbols of the city of Karnak: “mist and mist-grey, no colour, / still the Luxor bee, chick and hare / pursue unalterable purpose / in green, rose-red, lapis; / they continue to prophesy” (“Walls” 3).

The ruined walls of the city of Karnak, carved with the hieroglyphs, merge with the broken walls in the city of London. The symbols emerging through the mist carry meaning; they “prophesy”: “At Luxor, site of the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes, near the present village of Karnak, are the intact ruins of the temple of Amon, the greatest monument of antiquity…Amon is Ra, the Egyptian sun god. The bee in Egyptian
mythology came from the tears of Ra. The bee, chick, and hare, are all symbols of fertility and regeneration” (Barnstone 173). The Egyptian male gods are represented in these marks, these symbols carved upon the walls. But the divine female is also represented, this time by the colors: “In Egyptian writing, green is the color of fertility; Isis, a fertility goddess…The rose is also sacred to Isis. Lapis blue is associated with truth” (Barnstone 173).

Once again, the divine inhabits a conflicted area; this is a charged region similar to the shore line featured in “Hermes of the Ways,” where time and space are removed through magic so that two cities meet. As always with H.D., the destruction, the “ruin,” is the catalyst leading to union and the possibility of healing:

there, as here, ruin opens
the tomb, the temple; enter,
there as here, there are no doors:
…
ruin everywhere, yet as the fallen roof
leaves the sealed room
open to the air,

so, through our desolation,
thoughts stir, inspiration stalks us
through gloom: (“Walls” 3)
The London walls which do not fall form the shell of an ancient temple open to the sky. In this half-crippled architecture resides the opportunity for the poet to dream the gods and seek their healing measure. Her thoughts “stir,” inspiration comes, and a few lines further “shivering overtakes us” and her dream quest begins. Like London, H.D. endures the Apocalyptic enemy fire; and she too is stripped to her very foundation:

The bone-frame was made for
no such shock knit within terror,

yet the skeleton stood up to it:

the flesh? it was melted away,
the heart burnt out, dead ember,
tendons, muscles shattered, outer husk dismembered,

yet the frame held:
we passed the flame: we wonder
what saved us? what for?  (“Walls” 4)

Although her body is reduced to rubble the full destruction H.D.’s speaker envisions includes two more aspects central to her life—Womanhood and the power of the Word.

Section 2 offers the first glimpse of Womanhood under attack. Because of social standards, and H.D.’s unusual lifestyle choices, she acutely felt the stigma attached to being a woman. In the Karnak/London realm the forces attacking femininity also persist. It is another form of evil roaming the land: one she must confront, again with the help of the gods. She recalls that gods “always face two ways,” a reference to the Roman god
Janus who had two faces, one facing the past while the other looked towards the future. In ancient times the temples of Janus kept their doors open only during times of war so that the god could easily leave his holy site and intervene on behalf of the people who worshipped him. H.D calls on him to work in her favor, help her recover the old values when Woman was honored in society, and to do so she must ignore the cries of the people who ridicule the feminine:

[2]

Evil was active in the land,
Good was impoverished and sad;
…
but gods always face two ways,
so let us search the old highways

for the true-rune, the right-spell,
recover old values;

nor listen as they shout out,
your beauty, Isis, Aset, or Astarte,

is a harlot: you are retrogressive,
zealot, hankering after old flesh-pots;

(“Walls” 5)
“They” deride Woman by attacking the ancient deities which symbolize divine femininity: Isis, Aset, Astarte reduced in present times to “old flesh-pots.” As in “Sea Gods,” “they” are convinced that the gods have been discredited. Furthermore, the creative aspect of womanhood is rendered impotent. Her sex now functions as a double handicap: Woman is useless and so is any Word she creates. She is a mere “zealot,” hankering after something whose power has passed. She is nothing because of her sex, and she is also not respected as a creator—the Mother symbol—which for H.D. takes on the context of the female creator/scribe. H.D. unifies the concept of womanhood with creativity by linking goddesses here which were commonly depicted as fertile producers: “Isis was also a mother goddess, goddess of fertility, magic, and beauty, and widely worshipped for her ability to counter evil spells. The Greeks identified her with Athena and Demeter. Isis is often depicted suckling her baby son Horus; the iconography of sacred mother and child is said to be the model for Mary and Jesus. Aset or Astarte. Astarte was a Phoenician goddess of fertility, corresponding to earlier Babylonian Ishtar and later Greek Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty. In Assyrian-Babylonian art she caresses a child whom she holds in her left hand” (Barnstone 174-175.)

The battle plan is a familiar one: her home, her body, her values are all attacked, all are wounded. The resurrection can only begin by acknowledging the healing, transformative powers of the gods. She instructs the reader: “Let us, however, recover the Sceptre, / the rod of power: / … it is Caduceus; among the dying / it bears healing” (“Walls” 7). The Caduceus, of course, brings her familiar messenger god, Hermes, to the forefront and plays off the story of Asklepios and his rod:

The caduceus is a rod or wand carried by Hermes, the messenger god. It
consists of a wing-topped staff, with two serpents winding around it…

For the Romans it became a symbol of neutrality or truce and was carried by heralds and ambassadors making them immune to attack. The intertwining snakes appear on a staff in Babylonia as a symbol of the sun gods, fertility, wisdom, and healing. In alchemy, it is the symbol of the union of opposing forces. Since the 16th century it has replaced Asklepios’s one-snaked rod as a symbol of medicine, and since 1902 it has been the symbol of the medical branch of the US army. (Barnstone 175)

As mentioned in earlier paragraphs regarding the healing rituals endorsed at the Epidaurian temple of Asklepios: “The purpose of the visit to the sanctuary of Epidauros was to meet this divine power halfway. This was not a visit to a doctor who simply administers medicine; it was an encounter with the naked and immediate event of healing itself, experienced sometimes in sublime and sometimes in more realistic visions…In sleep the patient withdraws from his fellow men and even from his physician, and surrenders to a process at work within him” [Emphasis mine] (Kerényi 24-25).

In section 4 we encounter H.D. performing this first step of the healing ritual: closing herself off from all outside influences. The beauty of how she renders this process is quite startling. She emulates creatures from the phylum Mollusca—envisions herself as a shell-dweller snapping closed her “shell-jaws” against the infinite outer world—just as she imagines the oysters do to preserve themselves from the dangers lurking in the vast sea. The poet rocks shut, her body forming a wall/shell against outer circumstances to rely on what is within to create beauty. A visitor to the healing sanctuary of the god, she
surrenders to the process at work within her. The result is the pearl-of-great-price—the inner knowledge which enlightens her and creates a haven:

[4]

There is a spell, for instance,
in every sea-shell:

…

the shell-fish:
oyster, clam, mollusc

is master-mason planning
the stone marvel:

yet that flabby, amorphous hermit
within, like the planet

senses the finite,
it limits its orbit

of being, its house,
temple, fane, shrine:

it unlocks the portals
at stated intervals:

prompted by hunger,
it opens to the tide-flow:

but infinity? no,
of nothing-too-much:

I sense my own limit,
my shell-jaws snap shut

at invasion of the limitless,

…

so I in my own way know
that the whale

can not digest me:
be firm in your own small, static, limited

orbit and the shark-jaws
of outer circumstance

will spit you forth:
be indigestible, hard, ungiving,

so that, living within,
you beget, self-out-of-self,

selfless,

that pearl-of-great-price.   ("Walls" 8-9)

When she re-emerges she maintains her new found inner strength. Sections 5 through 7 describe her as a worm—a creature shunned by most but whose skills of survival are impressive. With section 8 she responds to those who mock her creativity and the power of the Word. It is the warning I quoted earlier: poets are not “non-utilitarian” and “pathetic,” and if the antagonists cannot comprehend “what words say, / how do you expect to pass judgement / on what words conceal?” ("Walls” 14). Stanzas 12, 13 and 17 of this section affirm the power of the poet as the keeper of divine knowledge, the bearer of wisdom who harvests the knowledge of the gods—even when the gods themselves have been abandoned:

for gods have been smashed before

and idols and their secret is stored

in man’s very speech,

…

he [the poet/scribe] takes precedence of the priest,

stands second only to the Pharoah.   ("Walls” 15)
In section 9 she readies herself to write and unfold the healing dream. Thoth and Hermes command that the paper and pen be prepared because, despite the mockery, people will always need books: “yet give us, they still cry, / give us books” (“Walls” 16). The incongruity of the speaker’s need for writing versus the people’s need is revealed in the next lines: “folio, manuscript, old parchment / will do for cartridge cases; / irony is bitter truth / wrapped in a little joke” (“Walls” 16). It is the war in London which makes the habit of writing seem frivolous to society at the moment: “But we fight for life, / we fight, they say, for breath, / so what good are your scribbings?” (“Walls” 17). To this H.D. responds:

this—we take them with us

beyond death; Mercury, Hermes, Thoth
invented the script, letters, palette;
…
[they] are magic, indelibly stamped
on the atmosphere somewhere,

forever; remember, O Sword,
you are the younger brother, the latter born,

your Triumph, however exultant,
must one day be over,
in the beginning

was the Word.  

(“Walls” 17)

Creativity, writing, these actions created through ideas and visions, are condoned by the gods. They are the forbearers of the Sword; only after the idea of a sword came into being could it then be crafted. Sword here represents any weapon used in war, and for London this means their tools of defense. The very people who attack the Word do not realize it is responsible for creating the item which defends them and will remain after its time has passed. H.D. clarifies this in the next section:

[11]

Without thought, invention,
you would not have been, O Sword,

without idea and the Word’s mediation,
you would have remained

unmanifest in the dim dimension

where thought dwells,

and beyond thought and idea,

their begetter,

Dream,
The last few lines propel this idea a bit further; the *vision/dream* produces the *idea* which begets the Sword’s creation. This reclaims the power of the Dream in her modern context. It asserts the worth of the Dream and the Word even in times of war; for the Sword comes from the dream/vision of creative souls even though they are shunned in times of action.

With the power of the Dream restored, the next section of the healing process may take place. Remember the story of Aklepios: the god will come in “sublime and sometimes in more realistic *visions*” (Kerényi 24-25). In section 16 the god appears momentarily, in a form both realistic and sublime: “Ra, Osiris, *Amen* appeared / in a spacious, bare meeting-house; / he is the world-father, / father of past aeons, / present and future equally; / …then I woke with a start / of wonder and asked myself, / but whose eyes are those eyes?” (“Walls” 25) The god’s identity is uncertain: Ra? Osiris? Amen? She tries to recall through the dream haze what significance the eyes played: “for the eyes (in the cold, / I marvel to remember) / were all one texture, / as if without pupil, / or all pupil, dark…” (“Walls” 25). But the image recalled shifts. The eyes were all one dark color, one texture, yet “very clear with amber/shinning,” and suddenly the speaker is struck with the fact that the god’s eyes are (“Walls” 25):

…coals for the world’s burning,

for we must go forward,

we are at the cross-roads,

the tide is turning;
it uncovers pebbles and shells,
beautiful yet static, empty

old thought, old convention;
let us go down to the sea,

gather dry sea-weed,
heap drift-wood,

let us light a new fire
and in the fragrance

of burnt salt and sea-incense
chant new paeans to the new Sun

of regeneration;
we have always worshipped Him,

we have always said,

forever and ever, Amen. ("Walls" 26)

The god himself is the source which will ignite the old world. Too much falseness—beautiful yet empty shells, scented false pinks, wadded pears—is currently harbored. The
poet carrying the coals of her dream returns to the sea, the embodiment of the tortured place we know from her Imagist poems, and gathers more fuel for the fire. With driftwood and dried seaweed she creates a new fire and no longer rests “in the cold,” unenlightened place. Through salt-scented smoke she chants prayers to the “new Sun,” at once realizing all prayers are for all gods: “The new Sun is a pun connecting the Sun God Ra with the New Son Jesus. H.D., among others, identifies Ra or Amon (Amen) with Jesus, and as in many prayers to Christ that end forever and ever, Amen, she puns on amen (from Hebrew amen), by capitalizing amen, thereby turning a Christian prayer into the regeneration of Egyptian Amon-ra” (Barnstone 180). The pun on Amen, in a word, captures the mythic metamorphosis which H.D. is in the grips of. This fire set with the coal eyes of the god illuminates the tortured place and reveals a truth which mankind has been blind to: the identity of god is one all-encompassing god—the All-father, the All-God, forever Amen.

Her healing will take place with the help of this All-God, and the time has come for their restorative dialog within the Asklepian dream to begin. She likens the dream to the Holy Ghost, a religious entity containing great power which will connect her to the gods. Her challenge is to follow the dream as it acts as an “interpreter” explaining the significance of ancient relics to the modern context. The speaker is the “spinner” who carries the “rare intangible thread/ that binds all humanity/ to ancient wisdom,/ to antiquity” (“Walls” 24). That “rare intangible thread” is the Dream:

Now it appears very clear

that the Holy Ghost,
childhood’s mysterious enigma,
is the Dream;

that way of inspiration
is always open,

and open to everyone;
it acts as a go-between, interpreter,

it explains symbols of the past
in to-day’s imagery,

it merges the distant future
with most distant antiquity,

states economically
in a simple dream-equation

the most profound philosophy,  
("Walls" 29)

Following the Dream, H.D. is led not to the Christian God she grew up with throughout her childhood; instead, she encounters a hybrid god composed of both ancient Greek and Egyptian deities embodied in the form of a ram. As we have seen, she names this divine creature Lord Amen, which links him, through a pun, to Christianity as well.
This metamorphosis is performed in section 21 through word associations: “Amen, Aries, the Ram: H.D. was deeply immersed in astrology. Aries, which in Latin means ‘the ram,’ is a constellation containing the stars of the spring equinox, and it is the first sign of the Zodiac. Early mythologies identify the Ram with Zeus and with Amon/Ammon, the ram God of Egypt” (Barnstone 180). The ram bellows:

    time, time for you to begin a new spiral,
    see—I toss you into the star-whirlpool;

    till pitying, pitying,
    snuffing the ground,

    here am I, Amen-Ra whispers,
    Amen, Aries, the Ram,

    be cocoon, smothered in wool,
    be Lamb, mothered again.       (“Walls” 30)

The Lord Amen begins to transform the speaker. While the process is issued in a “bellowing,” ferocious tone, the underlying nature of the god is one of concern for the well-being of the poet. Towards the end of the section he speaks softly to her, and adopts the characteristics of a divine mother-figure. His fleece is offered as the sheltering material of a “cocoon,” and he will take her as his “Lamb” to protect and nourish. This allows the poet to be “mothered again,” or in other words *re-born*. 
Now we must continue directly on to section 22 in which H.D. accepts the Ram’s offer and assumes the subordinate position of a child by clinging to the god/ram and referring to him as “Father”:

Now my right hand,

now my left hand

clutch your fleece;

take me home,

my voice wails from the ground;

take me home, Father:

…

hide me in your fleece,

crop me up with the new-grass;

let your teeth devour me,

let me be warm in your belly,

the sun-disk,

the re-born Sun. \(\text{\textsuperscript{\textdegree}}\) \(\text{\textsuperscript{\textdegree}}\) \(\text{\textsuperscript{\textdegree}}\) \(\text{\textsuperscript{\textdegree}}\) \(\text{\textsuperscript{\textdegree}}\) \(\text{\textsuperscript{\textdegree}}\) \(\text{\textsuperscript{\textdegree}}\) \(\text{\textsuperscript{\textdegree}}\)

(“Walls” 31)

She seeks protection, and the final act of acceptance, the yearning to re-unite with the parent figure in order to obtain the ultimate sense of protection. Like her mollusk stage, when she shut herself within herself to discover knowledge/haven (the pearl-of-great-
price), H.D. must now experience an internalization within the god. She wishes to be eaten by the Ram, processed by his body, and thus emerge “re-born.” What results from this re-birth? The poet has now, like Hermes, “become, as they once were, / personified messengers, / helpers, helpers / of the One, Amen, All-father” (“Walls” 34). She celebrates her new self, exposed and reborn, in section 25: “Amen, / only just now, / my heart-shell / breaks open,” (“Walls” 35).

But this is no Disney-style fairytale ending in “happily ever after.” H.D. knows that everything repeats, *everything is part of a cycle*, the healing will be followed by more destruction and then again more healing. She is called back to her still-suffering London self in section 29:

Grant us strength to endure
a little longer,

now the heart’s alabaster
is broken;

we would feed forever
on the amber honey-comb

of your remembered greeting,
but the old-self,

still half at-home in the world,
cries out in anger,

I am hungry, the children cry for food
and the flaming stones fall on them;

our awareness leaves us defenseless;       (“Walls” 39)

Back in the World, London is still the tortured place, the scene of Apocalypse. Although
she could rest forever in the dream, forever feeding on the sweet “honey-comb”
nourishment provided by the healing dream, her real-time body cannot rest. The bombs
fall on London, the destruction phase of the cycle continues and H.D. must confront the
skeptics again and argue her case. The hostile naysayers begin the confrontation by
attacking the very process of metamorphosis by which she has been brought to life. She
quotes them:

[38]

This search for historical parallels,
research into psychic affinities,

has been done to death before,
will be done again;

no comment can alter spiritual realities
(you say) or again,
what new light can you possibly
throw upon them?

To which she responds that each person has an individualized biological makeup which allows them to interpret the world in a unique manner. While everyone shares a similar physiology, “my mind (yours)”, it is the singular biology which creates the important distinctions as to how each person will process their surroundings:

my mind (yours),

your way of thought (mine),

each has its particular intricate map,

threads weave over and under

the jungle-growth

of biological aptitudes,

inherited tendencies,

the intellectual effort

of the whole race,

its tide and ebb;
but my mind (yours)
has its particular ego-centric
personal approach
to the eternal realities,
and differs from every other
in minute particulars,
as the vein-paths on any leaf
differ from those of every other leaf
in the forest, as every snow-flake
has its particular star, coral or prism shape. (“Walls” 51-52)
And what, exactly, has H.D.’s singular mind been able to decipher in its “personal
approach to the eternal realities”? She has seen her role as unleashing the hidden meaning
in words. It is in words that the hidden knowledge lies; and this wisdom, if translated, can
sanctify the psyche and allow it to reach heaven.

She explains this in section 39, wherein she uses the term “butterfly” which “in
Greek story often symbolizes the soul (Gr., psyche). In Christian symbolism, it represents
immortality and resurrection” (Barnstone 183). In the following lines words shelter the
soul like a cocoon, and when the moment is right—the metamorphosis through
enlightenment complete—they open and allow it to emerge:
...I know, I feel
the meaning that words hide;

they are anagrams, cryptograms,
little boxes, conditioned

to hatch butterflies...    ("Walls")

This is how the poet leads us through the wilderness. H.D., who is still before the skeptical crowd of non-believers, strengthens her argument by providing an example. She rises into the poet/scribe position of someone able to understand the secret messages housed in words, connect their meaning to ancient contexts, and thereby release the divine meanings:

[40]

For example:

Osiris equates O-sir-is or O-Sire-is;

Osiris,
the star Sirius,
relates resurrection myth
and resurrection reality
“Osiris” is a word-box stowing the identity of the All-God. H.D. translates the word, “O-sir-is or O-Sire-is,” links it to the context of the star Sirius, and deciphers the message: “resurrection myth” and “resurrection reality” are interconnected. There is destruction followed by re-birth/beauty; and the cycle repeats indefinitely” “there, as here” (section 1), in Karnak and in London.

H.D., having been the patient, spoken with the gods, and received the healing vision, was ingested by the Ram and re-born as one of the messenger gods. Her duty now is to return to the broken world immersed in the destruction of World War Two and prepare others for the healing process:

in an endeavour to make ready,

as it were, the patient for the Healer;
correlate faith with faith,

recover the secret of Isis,

which is: there was One

in the beginning, Creator,
Fosterer, Begetter, the Same-forever  (“Walls” 54-55)

The final, haunting scene of the sequence demonstrates this. She is thrust right back into the center of the chaos: bombed London. Enemy airplanes fly overhead and shriek their “zrr-hiss” into the sky: a dark sky, for there is no light either in the heavens,
the city, or the people’s downtrodden souls. The bombs drop, some of the buildings burst;
and in the confusion which ensues residents scramble blindly in the debris-filled air to
some area they hope will provide safety, a haven, a heaven. Only the final lines offer
hope to the reader that H.D. will not forget what she has learned and will therefore be
able to bring beauty out of the wreckage once again. I quote the final section, 43, here in
its entirety:

[43]

Still the walls do not fall,
I do not know why;

there is a zrr-hiss,
lightening in a not-known,

unregistered dimension;
we are powerless,

dust and powder fill our lungs
our bodies blunder

through doors twisted on hinges,
and the lintels slant
cross-wise;
we walk continually

on thin air
that thickens to a blind fog,

then step swiftly aside,
for even the air

is independable,
thick where it should be fine

and tenuous
where wings separate and open,

and the ether
is heavier than the floor,

and the floor sags
like a ship floundering;

we know no rule
of procedure,
we are voyagers, discoverers
of the not-known,

the unrecorded;
we have no map;

possibly we will reach haven,
heaven.
(“Walls” 58-59)

Just as there was the Dream before the war, so too will the Dream follow the war. The
Dream has shown her that creativity is the fuel for destruction even as it ignites beauty.
The state of destruction cannot be sustained indefinitely; for war, just as beauty, is simply
part of a cycle.

Chapter Five: End to Torment

So often when we admire particular writers, it is tempting to glorify their abilities;
additional, because we come to care about them, we wish for their biographies to end
on a note of triumph. I want to state: writing Trilogy allowed H.D. to heal, and so her
final days were spent in an emotional wholeness she had previously never been able to
achieve. But, that would be a blatant lie. It would also make me a poor reader—having
studied her works I should know better than to expect a neat ending. As I previously
mention, H.D. recognized that history is cyclical: destruction follows creativity
indefinitely. The final portion of the poet’s life demonstrated this; even in her last years she turned to writing in order to heal the wounds of her psyche.

One of the last wounds was also one of the oldest, and the man responsible for it was also the person who first introduced her to the Asklepian myth: Ezra Pound. The initiation into the myth occurred after she had a brief but vivid dream in America when she was only eighteen or nineteen years old:

The vision or picture was simply this: before sleeping or just on wakening, there was a solid shape before my eyes, no luminous cloud-pictures or vague fantasy, but an altar-shaped block of stone; this was divided into two sections by the rough stone marking; it was hardly a carved line but it was definitely a division of the surface of the rough stone into two halves. In one half or section, there was a serpent, roughly carved; he was conventionally coiled with head erect; on the other side, there was a roughly incised, naturalistic yet conventionally drawn thistle. Why this?

It is odd to think, at this very late date, that it was Ezra Pound who helped me interpret this picture….Ezra at the time was staying with his parents in a house outside Philadelphia, for the summer months. It was there, one afternoon, that Ezra said, ‘I have an idea about your snake on a brick,’ as he called it. We went to the study or library—it was a furnished house, taken over from friends—and Ezra began jerking out various reference books and concordances. He seemed satisfied in the end that this was a flashback in time or a prevision of some future event that had to do with Aesculapius or Asklepios, the human or half-human, half-divine child of Phoebus Apollo, who was slain by the thunder-bolt
or lightening-shaft of Zeus, but later placed among the stars. The serpent is certainly the sign or totem, through the ages, of healing and of that final healing when we slough off, for the last time, our encumbering flesh or skin. The serpent is symbol of death, as we know, but also of resurrection.

There was no picture of this. Ezra said airily, ‘The thistle just goes with it.’ I do not think he actually identified the thistle in connection with the serpent, but in any case it was he who first gave me the idea of Asklepios, the ‘blameless physician,’ in that connection. (“Tribute” 64-65)

Given that Pound introduced H.D. to the Asklebian myth it is fitting for the last work examined in this essay to be her piece dealing specifically with their relationship: End to Torment is a memoir of Ezra Pound written by H.D. in 1958 and published posthumously in 1979. By writing it, H.D. freed herself from her fixation on their relationship. William Carlos Williams stated it best: “Before meeting Pound is like B.C. and A.D.” (Guest 3). It was not an easy task; H.D. had to call up old experiences and manipulate them with her intellect as well as skills she acquired from hermetism, psychoanalysis, religion, and mythology.

Mythic metamorphosis once again proved to be the key to restructuring her emotions for Ezra Pound; through writing her memoir she enfolded her personality with those of other wounded women and then worked to resolve the pain. In a sense, she dreams in order to heal the women and their relationship with Ezra Pound. This united feminine figure learned to forgive and then love Ezra Pound and thereby relinquished the crippling anger. Following a typical plot in male/female relationships, H.D. imagined
bearing Ezra Pound’s child. But because this never actually occurred she needed to
develop an alternate method of conception. How could their union be “crystallized” in the
dream of this text? How could their love for one another be embodied, understood, and
expressed? H.D. turned to Hermetic principles for the answer:

This Hermetic attitude toward sex rests on religious grounds. Even God is
male and female, since he exists as life (zoé) and light (phôs) (CH I.9).
“Completely full of the fertility of both sexes and ever pregnant with his own
will, he always begets whatever he wishes to procreate” (Ascl 20). Therefore,
_procreation is a mystery of divine love, and the union of man and woman is
an adequate picture of divinity_ (Ascl 21).

However, when we analyze Hermetic ideas, we should never forget that
Hermetism is not a fixed system but a way, i.e., an evolution with several
stages. Granted that sex be allowed or even compulsory in the early stages,
what happens in the last one? Although our treatises give no direct answer to
the question, I am inclined to assume that, once perfection has been reached
by means of Hermetic initiation, _sexuality is somehow overcome or superseded._
Instead of being exterior, it becomes purely interior.

For the goal of Hermetic gnosis is to be born again in the Ennead like the
first self-generated man, who was male and female (CH I.12)….  

When we have gone through this process, _we become able to beget
spiritual children, like Hermes_ (NH VI.52.20, 52.26-27, 53.29-30).
*However, this peculiar way of begetting is different from normal
procreation. It can be likened to divine sexuality…*
In the *Walls Do Not Fall*, H.D. experienced her re-birth through her interaction with the All-God. In *End To Torment*, she used her metamorphic powers to beget a new, of-peace self “in a mystery of divine love” where “sexuality is overcome or superseded...[and ] becomes purely interior.” H.D. *imagined* the child she and Ezra Pound might have had: it is divine, what I label as a “Soul Child”, an *imagined spirit she pictured as the product of pure love*. Based on a real child she saw only for a brief moment, the Soul Child appears throughout the memoir, spliced into her recollections.

There is no linear pattern concerning the memories H.D. selects. One catches her fancy and she describes it regardless of what year it occurred in. This style imparts a dream quality to the narrative; the memories are blurred, fragmented, while the emotions of H.D. come across clearly. To help make sense of the narrative, we need to focus on a number of characters, in particular: Ezra Pound, the Soul Child, Dorothy Pound, Frances Gregg, and Sheri Martinelli (“Undine” in the memoir”).

Just as in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, the reader must understand that there are two time sequences unfolding simultaneously. We have the *physically real* seventy-two year old H.D. living at the Küsnacht sanatorium in Switzerland, where she has been since her complete nervous breakdown at the end of World War Two. At the urging of her psychiatrist, Dr. Erich Heydt, H.D. began to explore her restless feelings centered on Ezra Pound, who was then imprisoned at St. Elizabeth’s mental institution in Washington, D.C. It was Heydt’s questions, and the article “A Weekend with Ezra Pound,” sent to her by her former husband Richard Aldington, which opened the floodgate of emotions in her. These emotions threatened to overwhelm her, and she knew she must write in order
to understand and free herself from them. She chose to do so by writing dated journal entries from March 7 through July 13, 1958, and then compiled them into the short memoir *End to Torment*.

The second time sequence plays out in her *mind*. H.D. recalls various memories centered on Ezra Pound. The chronological order is ignored in favor of specific themes: H.D.’s romantic encounters with Ezra Pound; the wounds he opened in her and other women, specifically their former lover Frances Gregg, his wife Dorothy Shakespear (Pound), and his disciple Sheri Martinelli. These mental scenarios are resolved by linking her identity with those of the other wounded women and pulling in mythological figures whose tales embody and comment on their struggle. Just as healing came through the divine intervention of the All-God in the *The Walls Do Not Fall*, so too does *End to Torment* create a spiritual redeemer: the Soul Child. All of these mythological themes are envisioned in her mind while her physical self remained grounded at, or near, the Küsnacht sanatorium in Switzerland with Dr. Heydt. The scenarios at other locations are either recollected from her past or visualizations created by her imagination.

Only one character, the Soul Child, like Hermes, transcends both time sequences. While out with Dr. Heydt, H.D. saw the *actual* child; however, the boy later emerged as the *imagined* child she might have bore with Ezra Pound—a Soul Child, a divine spirit of love. This child, like Asklepios, is *both human and divine*: he is a real boy observed by H.D. and through her visions transformed into a divine being. Again, the poet borrowed an element from reality and altered its context in order to create a new story. To understand how this unfolds, it is crucial to realize H.D.’s conception of mythic
metamorphosis as a healing tool was profoundly affected by her analytic sessions with Sigmund Freud in 1933 and 1934:

That is to say, he [Freud] had brought the past into the present with his *the childhood of the individual is the childhood of the race*—or is it the other way round?—*the childhood of the race is the childhood of the individual*. In any case (whether or not, the converse is true), he had opened up, among others, that particular field of the unconscious mind that went to prove that the traits and tendencies of obscure aboriginal tribes, as well as the shape and substance of the rituals of vanished civilizations, were still inherent in the human mind—the human psyche if you will. But according to his theories the soul existed explicitly, or showed its form and shape in and through the medium of the mind, and the body, as affected by the mind’s ecstasies or disorders. About the greater transcendental issues, we never argued. But there was an argument implicit in our very bones.  

(“Tribute”12-13)

This is a key concept which H.D. latched on to from her discussions with Freud: “*the childhood of the individual is the childhood of the race*—or—*the childhood of the race is the childhood of the individual*.” She agreed with the Professor that the “substance and rituals of vanished civilizations” were somehow retained in the human mind/psyche. For her, specifically, this hereditary information was revealed in mythological/religious texts. These stories captured the universal questions each generation faces: love, hate, life, and death.
“However, there was an argument implicit in our very bones.” It is the argument about the condition of the soul that H.D. ties into her self-healing in *End to Torment*. Psychoanalysis, whether led by Freud or Heydt, could only help her so much because according to their theories her creative works were signs of a “hysterical” mind with its “ecstasies and disorders.” H.D. had to hold fast to her convictions that her writing functioned as a central component in her healing process, not simply as a symptom. She would write her dream-memoir to confront the issue of the soul: Ezra Pound’s soul, her soul, their *Soul Child*.

*The childhood of the individual is the childhood of the race*—H.D. understood that to link herself to healing mythological stories, “the childhood of the race,” she needed to recollect “the childhood of the individual,” specifically *her* childhood. But her precarious state of mind made this a more daunting task than it would be for most people. Hyper-sensitive, H.D. could lose her precarious grip on mental stability if her emotions were overwhelmed—and her past was indeed fraught with peril where memories, like landmines, could trigger emotions to explode her psyche. And so she eased into her memories by recalling a tender moment with the boy who knew her best. This is young Ezra Pound, “Ray,” who befriended and loved not the mature poet H.D., but rather the young Hilda Doolittle.

*End to Torment* opens with her entry from March 7, 1958: “Snow on his beard. But he had no beard, then.” She must force herself to remember the *boy* Ray (Ezra beardless); this is who remembers the *girl* Hilda. It is Ray and Hilda who must be remembered in order to reconstruct *childhood*. She is tentative at first due to her
difficulty in recollecting him; she can’t quite discern the color of his eyes or if he wore a hat as they played in the snow covered forest:

His eyes are his least impressive feature. But am I wrong? They seem small; color? Pebble-green? Surely not an insignificant feature. Gothic, as they call it, moonlight drifts through the etched trees. Cold?

Some sort of rigor mortis. I am frozen in this moment.

Perhaps I have held it all my life, it is what they call my “imagery”; even now, they speak of “verse so chiseled as to seem lapidary,” and they say, “She crystallizes—that is the right word.” They say, “that is the right word.”

This moment must wait 50 years for the right word. Perhaps he had said it, perhaps in the frost of our mingled breath, the word was written.

(“End” 3)

The word which comes to represent everything about H.D. and her writing, “crystallizes,” is born in that moment in their mingled breath. For better or worse, her life story is inevitably tied to Ezra Pound from then on. A few lines later she describes her first kiss with him. Appropriately, it foreshadows the combined ecstasy and danger of their relationship:

First kisses? In the woods, in winter—what did one expect? Not this. Electric, magnetic, they do not so much warm, they magnetize, vitalize.

We need never go back. Lie down under the trees. Die here. We are past feeling cold; isn’t that the first symptom of rigor mortis?

They used to say, “Run around, children; it’s all right as long as you don’t stop running.” Had I stopped running?
Stop running for a moment, if you dare call him back. (“End” 4)

Why was it “daring” for H.D. to recollect him? Essentially it is because he functions as the great element of destruction in her life. Like the air raids of World War Two which destroy sections of London and allow H.D. to envision Karnak, Ezra’s appearances in her life always signal turmoil and ruin out of which H.D. must create beauty. He inevitably destabilizes her sense of reality and forces her to retreat into her creative world in order to find healing and shelter. This is the danger and excitement harmonized in their first kiss—it links their lives, but also hints as the deadening elements their relationship creates: the rigor mortis effect.

This rigor mortis functions on two planes of existence: in the physical self of H.D. as well as her creative self. Just as she describes her physical self as “frozen” by their first kiss, so too would her writing have become paralyzed by Ezra Pound if she had remained his lover. In fact, she wonders if her “crystalline” style isn’t frozen in time to that relationship:

I wait for letters with the intense apprehension with which I waited almost 50 years ago, when Ezra left finally for Europe. Through the years, I have imposed or superimposed this apprehension on other people, other letters. A sort of rigor mortis drove me onward. No, my poetry was not dead but it was built on or around the crater of an extinct volcano. Not rigor mortis. No, No! The vines grow much more abundantly on those volcanic slopes. Ezra would have destroyed me and the center they call “Air and Crystal” of my poetry.

(“End” 35)
No, she sees, that moment in time shattered, and she moved on. The “crater of an extinct volcano” is her relationship with Ezra Pound. The H.D. waiting anxiously for letters is in fact young Hilda Doolittle still living in America while her fiancé, Ezra Pound, ventured off to Europe after a scandalous dismissal from his teaching position as Wabash College. She was unaware that the most fascinating person she has ever known, and had given her heart to, was about to abandon her. This “extinguishes” the volcano; it became “extinct.”

The naïve Hilda learned of the Wabash scandal from Ezra Pound himself, but his dismissal of her trickled down through hearsay:

[Ezra speaking to H.D.] “They say in Wyncote [his hometown which was in uproar over the much gossiped reasons of his dismissal from Wabash College] that I am bi-sexual and given to unnatural lust.” I did not understand the implication of the words. Nowadays any sophisticated teenager would laugh at them. But this is—1906? 1907?

“You must come away with me, Dryad.” “How can I? How can I?” His father would scrape up enough for him to live on. I had nothing. “Anyway,” an old school friend confided, as if to cheer me up, “they say he was engaged to Mary Moore, anyhow. Bessie Elliot could have had him for the asking. There was Louise Skidmore, before that.” What is it? What is it? The engagement, such as it was, was shattered like a Venetian glass goblet, flung on the floor.

(“End” 15)

This was the first severance in their relationship. Distraught, H.D. found comfort in the very “unnatural lust” she was originally bewildered by; she fell passionately in love with a girl named Frances Gregg. This relationship was arguably the most intensely
passionate and sexually gratifying one she ever had. Frances was the woman all of H.D.’s
subsequent female lovers were compared to. In fact, she often selected her future female
companions based on physical resemblances they shared with Frances: some had her
eyes, others her hair, but none ever came close in comparison to the complete woman.
So what became of this romance? As one might expect, Ezra Pound re-entered the picture
and complicated everything. This tension serves as a major theme in *End to Torment* as
H.D. seeks to heal her anger towards Ezra Pound over ruining her relationship with
Frances Gregg.

Ezra Pound began to cripple their relationship when he returned to visit his
parents in Pennsylvania in 1911. He asked to visit H.D., and promptly began a sexual
relationship with both her and Frances. H.D. chronicled this time in the story “Her,” and
as Barbara Guest observed:

That H.D.’s emotional prose is based on fact is corroborated by the
journal, or diary, Frances kept of her life, which has survived. She has
written: “Two girls in love with each other, and each in love with the
same man. Hilda. Ezra. Frances.” She records that it was from Ezra
she received her first kiss. (Guest 26)

But the young girls were not enough to keep his interest and he soon left again for
Europe. H.D. and Frances resumed their relationship, the intensity mounted, and they
became inseparable. When Mrs. Gregg decided to take Frances on a tour of Europe, she
invited H.D. to accompany them. Of course, this led the girls right back to Ezra’s
territory and again he re-entered their relationship and wreaked havoc. This time,
however, his motives were somewhat less self-indulgent.
Ezra Pound recognized H.D.’s literary gift. While the women toured London, Ezra impressed Hilda with his growing circle of literary friends. Enraptured with the exciting European city life, which was such a far cry from her rural Moravian life in America, H.D. decided to remain in Europe when Frances and her mother returned to America. However, this is not the end of the Hilda-Ezra-Frances saga.

This love triangle story is behind an important early passage in *End to Torment* where H.D. points to her creative tactic of self-healing. She pulls the memories of Ezra Pound and Frances Gregg together with the key concept of *childbirth*. This sets the stage for the Soul Child to eventually emerge and thereby heal her anger with Ezra Pound in regards to Frances:

I did not see him [Ezra] at the time of my first confinement, 1915. I lost that child. [This was her stillborn daughter conceived with her husband Richard Aldington.] The second was four years later, 1919. [Her only child, Perdita, fathered by her lover Cecil Gray.] He hurtles himself into the decorous St. Faith’s Nursing Home, in Ealing, near London. Black beard, soft black hat, ebony stick—something unbelievably operatic—directoire overcoat, Verdi….Naturally, I looked no sylph. He seemed to beat with the ebony stick like a baton. I can’t remember. Then, there is a sense of his pounding, pounding (*Pounding*) with the stick against the wall. He had banged that way, with a stick once before, in a taxi, at a grave crisis in my life. This was a grave crisis in my life. It was happening here. “But,” he said, “my only real criticism is that this is not my child.”
I wondered who let him in. I did not know he was coming. From me, screams were inhibited, prohibitive. Did I want to scream? I was sorry that my appearance shocked him. The next day at noon, March 31, 1919, the child was born.

The first time, in the taxi, was before I was married. Frances Gregg had filled the gap in my Philadelphia life after Ezra was gone, after our “engagement” was broken. Maybe the loss of Ezra left a vacuum; anyway, Frances filled it like a blue flame. I made my first trip to Europe with her and her mother, summer 1911. Frances wrote, about a year after her return to America, that she was getting married (“When this letter reaches you, I shall be married.”) She said that one of the objectives of her marriage to this English University Extension lecturer—or in fact the chief object—was a return to Europe so that she could join me; we would go to Belgium together where “Louis” was lecturing.

I found Ezra waiting for me on the pavement outside of the house, off Oxford Circus, where I had a room. His appearance was again unexpected, unpredictable. He began, “I as your nearest male relation…,” and hailed a taxi. He pushed me in. He banged with his stick, pounding (Pounding), as I have said. “You are not going with them.” I had seen them the day before at their hotel, off Victoria Station. It was all arranged. Ezra must have seen them afterwards. “There is a vague chance that the Egg,” (he called her), “may be happy. You will spoil everything.” Awkwardly, at Victoria Station, I explained to a married Frances, with a long tulle
traveling veil, that I wasn’t coming. I had changed my mind. Awkwardly, the husband handed me back the cheque that I had made out for my ticket. Glowering and savage, Ezra waited till the train pulled out.

(“End” 7-9)

Ezra Pound flows through her memories of two great crisis points in her life. His presence is marked by the force of his character. In each situation he overshadowed her decisions; he arrived unexpectedly and with pounding—Pounding: she puns on his last name—force redirected her life. By not leaving with Frances and Louis, H.D. remained in London and allowed her courtship with Richard Aldington to intensify. As we have learned, the two married, became well known Imagistes, had a stillborn child, and ventured into extramarital affairs. H.D.’s was with a musician named Cecil Gray, and during their brief union they conceived the only child H.D. ever had: a daughter named Perdita. Although she reconciled with Richard their relationship soon collapsed and they never lived together as man and wife again. H.D. found her life-partner shortly after giving birth to Perdita. The woman was Annie Winifred Ellerman (known as Bryher), daughter of a wealthy English shipping tycoon. The two women engaged in a tumultuous relationship for the duration of their lives. In many respects Bryher assumed a role of authority in H.D.’s life—one Ezra Pound once claimed. Ironically, Ezra Pound and Bryher could not stand one another, and each criticized the other’s influence on H.D.’s life. This tension also appears in End to Torment when H.D. describes Bryher’s vehement opposition to H.D. reconciling with Ezra Pound. As for Frances, her life took a tragic turn. Early on in World War Two, H.D. suffered the loss of Frances Gregg:

When H.D. had given Frances’ letters to Silvia for safe keeping, she
had written that there was such a charge in the atmosphere around Frances that it “caused an explosion and without exception destroyed something near it.” . . . But the letters she wanted to keep. “I simply do not want quite all of F. to burn into high-explosive.” These last letters from Frances to H.D. were written in 1934. When Plymouth was bombed in 1941, Frances, her mother, and her daughter were killed—exploded.

Their house was the only direct hit in that section of Plymouth. (Guest 229-230)

Meanwhile, Ezra Pound married Dorothy Shakespear who patiently endured his affairs. After he met a musician named Olga Rudge in 1922, the three remained in a ménage-a-trois relationship until his death. Each of the women would have preferred to be his only mate, but Ezra Pound wanted the best of both worlds and in this case got it. Despite matrimonial vows, children, etc., Ezra Pound kept his relationship with both women. Barbara Guest recounts how H.D. learned of his choices, specifically his illegitimate daughter Maria, and how this led to the second great rift in the relationship between the two poets:

It was a time [1938] of old ghosts before the world’s death. Very soon there came another letter from Pound telling H.D. that Olivia Shakespear had died. . . . Ezra asked H.D. to come to the flat in Kensington that had belonged to Mrs. Shakespear to help him sort out her effects. . . . While they rummaged, they talked. Ezra told her more completely about what had recently been happening to him; he explained the birth of Maria, whose mother was Olga Rudge. She learned that the daughter was being raised by a “friend” in the Tyrol. . . . He was stirring up memories, opening wounds.
She began to believe now that Ezra had been cruelly blind to Dorothy, just as he had been to her. The combined effect of the Shakespear flat, the familiar objects, her enforced intimacy with Ezra began to create a kind of anger in her toward him. She would later write to Bryher that “it was the way Ezra did not seem to see what he might be doing to each and everyone of the crowd…It did upset me because I might have been landed in just such a mess if I had not broken out with that past. That was the nightmare—there but for the grace of God!”

This time H.D. would be the one who turned away. Disgusted by his choices, H.D. broke off their final appointment to see each other the next day. The two would not fully reconcile until she healed herself by writing *End to Torment*.

And so we return to the text, aware of the biography H.D. uses in unexplained fragments. We have witnessed the birth of Perdita, and how Ezra’s action of “Pounding” his cane in the hospital links him to the memory of H.D. being forced to abandon Frances Gregg. Knowing how and why H.D. sympathized with the often cruelly-used Dorothy Shakespear, it comes as no surprise to see Ezra Pound’s wife being pulled into the dream memoir. Through a deft metamorphosis, H.D. confronts her continuing anger with Pound by returning to his treatment of Dorothy.

The article “A Weekend with Ezra Pound” gave her the opportunity. The article was written by David Rattray who visited Ezra Pound in St. Elizabeth’s mental asylum. During the visit Dorothy sat in the corner of Ezra’s room in order to be painted by his latest disciple (and possible lover), a young female artist named Sheri Martinelli who was obsessed with Ezra Pound. H.D. read this and manipulated the text in order to elevate
Dorothy to a divine being: a “sea-god,” an entity we know from her early poem of the same title, a deity which lives in the tortured space of the sea shore:

Dorothy Shakespear, Dorothy Pound, the “Weekend” article tells us, sits in a corner, “her corner,” sheltered, not wishing to be seen. I had a letter from her yesterday, the first in many years. I keep looking for her in the Canto series, Rock-Drill. To me, she is Leucothea, who in the last section, had pity on the ship-wrecked Odysseus. [Odysseus is Ezra’s alter-ego.] She is “leukos, Leukothea / white foam, a sea gull.”

Undine [Sheri Martinelli], in the “Weekend,” is sketching D.P., as Dorothy signed herself in the letter. Undine is reported to have said, “I think she has a beautiful profile, but it is so difficult. . . .” It is indeed difficult. We don’t hear enough of D.P. and her heroic fortitude, though I do not visualize her as Penelope in this special instance, but rather as that “mortal once / Who now is a sea-god.” [Quote from Pound’s Canto 95] (“End” 31)

Dorothy is placed in the tale of Odysseus, the alter-ego Ezra Pound uses for himself in his poetry. In this case, H.D. restores power to Dorothy by visualizing her not in the expected role of Penelope, but rather as Leucothea, the one who pities Odysseus/Ezra, rescuing Odysseus when his raft was wrecked.

There is also a more subtle transformation beginning, and it is hidden in the change of Dorothy’s full name into initials:

_Dorothy Shakespear_ meets _Ezra Pound_

Dorothy Shakespear marries Ezra and becomes _Dorothy Pound_

Dorothy Pound writes and becomes _D.P._
Hilda Doolittle meets Ezra Pound

Hilda Doolittle almost marries Ezra; would have been Hilda Pound

Hilda writes and becomes H.D.

H.D. empathetically merged her identity with D.P. through word associations, just as she once manipulated Amon-ra who became Amen and finally the All-God, Lord Amen. The women, after they encounter Ezra Pound, become different creatures. Hilda Doolittle undergoes the metamorphosis into H.D., and Dorothy Shakespear into D.P. The date detailing Dorothy’s name transformation is noted as: “March 30, Palm Sunday,” a religious day (“End” 31). How appropriate that Dorothy was transformed into a sea-god, and super-imposed on H.D., on a holy holiday. As Leukothea, she/they bring order to the sea’s pounding rather than being controlled by it.

Given the name transformation hints, it is not surprising that very next day’s entry details the merger of H.D. with D.P.: “My story as lived out in the second war in London might well have been that of Dorothy Shakespear; her story could not have been, but becomes, in retrospect, mine” (“End” 32). Stories are interchangeable. “Of course, we need not remind our readers, if we ever have any, that his [Ezra] father’s name was Homer” (“End” 28). Homer Pound, father of the poet Ezra Pound who adopted the character Odysseus as his alter-ego. D.P/Penelope pulled into the life of Ezra/Odysseus. To merge D.P. and H.D. means the Homeric position of wife/lover to Ezra is once again open for H.D. to imagine herself in. As his lover, what would have happened if they conceived a child? Who might that child have been? How might her anger be redeemed?

On “April 4, Good Friday,” another holy day, we find out. H.D. re-describes a scene she mentioned in an earlier journal entry. The original description was on March
16th: Hysterical from remembering Ezra in Philadelphia, H.D. was seated by Dr. Heydt on a train station bench. While Erich held her hands trying to calm her, she spied the child: “A small male child with short red-gold curls poked into the market basket of the woman beside us” (“End” 21). Red-Gold was the color of Ezra’s shocking hair. She will transform this boy into the divine Soul Child she would have conceived with Ezra. He is her dream vision, the ground of her healing. The April recollection begins the transformation by merging the memory with a religious reference: “The child reaches into the market basket of the woman on the bench beside us. His curls are short and red and gold. He is the ‘fiery moment’ incarnate. How many loaves and fishes are here?... ‘Pomona, Pomona. Christo Re, Dio Sole’” (“End” 33).

There are two keys to unlocking the April description of the boy. The first key is the “fiery moment.” This is a double reference: H.D. puts the phrase in quotations because it is something she wrote at the end of her March 11th journal entry, and it is also an allusion to another story, “Séraphita”:

Pedantically, he [Erich] questioned my phrasing of Eva Hesse [a critic who wrote about Ezra Pound], “She says it was to put you in the right light—ins rechte Licht—that he [Ezra Pound] founded the imagistische Schule [Imagist movement].”

Séraphita. A story by Balzac. The Being, he-her, disappears or dies in the snow. Séraphitus. Ezra brought me the story.

The perfection of the fiery moment can not be sustained—or can it?

(“End” 11)

In Balzac’s tale a hermaphroditic “Angelic Spirit” is born to a spiritually enlightened couple: the Baron de Seraphitz and his wife. The child comprehends the realm of the
Divine and therefore seldom interacts with the people of the town—Earthly pursuits are of no interest to a being capable of understanding the treasures of Heaven. However, after the child’s parents die he/she seeks some companionship and therefore befriends a few villagers. At the approximate age of seventeen the hermaphrodite becomes the subject of romantic affection for both a man and a woman. In the presence of the human female, Minna, the hermaphrodite appears as a male—Séraphitus. To the man, Wilfrid, it appears in female form—Séraphita. Both humans are consumed with trying to love the hermaphrodite; Wilfrid would possess it through strength, Minna through devotion. However, the hermaphrodite will have no physical contact with the mortals, nor offer any love other than that concerned with friendship. The creature is on a higher spiritual level, its only goal is to reunite with God. It wishes in the meantime, to help its human companions see the “true Light,” meaning the love of God and thereby salvation.

Séraphitus/ Séraphita also knows that Minna and Wilfrid are destined only for one another. The last chapter portrays the death of Séraphita/Séraphitus which enacts the theologies outlined by Emanuel Swedenborg: “…Divine state during which time his soul is woman and his body man” (Balzac 33). The creature’s body is transformed into “HE” while the spirit, female in its essence, breaks free and ascends into the divine light as a Seraph (a type of angel associated with purity and light) (Balzac 79). This light, the light of God, is so bright, so fiery, it threatens to consume Minna and Wilfrid, who are stationed next to the Seraph’s shed body:

Their eyes, veiled to the things of Earth, were opened to the Brightness of Heaven….They dared neither question him [the Seraph] nor contemplate him; they stood in the shadow of that Presence as beneath the burning rays
of a tropical sun, fearing to raise their eyes lest the light should blast them.

(Balzac 80)

The Seraph ascends to heaven, his transformation also altering the mortals who have now become Seers/Prophets: “Strength [Wilfrid] and Love [Minna]! what heights, what depths in those two entities, whom the Seraph’s first prayer placed like two links, as it were, to unite the immensities of the lower worlds [Earth] with the immensity of the higher universe [Heaven]! They comprehended the invisible ties by which the material worlds are bound to the spiritual worlds” (Balzac 83). With this new vision Minna and Wilfrid return to their village to spread the “Word,” the divine message of God.

We must jump ahead four days, to the March 15th journal entry, to learn how H.D. interprets the tale of Séraphita:

The significance of “first love” cannot be overestimated. If the “first love” is an uncoordinated entity, Angel-Devil—or Angel-Daemon or Daimon, Séraphitus-Séraphita—what then? Find a coordinated convention, Man-Hero who will compensate, complete the picture. By what miracle does the mariage du ciel et de la terre [marriage of the sky and the earth] find consummation?

It filled fantasies and dreams, my prose and poetry for ten years. But in the end, intellectual and physical perfection, the laurel wreath of the acclaimed achievement must be tempered, balanced, re-lived, re-focused or even sustained by the unpredictable, the inchoate, challenged by a myth, a legend—the poet (Vidal, shall we say), changed to Wolf or Panther, hunted down and captured.

(“End” 19)
The “fiery moment” plays off the meanings embedded in the story of Séraphita. Ezra Pound introduced her to the story, and at the same time it is their story. They are the human counterpoints to the characters Minna and Wilfrid. Both poets are “… keepers of the secret,/ the carriers, the spinners/ of the rare intangible thread/ that binds all humanity/ to ancient wisdom,/ to antiquity;” in this case “ancient wisdom” means the divine wisdom (Trilogy 24). Ezra Pound, like Wilfrid, embodies the “Spirit of Wisdom,” while H.D. enacts the role of the “Spirit of Love.” Only together can they fulfill their mission and guide others to healing, to “God.”

In the passage above we see H.D. wonder how this plot can be enacted. How does the marriage of “du ciel et de la terre,” sky and earth—or in this case Heaven and Earth—reach consummation? She explores one possibility in End to Torment: find a coordinated convention, a Man-Hero, and let it be challenged by a myth. H.D. is Minna, and the Man-Hero, i.e. Wilfrid, is Ezra Pound. The “coordinated convention” of a consummated marriage would be a child. The red and gold haired boy becomes this child: he is both a real child, the actual child at the train station; and he becomes the imagined child of Ezra Pound and H.D., divine like the Seraph.

This leads us directly to the second key in the passage which unlocks the Soul Child’s identity. It is when H.D. quotes: “Pomona, Pomona. Christo Re, Dio Sole,” which is a combination of lines from Ezra Pound’s Cantos 79 (“Pomona, Pomona”) and 83 (“Christo Re, Dio Sole”). H.D. reveals the full implication of this line in her next journal entry, which appropriately explains the Christ, “Christo,” reference on “April 5, Easter Sunday.” Just as Christ was resurrected on this date, so too does H.D. bring their Soul Child to life and also resurrects her love for Ezra Pound. Guided by their spirit child,
H.D. is able to face her dear friends (Bryher and Sylvia Beach visiting her for Easter) who are adamantly opposed to H.D caring for Ezra Pound. Their anger is justified—his pro-Mussolini newscasts supported anti-Semitism. Many people, including Sylvia, suffered indescribable horrors in concentration camps. But H.D. knows she must forgive Ezra Pound, and it is their spirit child, the “fiery moment incarnate,” who reminds her that in the fire, the destruction—the tortured space—that Ezra creates, beauty can still emerge:

April 5, Easter Sunday

“But,” he said, “my only real criticism is that this is not my child.”

This [the Soul Child] is the child but a long time after, drawn into consciousness by Erich Heydt, stabilized, exactly visualized, one summer day on the crowded platform of the Zürich-Stadelhofen station.

The Child was with us when George Plank, Bryher, and I discussed the “Weekend” and I laughed about Ezra, for the first time in the 12 years of his confinement….There is no reason to accept, to condone, to forgive what Ezra has done. Sylvia [Beach] made it very clear to me last night. And here, I should renounce my hope of recalling Ezra, if I dare think of Sylvia’s confinement in a detention camp, her near-starvation, the meager rations shared with her by her friend Adrienne Monnier, during a term of hiding. Dare I go on? There is no reason to hope for his release. “He has books, everything; students come to me in Paris and tell me about him. Fascist. Those dreadful people he knows—that man—.” “Yes,” I said, “I know, news items have been sent me, but…. ” “There is a group there. He
has everything…” “I know.” “It was a great mistake, that official prize they gave him.” [Bollingen Prize in Poetry for the Pisan Cantos] I said, “But…."

I said, “But.” There is no argument, pro or con. You catch fire or you don’t catch fire. “This fruit has a fire within it, / Pomona, Pomona. / No glass is clearer than are the globes of this flame / what sea is clearer than the pomegranate body / holding the flame? / Pomona, Pomona.”

(“End” 33-34)

Yes, H.D. knows Ezra sinned. But like Wilfrid (who committed numerous sins before meeting Séraphita and adjusting his ways,) he must be forgiven and allowed the opportunity to change. Additionally, H.D. must forgive him, even though there is no “reason” which would appear adequate to Bryher and Sylvia, because she can only complete her purpose with his help. Minna and Wilfrid together can spread the Word, so too must H.D. and Ezra Pound influence each other. Each of them possesses a certain aspect which allows them to understand parts of the Divine; together they can comprehend much more:

The virtues we acquire, which develop slowly within us, are the invisible links that bind each one of our existences to the others,—existences which the spirit alone remembers, for Matter has no memory for spiritual things. Thought alone holds the tradition of the bygone life. The endless legacy of the past to the present is the secret source of human genius. Some receive the gift of form, some the gift of numbers, other the gift of harmony. All these gifts are steps of progress in the Path of Light. Yes, he who possesses a single one of them touches at that point the Infinite. Earth has divided the Word…
into particles, she has reduced it to dust and has scattered it through her works, her dogmas, her poems. If some impalpable grain shines like a diamond in a human work, men cry: “How grand! how true how glorious!” That fragment vibrates in their souls and wakes a presentiment of heaven: to some, a melody that weans from earth; to others, the solitude that draws to God. To all, whatsoever sends us back upon ourselves, whatsoever strikes us down and crushes us, lifts or abases us,—that is but a syllable of the Divine Word.

(Balzac 76)

“There is no argument, pro or con. You catch fire or you don’t catch fire.” Either one is gifted to understand elements of the divine, or one is not. Both Ezra Pound and H.D. possess the ability, they “catch fire” as it were. Each of them has created poems which contain “some impalpable grain [which] shines like a diamond” in their “human work.” The unity of H.D. and Ezra Pound, their healed relationship, fosters a greater good: a more complete understanding of the Divine—represented by the Soul Child.

The resurrection was a success. The next day, Easter Monday, H.D. received word from her trusted friend Norman Pearson that Ezra Pound might soon be liberated. And amongst her Easter letters is one from Pound’s daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz. It says: “There is hope of having father with us soon,” which of course means Ezra, but also allows the word “father” to play off the significance of Jesus and the importance of Easter Sunday as the date of his return to the heavenly Father.

Throughout the book the child reappears in flashes, glimpses, half-hallucinated moments. Then, on May 23rd H.D. realized his other significance:

The Idol that should have been, that could have been, that was somehow
“hidden,” was, is the *Wunderkind* [Wonder-child]. If I was not the Child, as I obviously was not (as a child), I would have the Child. . . . I never told him [Heydt] of it but the Child at the Stadelhofen station, that summer day, before I went to America for my 70th birthday, was the Child, the *Eros*. . . . There must be others, perhaps many others. And Ezra, at one time, was an Idol, an Image of its adolescence, in its Ariel or Séraphitus Stage. And all this is long ago, and today, and tomorrow, and “existentialist” as Erich would say. (“End” 52)

The Eros-child is the universal Love child; the spirit of *Child*. He is the creation born out of the platonic love and wisdom that H.D. and Ezra Pound share. The Hermetic principles are fulfilled through him; physical sex is surpassed, Ezra and H.D. created this mystery child through their divine love. “*When we have gone through this process, we become able to beget spiritual children, like Hermes...*”…and like Eros.

For H.D. their Wunderkind healed one section of their relationship, but another wound remained: the wound he opened in Olivia Shakespear’s apartment; the other women Ezra Pound misused. H.D. must reconcile herself to these other broken women from his past; they are part of a sequence which began with Hilda.

As outlined in the explanation of Séraphita, H.D. has followed her own instructions. She has re-examined her first love, found a coordinated convention, consummated the marriage by creating the Soul Child, injected the challenging legend of Christ’s resurrection, and now she must deal with the last line: “the poet…changed to Wolf or Panther, hunted down and captured” (“End” 19). This is simple enough; Ezra Pound becomes the captured poet now that H.D. has healed herself. He is quite literally
caged, at first in Pisa and then in St. Elizabeth’s with Sheri and Dorothy for companions. H.D. now shifts her focus from self-healing to the same mission she accepted at the end of *The Walls Do Not Fall*: “an endeavour to make ready, / as it were, the patient for the Healer.” H.D. must help the others heal after their “escape.”

Will it be an easy task? Of course not, this is Ezra Pound she was dealing with. He is the destroyer, and again, he does not disappoint: “Our pard or panther, loosed finally from his cage, is still snarling. Would we have it otherwise?” (“End” 43).

Immediately upon his release from St. Elizabeth’s, Ezra Pound returns to his old habits: “I said when I first heard of Ezra’s freedom, that he walked out of the gate of St. Elizabeth’s alone, into another dimension. I was wrong. He walked out into life as he left it, 12 years ago. He goes on with ‘all the clichés,’ as Norman [Pearson] calls them, picking up the cudgels where he was forced to lay them down” (“End” 44).

These old habits of Ezra Pound included harming the women who love him. The first person to receive ill treatment from Pound was Sherri Martinelli, “Undine”, who had been corresponding with H.D.:

*June 26*

Undine writes, “The male just can’t go about like that, ditching a spirit love.” [Sheri referred to herself as symbolizing the spirit of Love] She writes, “I have known Ezra for 6 years.” She says, “The last 4 years I took a vow in St. Anthony’s Church in NYC not to leave the Maestro [Sheri’s name for Ezra] until he was freed. A month before he was freed he made me break that vow.”

6 years? Where does that take us on the pattern-parallel, the map or graph? 1958—6 years—1952. That summer we began the long Helen
sequence, an attempt, not unsuccessful, to retain a relationship, materially “ditched.” That is the only way to keep a vow. “But this is WAR,” Undine writes. Mine was WAR too, transposed to the heroic, retaining sea-enchantment. Nothing is lost or can be, of what Undine calls “a spirit love.” (“End” 57-58)

To heal Sheri, H.D. draws her into her own story, just as she had done with Dorothy Shakespear, into the “pattern-parallel.” The “Helen sequence” H.D. mentions was her epic poem Helen in Egypt, which she referred to as her “Cantos” (Friedman 374). In that work H.D. fused her identity with that of the famous Helen of Troy, altered the contexts of the tale (Egypt, Léuke, and Eidolon), healed Helen’s relationships with men who had harmed her, and thereby restored Helen’s sense of self-peace. She wrote Helen in Egypt to “keep a vow,” after also being “ditched,” in the only fashion which mattered: by transposing the relationship’s “WAR” into heroic, mythic terms.

In End to Torment H.D. mentioned several times that she identified with Sheri. She now takes this process of “identity incorporation” one step further:

We would like to confide Undine to the care of Marie-Thérèse-Françoise, Sainte Thérèse of Lisieux….Undine is imposed or super-imposed on Frances [Gregg] Josepha, as I have said. Again, Frances was the Florence of my childhood—all boy’s names. (Florence was a page or youth in the old French legends.) Florence—Frances. Frances said that people were always calling her Florence….Florence was a pretty child with the same crop of short curls that we see in the early Thérèse pictures. And our little Undine on her sea-rocks with her wind-blown hair, again, looks not unlike
the early Florence. For myself, all three, the Saint, the rejected wild and willful Undine and the gracious chatelaine of Bon Air, Virginia (the childhood alter-ego from whom I was parted at 8) become one in consciousness… (“End” 59)

By remembering Frances, Sainte Thérèse, Undine, and her childhood alter-ego all as children, H.D. is able to unite them into one character. The childhood of the individual is the childhood of the race. Each of their stories belongs to the others: they are all one story. That is where the stories’ power to heal resides. Just as she learned in The Walls Do Not Fall that all gods are the All-God, so too are all the women the All-Woman.

H.D. prayed to Sainte Thérèse of Lisieux during the Second World War, and there was a specific reason this Saint matched her needs: “Sainte Thérèse has a peculiar habit. She would spend her heaven, she had promised, doing good on earth” (“End” 60).

Heaven on Earth—London/Karnak—this is the exact construction H.D. created in The Walls Do Not Fall. In regards to Undine, H.D. took to heart the responsibility to help ease her pain and fear. She acted on what her metamorphic dreams revealed. She counseled her in letters, provided her with money, and secured a storage space (a safe “haven”) for her art when Sheri headed off to Mexico to ease the pain of her abandonment when Ezra and Dorothy Pound returned to Italy.

H.D. did not neglect the other woman she merged with in her journal entries: Dorothy Pound, D.P./H.D. Shortly after Ezra Pound was released he boarded a ship bound for Italy with Dorothy and their son Omar and promised never to set foot in America again. He did keep this promise, but before he left the U.S.A.’s shore H.D. was
able to extend a gesture of friendship, with the help of Norman Pearson, to Dorothy. We learn this in the final journal entry on July 13, in which H.D. quotes Pearson’s letter:

“…I [Norman] got to the Pier at 2:30 and after a little false search found my way to cabin 128…There on the bunk lay Ezra, stripped to the waist, his torso rather proudly sunburned….On the other side of the cabin was Dorothy, smiling and looking very well. She rose and kissed me, to my surprise; and I gave her a single yellow rose. ‘H.D. wanted me to give you this,’ I said. I told her you knew she was going but not when. ‘You were commanded then!’ Dorothy said, and she was really touched. ‘Yes,’ I answered, for the Spirits had told me you did command…Then the whistle blew at 3:30 and we bade farewell…. And so that is ended and I wonder if I shall ever see either of them again. And in any event your rose was with them. ‘It is for the Paradiso,’ I said at the end.”

“It is for the Paradiso”… “possibly we will reach haven, / heaven” (“Walls” 59). As is always the case, H.D. can guarantee no permanent peace for anyone. There is only one course to follow, and that is to seek beauty in the tortured places and keep faith in the healing dream:

In the subsequent months, H.D. sent the manuscript to Brunnenburg, Italy for Pound’s comments, and he responded with a few suggestions and the note, “there is a great deal of beauty.” A few days later he added a touching postscript: “Torment title excellent, but optimistic.” (“End” xi)
Chapter Six: Conclusion

Ezra Pound’s comments on End to Torment prove true for all of H.D.’s literary works. Each possesses a “great deal of beauty” —even when her crystalline dictation describes the tortured spaces, each seeks the “end to torment,” and it could be argued that each successive work was more “optimistic” than its predecessors for after every remission into hurt each piece of literature still exhibited her faith in the healing process. That she continued her journey, despite knowing she would never be fully healed, is a testament to the bravery of her character and the endurance of her spirit. The advancement in the complexity of her healing process bears witness to her genius.

The works of H.D. selected in this essay revealed the author adjusting her technique to suit both her social context and the increasingly complicated, and often compounded, wounds she endured. Her dexterity in manipulating language to create new contexts containing healing properties applicable to her psyche’s needs remained H.D.’s saving grace. She knew that the power to save herself came from within herself:

In me (the worm) clearly

is no righteousness, but this—

persistence; I escaped spider-snare,
bird-claw, scavenger bird-beak,

clung to grass-blade,

the back of a leaf
when storm-wind
tore it from stem;

I escaped, I explored

…

unintimidated by multiplicity
of magnified beauty,

such as your gorgon-great
dull eye can not focus

nor compass, I profit
by every calamity;

I eat my way out of it;
gorged on vine-leaf and mulberry,

parasite, I find nourishment:
when you cry in disgust,

a worm on the leaf,
a worm in the dust,
a worm on the ear-of-wheat,
I am yet unrepentant,

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

the industrious worm,
spin my own shroud. (‘Walls’ 12)

“I escaped, I explored…I find nourishment…for I know how the Lord God / is
about to manifest, when I…spin my own shroud.” Although H.D. relied on mythology to
weave her tragedies into universal themes in order to seek healing measures, it is still her
own will, desire, and skill which allow her to endure trial after trial.

In her first poetry collection, Sea Garden, H.D. emerged as a restless poet whose
disenchantment with the standardized perceptions of “worth” led her to seek a “new
beauty.” She fulfilled the promise she made in “Sheltered Garden” in the last stanza: “O
to blot out this garden / to forget, to find a new beauty” (CP 21). H.D. discovered the new
beauty in “Sea Gods” and “Hermes of the Ways.” It resides in the tortured spaces, which
are raw and charged, and house the gods. Despite people telling her that the archaic gods
no longer held any power, H.D. held fast to her belief that they would help her. She
evoked them, and met Hermes where “sea-grass tangles with / shore-grass” (CP 39).
With the Divine in her presence, H.D. initiated a dialog to receive their restorative
wisdom.
The Walls Do Not Fall records this dialog, the “immediate event of healing itself, experienced sometimes in sublime and sometimes in more realistic visions” (Kerényi 24). H.D. remained in war-torn London to observe the “realistic” and terrifying visions despite having more than enough wealth and personal connections to escape to America. She used her “sublime” visionary encounters to harvest knowledge from mythological/religious figures. Her ability to decipher the hidden wisdom housed in words enabled her to engage in her social context with the purpose of helping others heal.

By writing End to Torment she applied her healing skills to help mend her relationship with Ezra Pound and also facilitate the healing of the other women he hurt. What began as a quest to find “real” beauty translated into a lifelong mission to help heal herself and those she loved. The literary legacy she left allows others to follow her journey and realize that we are all participants united in an ongoing story. While the individuals may alter, their fundamental characteristics remain the same. We are all engaged in journey of discovery, and in this process we are all wounded one way or another and must seek the means to heal ourselves. All stories are one story.
Bibliography


