

H.D.'S *HELEN IN EGYPT*
ORIGINS PROCESSES GENRES

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HARRIET TARLO

H.D.'S *HELEN IN EGYPT*: ORIGINS, PROCESSES, GENRES

ABSTRACT

In the prelude to this thesis I introduce H.D.'s own very individualistic Hellenism. In the **Origins** section, I concentrate on the composition of the multiple characters of *Helen in Egypt*, both from original Greek sources and from contemporary ideas of classical and anthropological scholarship. I argue that the cosmology of the poem draws heavily on Greek, Egyptian and Tibetan legends of the underworld, suggesting that it can be read as an after-life adventure among spirits in a transitional state between life and death.

In the second section of the thesis, **Processes**, I concentrate on how Helen's stream-of-consciousness, especially her remembering process, forms the structure of the poem. *Helen in Egypt* is also shaped, I argue, by a process of ritualistic roleplaying between characters which serves to explore essential human schemata. Showing how H.D. subverts traditional epic heroism in *Helen in Egypt*, I analyse the alternative occult and dialectical process of spiritual quest which takes place in the poem. Resolution, I argue, can only ever be momentary and experiential, focused on "supernormal" states of mind or the ritualistic ecstasy of the Mysteries.

My third section, **Genres**, is concerned with issues of classification. I examine in detail the question of voice in *Helen in Egypt*: I discuss the complex multi-functioning nature of the prose voice, Helen's voice, and the other voices of the poem, and examine their polyphonic interaction. Finally, I review the poem as a whole. Refuting the usual classification of *Helen in Egypt* as an epic poem, I suggest that the text radically and self-consciously breaks down the borders of the three classical genres, epic, lyric and drama. I measure the poem instead against the yardstick of modernity and draw my final conclusions in that context.

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....literature itself is never anything but a single text: the one text is not an (inductive) access to a Model, but entrance into a network with a thousand entrances; to take this entrance is to aim, ultimately, not at a legal structure of norms and departures, a narrative or poetic Law, but at a perspective (of fragments, of voices from other texts, other codes), whose vanishing point is nonetheless ceaselessly pushed back, mysteriously opened: each (single) text is the very theory (and not the mere example) of this vanishing, of this difference which indefinitely returns, insubmissive.

(Barthes, *S/Z* 12)

Prelude

H.D., the Greek and Helen in Egypt

Greece is a spirit. (P 94)

Helen in Hellas forever. (HE 190)

[T]he lines of this Greek poet [Euripides] (and all Greek poets if we have but the clue) are to-day as vivid and as fresh as they ever were, but vivid and fresh not as literature ... but as portals, as windows, as port-holes I am tempted to say that look out from our ship, our world, our restricted lives on to a sea that moves and changes and bears us up, and is friendly and vicious in turn. (NEPGLP I:Helen 9)

Between September 1952 and December 1955, when she was in her late sixties, H.D. wrote *Helen in Egypt*. H.D.'s Helen was not born in that text, but had been an intrinsic element of her lifelong Hellenism. We can trace a continuum, a thread of meditation on Helen, that runs parallel to H.D.'s involvement with Greek language, literature and culture. *Helen in Egypt* is the fruit of that involvement, for, despite the influence of other cultures, both ancient and modern, this late work was, as I shall show, a return to "the Greek."

This prelude aims to establish a sense of the context and history of *Helen in Egypt* by tracing H.D.'s early involvement with the Greek, and by showing how the figure of Helen was intertwined with H.D.'s Hellenism from her earliest writing days. Like a musical overture, it introduces key motifs of this work, serving to "prepare the way for" and "foreshadow" ideas explored more fully in the chapters to come (OED definition of "prelude"). I am inclined to agree with Meryl Altman that H.D. is in danger of becoming a "prisoner of biography," so the rest of this thesis will not be as much concerned with H.D.'s life as this first piece (Altman 39). Here however I establish, as far as possible, H.D.'s knowledge of Greek literature and her own peculiar brand of Hellenism, necessary background for the rest of my argument.

H.D.'s first recorded work on the Greek, dated in her "Autobiographical Notes" as taking place in 1910, consisted of the composition of original poems modelled on Andrew Lang's translations of Theocritus, Bion and Moschus.¹



These poems were written for Frances Gregg, and the Lang translations were given to her by Ezra Pound (AN; ETT 36). In this year of 1910-11, when H.D. was in her mid-twenties, her engagement to Ezra Pound was terminated, her relationship with Frances Gregg was at the height of its intensity and, in 1911, she was to travel to Europe for the first time. Both Pound and Gregg were important in the earliest days of her involvement with the Greek, Pound as bearer of books, and Gregg as inspiration for H.D.'s early poetry modelled on Greek Lyric. In *End To Torment*, her late memoir of Pound, H.D. quotes from one of these early love poems:

O hyacinth of the swamp-lands,
Blue lily of the marshes,
How could I know,
Being but a foolish shepherd,
That you would laugh at me?
(ETT 36)

What appealed to H.D. in Theocritus' poems was precisely what appealed to Lang: the authentic quality of both the detail of flower and stream and the song-like verse (Lang, intro. 17-19).

However, it was not only lyric that inspired the young H.D. While still at school, as she records in her *Tribute to Freud*, she saw "my first real Greek play, done by students at the university" (one of these students was Pound) (TF 186).² A letter to Gemma D'Auria confirms that the play was Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* and that this production first "awakened" her to Greek drama.³ The Greek language became a reality for her: "I felt I had heard Greek at last," she wrote in the same letter.

Even earlier than this, it was through fairy-tale that H.D. had first met the Greek spirit:

The Greek came most vividly to me when I was seven; it was a Miss Helen who read us *Tanglewood Tales*, Friday afternoon at school. These stories are my foundation or background, Pandora, Midas, the Gorgon-head -- that particular story of Perseus and the guardian Athené. (TF 186-7)⁴

Fairy-tale and drama then preceded H.D.'s "official" poetic origins in Greek lyric and, as we shall see, they retained their influence on her work throughout her career.

It seems extraordinary that H.D.'s mother should have been called Helen and that she should have been introduced to Greek stories by a teacher called Helen. To H.D. herself, it was certainly significant, and we are not surprised to find her attracted to the classical figure of Helen while still in Pennsylvania. As she records in *Tribute to Freud*, a favourite early poem was Edgar Allen Poe's "To Helen," and she connects this to her mother's name (TF 44). In Poe's poem, Helen is the soul or psyche of Greece, the essence of classical Hellenism. He describes her beauty as a light to guide him home to the ancient classical world, his "Holy Land":

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
To the grandeur that was Rome.(165-6)

This idealised Helen of nineteenth century Hellenism, was perhaps H.D.'s first literary Helen. Although this Helen figure was to travel through many metamorphoses and take on ever more complex connotations for the poet, she was to keep her place as embodiment of the Greek spirit.

In 1910-11, it was precisely Poe's elevation of classicism to a spiritual level that appealed to H.D. She identified this with the English Pre-Raphaelites to whom she had also been introduced by Pound. She records how, while they were both still in Pennsylvania, he read William Morris to her under the apple trees and brought her Rossetti's translation of *La Vita Nuova* and Pre-Raphaelite pictures to peruse (ETT 22-3, 39).⁵ When she visited Paris on her way to London in 1911, the Greek was her spiritual and literary ideal. In the *roman-à-clef*, *Asphodel*, which fictionalises these years, Hermione (the H.D. character) wanders around the Louvre looking for "it," her own "Religion of love-of-beauty" (19-20). She asks:

Is Christianity then that, at its best, a curtain, woven of most delicate stuffs to hide reality, the white flame that is Delphi, that is Athens? (A 21)⁶

Hermione reads the Christian iconography of Leonardo, Correggio and Fra Angelico as a veil for Greek reality which lies in the beauty of sculpture (made by "Athene's hands") and the "Mystery" of the Greek islands (20-2). The words, "reality" and "mystery" were to remain for H.D. vitally associated with the "Greek."

However, the Greek did not only represent aestheticised spirituality for H.D. Little did Pound know, when he introduced her to Swinburne, that she was also to read the Greek world as a world of freedom from contemporary taboos, specifically freedom of sexuality. Hermione's frantic attempts in *Asphodel* to persuade Fayne Rabb (the Frances Gregg character) to remain in Europe include a legitimisation of their love by comparisons with Swinburne and with Wilde who talked with his lover, "of Greeks and flowers" (53). This phrase suggests a free paradise, innocent of cultural guilt. There is an echo here of the "hyacinth," the "blue lily" of the lyric modelled on Theocritus.⁷ Already, H.D. was using "the Greek" to explore her contemporary concerns, as well as to create a vision of a homosexual Greek rural idyll.

When H.D. reached London, the names of the protagonists in the Trojan War were on the lips of the *literati*, for the significance of Schliemann's discoveries at Troy (1870-90) were still being assessed. Schliemann's findings included treasure which, he confidently asserted, had belonged to Priam and Agamemnon (de Camp 80, 82).⁸ Such discoveries fired the imagination of contemporary poets, as Hugh Kenner has noted (42). Back home in Pennsylvania, Pound, in his "Hilda's Book," (poems written to H.D. between 1905-7) had exploited the Trojan scene for his own love-making purposes:

Love song was blossom to the searching breeze
 E'er Paris' rhyming had availed to bring
 Helen and Greece for towered Troy's disease....("L'Envoi," ETT
 83)

A year before H.D.'s arrival in London, Yeats had published *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910) in which a trio of Troy poems ("A Woman Homer Sung"; "Words"; "No Second Troy") cast Maud Gonne as Helen, the destroyer of Troy (*Poems* 139-140). In 1913 Maurice Hewlett was to publish *Helen Redeemed*, a book reviewed favourably by Ezra Pound in the magazine, *Poetry* 2 (May 1913). When war came in 1914, parallels between Troy and the current threat of destruction were bound to be made.

In the intervening time before that blow came, H.D.'s knowledge of the Greek seems to have expanded vastly. When she and Richard Aldington (newly in love and to be married the following year) visited Paris in the summer of 1912, their conversations with Henry Slominsky were about "Hellas and Hellenism, Pythagoras and Plato, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Homer, Thucydides, Aeschylus

and Theocritus" (Guest 47). It was still only one year since she had left Pennsylvania. One of H.D.'s especial interests was *The Greek Anthology*.⁹ Her first poems to be published in her new incarnation as "H.D. Imagiste" were headed "Verses, Translations, and Reflections from 'The Anthology.'" These poems had been shown to Ezra Pound in the British Museum in 1912, on which occasion he had created H.D.'s new identity, and sent her poems to Harriet Monroe who published them in *Poetry*, in 1913. From these poems, especially "Hermes of the Ways," we can already see one of H.D.'s most characteristic ways of working through the Greek (CP 37). This poem draws on an Anyte epigram in "The Anthology":

I, Hermes, stand here by the windy orchard in the cross-ways
nigh the grey sea-shore, giving rest on the way to wearied men;
and the fountain wells forth cold stainless water. (Mackail 92)

In H.D.'s poem, Anyte's simple invocation, a brief Greek fragment, forms the basis of a meditation or "reflection" on Hermes in his various manifestations. It remained H.D.'s poetic habit to draw a sense of mystery out of such fragments. Her Greek was by no means only the "straight talk, straight as the Greek!" that Pound described to Harriet Monroe (Paige 45).

Yet, although meditative and mysterious, this poem retains a strong "imagist" sense of materiality, of sand, of apple trees, of grasses, the natural features that H.D. had admired in Theocritus. Imagist character is also present in the simplicity of form and style that Pound so admired. This clarity and stark purity is still a persistent cultural concept of the Greek, and was to remain a Hellenistic ideal of H.D.'s for some time. Her series of essays on "The Cinema and the Classics" written in the late 'twenties for *Close-Up* magazine includes an essay on "Restraint" which praises:

Simplicity, restraint, formalisation are all Greek attributes,
Hellenic restraint and Hellenic naturalisation that never saw the
human body frankly other than the body of its deity.
(Restraint 37)

H.D.'s Hellenistic poetry was still also under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites. Cassandra Laity has described as a Swinburnian Hellas, the "realm of homoerotic passion and sympathetic love between androgynous male and female spirits" that H.D. created in her early poems (110-28, 112). Laity notes the relationship between Swinburne's lush gardens, where the unwary are

ensnared by love, and destructive seascapes and the landscapes of H.D.'s *Sea Garden* (Land. 115).

The freedom that the Pre-Raphaelites took with the Greek also seems significant in the light of the generic variety of H.D.'s Greek works to come. The Pre-Raphaelites published both translations and works derived from original Greek texts of all genres. Rossetti concentrated on lyric, including "Troy Town" and "Cassandra" which focus on the events of the Trojan War (Rossetti 9, 48).¹⁰ Swinburne, aside from lyrics (see above), also wrote dramas in classical Greek form: *Atlanta in Calydon* (1865) and *Erechtheus* (1876). Morris, with his *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867) and translations of the *Aeneid* (1875) and *The Odyssey* (1887), may well have provided H.D. with an introduction to the "modern" epic. A writer of the previous generation read by both H.D. and Pound, one of the few who stood the rigorous test of Pound's *ABC of Reading* (1934), was W.S. Landor (*ABC* 179-87). Landor displayed a similar free hand with the classical scene and also composed an epic set in Egypt, *Gebir* (1798). In *Hellenics* (1847), Landor re-told Greek myths in verse, and in *Imaginary Conversations of Greeks and Romans* (1853), he placed words into the mouths of his characters (including Achilles and Helen) with gay abandon (see Chapter One).¹¹

The link from the Pre-Raphaelites to the early Imagists was, thanks to Yeats, an unbroken one. Yeats had been powerfully influenced by Morris as a young man, as he details in the *Autobiographies* begun, when H.D. was still new to London, in 1914 (*Autos* 139-148).¹² Ezra Pound was close to Yeats and was to become his secretary, and H.D., as she records in the "Autobiographical Notes" met Yeats on "several evenings" in 1913.¹³ In her review of Yeats' *Responsibilities* (1914) H.D. regards Yeats as a fellow "torch-bearer" for "we few who still persist in the worship of beauty" (53).¹⁴ Notably, it is "When Helen Lived" that H.D. chooses to quote from:

That men desert,
For some trivial affair
Or noisy, insolent sport,
Beauty that we have won
From bitterest hours. (52)

As Gary Burnett has noted, in her selective quotation, H.D. "rewrites the poem, turning it into a defence of her own valuation of eternal beauty" and, I would add, recasting Helen as symbol of that beauty rather than as inextricably linked with war, as she is in the Yeats poem (Burnett *Image* 21, see also *Poetics* 54-63).

H.D.'s "Greek" was to become more her own during the war years. With the harsher times, she moved away from the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites and Yeats, although she remained attached to both Swinburne and Morris and became interested in Yeats again in the 'fifties.¹⁵ By 1914, H.D. had also parted poetic company from Pound who was absorbed in the the new futurist drive of modernism. H.D. writes in "Responsibilities" that the "chief enemy" of her poetic generation is "the great overwhelming mechanical daemon, the devil of machinery of which ... the war is the hideous offspring" (52). When she says that this "daemon" has taken "the most robust talent of our generation," she refers not only to those who have died, but also, as Gary Burnett suggests, to those who have deserted "beauty" for Vorticism and Futurism (Responsib. 52; Burnett, Poetics 56-8). For H.D. the war "destroyed the aesthetic values of a generation" (Burnett, Poetics 57).

With this parting of the ways, "H.D. *Imagiste*" had to strengthen both her own poetic voice and her defence of the Greek realm. She was forced to analyse more closely her strong draw to, and her poetic use of, the Greek. As a woman, the Greek had never of course really been an easy option for her. Rachel Blau DuPlessis has pointed out that H.D.'s largely self-taught classicism was a daring breach of the walls of patriarchy:

To enter the classics is to confront the issue of cultural authority, for knowledge of Greek and Latin, formerly barred to women and certain males, was the sigil of knowledge and authority, the main portal of the liberal humanist hegemony.
(*Career* 17)

However, for H.D., "the Greek" was not merely a hurdle to conquer: it remained central to her poetics long after the time when her classicism earned her respect. In the years to come, she was commonly perceived as static, trapped in her eternal Hellas, while other modernists moved on. In 1937 Douglas Bush portrayed her as caught in an "eighteen-ninetyish cult of Beauty," her poetry swamped by "romantic overtones" and dominated by an obsession with love (500-2). Her poems are "vague, unhuman, and esthetic," he says, and concludes that H.D. is a "poet of escape" retreating to "a dream-world of ideal beauty which she calls Greece" (504-5).¹⁶

Thomas Burnett Swann, in *The Classical World of H.D.* (1962), criticised Bush for his association of H.D. with the Victorian Hellenists in both form and attitude

(11). However, he too perceives her as a poet who fled "corrupt and corrupting society," retreating "at every opportunity to the stark and beautiful world which she took to be ancient Greece" (13, 29). What these (comparatively) early critics failed to see about the poems of *Sea Garden* was that Greek beauty existed in the ability of battered flowers, especially the sea-flowers assailed by two elements, to survive.¹⁷ H.D.'s Hellenistic "Beauty" had become what L.S. Dembo calls a "stoical beauty," a poetry of endurance (25).

With Aldington away at war, far from retreating, H.D. was confronting the problem and ethics of war through a deepening, even a hardening, of her work on the Greek. In 1916 she published not only *Sea Garden*, but also a book of choruses from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the play she had seen as a school-girl (CP 71). In emphasizing the story of Iphigenia, an innocent sacrifice to the necessities of war, H.D. made striking comparison between the ancient and the modern, and registered her protest and her warning.¹⁸ Between Aldington and H.D., the Trojan metaphor continued, but now, infected with trench fever, Aldington portrayed Helen, the spirit of classic beauty, as dead and gone forever:

"Dust hath closed Helen's eyes," and not all Homer's rhetoric nor
all the tears that have been shed for her will ever make that dust
pure red & white again or give that heart one thrill of the many
kisses of the young prince.
(letter to H.D., 23 June, 1918, Zilboorg 80)¹⁹

While Aldington despaired, H.D. re-shaped her "Greek" and attempted to confront.

This "Greek" refusal to compromise ideals is also seen in a poem of 1919, dedicated to Bryher, the woman H.D. had recently met and with whom she was to be involved until her death:

But it seems to me Greek rather
to live as you lived,
outwardly telling lies,
inwardly without swerving or doubt -
'if I can not have beauty about me
and people of my own sort,
I will not live,
I will not compromise'.... (CP 323)²⁰

The striving for beauty that is defined as Greek here is a striving for honesty, for the need to be true to self and sexuality. As Diana Collecott has said, "living

as a lesbian" in a modern world "involves an inversion of heterosexual values, a re-reading of words and meanings": in such a "philistine" world, H.D. implies, 'lies' may be 'true'.²¹ Here, H.D. made a stand against both Pound and Aldington, with whom she had previously shared her enthusiasm for the Greek. Both men, in their wranglings over Hellenism in *The Egoist* in 1914 (discussed below), take the same moral high ground over the "disreputable vices" of the Greeks (Pound, *New* 67; see Aldington, *Anti* 35).²² The radicalism of H.D.'s Greek struggle to be true becomes apparent here, for it involves moving against the social current which both condemned homosexuality and made a heroic virtue out of war. The "Greek" message was for H.D. by no means apolitical or uninvolved with contemporary issues.

It is significant that the three areas of Greek literature that were arguably the most important to H.D. during these early years, the epigrams of *The Greek Anthology*, the Lyric Poets²³ and the drama of Euripides, have in common centuries of neglect and mistreatment. The work of the two writers whom she looked upon as literary parent figures, Sappho and Euripides, is eaten away by censorship and time.²⁴ Their authors led lives little known about. Gilbert Murray, in his book *Euripides and his Age* (which H.D. read – see note 41), is at pains to stress the unreliable and scanty sources for Euripides' life (20-4). It is this aspect of Euripides' work that H.D. herself first emphasizes in her "Notes" on the poet : "we judge Euripides by about one fifth of his total output" (NEPGLP I:Eurip. 1). She draws a comparison between Euripides and Sappho, suggesting that Euripides' plays, like "so many of the exquisite stanzas of Sappho" might have been censored for their "erotic-emotional innovation" (NEPGLP I:Eurip. 2). It is significant that these figures of great importance to H.D. were perceived by her as existing on the margins of censorship and time, as fellow-strugglers against social and cultural norms.²⁵

By the time of the First World War, the Greek had for H.D. come to represent her very attitude to life, her philosophy. H.D.'s Greek beauty was now no idealistic "eighteen-ninetyish" beauty, but a difficult, demanding, striving for clarity and honesty, rather than romantic obfuscations: "I love that Greek world ... but sometimes the hard light, the cruel, bitter beauty tortures me too much" she wrote in 1916.²⁶

"The Greek world" had also become the mental/emotional set in which she wrote – a light which would not allow her to be false. At this time, H.D. was

working simultaneously and assiduously on poems originating from specific Greek poems, poems set in her own Hellas, translations, and interpretation. All of the above forms of work were inter-connected and each was, in its own way, a form of translation, a translation of the modern into the ancient, the ancient into the modern. Greek was writing; writing was Greek.

The letter quoted above was written to John Cournos, H.D.'s close friend and confidante during the war years, a man whom she later classed as one of her "intiators" (CF 35). The friendship turned sour, but from Cournos' novel *Miranda Masters* (1926), although his caricature of H.D. as Miranda is merciless, it is possible to gain a sense of how H.D. regarded the Greek spirit at this time. Miranda looks as if "some ancient demon possessed her, granting her ancient sight." "But what is the subconscious," the Cournos character asks, "if not our ancient memory come to life, the ancient Greek daimon crying in us...?" Cournos and H.D. clearly related on this level.

Perhaps due to satirical treatment of these beliefs by such as Cournos, H.D. is reticent in writing about possession by the Greek spirit, yet the word demon, *daimon* or *daemon* was an important one for her. She used it to suggest various powerful forces – we have already seen her refer to machinery and war as a "daemon" in "Responsibilities." In *End To Torment*, she characterises "first love" as "Angel-Devil - or Angel-Daemon or Daimon," emphasizing its double-sided nature (ETT 19). In the same text however, she also uses the word to refer to Pound's "genius, his daemon or demon" (49). This is "daemon" as the part of the self which takes over in writing – an intense creative state close to possession. In *Notes on Thought and Vision* (composed 1919) this daemon spirit is associated with the "overmind state" of artistic inspiration, a striving toward perfection: "But we are important only insofar as we become identified with the highest in ourselves -- "our own familiar daemon" (NTV 37). As a part of the self, the daemon will become associated with the Freudian subconscious, a spring rising up within (see Chapter Three).²⁷

In 1937 H.D. described her early writing practice to Norman Pearson:

I let my pencil run riot, in those early days of my apprenticeship, in an old-fashioned school copy-book.... Then I would select from many pages of automatic or pseudo-automatic writing, the few lines that satisfied me. (73)²⁸

This daemonistic writing process has not often been emphasized, probably because, as Eileen Gregory suggests, scholars are embarrassed at the picture of the inspired, daemonic woman poet and find themselves unable to distance it from the "specter of the poetess" as "pale and withdrawn" and "sensitive to the point of neurosis and hysteria" (Rose 527).

"Helios and Athene," a prose-poem written in 1920 but unpublished in H.D.'s lifetime, probably due to the inhibitions I have mentioned, tells us more about her increasingly vital attitude to the Greek (CP 328).²⁹ In three of the stanzas³⁰ we can trace a movement from a sober, almost academic, tone to an ecstatic call to take on the Greek spirit at an inspired level:

But the time has come for men and women of intelligence to
build up a new standard, a new approach to Hellenic literature
and art.

Let daemons possess us! Let us terrify like erynnes, the whole
tribe of academic Grecians!

Because (I state it inspired and calm and daemonical) they
know nothing! (CP 328)

There is definitely a note of humour in this poem, but H.D. is, one feels, perfectly serious in her call for active participation in the art and ritual of Greece.

Although "academic Grecians" are pilloried here, as Zara Bruzzi has shown, in some contemporary scholarship H.D. found confirmation for her interest in daemonistic possession (Bruzzi 97). From, at the latest, 1919 onwards, she was aware of a strain of classical anthropology which had come to the fore with the new century. This genus of scholarship is best exemplified by the works of James Frazer, Jane Harrison and Lewis Richard Farnell, the latter being the scholar with whose works H.D. was most familiar.³¹ These writers explored the Greek cults, concentrating on the ritualistic element of Greek religion. Harrison is particularly passionate in her emphasis on the significance, as well as the power, of ritual:

In the study of Greek religion it is all important that the clear distinction should be realised between the comparatively permanent element of the ritual and the shifting manifold character of the myth.... This does not, however, imply, as is sometimes supposed, that ritual is prior to myth; they probably arose together. Ritual is the utterance of an emotion, a thing felt, in action, myth in words or thoughts. (*Themis* 16)

During the Second World War, if the remembrances of D. Bruce Ogilvie are correct, H.D. became involved with a circle of people attempting to preserve the poetic line of inspiration "in the female-inspired Dionysiac mode," whose "special power" involved the "conjuring of images" in the "trance of the seer" (10-11). The circle centred on Lord Hugh Dowding, previously only known as an influence on H.D.'s spiritualist experiments during this period.³² According to Ogilvie, H.D. worked within the circle with Dowding, J.R.R. Tolkien and Robert Graves, who regarded her as "'Cybele Erykinos,' inspiration, temptor" (12-13). Although her involvement with Dowding ceased painfully when he rejected her spiritualist "messages," this circle, in which H.D. was "Bacchante," must have provided experience of the ritualistic. She certainly continued to work with essential time-transcending images, and she drew heavily (as I shall show) on Graves' book, *The White Goddess* (1946), written in the tradition Ogilvie describes, when composing *Helen in Egypt*.

Long before the Second World War however, in her poetry, H.D. had sought a sense of ritual, of the *active* experience behind the myth. Running parallel to her own exploration of daemonism with Cournos was a poetic evocation of the vital pagan spirits which classical anthropology of the day suggested might lie behind the consolidated gods of the Homeric Mount Olympus. In her early poems, as A.D. Moody has said, these spirits are pantheistic and elemental, embodied in natural forces (Moody 83).³³ In "The Wind Sleepers" the spirits of the wind speak, demanding worship:

Tear-
tear us an altar,
tug at the cliff-boulders,
pile them with rough stones-
we no longer
sleep in the wind,
propitiate us. (CP 15)

In "H.D. by Delia Alton,"³⁴ H.D. expresses her frustration with the reception of her early work: "I grew tired of hearing these poems referred to, as crystalline" (184). She goes on to reflect that a crystal grows out of the "rough matrix" or the "energy ... that projects it," and to conclude, "[t]he energy itself and the matrix itself have not yet been assessed" (184). It is surely the "matrix" of such poems in daemonism and the "energy" of the elemental forces within them to which H.D. refers here. Her sense of being misunderstood must have been confirmed by Bush's reading of her work as "static" in 1937.

In later work, her interest in ritual is evident in the many poems which evoke religious practice in ancient Greece. Thomas Swann was one of the first critics to note this element of her work (see esp. 44-94). Of H.D.'s poem, "Demeter" (CP 111-5), in which the goddess speaks as an object of worship, Swann wrote:

For twenty-five hundred years previously, poems about Demeter had simply told a story about the goddess and her daughter. Sometimes it is true, the story held symbolic overtones, but there was little emphasis on Demeter as an object of cult, of sacrifice, of ritualistic observances. She was shown to be powerful, but rarely in the actual process of being worshipped. It remained for H.D. to add *ritual* to *narrative*. (44)

In this and other poems, H.D. also explored more mystical elements of Greek religion (see below). Her poems also show her interest, drawing particularly on the work of Farnell, in the relationship of the ancient spirit to the later consolidated god (see Chapters One and Two). This sense of the process of transformation between divine states was to remain a major interest and inspiration.

Appropriately enough, during these years in which active ritual absorbed her, much of H.D.'s work on the Greek was focused on Greek drama, notably Euripides.³⁵ Her work was especially focused on Euripidean chorus. After the publication of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* choruses, 1918 saw work on choruses from Euripides' *Hippolytus*, published by Aldington in his 1919 *Poets' Translation* series. H.D. also started work on the *Ion*, publishing the "bird-chorus" in *Heliodora* (1924) (CP 206). In *Red Roses for Bronze* (1931) we find "chorus translations" from *The Bacchae* and the "sea-choros" from *Hecuba*, as well as H.D.'s original sequence, "Choruses from *Morpheus*" (CP 223, 227, 253-70). The thirties also saw the publication in periodicals of "From Electra-Orestes" (CP 378-88) and "Four Prose Choruses" (16-23). H.D. took her inspiration for these original poems from Euripidean chorus. The qualities that H.D. valued, looking back at what she considered the successful work of this period, were "drive and originality"; "vivid integrity"; passion and the "costume, colour and rhythm" (of "Electra-Orestes") that "is striking and authentic" (HDDA 212-3). The emphasis here is again on movement, energy, brightness, and, vitally, rhythm.

In the first part of H.D.'s novel *Palimpsest* (1926), when Hipparchia rediscovers sexual pleasure with Verrus, Euripidean chorus is correlated with the rhythms of the sea's movement and of sexual contact. The passage presents Greek choral

rhythm as passionate, refuting in its own terms Hugh Kenner's description of H.D.'s choruses as "statements of her own impassioned sterility" (522-3):

She came back to Euripidean choros. Euripidean choros seemed to fit simply her surroundings, part simply of the landscape as that gentle, subtle lap-lap of the almost tideless ocean that beat a measure so fine, so subtle, so etherealised that one could scarcely count it. Euripidean choros was perfected subtle breath of metre as the man beside her had perfected breath of loving. (*P* 38)

In the late teens, H.D. also began the Euripides section of her "Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets," an unpublished work of over a hundred pages.³⁶ In this section, H.D. explored Euripides' *Helen*, *Ion* and *The Bacchae* more with the eye of a theatrical director than a poet-translator. Characters, especially in the *Helen* piece, "appear on the stage of H.D.'s imagination" (Clack 28).³⁷ We find evidence in these "Notes" of the growing absorption of that imagination in elemental spirits and daemonism. The *Helen* piece is set in a "spirit-world" of "sea and sand and rocks, elemental detachment" (*NEPGLP* I:Helen 14). Helen herself is a far cry from Poe's Helen: she is a bird-like spirit, the daughter of Leda and Zeus, god-like, daemon-like, erotic and impressive.³⁸ No longer a static, "classic" ideal form or a naturalised sculpture, "[h]er face is not in any Praxitelian sense beautiful" (*NEPGLP* I:Helen 3).

This remark is interesting in relation to an argument about Hellenism that took place between Aldington and Pound in *The Egoist* in 1914. In his article on "The New Sculpture" (praising the work of Epstein and Gaudier-Brzeska) Pound condemned Greek sculpture, especially the "cake-icing and plaster of Paris" art of Praxiteles (67). At Aldington's outraged response in the name of "Hellenic Civilisation" (Art 97), Pound hits out at Aldington's Victorian "Paterine sentimentalesque Hellenism," stating that: "Some few of us are at last liberated from the idea that 'THE BEAUTIFUL' is the caressable, the physically attractive" (Caress 117). H.D. tackles the same attitude in her "Notes on Euripides," for both similar and different reasons.³⁹ Pound's invective against the sentimentalising of the female body in Greek sculpture was in keeping with H.D.'s changing attitude, but whereas Pound writes in honour of the new futurism (which we have seen H.D. rejected), H.D. is extending her study of the ritual and elemental, the force that transcends the distinction between ancient and modern. For both, however, the new direction is firmly away from "Paterine sentimentalesque Hellenism."⁴⁰

The significance of Euripides cannot be over-estimated in H.D.'s work. When she came to London, Euripides' plays were enjoying something of a revival through the work of Gilbert Murray, but H.D. was to remain faithful to Euripides right up to her death.⁴¹ For her, Euripides was always associated with his *Helen*, which she worked on intermittently, in various ways, for over thirty years. In the mid-twenties H.D. was still working on a translation of Euripides' *Helen* (HDDA 218). In the mid-thirties, whilst in analysis with Freud, she told Bryher that she wanted to return to her Greek work begun in 1918/9 (the time of her pregnancy with her daughter, Perdita, nicknamed "Pups"):

This work I was doing after the first confinement and during my preg. with old Pups. Probably I have linked it up with physical creative force. As that is going, I translate it into this output of plays. The attitude one takes now is all important for the rest of ones (sic) life.... I plan completing *Ion* for a publisher -- I have written Boston before leaving here and probably starting on the *Helen*.⁴²

Clearly, the work she wanted to return to was specifically Euripides' *Ion* and *Helen*. This letter also indicates how H.D.'s Greek work formed a vital link with her earlier work and life. Her association of the Greek work with the actual "physical creative force," that enabled her to give birth to her daughter indicates how it forms the matrix of her creativity. The re-gaining of this creativity was a major reason for H.D.'s analysis with Freud. In taking up the Greek again, H.D. believes she will achieve personal and creative equilibrium. The letter ends: "The Greek will hold me to my centre, now whether here or in London" (see note 42).

Euripides was an important influence on *Helen in Egypt*, as I shall show. When H.D. began to write the poem in 1952, she turned again to Euripides, asking Bryher to send her the "very good translation... in French" that she had read before (October 13, 1952).⁴³ On September 13 1953, in the midst of writing *Helen in Egypt*, she wrote to Richard Aldington:

I am trying to work over some scrappy Euripides notes... If I do any "Greek", it is my old Euripides, as inspiration, as background.

As she was finishing *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. was re-reading and amending *Ion* for a radio broadcast that went out on 19 December 1954, just as she was completing the poetry of *Helen in Egypt* and before her writing of the prose

captions.⁴⁴ Both the *Helen* and the *Ion* finally reached their culmination together in 1955 when H.D. "put aside my Euripides volumes and the notes that I have done, as for the *Helen* and the comparison of the Iphigenia and the Helen" (CF 71). In 1955, H.D. was contemplating more Greek translations (CF 23). In 1958, handwritten notes on the "Helen" section of her "Notes on Euripides" indicate that she was still re-thinking her views on Euripides "over a quarter of a century later" as she herself noted (NEPGLP I:Helen 12-3, 17-8).

As my epigraph from "Notes on Euripides" shows, the work of Greek writers such as he could grant, H.D. believed, clear, new vision, "vivid and fresh," to the reader. Through the "port-holes" of their work a wider perspective than that of those trapped in "restricted lives" of frenzied modernity could be achieved. This view extends, as the reference to the elemental sea suggests, to the belief that the Greek takes the artist out of time into a realm of essentials, linking her into a shared race-memory or thread of inspiration. In *Notes on Thought and Vision*, H.D. described Euripides as an "over-mind artist" who knew that his ideas were not his own, but "eternal changeless ideas that he had grown aware of, dramas already conceived that he had already watched" (21, 23). This conviction was to receive confirmation in the ideas of Freud (see Chapter Four), and is repeated in her commentary to *Ion*, completed after her analysis with Freud and published in 1937:

How can we believe that 500 B.C. and A.D. 500 (or our own problematical present) are separated by an insurmountable chasm? The schism of before and after Christ, vanishes. The new modernity can not parody the wisdom of all-time with its before and after. (ION 63)

The attraction to eternal realities did not detract from H.D.'s draw to material reality. Through the "artificial" work of translation, H.D. experienced a powerful sense of the "real," that criteria that we shall find was an important barometer for her (see Chapter Four). In the novel *Bid Me to Live*, as Julia translates Greek in Cornwall, the palimpsest of the two places, Greece and Cornwall, are drawn together as a way through to the "real."⁴⁵ Nature and culture are also fused via language. On a walk in the Cornish countryside, Julia reflects: "Every breath she drew was charged with meaning" (BMTL 147). The gate to the expression of this meaning is through her Greek translation:

The stones, the sun setting, rising, the ruin of the tin mine shaft,
the trunk of solid ivy, all these would have words to describe
them exactly in that Greek dictionary spread open on the low
chair at her elbow. (BMTL 162)

The translation is simultaneously translation from the material into language, and from the Greek into English. There is a sense that, without language, the material is not material, the real is not real for H.D. The quality of the words becomes almost physical in the reality they can convey, "She wanted the shape, the feel of it, the character of it, as if it had been freshly minted." Similarly, in her commentary on Euripides *Ion*, she urges the reader to learn Greek "with your hands and your feet and especially your lungs" and goes on to say:

Realize with some sixth sense, the sea; know that it is there, by the
special quality of the shimmering of bay-leaf or some hinted reflex
from the sky-dome. (*ION* 12, emphasis added)

We are moving here toward a greater sense of what H.D. was reaching for through the Greek: eternal realities based in the material present.

This approach was theorised in the late twenties when H.D. was most involved in the exciting new media, cinema. H.D.'s interest in film, Chris Brown suggests, dated from as early as 1920 (24, n.6).⁴⁶ Her involvement reached its greatest intensity in the late twenties when she was living with Bryher and Kenneth Macpherson who were editing the avant-garde film magazine, *Close Up*.⁴⁷ H.D. wrote several reviews and two poems, "Projector" and "Projector II," for *Close Up* (CP 349, 353). In 1928 she was working on a film called *Foothills* with Kenneth and Bryher (AN) and in 1930 she took a lead role in Macpherson's film, *Borderline*.⁴⁸ In her discussion of "The Cinema and the Classics," H.D. once again applies the word "real" to artifice:

Could anything be more true, more real, more unsullied, more
unstudied yet more exactly artificial, in the sense of art made
reality? (Restraint 39)

Although art is artifice, art within the Greek tradition, like cinema, symbolises for H.D. a search for greater truths, for aesthetics that do not just represent, but *embody* their own truths. She wrote of the actress working under G.W. Pabst's direction: "she is for the time being what she typifies" (Appreciat. 56-68, emphasis added). The right cinematic image is, like the right word chosen in her own translation, "freshly minted," as real as the sea or a branch of a tree. In this sense, the modern too is classic and eternal. Diana Collecott links H.D.'s

cinematic interests with the scrapbook made for her by Kenneth Macpherson in which photographs of ancient Greek temples were cut up and juxtaposed with photographs of H.D. Here again we have ancient materials and modern *photomontage* methods, the same combination, "both ancient and modern," that we are to see again in *Helen in Egypt* (Collecott, Images 157).

In 1920, with Bryher, H.D. was at last to experience the material present of Greece itself.⁴⁹ She was to visit again in 1922 and in 1932. This reality was literary, as well as geographical: "I was physically in Greece, in Hellas (Helen)," she wrote in *Tribute to Freud* of the 1920 trip and she refers to "Delphi and the shrine of Helios (Hellas, Helen)" (44, 49). In 1920 she visited many places that were already important to her, including Athens and the Acropolis; the Greek theatres at Illissos and at Kallirhoe (the Theatre of Dionysus); Corinth; Corfu and Eleusis (AN). In 1922 she and Bryher also saw Ithaca, the Asia Minor coast including the "Plain of Troy over hills" and "Tenedos, Mount Ida? Mytelene, Scyros" and Constantinople (Bryher's notebook, AN). At the Archaeological Museum in Athens (visited in 1920 and 1922), she would also have seen many of the objects found by Schliemann at Troy.

In 1932 on a very different trip, a Hellenic Cruise including lectures on archaeological sites (Guest 205), she was at last to see Delphi, her original intention in 1920. Her notes on this trip (taken from lectures as well as her own observations) indicate her interest in the practice of religion in Ancient Greece. She records details of the rites of Artemis, the Delphic oracle and the Eleusinian Mysteries. H.D. also visited Crete which made an important impression on her and was to take a significant place in the cosmology of *Helen in Egypt* (see Chapter Five). She made notes on several aspects of Cretan culture and religion which were to prove important in her writing, including the Cretan Labyrinth; the possible connection between Atlantis and Crete⁵⁰; Minoan art (especially the murex shell motif which appears often in her poetry); writing ("cipher"); the equality of women in Cretan society, and the matriarchal religion of Crete. The "lady of wild-wood," she notes, was "supreme God herself," Zeus-Zagreus (Zeus in his sky manifestation) being her son and consort (AN). Confirmation of these ideas about matriarchal religion was to be found in the work of Frazer, Farnell and Harrison, in her involvement with the Dowding circle during the Second World War, and while she was writing *Helen in Egypt*, in Graves' *The White Goddess* (see Chapters Two and Five).

One of the most revealing notes H.D. made about Crete was that it was, "All oldest reality of Hellas" (AN) She also makes a list reading, "Cretan/ Egyptian/ Babylonian," a hierarchy, it seems, of antiquity and religious influence (AN).⁵¹ Crete, she suggests here, looked originally to Egypt. In 1923, after her second visit to Greece, H.D. and Bryher, via Dante's Florence and Capri, had visited Egypt (AN). They went to "Karnak and Luxor and Valley of the Tombs ... the fullest most perfect day of my life," as H.D. later wrote to Bryher.⁵² In the third part of the novel *Palimpsest*, we can trace the process by which the hero, another Helen (embodying perhaps Hellenism confronted by Egypt) comes to accept her companion's statement that, "[t]he Greeks came to Egypt to learn" (215, 217, 218, 226, 229). Guest is probably correct when she suggests that H.D.'s attraction to Egypt reflected her growing draw to mysticism and the occult (157-8). It is also, I would suggest, the root of her interest in Eastern Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. Above all, this hierarchy of influence reflects a reaching back into antiquity, a search for origins.

In her trips to Greece, H.D. grounded herself in the land which had obsessed her.⁵³ Perhaps the most striking aspect of the notebooks written in Greece are the descriptions of the landscape and the lists of flowers, the "thyme/ wheat/ lilac/ freezia/ calla-lily."⁵⁴ These flowers were not only material Greece, but also evoked the Greece of Theocritus and Sappho, another palimpsest of literary and material realities.

Flowers and light, colour and sea-water, remain vivid within the Greek lyric spirit in H.D.'s work. H.D.'s review of Edwin Marion Cox's edition of Sappho (1925) uses flowers to drive home her anti-academic attitude to Greece:

Mr. Cox is by far my superior in scholarship but has he seen the slopes of a Greek island, thyme and wild anemone, wild dwarf iris matching in size the stalks of the low-growing hyacinth, with hyacinth itself whipped over and across with boughs of flowering oranges? (596)

The review stresses the actual flowers that grow in Greece and insists on their relevance to the spirit and colour of Sappho and the islands. Similarly, it was the renewal to the old names given by the rocks, the Sicilian sun and the music of the shepherd lads that H.D. extolled in "Curled Thyme," her notes on Theocritus (*NEPGLP* III:Theoc. 1-5).

The attraction to the material reality of Greece is related to H.D.'s drive to historical authenticity in her work. Swann draws attention to the fact that the flowers that appear in her poems are genuinely those that grew in Greece around the fifth century before Christ (22). Aside from literary and mythological books, H.D. was also an avid reader of popular books which concentrated on the culture of ancient world, including dress, cooking, religion, hunting, dance, animals, folklore, medicine and plants.⁵⁵

Swann also notes that H.D.'s cities are full of pagan altars and marble images, her mountains free of manmade structures and her seas wide and frightening in relation to the little Greek seacraft. He detects archeological knowledge behind H.D.'s description of Apollo's temple at Delphi in *Ion* and the restored Egyptian temples in *Palimpsest* (7). Gary Burnett suggests that H.D.'s attentive reading of Pausanias was connected to the "specific mythic and geographic placings" of her poems (Image 73). He notes the "literal landscapes" of "At Ithaca", "After Troy" and "At Eleusis" in *Heliodora* (1924) (73). Perhaps Bryher's interests as a historical novelist were a factor here. In *Palimpsest*, although the purposes of the novel are manifold, there is a genuine attempt in the first part of the triad to portray the feelings of a Greek, Hipparchia, existing under Roman occupation, "circa 75 B.C." (3). Threaded through Hipparchia's part of the novel runs the sentence or motif: "Greece is now lost, the cities dissociated from any central ruling" (see 71).

This impulse was still in evidence even when H.D. was creating the shifting, highly symbolic cosmology of *Helen in Egypt*. In the midst of writing *Pallinode*, she writes to Bryher to check the authenticity of her reference to the "Simoan Plains" (2 and 29 September, 1952). On the 2 September 1953, while writing *Leuké*, she writes to assure Bryher that the meeting of Achilles and Helen in *Helen in Egypt* is "authentic myth, Euripides refers to it." With the words, "authentic myth," however, we come again to the check and balance to H.D.'s "authenticity." Her attraction to Pausanias was, as I shall show, as much to do with the multiplicity of his stories, with the freedom that this allowed her to choose her legends, than with any notion of "truth." The authenticity of the legend was not about whether or not it was true, or was even likely to be true, but was based in the very fact that the story had been told (see Chapter One). The impulse (as with daemonism) is again to praxis, rather than scholarly deliberation.

Another pull away from H.D.'s attachment to the materiality of Greece was her growing fascination with occult symbolism, the esoteric meaning behind the obvious. Even in her very early poems, as Zara Bruzzi has shown, alluded to the "flower symbolism of nineteenth century French occultism," via Balzac (Bruzzi 102-4). In later works like *Helen in Egypt* this reaches its height (see Chapter Five), but even in her early writings, as we saw in the "Hermes" poem, H.D. had a powerful sense of the mysterious. In a fascinating passage of the "Notes on Euripides" the map of Greece, the physical line of its coast, is also an endlessly signifiable symbol, a hieroglyph with many meanings:

Look at the map of Greece. It is a hieroglyph. You will be unable to read it and go away and come back after years and just begin to spell out the meaning of its outline. Then you will realise that you know nothing at all about it and begin all over, learning a cryptic language. I am never tired of speculating on the power of just that outline, just the mysterious line of it, apart from the thing it stands for.
(NEPGLP I:Eurip. 4)

"The thing it stands for" is very often the active principle behind the print. When H.D. read Pausanias, who scrupulously and dispassionately records every name, every temple, every tradition and every cult he encounters, she read with an eye to what lay behind the words:

As one goes on, one becomes fascinated, one's eyes forget to be tired, page after page after page of this fine print speed on with their miraculous treasure like some fine dull black and white screen-projection behind which, to the initiate eyes, gleam phantoms and treasures of colour and magic. Again, this life within life, this 'superlife seems to descend sometimes'.
(NEPGLP II:Pausanias 4a-5)⁵⁶

Here, behind the catalogue of names, H.D. find treasure lurking. Although this treasure will often in later work be occult, it is also always "life" and "superlife," suggesting, once again, overmind daemonism. In calling herself "initiate," H.D. implies that she is taking part in a Mystery through Pausanias' words. In *Notes on Thought and Vision* also, H.D. showed how the "overmind" could be activated through works of art:

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

H.D. had seen this process as comparable to the Eleusinian Mysteries. She describes three stages of the Mysteries in this text. "The first step" of the Mysteries, she writes, "had to do with sex" (29). The second was intellectual, in which "You can look into things with your sheer brain" (29-31). This is the stage at which "sheer hard brainwork" is important (26). The third stage involved "experiments in over-mind consciousness" (31). Variations on these three stages form a pattern that can be traced in some of H.D.'s shorter poems, as Gary Burnett has shown in the aptly titled *H.D. between Image and Epic: The Mysteries of Her Poetics*. In "Helios and Athene," for example, the speaker experiences sexual desire for a statue, then desires rest and stasis, and then attains inspired daemonic passion (Burnett 26).

This structure of three Mysteries leading to overmind ecstasy appears throughout H.D.'s work, and becomes more distanced from writing, from art as inspiration, and closer to an evocation of ritual itself. In "Delphi" (first published as "Apollo at Delphi" in *Poetry* 41 [March 1933]), the initiate woos the god who "if he loves, he will slay you" (CP 406). Firstly, the speaker seeks "His Presence," secondly, "His Riddle" must be solved and thirdly, the initiate partakes of "His Ecstasy" (401-6).

Another Helen emerges from H.D.'s growing interest in ecstatic states of mind. In 1926 (AN), she wrote the "Choros Sequence from *Morpheus*," published in *Red Roses for Bronze* (1931).⁵⁷ With hindsight, the poem can almost be read as a condensed first draft of *Helen in Egypt*. The speaker invokes Morpheus, longing to enter a sacred trance (CP 253-6):

I would revive the whole
of Ilium
and in sacred trance,
show Helen
who made Troy
a barren town. (256)

While these lines recall the Helen of Rossetti's "Troy Town," destroyer of the city, the speaker of the poem precedes to identify, in her trance, with Helen. Taking on Helen's voice, she relates her disillusionment with the "state and grandeur" of Sparta, the flinging off of her jewels and departure on the "sea-road leading/ to the mightier sea," with "Aphrodite's veil" as sail and protection, the very same images of spiritual freedom H.D. will use in *Helen in Egypt* (CP 256-7, see Chapter Three). Returning to the traditional story, Helen

then addresses Paris, whose "native land" is now reached, and with whom there will be "nothing but kisses" while "Troy burns" (257-8). The vision of Paris is then banished.

There follows a chorus-like interlude, in which Morpheus is again invoked. In these verses, the speaker identifies with Cyprus (Aphrodite) and experiences rebirth through invocation of the Eleusinian Mysteries (158-265, see Chapters One and Five). In a new vision or possession, the speaker becomes Thetis, the "lover-mother" dwelling on her son, Achilles who then vanishes as suddenly as he has appeared (265-6). The sequence continues with a series of meditations on rebirth and the familiar theme of love and song (266-70). These subjects; the exploration of the fringes of consciousness in the poem; the appearance of Paris, Thetis and Achilles as possible visions of Helen; the possession by a god and the confusion of voice between narrator and Helen all recall *Helen in Egypt*.

Alongside H.D.'s engagement with sacred drama, trance and ritual in the 'twenties and 'thirties went a probing exploration of the fundamentals of human relationships, familial and sexual. Through the Greek porthole she could see patterns of human life more clearly. Far from using the Greek world as a retreat from the human as her critics suggest, H.D., like Freud, used Greek motifs or myths to go deeper into the human (see Chapter Four). Diana Collecott has noted that H.D.'s mythological characters seem to represent "supra-personal emotions or 'states of mind'" and that this coincides with Dora Marsden's call on poets, in *The New Freewoman* of 1913, to evoke the "true delineation of the soul," in all its "movements" (emotions), be they love, anger, lust or fear (Collecott, *Imagism* 122-3). H.D.'s poems of the twenties used scenarios from Greek myth and legend to explore precisely this: love and hate, desire and passions both destructive and creative.⁵⁸

These poems were translations beyond translations, several steps beyond their original Greek texts which are of all three classical genres. The basic relationships between Hippolyta, Phaedra and Hippolytus; Orestes and Electra and the central characters of the Trojan story were gleaned from both Greek drama, usually Euripides, and from Homeric epic. H.D. often explored the same situation from different angles in these poems. Her work on Hippolytus forms a sustained continuum: translation leading to translation leading to translation, each further from the original text. The choruses from Euripides' *Hippolytus* were composed in 1915-16; three original poetic monologues

(composed 1920-1) were published in H.D.'s second book, *Hymen* (1921) and *Hippolytus Temporizes* (1927), the original play which "reflect[s]" both Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Ion* (HDDA 221)⁵⁹, was written in 1922-5. We can see this as a more compact parallel to H.D.'s long work on the Helen theme beginning with her early "Helen in Egypt" in the "Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets."

H.D.'s work on the Greek chorus had involved raising the women's voices at the margins of the action of the play to the position of main speaking voice. In the *Hippolytus* poems of *Hymen* she also brings to prominence Hippolyta, the Amazon Queen who was raped by Theseus long before the action of the play and who is hardly mentioned in Euripides. Phaedra addresses Hippolyta in "She Contrasts with Herself Hippolyta" and "She Rebukes Hippolyta" (CP 136-40). In the first of these poems, Phaedra quotes Hippolyta producing a double voiced effect in which the two women seem to merge voices. In the second, Phaedra seems drawn erotically to Hippolyta despite the inference of the title. In these poems, H.D. makes a new cultural connection, drawing attention to the dynamic between women.

In other pieces, often written in the form of monologues, H.D. was to present the perspective of women characters from the Homeric epics. Penelope ("At Ithaca" CP 163-4); "Calypso" (CP 388); "Cassandra" (CP 169); "Leda" (CP 120) and Thetis all convey a new angle on the central Trojan events. One of the earliest of the poems was, unsurprisingly, "Helen," composed "1923-4 roughly" (AN), and published in *Heliodora* (1924). This poem is unusual in that the central figure does not gain her own voice, but stands silently before the reader while the speaker of the poem draws our attention, alternately, to the attitude of "all Greece" and to the figure of Helen (CP 154-5).

This mute Helen is the victim of the hatred of Greece which only deepens when Helen's face "grows wan and white" from remembrance of "past ills." The stasis of the situation, Helen still and silent and Greece "unmoved," can only be solved, it seems, by the death of "the maid," her complete dissolution into "white ash." In the final verse, H.D. draws on two traditions of Helen; that of the maid and that of Helen as Zeus' daughter. The latter suggests the possibility of immortality and, hence, that Helen may never die, that the stasis of the suffering Helen and the hating Greeks might remain for eternity, a crucifixion without resurrection.

There is however passion and power beneath the still features of this Helen. She recalls another victim figure, the bride in H.D.'s masque, "Hymen." The word white is again repeated in the evocation of the veiled figure, but, even hidden and unseen, the women of the chorus know more of her:

For we know underneath
All the wanness,
All the heat
(In her blanched face)
Of desire
Is caught in her eyes as fire
In the dark center leaf
Of the white Syrian iris. (CP 106)

The figure of the silent hated woman recurs throughout H.D.'s work and will haunt *Helen in Egypt* (see Chapter Four).

H.D. did not only revitalise marginalised female personalities lost in the vastness of Greek epic. She also created powerful human situations out of epigrams and tiny fragments of Greek lyric. Drawn to the rediscovery of "intricate songs' lost measure," H.D. created extenuated scenarios from brief lyric fragments ("Epitaph" CP 300). "Lais" (CP 149) makes use of an epigram of Plato's, "Heliadora" (CP 151) and "Nossis" (CP 156) take their key phrases from Meleager's *Garland*, and "Telesila" (CP 184), from Pausanias' *Description of Greece*. Most famous of H.D.'s poems based on fragment of texts however are her poems based on Sapphic fragments, five of which were published in the early twenties.⁶⁰

The Sapphics were "re-worked freely," as H.D. wrote in her introduction to *Heliadora* in 1924 (CP 147). The original fragment becomes a phrase for meditation, growing in associations and significance. In the poem "Eros," the line, "Where is he taking us/ now that he has turned back?," at first an unclear ambiguous fragment, gains through repetitious unravelling a sense of the turning back of love, the loss of love and the loss of the rejected lover, becoming a meditation on the Sapphic theme of the bitter-sweetness of love. Although H.D. was free with the Greek, using it to explore love, song and passion, the original fragment is somehow cherished in her poems which circle around the brief phrase as though to stress its essential worth. Once again, the original is important, a talisman or mantra left to the modern world.

Writing about Sappho in her essay "The Wise Sappho", H.D. adopts the same technique as she was to perfect in her Sapphics, playing her whole piece around Meleager's phrase about Sappho, "Little, but all roses" (NTV 57).⁶¹ She follows the metonymic processes of the mind. The argument is not presented as accomplished, ordered, known. The process is one of reading and exploring significances. The few Greek words once again act as a springboard to H.D.'s imagination. Repetition played an important part in this process of working, in sensitively irregular free verse, through the connotations of a given phrase. This, presumably, was the class of H.D. poetry that Pound, as early as 1917, described as "dilutions and repetitions" (Paige 169). It was out of this technique however, that H.D.'s late poetry would grow.

One year after she wrote the "Chorus Sequence from Morpheus," in her "Cinema and the Classics" series, we find a more human Helen evoked in H.D.'s article, "Beauty." In this piece, H.D. praises the Greta Garbo of G.W. Pabst's *Joyless Street* and sharply attacks Hollywood for Garbo's subsequent decline into a vulgarised screen "vamp." Garbo is, several times, equated with Helen in the article. The post-war Vienna of *Joyless Street* is compared to Troy town. Garbo walks like "Helen walking scatheless among execrating warriors, the plague, distress, and famine[,] is in this child's icy, mermaid-like integrity" (31). Through H.D.'s distress at the plight of Garbo, we read sympathy for the hated Helen of H.D.'s "Helen" poem: "Helen who ruined Troy seems to have taken shape, but this time it is Troy by some fantastic readjustment who is about to ruin Helen" (29).

There is a growing awareness in this review of the power of image and the process of cultural image-creation, an awareness which H.D. had learnt from her study of cinema. Woman as image in this piece is also however, as Charlotte Mandel has indicated, "a vision which absorbs and spiritualizes the projection of a beautiful woman as hieroglyph, a sign" (Garbo 128). "Miss Garbo is a symbol, was, I should say, a symbol as I saw her in "Joyless Street," wrote H.D., describing her also as a "glorified embodiment" (29).

However, we still find the draw to the beautiful, though not simply the physical beauty for which Helen is "glorified." To the Greeks, H.D. writes, "Beauty and Goodness ... meant one thing" (29). This classical beauty, "among other things, is reality," writes H.D. (32). Reality, as she uses it here, is the distinction between what is genuine and what is not, between Garbo in *Joyless Street*, and the Garbo

who she now sees as a "totem of beauty," a sham replacement or defilement of the *original*, the "classic" Garbo. We have once again a notion of the genuine, the original. And, as in the review of Yeats' *Responsibilities*, a duty to tread carefully: "Beauty brings a curse, a blessing, a responsibility" (33). Only occasionally, and temporarily can such a beauty as honesty and transcendence of mediocrity triumph:

...once in so often, beauty herself, Helen above Troy, rises triumphant and denounces the world for a season and then retires, spins a little web of illusion and shuffles off to forget men and their stale formulas of existence. (32)

In this Garbo-Helen, we find the beginnings of the Helen who will walk out of the various projections discussed here and attain her own voice.

A quarter of a century after the Helens of "Helen," "Morpheus" and "Beauty," H.D. began to write *Helen in Egypt*. In the interim, she had, to some extent, moved away from "the Greek" and, for a shorter time, from poetry.⁶² Although Helen is "in Egypt" in the title of the poem, *Helen in Egypt* reflects a return to the Greek, as H.D. recognised: "I found myself returning to poetry, to the old Greek scene," she wrote in her journal (CF 30). "I thought I would never write any more early H.D.!", she wrote to Bryher on 23 September, 1952 and, a little later, "It was a great delight to get back to the Greek..." (25 October 1952). To Pearson, as she drew the poem to a close, she expressed a sense of the Greek so strong that she felt physically transported: "I feel the last days, that I am in Athens, the hills are miraculously 'violet-crowned'" (26 November, 1955).

Although *Helen in Egypt* is often read as a parallel to H.D.'s own life, it represented in many ways an escape from entrapment within the personal, through the port-hole of the Greek, onto a wider sea where she was able to achieve perspective on the broader issues provoked by both her experience and her reading. Apart from the solid achievement of *Trilogy* during the Second World War, H.D. had felt herself trapped in the previous two decades in an endless re-writing of traumatic events in her own life. The First World War, especially the disintegration of her marriage, had dominated the whole period. The Second World War, especially the rejection of her spiritualist "messages" by Lord Hugh Dowding, had been added trauma. At last, in *Bid Me to Live* (1960), completed in 1950, and in the unpublished novel, "The Sword Went Out To Sea," completed in 1947, she had conquered the personal trauma of the past:

Yes - the Sword is important. But simply again, as a record and a record I could not have done, if I had not persisted, even at Küsnacht, on REMEMBERING. For me, it was so important, my own LEGEND. Yes, my own L E G E N D. Then, to get well and re-create it.
(letter to Pearson, June 17, 1951)⁶³

By 1952, when she began *Helen in Egypt*, she was free from the past's domination, free to return to the Greek material, medium and mode which she had always associated with clarity and creativity. The poem "came clear," she writes to Pearson (8 December, 1952). She had found again the self she described in a letter to John Cournos in 1929 as her "real self, my real artist personality," as opposed to the "personal self" that was caught up in the past (July 9, 1929).

The triumphant tone, the sense of ecstatic reconnection with the past that we find in H.D.'s letters about *Helen in Egypt* is not only the result of her sense of union with Helen as "alter-ego" and Helen-as-mother, but also with her other mother, Hellenism. The writing of *Helen in Egypt* was a re-establishment of Greece and the Greek: "It brings back memories of times and places, Greece, Egypt and the writing of old Heliodoras," she wrote to Bryher of the new poem (26 September 1952). In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. celebrates a lifetime of reading and translating Greek and of her wider reading in Hellenic literature, Egyptian myth and legend and European and esoteric literature. The dexterity of her dealings with the multiple legends told by and about Helen in *Helen in Egypt* bear tribute to H.D.'s confidence with and knowledge of "the Greek."

The writing of the poem itself bears witness to H.D.'s return to the Greek, for her letters and journals suggest that with *Helen in Egypt* she also returned to Greek daemonic inspiration. From her letters we can see that H.D. is clearly letting her "pencil run riot" again as in "those early days of my apprenticeship." She records a pattern of periods of intense morning meditation at this time, followed by writing (CF 94-5). We can see from her original notebooks that her pencil flowed fast and certain. This time though it was more than a "few lines" that satisfied her. Although certain poems are left out of the whole work, very few corrections are made to the poetic text as a whole.

H.D.'s letters refer to the writing process as automatic or spirit-driven: "I must just wait till the spirit moves"; "I really feel that pull and urge"; "I do not want to hurry *Leuké*, it must 'write itself'; "I depend on the MOOD entirely and can't force the sequence"; "I have no idea where the 'caravel' is taking us" (letters to Pearson, 30 September, 1952; 28 December, 1952; 9 September, 1953; 25

November, 1953; 2 December, 1953). The "spirit" that moves her, like the "daemon" of earlier years, is associated with her own buried inner self which, after over twenty years of intermittent psychoanalysis with Mary Chadwick, Walter Schmideberg, Sigmund Freud and Erich Heydt, she now calls the "un-conscious":

Yes, the Helen carries on the "Mystery"; it is a miracle that it came clear like that. And a miracle that it waited until the end of the "lustre" to manifest from the un-conscious to the conscious or to inspire or what-not.
(letter to Pearson, 28 December, 1952)

Alongside the psychoanalytical term however, we also find a more religious idiom (mystery, miracle) and, most importantly perhaps, the word "inspire," with its associations with romantic inspiration and the muses. To Bryher, H.D. could write more freely, and to her she wrote:

I don't know what has come over me, my MUSE comes along to
Porch or inspires me in bed, the Helen, it could go on forever.
(September 26, 1952)

This letter recalls H.D.'s daemon and the depiction of the female muse in *Trilogy*. It hints at the figure of Thetis who will play a muse-like role in *Helen in Egypt*.

Above all else, these references to daemonic writing suggest that in this new burst of Hellenism, H.D. was still striving for spiritual truth, still struggling against the powers of war, as she had been in 1914. Twenty years after that war and twenty years before *Helen in Egypt*, with the threat of the Second World War hanging over her, in the same letter in which she declared her intention to translate Euripides' *Helen*, H.D. wrote to Bryher:

My work is creative and reconstructive, war or no war, if I can get across the Greek spirit at its highest I am helping the world, and the future. It is the highest spiritual neutrality....⁶⁴

This was the mission she was still determined to fulfill in the nineteen-fifties when, at last, she sat down to compose her own Helen.

Afterword

Her work was a correlation of gods, temples, flowers, poets
... a fervid compilation of poetry, religion and ethics. (P 71)

I have traced here the formation of a complex Hellenism, a philosophy as much as an involvement with Greek literature and Greece. H.D.'s "Greek spirit" however cannot be wholly dissociated from Greece and the Greek, as some have argued. It is often H.D.'s defenders, keen to emphasize the modernity and relevance of her work and to meet the charge of escapism, who have claimed this. It was perhaps Pearson from whom this interpretive trait originates. In interview with L.S. Dembo, he said:

[S]he often told me that her nature imagery, for example, was never really Greek but came from her childhood reminiscences of Watch Hill and the coasts of Rhode Island and Maine, which she used to visit with her friends as a child. (437)

Rachel Blau Duplessis takes up on Pearson's comment, agreeing that:

[I]t is possible to see ... the whole set of lyrics [as] only coincidentally Greek: the landscapes are American, the emotions are personal, the 'Greek' then becomes a conventional but protected projection of private feelings into public meanings. (*Career* 14)

Here DuPlessis reads the Greek context of H.D.'s poems as cultural disguise for unacceptable personal feelings. While I would not wholly dismiss this, I would argue that for H.D. the Greek was in fact a way through (a "port-hole") to clarity about those feelings, mythology used to reach conclusions, and not only about the personal.

Du Plessis cites H.D.'s "Note on Poetry" as evidence for her view, yet if we examine that text closely we can trace a complex dialectic of seemingly oppositional perspectives on the Greek. Here is the passage that DuPlessis quotes from in substantiation of her own and Pearson's argument:

"Leda" was done at the same time as "Lethe". Lotus-land, all this. It is nostalgia for a lost land. I call it Hellas. I might psychologically just as well, have listed the Casco Bay islands off the coast of Maine but I called my islands Rhodes, Samos and Cos. They are symbols. (72)

Firstly, this passage does not describe H.D.'s whole oeuvre: the two poems she mentions "Leda" and "Lethe" are in fact specifically about the desire for a drowsy death-like state such as that offered by the syrens of the *Odyssey*. Secondly, as Collecott has suggested, might not H.D. be adopting "a defensive gesture" here, "protecting what she identified as her most poetic and her most female self" (Memory 68)? We should further bear in mind that she has already been told by Pearson that the readership for whom she writes "may not be altogether in sympathy with my own sort of work" (71).

Most important however is that this passage is in fact surrounded by words that directly contradict the idea of her Greek land as an escape.⁶⁵ In this piece H.D. in fact constructs a dialogue with herself, in which she plays both prosecution and defence, on the charge of escapism. The first positing of the charge comes in the form of the familiar cliché that "the ivory tower, where poets presumably do live" must be contrasted with the war-torn contemporary times (71). Her first attack on this perspective is a personal justification in which she portrays herself stumbling home through an air-raid only to find a letter from Harriet Monroe suggesting that she should be more "in touch with events" (72). "Ivory tower?" asks H.D., with some sarcasm. Her first defense then is to point out where she actually spent the two World Wars which was, by choice, against opposition and, to some extent, through loyalty to her first receptive public, in England.

H.D.-the-prosecution then repeats the charge against "this sort of poetry": "We don't live. We don't see life. And so on" (72). Couched in terms of another wartime incident when a companion kicks a copy of Browning lying on the floor of a bombed house⁶⁶, she advances her second argument that the use of such poems at that time of crisis was that they opened up "other space, other dimension, never so clear as at that very moment" (72). Once again, we have the sense of a portal or port-hole on to an open sea, a way out only in that it reveals a greater clarity and perspective on the war-time scene in which the central characters of this vignette find themselves. This passage also hints at H.D.'s daemonism, at the mystical dimension of existence.

It is after this defence that H.D.'s comments about the "lost land" of Hellas (quoted above) are placed. These are ambiguous in that they can be read as a defence against the charge of escapism, in that the land itself is not of importance. However the word "nostalgia" suggests a romantic desire for the

past that is more self-indictment than self-defence. It is possible that H.D. recognises this element in the two particular poems (and associated poems of that period) mentioned. Furthermore, these words diminish the importance of Greece. While I would not in the least take issue with the fact that H.D. drew on the landscapes of both America and Cornwall, it is quite evident that the "Greek" was significant and so was the material reality. H.D. immediately pulls back from this more insidious attack. Having described the islands as symbolic, she goes on to physically describe the exact island they stem from, the *originary* island: "It was a thickly wooded island in the Lehigh river and believe it or not, was named actually, Calypso's island" (72). The Homeric name is of course significant and she stresses this. Again, a little later in the piece, she refers to Capri as where she found "the actual geographical Greece for the first time, Syren isle of the Odyssey" (73). Once again, the literary and material origins merge.

In the penultimate paragraph of the piece the prosecution flows into the defence and, finally, into a defiant upholding of her Greek world, the matrix of her memory and inspiration as a writer, her portal or way through to a sense of reality and timelessness :

The 'lost' world of the classics and the neo-classics is the world of child-hood. 'What are the islands to me?' This, I suppose -- an inner region of defence, escape, these are the poems of escapism -- if there is any such word. And of memory, suppressed memory, maybe (And what about the mother of the muses? Mnemosene, if I remember.) Actual memory, repressed memory, desire to escape, desire to create (music), intellectual curiosity, a wish to make real to myself what is most real, the fragrant pages of the early Greek poets, to tear, if it be even the barest fragments of vibrant, electrical parchment from hands not always worthy to touch, to fingers whose sterile 'intellectuality' is so often a sort of inverted curse of Midas - these are some of the ingredients of my poetry. Times, places, dates don't seem so much to matter. (73-4)

The passage begins in subdued tone. The quotation marks around "lost," the "I suppose," and the doubt about the existence of the word "escapism" are all, I suggest, evidence of H.D.'s dubiousness about her dismissal of the islands. With mention of memory, the rhythm of the piece (and her own enthusiasm) picks up. Mnemosene is sidelined into parenthesis, a supposedly casual mention, although to H.D.'s readers the "if I remember" does not convince. For, we are close to an encoded statement of one of H.D.'s central credos, advanced with greater confidence in *Notes on Thought and Vision*: "memory is the mother, begetter of all drama, idea, music, science or song" (23). That memory of course

is "classic" in the sense that it is ancient: the Greeks are access to the "eternal changeless ideas" of Euripides, ideas that he before him had recognised as "not his ideas" (NTV 23). Hellas is invoked then as mother and muse, source of all creativity.

The following sentence lists what the Greek means to H.D.: desire to escape is balanced out in sound and sense by "desire to create," and "(music)" hints at the inspiration of the rhythm and song of Greek chorus and lyric. With "intellectual curiosity" we have another hint -- this time, of H.D.'s extraordinarily detailed study of Greek, an area of her work that usually went unadvertised by her. It is in "a wish to make real to myself what is most real" however that H.D. finally defeats the charge of escapism with her conviction that time-transcending realities are of more significance than modernity *per se*. The "reality" of the very pages of Greek poetry is insisted on with the words "fragrant" and "vibrant, electrical parchment." The scent of Greek flowers is in the pages, H.D. seems to suggest: they have the power to physically electrify the reader.

The passionate desire to tear the Greek texts, portrayed here as sacred, out of the unworthy hands of sterile intellectuals and other cynics reveals both H.D.'s passion for the Greek and her *belief* in it as a mystical reality. The wonderfully demure phrase about ingredients pulls the daemonically-inspired poet back down to earth. The casual statement about times and places is an understatement in the light of what we have just read -- the assertion of "the Greek" as real beyond temporal realities.⁶⁷ Read as a whole, H.D.'s "Note on Poetry" is an extraordinary defence, rhetorically and dialectically powerful, and despite its confines, defiant.

ORIGINS

Chapter One

The Origins of H.D.'s Helen

I am alone (HE 1)

Helena? who is she? (HE 37)

Who will forget Helen?
(HE 121,122,123,124,137)

In the very first poem of *Helen in Egypt* Helen stands in relief, out of context, unusually "alone" (HE 1). Once again, H.D. revitalised and brought to centrality the voice of a marginal, minor character, a mere cypher for the feelings and actions of others in the Homeric tradition. In her own commentary to her translation of Euripides' *Ion* H.D. writes about the bringing to life, the re-creating, of an ancient character from the classical past, the mother of Ion, Kreousa:

A woman is about to break out of an abstraction and the effect is terrible. We wish she would go back to our preconceived ideas of what classic characterization should be. It seems this queen of Athens had leapt forward that odd 450 years that separates this classic age from our own. (ION 30)

H.D. compares Kreousa, translated by Euripides into Greek speech, and then further translated, by H.D. herself, into English, to "a woman ... about to step out of stone, in the manner of a later Rodin" (30). The poetry of Euripides, the sculpture of Rodin are "ultra-modern" and "real."

The reader feels the same fear and exhilaration at the beginning of *Helen in Egypt* as H.D. expresses, on behalf of the readers of *Ion*, at Kreousa "alive" again. H.D. brings the reader face to face with Helen, not through a sculpture so powerful that the model has stepped out of stone, but through a voice of such conviction that she would have us accept it as "real," as "ultra-modern," to use her terms. We might echo H.D.'s own words about Euripides' Helen:

It is good to meet Helen face to face, for men and poets have visualized her so crudely. We had become tired of her sweetness, her contours painted for us, as soft and luxurious. But this face is not sweet nor are the body lines luxurious. (NEPGLP I:Helen 3)

H.D. flinches in this passage from the idealised beauty of Helen's "classic characterization" in masculine (and) poetic fantasy. This image is not only that of the "men and poets" of an older generation, but is also an image deplored by H.D. in popular culture. In the 'fifties she wrote of a film-portrayal of Helen of Troy:

I felt quite ill -- They always make H. of T. a cutie -- is it the male conception? she was a Spartan, a goddess, etc. Well -- I suppose mere man cannot swallow that.
(letter to Pearson, 31 January, 1956)

This cute Helen is also of course quite incapable of experiencing pain. Part of the fear H.D. expresses for "us" in the *Ion* commentary is the fear of Kreousa as "mother of sorrows," the fear of facing feelings caught in a poetry that "rises clean cut to-day, as it did at the time of its writing" (*ION* 30). During the first few pages of *Helen in Egypt*, the reader realises that, while the "classic characterization" of Helen cannot threaten us, H.D.'s newly, and yet re-created, Helen can. Striving for the ultra-modern, art that steps out of time, H.D. intends to bring her Helen, in a very different sense from Poe, "home."

Our first impression then is of Helen alone, powerfully insistent as the speaking subject of the poem, and addressing us now. We might expect an intense lengthy dramatic monologue, a concentration on the perception of the tale of Helen from her point of view, even a vindication by means of the Egyptian legend, of her innocence. However, complication and confusion grows as, gradually, characters and scenes from multiple and contradictory traditions reassert themselves, surrounding Helen with various alternative pasts. Knowing H.D.'s previous experiments in dramatic dialogue, we might have expected this. After all, in her earlier work, Odysseus had his chance to respond to "Calypso," and Orestes to Electra (*CP* 388-400; 378-88).

In this chapter I explore the origins of the Helen that H.D. brings "out of abstraction," attempting to unravel the strands that make up this multiple figure. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss Helen's doubleness and, in the second, her multiplicity, showing how the different Helens of Greek legend can be seen to parallel the different perceptions of Achilles, Paris and Theseus in the poem. I stress the scholarship that lies behind H.D.'s Helens, her awareness of how images are created and the craft by which she both welds the different figures and maintains their separateness. Throughout this thesis I shall explore

how this multiple unravelling Helen sits with our sense, at the beginning of the poem, of a single speaking voice.

I *The Doubling of Helen*

I dropped
a screen, a shutter; a heavy door clanged
between Helen-Helen.... (HD 92)

The first legendary Helen mentioned in *Helen in Egypt* is Stesichoros' Helen who, the prose gloss informs us, never went to Troy at all, but was rapt away to Egypt while a phantom was placed on the Trojan ramparts in her stead (HE 1). We have only a few lines of Stesichoros' *Palinode*:

I spake vanities, and I will go seek another prelude. This story is not true, thou wentest not in the benchèd ships, thou camest not to the city of Troy. (Edmonds, *Lyra* vol 2, 45)

The prose voice records how Stesichoros was said to have been struck blind for an earlier condemnation of Helen, and to have composed his *Palinode* to appease her. H.D. had probably read of this legend in Plato's *Phaedrus* (52), and certainly would have known it from her well-loved Pausanias' *Description of Greece*. Pausanias relates how, when Leonymus of Crotona met some of the Trojan heroes after death, he returned with the following news:

Helen was wedded to Achilles, and had bidden him sail to Stesichoros at Himera, and announce that the loss of his sight was caused by her wrath. Therefore Stesichoros composed his recantation. (Vol. 2, III 19:13-20:1, 125)

This legend of Helen's stay in Egypt was taken up in the mid-fifth century, about a hundred years after Stesichorus, by Euripides. Euripides, also mentioned in the prose piece of *Helen in Egypt*, insisted on Helen's innocence, arguing that she was rapt away from Troy by Zeus. This was a radical view since Helen had been cast as a villain in all previous contemporary drama. In Euripides' *Helen*, Menelaus searches for home for seven years, with the phantom Helen on board, until he reaches Egypt and finds the real Helen.

We have then two main traditions: the familiar one, which we know from Homer, Aeschylus and Sophocles, that Helen did go to Troy and the lesser known one, that she went instead to Egypt and that an *eidolon* was sent to Troy

in her place. The former account suggests she was guilty of eloping with Paris and the latter, innocent. Already, then, we have a double tradition, as the first prose note suggests: "*We all know the story of Helen of Troy but...*" (HE 1, emphasis added). Plato's mention of the Stesichorus story emphasized the split between the two accounts. Plato contrasts Stesichorus with Homer whose legendary blindness, Plato implies, could have been healed if he too had composed a *palinode* to Helen (*Phaedrus* 44-5). One tradition, it is implied, must be right.

As in the days of her early Hellenism, when the Pre-Raphaelites provided a bridge to the Greek world, so, in the fifties, Goethe was an inspiration.¹ He too, in *Faust*, had dwelt on the two traditions about Helen. Phorkyas says to the phantom of Helen summoned for Faust: "Yet rumour has it, you assume a two-fold shape,/ Seen both in Ilium and in Egypt's lands" (171).² There is yet further doubleness in Goethe, for Helen and her chorus of women do not know that they are ghosts and are mocked by the cruel Phorkyas who threatens them with death (173-181). Goethe's "double Helen" was discussed by E.M. Butler (a friend of Bryher's and H.D.'s) in *The Fortunes of Faust*.³ This book, H.D. wrote in *Compassionate Friendship*, "really struck the spark that started my Helen" (21).

Butler heads her section on Goethe's Helen, "*An unearthly Helen*," and draws particular attention to Helen's "state of mind" in the scene: "a dream-like state of mind, into which doubts of her own reality intrude and bewilder her" (233).⁴ Butler draws attention to how Phorkyas, in telling Helen the legends of her doubleness, is "slyly insinuating her essential unreality" as a phantom (234). Goethe's Helen is a phantom, though she does not know it. H.D.'s Helen may or may not also be a phantom -- but also does not know it. Her first speech denies it:

Do not despair, the hosts
surging beneath the Walls,
(no more than I) are ghosts.... (1)

Yet, her words about the meeting with Achilles suggest suspicion in her mind:

few were the words we said,
nor knew each other,
nor asked, are you Spirit?

are you sister? are you brother?
are you alive?
are you dead? (6)

This question refers to the legend, that Pausanius tells, of Helen marrying Achilles after death (see above). Goethe also takes up on the story. When Phorkyas asks Helen about her marriage with Achilles, she replies: "Eidolon I, and Eidolon he, yes, we were wed."⁵

Helen however denies such "harpers" who place her meeting with Achilles after death:

the harpers will sing forever
of how Achilles met Helen
among the shades,

but we were not, we are not shadows;
as we walk, heel and sole
leave our sandal-prints in the sand. (6)

A few pages later, the prose voice again alerts us to the question when Achilles attacks Helen: "*This is quite enough. Can you throttle a phantom? He tries. The end is inevitable*" (15). The ambiguity of the term "phantom" here adds to the confusion: it can be read as *eidolon*, created image, or as ghost, dead spirit in the afterlife. The prose voice teasingly articulates our uncertainty, as the dialectic swings from one side to another:

She [Helen] had said of herself and Achilles in Egypt, "we were not, we are not shadows" and she had insisted that "the hosts surging beneath the Walls, (no more than I) are ghosts." They are not shadows, not shades, not ghosts. What are they? (HE 43)

Euripides too also extends his questioning of the notion of reality to the area of life and death. In *Helen* the figure of Menelaus is at first *believed* by Helen to be dead; he then *appears* alive on stage; he then *pretends* to be dead in order to deceive Theoclymenus in order to save, of course, his life.

Both the "Helen of Troy" and "Helen in Egypt" double legend and the double Helen who may be alive or dead are extensions of a quintessential doubleness which characterises Helen as a legendary figure:

Stesichorus did not invent the doubleness of Helen and her *logos*. For doubleness is the distinguishing mark of her entire tradition ~ from her two abductions, first by Theseus before her marriage to Menelaus and afterwards by Paris, to her twin brothers, the Dioscuri, whose alternation between death and divinity parallels the *eidolon/etumus* pairing, and above all, her dual paternity, Tyndareus and Zeus. (Bergren 81)

H.D. was obviously aware of this, and aware too of further doubles that Bergren does not mention here. Helen's sister, Clytaemnestra, said to be the immortal Helen's mortal twin (as, of the Dioscuri, Castor was to Pollux), features in *Helen in Egypt*.⁶ There are also two traditions about Helen's mother. The mortal Leda is usually named as Helen's mother, but the *Cypria* names the goddess Nemesis:

Rich-tressed Nemesis once gave her birth when she had been joined in
love with Zeus the king of the gods by harsh violence. (499)

Pausanias also names Nemesis as Helen's mother, and Leda, the mortal, as adoptive mother, just as Tyndareus is the mortal adoptive father and Zeus the immortal father:

The Greeks say that Nemesis was the mother of Helen, while Leda
suckled and nursed her. The father of Helen the Greeks like everybody
else hold to be not Tyndareus but Zeus.
(Vol 1, I:33:7-8, 183)

As Euripides did before her, H.D. plays on these mortal and immortal doubles of Helen's parentage and on the two sets of twins, a doubled double. Theseus speaks:

some say (did you know this?)
that the swan fathered Helen and Pollux,
but that Castor and Clytaemnestra

were mortals, begot of Tyndareus;
so growing within the Egg,
you were destined forever to know

this dual companionship,
man and hero, Castor,
god and hero, Pollux,

yourself in another,
the magic of Clytaemnestra.... (188)

We already have then the Helen of Homer and that of Stesichorus; the dead Helen and the alive one; two fathers; two mothers; and two sets of twins, two immortal and two mortal. All of these H.D. refers to, but it is the double *within* the "Egyptian" tradition, the actual Helen and the *eidolon* Helen, reality and fantasy, that was of greatest interest to H.D. as she began the poem, as a letter of 25 November, 1952 to Pearson indicates:

I could do a short descriptive paragraph, as the Helen in Egypt myth and the doubling of the Helen is too metaphysical or mystical, I suspect, for most readers.

H.D. proliferates questions in the early part of the poem about this doubling. The simplicity of the prose passage's original presentation of Stesichorus' "alternative" Helen is deceptive. H.D. surely drew on Euripides again here for, as Charles Segal suggests in "The Two Worlds of Euripides' *Helen*," while Helen in Egypt might be the real Helen in Euripides, the Egyptian setting seems like a fairytale (559). Conversely, while Helen of Troy is a phantom in Euripides, the fighting and destruction of war-time portrayed in the *Helen* seem all too real (559). H.D. plays on this same paradox in the early poems of *Pallinode*, contrasting the war deaths with the elemental, yet dream-like scene of Egyptian beach and temple. She also draws perhaps on Goethe's shifting fantastical scene in which Menelaus' castle gives way to a Medieval castle which in turn gives way to Arcadia.

Euripides' and Goethe's Helens are both aware of Troy, but H.D. takes this a step further, for her Helen seems *actually* to remember Troy. While it is *in* Egypt that Helen speaks, it is the walls of Troy that she speaks *of*. H.D.'s Helen appears to be Helen of Troy as well as "in Egypt." Is Helen resting in Egypt after the turmoil of Troy, as some lines suggest:

the old enchantment holds,
here there is peace
for Helena, Helen hated of all Greece. (2)

Is Egypt her afterlife or immortality? Alternatively was she, in all innocence, brought there by Zeus? Is Troy the Egyptian Helen's fantasy? Does she attempt to conceal her identity from Achilles because of her own guilt, or is she simply hiding from her unjustified reputation? The meeting with Achilles is comparable to the meeting of Helen with Teucer in the early pages of Euripides' *Helen*. In both, a destroyed Greek hero meets Helen, who attempts to disguise her identity, to hide from the obvious hatred of the Greeks.⁷ Does the Trojan Helen only exist in the tradition of hatred that is directed against her, or is she Helen's past as the first poem may seem to imply?

Does H.D. suggest, as Robert Duncan believed, that the two Helens co-existed, that no one tradition was right in fact, and that Euripides knew this, creating two Helens living in different dimensions:

Euripides does not recant the Homeric account of Troy but imagines in his drama the fiction of an historical Helen and a spiritual Helen, the one in Egypt and the other in Troy, the one the real body and the other an eidolon. (Book II:10, 353)

Certainly, both traditions co-exist in *Helen in Egypt*, but the question is of even greater complexity than Duncan implies. In the extant "alternative" tradition it is always the Trojan Helen who is the wraith or eidolon. At first we might well assume that the Helen who speaks to us from Egypt is the real Helen and that her Trojan counterpart was "but the phantom and the shadow thrown/ of a reflection," as Helen herself suggests (5). But, at other times, the position seems to be reversed: it is hinted that the Trojan Helen might be real or "historical" and that Helen in Egypt might herself be the fantasy or ghost of Helen of Troy. We question not only whether both Helens might be real, but also whether neither in fact exist? "*She says that Helen on the ramparts was a phantom. Then, what is this Helen? Are they both ghosts?*" asks the prose voice, articulating our confusion (15).

The Helens of past traditions know their position, be it guiltily self-loathing, as in Homer; led astray by the gods, as in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, or innocent, as in Stesichorus' *Palinode* and Euripides' *Helen*. H.D.'s Helen (like Goethe's) does not herself know what she is, real or ghost, historical or legendary, a single or double entity? She asks herself the questions we ask:

She knows that her name was Helen, in Sparta, in Greece. But she wants to know of that other, 'walking upon the ramparts.' ... Is this Helen actually that Helen? (47)

H.D. sets up then, using Stesichorus' framework, a series of questions about reality and identity, questions both mystical and metaphysical, which absorb both Helen in her seeking and the reader in hers/his. The poem both questions the nature of reality and suggests the possibility of other, different, yet simultaneously existant, realities.

At this stage of the book the question of Helen's identities is framed dualistically. Achilles asks Helen a question in the first poem of Book III of *Palinode* that is to echo throughout the work:

Helena, which was the dream,
which was the veil of Cytheraea? (36)⁸

The question comes to refer to many aspects of the poem, but here it is a question about Helen's two legendary selves, as Achilles makes clear at the end of the fourth book of *Pallinode*:

how are Helen in Egypt
and Helen upon the ramparts,
together yet separate?

how have the paths crossed?
how have the circles crossed?
How phrase or how frame the problem? (63)

Certainly no answer has been given, and H.D. herself had no ready answer at this stage of her writing. She wrote to Bryher of this poem, "Yes - the last poem. It is an enigma, it just came that way" (10 October, 1952). H.D. was embarking on a questioning process based on one repeated enigmatic, riddling question. The dialectic is similar to that of her earlier epigram poems and "Sapphics": part meditation, part intellectual and philosophical debate. As the question changes, the answers change, and the answer is always a question:

was the dream, Helen upon the ramparts?
was the veil, Helen in Egypt? (85)

it is I, Helen, who took the blame (HE 221)

The question of whether Helen is guilty or innocent creates a further split within the now familiar split between the two Helens of Troy and Egypt. Whereas, thus far, we have equated guilt with the Helen who went to Troy and innocence with the Helen who stayed in Egypt, this is by no means the assumption of classical writers. The image of the guilty Homeric Helen endured and, if anything, became more daemonic in dramatic representation, until the fifth century when Euripides, Herodotus the historian, Gorgias the orator, and Isocrates, his successor and pupil, challenged this traditional view.⁹

The split between guilty Trojan Helen and innocent Egyptian Helen was also disputed. Herodotus, who claims to have his story straight from the Egyptian priests whose predecessors were involved, has Helen and Paris shipwrecked in Egypt on their way to Troy (II.113, 403). In this case, Helen, although she spends the war in Egypt, is not innocent, having been guilty of the original elopement. It is Paris however who receives the greater blame from the Egyptians (II.114-5, 403-6).¹⁰

According to Herodotus, the Greeks' over-reaction to the theft of Helen was the original cause of the Persian Wars: firstly, the Phoenicians stole the Greek Io from Argos; the Greeks then took the Phoenician Europa from Tyre; the Greek Argonauts took Medea from Colchis and then Paris stole Helen away from Sparta (vol.1, I.1-5, 3-7). No reparation had been received for the first three thefts of the daughters of kings. The Greeks reaction was therefore extreme according to the Asiatics, "for plainly the women would never have been carried away, had not they themselves wished it" (vol. 1, I.4, 7). Here then Helen is guilty, but is really only a pawn in the game of war, as we can see by the fact that it is Helen *and* the stolen goods of Menelaus that the virtuous Proteus keeps safely by for their owner (vol.1, II.115, 405-6).

If the Egyptian Helen is not necessarily innocent, then nor is the Trojan Helen necessarily guilty. Gorgias and Isocrates set out to prove their rhetorical skill by taking up the case of Helen of Troy. Gorgias claims to be the first to declare Helen's innocence, despite accepting that she went to Troy. In his *Encomium of Helen*, a showpiece of rhetoric, Gorgias absolves Helen on the grounds that forces, human and divine, were ranked too powerfully against her to resist. Either the attractions of Paris, or the sheer power of love, or the goddess of love, Aphrodite, compelled her.¹¹ None of these forces would be resistable by a mortal woman, he argues. Once again, a further duality is set up within that of guilty or not guilty: did Helen act with free will, as Herodotus assumes, or was she torn away against her will or overcome by seductive forces?

These arguments relating to the power of the gods, especially Aphrodite, are put forward by Helen herself in Euripides' *Trojan Women*.¹² Euripides expands here on Helen's justification in the *Odyssey* that her deeds are the fault of Aphrodite (*Ody.* 72). In the court *agon* scene, Helen and Hecabe present their cases to Menelaus (Vellacott 119-121). Helen argues that Priam and Hecabe should have killed the baby Paris when it was prophesied that he would destroy Troy (120). She then claims that she was the victim of Aphrodite's power, since it was she who promised Helen to Paris at the Judgement of Paris (120).

Hecabe refutes these arguments, denying that the Judgement ever occurred or that Aphrodite went with Paris to Troy: the gods would not be bothered with such trivia, she says (122). Helen was seduced by the attractions of Paris'

handsome person and wealth, and this is no excuse in Hecabe's eyes: "your appetite became your Aphrodite" (122). Hecabe appeals to Menelaus for Helen's death on social grounds:

Kill Helen, and establish in all lands this law,
That every wife unfaithful to her husband dies.
(Vellacott 123)

Menelaus does condemn Helen to death by stoning in this play, but Euripides has not declared his own view, painstakingly presenting both sides of the argument and, ultimately, leaving the question open.

If guilt or innocence is not so simple a dichotomy in classical debate about Helen, nor is it in H.D.'s poem. H.D. takes up all of these Euripidean arguments, and the question of Helen's guilt becomes a further debate that Helen holds both with herself and with the other characters from the story. The possibility that the gods, especially Aphrodite, are to blame; that Hecabe should have killed her son at birth; that Paris was guilty of the theft of Helen or that forces, less personalised than the gods, such as fate, love or hate (*eros* or *eris*) brought about the war are all suggested in the poem. The guilt, it is also implied, perhaps cannot be placed, but might rest with more than one of these people or forces. Helen may not be solely innocent or guilty.

We can see that H.D. both suggested and split apart the multiplying doubles of the Helen mythos and drew on the complexity of legends about Helen and the classical tradition of sophistic debate in doing so. She asks a fundamental question: can there be a provable "true" distinction between real and phantom, Troy and Egypt, guilt and innocence, even death and life? These questions, as we have seen, are close to the concerns of Euripides who, Segal claims, in the spirit of the "sophistic intellectualism" (557) of his day, asked the following fundamental question in his *Helen*:

Is reality perhaps so problematical, so divided against itself, that we cannot even say what 'reality' is at all, or cannot even be sure that anything is 'real'? (561)

This questioning of reality would also have been familiar to H.D. from Plato's famous "Allegory of the Cave" in which his imagined "prisoners" recognise as reality only the shadows of artificial objects revealed to them (*Repub.* VII:514-521, 222-30). Later in the *Republic* Plato actually uses Stesichorus' Helen as an

example of the blindness of men who fight passionately for unreal painted pleasures (IX.586, 306). *Helen in Egypt* is alive to this epistemological debate and the intensity of the question is sustained.

II *Helen - Helen - Helen -
 there was always another and another and another;
 the rose has many petals.... (HE 187)*

Thus far, I have concentrated on dualities. Yet, we have already seen that doubles are split again, fractured into multiples, within both the classical tradition and *Helen in Egypt*. Not long after the original two Helens, of Troy and Egypt, are introduced in *Helen in Egypt*, other possible Helens appear, revealing the range of H.D.'s classical study, and leading to a perception of Helen that is continually shifting, eluding classification, leaving unanswered the questions it poses.

The differing traditions are also an enquiry into the perceptions of men. To Butler, the "tragic irony" of Goethe's Helen is that:

[F]eeling and thinking as a real woman, she is but a shade, and one perhaps who has never had a real existence except in the minds of men....
(*Faust* 234)

It is very possible that Butler uses "men" in its gendered sense here. Certainly, in *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. identifies the differing traditions about Helen with the perceptions that the male characters in the book have of her. Hence her book becomes an investigation of ancient and modern stereotypes of women. Helen is each other character's possession, in that each has his own perception of her and of what he desires her to be. Each has his version of her story. They are free with her name. She is a catchphrase:

only Helena could be named
and she was a public scandal
in any case, a cause of shame. (251)

To the Greeks, she is even a password, a means of passing by, a channel. As Achilles walks down to the beach he answers "the sentinel's threat":

with the simple pass-word

of Achilles' Myrmidons,
Helena.... (248)

As Jeanne Larsen has pointed out, this use of Helen's name is the height of masculinist reading of woman as sign (90). H.D. articulates the role of women as a medium of exchange between men, the position assumed, and therefore openly discussed, by Herodotus.

In the early chapters of the *Iliad* we find a prime example of such use of women as men's coinage, a story H.D. is to exploit in *Helen in Egypt* (see Chapter Four). The tale of Chryseis and Briseis forms the matrix of male honour out of which is born the famed anger of Achilles. Chryseis was priestess of Apollo whose temple was burnt down (H.D. dramatised this moment in "From Megara to Corinth") and who was taken by Agamemnon to "work at the loom and serve my bed" (NEPGLP II: Megara 5, *Iliad* 51). The priest called down a plague of Apollo and Chryseis was returned, but Agamemnon, angry at Achilles' part in his having to relinquish Chryseis, stole Achilles' spoil of war or "prize," Briseis, who "went with them, reluctant" (*Iliad* 58).

Eventually, when Achilles is needed to fight against the Trojans, Briseis is returned, although it is really Patroclus' death, the honour between men-at-arms, that leads Achilles to fight (*Iliad* 169).¹³ Although Achilles has protested his love for Briseis, when he and Agamemnon are reconciled, Achilles wishes Briseis had been killed by an arrow before she should cause the two men to quarrel (*Iliad* 325). When she does return, it is vital for his honour that Agammemnon should swear that "she has remained untouched in my huts," which Achilles now believes although previously he was not convinced (329, see 173).

Gayle Rubin (re-)exposed this phenomenon in her essay, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" (1974) in which she argues that women's passivity is culturally determined by their position as objects of exchange. In these brief passages, H.D. carries out a similar exposure. By having Helen return to confront not only this attitude in itself, but the full range of masculine perceptions about women, H.D. exposes the intervening centuries of masculine exploitation of Helen as a fantasy object on which to project love, hate and fear. A sense of the various masculine readings of Helen that we, and she, are to meet comes in Achilles' words early in the poem:

are you Hecate? are you a witch?

a vulture, a hieroglyph,
the sign or the name of a goddess?
what sort of goddess is this? (16).

Here Helen confronts herself here as a cultural sign, in the language of the poem, "a hieroglyph." This is one meaning of the enigmatic: "She herself is the writing." Helen's first encounter with her own past, and with intervening iconography, is with the hatred of Greece in the person of Achilles.

Helen, hated of all Greece (HE 2, 14)

In this line, H.D. picks up on the image, from the short "Helen" poem of the nineteen-twenties, of the Helen whom "[a]ll Greece hates" (see Prelude). This "hated" Helen is the one who "took the blame" for Troy (221). Mihoko Suzuki has argued, drawing on anthropological ideas, that the classical figure of Helen represents a cultural scapegoat, chosen to purge society of anxiety in order to maintain epic and social coherence between men (5-6).¹⁴ As such, Helen represents the positioning of women as "other," the "negative pole" of binary oppositions, an ambivalent figure of difference (4-5, 13-14).

H.D. explores in her Helen just such a range of "other" negative feminine archetypes, both ancient and modern, society's scapegoats. Thirty years after writing her early "Helen" poem, despite the early reference to *Helen in Egypt* as a "palinode," the hated Helen is not simply dismissed in a victorious deliverance in H.D.'s poem, but remains (like Helen's reputation) hauntingly persistent. The repeated line or motif, "Helen hated of all Greece," reminds us both of the scapegoating of Helen and of her own painful awareness of this. However, the Helen of *Helen in Egypt* does escape the passivity of the Helen of the earlier poem in that she is able to interact with the hatred directed against her.

Like Kreousa, she steps out of cold stone, the frozen stasis evoked by Sylvia Plath in "Edge," a poem not dissimilar to "Helen." Plath also reveals the same ambivalence toward Greek statuary that we find in H.D.'s later works:

The woman is perfected.
Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,
The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga.... (272)

This notion of being caught in stone has a modern equivalent in the idea of the entrapment of an image in a film still. Charlotte Mandel has suggested that the passive Helen of H.D.'s early poem "a held shot of a living image, a cinematic dynamic of tension within status," can be compared to just such a still (Garbo 130, see also DuPlessis, *Career* 109). In *Helen in Egypt* the still re-enters her own film and begins to move.

The ancient Homeric origins of this hated Helen have been analysed by Linda Lee Clader (18-23). In Homer, Clader shows, Helen is fickle, dangerous and unworthy of the blood being spilt for her.¹⁵ She is the "bitch," an insult referring both to her sexual availability, and also to the dogs who scavenge human flesh on the battlefield. This insult carries with it the fear of dishonourable death, the greatest fear of the potential hero. The words used about Helen associate her with chill, fear of death, grief, danger and violence. Significantly Homer's Helen also regards herself as a wicked seductress, "the bitch, the scheming horrible creature that I am" (*Iliad* 137-8).

Aeschylus upheld this interpretation in his *Oresteia*, but lays particular stress on Helen's infidelity: his Trojan War is "a war fought for a faithless wife" (68). Helen is condemned by the Greeks who resent the deaths of their men "for another's wife" (59). The "unnatural" nature of infidelity is emphasized. The chorus compare Helen to a wild beast that bites the hand that feeds it (68). She is a spoiler and a fiend who, in breaking the cultural contract (the exchange medium) between men, is beyond pity. The moment of leaving Sparta is portrayed as easily and thoughtlessly done:

Lightly she crossed the threshold
And left her palace, fearless
Of what should awake her fears;
And took to Troy as dowry
Destruction, blood, and tears. (57)

Menelaus is then pictured "dumb in his stricken room", desolate and beset with visions of Helen in "a home become a tomb" (57):

H.D. had begun to explore cultural archetypes of evil women in her earlier prose fiction of the twenties, as Cassandra Laity has shown. H.D. drew on images of degenerate, often lesbian, *femmes fatale* in the writing of decadent aesthetes such as Swinburne (Laity, intro. 23). These images, together with her own experiences with Frances Gregg, informed H.D.'s portrayal of her heroine's first female lover: Josepha in *Paint It Today* and Fayne Rabb in *Her*. These dangerous women are also erotic and stimulating, obsessing Midget (*PIT*) and Hermione (*Her*), and exciting creative activity in the same way as Helen of Troy inspired male poets.¹⁶

While the entrapping, enthralling women of her novels might recall Swinburnian characters reminiscent of Faustine or Anactoria, in the late twenties H.D.'s article on "Beauty" in *Close-Up* (as I have discussed) criticises fiercely the "deflowering" of Greta Garbo into a seductive temptress by Hollywood:

A beauty, it is evident, from the Totem's stand-point, must be a vamp, an evil woman, and an evil woman, in spite of all or any observation to the contrary, must be black-eyed, must be dark even if it is a nordic ice-flower and Lya de Puttiesque. (27)

The word "totem" stands in the article for the replacement of the actual by a socially-engineered version or fetish. Once again, H.D. critiques cultural stereotyping, attacking the idea that beauty equates evil, just as she had earlier attacked the opposite perception of Helen as soft and sweet in her "Notes on Euripides." In these two stereotypes we can find the two images of the madonna and the whore, images H.D. had previously explored in her depiction of Mary Magdalene in *Trilogy*.¹⁷

The power of a woman such as Helen or Garbo is intolerable to the "totem" who makes sure that woman's power is portrayed as sexual or "vampish." Aeschylus' Helen haunts Menelaus when she has gone, but his enthrallment is perceived as that of sexual desire:

Visions of her beset him
With false and fleeting pleasure
When dreams are dark and deep. (57)

Helen betrays not only her own husband, but a whole generation of Greeks and Trojans, causing the deaths of hundreds of other women's wives, as the Greek

citizens of the *Agammemnon*, who presumably remain within the social bonds of marriage, stress. In Greek drama, whether she herself appears or not, she is cursed "for eternity" by choruses of Greek women: Hecabe; Iphigenia; Orestes, and Electra; although usually not by Clytaemnestra, her sister. Pausanias' tale from Rhodes, of how Helen was betrayed by her erstwhile friend Polyxo, Queen of Rhodes also hangs on the anger of other women toward Helen: Polyxo and the women of Rhodes, furious for the loss of their husbands, hung Helen on a tree "and for this reason," says Pausanias, the Rhodians have a sanctuary of Helen of the Tree" (vol. 2, III:19:9-10, 123).

It is from this tradition, that the image of Helen as the archetypal dangerous, seductive female emerges to be explored, and even "embraced" in its "marginality" and "violence" in *Helen in Egypt* (Laity, intro, PIT 37). The enduring power of this image is stressed in the poem. Although the soldiers at Troy "fought" at a particular time, their curse goes on for ever:

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

The curse of the Greeks is expressed in the verbal and "physical" attack of Achilles on Helen at the end of the first book of *Pallinode*:

'Helena, cursed of Greece,
I have seen you upon the ramparts,
no art is beneath your power,

you stole the chosen the flower
of all-time, of all history,
my children, my legions....' (16-7)

Achilles accuses Helen of stealing the flower of "all history," giving her crime (literally) epic proportions. Helen herself, in the prose section before this poem knows the full weight of the eternal curse: "*O -no- but through eternity, she will be blamed for this and she feels it coming. She will blacken her face like the prophetic femme noire of antiquity*" (15). The blackening of her face, the covering up of her beauty, suggests, as Euripides' Helen expressly states, that beauty has been a curse not a blessing to Helen.

While Achilles personifies the hatred of Greece, he also has feelings of both attraction and fear, even enthrallment, towards Helen. Book IV of *Pallinode* (spoken by Achilles) is dominated by his gaze on Helen as she walks the walls.

Her very steps become his oracle by which he decides his actions in the war (53). In a fascinating poem denying Helen's legendary beauty, Achilles himself seems to realise that his Helen is, in fact, as much his own gaze as any integral attraction:

it was not that she was beautiful,
true, she stood on the Walls,

taut and indifferent
as the arrows fell;
it was not that she was beautiful,¹⁸

there were others,
in spite of the legend,
as gracious, as tall;

it was not that she was beautiful,
but he stared and stared
across the charred wood

and the smouldering flame,
till his eyes cleared
and the smoke drifted away. (252)

The power with which Achilles and the men of Greece invest Helen borders on the supernatural. In the poem of attack, he accuses her of "enchantment," calling her a vulture and a witch (16). Watching her on the ramparts, he feels that "no art is beneath your power" (16, see 61). The other men, trapped in battle, also watch her, but dare not destroy her:

an arrow would settle it,
but no man dared aim at the mark
that taunted and angered us;

and we asked, would an arrow pierce
a Daemon's heart? a devil?
had she enchanted us

with a dream of daring, of peril,
as yet un-writ in the scrolls of history,
un-sung as yet by the poets? (50)

The word "daemon" here suggests a being on the borders between human and evil spirit, rather than the elemental spirits of nature of H.D.'s earlier poems.¹⁹ As Jean-Pierre Vernant has shown, it is daemonic female figures who exemplify the horrific element of death in the Greek tradition. The Gorgon turns men to stone and the Keres who "represent death as a malefic force that sweeps down upon humans to destroy them ... thirsting for their blood" are also female spirits

(Vernant 54). Achilles portrays Helen as a similar grim reaper figure who causes the army to fall as ears of wheat: "they fell as the ears of wheat/ when a reaper harvests the grain" (49).

The image of the evil woman as witch (related to the daemonic image) is also touched on in the poem, when, just before he attacks her, Achilles suspects Helen of witchcraft: "what sort of enchantment is this/...are you Hecate? are you a witch?" (16). In the *Odyssey*, Homer portrays just such a witch-like Helen. In Book IV, Helen drugs the men with herbs, given to her by Polydama of Egypt, to remove sorrow (70).²⁰ Menelaus tells the story of how Helen imitated the Achaian wives to lure the Greek heroes out of the Wooden Horse at Troy. The tale, although designed to show her in a bad light as unfaithful to both husband and country, causes the reader to wonder how Helen knew which heroes were in the horse and how she could imitate the voices of their wives so successfully that their husbands were convinced by them (71-2).

Most notable is the occasion in Book XV of the *Odyssey* when Helen reveals her powers of prophecy. As Telemachus is about to leave Menelaus' palace, an eagle flies past with a goose in his beak, and he asks Menelaus for an interpretation (234). Helen pre-empts her husband, and interprets the omen correctly as a sign that Odysseus will soon return to Ithaca and destroy the suitors for Penelope's hand. It is possible that this scene partly inspired the scenes in which Helen reads Egyptian hieroglyphs in *Helen in Egypt*, especially since the first sign she reads is that of a live vulture. These actions of Homer's Helen in which she takes the initiative and shows her powers to be greater than her husband's are designed, Clader suggests, to show Helen as a bad Greek wife (37). Despite this possible Homeric intent, especially when compared to the weak and melancholic Menelaus, Helen's strange powers haunt and dominate this section of the *Odyssey*.

Helen is not wholly the victim of the image of herself as hated or daemonic in *Helen in Egypt*, for, in a transitional poem marking the movement from *Pallinode* to *Leuké*, she firmly rejects this image:

I am not nor mean to be
the Daemon they made of me;
going forward, my will was the wind,

(or the will of Aphrodite
fitted the sail, as the story told
of my first rebellion.... (109) .

This poem forms one of a number of rejections of images that Helen, stepping out of stone or out of her glossy film still, makes. Helen seems to celebrate here her own freedom or will ("my will was the wind") to escape not only Troy, but the image of the guilty daemonic Helen that has been "made of" her. Yet, immediately afterwards, the power of other forces assert themselves: both the power of the gods ("the will of Aphrodite") and the power of legend and culture ("the story") can never be challenged or wholly defeated, as the very multiplicity of tales told in the poem continues to insist.

was Helen daemon or goddess? (HE 231)

The allusions to a spirit Helen with daemonic magical powers in *Helen in Egypt* reflects in part the legendary status of Helen as, at least in part, immortal. The fear and the fascination of the Achilles who stares at Helen on the Walls is not far from the fear of a man who meets a god. A mortal is liable to be crippled or even killed by the look of a god or goddess.²¹ In Homer's *Iliad*, at the sight of Helen, people freeze with fear and when she walks out, the Trojan elders say in awe, "she is fearfully like the immortal goddesses to look at" (88). Achilles calls her "first cause," a phrase that suggests not only bringer of war, but a figure of such mythic status as Pandora²², Eve, the Kabbalistic Malkuth or Gnostic Sophia, releasers of evil into the world (47). When H.D.'s Paris returns to Oenone after Troy, he cannot relinquish Helen, for "*who can fight Fate, Destiny or Helen?*" (119).

Helen's parentage grants her some degree of immortal, god-like status. This birthright is stressed even in the most unflattering portrayals of Helen. Aside from her parentage, or perhaps because of it, there is much other evidence in the tradition that Helen was worshipped in the ancient world. In *The Malice of Herodotus* Plutarch notes that "both Helen and Menelaus are the recipients of many honours in Egypt which still go on" (31). Pausanias mentions the shrine at Therapnai where Helen and Menelaus are said to be buried (vol. 2, III:19:9 123). Another Laconian shrine to Helen is reported among the "hero-shrines" at Plane-tree Grove (vol. 2, III:15:3, 91). Both Pausanias and Herodotus tell a Laconian story that Helen changed the ugliest maiden in Sparta into the most beautiful (Pausanias vol. 2, III:7:7, 41; Herodotus vol. 3, VI:61, 209).

That Helen was worshipped is accepted among scholars, but, at H.D.'s time there was fierce contemporary debate over the immortal status of such Homeric characters. Scholars such as Edwin Rohde in his *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (1925) argued that Helen, among other "heroes," was worshipped as a spirit of the dead, a real person made immortal after death (137). Classicists and anthropologists such as Jane Harrison and, at times, Lewis Richard Farnell argued against this notion that such heroes were only worshipped after death and in memory of their deeds at Troy. They questioned whether the Homeric characters might not in fact be faded gods and goddesses of ancient prehistoric cults.

Farnell discusses this debate in *The Cults of the Greek States* and in *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*, both books H.D. was familiar with (see Prelude, note 31). In the fifties H.D. would have been reminded of these debates by Robert Graves' *White Goddess* which she read and took notes from shortly before writing *Helen in Egypt* (see *Helen in Egypt* notebook). Farnell originally found confirmation for the argument that Helen was an ancient vegetation goddess in Pausanias' story about Helen being hung from a tree in Rhodes, the story of Helen Dendritis. Farnell believed that the explanation that the hanging took place because of the anger of the women of Rhodes was an aetiological explanation of a primitive "simple rite of theistic or daimonistic magic" (*Hero* 31). This rite would have involved "the hanging of the puppet of the vegetation-daimon on a tree for the magical purposes of fertilization" (*Hero* 31). Interestingly, in his later book, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality* Farnell changed his mind about Helen, dismissing her status as ancient goddess and redefining the Dendritis cult as the cult of a "heroine of a saga" who once really existed and whose deification was her final, not her original, manifestation (323-5).²³

In his earlier work, *The Cults of the Greek States* however, Farnell links Helen as Rhodian vegetation goddess with the goddess who became Aphrodite (vol. 2, 634 n.b; 675 n.h). Farnell relates how, according to Hyginus, Aphrodite was born from an egg that fell from heaven and was hatched by a dove:

[This] Oriental fable about the birth of the goddess from the egg plays its part, not only in the wide-spread myth of Helen's birth from Nemesis or Leda, but also in the Laconian worship, as Pausanias speaks of the sacred egg in the temple of Hilaeira and Phoebe at Sparta; and Helen is probably one of the many 'doubles' of Aphrodite. (vol. 2, 675)

Herodotus also seems to have connected the two goddesses in the second book of his *Histories*, a description of the Nile Valley. He describes Proteus' temple at Memphis and states his conviction that the "temple of the stranger Aphrodite" within the precinct is in fact Helen's temple, arguing that Helen stayed in Memphis and that this is the only temple of that name among Aphrodite's temples (vol. 1, II:112, 401-3). Aphrodite was goddess of the sea, so a link between Helen and Aphrodite could explain the otherwise surprising deification of Helen as a goddess who protects mariners in Euripides' *Orestes*.

As a fertility goddess, Helen would follow a similar pattern to that of Persephone who lives beneath earth for half the year and above for the other half. In *The White Goddess*, in a passage noted by H.D. in her *Helen in Egypt* notebook, Robert Graves suggests that Helen is a Persephone figure. Graves dismisses the Homeric account of the apple of discord that began the Trojan War, arguing that, in the icon that is meant to represent the Judgement of Paris, the Goddess of Love is in fact granting the apple, sacred to Aphrodite and representing immortality, to the shepherd figure, and that this young man, usually perceived as the Trojan Paris, is in fact a Dionysus figure (256-7). The goddess represents the triple goddess and Helen, rather than being the prize Paris has won, is one of this triad: "Helen was not a mortal woman; she was Helle, or Persephone, a Goddess of Death and Resurrection" (257).²⁴

In her complex multiple characterisation of Helen in *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. refers to all these differing yet over-lapping theories of the goddess Helen. H.D.'s Helen seems, at different times, to be spirit, fertility goddess, deified hero of the Trojan War, and goddess with the attributes of Aphrodite. From her earliest work on Helen, H.D. had emphasized her divine or semi-divine nature. In "Notes on Euripides," as I have mentioned, the scene is that of a "spirit-world," and Helen is a "child of God" (*NEPGLP* I:Helen 14). Helen's un-Praxitelian beauty is revealed, in a passage close to the erotic, to be that of a bird-spirit:

It seems (if we could strip off the close-fitting texture of her robe)
we would find another such light soft body as this bird's [a
flamingo]. The bird looks at her indifferently as he might look at
another bird, another kind of bird, a great gull perhaps....
Her face ... is white and beautiful as a skull or a bird's swift,
destructive beak is beautiful.
(*NEPGLP* I:Helen 2-3)

This Helen resembles the erotic, although sometimes cold, bird-women who appear in H.D.'s novels and who both enthrall and disgust their male lovers. In

Palimpsest Marius perceives Hipparchia as she lies on the bed as "some inconsiderable nymph, no goddess.... Her arms were lying bare outside the red cover and ended in claws, a bird-angular wing structure, featherless" (16).²⁵ In *Hippolytus Temporizes* the bird-woman is more spiritualised body than eroticised spirit, for she is Phaedra whom Hippolytus lies with, imagining her to be Artemis:

that thing that held me
was a broken bird,
with arms cold like a sea-gull from the sea,
I say (and I repeat) those hands were cold,
and O, the white was luminous.... (96)

Helen's parentage is proof of her status as more than mortal:

Why must men and poets visualise her as a woman, this Helen?
She is a spirit; she, who was hatched from an egg by Leda the
mistress of God.
(NEPGLP I:Helen 3)

When Hipparchia identifies with Helen in *Palimpsest*, she says: "Helen must defend her parent-hood, bird and nymph wedded" (74).

In *Helen in Egypt*, the sense of Helen as spirit or goddess remains, but her coolness has gone. It is as fertility spirit or goddess that she is evoked by Paris, the second man to imprint his image upon her. Paris insists that Helen died at Troy, but that she then rose again with the spring -- through Helen as goddess, Paris could be saved from death.²⁶ As the prose voice says, "A tree is struck down or blighted by the frost, it flowers again" (131). Paris asks:

what mystery is more subtle than this?
what spell is more potent?
I saw the pomegranate,

blighted by winter,
I saw the flowering pomegranate
and the cleft fruit on the summer branch;

I wait for a miracle as simple,
as inevitable as this.... (131)

H.D. would have known from Graves that the fruit of the pomegranate was sacred to Adonis and his counterparts in other cultures, Attis, Tammuz, Rimmon, and Dionysus, from whose blood it was said to have sprung (*Goddess* 314, 371). Adonis was of course lover of Aphrodite and associated, like her, with sensuality. Paris becomes an Adonis figure in *Helen in Egypt*. The

pomegranate, with the lily, was also sacred to the oriental Ishtar who is seen by Farnell as antecedent of Aphrodite, a connection H.D. knew and made use of in *Helen in Egypt* (Friedrich 75; Farnell, *States* vol.2, 626-7). The pomegranate here then suggests Helen as "double," as Farnell has called it, of Aphrodite, and Paris as her consort.

The pomegranate was also however the fruit that the King of the Dead gave Persephone to trick her to remain in Hades, for having eaten there it was impossible to return (see the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter," *Cypria* 315). This story, named "The Pomegranate Seeds," was one of those told in Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales*, H.D.'s first introduction to "the Greek." As the title suggests, the re-telling emphasizes the six pomegranate seeds, each one of which condemns Persephone to a month below the earth with Hades (324-7).

Friedrich argues that the pomegranate is one of the links between Aphrodite and Demeter-Persephone, just as the poppy links Aphrodite to Demeter (208-9). The scarlet flesh of the pomegranate, he argues, evokes not only "Persephone's rape and defloration," but also the "love and death, rebirth and fertility" associated with the blood of Dionysus (177). It is after Persephone returns to Demeter for the first springtime, he notes, that Demeter teaches the sacred rites of Eleusis to the leaders of the people (179).

In *Helen in Egypt*, all these perceptions of Helen as immortal find their place in the multiple portrayal of Helen: no theory is allowed to totally supercede the others, as Helen moves through the past of her iconography. The first significant portrayal of Helen as Goddess comes when Thetis proclaims her Goddess of Love, at the end of *Pallinode*, mentioning those places where Helen was worshipped in the ancient world: "in Melos, in Thessaly,/ they shall honour the name of Love" (95). Thetis' Helen-as-Love is associated with the side of the academic argument, that declares Helen a legendary figure who attained immortal status only after death.

There seems to be an echo of Helen's apotheosis at the end of Euripides' *Orestes*, again after the war is over. In the final scene of Euripides' play Helen is rapt away by Apollo on the orders of her father, Zeus, and set on high among the other immortal stars as a goddess of the sea:

Immortal 'midst her kindred stars she shines,
Beaming kind influence on the mariners.

.....
A goddess she shall hear the vows of mortals;
and honoured with the twin-born sons of Jove
Guide the tost mariners, and rule the sea. (Everyman vol. 1, 243)

In *Helen in Egypt* it is Thetis, but Thetis as representative of Greek lords rather than Greek gods, who announces Helen's deification in the second poem of Book VII of *Pallinode*:

The Lords have passed a decree,
the Lords of the Hierarchy,
that Helen be worshipped,

be offered incense
upon the altars of Greece,
with her brothers, the Dioscuri. (95)

The words of Thetis have the same declamatory and conclusive tone as the Euripidean *deus-ex-machina*. Both texts put the deification after Troy; in *Helen in Egypt* Helen is "Love,/ begot of the Ships and of War" (95-6). The emphasis on stars at the end of *Pallinode* again recalls *Orestes*: Achilles is a star in the night; Agamemnon is a star whose course could not be altered (98); Clytemnestra is "called to another star" (102). The prose voice reflects on Helen's apotheosis: "'Helena shall remain one name, inseparable' with the names of the twin-stars or the star-host, 'the thousand-petalled lily'" (103). H.D., like Euripides, stresses the Dioscuri: here they are the "twin-stars."²⁷

In *Helen in Egypt* however, this form of immortality has its drawbacks. Might not Helen, like H.D.'s earlier "Demeter," be trapped within her worshippers' concept of what she should be? The "order" for Helen's deification comes from the "Lords of the Hierarchy," the same masculine "iron-ring" of Greek lords (95). The order is "the Law," "the Mandate," words chilling to the reader (96). As Book VII continues, our doubts about Helen's apotheosis increase. In the third poem of the book Helen is firmly instructed to forget "Clytaemnestra, the shadow of us all" (97-8). Helen, it seems, is being respectably set up with both male twins, the Dioscuri, to receive honour, while Clytaemnestra must be forgotten, even if Astarte may "re-call her ultimately" (98). The sixth poem of the book ends with a further declaration that Helen shall be worshipped as goddess, "inseparable/ from the names of the Dioscuri," but the seventh prose section begins: "But only if she accepts, without reservation and without question, the decree of the Absolute..." (104-5). The poem that follows insists that she should not "seek to know / too much," nor "grieve for Clytaemnestra" (105).

We are not surprised that Helen, although she does let go the story of Clytaemestra, rejects this form of divinity which seems designed to settle the dust of Troy shaken up by her revival.²⁸ The book does not end, like Euripides' *Electra*, with a climactic and conclusive apotheosis. Just as she escaped her designation as "daemon," so Helen rejects this immortal identity:

let them sing Helena for a thousand years,
let them name and re-name Helen,

I can not endure the weight of eternity,
they will never understand
how, a second time, I am free.... (110)

"Helen, half of earth" in the end "out-live[s] the goddess Helen/ and Helen's epiphany in Egypt" (111).²⁹ Thus Helen escapes the Greek definition of her as goddess.

In Book III of *Leuké*, Helen is a different kind of Goddess of Love, associated with both Aphrodite and the ancient fertility goddess, Helen Dendritis, and therefore with the academic argument that Helen was a "faded goddess" before she was a Homeric character. However, there is also a hint of Helen as Persephone, Queen of the Dead, in the fragment of story told in this book, creating another double Helen: Helen as both love and death. Paris, now King of Troy, but dying, returns to Ida where Aphrodite appears to him. She offers him life, but only if he can forget Helen (134-7). Paris, the prose voice tells us, "*is now the dead or dying King, the Adonis of legend*" (136). Returning to the original myth, we find that both Persephone and Aphrodite loved Adonis who was ultimately killed, at the incitement of Persephone, by Ares (War), Aphrodite's lover. *Helen in Egypt* echoes this story, for Paris, like Adonis, is caught between Aphrodite, Helen as love, and Persephone, Helen as death. He, like Adonis, is killed by war, incited by Helen in her role as grim reaper of men, death.

Paris however, struggling to survive, attempts to create the image of himself and Helen as Adonis and Cytheraea (Aphrodite). Woman as boundless love, can be, he feels, his salvation. He contrasts the violence of war with "this haven, this peace, this return,/ Adonis and Cytheraea" (140).³⁰ Paris (like Farnell, according to his earlier theory) connects Helen as Love with Helen Dendritis, Helen of the Trees. It is from Helen Dendritis that he can achieve resurrection:

you slipped from a husk

or a web, like a butterfly;
they call you *Dendritis* in Rhodes,
Helena of the trees;

not lightning out of the clear skies,
but waiting for the sap to rise;
why, why do you yearn to return? (141)

In these lines Paris first figures Helen's death as a death into birth like that of the butterfly. He then recalls Helen of the trees: instead of lightning which brings death to a tree, Helen awaits the affirmation of spring, the certainty of resurrection, the coming of the sap. Paris wants to keep Helen away from Achilles, to preserve his image of her as goddess of life, symbol of resurrection, in a perpetual tableau offering him the springtime of the mysteries. The poem ends:

O Helena, tangled in thought,
be Rhodes Helena, *Dendritis*,
why remember Achilles? (142)

However, when Helen does finally appear to him as Aphrodite, Paris is shocked:

Was Her power nothing that you dare
to appear before me,
in torn garment, in rent veil? (145)

The prose voice emphasizes Paris' retraction of his perception of Helen, suggesting that he did not really comprehend Helen as goddess, or desire her as such: "True, Paris had referred to himself and Helen as '*Adonis and Cytheraea*.' But now he turns on her, 'do you dare impersonate Her?'" (145). It is the beautiful Helen with whom he ran away to Troy whose "garment sheathed you/ like an image in Egypt" and who was "suave and cool,/ with silver sandals" that Paris really desires (146). Instead, he must watch her leave, her departure signalling her rejection of that sleek Spartan Helen and of Paris' conception of her divinity. This poem does not suggest a total rejection however of her immortal or god-like status as a whole, for she is more Aphrodite than she has ever been as she departs. The notion of her doubleness with Aphrodite lingers -- Paris himself suspects she might actually be "that other" (145).

In the latter half of *Helen in Egypt*, it is the link that Graves makes between Helen and "Persephone, a Goddess of Death and Resurrection," that comes to the fore. The complex shifting question of whether Helen is alive or dead, phantom or immortal which plays in and out of the poem recalls Persephone who likewise shifts between the world of the living and the dead. Paris' account of Helen's death at Troy centres on a stairway which figures again and again, and could suggest Persephone's descent up and down from Hades (143).

It is during her encounter with Theseus in Book IV of *Leuké*, immediately after the Paris sequence, that images of Helen as Persephone first emerge. Theseus recalls his theft of Helen from Sparta when she was but a girl which was linked with Pirithous' attempt to steal Persephone from Hades. This story is a familiar one, mentioned in Pausanias, and in Goethe's *Faust* (Pausanias vol. 1, II:22:6-7, 365-7; Goethe 169). Persephone and Helen are doubles again here, for the two men had sworn "to wed only God's daughters" and to help each other in these ventures (147-8). Pirithous was unsuccessful, but Theseus' rape of Helen has its parallel in Pluto's rape of Persephone.

To Theseus, Helen is the "frail maiden" he seduced, yet he also perceives her as a goddess. Theseus calls Helen "Demeter" and then casts Persephone as her sister. He asks: "did you too seek Persephone's/ drear icy way to death?" (151). Theseus describes her as "Persephone's sister" who must "wait - wait - you must wait in the winter-dark" (57). Theseus description of Helen as a "Psyche/ with half-dried wings" has usually been read as an image for psychological emergence, but it also draws surely on Persephone's emergence from hell (166). Psyche means both soul and death. The emergence of Helen then, her passing of "the frontier,/ the very threshold you crossed/ when you sought out the Minotaur," carries the same sense of passing from death to life (181-2). In the poems which follow, Helen's encounter with Achilles is portrayed as an encounter with a death-cult and he is named Hades to her Persephone, just as Paris was Adonis to her Cytherea (see 195, 198, 209). I discuss Helen as Persephone and Achilles as Hades at greater length in Chapter Five.

These connections between Helen and Aphrodite and Persephone can be read, in the light of Farnell and Graves, as a superimposition or palimpsest of two different Helens of two different times. Helen can be seen as having been doubled here into goddess Helen and Trojan Helen, and the goddess Helen then again doubled into Aphrodite and Persephone. In the poems where Helen

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seems to be Aphrodite the doubles are reunited across time, the ancient goddess Helen meets the Homeric hero Helen. The different Helens do not succeed each other clearly in the text but overlap, recur and coexist, constantly shedding and gaining from each other.

In *Eidolon* the questions proliferate; nothing is as yet resolved. We read again the questions we have asked ourselves, often in the very same words they have been phrased earlier:

was Helen daemon or goddess? (231)

was Helen another symbol,
a star, a ship or a temple? (231)

is she a slave or a queen? (233)

Through the eyes of Achilles, the encounter that began the poem is replayed throughout *Eidolon*, with the same attendant questions about Helen:

what spirit, what daemon, what ghost? (239)

is she Greek or Egyptian? (254)

are you Hecate? are you a witch?
a vulture, a hieroglyph? (261)

We return here, in a circular pattern, to the first portrayal or image of the "hated" Helena, the encounter with legend with which we began. We have seen how the different perceptions of the central characters of the story represent different legends about Helen, and how both reflect various cultural attitudes to Helen, both ancient and modern. The Helens we have met are not new Helens; they are translations of translations, both translated out of the Greek of Homer, Euripides, Pausanias and Stesichorus, and translated too out of their original plays, histories and poems into a new form, an enacted meditation in prose and poetry. There is always "another Helen," another translation of a translation of an *original* Helen.

We are not given the security however that any one of these original Helens is *the Helen*. It is true that we can trace the cultural journey as being one back through time: beginning with secular modern images of vampish or "cute" Helens in popular culture, we move on to academic debates of earlier this century in which Helen is sacred: firstly, as Homeric hero worshipped after

death and, even further back, as pre-historic fertility goddess who can again be read as a goddess of the dead, since the two were *originally* connected. Yet, all these Helens have their counterparts in ancient culture and, besides, Helen herself never wholly accepts any idea of herself as even the most ancient of images. As the questions of *Eidolon* show, the journey backwards is a circling, a questioning, a refusal to believe that history and legend can tell the truth, a refusal in the end, of the notion that there is a true, a real, an *original* Helen.

Helen is then, as DuPlessis says, "a site of resistance by being plural" (*Career* 109). In sifting through the cultural representation of herself, as Claire Buck has argued, she is "a model of the woman reader, and a feminist political model of reading, in so far as she exemplifies a necessary process of re-examination of the representations and definitions of femininity" (148). It is not so much that Helen does our reading of "her" poem for us, since her reading is endlessly questioning, ever resistant to closure, but more that she is a parallel figure for her own woman reader who is undertaking the same process as Helen herself, however different her reading might be. Helen is in this way an "everywoman" figure, as Susan Friedman has said (*Myth* 167).

But, who is this Helen who rejects images of herself, who "is a site of resistance by being plural," who is a model for the woman reader? That there is a Helen who does these things leads us to question the idea that Helen is simply a textual effect, a cubist construction, a trick with mirrors. Claire Buck has suggested that knowledge of her self always escapes Helen because she is caught up in "cultural knowledge" which is always "the wrong knowledge - knowledge about her rather than her knowledge" (149). I would argue instead that it is Helen's knowledge of cultural knowledge that enables her to move through the poem, ever elusive. Helen's cognisance of her history, of the multiple legends that formed her, enables her to elude the identities that individuals, representing cultural ideas, suggest to her. If she stops in a story too long, she is lost, but she never does so.

We approach here the vexed question of Helen's identity which is, in one way, irrelevant since the poem self-consciously explores multiple literary and legendary images of Helen and, yet, is, in another way, utterly relevant since it poses the question of what we do with, not just our personal pasts, but with all our pasts. It is this last significance that has made *Helen in Egypt* an important text for the feminist project of exploring cultural stereotypes and reductive patriarchal texts in which "woman" (like Helen) equals beauty, sexual

availability or evil. It is in this way that Helen can be seen to be a "common woman reader," exploring how culture has created her according to its own desires.

It is important however to remember that Helen not only explores this cultural past, but she also is that past. As a multiple character, she can never be described as a transcendental subject. As an exploring, rejecting consciousness, she can never be read as utterly fragmented. I shall be suggesting that the only theoretical model of identity that we can apply to the Helen-who-rejects created by H.D. in *Helen in Egypt* is that of Julia Kristeva's subject-in-process (*subject-en-procès*). This model is appropriately a literary as much as a psychoanalytic one, arising, as John Lechte has suggested, from Kristeva's study of texts where identity is unfixed, where the place assumed by the subject of *énonciation* is pluralized by poetic effect (Lechte 72). This "poetic effect" works at the level of language itself. I shall be discussing this aspect of Kristeva's model in relation to H.D. later in the thesis, especially in Chapter Three.

Suffice it to say for now, that the rhythm which places the subject in-process is the rhythm of "text," the most radical signifying process Kristeva identifies in *Revolution in Poetic Language* and that this bears close relation to the rhythm we have begun to identify in *Helen in Egypt*. It involves a "continuous passing beyond the limit," an infinite process in which the subject risks her/his sense of identity, reality, family, state and religion in an endless rhythm that "destroys all constancy to produce another and then destroys that one as well" (*Revolution* 104). So it is that the "subject in process/on trial," as Margaret Waller translates it, is born, or is rather continually being born, destroyed, deconstructed or questioned, and then again, in another guise, reborn.

The space carved out theoretically by Kristeva and, before her, by H.D., is one where the subject, specifically the female subject with the full weight of cultural cliché upon her, can become someone other than the transcendental subject in which shape the historical, cultural trap lies; other than the utterly repressed place of denial, and other than the irreparably fragmented. This space is perhaps better envisaged as movement (as I shall conclude more fully in Chapter Six), movement that is both deconstructive and creative, movement by which Helen as subject-in-process escapes the trap described by Claire Buck (after Irigaray): "The woman is either a function of a phallic representational economy, or she is 'inter-dict' and 'between the lines'" (*H.D./Freud* 131).

Of the H.D. scholars, only Rachel Blau DuPlessis has suggested this Kristevan model, among several mentioned as possible ways of reading Helen, in her book, *H.D.: The Career of that Struggle*. Her suggestion is necessarily made briefly, since her book is a condensed account of H.D.'s life and work:

[Or] it can be read as an acceptance of the ever unravelling and reconstituting of a subject-in-process/ subject-in-question. (*Career* 110)

In a later essay on "Language Acquisition," DuPlessis' description (using the same Kristevan model) of H.D. herself at a particular moment in *Tribute to Freud* could well have been written about Helen:

And H.D. does here seem to shift between the postulate of a stable ego which may be reformulated through the clarities of memory and the postulation of what Kristeva calls a 'subject-in-process,' a selving (like a duckling) that can be provisionally postulated given this kind of statement, another selving, given another kind of statement, for H.D. enjoys fragmenting herself when and if she can do this by attending to myth (multi-cultural myths and stories) because these old images are at bottom. (Lang. 99)

Kristeva's model, I would argue, is itself a balance between these two possibilities, rather than just one side of the equation. Her work on the subject, as Toril Moi has argued involves a balancing act:

We find her carrying out ... a difficult balancing act between a position which would deconstruct subjectivity and identity altogether, and one that would try to capture these entities in essentialist or humanist mould. (Moi 13)

In *Helen in Egypt* we find a similar act in process, the same precarious balancing act. On one side of the balance, we have the the subject as "stable ego," the Helen who is alone at the start of the poem and who rejects imposed identities throughout.³¹ On the other, we have the "provisional postulations" of the many, many Helens of not only "myths and stories," but films, plays, histories and scholarly works, ancient and modern. Even as H.D. and H.D.'s Helen refuse these postulations, we still sense, as DuPlessis suggests, H.D.'s fascination with the "old images ... at bottom," the idea, the fantasy, the ever-resisted myth of an original.

Chapter Two

Divine Beings and Deathly Origins

I

Gods, Heroes, and Liminal Beings

Everyone around is a sacred personality.¹

Helen in Egypt throngs with beings mortal, immortal, and liminal. The latter category includes characters who can be read, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes at different times, as heroes, both before and after death; mortals at the moment of apotheosis; daimons; spirits, and ghosts. Helen's elaborate dance in and out of the varying legends told about her is echoed by the other members of the "cast" of the poem. Each characterisation draws on several traditions, glimpsed briefly in the text as their different sides catch the light. The influence of H.D.'s interest in the ancient origins of the Olympic pantheon, and in the worship of legendary characters, can be discerned in the portrayal of these shape-shifting beings.

The Goddess

The recognition between Achilles and Helen in the early pages of *Helen in Egypt* is made by the "sea-enchancement" of his mother, Thetis, reflected in Achilles eyes' (7). Shortly afterwards, Helen recognises the "night-bird" that flies toward them as "*the protective mother-goddess ... no death-symbol but a life-symbol, it is Isis or her Greek counterpart, Thetis, the mother of Achilles*" (13). The prose piece to the following poem continues, "*She has named Isis, the Egyptian Aphrodite, the primal cause of all the madness. But another, born-of-the-sea, is nearer, his own mother*" (15). Yet even as they are differentiated, the goddesses are once again presented as interchangeable. Helen attempts to absolve herself of the guilt of Troy, blaming: "*Thetis - Isis - Aphrodite - it was not her fault*" (15).

In the first book of *Pallinode* then, a complex dynamic is set up between Isis, Thetis and Aphrodite, the three major goddesses in *Helen in Egypt*. Thetis is seen as Greek "counterpart" to Isis, and Isis as the "Egyptian Aphrodite." In Book II, the three are again named together in context of female power: "*She*

seems to doubt her power to lure Achilles from this, or the magic of the goddess Isis (Aphrodite, Thetis)" (30). In the final book, Thetis speaks, but once again the other two goddesses stand in parenthesis beside her: "It is Thetis (Isis, Aphrodite) who tells us this, at last, in complete harmony with Helen" (93).

Throughout the poem, the three goddesses have in common an association with both sea and moon. In *Trilogy*, H.D. had already connected the mother-goddess with the sea in the lines in which the word, "marah" (bitterness), is distilled into:

mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary,
Star of the Sea,
Mother. (CP 552)

In *Helen in Egypt*, the goddess is "the 'sea-mother,' whether we call her Thetis, Isis or Aphrodite" (299). Thetis of the sea is also described as a moon goddess, like Selene and Artemis:

Thetis is the Moon-goddess
and can change her shape,
she is Selene, is Artemis;

she is the Moon, her sphere
is remote, white, near,
is *Leuké*, is marble and snow,

is here.... (193)

Robert Graves' "White Goddess" was also an important influence on H.D.'s goddess. Graves' Goddess of sea and moon, worshipped in "popular religious ceremonies" was also the Muse, the "unimprovable original" of the language of "true poetry" and origin of all Mediterranean and Northern European myth (9-10). H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* notebook contains notes from Graves on moon- and sea-goddesses, including a note on Aphrodite as "patroness of poets + lovers ... 'risen from the sea foam' -- mermaid."² This was the goddess that Ogilvie claimed was worshipped by Dowding and his "circle" (see Prelude).

The insistence, especially of the prose voice, that the goddesses are all *one* goddess of sea and moon draws on H.D.'s study of esoteric syncretist texts.³ Jane Augustine has shown how the "spiritual etymology" of *Trilogy* was influenced by the linguistic correlation of sea and mother in Harriette and Homer Curtiss's book, *The Key of Destiny*, one of the Curtisses' numerous

syncretic Christian theosophical works (published c. 1935-43) and read and annotated by H.D. (Augustine, Theos.).

Robert Graves was also a syncretist. In one chapter of *The White Goddess* Graves enters an "analeptic trance," listening in on a conversation between Theophilus, a Syrian-Greek historian, and Lucius Sergius Paulus, Roman Governor of Cyprus. Theophilus explains to Lucius about the Greek goddesses and their ritual worship, tracing the goddess Athene back to her origin as a sea-goddess and likening her to Aphrodite, Thetis and Artemis (350-1, 360-1). Such goddesses, he argues, are also "incarnations of the moon" (360). Faced with this seamless web of connections between goddesses, which Theophilus also extends to Roman goddesses, Paulus says: "I am getting confused in my mind between these various goddesses. Are they all the same person?" (361). Theophilus replies, "Originally. She is older than all the gods" (361).

Jane Harrison's discussion of the "The Making of a Goddess" in Chapter Six of her *Prolegomena* is the most useful summary of the contemporary perception of how one goddess became many. Harrison writes of how goddesses began as bird-women, spirits and daemons. Local cults grew up out of this spirit worship. All were focused on the earth mother goddess whose early names were related to this essential nature: Ge, Gaia, Themis. There was then one original goddess. From this one earth goddess developed the many goddesses associated with particular places, such as Demeter and Kore at Eleusis. The mystery, cult and rites were still paramount. Although mother-daughter dyads were now common, the goddess was still original earth mother. Harrison explains that, as matriarchal society gave way to patriarchal, the goddesses were subordinated to husbands, and set in the framework of a patriarchal family. They became ultimately divided from each other. The Great Goddess was split. The son/lover consort of the goddess took precedence over his mother and the father became paramount. Graves expresses the same general beliefs in *The White Goddess*, claiming that social changes caused the remodelling of matrilinear societies and myths (10, 64). He goes on to argue that, with the loss of the Goddess, logical philosophy replaced the magical poetry that had previously been dedicated to the goddess in Greece (10).

H.D. was not only interested in Greek goddesses. With the goddess Isis, her scope extended to the East. The history of the "original" Isis was not dissimilar to that of the Greek Great Goddess. In the early period, Isis absorbed all the

attributes of the great "primitive goddesses" of water, earth, corn, stars and the Underworld (Budge *Gods* vol.2, 216, see note 13). Her worship spread widely, especially to Greece and Syria (217, 220). Shortly after 80 B.C. (in the period that H.D. fictionalised in the first part of *Palimpsest*), the Romans began to suppress Isis-worship, pulling down temples and trying to prevent the Mysteries of Isis from taking place (217). Isis was ultimately superseded of course by Christianity, a religion dominated, like the later Greek religion, by father and son.

Isis is also associated with the sea and the moon. Graves reads her name, "*Ish-ish*," meaning "She who weeps," as a reference to the Moon scattering dew (and to Isis' mourning for Osiris when Set killed him) (*Goddess* 337). A chapter of Harold Cooke's *Osiris*, which H.D. owned, is also devoted to this reading of Isis as moon to Osiris as sun (Smyers, Errata 25). H.D.'s Isis was also influenced by Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, as her notes for *Helen in Egypt* show.⁴ In "The Goddess Isis Intervenes," Isis appears to the transformed Lucius on a beach under a full moon. She is described as:

[S]ole sovereign of mankind ... the shining deity by whose divine influence not only all beasts, wild and tame, but all inanimate things as well, are invigorated; whose ebbs and flows control the rhythm of all bodies whatsoever, whether in the air, on earth, or below the sea. (268)

Lucius goes on to mention some of the titles by which this "sole sovereign" is known: "Ceres, the original harvest mother"; "celestial Venus, now adored at sea-girt Paphos"; Artemis and "dread Proserpine to whom the owl cries at night" (268-9). When the goddess appears, with the symbols of all cultures who worship her, she accepts these titles and more, but says her true name is "Queen Isis" (271). H.D.'s notes on the goddess in her *Helen in Egypt* note-book read:

One goddess -- many names:
Isis -- triple character --
Ceres -- harvest mother --
Venus of Paphos --
Artemis of Ephesus --
or dread Proserpine -- (Apuleius) --

Here we can see H.D.'s interest in the form of the trinity. Isis is the great "mother," the one, in her notes, with Ceres, Venus and Artemis or Proserpine as the three.

Both Graves and Harrison make much of trinities of female deities. Harrison notes how there are always three "maiden-goddesses" or *korai* in the Greek tradition, giving the examples of the Charities, the Gorgons, and the Moirae (*Proleg.* 196-9).⁵ Harrison interprets ancient vase-paintings of a scene usually described as the "Judgement of Paris" as a depiction of the "three Korai or charities" bringing gifts of fruit and flowers appropriate to their calling (297-8). Graves, as I mention in the previous chapter, claims that these three are the "Triple Goddess," rather than "jealous rivals" (257). H.D.'s awareness of this argument is evident from a passage of *The Sword Went Out To Sea* in which she muses on the three goddesses:

The wrong side or the underside of the tapestry, seemed to stress the usual, mythical, rivalry of the three goddesses. But when I stood before the finished picture, I saw Love, crowned with white violets, with the Moon, her most powerful rival, and the goddess of war. They were hardly to be distinguished, in subtlety and beauty. (217-8)⁶

The trinity H.D. creates in *Helen in Egypt* is within the tradition of such trinities. The goddesses she invokes draw on older variants of the goddess than the Homeric Athene, Hera, and Aphrodite who appear in the Mount Ida beauty contest. The specific trinity of Isis, Aphrodite and Thetis however, was her own combination of goddesses, just as the trinity of Athene, Aphrodite and Artemis evoked in an earlier poem, "Triplex," had been her own (*CP* 291).⁷

H.D. attempts to recapture the spirit of the "magic poetry" of the one lost goddess in *Helen in Egypt*, and to present a valid religious experience for the spiritual woman in a patriarchal culture. She also moves toward the belief, common to both Hindus and Buddhists, that the believer sees the manifestation of god in which she/he believes, although all are in essence, one. In her copy of *Wisdom of the Hindus: Their Philosophy in Sayings and Proverbs*⁸, H.D. annotated the following passage:

Many are the names of God and infinite the forms that lead us to know Him. In whatever name and form you desire to call Him, in that very name and form you will see him. (264, H.D.'s emphasis)

In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. does not create a completely merged goddess figure however. She differentiates between the goddesses, drawing on their histories to reveal their specificity. Once again, this reveals her interest in origins, as well as in mythological shifts, for, as we saw above, Harrison had suggested that

each goddess was originally a local bird-woman, spirit or daemon. While H.D. does re-fuse the goddesses into what she saw as their original ancient self in *Helen in Egypt*, she also traces their separate histories, making use, as she did with her Helen figure, of their different cultural traditions and the different legends told of them.

In "Triplex" H.D. also characterises each separate goddess, even as she sets them in a generational relationship to each other as maid, mistress and goddess, and prays that all three should "dwell side by side in me" (CP 291). Each goddess is associated with a particular flower implying that each is the embodiment or spirit of that flower: Athene is the violet; Aphrodite, the rose, and Artemis, the hill-crocus (CP 291). While the goddesses of *Helen in Egypt* also have both their connections and their specificity, they, in the course of the long poem of sea-changes, are more fluid in their relations. They are shifting, evolving, sacred beings, at times models, originals and counterparts to each other, but, at others, separate spirits and even, it is occasionally hinted, rivals such as we find in Homeric epic and Greek drama.

While it is often in the psycho-dramatic encounters with other characters that differentiation is drawn between goddesses, even in the very midst of dramatic interaction, allusions are drawn to their individual sacred natures. In *Eidolon* for instance, in the midst of a series of poems about the relationship between Achilles and Thetis, there is a poem in which the worship of Thetis and Aphrodite is contrasted. While the "poorer worshippers" bring their "meaner offerings,/ a filigree ring of no worth,/ a broken oar, a snapped anchor-chain," to Thetis, on Aphrodite's "Paphos-altar," "sea-chests from the uttermost seas,/ empty their priceless treasure" (281).

This poem alerts us to the fact that, in choosing Thetis as one of her trinity, H.D. revived a goddess whose reputation had declined. To the modern reader, Thetis is only known, from Homer, as the devoted mother of Achilles. The portrayal of Thetis in *Helen in Egypt*, as well as drawing on legends of Thetis as mother of Achilles and re-creating Thetis as goddess, also looks back to what Graves suggests was Thetis' original form, that of sea-spirit (*Goddess* 128).⁹ Two earlier poems by H.D., both called "Thetis," had evoked Thetis' movement as elemental sea-spirit through the waters (CP 116-8, 159-163). These poems emphasise the plunging movement of the nereid, both deep into the waters and darting upwards out of them:

you may dive down
to the uttermost sea depth,
where no great fish venture.... (CP 118)

but one alert, all blue and wet,
I flung myself, an arrow's flight,
straight upward
through the blue of night.... (CP 162)

Both poems interact with other representations of Thetis: the *Hymen* poem works inter-textually and resistantly with Ovid's Thetis, as Eileen Gregory has shown¹⁰, and the *Heliodora* poem touches on Thetis' marriage to Peleus and love for Achilles, although not neglecting her essential sea-nature as "a crescent, a curve of a wave" (CP 160).

Certain lines in *Helen in Egypt* are almost fragments of H.D.'s earlier poems: "Did she rise and fall/ like the ebb and flow of the sea?" (293). The Thetis prow figure (see Chapter Four) stands unwavering, but makes:

as if to dive down, unbroken,
undefeated in the tempest roar
and thunder.... (278)

We can also trace this sea-spirit Thetis in the titles of "daemon" and "sea-enchantment" that she is given by Helen (273).

Even the prose section where Thetis is named, and Isis and Aphrodite stand in parenthesis beside her, suggests the differentiation of Thetis from the other goddesses, for it is only the goddess as elemental sea spirit who could speak the following poem about the sinuous wiles of woman:

they would plunge beneath the surface,
without fear of the treacherous deep
or a monstrous octopus.... (94)

As plunging sea-spirit, as I discuss in Chapters Three and Five, Thetis symbolises the specifically feminine aspect of the spiritual quest in the poem.

Thetis is also specifically characterised in the poem by her shifting sea-ability to change shape:

And Thetis? she of the many forms
had manifested as Choragus,
Thetis, lure-of-the-sea.... (117)

The prose voice before the poems in which Thetis controls the "god-like beasts" of the Zodiac notes, "*We have seen that Thetis, like Proteus, takes many forms*" (275). This prose-note echoes a note H.D. took from the following passage of Graves in her *Helen in Egypt* notebook:

Thetis was credited with the power to change her appearance; She was, in fact, served by various colleges of priestesses each with a different totem beast or bird - mare, she-bear, crane, fish, wryneck and so on. (Goddess 129)

The beasts that Thetis took the shape of and which became, in cult, emblems of her priestesses, can be seen to correspond to the beasts of Book V of *Eidolon*. When Helen sees them, she calls to Thetis to "gather" and "herd" them, to reconcile them (273-4). Thetis' symbols in *Helen in Egypt*, grasshopper, flying fish and octopus, are the specifically "*Greek symbols of a Greek sea-goddess*" and are differentiated from those of Isis, the Egyptian vulture-goddess (107). The symbol especially associated with Thetis is the spiral sea-shell, and, in granting Helen that image, Thetis comes to play a muse figure in the poem (HE 107, see Chapter Six).

Thetis' distinguishing characteristics in *Helen in Egypt* relate to her full history from nereid to mother of Achilles, with especial emphasis on her shifting sea-nature. The image of Aphrodite in the poem however draws largely on her Homeric character, or rather on debates as to the true nature of her Homeric character. As we have seen, the doubling of Aphrodite and Helen is used to ask questions about fate and responsibility (see Chapter One). Early on in the poem, the helmsman opens the question:

*O Helen, Helen, Daemon that thou art,
we will be done forever
with this charm, this evil philtre,
this curse of Aphrodite* (4)

Here we can read Helen and Aphrodite as doubled, as the same daemonic figure, both the curse of Troy, or we could say that Helen herself is under the curse of Aphrodite, is out of control of her own destiny, either through force, or through the sensuous power of desire. In the reading of Helen and Aphrodite

as doubled is a hint of Hecuba's perception of Aphrodite in *The Trojan Women*, as simply the power of desire *within* Helen, or, as a Homeric scholar writes, as merely the "predicative image of all Helen's . deeds, attitudes, and circumstances" (Whitman 225).¹¹

This ambiguity continues. *Leuké* begins with the equally double-sided poem in which Helen describes her "will" as "the wind" that took her from Sparta to Troy, but offers in parenthesis an alternative reading in which "the will of Aphrodite/ fitted the sail" (109-10). Later in the book, Paris relates Helen's enchantment of Achilles from the ramparts with similar ambiguity:

I saw your scarf flutter
out toward the tents;
the wind? the will of Helena?

the will of Aphrodite?
no matter - there was no pulse in the air, yet your scarf flew....
(139)

Aphrodite's defining image in the poem, the veil, is at the nexus of this, as well as other, dialectical debates. The veil functions too as an image of intermittent revelation in the poem (see Chapter Five). Otherwise, her specificity plays on her position as goddess of love and double of Helen as Love. These two elements of Aphrodite's significance in the poem join in the meditations on love and death in the poem, discussed at length in Chapter Five.

We come to Isis, distinguished in the poem, unsurprisingly by her Egyptian origin. In *Helen in Egypt*, Isis first appears as a nightbird, a hieroglyph, interpreted as vulture by Achilles and as "*protective mother goddess*" by Helen (13-17). As winged goddess, she is particularly Egyptian. Margaret Murray, who H.D. was reading when she wrote *Helen in Egypt*, writes that "the vulture was the sign of sovereignty for the Queen" and that the goddess of Upper Egypt was known as Nekhebt, the vulture (36).¹² These winged goddesses functioned as guardians:

[The goddesses] were invariably protectresses, never requiring protectors themselves. For this reason they are often represented with wings on their arms which they stretch out over the devotee or even the god, whom they protect. (38)

The protective "great spread of wings" (25) is an image evoked again and again in *Helen in Egypt*, linked also with the wings of Isis' child, Horus, the hawk-god (see *Pallinode* III).

Isis as Egyptian goddess is especially contrasted to Thetis who speaks at times as the mouthpiece of Greece (see 95-108). Isis is associated with magic in the poem, where Greece sometimes stands for reason. The power of Isis to work magic and utter "words of power" is emphasized by E.A. Wallis Budge, foremost Egyptologist of his day, whose work H.D. knew well. Even in an account largely concerned with narratives of Isis, rather than ancient attributes, Budge stresses the powerful magic of Isis (*Gods*, vol. 2 214-5).¹³ Isis was also the overall Queen of the occult and mystical tradition that the Curtisses explored, and is identified in their books as Divine Mother or Divine Love (Augustine Theos. 4, 18). Achilles' association of Isis with the Greek goddess, Hecate, one of the names Isis claims as hers in *The Golden Ass*, also evokes magic, although here it is the black magic of the witches (Apuleius 271).¹⁴ H.D. may have remembered Hecate as a witch in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and intended to trigger this recollection in the mind of her readers. It is this Hecate that the prose voice seems to refer to when it says that Achilles "*related the Isis-magic to a Hecate or witch-cult...*" (26).¹⁵

When all three goddesses are named together, with Isis as the goddess out of parenthesis, it is "*the magic of the goddess Isis*" that is emphasized (30). There is a sense in which Isis is the great original, most ancient of the goddesses, as Apuleius suggests when he grants her the attributes of all other goddesses. The passage interested Budge, who also shows how Isis was identified with goddesses of many other nations and suggests that she gave many of her attributes to the Christian Mary (*Gods*, vol.2, 217, 220). H.D. could have read of Isis as antecedent to Aphrodite in Farnell who regarded Aphrodite as oriental in origin (*States*, vol. 2 618-629). Farnell names the semitic goddess from whom Aphrodite evolved by her many names, mentioning Isis as the ancient Egyptian source from whom the semitic goddess gained her lunar associations, which were then passed down to Aphrodite herself (627).¹⁶

Revealing once again the draw toward origins, Isis can never really be rivalled in H.D.'s pantheon. In her unpublished novel, *Pilate's Wife* (composed 1924-34)¹⁷, the heroine, Veronica, finds a spirituality that satisfies her as a woman in

the cult of Isis. The Greek goddesses may have elements of the power of Isis, but could never attain her specifically Egyptian magic:

Isis was a magician and goddess of wisdom. The Greeks, for all their immense pragmatism and logical philosophy, had had to split the perfect image of the perfect Woman, say here is Love, faithless and here is Wisdom, loveless. Yet even Aphrodite and Athene, re-modelled, flung into some blasting furnace, to return, one perfectly welded figure, would yet lack something – something of the magic that Isis held in Egypt. (25)

The God

The God in *Helen in Egypt* is, like the Goddess, a conjoined and split figure, spanning both Greek and Egyptian mythology. He is usually Amen or Zeus, a fusion of the two almighty Egyptian and Greek gods.¹⁸ Like the trinity of Thetis, Aphrodite and Isis, in the early pages of the book, he is established as one original almighty god: "Amen (or Zeus we call him)" (2). Again, H.D. is aware of further counterparts: the God's temple is described as, "the great Amen, Ammon or Amûn temple" (11). This god of Egyptian and Near Eastern antecedents sets the Egyptian scene, but soon merges into a Greek-Egyptian hybrid, usually named Amen-Zeus or Zeus-Amen (see 34, 179, 187, 191). His names are used more interchangeably than those of the Goddess:

'Zeus be my witness,' I said,
'it was he, Amen dreamed of all this
phantasmagoria of Troy....' (17)

In the midst of writing *Pallinode*, H.D. responded to Bryher's perplexity about the god:

I will look into the Amen again. I meant throughout, a sort of Amen-Zeus, one or other but I will clarify. Also, later I refer to Thoth-Amen or Amen-Thoth, sort of relative for God-the-Father. (14 October 1952)

Amen-Thoth duly appears in Book V of *Pallinode* in a specifically Egyptian context (67). Amen in the form of Thoth is the all-father in the aspect of wisdom. An inscription quoted by Margaret Murray describes him as the element of Mind, while Horus functions as Tongue:

It was the Mind that fashioned the gods ... for every divine word came into being as the thought of the Mind.... It is the Mind which makes every kind of work and all Art. (47)

The "wisdom of Thoth" is briefly mentioned twice in *Helen in Egypt* (90, 112).

In myth, Thoth helps Isis and Horus save Osiris from Set. This role of protector and wise vizier is the one he plays in *Helen in Egypt*, when he mediates between Helen and Achilles (67, see below). Margaret Murray's translation of a "Hymn to Thoth" reveals this aspect of the god:

Hail to thee, Moon, Thoth, Bull of Heliopolis, ... he who sifts evidence,
who makes the evil deed rise up against the doer, who judges all men.
Let us praise Thoth, the exact plummet of the balance, from whom evil
flees.... (99)

As the Weigher of Souls who "recalls all that is forgotten" Thoth, with the symbol of the balance or scales, represents the struggle for justice and understanding of the past in the poem (M. Murray 99, see below).

Thoth, as H.D. wrote in *Tribute to Freud*, is the "prototype of the later Greek Hermes" (TF 100). From the early days of "Hermes of the Ways" this god had been a significant figure to H.D. He is presented as Thoth, Hermes, Mercury, and Janus in her work: as god of crossroads or borderlines; of gates and entrances; of the light of wisdom; as balancer of ills and as "Leader of the dead" (TF 100; CP 567-8). We can trace once again the pursuit of the "original" in her writing on Thoth/Hermes. In her earlier poems she concentrated on Hermes; in the texts of the 'thirties, *Tribute to Freud* and *Trilogy*, she traced the genealogy of the different manifestations of the god; in *Helen in Egypt* it is Thoth, the "prototype," "the *original* measurer" who appears alone (TF 100, emphasis added). Although we cannot observe the process of tracing the god back in *Helen in Egypt*, as we can with the Great Goddess, nonetheless it lies in H.D.'s wider work.

The God takes on other names in *Helen in Egypt*, including that of Proteus, the Egyptian king who sheltered Helen in Euripides' *Helen* (104). Proteus is a counterpart of sorts to Thetis, for he too can change his shape: "Proteus, king of Egypt,/ of many names and shapes" (179). The changing of shape again suggests the ability to be both one and many. In *Eidolon* the God is named Formalhaut, said by the prose voice to be another "synonym for '*the Nameless of many Names*,'" who inhabits the "*same Amen-temple*" (212).¹⁹ Such explanations were less necessary for the female goddesses in their single and separate

identities, since both their oneness and their specificity was interwoven through the text.

In the first poem of *Pallinode* Book VI, H.D. attempts the clarification of the god-figure promised in her letter to Bryher. She insists on the sacred oneness, and yet separateness, of her gods:

You may ask why I speak of Thoth-Amen,
of Amen-Zeus or Zeus separately,

.....

how can you understand

what few may acknowledge and live,
what many acknowledge and die?
He is One, yet the many

manifest separately.... (79)

This poem, together with the later title, "Nameless of many Names" (104), echoes the passage of *Wisdom of the Hindus* in which God is said to have many names and forms. Although H.D. explains her doctrine of the one and many here, her portrayal of the different manifestations of the male god is less successful than that of the goddess. Only Thoth is convincingly distinguished as a particular aspect of Amen and even he is only mentioned by name three times in the poem. As one, rather stern, absolute god, similar to E.A. Wallis Budge's description of the Egyptian Amen, her depiction is more convincing:

[T]he personification of the hidden and unknown creative power.... The word or root *amen* certainly means 'what is hidden', 'what is not seen', 'what cannot be seen' and the like.... [I]t indicates the god who cannot be seen with mortal eyes, and who is invisible, as well as inscrutable, to gods as well as men. (*Gods*, vol.2, 2)

It was not that H.D. was *unable* to depict a similar network of gods and attributes, as she had done with the goddess. In *Trilogy*, Thoth (already part of a structure of counterparts in her wider work, as we have seen) is one of the male gods shown to be both separate and one, "Ra Osiris Amen" (CP 523). Amen is the ram, as Christ is lamb of God and is also Amen-Ra (Amen as Ra), the sun-disk (525-7).²⁰ Osiris (or Sirius) is the resurrected god, also likened to Christ (CP 540-42). Thoth-Hermes, as scribe of the gods and creator of the Divine Word, is related to Christ as Logos, and the three again linked to the unified God (CP 518-9, 537, 547, 567). Astrological parallels are also drawn (CP 528-9, 539). Nor is

it that H.D. had "achieved" the god, and now concentrated on the goddess, for she also interweaves a series of Christian and Classical goddess figures in *Trilogy*.

I would suggest that the reason the goddess is more convincing as a sacred force in *Helen in Egypt* is twofold. Firstly, H.D. sought a feminine spirituality, which led her, both within individual works and in the process of her work as a whole, to move toward the goddess, as Susan Friedman has noted: H.D. frequently begins with father-symbols and moves backward in time to recover the primal mother, the source of birth and re-birth (*Psyche* 145). Hence, the figure of the god in *Helen in Egypt* as a "distant abstraction" (207), the rather generalised "God-the-father" of H.D.'s letter to Bryher, reflects not only the absolute god of the Eastern tradition, but also a god who is to some degree alien to the contemporary spiritual woman.

Secondly, H.D.'s draw toward origins also led her to the goddesses of matriarchal religion who, her reading had convinced her, were ancient and originary. Graves' *White Goddess*, which appeared in 1946 (after she had completed *Trilogy*) and which she draws so on for *Helen in Egypt*, must have been decisive confirmation for her of this view. There is more than a hint in the distant God of *Helen in Egypt* of the male gods of Graves and Harrison: the omnipotent deities of the last days of Classical Greek and Ancient Egyptian religion who had "conquered," as Graves said, both the figure of the all-powerful goddess and the plurality of earlier specific elemental gods and goddesses. In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. brings back these ancient goddesses, one and many, and minimizes the significance of the impersonal, dominant male god.

Daemons, Hero Gods and Children "Half of Earth"

H.D.'s fascination in borders, gate-ways into other worlds, and liminal states extended to the fringes of divinity. It is not only Helen who is "half of earth" in *Helen in Egypt* (HE 111). The other characters too have their divine aspect. Theseus was said to be the son of a goddess, Aithra, and either the mortal, Aegeus, or Poseidon, god of the sea. Achilles is the son of the marriage between Thetis and the mortal Peleus. The concentration on the borders of the divine in *Helen in Egypt* emphasizes the spark of the divine in mortal beings.²¹ This was a gnostic and orphic belief which, as Augustine has shown, the Curtisses also held, describing God as the "Higher Self" and subscribing to the occult formula,

"As above, so below; as below, so above" (Theos. 5). The Dowding Circle, with which H.D. was involved during the Second World War, was concerned, according to Ogilvie, with regaining the lost divinity of the mortal (11).

Once again, classical anthropology provided origins for H.D.'s belief. From her reading about Greek cults, she would know that Achilles and Theseus, like Helen, were worshipped as divinities. Pausanias records how Theseus was worshipped in Athens at the portico or sanctuary where his bones rested, and sacrifices were made to him by the Athenians (vol. 1, I:xvii:2, 6, p.83, 85; vol.4, X:xi:6, 431). Honours were paid to Achilles, with the nereids of the sea, at sea-side precincts in some parts of Greece (vol. 1, II:i:7, 252).²² Achilles was also worshipped of course on the "White Island" of Leuke in the Euxine, where he was said to have married Helen (vol. 1, III:xix:11, 124-5, see Chapter One). The most important record of Achilles-worship was that of a ceremony that took place in Elis where his cenotaph was raised:

On an appointed day at the beginning of the festival, when the course of the sun is sinking towards the west, the Elean women do honour to Achilles, especially by bewailing him.
(vol. 3, VI:xxiii:3, 143-5)

The same contemporary scholarly debate about the worship of Helen also applied to Theseus and Achilles. Some scholars suggested that they were faded gods; others, that they were real men worshipped after death in hero-cults, grown up around their legendary deeds, and focused on their tombs. The tomb and temple of Proteus in Euripides' *Helen* is an example of such a post-death elevation of man to god-figure. Such heroes were seen as mediators between the gods and mortals and were worshipped especially in their local areas (Richardson 56-7, see Rohde Ch. 4). They were liminal beings, occupying a similar position to the saints and angels of Christian and Semitic origin who were to occupy H.D. in *Hermetic Definition*.

Farnell interprets both Theseus and Achilles as epic-heroes of mortal origin. Theseus was so beloved of his subjects, Farnell suggests, that the Athenians embellished the tales of his deeds and created a Theseus-cult after his death (*Hero* 337ff). This is also the popular view of Theseus (see Bullfinch 115). Achilles too, according to Farnell, was simply a glorified hero of the Trojan battle whose cult originated on Leuke soon after Homer's stories began to circulate (*Hero* 286ff). The wailing of the women in his worship was merely mimicry of the wailing of the women in the *Odyssey*.

In *The White Goddess* however, Robert Graves, in passages noted by H.D. in her note-book for *Helen in Egypt*, describes Theseus, like Hercules, as an "Attic Sun-hero" (106). Theseus' deeds, which were to Farnell part fact, part epic embellishment, are to Graves mythical. According to him, the expedition to the underworld and the story of the Cretan Labyrinth were separated parts of the same "myth of the hero who defeats Death" (*Goddess* 106). Jane Harrison interprets the visit to the underworld similarly, and suggests that Theseus was originally a fertility daemon, an interesting parallel with Helen Dendritis (*Themis* 316ff). Graves claims that Achilles was originally a "sacred king" of the Myrmidons at Thessaly, rather than a Trojan hero: he cites the vulnerability of Achilles' heel as evidence of his godhead (gods, including the Egyptian Ra, often have a wounded or vulnerable heel) (*Goddess* 283, 303, 390).

In *Helen in Egypt*, as with the multiple Helen figure, H.D. draws on these different perspectives on Achilles and Theseus. She refuses to take a position as regards the scholarly argument about the worship of heroes, but maintains a sense of the sacred character. Theseus is referred to as "noble hero-king" and "god-hero" in the poem (155, 189). These titles are ambiguous although seeming to suggest a hero made a god for his epic deeds. Yet, Helen prays to Theseus as a more personal god than the distant Amen (207). In the same poem in which Theseus is "god-hero," Achilles is "man-hero," drawing attention to his humanity and his legendary mortality (189). Yet, Achilles is also described, after Graves, as "King of the Myrmidons" and his wounded heel is stressed (6). The characters remain liminal, on the borders of the human and the divine. As such, they also inhabit the borders of life and death. Through their uncertain immortality, they raise questions of mortality.

II

Questions of Death

Helen's first words in *Helen in Egypt* introduce the question of death:

Do not despair, the hosts
surging beneath the Walls,
(no more than I) are ghosts.... (1)

When Achilles stumbles on to the beach in *Pallinode*, "limping slowly across the sand," although he is the "immortal son/ of the sea-goddess," all signs suggest that he is newly dead (10, 27). Reference is made to the legend that Thetis, dipping the infant Achilles in the Styx to confer immortality on him, neglected to dip the heel, ultimately leading to his death in battle:

Here, values are reversed, a mortal after death may have immortality conferred upon him. But Achilles in life, in legend, is already immortal - in life, he is invincible, the hero-god. What is left for him after death? The Achilles-heel. (9)

Playing on the notion of the hero-god, the prose voice suggests that Achilles moved from a state he believed to be immortal into mortality:

His after-life apparently, was not what he expected. Where was the circle of immortals to hail and acclaim him? Time values have altered, present is past, past is future. The whole heroic sequence is over, forgotten, re-lived, forgotten again. (57)

Near the end of the poem, Achilles himself describes the meeting with Helen as "after-death" (254). In pursuing the references in *Helen in Egypt* to the Helen and Achilles meeting as after death, we find that H.D.'s most important sources for the cosmology of *Helen in Egypt* are the legends and literatures of the afterlife.

A brief look at H.D.'s life and work soon reveals her interest in legendary underworlds and life after death. Early poems dwell on the descent into the Underworld. In *The God, Poems 1913-17* we find "Eurydice" (CP 51-55). In *Hymen* (1921) "Demeter" reflects on the story of Persephone (CP 114-5). In *Heliodora* (1924) the longing for the forgetfulness of Lethe and death permeates both "Lethe" and "Fragment Sixty-eight," a poem turning on the Sappho fragment, "even in the house of Hades" (CP 190, 187-9). "Psyche" (published July 1927 in *transition* 4) includes further reference to Persephone beneath the earth (339-340).

In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. records her deep distress at discovering that Freud did not believe in an afterlife, save through a "Mosaic" conviction that he would live on through his descendants (TF 43, 62-3). A "sudden gap, a chasm or a schism in consciousness" opened up between her and the Professor (TF 62):

I am also concerned, though I do not openly admit this, about the Professor's attitude to a future life.... It worried me to feel that he had no idea -- it seemed impossible -- really no idea that he would 'wake up' when he shed the frail locust-husk of his years, and find himself alive. (TF 43)

Her own belief in an afterlife was certain, but, she realised, never really investigated:

It was a *fact*, but a fact that I had not personally or concretely resolved. I had accepted as part of my racial, my religious inheritance, the abstract idea of immortality, of the personal soul's existence in some form or other, after it has shed the outworn or outgrown body. (TF 43)

One of H.D.'s own interpretations of her dream of the Egyptian princess descending to the river to find and protect the little baby she finds there, is that the princess is Freud's personal protectoress or giver of life (TF 42).²³ The dream is H.D.'s "life-wish" for the Professor, dreamt in the light of her distress at his lack of belief in life after death (42). It is the Egyptian context, the story of the discovery of Moses as a baby, that H.D. subconsciously selects in her dream, and the river, the "river of life presumably," is "that river named Nile in Egypt" (TF 42).

H.D. had known since childhood of Egyptian beliefs about life after death, remembering in *The Gift*:

There were the Egyptians who lived along the river. They built little houses to live in when they were dead. In these underground houses they piled up furniture, chairs, tables, boxes, jars, food even. (*Gift* 5)²⁴

After her analysis with Freud, in the thirties and forties, H.D. seems to have become more concerned to explore her assumed but not "resolved" belief in the afterlife. Her edition of E.A. Wallis Budge's translation of the *Book of the Dead* was published in 1938.²⁵ She perhaps sought in it confirmation and deepened comprehension of her own belief in the afterlife, challenged by Freud, and of her dream-sense that Egypt was the ancient source of eternal life. During the Second World War, H.D.'s experiments with spiritualism continued the

exploration in an active fashion.²⁶ *Trilogy*, her wartime poem, is primarily a poem of rebirth and resurrection. "The Flowering of the Rod" (1944), the final part of the poem, draws on Greek lore of the afterlife, referring to the lost isle of Atlantis and the "Islands of the Blest" (the Hesperides), and palimpsesting these with ideas of Christian resurrection (CP 580-3, 601-2).²⁷

Undoubtedly, H.D.'s interest in underworlds and paradises was also influenced by Dante. She re-read the *Divine Comedy* before writing *Helen in Egypt* and regarded it as an important influence on the poem (HDDA 198, CF 32, see Friedman, Genre 215). The notion of an Underworld setting might well have been sparked off by Dante, just as E.M. Butler's book had reminded her of the doubleness of Helen.

Helen in Egypt however, draws not on Christian cosmologies, but on the underworld legends of the ancient Egyptians and Greeks, and also, I would suggest, of the Tibetans. Among the books on Buddhism in the Bryher Library, there is a 1936 reprinted edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.²⁸ The editor, W.Y. Evans-Wentz, suggests, that the Tibetan book probably originated from the same prehistoric antecedent as the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* which, as I have mentioned, H.D. owned (intro. 2, 22, 35).

The books of the dead found in Egyptian tombs and pyramids contained talismans, spells and prayers designed to help the dead person's *ka* navigate the underworld, attain a new body, and achieve a happy afterlife. This would be either a life very like the previous life in the fields of Osiris, King of the Dead²⁹ or a permanent place in the sun-boat of (Amen-)Ra which sailed through the skies of Egypt in the daytime and along the river of the underworld at night.³⁰ Budge defines the *ka* as the "double" of the dead person, "the abstract individuality or personality, which possessed the form and attributes of the man to whom it belonged" (*Dead*, vol.1 59). H.D. had used the idea of the *ka* in her novella, *Kora and Ka* (composed 1930).³¹ The narrator, John Helforth sees himself as the "sort of shadow they used to call a Ka, in Egypt" and his companion, Kora, as the "materialized substance" (7). We can relate this doubleness of Egyptian *khat* (body) and *ka* to the doubleness of Helen already discussed.

The *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, like the Egyptian, is designed to help the *hpho* (the essence of the dead person's personality and karma) wander through the various regions of the *Bardo* (Tibetan underworld). The book attempts to lead the *hpho* to recognise the light of one of the Buddhas who appear to it and thus attain the paradise of Nirvana. Both Egyptian and Tibetan dead may be judged and condemned to be chopped in pieces, but the Tibetan *hpho* has many more possible fates than the Egyptian *ka*. It may be reborn as a human again, with another opportunity for enlightenment, or become one of the various demons, ghosts or tormented inhabitants of various hells. In the next life, it may always redeem itself and move closer to Nirvana.

While it is possible to create a general picture of the Egyptian and Tibetan afterlives, Greek ideas about life after death, as H.D. would have known, were various, more a "nexus of interrelated ideas" than a coherent philosophy (Richardson 64).³² In *Works and Days*, Hesiod describes how some heroes, including those of Troy, lived on the Isles of the Blest, ruled over by Kronos, at the ends of the earth (15). In Homer however, the dead go to Hades, a colourless Underworld where they can only briefly be revived by blood offerings.³³ With the Mysteries, came the belief that the initiated could escape this Underworld, and attain Elysium (Richardson 57-9). The Orphics, followed by Plato in his later works, taught the doctrine of reincarnation, the soul (like the Tibetan *hpho*) having some choice as to its next life, and always the possibility of attaining divinity through wisdom (Richardson 61; *Repub.* 334-50; see *Tibet* 153).³⁴

Turning to *Helen in Egypt*, we find many allusions to the underworlds of Egyptians, Tibetans and Greeks, especially in the cosmology of the poem. The Egypt of *Pallinode* seems, at first glance, to be that of Euripides' *Helen*: "Proteus' tomb, at the entrance of Theoclymenus' palace in Pharos, an island at the mouth of the Nile" (Everyman 100). Of the three elements of tomb, palace and sea that we find in Euripides, only the palace of Proteus' son, Theoclymenus, the villain of the Euripides play, has disappeared in *Helen in Egypt*. The shoreline and the shrine of Proteus, more temple than shrine in H.D.'s poem, remain. At one level, H.D. seems even to have kept the island of Pharos (off Alexandria at the mouth of the Nile) as a part of her poem. "Pharos" means lighthouse, after a famous lighthouse built on the island by King Ptolemy Philadelphus, and H.D. has Achilles working to "reclaim the coast/ with the Pharos, the light-house" (63).

The island of *Leuké* of the second book of *Helen in Egypt* is, as I have mentioned, the after-life home of the blessed where, not only Helen and Achilles, now wedded, but also the two Ajax's, Patroclus and Antilochus live (Pausanias vol. 2, III:19:13-20, 125). It is a "White Island ... wooded throughout and abounds in animals, wild and tame while on it is a temple of Achilles with an image of him," Pausanias tells us (vol. 2, 19:11-12, 123-5).³⁵

We have two islands, two stories, then: one Egyptian and the other Greek. In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. merges the two. Whereas Euripides' Egyptian scene takes place seven years after Troy and is the setting for Helen's reunion with Menelaus, in *Helen in Egypt*, Helen meets Achilles in Egypt and there are allusions to Achilles' death. The very legend Pausanias recorded is referred to in Helen's denial of the tale the "harpers will sing forever/ of how Achilles met Helen/ among the shades" (6)³⁶

Although H.D.'s Egyptian shore may originate in Euripides' Pharos and Pausanias' *Leuké*, in *Helen in Egypt* the place is more akin to the Asphodel Fields. It is certainly not like a blessed isle where heroes feast and make merry. The Asphodel Fields had formed a recurring image for Flanders' fields in H.D.'s *Asphodel*: "white lilies are growing from the trenches, there are lines and lines of lilies across France" (132). Her epigraph to *Asphodel*, from Landor's *Imaginary Conversations between Greeks and Romans* reads, "There are no fields of asphodel this side of the grave."³⁷

The Asphodel Fields were reached by the Greek dead after they had crossed the Styx from Tartarus. This "other shore," a strand of sorts, was where, according to C.M. Bowra's *The Greek Experience* (which H.D. owned), most Greeks believed the dead remained (38).³⁸ The Fields are defined as grey shadowy places where shades, without consciousness, wander. Although the Tibetan dead experience visions, moving through various regions and onto various fates, their world immediately after-death is similarly limbo-like. "*Bardo*" is explained by Evans-Wentz as meaning literally "between two," the two being the two events of death and rebirth, and translated by him as "Intermediate" or "Transitional" State (intro. 28). It is "at all times" lit by a "grey twilight-like light" (161).

The place of meeting with Achilles, on the desolate shore, in the early poems of *Pallinode*, is similarly undefined: a borderline state or place, the division between life and death represented by the blurred division between sea and

land, the very division stressed in "Hermes of the Ways." Over thirty years before *Helen in Egypt*, the "Helen" section of H.D.'s "Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets" emphasized the same elements:

I visualize this opening scene of the Helen of Euripides not with stage-property and ceremonial of the religious drama, but as taking place out of doors upon some exquisite sea-shelf. I do not hear music but a blending of waters.... (1)

In the early poems of *Helen in Egypt*, shoreline and temple have become even more elemental, less actual. We are left only with the timeless sea and the temple. The meeting of Achilles and Helen "*in eternity was timeless*" we are told (HE 11). Helen has "all-time to remember" (HE 11). Eternal timelessness suggests the limbo of an after-life state.

Furthermore, the dead Achilles arrives on the shores of Egypt by "caravel," a boat-trip referred to several times as a central memory of Achilles (see HE 202, 253, 260). The crossing over to the afterlife on water plays a significant part in both Greek and Egyptian legends of the Underworld. Achilles is rowed away from Troy by an "Old Man" in a "death-ship," a figure reminiscent of Charon who rowed the Greek dead over the Styx (57). In Egyptian Underworld mythology, as Margaret Murray's book might have reminded H.D., the happy dead join the "boat of the sun" as it goes down in the West, survive the perils of the night, and emerge joyfully at sunrise in the "boat of the morning" (M. Murray 49-50). Murray translates several hymns to Osiris in which he is addressed as "Lord of Eternity," "O Dweller in thy Boat!" and "first of the Westerners" (79, 89).

The word "caravel" is not normally used to mean a ship for conveying the spirits of the dead to their destination. H.D. chose the word for its very alien quality and gave it its new significance as "spirit-ship" herself:

I will look into 'caravel'; I wanted to weave in the thread, as to first Helen, and 'caravel' is a 'foreign' word, 'foreign['] to Greek -- Turkish, I think it is, Bryher knew it and implied it could be used poetically. It means that to me, the shock of a new word; the spirit or spirit-ship, must have a 'foreign' sound or look to it.³⁹ (letter to Pearson, 25 November, 1953)

H.D. makes Achilles confused as to where the boat has come from or is taking him to:

it was not his own ship
but a foreign keel
that had brought him here;
the Old Man who ferried him out,

called it a caravel;
a caravel - what is that?
Phoenician...? (253)

Although the "Old Man" recalls the Greek Charon, the caravel becomes associated with the Egyptian boat of Osiris, first been seen by Helen represented on Egyptian papyrus fragments:

I had only seen a tattered scroll's
dark tracing of a caravel
with a great sun's outline,

but inked-in, as with shadow;
it seemed a shadow-sun,
the boat, a picture of a toy.... (22)

A poem a few pages later confirms that:

The inked-in sun
within the caravel,
was symbol of Osiris,

King and Magician,
ruler of the dead.... (26)

This "inked-in sun" is the sun of the Egyptian Underworld, which shines when Egypt itself is dark, the sun of the dead. Being identified with Osiris, the ancient King of the Dead, the boat in *Helen in Egypt* is more sinister than Amen-Ra's sun-boat which is triumphant against all ills.

During the poem, Achilles seems to be trying to gather up the heroes of Troy to live in an island heaven, the Greek Blessed Isles (29). His work with the pharos or light-house remains unexplained until the end of Book VI of *Pallinode* where his mission is clarified:

a light and a light-house for ships,
for others like ourselves,
who are not shadows nor shades,
!
but entities, living a life
unfulfilled in Greece.... (89-90)

This attempt to "reassemble the host,/ so that none of the heroes be lost" remains Achilles's task, and sometimes Helen's, throughout the poem (207).

Before looking further at Helen's journey through underworld-related realms, it seems appropriate to explore the nature of the after-death beings who people such regions and their relevance to the nebulous shifting figures of Helen and her fellow characters. The Homeric "shadow" or "shade" is a bloodless ghost of its former self, but Helen insists, as I have mentioned, that she and Achilles are not such ghosts:

but we were not, we are not shadows;
as we walk, heel and sole
leave our sandal-prints in the sand,

though the wounded heel treads lightly
and more lightly follow,
the purple sandals. (6)

Perhaps Helen, like Dante, is merely a visitant to the Underworld. However, the Egyptian and Tibetan legends of the after-life suggest another answer. In these traditions, after death, a new body, like the earthly body, is gradually recreated, the fragments of body, soul and spirit gathered together as Isis gathered Osiris together. The Tibetan *hpho* or "consciousness-principle" lives in a body resembling the previous body, but translated variously as "illusory body," "thought-body," "mental-body" or "desire-body" (*Tibet* 100-101, 105-6).

The Helen who is "*both phantom and reality*" in the early pages of *Helen in Egypt* could perhaps be read as in a similar state between life and death or mortality and immortality (*HE* 3).⁴⁰ The lightness of the footprints, the mark of the death-wound on Achilles' heel, suggest a limbo state both after death and before the fate or afterlife is decided for eternity. Such a period is suggested in a speech made by Theseus about the fate of the men who sailed on the *Argo*:

so we were drawn back,
back to the past,
and beyond, to the blessed isles,

and beyond them to Lethe, and beyond forgetfulness
to new remembrance,

and beyond the new remembrance
to the opiate of non-remembrance,
when the spark of thought goes out,

only the bliss of the immortal fields,
(they called it Death).... (168)

The rhythm of remembering and forgetting, punctuated by visitations to parts of the Greek Underworld (the blessed isles, Lethe) is characteristic of Helen's search. This process takes place before absolute death, but after life. In the "opiate of non-remembrance" we recognise an allusion to the east, perhaps to the Tibetan Buddhist paradise of blissful nirvana.

Like both H.D.'s and Goethe's Helen, the Tibetan "thought-body" does not know that it has died, and the text makes much play on this:

When the consciousness-principle getteth outside [the body, it
sayeth to itself], 'Am I dead or am I not dead?' It cannot
determine. it seeth its relatives and connexions as it had been used
to seeing them before. (*Tibet* 98)

The question of whether Helen is or is not dead remains in *Helen in Egypt*, like all the other dualistic questions, forever ambiguous. However, blurred borderlines are as characteristic as undecided dualities in this poem, and the possibility that Helen is a ghost never disappears. It is not only Achilles who suggests it, but also Theseus who greets her with the question, "are you a phantom?," and refers to her as "spirit" (147, 160). Paris too makes reference to a "new spirit-order" (217). He asserts that Helen did actually die:

I am the first in all history
to say, she died, died, died
when the Walls fell.... (131)

Yet the tradition that Helen did not die, but was transported away by Zeus is also given space: "*Zeus had rapt you away*, Paris said,/ there by the spiral-stair,/ yes, Zeus had rapt me away" (242).

In the broken piece of narrative of *Eidolon IV* Helen appears to seek the "Master Mariner," death, by the Trojan shore. In the following ambiguous poem, she is again in limbo between earth and water:

I only know that I slipped
on the floating weed

near the edge - was it Simois' river?
was it the sea?
it was a harbour, a bay or estuary....
(266)

In this nightmarish piece Helen is uncertain whether she is by the banks of the Simois, one of the Trojan rivers referred to in *The Iliad*, or at the harbour or bay by the sea, but both waters suggest the other shore of death. Helen seems to seek annihilation:

it was dark, I had not the power
to leap from the platform or wharf;

O, it was dark
so I lost my lover;
I slid on a broken rung

and my hand instinctively caught
at the skeleton-frame of the ladder
and I had not the strength to drown. (266-7)

The confusion inherent in this poem suggests the attempts to grasp the slipping shores of memory and tangibility itself (266). The following poem seems to confirm that Helen cannot in fact die, but, as ever, it is impossible to say whether it is post-death memory, the past itself, she cannot drown in, whether it is a spiritual death or nirvana she is forbidden or whether after Troy, she tried to die and failed. The prose voice merely says: "*No, Helen can not escape from Troy through physical death*" (268). Helen knows the old man will not take her, "no Old Man would ferry me out" (268). A reader determined to establish Helen's death can always find the story however in Paris' words and in Helen's very own words: "I was a phantom Helen/ and he was Achilles' ghost" (263).

This question is always interdependent on two other questions, whether Helen is real or *eidolon* (merely a shadow or reflection, another, yet different, liminal state) and whether Helen is mortal or immortal. If she is indeed a "deathless name" then, like Tithonus, however hard she wishes it, she cannot die (37). If immortal, was she always so, did she take mortal form, like Christ, for a spell, or was her immortality only bestowed upon her after her mortal life? These interrelating questions weave a web that can never ultimately be answered.

However, if we are to look to the underworlds for an after-life model for Helen herself, as well as for the cosmology of *Helen in Egypt*, then the most appropriate figure is that of the Tibetan *hpho*, itself closely related to the Platonic soul. The *hpho*, like the multiple Helen, is not a stable subject. It differs from the semitic soul, as Evans-Wentz points out, in its continual shifts and changes, even as its personality essence or "soul-complex" lives on in

various bodies (85-6, n.7). During the "Intermediate State" the *hpho* can have knowledge of all its past selves, knowledge which fades (unless it is born as a great Yogi) after it enters a new body. Helen's different selves exist, as I have said, on a similar thread of Helen-ism, even as they contradict each other. H.D., though, goes further, since her different Helens can be read as simultaneous and overlapping, as well as subsequent.

In the Egyptian and Tibetan traditions, and in some Greek traditions, the dead have further journeys to make once they have crossed to the other shore. Similarly, in *Helen in Egypt* the shore scene is only the beginning of a long journey from place to place, encountering beings mortal and immortal on the way. The sense of a journey to certain key places, Egypt, Leuke, Athens, which function as physical, symbolical and mental settings can find a parallel, perhaps an origin, in the Books of the Dead. The underworlds of Egypt, Greece and Tibet all form alternative cosmographies born of myth and legend. These, like H.D.'s, have their own oceans and islands, and form shifting dream-like worlds.

The underworlds of the Egyptian and Tibetan Books can be nightmarish and fearful, dark and uncertain. Monsters (comparable to the many-headed Cerberus who guards the entrance to the Ashphodel Fields in the Greek tradition) lurk in waiting in the Egyptian Book, and must be pacified with the correct "words of power." However, if the correct words are said and the *ka* judged fit (see below), it does at last have Osiris or Ra as its friend, and attain paradise. In the Tibetan Book, it is at the start of the process that the *hpho* has the opportunity to reach a Northern, Western, Southern or Eastern paradise realm through recognition of the shining Buddhas. If it fails to do so, it continues to "wander downwards" or "stray downwards" in the *Bardo*, encountering the same gods, in more and more terrifying aspect, as "wrathful deities" until at last it takes another "pathway" or "falls into" another "world" (*Tibet* 118, 126, 130).

Helen too encounters gods and other beings in her journey. She too meets her own monsters, her "minotaur," as well as more sympathetic gods and spirits. These encounters take place within the context of journey through memory, through the past. Like the Eurydice of H.D.'s earlier poem, Helen remembers, if very gradually and more problematically, the significant events of the past (*CP* 51-5). I shall trace the overall process of Helen's remembering in Chapter Four.

Here, however, I want to draw attention to those aspects of the memory process most suggestive of a post-death existence in the Underworld.

The striking realisation at the beginning of *Helen in Egypt* that all the events of Helen's lives are being recollected in the poem suggests in itself that she speaks after life. The prose voice of the poem stresses that Helen has not crossed that tributary of the Styx, Lethe:

Lethe, as we all know, is the river of forgetfulness for the shadows, passing from life to death. But Helen, mysteriously transposed to Egypt, does not want to forget. (HE 3)

In Helen's words, "it is not Lethe and forgetfulness/ but everlasting memory" that is her "potion": she has chosen "all-time to remember" (11). The very mention of Lethe seems to suggest an afterlife of sorts, but an afterlife not of forgetfulness, but of remembrance. Not all Greeks in legends of the Greek afterlife forgot the past and lost all consciousness.

Robert Graves writes of two pools in his cosmology of the underworld, his source being the Orphic Tablets:

Beyond these meadows lie Erebus and the palace of Hades and Persephone. To the left of the palace, as one approaches it, a white cypress shades the pool of Lethe, where the common ghosts flock down to drink. Initiated souls avoid this water, choosing to drink instead from the pool of Memory, shaded by a white poplar [?], which gives them a certain advantage over their fellows. (Graves, *Myths* I 121)

The suggestion here that it is the higher or "initiated" souls who do not forget the past. This seems to affect favourably their chances of reaching Elysium, the Blessed Isles of which Leuké is one. The entrance to Elysium is "close to the pool of memory" (121). It is possible to see Helen, Achilles and Paris as such higher souls, souls who do not forget. Helen does refer to herself as "initiated" and does of course attain the isle of *Leuké* in the second book. In the Egyptian and Tibetan Books of the Dead all spirits remember. Memory is one of the powers the *ka* regains through magical formulae in *The Book of the Dead* (Budge, *Dead*, vol. 1 104-5). In *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* the memory is said to be "ninefold more lucid than before" in the afterlife (183).

Two particular preoccupations that form part of Helen's attempts to remember the past in *Helen in Egypt* suggest that she inhabits the world of spirits. The first

is her search for the moment of death. In *Pallinode*, Helen explores the moments of death of Clytaemnestra (69, 88) and Iphigenia (81, 84). Especially in the first three books of *Leuké*, Helen painstakingly seeks to re-live Achilles' and Paris' deaths until, at last, each death is related.⁴¹ *Leuké* Book I-III is dominated by Paris' death by the arrow of Philoctetes.

Helen also seeks clues to the question of her own possible death and hence to her current state. She asks, and the reader echoes her question, "Helen was never dead,/ or is this death here?" (225). The search for an answer to this question edges closer and closer to Troy, until, in *Eidolon* Book II, she is "called back to the Walls/ to find the answer" (232). The answer is never finally found, but the return to Troy itself suggests the haunted spirit returning to the place of death.

It is not only death, but the justice of death and the justice of the after-life of the dead spirits, that obsesses Helen. *Helen in Egypt* has much in common here with Greek texts concentrating on the aftermath of Troy. In the first we know of these, the *Odyssey*, Odysseus still wanders, Penelope still waits and, Menelaus and Helen, although at home, are haunted by Troy. *Helen in Egypt* draws more however on the later Greek dramatists who became absorbed in the questions of post-Troy justice and revenge, guilt and innocence, left open by the epics. In the dramatic action, choral comment and set piece debates of these plays, the war is mulled over. Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Euripides' and Sophocles' *Electra* trace the fate of Agamemnon's House; Euripides' *Hecabe* and *Andromache*, the fate of the only two women left after the destruction of the Trojan royal family by the Greeks. The crucial difference is that, in *Helen in Egypt*, Helen, always previously the one to be judged, becomes the assessor.

Judgement plays a part, implicit or explicit, in all three of the ancient traditions of the underworld I have mentioned, and in the Christian after-life as evoked by Dante. Of all these traditions however, it is the Egyptian Judgement scene that is most dramatic and it is that scene that H.D. draws on in *Helen in Egypt*. Judgement in the Egyptian hereafter was administered by Osiris, King of the Westerners. After it's journey through the different regions of the Underworld, the *ka*⁴² would come into the presence of Osiris and the Forty-Two Assessors. A balance before Osiris had two pans: one containing the feather of truth and the other the heart of the dead mortal. Thoth stood by to record the verdict and Anubis to release the balance. Then the dead one made the "Negative

Confession," a list of sins *not* committed. If the feather did not move or weighed down the heart, the individual was speaking the truth, but, if the heart weighed down the feather with its sins, he/she was guilty. Amit, a composite crocodile, lion and hippopotamus monster, waited to consume the guilty ones.⁴³

From this scene, H.D. takes up the image of the feather, an image she had used in *Tribute to Freud* to suggest the psychoanalytic process. When H.D. first walks into Freud's consulting room, she remembers "the infinitely old symbol, weighing the soul, Psyche, in the Balance (97). Freud is the door-keeper, she the soul (97-8, see 100-1). In psychoanalysis, the analysand tells all to the analyst, the door-keeper, prototype of the recording angel, and attempts an assessment of the past similar to that attempted by Helen in *Helen in Egypt*.

In *Helen in Egypt*, the balance and the feather also convey a weighing up of guilt after the war. Although the Egyptian soul does not come to judgement until late in its journey through the Underworld, the assessment of guilt in *Helen in Egypt* takes place early in the book (mainly in *Pallinode*) -- in this detail, it is more like the Greek and Christian traditions. The balance conveys the redressing of balance more than the consignment of characters to the equivalent of Amit in *Helen in Egypt*. In *Pallinode* Achilles will not allow Helen to forget Troy, weighing her up against the death of the lost:

Will he forever weigh
Helen against the lost,
a feather's weight with a feather? (30)

Helen is vulnerable to the weight of Achilles' testimony against her. She perceives herself as Isis, but Isis defenceless, pitted against Achilles as powerful "Typhon-serpent":

so in the book of Thoth,

the serpent, reared to attack,
is Achilles' spring in the dark;
so the Goddess with vulture-helmet

is myself defenceless,
yet crowned with the helm of defence;
he had lost and I had lost utterly,

but for the wisdom of Thoth;
Amen-Thoth held the balance
as it swayed, till it steadied itself

with the weight of feather with feather;
it was Fate, it was Destiny,

as a magnet draws ore from a rock. (66-7)

Here Thoth, the traditional weigher of souls, holds the balance and establishes that Achilles and Helen, if not innocent, are at least equal in guilt, two feathers of the same weight. The poem suggests that in meeting each other, Helen and Achilles meet death, the afterworld, judgement. Their meeting is the balance of "the inevitable weight/ of feather with feather" (82). Here then is a redressing of balance: the hated guilty Helen is no worse than the heroic Achilles.

From this stronger position, Helen begins her inquiry into the sins that took place against women during the Trojan War. She questions the fairness of Clytaemnestra's fate: why should she should have peace when Clytaemnestra is "doomed" for the murder of her husband (69)? In the following poems Helen retells the story of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the play H.D. had in part translated in the nineteen-tens and re-read again while writing *Helen in Egypt* (letter to Bryher, 16 October, 1952). She attempts, once again, to redress a balance. Clytaemnestra, usually portrayed (like Helen) as daemonic, is shown in a different light. These poems recall Euripides' *Medea* in which Euripides explores *how* Medea was driven to the "unnatural" deed of killing of her own children. Helen stresses the horror of the moment when Clytaemnestra realised the depth of Agammemnon's betrayal in luring Iphigenia to Greece on the pretence that she was to be married to Achilles. As in Euripides, Iphigenia is rescued by Artemis:

but not even Artemis could veil
that terrible moment,
could make Clytaemnestra forget

the lure, the deception, the lie
that had brought her to Aulis.... (72-3)

Helen stresses the "innocence" of the flower-loving Clytaemnestra prior to Agammemnon's act of betrayal (74). She also emphasizes that it was not her lover, Aegisthus, who was important to Clytaemnestra at the time of the murder, but vengeance for her daughter, vengeance that she wreaked in the murder of Agammemnon, as a swan might attack the killer of her cygnet (75-6). Like a passionate lawyer, Helen brings the case for Clytaemnestra to the fore.

It seems that Thetis, representative of Greek Law, is the judge in this case. Thetis does not reinstate Clytaemnestra. Her judgement is couched once again in terms of the Egyptian balance: "does it even the Balance/ if a wife repeats her

husband's folly?" (97). Thetis declares that it does not, that "the law is different" for a woman: there should be "no sword, no dagger, no spear/ in a woman's hands" (97). Although Clytaemnestra is not exonerated, it would seem Helen has acted successfully in mitigation for her. Clytaemnestra does not any more seem "doomed" for eternity. She is described as merely "called to another Star" from where she might eventually be re-called (98, 102). She sleeps in a bed of "royal purple" (105).

The reader might well feel rebellious against the Greek "law" which banishes Clytaemnestra. However, the status quo that condemned her, but condones war, is challenged in the poem that follows. Helen turns to a crime which neither Clytaemnestra's nor Orestes' crimes "could alter ... Agammemnon and the Trojan War" (98). The "iron-ring" of the Greek Lords, Achilles and Agammemnon, is described as a "*death-cult*" (99-100). Helen states firmly that war was not inevitable, that Achilles and Agammemnon must be judged responsible for their part in it:

could they have chosen
another way, another Fate?
each could - Agammemnon, Achilles,

but would they?
they would not:
but the Balance sways,

another Star appears,
as they step from the gold
into the iron-ring;

as a flash in the heaven at noon
that blind the sun,
is their Meeting. (99-100)

Again we have the balance which, this time, asserts that Achilles' and Agammemnon's crimes are equal in weight. Their golden glory as war heroes is reduced to iron. Yet, although they were judged as a pair, Achilles "woke from the dark," while Agammemnon was cast "into the lowest depth/ of Cimmerian night" (102). These judgements reflect not only the two men's parts in the crime of war, but also the individual war crime of the sacrifice of Iphigenia whom they pledged to "Death,/ to War and the armies of Greece" (78).

It is clear that Agammemnon's fate is determined by his crime against Iphigenia, for Achilles has been exonerated for the crime by Helen, despite much questioning of his part in it:

Why did he pledge her to Death?
I tell and re-tell the story
to find the answer.... (84)

Although Achilles "stood by the altar/ and did not interfere" at the sacrifice, ultimately Helen discovers what the prose voice describes as "*a way out*" for him (81, 87). She excuses him "*on the material plane*" on the grounds that he would have been stoned to death had he not agreed to the plot, for Calchas, the Greek soothsayer, had prophesied that the ships would never be able to leave Aulis for Troy until a virgin was sacrificed to Artemis (87).

However, Agammemnon is not exonerated for the crime and never can be, for it was he who betrayed his own wife and daughter. Furthermore, he committed another unforgivable crime against a woman: "*his rape or concubinage of Cassandra, the priestess of Apollo*" is a further cause of his "*dishonourable death*" and after-death (101). Agammemnon then, for his crimes against women, is the only character in the poem to be condemned. In this judgement scene the position of women, living "alone and apart" from their lords, and yet subject to the crimes of war, is emphasized. Crimes against them are weighed in the balance, rather than being merely regarded as inevitable casualties of war. The Homeric valuation of woman as mere coinage of war (Rubin's "medium of exchange") is challenged. War itself is not seen as inevitable, but as a human action that must be accounted for. Less than a decade after the Nuremberg trials, H.D. (with Helen for an able lawyer) conducts her own trials in *Helen in Egypt*, and dares to make war itself a crime.

Over these scenes of judgement, the balance of the Egyptian judgement scene hovers. Cause for hope is given in the idea that, after death, a more equitable court of law awaits the dead. Despite the balance, the "Last Judgement" of *Helen in Egypt* does not take place wholly within the Egyptian schema, for even Agammemnon might still be saved from Cimmerian flames:

yet even Cimmerian embers,
burnt out, extinguished and lost,
will flame anew if God
wills to re-kindle the spark (102).

This God who is potentially merciful after death is not in keeping with Osiris or Rhadamanthys, the Egyptian and Greek Judges of the Dead, who condemn

their sinners to consumption by Amit or life in Tartarus for ever. Nor does this God suggest the Protestant Christian God, although it might imply the Catholic God of Dante's purgatory. There is however a hint here of the infinite possibility for change of status within the Buddhist and Orphic/Platonic doctrine of re-birth, especially the Tibetan tradition which allows even the residents of numerous hells the chance of a new life.

As we have seen, the underworld cosmology of *Helen in Egypt* draws extensively on and freely syncretises diverse legends of the after-life, to create an individualistic "other" world. We are struck particularly by Helen's own freedom and flexibility within the underworld cosmology. The judgement scenes, although Thoth and Thetis play a part in them, are largely Helen's own examination of the past. What is more, she refuses her own after-life fate, as prescribed by Thetis. Her memory-journey takes precedence over a place in paradise. Twice, she refuses Elysium. The first time she rejects Achilles' gathering of spirits, deciding to continue her search alone (89-91) and the second time, she refuses the immortality offered her by Thetis at the end of *Pallinode*.

Thetis had urged Helen to sail away from the Egyptian shoreline (the equivalent to the Asphodel Fields, the place where spirits await their fates in limbo) to paradise where she is promised a happy future: "the isles are fair (not far)," she says, and "Achilles waits, and life" (107). The emphasis on the ship that waits to sail away with Helen reminds us of the death-ship, the caravel, waiting to take spirits to their destinations. Yet, although Helen reaches the Elysian isle of *Leuké*, she refuses to live a paradisaical life with Achilles as Thetis had intended.⁴⁴ Once again, Helen rejects a myth. H.D. shows herself aware of this in a letter to Bryher of 2 September 1953:

I call the series *Leuké* (*l'isle Blanche*). She [Helen] was supposed to meet and complete her life or after-life there with Achilles, but I have her meet Paris instead.

Helen, like an angry ghost, will not forget the past. She has been told by Thetis "strive not to wake the dead." In *Leuké* she wakes, not only Paris, but Theseus also (107). *Leuké* becomes not a Blessed Isle, but an Isle of Memory, the axis of Helen's continued journey through the past. Helen, disregarding the fact that "Achilles waits," remains "*back in time, in memory*" (115).

Helen's choice of her own destinations, the domination of her journey by memory, and her ability to speak to the dead all suggest that the world of *Helen in Egypt* is, at least to some degree, internalised. This is the proposition I go on to explore next.

PROCESSES

Chapter Three

States of Mind

Outside exists in a secondary dimension ... everything outside can be lighted, renewed by this within. (CF 75)

But we are ... in a labyrinth and no formalized ... static labyrinth. It does not stay, with all its meanderings, on one plane and time goes slowly, goes swiftly; our dream-time is relative but we have yet no formula for this relativity. (HDDA 220)

In *Helen in Egypt*, above all her other poems, H.D. explored her own self-acknowledged "intense, dynamic interest in the unfolding of the unconscious, or the subconscious pattern" (TF 6). This section concentrates on the interior plot of the poem. In this first chapter, I explore Helen's different states of mind, showing how H.D. creates the sense of a changing stream of consciousness. In the second and third chapters I concentrate on two important threads relating to internal consciousness; the process of remembering and patterning or schematising the past, and the process of internal spiritual quest.

The sense of an individual consciousness is so powerful in *Helen in Egypt* that it is a lure to the belief that has, after all, a stable identity for Helen, despite her multiple origins and the many and contradictory tales told by and about her in the poem. Reading *Helen in Egypt*, one is drawn into the sort of absorbed involvement that might be associated more with the modern novel than the long poem. Susan Friedman has suggested that H.D. "directly applied the modern novel's experimentations with stream of consciousness" to create the "interior monologue and reflective plot" of *Helen in Egypt* (*Psyche* 67, see Genre 215). H.D. drew here, not only on the techniques of other novelists, but on her own early novels and on her prose work of the eight years between the completion of *Trilogy* (1944) and the commencement of *Helen in Egypt* (1952).

H.D.'s work in prose and poetry can be read then as in sympathy with the modernist generation's attempt to explore, and to present undiluted, the unreliable, visionary, even crazy, view from the interior; the slanted voice of such as Woolf, Joyce and Richardson. Transposed to a long poem like *Helen in Egypt* this internalised perception challenges the epic tradition by replacing its



active externalised plot with an internalised reflective plot. In this section as a whole I shall be arguing, with reference to modern narrative structure, that Helen herself is the plot, the suspense, the very movement and process of *Helen in Egypt*.

Helen in Egypt deliberately provokes uncertainty in the reader over the reality of externals: are the other characters in the poem Helen's fellow characters or are they *eidola*, existing within the "secondary dimension" of Helen's imagination? At what level of "reality" do we read the places suggested by the text? As Susan Friedman first asked in *Psyche Reborn*, "Is, then, the 'setting' her mind?" (65, see Genre 217). Through these ambiguities, H.D. points self-reflexively to her own art and, as my epigraph from her 1950's journal suggests, questions the very existence of the external.

The power of the internalised Helen is so great in *Helen in Egypt* that it is quite possible to read the whole work as taking place within the mind of Helen. According to this scenario, the people Helen "meets" are figments of memory and imagination, and the places she visits are visited merely within her own mind. This reading relates interestingly to the underworld reading offered in the previous chapter, especially to the experiences of the Tibetan *hpho* in the *Bardo*. The *hpho* sees the people of the past "as one seeth another in dreams" (160).¹ The *bardo* body has the special power of "miraculous action", meaning that it can go wherever it desires and tends to visit familiar haunts on earth (159, 163). The visions of gods in their benign or angry aspect seen by the *hpho* in the underworld are all born of the past of the deceased person, are in fact mental phenomena. In his introduction, Evans-Wentz describes them as:

[S]ymbolic visions ... the hallucinations created by the *karmic* reflexes of actions done ... in the earth-plane body. What he has thought and what he has done become objective: thought-forms ... consciously visualised ... in a solemn and mighty panorama.... (intro. 29)

The visions seen then are the symbolic summation of the past life of the deceased. Not only are the Peaceful and Wrathful deities themselves "from within thine own brain," but the realms they come from are the North, South, West and East quarters of the brain (*Tibet* 137). The account in the Tibetan Book is that of only one dead being's journey: each experience will differ, including the gods seen in visions, according to the individual's life on earth (intro. 33). In order to attain nirvana, the *hpho* must recognise that the distinction between self

and other is invalid. It prays, "May I recognize whatever [visions] appear, as the reflections of mine own consciousness" (Tibet 103).

The swing from "momentary joys" to "momentary sorrows" characteristic of the *hpho*'s life after death reflects the effects of good and bad *karma* swinging it like the "mechanical actions of catapults" (169). Since no material body weighs the Tibetan *hpho* down, it is "like a feather tossed about by the wind of karma, ceaselessly wandering, stopping nowhere for long (161). Helen's broken narrative, shifting in time and place is comparable to the thought-body's experiences after death. Her existence in *Helen in Egypt* can be read as a series of visions, both pleasurable and terrifying, which are solely products of her own mind or "thought forms of [her] mental content." As in the Tibetan Book, her encounters with the divine, can be read as encounters with or tests of the divine within herself (*Tibet* intro. 17).

In the very first poem of *Helen in Egypt*, the Amen temple is described as the place where Helen is alone, and yet can "hear voices" (1-2). We can read the whole poem as taking place within this temple and the temple itself as being the chamber of Helen's own mind. The image of the inner self as a temple was one H.D. had used in *Paint It To-Day*. The narrator reflects on the effect on the young Midget of her first relationship with a man:

[S]he had ... gained nothing from him but a feeling that someone had tampered with an oracle, had banged on a temple door, had dragged out small curious, sacred ornaments, had not understood their inner meaning, ... [had] left them, ... exposed by the road-side, reft from the shelter and their holy setting. (7)

A passage in *Tribute to Freud* suggests a similar view of self-as-temple although more obliquely. H.D. describes her own "terrain" for mental "journeys" with Freud as being "implicit in a statue or a picture, like that old-fashioned steel engraving of the Temple of Karnak that hung above the couch" (9).

Returning to *Pallinode*, we can read the hieroglyphs on the pillar walls as Helen's own hieroglyphs, the marks or scars of her past upon her psyche (21-3). In this poem from Book III, Helen's comparison of herself with the blind suggests a fumbling within her own invisible mind:

I place my hand on a pillar
and run my hand as the blind,
along the invisible curve.... (46)

The pillars, with their hieroglyphs, seem to be the anchors of her thought and her walking from one to the other an image for meditation, a repetitive circling of the mind, rather than an actual activity:

I wander alone and entranced,
yet I wonder and ask
numberless questions.... (85, see 64-5)

Here the similarity in sound of the two words, "wander" and "wonder", conflates the two meanings and contributes to this sense of the speaker roaming internally.

It is partly the lack of literal detail in descriptions of place in *Helen in Egypt* which suggests they function as settings and encounters of the imagination. I have already mentioned in Chapter Two how the *Pallinode* scene in *Helen in Egypt* is lightly sketched, especially compared to the greater detail of the Egyptian beach in H.D.'s "Notes on Euripides." Throughout the book, places become less and less geographical and more and more symbolic of Helen's state of mind.

According to this reading, the people and gods Helen encounters are the people she desires to see.² Close reading suggests that, once thought of, her fellow-characters appear. Achilles is described as drawn by Helen's own "magic" to Egypt (5). The lines translated from Heine by H.D.'s hero, Midget, in *Paint It Today* seem to be echoed here: "I have come away from the dead,/ Drawn by strange powers to thee" (11). At the end of Book II of *Pallinode* Helen desires to "draw him back" again and at the beginning of Book III, Achilles re-materialises (32, 35).

Similarly, Helen prays to Thetis (17, 42) and, in Book VII, Thetis appears (93). Her voice, "*Thetis (Isis, Aphrodite)*", speaks "*in complete harmony with Helen*" (93). The identification of Helen with these goddesses, discussed in Chapter One, further blurs the distinction between characters, especially as Thetis is, like Helen, perhaps not Thetis at all, but "Image or Eidolon of Thetis" (93). Thetis can be read as Helen-as-Thetis or as Helen's imagined Thetis. Helen names her family. The prose voice notes that "[i]t is as if Helen wanted to recall her immediate 'family' (68). In the next poem, Isis and Nephthys are seen as images of Helen and Clytaemnestra, and the following poems reflect on familial structures. Whilst in *Pallinode* the simple scene of shore and temple remains constant, in

Leuké, as we shall see, places shift according to the character invoked, and place and person merge into one in the powerful alchemy of memory.

Our introduction to *Leuké* however is, like that to the Egyptian temple, to a place of inner meditation. This is a white world where Helen is able to continue her assessment of the past, of the Trojan War (see 112-3, 115). The island is a blank space, more like a cinematic screen than a piece of paper for, after Helen has projected her scenes from the past, at the end of the book, the screen is again blank.³ This return to the blank screen seems here to symbolise Helen's return to a temporary peace, away from the past. Her mind is still the island. "This is the ship a-drift,/ this is the ship at rest," she says of the island and of herself (194). Helen is *Leuké* "held/ to it's central pole," although "a-drift," a word reminiscent of a phrase in *Tribute to Freud*: "I do not want to talk today. I am drifting out to sea" (HE 193, TF 133). In the "Winter Love" of *Hermetic Definition*, a further collection of Helen poems, *Leuké* is even more clearly Helen herself:

conjure a magic circle of fruit-trees
with roots to hold *Leuké*, the island-Helen,
in a firm embrace.... (106)

Between these two periods of white peace comes a rush of "activity" during which Helen returns to palimpsested places and people of the past. Firstly, she meets Paris. Once again, it seems to be within her mind that she claims to have "escaped - Achilles," and to have allowed herself, "weary of war," once again to be lured by Paris (116-117). Memories of Paris return her to Troy itself and, more specifically, Paris' little room with its burning taper (125-6). This room becomes the symbolic place for their encounters. Again it is vague in physical characterisation, seeming to be both in Troy and on Mount Ida (where Paris went to die), yet strong in association. It is Paris as "haven," "peace," "return," "sanctity," the original love, home of the safe memory (140, 142).

Again, it is Helen who leaves the little room, who can it seems at will translate herself elsewhere. Although the pull of the Paris-memory is strong, in Book IV of *Leuké* she "*finds her way to another lover*," Theseus (146-147). With Theseus, the reknowned hero of Athens, Helen is herself in Athens: "This is Athens, or was or will be," declares Theseus (151). Athens is not the city here, but Helen's relations with Theseus, Theseus' fireside, just as Paris' little room symbolised her past with Paris. The flickering of light in the taper of Paris' room and

Theseus' fireside suggest that they might themselves be a past animated through light, as in the cinema, or as passing pictures seen in flame.

In *Eidolon*, the world of *Helen in Egypt* becomes even more self-consciously interior and symbolic. Helen is said to be in Egypt, having "never left Egypt," suggesting that all the places she has visited in the meantime were visited only in imagination, that the poem has remained within the temple of the mind (209). The Amen temple is palimpsested with other places of significance: it is "not far from" Eleusis, Athens, the blessed isles, the Hesperides, Amenti (212). The temple loses its specific Egyptian and Euripidean identity:

It is the same Amen-temple, at all times, in all places, on all planes of existence, whether they are symbolized by Athens, the intellect, or by Eleusis, the mysteries. (212)

Retrospectively the prose voice defines the places Helen has "visited" in terms of planes of thought or revelation: Leuké is "the light" and Egypt, a "*transcendent plane*" (210, 213-4).

The first prose caption of Book II of *Eidolon* lists the mental or psychic states of Helen and seems to equate them with the places she "inhabits" in the poem, suggesting again a landscape of the mind:

We have had dream, delirium, trance, ecstasy. We have had Helen in Egypt and Helen in Leuké, l'isle blanche. Where is she now? ... We feel that there is a balanced perfection in her surroundings, her state of mind.... This is a waking dream or day-dream. (222)

In this passage, "surroundings" and "state of mind" have become synonymous.

Equally, it is in *Eidolon*, the book of images or *eidola*, that the existence of the other characters is questioned most radically. Achilles calls her, says the prose voice, "*or it is the image or eidolon of Achilles* " (208). When Paris reappears, it is "*Paris or the voice or image of Paris*" who "*would call Helen back to 'my small room'*" (213). This suggestion that Achilles and Paris are *eidola* can be read to reveal that they are the ghosts suggested in Chapter Two, that they are merely shadows from Helen's memory, or that they are supernatural beings. The line between these possibilities is of course blurred. We recall the Helen of *Pallinode* Book I, who, alone in her temple, hears voices.

Dream, Delirium, Trance, Ecstasy

I remember a dream that was real. (HE 110)

If these early poems of *Eidolon* sustain a conviction that the poem takes place within Helen's own mind, based perhaps in the voices and places of the past; if Helen's experiences in the poem might all be internal experience, powerful memories, fantasies, visions or dreams; then what kind of internal consciousness is Helen's? What of this "*dream, delirium, trance, ecstasy*" (222)?

To approach the question of state of mind in *Helen in Egypt*, it is useful to refer to H.D.'s own fringe-of-consciousness experiences as identified in her autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writing. These include certain intense dreams and memories; visions of images and of people; spiritualist connections to the afterlife; experiences of possession; and meditative states or trances, often focused on symbols, talismans or images. It is possible to identify some counterparts in *Helen in Egypt* to these experiences and to suggest how they may have influenced the "enchanted" atmosphere of the poem. While these psychic occurrences can not be wholly differentiated from each other — especially supernormal memory which permeates the whole poem — *Helen in Egypt* is not merely coated with a vaguely visionary gloss. I shall go on to explore how in her own life and in *Helen in Egypt* H.D. continues a lifelong deliberation about the nature and validity of such psychic experience.

H.D. describes her "authentic" supernormal experiences, as Susan Friedman and Adalaide Morris have established, with such words as "real" and "true," and by such characteristics as "intensity" and "clarity" (Friedman, *Psyche* 198-200; Morris, *Project*. 273). These are concepts familiar to us from H.D.'s associations with the Greek spirit. Susan Friedman has especially emphasized the notion of "reality," taking up H.D.'s phrase from *Trilogy*, "spiritual realism" (CP 537) and using it to refer to H.D.'s "nonmaterialist, nonrationalist perspective" (*Psyche* 87, 98). "Spirituality" must be read widely here, as Friedman does read it, to cover the religious, the visionary, the occult and the alternative, unreasonable perspectives that poetry itself, through image and contradiction, insists on (*Psyche* 98). Like Friedman, I too would emphasize the word "real," seeing it as an extension of H.D.'s "Greek" determination to "make real to myself what is most real" (Note 73).

In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. conducts a dialogue with herself and (in retrospect) with Freud about her different "supernormal" states. She insists that "we may differentiate with the utmost felicity and fidelity between dreams and the types of different fantasies" (92). One dream may be "trivial and tiresome ... the newspaper class," while another is a "luminous *real* dream ... in the realm of what is known generally as the 'supernormal'" (36-7, 92). Such dreams might even come from the same sacred source, she suggests, as Holy Writ (36). Certain memories also come within this "real" category as "super-memories ... ordinary, 'normal' memories but retained with so vivid a detail that they become almost events out of time" (41-2).

Interestingly, in "A Sketch of the Past," Virginia Woolf also uses the word "real" when writing about intense or visionary experiences, especially heightened memories which, she reflects, can "be more real than the present moment" (67). In a passage reminiscent of H.D.'s own exploratory essay style, she writes:

I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there.... Now if this is so, is it not possible -- I often wonder -- that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them? (67)

In *Helen in Egypt*, memory has the same clarity and timelessness. Conventional space and time are defeated by this memory process: Helen is as she was. She is in the little room with Paris or by Theseus' fireside; on the Egyptian strand or walking the walls of Troy. Memory becomes a present tense activity in the poem, as I shall discuss at greater length in the following chapter.

It is possible that other "psychic or occult experiences" (TF 39) of H.D.'s gave rise in part to Helen's strange encounters with other beings in *Helen in Egypt*. In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. tells of a strange meeting with a man on a boat, a man who is like Peter Van Eck, a fellow passenger, but who is not him (154-161). Her account of "the man on the boat" circles around this mysterious meeting, contrasting it with various later meetings with the "normal" Van Eck. The duality of Van Eck/ not Van Eck or the real and the phantom Van Eck is an insoluble puzzle to H.D. Was he a double (we remember Stesichorus' and Goethe's Helen and the Egyptian *ka*), or was he a god in mortal form, "Anax Apollo, Helios," as H.D. suggests in her unpublished novel, *The Majic Ring* (156)?

Some light might be shed here on the origins of Helen's meetings with the shifting characters of *Helen in Egypt* who appear at times real, at times *eidola*. Perhaps the atmosphere of the strange encounter with "the man on the boat" contributed to Helen's accounts of her meetings with Achilles, Paris and Theseus. They too of course can be read as gods in disguise or as immortalised heroes appearing in their divine manifestation (see Chapter Two). Helen suggests that the meeting with Achilles might, like Semele's with Zeus, have burnt her out utterly (45). Even Paris might be "*an agent, medium or intermediary of Love and of Troy's great patron, Apollo*", suggests the prose voice (112).

A further heightened, intense encounter is suggested by both H.D.'s account of the meeting with the "man on the boat" and Helen's meeting with Achilles in *Helen in Egypt*. Both are presented as romances, an awakening into the state of love. We can read the strange deathly aspect of the world of *Pallinode* as the death-in-life H.D. depicts in *Paint It Today*:

The dead? Was it not today and all that today contained of friends
and relatives...? Which was dead and which was living? ... Heine
had loved and it had drawn him from the dead. Plato had loved
and it had drawn him to the star in the end, among the living.
(11-12)

Love, *Paint It Today* suggests, is its own intense reality or "emotional white truth," a state in which the earth is "swept from beneath our feet; and we are left ungravitated between the stars" (23, 22). It is once again a visionary, supernormal state, the mention of Plato here reminding us of the love as divine madness that Socrates describes in the *Phaedrus* (56-7).⁴ Love is, Midget reflects, "the door to another world, another state of emotional life or being" (*PIT* 12).

We can also relate supernormal experience in *Helen in Egypt* to H.D.'s spiritualism. H.D.'s calling up of the spirits of airmen who had fought in the Battle of Britain has its parallel in Helen's calling up of the dead warriors of the Trojan War and in her contact with the hordes of lost dead who surround her in *Pallinode*. Surely the mysterious "Spirit-master" who "summons" Achilles reflects a spirit medium such as Manisi or Dowding (11).⁵ Many of the concerns H.D. expressed in *The Sword Went out to Sea* which concentrates mainly on spiritualism, are echoed in *Helen in Egypt*, as I shall show.

Not all H.D.'s visionary experiences were as dramatic as these. She regularly invoked herself a half-dream or half-trance state by meditation on significant symbols. In May 1955 H.D. reflects on this process:

I depend so on my meditation-hour after breakfast.... I go round and round the clock-dial of the symbols and find new readings and get caught in a semi-trance state. This state is life to me.... (CF 92)

H.D. goes on to draw comparison between her trance and Yeats' reveries on images as described in the *Autobiographies* (CF 93). This state, the "waking dream", is the one she describes herself as having been perhaps even over-doing before she wrote the "Helen sequence" (CF 94). It was clearly inspiration for the poem and it is mirrored in the experiences of Helen in her meditation on hieroglyphs and symbols throughout the poem (see Chapter Five).

At times, symbols that were uninvoked came alive for H.D. in the form of visions. The first part of *Tribute to Freud*, "Writing on the Wall," contains a lengthy account of H.D.'s "Corfu Visions." These were a series of significant pictures seen drawn in light on a hotel wall in 1920. H.D. again classes this experience as "supernormal," including it in her "catalogue" of occult happenings (42). The parallel with *Helen in Egypt* is quite evident in this case. In *Eidolon* Helen has a sensation of waking up to a new sense of reality: "*she sees the pattern*" of "real" pictures of her Trojan past:

..... I am awake,
the slats of the shutter make

a new pattern, seven and seven,
as the light moves over the wall;
I think I see clearly at last
?
the old pictures are really there,
eternal as the painted ibis in Egypt,
the hawk and the hare,

but written in marble and silver,
the spiral-stair, the maze
of the intricate streets.... (264)

The old pictures are compared to hieroglyphs, just as, in *Tribute to Freud*, H.D.'s visions are described as hieroglyphs in operation (47). The light moving over the wall reflects the light of the "Corfu Visions" and the seven slats of the shutter suggest the ladder of light that H.D. saw (TF 53-4).

While H.D. attempted to distinguish her visionary experiences one from the other, she also identified the elements they had in common. In a short wartime book of reflections, *Within the Walls*, "the world of dream, of vision, of the blue light" is referred to as the "4th dimension" which is also the "art-dimension", the "stage or screen state of mind" (16, 14). The prose voice in *Helen in Egypt* uses the same word, "dimension," referring to "*another dimension*" and twice to "*an intermediate dimension or plane*" (107, 45, 85).

The "intermediate dimension" suggests a limbo state like that between death and life (see Chapter Two). It echoes the "intermediate world" mentioned in *Within the Walls* in which the white or yellow light of the "ordinary world" merges with the blue light of the fourth dimension to produce "perhaps the green world of rest, grass, trees, the level surface of the sea between tides" (16). While the green colour symbolism may not be especially relevant to *Helen in Egypt*, the suggestion that there is a state of rest between dream or vision and ordinary sight seems to be an apposite description of Helen's *Leuké* state of mind.⁶

H.D. finds herself in this intermediate state in *Within the Walls* when she steps out of the cinema and is not sure whether the Leicester Square scene around her is "completely unreal" or whether it is "actual life" (9-10). The street merges with the film. It is the "*intermediate dimension or plane*" between veil and dream (45), experienced by Helen when "*living in fantasy, the story of her sister*", in other words, identifying as H.D. did with her film, so strongly with another story, that she does not know which is her own (85, see Chapter Four).

What however of the fourth dimension itself, complete emergence in the "other-mind" (WTW 14)? H.D. begins *Within the Walls* with the words: "The whole conception of time must be re-valued." Further clarification comes in *Palimpsest* in which the "fourth dimension" is the plane where "[t]he present and the actual past and the future were (Einstein was right) one" (166). H.D. refers here, as she does in my epigraph from "H.D. by Delia Alton," to the theory of relativity by which Einstein proved that there was a "fourth dimensional continuum, 'space-time'" (Capra 64-5). The notion of absolute relativity of space and time abolished the Newtonian flow of time (Capra 65) and forms a place of meeting for physicists, Spiritualists and mystics.

In *Tribute to Freud* "the fourth dimension," defined as *neither* present nor past nor future, is an extension of the same idea (23). H.D. uses the fourth wall of Freud's consulting room as an image for this timelessness. The fourth wall is a "wall largely unwallled, as the space there is left vacant by the wide-open double doors" (23). While the moment of the supernormal experience is there, like the fourth wall, it is also not there. All H.D.'s "supernormal" experiences share this timelessness. Her "super-memories" and the writing on the wall are "almost events out of time" (TF 41-2). In "H.D. by Delia Alton," it is in "time-out-of-time," that H.D. and her fellow-spiritualists could contact the dead (187). The "supernormal" state of love also transcends time. When Midget falls in love with Josepha, she enters "a life of being that contained the past and the future," a state in which "morning and evening star had met" (12). Writing too could suspend time. A letter describing the writing of *Helen in Egypt* also evokes this sensation and associates it with the East:

I have so much, am really excited about life, seem to find days too, too short. I seem to have found the "eternal present", L'infini Sans Bornes, the Akasha of the eastern mystics. But I must trim my sails to it. It might be unknottting a bit of string was more important than - than what? It comes over me, sweeps over me - the miniatures for instance, take me so far. How much time have we? (letter to Pearson, 5 March, 1952)

Akasha is usually translated as "space" or "ether" (Werner 25, Biardeau 177, Varenne 219, 232). It is defined in Karl Werner's *Yoga and Indian Philosophy* as the "idea of the boundlessness of the universe current in later systems of Indian philosophy" (25). Madeleine Biardeau describes it as the most subtle of the five Indian elements after earth, water, fire and air, a kind of fifth dimension, a similar idea to H.D.'s "fourth dimension" (Biardeau 177). Both the fourth dimension and the element of ether give access to space, space unlimited, the "unwallled wall."

Taken to their conclusion then, H.D.'s "events out of time" point to a meditative escape from time into space unbounded by time's confines, glimpses of the Buddhist nirvana. As early as the 1920's, in her "Prose Corybantic," H.D. called to the West to "[r]each toward Asia," where "super-consciousness" was a religious tradition, rather than an aberration: "In India, the fish leap and swing in a set circle of perfect liberty" (15).

The poems of *Leuké* Book VII trace this process of the union of the moment and the infinite, the "eternal present." Three images of time or three different times begin the fourth poem of the book:

Time with its moon-shape here,
time with its widening star-circles,
time small as a pebble.... (200)

Time, moon-shaped, is both time moving moment-to-moment with the waxing and waning moon, but is also each moment as it occurs "here," a word suggesting a moment happening now in a place on this earth. Beyond this single moon-time are other times, "star-circles." These form an infinity of circling intersecting times beyond this earth, this place and moment. Time "small as a pebble" is surely time contained within the mind, within the moment. Helen can achieve control over time through meditation:

I will encompass the infinite
in time, in the crystal,
in my thought here. (201)

The fifth poem of the book sees this enclosure of time in self come about: the wheel of stars or, as the prose voice explains it, of the "*great circle of the Zodiac*" is stilled into her moment in self (202). Repetition and incantation, sound slippage (seal, still) lull the reader of the poem into the same sensation:

to me, the Wheel is still,
(hold me here),
the Wheel is as small

as the gold shoulder-clasp,
I wore as a girl;
the Wheel is a jewel,

set in silver; to me
the Wheel is a seal...
the Wheel is still. (203)

The repeated "I" endings pull the poem in, as the wheel is pulled in, lulled, stilled. As the prose section to the seventh poem explains, Helen is now "*free from time-restrictions*" through her own "*reflection and meditation*" (206).

H.D.'s definition of such fourth dimensional experiences as real, despite their dream-like and art-like qualities, has a paradoxical air. At other times in her work, real and dream are contrasted, real being used in its conventional sense,

as in *Hermetic Definition* when Helen is told to, "Rise from your apathy, your dream" and,

go out, go out, go forth,
renounce the cult of dream for stark reality,
the ashes, the dark scarf.... (107, see 100)

In *Helen in Egypt*, this paradox is recognised, and dwelt on: hence Helen's "I remember a dream that was real" (110). We are reminded again of the language of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The third stage of the *Bardo*, in which the karmic illusions are seen, is called "The Bardo of the Experiencing of Reality" (101). Three of the six "states of reality" experienced are called the "dream-state"; the state of "ecstatic equilibrium, while in deep meditation" and "the *Bardo* of reality" (102). Evans-Wentz explains that these states relate as much to life as to the after-death process, being the stages an initiate must go through to attain liberation.⁷

To the outside world however, the "reality" of such experiences was hard to prove, as H.D. knew. "They are real" she wrote, "but we cannot prove that they are real" (*TF* 35). As Susan Friedman has shown, such "proof" of validity could not meet Freud's criteria that "it must ... be possible to decide this by observation" (*Psyche* 89-92). H.D. might have answered, as Robert Duncan does in his *H.D. Book*, that:

The life experience of any individual is not simply a matter of its actualities but of its realities. The man who would present himself without the dimensions of dream and fantasy, much less the experience of illusion and error, who would render the true from the false by voiding the fictional and doubtful, diminishes the human experience. In the extreme state of such an anxiety for what truth can be held with certainty, he has left only the terms defined by logical positivism with which to communicate; the rest is poetry, the made-up world -- the forging of the conscience of his race. (*Book II*:10, 352)

Only by intuition can such "realities" be distinguished from "actualities." Ultimately, intense or "supernormal" visions, dreams, or memories could only have "the undefineable reality of an experience" (*Psyche* 99). H.D. knew that it was only just such a subjective feeling that she had to pit against the rational materialism of Freud: "My intuition challenges the professor" she wrote in *Tribute to Freud* (99). Her challenge to the Professor, possibly wordless at the time, but finally articulated in her "tribute," was to suggest that "there is another region of cause and effect, another region of question and answer" (99).

Yet H.D.'s position on the interpretation of psychic experience was not simple, nor was it in direct opposition to Freud. She believed in Freud's discovery of the unconscious, praising him for this above all other achievements (TF 70-2). In her reflections on dream, we can trace her agreement with and divergence from Freud. H.D. was deeply impressed by Freud's use of dream-analysis to plumb the unconscious and his discovery of a "universal world of dream" with language and imagery common to all (71). Like Duncan she believed in the commonality of the human "made-up world." Through this belief in the collective unconscious, H.D. attempted to unite visionary and psychoanalytic "truths." The very experience of psychoanalysis with Freud, drawing on the symbolism of dreams, held this quality for H.D.: "It was not that he conjured up the past and invoked the future. It was a present that was in the past or a past that was in the future" she wrote (TF 9).

This dream-world is similar to the underworld. In *Tribute to Freud* H.D. herself makes the connection. We have noted that she identified Freud with the "Door-Keeper" to the Judgement Scene (97). The dreams of the unconscious, she argues in *Tribute to Freud*, reveal the underworld of the dreamer: "in the dream matter" was "heaven and hell" (72). Again, the censor of the dreaming mind is like the "guardian at the gates of the underworld, like the dog Cereberus, of Hell" (72). *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* makes the same connection between dream and death, describing the *Bardo* state as "the after-death dream-state" (intro. 31).

Yet, even as H.D. was exhilarated by Freud's new theories of the unconscious, especially as made manifest through dream, she would not relinquish the occult possibilities of dream. "Real dreams" could be epiphanal, involving visits from divinities, such as the vision of Our Lady in *Trilogy* (CP 562-74) or from the spirits:

I think people do actually come to us in dreams. I dream of my mother, simply confused dreams mixed up, that don't count - then one is so clear and exact, with such perfect detail, that I KNOW that this time, I have actually been with her.⁸
(Letter to Viola Jordan, July 30, 1944)

Once again, the words, "I KNOW", testify to H.D.'s insistence on individual experience and intuition in the interpretation of dream.

Between the pole of the "I KNOW" of H.D.'s convinced belief in the occult and the pole of occult experience as the reflection of a disturbed mind was a wide grey area in which H.D. seems often to have dwelt. She had reason to fear madness, having suffered mental breakdown at least twice in her life. Her description of her experiences in *Tribute to Freud* as "supernormal, abnormal (or subnormal) states of mind" suggests an ambivalent attitude toward them (42).⁹ Her discussion of her "supernormal" experiences of 1920, especially the Corfu Visions, is strangely shift. On one hand, she gives credence to psychological explanations, relating the happenings to the extreme trauma she suffered during the period before them (TF 40). On the other, she uses terms such as "occult phenomena" about them (TF 40). She was also aware of other factors that might "explain" such experiences, such as the power of memory, fantasy and the artistic imagination.

Adelaide Morris in her essay on "H.D.'s Visionary Powers," has interpreted such states as "projections," either internal in origin (dream, fantasy, the eruptions of the unconscious) or external (from the gods via persons, images and dreams) (274, 281, 285, 287). Morris argues that H.D. "clearly prefers" the theory of the outer origins of vision and that she gave "biblical sanction" to the Corfu visions by calling her account of the analysis with Freud "Writing on the Wall" (274, 287). But can the distinction between external and internal origin be so clearly maintained? Do the visions have *either* to be Freud's "dangerous symptom" or a prophetic, creative, god-sent vision of the artist as psychic, as Morris suggests the "main question" must be (287-8, see 274)?

H.D. herself approaches the Corfu visions, as DuPlessis has said, "slowly, with how measured, how careful a footstep" (Lang. 103, see TF 39). Once the tale is told, she offers several explanations of the origins of the Visions. First, she mentions Freud's view that they were a "dangerous tendency or symptom," expressing her desire for union with the mother (41, 44). She then suggests that they were a "halfway state between ordinary dream and the vision of those who, for lack of a more definite term, we must call psychics or clairvoyants" (41).

In the actual telling of the story we find a similar inconclusiveness. One comment, "if these objects are projected outward from my own brain," suggests

that they might or might not be (45-6, emphasis added). A little later, she is still undecided:

Whether that hand or person is myself, projecting the images as a sign, a warning or a guiding sign-post from my own sub-conscious mind, or whether they are projected from outside -- they are at least clear enough.... (46)

Finally H.D. makes two "official" suggestions of how to read the visions. First (and this is, I suggest, her own Freudian interpretation rather than Freud's analysis, which centred on the mother) the visions reflect her own megalomaniac desires. Second:

[T]his writing-on-the-wall is merely an extension of the artist's mind, a *picture* or an illustrated poem, taken out of the actual dream or daydream content and projected from within (though apparently from outside), really a high-powered *idea*, a reflection of a reflection, a 'freak' thought that had got out of hand, gone too far, a 'dangerous symptom.' (51)

Both these explanations assume that the visions originate from within, as Freud had assumed, and suggest, perhaps, his long arm stretching over the years towards her. The second however stresses the artistic and creative aspect of the visionary experience. Yet, the earlier explanations, casually thrown out in the midst of the story-telling, suggest at least some degree of "psychic" power and leave open the possibility that the visions might be projected from outside. There are not simply two opposed possibilities, as Morris seems to suggest. The visions might be dangerous symptom, a creative emanation from the artistic unconscious, a clairvoyant experience or an epiphany, a divine-sent vision. Equally, they might combine or merge two or more possible origins: H.D. as Morris's prophet and artist hybrid or Freud's disturbed artist, effected by the power of the past and the subconscious.

All in all, H.D.'s own account reflects ambivalence toward the interpretation of her own visions, and an almost painfully acute awareness of the different possibilities. While Freud's interpretation is dutifully recorded by H.D., her own is never confirmed. I do not think however that we can be so certain, with Morris, that H.D. saw herself and Freud as diametrically opposed or their opinions as mutually exclusive. I would suggest that the text of *Tribute to Freud* itself suggests a genuine and exacting attempt to come to terms with these experiences and with the contradictions in their interpretation. It seems clear

that H.D. was attempting to mediate between the two realms of the occult and psychoanalytic.¹⁰

Similar doubts as to the authenticity of her psychic experience can be found in *The Sword Went Out to Sea* in which H.D. deals with the experiences leading up to her breakdown at the end of the Second World War. In this novel, she equivocates about the interpretation of spiritualism, revealing her ambivalence about her encounters with dead spirits. At times, spiritualism is refuted. Delia recognises "my own madness," interpreting the seances as psychological symptoms (210). She suggests that she "may have jogged the yes and the no-no from the table ... by contracting or expanding those arm and wrist muscles, at the prompting of the unconscious mind" (23). She also applies scientific reason, arguing, "I suppose if we delved deep enough, we could rationalise the table, the messages, the whole of the psychic phenomena" (110). She criticises the vagueness of messages from Psychic mediums arguing that, "[i]t almost seems that it is the hall-mark of respectability to take things in faith and to refuse to let the mind 'interfere'" (267, 270).¹¹

However Delia also describes the messages as events which which could not be wholly rationalised (139) and there are moments of absolute conviction in the manuscript:

Biologically, I can accept the fact of some relation between dead and living.... I feel we may continue our relationship with certain people after death. We are and we remain physically part of our mother and our father. My own mother did seem a living presence, on the occasion of my first talk alone with Ben Manisi. (143-4)

With notions of "Dream" and subjectivity Delia tries once again to form a bridge between rationalistic dismissal and absolute conviction:

But I think the whole content of psychic communication can be related, as I have said before, to the dream-life of the individual.... We know comparatively little about that dream-life. But we do know that it is only possible to approach the dream-world subjectively. The same might be said of the world of psychic phenomena. (143)

At times, in the novel, through that shifting concept of "dream," it seems possible to escape the dilemma:

Whether the dream had or had not the quality of a so-called psychic materialization, or was projected by the submerged content of the sub-conscious mind, is beside the point. (216)

Subjectivity of experience and intuitive judgment of that experience is, in the end, her only recourse:

[M]y valiant -- if I may say so -- effort to make a bridge between the conscious or scientific mind and the unconscious or dream-mind, met with scant recognition. Thrown back on myself, myself becomes the arbiter. (143)

In *Tribute to Freud* and *The Sword Went Out to Sea* H.D. places great emphasis on both mediation between interpretations and on the subjective experience of the paranormal. Whichever way we choose to interpret paranormal events their existence at the moment in which they are experienced, she argues, cannot be denied.

In *Helen in Egypt* both the undeniability of the subjective experience and the doubt as to the interpretation are expressed by Helen who encounters such similar forms of the "supernormal" to H.D.'s own. In the present tense, Helen experiences the "reality" of supernormal visions and memories, but in retrospect she questions, even dismisses, them. Again, we find a parallel with the experiences of the Tibetan *hpho* after death. In his introduction to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* Evans-Wentz explains:

[T]he passing from one *Bardo* to another is analagous to the process of birth; the Knower wakes up out of one swoon or trance state and then another, until the Third *Bardo* ends. (29)

Helen, in her three books, experiences the same. Her first awakening comes in *Pallinode*, when she meets Achilles, a meeting she experiences as reality, however strange it may seem (42-4). In *Leuké*, she feels the same sense of awakening, but this time it is the supernormal memory of Paris that wakes her. Egypt fades and Helen says, "reality opened before me/ I had come back" (116). In *Eidolon* Book I, returned to the now largely symbolic Egypt, Helen encounters Achilles, Paris and Theseus again. After these encounters, she seems again to "start awake" and questions, "was this dream? delirium?" (220). Here dream becomes deception, part of the fantastical Egyptian scene:

I do not see Achilles,
Paris is far, far --
it was a dream, a catafalque, a bier,

a temple again, infinite corridors,
a voice to lure, a voice to proclaim,
the script was a snare.... (221)

Helen asks of her meeting with Theseus, "was I ever there?" and wonders of all three male characters, "who said this,/ who spoke (if any), who answered," and, again, "I did not see them, or did I?" (220, 221, 226). The new reality is no longer anchored in strange encounters with past characters, but in visions, the visions I have described as similar to H.D.'s own Corfu Visions (223). Yet, in Book IV of *Eidolon*, memory again becomes reality. Helen says, "I am awake,/ I see things clearly; it is dawn," and proceeds to re-experience some of the final events of the Trojan War (255). Her visionary experiences, based in Egypt, become "nothing," in the face of the power of memory (258).

Helen's experience is made central then to the reader of the poem, and H.D. constantly emphasizes Helen's reality. Her experience is the matter, the place and the form of the poem. Because each state, though dream or trance, is claimed as real in the poem, so the reality of the poem, which we are challenged to accept, is the internal and present time reality of Helen's internal mind. The reality of the poem is never static, but is each present moment, whatever Helen's mental perception may be. It is only really possible to read the poem as a process in which Helen moves from one state to the other, stress being laid on the transition from one reality to another. Each state is projected as "real," as happening now.

However, despite this emphasis on experienced reality, there is a questioning of how to interpret realities of other realms. The word dream is used shiftingly in the poem, as we can see from the quotations above, to suggest at times, delirium or snare, at times, reality. Like the concept of "reality," "dream" is hard to pin down. As Susan Friedman has suggested, *Helen in Egypt* is "often like a dream sequence in its shifting time and locale," but clear interpretation of the dreaminess of the poem and of the frequent use of the word "dream" is not easy to make (*Psyche* 61). When Thetis addresses Helen at the end of *Pallinode* as "asleep? awake? a phantom or a dream" it is not only Helen's identity that is questioned, but her state of mind (106). Are her visions real? Is she dreaming or awake? Are the agents of vision internal or external? While Helen is at first portrayed as drawing Achilles to her, she herself questions what the "magic" is

that brings him. Is it her own memory ("I do not know that memory calls him") or is it the mysterious "Spirit-master" who "summons him" to see her (11)?

The description of Delia in *The Sword Went Out to Sea* deliberating the authenticity of her messages from the other world might be of Helen mulling over her strange meetings, visions and supernormal memories:

The scales weighed heavily against me or against them. I shifted the evidence from one side of the balance to the other, deliriously in my fever. (200, see 201)

At the centre of this balance, "dream" swings first one way, then another. Even in the present moment, in full flood of speech, the use of the word "dream" is ambiguous. In Book VI of *Leuké* Helen speaks of "my dream here, my half-trance,/ my trance, Nepenthe, forgetfulness" (179). In the penultimate poem of the book, Helen describes herself again as "in a trance, following a dream" (301).

Helen's doubts as to the nature of the reality of her experience are fanned by other voices tipping the balance in the poem, just as Freud's and Dowding's doubts about her influenced H.D. In H.D.'s account in *Tribute to Freud* of two memories of trying to grow a cactus and trying to hatch a butterfly we can trace her process of doubt and see how the question of how Freud will receive her story deepens that doubt:

If I tell the Professor about the cactus *and* the butterfly, he will think I have made up one or the other, or both.... No, I am sure about the cactus. I am not quite sure about the butterfly.... Did I make it all up? Did I dream it? And if I dreamt it, did I dream it forty years ago, or did I dream it last night? (127-8)

In *Helen in Egypt*, it is Helen's doubts about the meeting with Achilles that are particularly exacerbated by other voices in the poem. Using the familiar veil/dream dichotomy, Helen asks herself which is the most "real," her memories of Troy or her meeting with Achilles in Egypt (42)? Helen seems to insist that Egypt and Achilles are "real," that she is "awake, no trance,/ though I move as one in a dream" (44).

However, at the beginning of *Leuké*, the prose voice seems to re-interpret this statement with a completely different emphasis. Although Helen has said the meeting was "no trance", her admission that it was a "dream" is taken by the prose voice to mean that it was a mental experience: "*an ecstatic or semi-trance*

state" (109). The voice is immediately countered by Helen's voice asserting, "I remember a dream that was real" (110). In *Eidolon*, once again, the prose voice insists that the meeting with Achilles is simply a "*waking-dream or day-dream*," the phrase "day-dream" derogating the experience further (222). We find perhaps a mirror here of the situation between Freud and H.D. regarding dream: Freud is certain of what dream represents; H.D. is questioning, always wanting to take dream possibilities a step further, to insist that in dream can be found not only the unconscious mind, but also the "real" experience, whether it be otherworld meeting or epiphinal vision.¹²

The voice of Theseus in the poem also veers toward the pragmatic line and restricted interpretation of dream as fantasy, although his original words about the Achilles meeting are ambiguous: "in a dream he woke you,/ you were awake in a dream" (157). This seems in keeping with Theseus' general aim in his conversations or pseudo-analysis with Helen. He attempts to "normalise" Helen, to convince her that she must remember "*other loves*" than Achilles and "*balance and compensate for the too intense primary experience*" (163, 162). He attempts to assert "*the mountain, the reality*," a different reality from Helen's, based in accurate remembrance rather than fantasy or the "*dream ... opiate*" (169). He seems to cause Helen to question the Achilles experience: was it just "a dream? a dream within a dream?/ a dream beyond Lethe?" (182).

The continual dialectical questioning in *Helen in Egypt* leaves the question open, as the questions about Helen's very identity were left open. We find that the emphasis on experience includes the experiencing of doubt, from both within or without, as part of visionary or paranormal experience. H.D.'s Helen is perhaps her most successful sustained exploration of the phenomena of psychic experience. While her evocative explorations of memory-recovery in *The Gift* and *Tribute to Freud* are powerful, her prose works on psychic experience, such as *The Mystery* and *The Sword Went Out To Sea*, are weighed down by lengthy re-workings of her own experience. In *Helen in Egypt* she concentrates on the essence of the experience of the ecstatic, the process of transition from experience to experience, and the self-doubt attendant on the visionary.

the sea roads lie between/ you and the answer

taking the plunge, she descends into sea (stringent waters of memory,
dream, emotion, *eidola*)¹³

It is through the element and symbolism of sea that H.D. often articulates the transition into the blue light of the fourth dimension in *Helen in Egypt*. The plunge into the sea expresses the plunge into the past that creates the notion of Helen's consciousness in *Helen in Egypt*. Through sea rhythm, H.D. draws her insights into the experiential into a poetic unity. The Egyptian strand, the island of *Leuké*, the references to the sea in the Homeric story and the emphasis on Thetis, the sea-goddess all ensure that the sea is the medium of the poem.

I have mentioned that, in the very first book of the poem, Helen recognises Achilles as Thetis' son through the "sea-enchancement" in his eyes (7, 13). Achilles too describes the light of Helen's eyes as "shimmering as light on the changeable sea" (54). While Helen instructs Achilles: "go, follow the ways of the sea", Achilles tells Helen that "the sea-roads lie between/ you and the answer" (36, 47). Despite Helen's attempts to draw Achilles back to the sea and the islands, his eyes take on the "metallic glitter" of "*the Battle*" (35). It is Helen who traces the sea-enchancement back to its origin, the sea-mother, who follows the ways of the sea, and who arrives on the island of *Leuké* by "skiff" (105-6, 116).

Her journey on the "sea-roads" is an image for the process of Helen's inner travel. Eileen Gregory has identified the image of the plunge into deep water as significant in both H.D.'s work and the writing of other women writers such as Olga Broumas. Gregory's description of this process, my epigraph here, forms an excellent summation of the significance of sea as plunge into consciousness in *Helen in Egypt*: "taking the plunge, she descends into sea (stringent waters of memory, dream, emotion, *eidola*)" (Margins 113).

This plunge and the ecstasy of the plunge are articulated in Book V of *Eidolon*. Helen looks back at her first encounter with the sea-enchancement and with Achilles. Identifying herself with Thetis, the sea-goddess, Helen describes herself at the moment before the plunge into the sea of discovery. She

....stood unwavering but made
as if to dive down, unbroken,
undefeated in the tempest roar

and thunder, inviting mountains
of snow-clad foam-tipped
green walls of sea water

to rise like ramparts about her,
walls to protect yet walls to dive under,
dive through and dive over.... (278)

The water here is her element which opposes yet protects her. It is challenge and, above all, rhythm to the poem, presented as the ecstatic edge of experience. There is a similar sense of sea as process in an early poem in which the massed spirits of the dead in their manifestation as Horus are described as:

...with great wings unfurled,

sailing in ecstasy,
the western sea,
climbing sea-mountains,

dividing the deep valleys of the sea.... (21)

Freud described this feeling in his *Civilisation and Its Discontents* as a sense of "belonging inseparably to the external world as a whole," of abandonment, an "oceanic feeling," "waves of rapture" (8-9). In the lift and fall of the sea, each fall of the wave both reveals and conceals, yet each is its own moment, an experience, a complete absorption in the process of time moving from second to second, similar to:

the Sun's beneficent weight
unclosing, disclosing each star...
nenuphar by nenuphar. (92)

As the "blue light" of the "fourth dimension" suggests, the sea is especially the dimension of psychic enchantment. H.D.'s accounts of her visions and super-normal experiences were often associated with a sensation of being beneath water or below sea. She reflects in *Notes on Thought and Vision* on the "over-mind," the "abnormal" state of inspiration:

Sometimes when I am in that state of consciousness, things about me appear slightly blurred as if seen under water ... thoughts pass and are visible like fish swimming under clear water. (NTV 18-19)

During her "jelly-fish experience" in 1919 on the Scilly Isles, she felt as though she were submerged, enclosed in a globe, as if "seeing things through water"

(TF 130). As she lies on Freud's couch, reflecting on this sensation, she suggests that she had entered a psychic realm in her sea bubble:

Are we psychic coral-polyps? Do we build one upon another? Did I (sub-aqueous) in the Scilly Isles, put out a feeler? ... My psychic experiences were sub-aqueous. (TF 133)

In her article on projection, Adalaide Morris mentions that H.D. and Bryher used the word "fish" to convey psychic matters in their correspondence. In this coded or occult language, "fish matters", "fish-eye", "fish-tail" and the "Fish-age" were, respectively, psychic manifestations, foresight, mobility and the psychic era to come (Project. 294, n.18).

The association of the word "sea" with the word "enchantment" in *Helen in Egypt*, suggests that the sea is the element of magical happenings, encounters with *eidola* and possession. In *End To Torment*, H.D. summed up the poem with the words, "Mine was WAR too, transposed to the heroic, retaining sea-enchantment" (58). In *The Majic Ring*, H.D. describes her meeting with the "man on the boat" as intimately connected with the sea. The man had "sea-blue" eyes reminiscent of Achilles' eyes of "sea-enchantment," and, with him, she watched a "flock" of dolphins swimming on a natural, yet unnatural, sea (157-8, 160). H.D. felt that at the "exact moment" of the encounter, a line in the sea was crossed and "the boat slipped into *enchantment*" (161, emphasis added).

The word "enchantment" is also used in *Helen in Egypt* to suggest psychic or "supernormal" events. This is especially true of the eerie meetings between characters in the poem. Achilles is said to "enchant" Helen (37, 213). Paris or the *eidolon* of Paris is "enchantment" (291). Helen herself draws Achilles to her by power of "magic" and calls Paris to her by a "formula" plotted "like an old enchanter" (5, 297). Helen is also said to be "*enchanted*" when she is able to read hieroglyphs (2).

The plunge into the sea is not only the plunge into psychic enchantment, but also the plunge into the past. In the midst of the bombing of London during the Second World War H.D. wrote her memoir of childhood, *The Gift*, and her account of her analysis with Freud, *Tribute to Freud*, in which she also delves deep into her past. "The past is literally blasted into consciousness with the Blitz in London" she wrote (foreword, TF 5). In the final pages of *The Gift*, war and memory are a wave carrying H.D. into the past. The bombing is said to come in

"waves," in a "tide-wave of terror" that penetrates to the depths of the subconscious (137-8). In these depths H.D. had found a sea of deep memory:

I had drowned; I had gone down, been submerged by the wave of memories and terrors repressed since the age of ten and long before, but with the terrors, I had found the joys, too. (139)

Helen too chooses the sea-depths, involving not only the ecstasy, but the pain of memory. The "mountains/of snow-clad foam-tipped/ green walls of sea water" are fearful, as well as liberating (278). As Gregory writes, "Those who choose the path of the sea choose first their own sources - body, memory, emotion" (Margins 120).

The plunge into the sea is the plunge into Thetis' element in *Helen in Egypt*, and memory is deeply connected with the mother. The daughter (Helen) seems to plunge in search of her sea-mother (Thetis). As Eileen Gregory suggests, "this moment of heightened desire draws her [the woman] back to her maternal origins" and "represents the search for a specifically female source of experience" (Margins 120). The below/within sea sensation of being within a globe is expressed in the writings about childhood of both Virginia Woolf in *Moments of Being*, and Rosamond Lehmann in *The Ballad and the Source*:

If I were a painter I should paint these first impressions in pale yellow, silver, and green.... I should make a picture that was globular; semi-transparent. I should make a picture of curved petals; of shells; of things that were semi-transparent; I should make curved shapes, showing the light through, but not giving a clear outline. Everything would be large and dim....
(Woolf 66)¹⁴

Looking back into childhood is like looking into a semi-transparent globe within which people and places lie embedded.... Time is not movement forward or backward through them, but simply the colourless globe in which they are all contained. (Lehmann 27)

Although Lehmann's globe is not re-entered through memory, but looked at from without, the similarity of image is striking. The globular in all three writers immediately suggests the womb, the sensation Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes as "the child reconstructed in the medium of the mother, looking out as if through an encasing fluid" (Lang. 91). Woolf makes clear later in the same piece that she too associates this sensation not only with childhood, but with adult epiphanal moments also:

The lemon-coloured leaves on the elm tree; the apples in the orchard; the murmur and rustle of the leaves makes me pause here, and think how many other than human forces are always at work on us. While I write this; the light glows; an apple becomes a vivid green; I respond all through me; but how? ... Figuratively, I could snapshot what I mean by some image; I am a porous vessel afloat on sensation; a sensitive plate exposed to invisible rays; and so on. (133)

The sensation is again physical (Woolf responds "all through me") and the image of the sensitised porous vessel reminds us of H.D.'s "over-mind" as "sea-plant, jelly-fish or anenome" which is "fluid yet with definite body and which reaches its "long feelers" all "through the body" (NTV 18-9).¹⁵ H.D. saw her "over-mind" state as rooted in the womb as much as in the brain, as a woman's physical as well as psychic experience (19-20). She questioned whether her globular below-sea experience in the Scilly Isles was not at least more possible for a woman than a man: "Is it easier for a woman to attain this state of consciousness than for a man?" she asked (20). The daughter with her own womb, her body mirroring that of the mother, might enter the realm of the "blue light" more easily she suggests.

Some years later, in *Her*, H.D. fictionalised the watery space in which mother and daughter could meet as a temporary recreation of the womb (87-90). When a thunder storm strikes in *Her*, the sense of being claustrophobically enclosed in a tight room gives way to "a profound intimacy" between Hermione and her mother, Eugenia (87). Mother and daughter enter a space "deep underwater [where] ... breathing came more naturally" (*Her* 87-8). The storm releases Eugenia to tell Hermione the story of her birth and through the storm, mother and daughter are "born of water, reincarnated" (89). Deborah Kelly Kloepper reads these "amniotic images" as an entrance to the "islands ... Hellas or *Leuké*," and the telling of "birth-stories" as the mother (a Demeter figure) calling her daughter back, an "affirmation of maternal power" (Flesh 38, 40; *Mother* 87-8).¹⁶ The womb is re-established in the storm and the "no break in consciousness" with the mother, longed for by H.D. in *Tribute to Freud*, is achieved (TF 33).

In context of this earlier work, we can see why Freud's assessment of H.D. as a woman in search of her mother appealed to her, as this enthusiastic letter to Bryher shows:

I got stuck at the earliest pre-OE [oedipal] stage, and 'back to the womb' seems to be my only solution. Hence islands, sea, Greek primitives and so on. It's all too, too wonder-making.
(23 March 1933)

Having, as early as 1919, herself identified the womb as central to the "jelly-fish" state, Freud's diagnosis that her visionary experiences expressed a desire to return to the womb must have seemed, at one level, an affirmation. In *Tribute to Freud*, it is H.D. herself, with Freud's approbation, who identifies the jelly-fish state as "prenatal fantasy" (168).

However, there was still an impasse between Freud and H.D. Freud did acknowledge the existence of ecstatic or visionary states, the "sensation of eternity ... of indissoluble connection, of belonging inseparably to the external world as a whole" in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (80).¹⁷ He even linked this "oceanic feeling" with the mother, describing it as an attempt to return to the mother's breast, the "primary ego feeling" of gratification of the pleasure principle (8, 11-14). However, he denies that such an "oceanic" feeling should give rise to religious need or even be perceived as spiritual (20). H.D.'s "spiritual realities" are of course, as Friedman points out, a direct challenge to this, the term "spiritual realism" radically yoking together the opposite poles of Freud's thought (*Psyche* 98, see 93).

Furthermore, religion, to Freud, can only derive from the helpless child's need for a "father's protection" (21).¹⁸ The God figure then must be male, and is never connected to oceanic feelings originating in the mother's womb or breast. H.D. however unites the desire for the mother's actual body with the longing for a goddess. The "oceanic feeling" is a physical womb- and brain-centred key to mystical or religious experience in H.D. The point where physical and mystical meet in meditations such as those of the "Indian Yogi" is the point where Freud finds "it very difficult to work with these intangible qualities ... obscure modifications of mental life, such as trance and ecstasy," and moves swiftly on (22). This is the place from which H.D.'s poetry emerges. Perhaps Freud's honest claim that he "cannot discover this oceanic feeling in myself" was also made in person to H.D. or realised by her, confirming her much earlier sense that this experience was "easier for a woman to attain" (NTV 20).

In H.D.'s poetry, the psychoanalytic insight and confirmation she received from Freud is never presented as unconnected with the sacred. In *Helen in Egypt*, while the womb clearly symbolises union of mother and daughter, it belongs not just to a "mother-figure," but to the Goddess. The island of *Leuké* is portrayed not only as Helen's own mind, cleared for visionary remembering experience, but also as the island of Thetis, the sea-mother, "lure-of-the-sea"

(117). It is not only Helen's own restless ship that is stilled on *Leuké* (194). "Leuké,/ a-drift, a shell but held/ to its central pole" suggests also the power of the waves held by the power of the moon, sea and moon being the elements of the Goddess (193).

As island of the sea-mother, Leuké is womb in *Helen in Egypt*, a place of gestation in which Helen can be re-born, "wavering/ like a psyche/ with half-dried wings" (166). As H.D. had noted from Graves' *White Goddess*, the new moon "is the white goddess of birth and growth" (*Goddess* 70, see Chapter Five). As an island, Leuké is no-place, "neither there nor here," as Theseus says, not in Egypt nor at Troy, but, like the womb, simply its own space, from which Helen can emerge. The island as womb is made clear in the lines:

..... only let Thetis,
the goddess hold me for a while
in this her island, her egg-shell. (197)

In *Trilogy* the mother-ocean is a place where logic is "sterile" and reason "trivial," just as in the watery space of *Her*, Hermione realises that her mother's birth-stories have "more power than textbooks, than geometry" (*CP* 533, *HER* 89). To return to the womb, H.D. seems to argue, allows for the visionary, the ecstatic, even the mad¹⁹, a state pre-reason, pre-language, pre-separation. The lines of the prose caption to the third poem of *Leuké* might evoke a deep pre-natal past: "*But there is this world of which Thetis had spoken, of forest-trees, involuted sea-shell, snow. Helen had lived here before*" (112). This past is very clearly a space, a place associated with womanhood. Talking to Fayne Rabb in *Her*, Hermione is released into "another forest. This forest was reality.... A whole world was open" (62). The forest-trees seem to be the ostensible link between these passages, but it is the space beneath or within these trees, just as it was the space beneath and within water, that evokes the womb opening up again to receive Helen or Hermione.

This sense in H.D. of a new space for woman's speech through re-emergence in the ancient mother's womb has led some critics to draw fruitful comparison between H.D.'s return to the sea-like womb and Julia Kristeva's semiotic *chora*, a "rhythmic space" through which the language of the Father (Lacan's "Name of the Father") can be disrupted through the body of the Mother (*Revolution* 26). Kristeva describes evidence of the *chora*'s "vocal or kinetic rhythm" within language as "gestural and vocal play" which resists the symbolic language of

patriarchal discourse inaugurated at the thetic phase of the child's development (*Revolution* 26, see 48).

Art of the *chora* is precisely the kind of "poetic effect" which (as mentioned in Chapter One) pluralizes the subject of *énonciation* (Lechte 72). It contributes then to our sense of Helen as "in-process," according to Kristeva's model. Kristeva's "poetic language" involves transgression of grammatical rules and a break down of the thetic distinction between true and false (*Revolution* 57-9). At the thetic threshold, the semiotic gives way to the symbolic; in poetic language, the semiotic breaks back into the symbolic (*Revolution* 46-9). Deborah Kelly Kloepfer, Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Susan Stanford Friedman have all explored this pre-oedipal semiotic rupture in the symbolic language of H.D.'s writing.²⁰ Kloepfer shows how the storm scene in *Her* releases a "cadenced speech" into the novel, a "language born of the maternal body, born of water, born of rhythm and translucence" (Flesh 39-40). DuPlessis writes of a passage of *Palimpsest*:

When H.D. writes of maternal Otherness, it is manifested in language in a particular way: racing, dynamic, meditative and associative, in punning substitution (iris/Isis). (*Career* 55, see also 38)

In *Penelope's Web*, Susan Friedman argues that the semiotic is most marked in H.D.'s early prose fiction, rather than her later prose work and poetry (94, 99, 217).²¹ However, DuPlessis identifies this novelistic tendency to what we might call "writing of the chora" as an influence on *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt* via H.D.'s journals, themselves a "kind of associative babble mixing high and low, lyric and exposition, sound and murmur almost without meaning" (*Career* 55, 84).²²

I would agree with DuPlessis about the presence of the semiotic in H.D.'s later poetry. In her striking piece, "Language Acquisition," a reflection on Kristeva's semiotic, DuPlessis makes clear that the semiotic and symbolic texts are layered within the palimpsest of language and that it is in part the act of reading which places emphasis on one level or the other (86). "The act of reading must be slid across to the mother," she writes (86). Kristeva herself insists in fact that all poetic language, via metaphor and metonymy which inevitably undermine and pluralize meaning, is in fact dependent on the semiotic rupture or "corruption" of the symbolic (*Revolution* 59). Equally, as is more obvious from our current

perspective, the semiotic depends on the symbolic and can never break wholly free of it. It is a matter then of layering, of influence, or balance and degree.

Following Du Plessis' injunction to "slid[e] across to the mother" in order to reveal the semiotic layer or "space behind space" of language, we must return to the mother in H.D., where this discussion began (Lang. 86). It is on the level of "punning substitution" on the name of the mother/Goddess figure that in *Helen in Egypt*, as in *Trilogy*, rhythmic poetic language is most in evidence. The "mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary" passage of *Trilogy* (CP 552) gives way to a poem in *Helen in Egypt* which also begins with the mother:

Cypris, Cypria, Amor,
say the words over and over,
what does she want, this Cypris,

for Cypris is Thetis.... (178)

Working through various sound genealogies, the poem returns to re-namings of the goddess associated through sound and rhythm:

I called my sister, Astarte²³

or Nephthys, twin-sister of Isis,
and Isis is Cypris, Cypria....²⁴ (179)

In the rest of this poem, the sound-magic of names is worked through the repetition of names of the mother, "Cypris, Cypria, Amor," of which Helen twice more repeats "say the words over and over" (179). In the "Winter Love" section of *Hermetic Definition* the voice of Helen actually reflects on her tendency to punning substitution: "The-tis - Sea-'tis, I played games like this" (92).

Of course not all examples of "punning substitution" take place on the actual names of the mother. The process, in both *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*, often works on male or spirit names such as Osiris "equates O-sir-is or O-sire-is;/ Osiris,/ the star Sirius" in *Trilogy* (CP 540). In *Helen in Egypt* this sound-play is usually inter-woven within the poem, rather than concentrated in patches. The play on Eros and Horus (32, 41), Eros and Eris (115, 183) and Paris, Eros and Eris (159, 184-5) extends throughout *Pallinode* and *Leuké*. This is in part "subtle genealogy" (HE 184), a weaving of relations between characters (see Chapter Four), but it is also a weaving of sound.

The prose passage to the "Cypris, Cypria, Amor" poem reveals H.D.'s awareness of this process. Something (that Kristeva would call bodily drives) takes Helen over: "*the 'voice' seems to speak for Helen*" (178). The poem is "*lyric ... a song rather than a challenge*," a phrase which stresses rhythm over reason (178). We are reminded of the "gold of the humm-mmmmm of the note of the song that is Unreason" in the "Four Prose Choruses" (16). The reading of such a piece must "slid[e] across to the mother": "*We cannot altogether understand this evocation, the rhythms must speak for themselves and the alliterations*" (178). In *Trilogy*, a critical voice within the poem puts the other view on such play, calling it "perilous ascent,/ ridiculous descent; rhyme, jingle,/ overworked assonance, nonsense" (CP 554-5). Here, madness "like maternity, like sexuality, is a dissolving of the boundaries of self and other, inside and outside, a vertiginous moment in which language unlatches" (Kloepfer, *Flesh* 43).

Kloepfer identifies here a Kristevan dissolution of the boundaries of self as erected in language, a dissolve which comes close to madness, sexual experience and maternity. It is also reminiscent of the laughter of Isis and of "wild Aphrodite" which overtakes Helen Fairwood in *Palimpsest* (212, see 210, 219-20). Such boundary-dissolves can also be related to the dissolution of the boundaries of space and time in H.D.'s fourth dimensional experiences, in that broad and problematical category of "dream" which crosses over the boundaries between life and death, between material reality and "super" reality, between the divine and the mortal. The image of *Leuké* (or Helen-as-*Leuké*), isle of meditation, as a shell suggests a place that is both inner and outer, as a shell's walls are both inside and outside (*HE* 114, 170). In the unravelling of language that we find in H.D.'s sound-slippage and in the unravelling of space and time in vision, the subject also dissolves or unravels, to become lost in the "*akasha* of the Eastern mystics." The push in *Helen in Egypt* then is toward loss of identity, not in cultural fragmentation, but in loss which is gain, gain not of the prize of self, but ultimately of the prize of self lost, of boundaries collapsed. We see another reason for Helen's avoidance of illusory selves in the poem.

It is not insignificant that it is usually on the names of gods that H.D.'s "semiotic language" dwells. This dissolve of barriers or madness of a sort would have been understood by her as mystic joy, reminiscent perhaps of the Moravian²⁵ gift of tongues described in *The Gift*:

[S]trange words spoken, strange rhythms sung ... by the power of the Holy Spirit; the Holy Ghost of the Christian ritualists and the Great Spirit of the Indians. (86)

A later visit of this spirit is described simply: "The laughter ran over us" (G 87). H.D.'s poems on the names of gods also recall the Orphic Hymns which Gilbert Murray describes as, "full of repetition and magniloquence, and make for emotion" (*Greek* 66) and the Egyptian repetition of the names of gods as words of power in the *Book of the Dead*. Jane Harrison writes of how the gods continually change shape in Orphic poetry, as they do in the Mysteries, until they become one, "in an atmosphere of mystical monotheism" (*Proleg.* 39).²⁶ Such oneness of the God or Goddess, as I have discussed in Chapter Two had a deep appeal for H.D. and can be related to a transferred pleasure in the loss of distinction between gods, but, most importantly, to the need for a single divine in which to lose the self in the One. Through such a one, the division, the doubling of selves, is dissolved: the initiate in the "Chorus Sequence from Morpheus" asks the god to "lift/ the veil,/ dividing me from me" (CP 256).

Once more, however, in this reading of H.D.'s sound-substituting poetry, Freud must be brought into the equation, if only to show how H.D. was able to hold on to Freud for her own ends, another prodigious balancing trick. In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. associates such babbling with childhood:

Talking half-asleep to myself, or rather to the Professor, I realize I am using the rhythm or language I use only for cats and children. (124)

Here, the child H.D. talks to, is, as she says, herself, a self regressed in analysis to a childhood state, a pre-oedipal babbling.²⁷

This talk of babbling tales evokes the "Choros Sequence from *Morpheus*" in which the dreamer's fantasy of being Thetis with the baby Achilles beneath the sea evokes a repetitive sea-like babbling:

cherishing the just-born
Achilles
with bright tales
and phantasies,
told in the same
monotonous little song,
like water going over and over and on,
on, on to mightier lakes
and stranger seas.... (CP 265)

The baby-language gives way to love-language which is the same language as sea-rhythm:

see I tell
and tell and tell the same thing over again,
over and over
in monotonous tone,
I love you
love you,
love you,
dear-my-own. (CP 266)

Both line-breaks of both these passages, like over-lapping waves, enact the repetitive spilling over of sound: "on,/ on, on"; "over again,/ over and over."

This babbling, so in keeping with Kristevan notions of the pre-oedipal, was related by H.D. herself to the Freudian unconscious. Indeed, the voice that mocks such "overworked assonance" and "nonsense" in *Trilogy* makes clear that it is the "[d]epth of the unconscious" that "spews" it forth (CP 534). This is not out of keeping with Kristeva whose psychoanalytic/poetic theory obviously emerges from Freudian and Lacanian thought. Kristeva herself stresses the importance in the process of *signifiance* of the "de-structuring and a-signifying machine of the unconscious" (proleg., *Revolution* 17, see Lechte 7).

And here we come full circle, for in *Tribute to Freud* the discovery of the Freudian unconscious is a heroic feat and Freud himself the plunger, having "dared to plunge into the unexplored depth" in order to discover the unconscious (TF 71-2). By this sea-image H.D. successfully appropriated the Freudian unconscious for herself:

He [Freud] had dared to say that the dream came from an unexplored depth in man's consciousness and that this unexplored depth ran like a great stream or ocean underground, and ... produced inspiration, madness, creative idea, or the dregs of the dreariest symptoms of mental unrest and disease. (71)

If the unconscious is a deep sea, it is then the feminine womb-space or *chora* of H.D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision*, *Her and Helen in Egypt* and it is, not only, this passage insists, a place of dreary "mental unrest," but a space of "inspiration" or vision and of "madness" or fruitful "nonsense." Above all, as H.D. shows, of "creative idea."

Chapter Four

Remembering and Schematising

I reflect, I re-act, I re-live (HE 196)

I have suggested in the previous chapter that Helen's shifting state of mind provides the reader of *Helen in Egypt* with a thread of consciousness to follow through the labyrinth of the poem. This thread is also a thread running back into Helen's past multiple lives. Our sense of a personal past remembered contributes to the tantalising flickerings of possible identities hovering in the pages of *Helen in Egypt*. This chapter falls into two sections: the first on memory process in *Helen in Egypt* and the second on the adoption by characters within the poem of schemata or familial patterns in their search for a resolution of the past. These schemata, I shall argue, are not only part of Helen's attempt to heal past scars, but also reflect H.D.'s attempts to explore psychology, culture and the sacred through essential mythical patterns.

I

Remembering

We are all haunted houses (TF 146)

Helen is surrounded by the past, "the hosts/ surging beneath the Walls," from the very first page of *Helen in Egypt*. These voices of the spirits of the dead lead us back on a fragmented journey into Helen's several possible pasts (the various legends discussed in Chapter One). The "plot" of memory which we follow is unconventional and, once again, dominated by internal processes. The modern novel is an important antecedent for such a plot and narrative theory a useful tool in its analysis. To employ Gérard Genette's terms, H.D. has created a narrative which consists of a series of "anachronies": discordances between the order of the story that lies behind the text and the order of the narrative itself (Genette 35-6). Although the background stories in this case are plural (making the analysis more complex), they can still often be pieced together from the text and from our prior shared knowledge: "*We all know the story of Helen of Troy*" (HE 1). Charlotte Mandel has pointed out that H.D.'s plot manipulation in *Helen in Egypt* can be usefully compared to "cinematic dynamics": "As in film editing, *Helen in Egypt* alters time sense by rearranging images so that they operate as flashback or flashforward" (42).

Such flashbacks are called by Genette "analepses." *Helen in Egypt* features both external analepses, which cover a wholly separate earlier time from the first narrative in which the narrator speaks, and internal analepses, which take place within the time zone of the first narrative (Genette 49). Memories of Troy in the poem are an example of the former, and Helen's memories of Achilles' attack, of the latter. Mixed analepses, in which the recollection reaches back to a point before the first narrative but extends to meet it, can be identified less frequently and certainly in this fragmentary text (Genette 49). Most common is the technique called by Genette, "paralipsis," in which important elements of the story are sidestepped to be completed later (Genette 51). Paralipses in *Helen in Egypt* do not occur only once, but repetitively, so that the poem circles around a lacuna, which is eventually filled.

The process by which Helen recalls Paris is a tantalising series of paralipses, in which what is not spoken holds the greatest significance. In the very first book of *Pallinode*, like the detective in the first chapter of a murder mystery, Helen asks who killed Achilles. It is with her own mind that Helen plays detective, for the reader is very likely to know that Paris (possibly with Apollo) was the legendary killer. Paris however is not mentioned in Helen's answer:

some say a bowman from the Walls
let fly the dart, some say it was Apollo,
but I, Helena, know it was Love's arrow. (9)

In Book II and Book VI of *Pallinode* the dart is mentioned again, and still Paris' name is not actually stated (25, 83). Finally, in the first poem of *Leuké*, Paris does at last surface in Helen's conscious mind. He is, as the prose voice makes clear, "*the so far suppressed memory and unspoken name - Paris*" (109). The name itself sidles in in parenthesis, jerking the syntax aside, at the end of a poem in which Helen reflects on her flight from Sparta:

he was banished, as his mother dreamed
that he (Paris) would cause war,
and war came. (109-10)

Over a hundred pages after the question of who killed Achilles was posed, Paris' arrow is at last linked with Achilles' death, the paralipsis is complete:

and later, a bowman from the Walls
let fly the dart;
some said it was Apollo,
but I, Helena, knew it was Love's arrow;

it was Love, it was Apollo, it was Paris;
I knew and I did not know this,
while I slept in Egypt. (112-3)

In terms of structure and poetics, a scene (Achilles' death) and, on pages 9 and 83, the very same words, are presented and re-presented, involving analepsis after analepsis, until the gap is at last filled: "it was Paris."

We have traced here a repetitive form of memory recovery which, as Bruce Kavin notes in *Telling it Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film*, "makes intense and solid through persistence" (49). "I tell and re-tell the story" says Helen, "to find the answer" (84). Near the end of the book, Helen is self-conscious of the pattern of

things remembered, forgotten,

remembered again, assembled
and re-assembled in different order....
(289)

The line between "forgotten" and "remembered" here seems to be the very space of lost memory to be recovered.

Marianne Dekoven's description of the process through which the speakers in Stein's early novels travel seems in part fitting, although I would argue that "full" vision is never achieved either in Stein or in H.D.:

Like a fixated, blocked mind struggling to free itself by going over
and over the terms of its fixation until it has mastered them,
Stein's narrator ruminates..., pushing the story slowly forward,
gradually achieving a full statement of her vision. (Dekoven 41)

To take up the psychological implications of Dekoven's analysis, each gap in memory represents a part of the story that cannot be faced, that is "blocked" before it can possibly be (re-)born. A more recent exploration of this process in terms of black culture is Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in which Sethe, like Helen, must confront the (both literal and metaphorical) ghosts of a past which haunt her and must be remembered to be reconciled. Jane Miller writes that in order to convey this traumatic experience Morrison "has needed to confront precisely

those aspects of the experience which have blocked memory, made remembering intolerable and memories inexpressible, literally unspeakable" (129). As Miller explains, the "very word 'rememory' is invented in *Beloved* to stand for something like a willed remembering which includes its own strenuous reluctance to return to the past" (129-30). In *Helen in Egypt* a similar taut tension is felt between the longing to remember and to forget: "teach me to remember", Helen prays, "teach me not to remember" (207).

Memory can be blocked not only by the horror of fresh past to remember, but by a certain point in the remembrance beyond which it is hard to penetrate.¹ This moment is repeated endlessly out of habit or neurosis, memory running in an established groove. The repeated internal analepsis of Achilles' attack on Helen at the beginning of the book, can be read as a fixated memory of this sort. At moments of difficulty, Helen returns again and again to the scene on the beach with Achilles, unable to unblock the past and exorcise the encounter in order to proceed to fresh memory. In *Leuké*, Theseus urges Helen to remember the battle at Troy, "the shock of the iron-Ram,/ the break in the Wall,/ the flaming Towers" (170). But, she cannot respond or proceed beyond the beginning of her remembering process, Achilles:

..... you are safe here;
remember if you wish to remember,

or forget... "never, never,"
you breathe, half in a trance...

"Achilles." (171)

In *Eidolon*, in a series of fragmented memories, Helen at last returns to Troy and the end of the war. She tells the story of her confrontation with a Trojan sentry, full of hatred toward the woman who has just cost the Trojans their hero, Hector:

"was Hector born to be conquered
by harlots and thieves,
stealing a prince's honour?

let Paris retrieve
the fate of Priam's city;
he is next to the king

in the Trojan hierarchy,
but we will have no decadent lover
for king, none sick of a fever,

a Grecian harlot brings
to weaken the fibre,
to melt the sinews of war

in a lascivious seven-year dallying";
was it seven years, was it a day?
I can not remember...

I only remember the shells,
whiter than bone,
on the ledge of a desolate beach. (235)²

It is possible to trace here the tides of remembering and forgetting. Telling her story of the events of the Fall of Troy, Helen is caught up by the abuse of the sentry, the expression of Trojan hatred, in a memory she cannot bear. The memory of Troy fades again. She can no longer remember how long she even spent there. She returns again to the Egyptian beach, the meeting with Achilles.

Remembrance is taking its place (HE 109)

We must return now to H.D.'s notion of "super" or "real" memory -- a memory so powerful and clear that it transcends conventional time and space. Such memory is re-experienced, is *felt* again. Gertrude Stein conveys this sense that real memory is re-feeling:

I remember well I cannot say I do remember but I do feel as if I did feel
and did remember and do remember this. (19)

That each repetition is new, that memory re-felt is present, is re-lived, is being felt as it is remembered, is emphasized in Stein's "I do feel."

To feel again, where trauma is concerned, is again to re-experience pain. Samuel Beckett, in his study of Proust, has called this intensity of feeling "the suffering of being," suggesting that it confronts the ego with what it cannot control, pushing it to the "extreme limit of intensity" (9-10). He suggests that such intensely felt memory is likely to occur in states of sleep, "mental alienation" or "waking madness" (18-19). These "dream" states (in H.D.'s use of the term) are exactly the states of mind we have identified as experienced by Helen. But for Beckett, for Proust and for the Marcel of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, for H.D. and for her created character, Helen, memory is:

[M]ore because less, more because it abstracts the useful, the opportune, the accidental, because in its flame it has consumed Habit and all its works, and in its brightness revealed what the mock reality of experience never can and never will reveal -- the real. (Beckett 20)

The reality then of involuntary memory lies in its essentiality, it's bare bones or pure flame of experience. The states of Helen's mind, often visionary or meditative, dreaming or delirious, are the states in which it is possible to attain extra-temporal re-experiencing of the past. Each memory appears "real" to Helen, and is accompanied by a sense of awakening from dream to reality (see Chapter Three). A new memory becomes "real," the old is a dream. Each intense remembrance is it's own trance. When Helen moves from memories of Achilles to those of Paris, Paris' arrow divides the two sections, once again destroying Achilles, only this time in Helen's remembering process:

I was laughing with Paris;
so we cheated the past,
I had escaped -- Achilles. (116)

This cheating of the past also refers to the backward running time of the poem. Whereas, in legend, Achilles is Helen's lover or husband *after* Paris, in memory this is reversed.

"Real" remembrance, like the other "real" states of mind discussed in the previous chapter, is also ecstatic. In H.D.'s memoir of Ezra Pound, *End to Torment*, we find a striking statement of this. The book was composed in 1958 on the advice of H.D.'s analyst, Erich Heydt. Fifty years after H.D.'s romantic relationship with Pound, the writing of *End to Torment* was, as the psychoanalytic context suggests, a healing process.³ While this past was "tormented," the remembering and writing process, the making "real," was ecstatic:

I couldn't really have forgotten it, but it only became real when I wrote of it; past, present and future, as you say, came together, *die drei Ekstasen*. This is the sort of remembering that is reality, *ecstasy*. (55)

Beckett writes, "[w]hat is common to present and past is more essential than either taken separately" and forms a "brief eternity" in which time and death are eluded (56-7).

The timelessness of the past in *Helen in Egypt*, is conveyed by dramatic use of the present tense.⁴ When Helen achieves "successful" or "real" memory in the poem and a missing part of the past returns, it often moves one step further into clarity and enters the present tense. This is why Toni Morrison's term, "rememory," is again so evocative, for it implies memory as a present tense activity. The present tense, combined with the startling immediacy of the pictures or scenes painted of the past, propels the reader into a sense of past as present. Returning to the (re-)emergence of Paris in the poem, we see that at a certain point Paris enters the present and becomes what H.D. termed a "real" or "super" memory. Helen, narrating from a later unspecified point in time, remembers how at the moment when the "real" memory of Paris dawns in *Helen in Egypt*, she smelt the scent of the past:

... I woke to familiar fragrance,
late roses, bruised apples;

reality opened before me,
I had come back.... (116)

After this moment, Helen and Paris enter the present tense. The prose voice describes Helen as follows: "*She is laughing with Paris, ... She is running away*" (117). In the poem itself, Paris says, "*we will hide,*" and, "*now it is dark upon Leuké*" (117). Some present tense passages in *Helen in Egypt* are longer than this one, which, in its suddenness and brevity, is comparable to Marcel Proust's "involuntary memory."⁵ In involuntary memory day-to-day time is suddenly transcended through sensory stimulation in what Proust described in a letter to Jean Cocteau as "an action and not a passive pleasure."⁶ Proustian sensory phenomena as a memory trigger seems especially associated with the Paris memories in *Helen in Egypt*, while in other parts of the text memories are linked associatively with each other through words and emotions, as I shall discuss.⁷

"[P]ushing the story slowly forward" (Dekoven 41) also involves approaching it from different angles, through which memory can finally be made real, fully realised. Helen must recognise the perspectives of the other members of the "cast" of *Helen in Egypt* in order to achieve her own memory of an event. She lives through the past as experienced by others through empathetic identification.⁸ The prose voice recognises this, remarking about the Clytaemnestra poems in *Pallinode* and the poems about Achilles and Thetis in *Eidolon*, that Helen lives "*in fantasy the story of her sister,*" and that "*the memory is really that of Achilles but she lives it with him*" (85, 260).

Through this empathetic identification, the past is made real, paradoxically more her own. We can see this process at work in Helen's attempts to remember Achilles' death. In *Pallinode* and *Leuké*, there are numerous oblique references to Achilles' death (and, as I have mentioned, to the arrow that killed him). Early in *Eidolon*, Helen goes beyond the moment of death, repeating in two separate poems, "Achilles was dead," and evoking the moments after his death (236, 241). But it is not until *Eidolon* Book IV that Achilles' death comes fully to Helen's consciousness as she lives through Achilles' own version of the story of his death. The first poem in the book begins with Helen's "I am awake,/ I see things clearly," but, in the fourth verse, identification is so strong that Achilles "seems" to take over the narrative position: "he seemed to say, it was nothing,/ the arid plain" (256). Helen is then with Achilles as he lies in the boat after death "caring nothing for heat,/ nothing for cold," being carried away from the life he had thought immortal to the afterlife of the Egyptian shore (256). The prose heading to this poem confirms that this memory has achieved "real" status: "*Clearly she realizes the 'death' of Achilles*" (255, emphasis added). This identification with Achilles extends intermittently into the last book of the poem.

Even when memories are not reaching "real" status, the prose sections continually contribute to a sense of the present tense of the poem itself, placing the reader, as well as Helen, in the time of writing/reading: "*And now we see how Pallas Athene....*"; "*And now we are in King Priam's palace...*" (121, 123). While this technique in part suggests dramatic scene change (see Chapter Six for discussion of this function of the prose voice), it also contributes to the function of the text as "moving camera," one of the parallels with cinematic techniques noted by Mandel (43). The moving camera enables the audience to move at the same speed and with the same vision as the protagonist on film. H.D.'s reader is similarly drawn along by the present tense minute-to-minute process of remembering, for we can only read in the present tense, just as Helen can only remember poem-by-poem, line-by-line. At its height, the effect on our sense of time is similar to that of Stein's "continuous present." Stein also conveys experience minute-by-minute, tracing the processes of consciousness as the mind focuses on objects or aspects of people.

Once key memories are realised in the text, they often linger on in the form of a phrase or an intensely visual scene (or both together), and are repeated

throughout the poem. Mandel refers to such scenes as "images of persons, places, objects" which appear in a "montage" of "close ups" and which are "juxtaposed without chronological explanation" (40).⁹ Mandel notes Helen knotting her scarf, "shells whiter than bone" and the broken sandal strap, but we can immediately think of many more images or scenes: Achilles in the caravel, Iphigenia at the altar, the thousands of swarming spirits or ships. Mandel uses Hugo Munsterberg's term, "objectifications," to describe memories flashed on the screen of the text (42). "Objectification" once again suggests immediacy, the bringing of the past into the present tense, and, as Mandel succinctly expresses it, "[t]ime in cinema is always present" (42).

Susan Friedman has described such moments in H.D. as "hieroglyphic" moments in which H.D. extends the formal image of Imagism (based on Pound's pictographic ideogram) into a psychoanalytic dimension (*Psyche* 59, 61, 63). In such "objectified" moments, as Friedman suggests, H.D. conveys the sense that the scene before our eyes has been dredged afresh from the unconscious into the conscious mind. From the juxtaposition of such images we receive the impression of Helen's remembering mind and of time in disarray. Analepsis leads to prolepsis leads to analepsis as, dazzled by the "objectified images" before our eyes, we forget *when* we are. This repetition of images creates a time that is both whirling and repetitious, and yet, through the immediacy of Helen's visions, always present.

I thought I had lost that

(HE 12, 222, 283)

I want to explore further here how our impression of swirling time in *Helen in Egypt* is related to H.D.'s attempt to show how the unconscious enters the conscious mind. This involves looking at how the memory process shapes the structure of the poem as a whole, rather than concentrating on the specifics, as I have done until now. The process of Helen's remembering in the poem is strung out on a long line of links ("hieroglyphic moments") which, if we follow them through, form a chain of associative, thematic memory, one of the inner logics of the work. In her earlier prose work, H.D. had perfected novels and memoirs structured on memory process, works which lead the reader into the protagonist's past through a series of images, relating to associated events.

The treatment in *The Gift* of an incident in H.D.'s childhood, when her father appeared at the door bleeding at the head from an accident, shows this process at work (G 101-29).¹⁰ The "Advent" section of *Tribute to Freud* provides important background to the story.¹¹ Here H.D. records how this incident had been repressed: "I had 'forgotten' my father's accident for thirty-five years," writes H.D., "until I began my work [analysis] with Miss Chadwick" (TF 139). H.D.'s fear of war creeping up on Vienna, and the danger to her own "Papa" Freud, brought her father's accident to mind and, although she did not want "to mention blood to the Professor," she told him the story (138-9). H.D. feels the incident is important, both in terms of the past, the "long-delayed shock," and the present, her "actual terror of the lurking Nazi menace" (139). However, Freud does not follow up the tale, a dismissal which causes H.D. to feel "buried alive" (139).

The description of the affair in *The Gift* (written during the war H.D. had so dreaded) can be read both as H.D.'s own continued self-analysis in which she pursues the significance of the incident alone (the analysis she might have had with Freud) and as a literary portrayal of associative memory. H.D. not only renders a full account of the traumatic discovery of her father, most particularly the fact that he does not recognise her, but she also shows how this trauma evokes past traumas for the child Hilda (105-9).¹²

In the confused aftermath of the discovery Hilda is reminded of three previous distressing, suppressed, incidents: a time when she and her brother caused their older half-brother, Eric, to cut himself while shaving by teasing him about a fiancé who was (unknown to the children) no longer a fiancée (122); a "terrible time" when she was left by the trick of a family servant with uncongenial people while her parents went away to the World Fair (123-7) and, finally, what seems to have been a sexual exposure or attack on Hilda by the milkman (G 128). This trail of childhood trauma is linked by the thread of mysterious wounding: her father's wound evokes Eric's cut; his cut, her own emotional wound at her parents' desertion and that desertion, the final never fully articulated wound, both emotional and physical, of the milkman's assault.¹³ This series of associated memories dominates and structures a whole chapter of *The Gift*, and is itself part of a chain of further associated memories which structure the book as a whole.¹⁴

In *Helen in Egypt* we can discern a similar thematic plot of memory, circling through past and present in a whirl of associated pictures, like the kaleidoscopic circles the child Hilda sees in *The Gift* (127). At the end of *The Gift* H.D. reflects on the need to "follow the clue through the labyrinth of associated memories" (135). This is precisely what we and Helen attempt to do in *Helen in Egypt*. H.D.'s Helen, like Hilda, once memory blocks have been released, is led back into her past by a series of linked mental images. This process is at times, slow, and, at others, in moments of revelation, hectic.

The memory process of Helen is shocked into being by the attack of Achilles, just as Hilda is flung into hers by the sight of her father. It is possible to perceive this scene with Achilles as the only external event to happen to Helen in the poem: all other encounters could be read as "real" memories. The trauma evoked by the attack is centred on the related personal and cultural traumas of Helen's encounters with men and of the Trojan war.¹⁴ The height of Helen's resistance to memory is reached and surpassed in the very poem which describes the attack:

O Thetis, O sea-mother,
I prayed, as he clutched my throat

with his fingers' remorseless steel,
let me go out, let me forget,
let me be lost.....

O Thetis, o sea-mother, I prayed under his cloak,
let me remember, let me remember,
forever, this Star in the night. (17)

Achilles, representing war, rape, seduction, violence, pain and death, is almost memory incarnate here. Helen resists and succumbs, hates and desires. The prose voice describes the scene as "attack and reconciliation" (18). The reconciliation with Achilles that brings Helen to "sleep in his arms" can be read as the desire to remember, to come into contact with pain, the arms as the arms of the past (19).

Helen discovers the past, as Achilles finds a flint in his pocket in the Egyptian scene and, on seeing it, knows it had always been there: "I thought I had lost that" he says (12). Achilles, the flint, and the fire lit with it, are together the embers of memory Helen must never forget, "never the ember/ born of his strange attack" (77). The fire is kept burning throughout the poem through reference to Paris' taper and Theseus' brazier. Achilles remains the touchstone

for the memories that Helen must pursue, although she "would rather forget" (35):

It is not "in the oracles of Greece or the hieroglyphs of Egypt" that she finds the answer. It is in the simple remembrance of her first meeting with Achilles, and his recognition of her. (82)

Achilles' "recognition" is the knowledge of herself as the hated Helen (see Chapter One). From the first pages of the poem, the past is the curse: "*Her concern is with the past, with the anathema or curse*" (5). The original rape by Achilles is an act of male hatred which blasts Helen back into a past of male sexual threat and betrayal, and of the violence of war.

The first cluster of memories that the encounter with Achilles provokes is the betrayal of Clytaemnestra and Iphigenia, in which he of course colluded as "false bridegroom" (see Chapter Two).¹⁶ Although the image of Clytaemnestra as a swan can be read in terms of her defiance and murder of Agammemnon, it also recalls Zeus' rape of Leda, of which union, Helen was born. The women of the family are shown here caught in a web of male sexual violence and betrayal. Throughout Book VI of *Pallinode*, as the prose section stresses, Helen "*returns constantly to this theme of sacrifice*" (84).

Even the memories of Paris continue the thread of violence: the "arrow" of love is certainly capable of wounding. At one point we see a brief flash of a violent Paris, his hand smothering Helen's cry, pulling her back when, hearing the Trojans shouting that she should be returned to Greece, she attempts to flee Troy (126).¹⁷ However, it is in Helen's encounter with Theseus in Book IV of *Leuké*, that we seem to touch the original memory of sexual attack. H.D. draws here on the legend that Theseus stole Helen from Sparta when she was only a child (*HE* 147).

The story of this rape is generally neglected in critical interpretations, as not in keeping with psychoanalytic project, nor with the persistent, rather restrictive, insistence on the biographical link in which Helen plays H.D. and Theseus is always "a portrait" of Freud (Friedman, *Psyche* 20, *Web* 302-3). This Freudian Theseus generally receives kind treatment by critics. In Friedman, Theseus offers Helen "gentle questioning" and "tenderness and strength" (*Psyche* 66, 154). To Gelpi, he is "the wise man and paternal authority who offers his couch to [Helen] for rest and an analytic rehearsal of her amatory embroilments" (Hilda

235). DuPlessis has Helen "decoding her own memories" under his "tutelage" (*Career* 110). In Buck's *H.D. and Freud*, Theseus is the analyst whose role is simply to ask Helen "a series of questions about her memories" (160). To Liz Yorke, he is the "thoughtful Theseus" who "takes care of her" (92). Although Paul Smith notes that Theseus "abducted [Helen] when young," he is now the "sage and protective father" (*Wound*. 121).

Susan Edmunds is the only critic who does dwell on the rape. She portrays it, within the psychoanalytic context, as the possible fantasy of analyst or analysand (477). In the light of Freud's theory that hysteria can be traced back to sexual assault or, as he later thought, to the universal fantasy of sexual assault, Edmunds reads Helen's remembrance of the repressed as the experience of the Freudian hysteric (473-5). The reading is successfully sustained both in the illumination of the confusion of fact and fantasy in the poem and the interpretation of Helen's visions as hysterical symptoms (479-81). However, the neglect of the story of Helen's rape by Theseus *as a legend*, restricts Edmunds' view. As I have shown, H.D. exploits all tales told about Helen in the poem, implying that all are both intrinsically unreliable and yet, at the cultural level, true by the very fact that they are told about her. To perceive the rape story as simply the fantasy of a hysteric, while a sustainable reading, is I think reductive, entrapping the whole poem within the psychoanalytic context.

I would not of course deny that Helen goes through a now well-documented process akin to psychoanalysis in her discussions with Theseus, originally and most successfully described by Susan Friedman in *Psyche Reborn*.¹⁸ However, as I have stressed, the characters in *Helen in Egypt* are many-sided, performing more than one function in the poem. I would argue that Theseus is not only analyst in the poem, but also represents the most significant link, the most deeply buried memory, in the chain of male betrayal. Theseus is quite clearly a sexually sinister figure in *Helen in Egypt*, although the prose voice calls him merely "*another lover*" (147).¹⁹

As Theseus speaks to Helen, addressing her at one point as "belovèd Child," she seems to become again the child that he has in the past violated (158). He urges, even commands, her to "come here, come near" in lines laced with the threat of sexual invitation or abuse (147). At the end of this same poem, he chillingly evokes his confidence in his own powers, as he attempts to persuade Helen that she must really have enjoyed being stolen away by him:

you must have loved me a little,
frail maiden that you still were,
when your brothers found you. (148)

There is no answer from Helen as Theseus continues to refer to her as his "love" from the past, but a flinching away on her part is inferred by his words, "come, shake the snow from your mantle,/ if you fear my touch" (149).²⁰ A similar fear is implied in his assurance that he will not "immolate you/ on an altar" (151). This reference to the altar of sacrifice recalls Iphigenia and Polyxena, sacrificed to male glory, lust and desire for war.

In the course of this meeting with her childhood vulnerability, Helen is described as weeping and wounded. Her first words express a desire to return home: "in all my search," she says, "it was the same everywhere;/ I wanted to come home" (153). The prose voice describes the Helen who longs for home as "*the child Helen*" and the longing for home does indeed recall the longing of the Helen whom Theseus stole away (153). It relives the original trauma. The image at the end of this poem, as Helen remembers Theseus laughing at her entangled in nets, is disturbing:

'for you laughed once,
finding a Maiden
(Helena she was)

entangled in the nets
your huntsman spread';
-- you spoiled our quarry -- '

' -- but to free the birds -- '
' -- and found yourself entangled -- '
' -- that is Love.' (154)

The entanglement here suggests a sexual trap, which Theseus laid for Helen as light-heartedly as he laid traps for young birds. We remember the bird-Helen of legend.²¹ The impulse of the child was to free the birds, but the impulse to freedom leads to capture and entanglement and these last are associated with love in the mind of Helen of Troy.

The memory of a rape by Theseus, while we can read it as encoded in this poem, is never fully realised in Helen's voice here.²² This memory is associated in an inter-linking chain in *Helen in Egypt* with other memories in which Helen, the girl grown up, is still entangled in the nets of men. Even now, Paris tries to

hold her and "Achilles waits." Theseus, the first male trapper or immolator, still attempts to lure her: "Come nearer," he says, "come closer, draw nearer to Theseus,/ until this heart-storm is over" (159).

The island of Leuké, in the heart of the poem, is not only a blessed isle, related to H.D.'s beloved Greek Islands. It can also be read as "*Wunden Eiland*," the "Island of Wounds" which her grandmother tells Hilda about in *The Gift* (82-3). The "Island of the Wounds" was a community of the *Unitas Fratrum* (or Moravians) where initiates meditated on Christ's wounds and chanted a liturgy of wounds (G 83, 85-6, 97, 141). Leuké is Helen's own Isle of Wounds on which she arrives, with wounded feet, to explore her wounds (151). Possibly, H.D. knew the story of the nymph "Leuce" whom Hades tried to violate and who was metamorphosed into the white poplar standing by the pool of memory (Graves *Myths* I 121).²³ If so, at the heart of Leuké as "Wounded Island" lies the same violation as lies in the heart of Helen's memory.

I shall close this exploration of the pattern of male betrayal with perhaps the most poignant and repressed of all Helen's memories evoked by the memory of Theseus' abuse, the memory in which she herself is the betrayer. In Book II of *Leuké* Helen returns to Sparta to speak of her own daughter, Hermione. The image of herself as violated child seems to be the associative link here. The memory is also evoked by the same sensory phenomena of "late roses, bruised apples" that were connected with Helen's elopement with Paris from Sparta. This indicates the close of an extended paralipsis for Helen picks up at this point a story abandoned over a hundred pages earlier. The moment Helen recreates here appears to be the very moment before she left Sparta for Troy:

I remember all that went before,
Sparta; autumn? summer?
the fragrant bough? fruit ripening
on a wall? the ships at anchor?

I had all that, everything,
my Lord's devotion, my child
prattling of a bird-nest,

playing with my work-basket;
the reels rolled to the floor
and she did not stoop to pick up

the scattered spools but stared
with wide eyes in a white face,
at a stranger - and stared at her mother,

a stranger - that was all,
I placed my foot on the last step
of the marble water-stair

and never looked back;
how could I remember all that?
Zeus, our-father was merciful. (227-8)

At first the Spartan memory is old and uncertain, question marks indicating Helen's doubt even as to the season. Then, in a strange mixture of different tones, Helen sums up her conventional married position at that time. She had, she says casually, "all that" and then, more formally (perhaps in a parody of the very conventional language that will be used to condemn her for her act), the devotion of "my Lord" and "my child." Menelaus is never fully realised in the poem, but Hermione becomes here a "real" child in a naturalised setting, a *realised* memory.

The poem centres in one of Friedman's "hieroglyphic moments": the "child's intuitive recognition of the truth" is "condensed, embodied, and frozen into tableau ... the intense glance shared by mother and daughter" (*Psyche* 63). The stare, I would suggest, evokes again the white faces of Iphigenia, Polyxena, Helen in the nets, the young girl at the moment of sacrifice. We can read in this parallel of Helen's and Hermione's experiences, the liberation of perhaps the hardest memory of all. From this memory of Helen's desertion stems, not only the hatred of others for Helen,²⁴ but Helen's own guilt. As Rachel DuPlessis has stressed, Helen is not found "innocent as charged": the poem is in fact "explicitly revisionary of female guilt" (*Career* 113). Here there is the very heart of pain, the exposure of the sorest wound, but there is also, still, in the very simplicity of the poem, the wonder and ecstasy of remembering, of the crucial breakthrough or break-back into the haunting past: "how could I remember all that?/ Zeus, our-father was merciful."

She was back ... with the family problem, treading round and round and round. Like the donkey in the old grain-presser who walks round and round and round. (P 62)

To H.D. "hieorglyphic" memories, when time is stilled, belonged, as Robert Duncan recognised, not only to an ecstatic "today," but also to eternal time (Challenge 31). Such eternal memories were extra-personal, having an essential significance which was, simultaneously, cultural, psychological and sacred. H.D.'s daughter remembers how, when asked what exactly she was doing when "not entirely in this world" H.D. answered:

Evolving. Searching. My past, the past that never was, and making something real of it.... The idea *behind* the idea is the one I'm really reaching for. (Schaffner 145)

The associated theories of race memory and collective consciousness provided for H.D. the link between personal memory and the eternally significant pattern, as a passage from the original manuscript of *The Gift* shows:

The wind blows through the door, from outside, through long, long corridors of personal memory, of biological and of race-memory.... Leave all the doors open and you are almost out-of-doors, almost within the un-walled province of the fourth-dimensional. (Dream 605-6)

Freud's ideas again served H.D.'s purpose here, for he, as she wrote, had brought "the past into the present with his *the childhood of the individual is the childhood of the race*," proving 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 psyche" (TF 12-3). These ideas would have resounded for H.D. with the discovery of mythical and tribal patterns in Farnell, Frazer and Harrison.

In *Helen in Egypt*, mythological links between the personal and universal are established.²⁵ H.D. creates schemata, essential mythical patterns, through which her characters enact relationships. As Friedman has said, this is an expansion of Freud's conviction that "myth is a kind of collective dream" (*Psyche* 108, 111). The description in *The Gift* of Hilda's nightmare about a monster prefigures this use of mythology:

It is so real that I would almost say an elemental has been conjured up, that by some unconscious process my dream had left open a door, not to my memories alone, but to memories of the race. This is the vilest python whom Apollo, the light, slew with his burning arrows. (58, see also 66)

Here the monster is the "door" to the racial memories encapsulated in mythology.

In taking the drama of Troy as the material for *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. had already begun the process of substitution out of the present time. This process continues in the text, as the characters in *Helen in Egypt* engage in their own enactment of roles from mythology. This substitution takes place at several levels in the poem. The "closest" to the Trojan story is the sympathetic identification by which characters (usually Helen) live through events in other characters' lives within their own legend (as in Helen's empathetic identification with Achilles, mentioned above). There is also identification with other characters from the same legendary era, whose stories often inter-relate with the central story of the Trojan War, but who do not appear in *Helen in Egypt* itself. Identification with the Trojan royal family, Priam, Hecuba and Hector, and the younger generation of Greeks, Orestes and Iphigenia are examples for this. What I would call "mythical roleplay," identification with the gods, is the most distant from the "original" story. Some of the gods identified with, such as Aphrodite and Thetis, are also characters in the story of Troy but others, like the Egyptian gods, operate in a wholly distinct mythical schema.

This is all far more than sustained imagery on the part of the author (the claim that Helen is *like* Isis or Achilles *like* Typhon), for H.D. makes the characters themselves active in the process of substitution and enactment.²⁶ Although it is more often Helen who assigns roles in the poem, other characters are also involved in the process of exchange, in creating their own meta-drama. All assign, accept and reject roles. Various patterns or schemas then, most often dyads and trinities, are presented as created by the characters themselves, and are continually redefined in a process of movement. Otto Rank (whose Freudian analysis of the hero H.D. had read on Freud's recommendation) pointed out how myth formation itself leads to a multiplication of mythical personages, a tendency to doubling, splitting, and duplicating (84). The "mythical roleplay" of these inter-relating dyads and triads forms the drama (rather than internal process) of the poem.

More critical attention has been paid to what Klopfer refers to as the "curious collapsing of family romance," the identification of Helen with her own family, than the identification with gods (*Mother* 165). Susan Edmunds sees the identification with characters from Helen's own legend and from wider mythology as interchangeable. Both are symptoms of Freudian "hysterical identification" through which Helen is able to "suffer on behalf of a whole crowd of people and to act all the parts in a play single-handed" (478). Edmunds points to the wounded heel which seems to pass from Achilles in *Pallinode* to Helen in *Leuké*, and to Helen's blackening of her face making her into an Isis figure (478, 484).

This is an interesting interpretation and I think it very possible, as Edmunds suggests, that H.D. appropriated Freud's ideas about "hysterical fantasy" into a "valued method" of reconstruction of the personal past and critiquing of the social structure (478-9). However I find it easier to concur with Edmunds' theory when it is applied to Helen's identification with characters from her own legend. Where she identifies with other myths and legends, I would argue that H.D.'s remit is broader, that she edges not only toward personal and social patterns, but toward essential psychological and sacred patterns.²⁷ When Hipparchia comes back to "treading round and round and round" the "family problem" like a donkey, in *Palimpsest* (see epigraph), "spiritual nourishment" is "the meal, ground fine" which she hopes to gain from the process (*P* 62).

This is not to say that H.D. was not concerned with psychological schema in *Helen in Egypt*, or that she does not relate role-playing activities to her mythical substitutions.²⁸ This too is part of the attempt to find the "idea behind the idea." Freudian psychology is of course fundamentally schematic and H.D.'s own analysis-notes "swarm with formulae as Freud and H.D. decipher ordinary patterns" in her relationships (Morris, *Project*. 287). In *Tribute to Freud*, we find a clear example of this. H.D. tells the story of an occasion when her brother decided to sit on the curbstone and refuse to go home. She joined him, although she was genuinely frightened that her mother might abandon them. Together they made:

[A] little group, design, an image at the crossroads. It appears variously in Greek tragedies with Greek names and it can be found in your original Grimm's tales or in your nursery translation called Little-Brother, Little-Sister. One is sometimes the shadow of the other; often one is lost and the one seeks the other.... they make a groove or a pattern into which or upon which other patterns fit, or are placed unfitted and are cut by circumstance to fit. In any case, it is a common-

or-garden pattern though sometimes it finds its corresponding shape in heaven. (29)

The word "crossroads," as Diana Collecott has noted, suggests the murder of Oedipus's father at the crossroads, hence both classical and Freudian schema (Images 160). The mention of Grimm's tales and the stars (the "shape in heaven") emphasizes the essential nature of the pattern or "design" in imagination and fate. H.D. mentions in this passage, invoking the Helen myth, that the two siblings might both be boys, Castor and Pollux, or a four, with Helen and Clytaemnestra. In this four there is also then the possibility, although not made explicit, that the pattern might be two girls. In the image of cutting to fit, there is also a hint of possible pain in fitting the pattern or perhaps, to use a word that Jacqueline Rose has loaded, "discontent" with the psychoanalytic status quo (see the "daughter/son/mother" discussion below).²⁹

Returning to the sacred element of the schemata, we can trace here (as we did in Chapter Three) a divergence between H.D. and Freud. The Freudian view, as expressed by Otto Rank in his "psychological interpretation of myth," was that myth was created by humans as an expression of their psyche; that the human imagination was the "ultimate origin of all myth" (Rank 7). H.D. however refused to deny the sacred character of myth. She persistently reads both ways. In *Tribute To Freud*, she insists that the images of gods on Freud's desk are of sacred, as well as psychological, universal significance:

There were the immemorial Gods ranged in their semicircle on the
Professor's table, that stood ... like the high altar in the Holy of Holies.
There were those Gods, each the carved symbol of an idea or a deathless
dream, that some people read: Goods. (93)

The gods here are "immemorial," suggesting eternal and ancient, and insisting on an originary pre-Freudian significance. There is behind them an "idea or deathless dream," an eternal significance.³⁰ The reader who is unaware of this reading both ways will be continually frustrated by *Helen in Egypt*. The poem refuses to settle into a mere "psychological interpretation of myth," but remains a sacred poem, H.D.'s own religious ritual. In her schematising, H.D. looked for the sacred in human life patterns, as much as for the human truth within the mythical pattern. Robert Duncan best describes this element of her work:

All the way through she understood the sacred, and studied and
studied, and in her last years she was still studying the nature of the
sacred and working to unify the sacred myth or story with the world
story, to keep it as a solid center, the story. 'Myth' means 'story.' And

the truth of myth is when the story is compelling, when the story is so compelling that we can tell that we're not just making it up, but it seems to have a force of its own going and an intent that goes toward, not metaphysically, not with a mind thinking about what ought to be the result here at all, but have a whole identity of its own that the author or the storyteller is following and we are too, listening, then it is really myth, and H.D. worked not toward just a personal myth but with the recognition that nothing is personal but everything is transpersonal and goes toward a new human being. (Challenge 28-9)

H.D. pursued the story that "is so compelling that we can tell that we're not just making it up" relentlessly, in search of this "force" which was not intellectual, but mystical. In *Helen in Egypt* she persistently blurs the boundary between mortal and immortal (not only by referring to the sacred character of legendary characters, as I have shown), but also by relating each character to fully-fledged gods. We should remember that the prayers of identification with gods in order to attain mystical powers are some of the oldest passages of *The Book of Dead* (see vol 1, 131). This mythical role-playing also echoes the rituals of the Mysteries in which the initiate becomes the god (see Prelude and Chapter Five). However unfashionable this might have been, in her pursuit of the "idea behind the idea," H.D. was attempting to forge a sacred poetics.³¹ This will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter.

To forget the schematising element (sacred or psychological) altogether, and read the relationships in *Helen in Egypt* as purely personal romance, is perhaps the approach most neglectful of the text.³² If we read the first books of *Pallinode* for example as the commencement of a steamy love affair between Helen and Achilles, eliding their assumption of the roles of Isis and Osiris to mere (fore?)play, we neglect H.D.'s serious investigation into sexual psychology and politics and lose the important brother and sister element of the Helen-Achilles dynamic. Equally, to read Book V of *Pallinode* as merely the words of a woman pining for her lost sister is to lose the layers of H.D.'s exploration of the sexual bond between women. Either of these restrictive readings would result in neglect (sublimation) of the "shadow stories of, allusions to, incest which flicker through this tale" (DuPlessis, *Career* 114). It is these "shadow stories" of the "family problem" that I want now to explore.

mother/father/son

This ancient schema first emerges in *Helen in Egypt* through the characters' assumption of the roles of the Egyptian trinity, Isis, Osiris and Horus. Although it is Helen who first perceives the night-bird as Isis, it is Achilles who first allots the role of Isis to Helen:

in the dark, I must have looked
an inked-in shadow; but with his anger,
that ember, *I became*

what his accusation made me,
Isis, forever with that Child,
the Hawk Horus. (23, emphasis added)

Helen takes up the Isis role, but interprets it very differently from Achilles's reading of Isis as sinister and witch-like (16-7). For Helen, Isis is the goddess as protectoress, often shown (her iconography influencing later Christian representations of the Madonna) with her child, Horus. Helen goes on to assign Achilles the double role of Osiris, Isis' brother-husband, and Typhon, Osiris' brother and murderer (26). As such, Achilles typifies the archetypal warring male, continually destroying himself and his own men in "the Whirlwind, War" (27). However, in the myth, Osiris is also Isis' husband. Achilles and Helen, in *Pallinode*, are united in the sexual act. The "old flint" that Achilles finds again in his "pouch," as well as symbolising the kindling of memory, can also be read as the re-kindling of Achilles' sexual virility (*HE* 12; see Larsen 91-2). Psycho-sexually, the self-destructing Osiris-Typhon Achilles figure represents the masculine oedipal schema whereby the son must perpetually desire the death of the father in order to achieve sexual potency

Through the Egyptian myth, H.D. sets up an essential pattern: Isis and Osiris/Typhon are set against each other as woman and man (the psycho-sexual dilemma), peace and war (the cultural dilemma) and, ultimately, the powers of love/life and hate/death (the sacred dilemma). I shall return to the sacred aspect of the struggle between life and death in the following chapter. The battle between the two forces is fought in *Helen in Egypt* over the child, Horus, representing in the text the spirits of those who died at Troy, and symbolized by the petals of the rose, the lily petals and the spread of wings (24-5). The spread of wings allies the hosts with Helen's own adopted identity as winged Isis, an attempt to save the child from the masculine schemata, to bring it back into the realm of the mother.

Won over by the mother, the poem implies, the child (representing the hosts killed in war) would be saved from the cycle of perpetual war. The child would also be saved from the psychological schema (or symbolic structure) which dictates that the son must complete the oedipal stage of rivalry with the father and eventual rejection of the mother in order to take his place in society. These two structures are shown to be fused:

O Child, must it be forever,
that your father destroys you,
that you may find your father?

O Child, must the golden-feather
be forever forged by the Spirit,
released in the fury of war?

O Child, must you seek your mother
while your father forever
attacks her in jealousy.... (28)

The struggle rages in the fight over "whose are the dead/ and whose the victory?" (31). Achilles claims the child Horus is his, that the hosts of spirits were born of war and death: "I begot them in death, they are mine", to which Helen replies, "must death rule life?/ must the lily fade in the dark?" (28). In a further substitution, a further sally for the power of love, Horus is made "eros," the power of love to overcome war (32, see 41).

Eros is a bridge to a further father/mother/son trinity, for Paris-as-Eros will enter as the new son figure. However, at first, Paris appears as lover to Helen, Adonis to Cytheraea (140). The figure of the son-lover consort to the goddess is familiar from matriarchal mythology. Eros, with whom Paris is identified, was both son and lover to Aphrodite. The son/lover motif is one which H.D. had explored in some depth in earlier work, especially the novel *Hedylus* (composed c.1924). In this novel, the mother-obsessed Hedylus compares his mother, Hedyle, to Helen, to Cypris (Aphrodite), and to Thetis (these last two will become central mother-goddess figures in *Helen in Egypt*, as we have seen) (18 and 20, 19, 32). The motif continued to haunt H.D. In *Hermetic Definition*, her last work, she emphasizes the centrality of this schema:

Sombre Mère Sterile and Brilliante Mère Féconde,
the light and the dark; you hold the planets steady

in their course, you and your Son,
and there is no land where you are not found.... (75)

In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen shifts Paris from his role as lover (and rival of Achilles) to the role of son: "I lost the Lover, Paris,/ but to find the Son" (155, see 215). As DuPlessis points out, in doing this "[s]he has contained his sexual power by demoting him generationally" (Thrall 422). The son must have a father, and so, in *Eidolon*, Achilles enters again as father, and Paris must be Helen and Achilles' son. Once again this is an attempt to defeat the power of war and hatred, for Achilles and Paris are rivals in war.³³ Helen, through mythical roleplay, wants to "reconcile Trojan and Greek" by bringing Paris and Achilles into the same design or pattern, placing Achilles in the role of father to Paris in an attempt to reconcile the two (159, 156).

This cannot of course succeed, for as a psychological pattern, the trinity is the traditional oedipal one which inherently involves the murderous rivalry of father and son, the basis of the masculine war ethic as portrayed in *Pallinode*. Paris (as son) is Achilles' (as father) rival for Helen. Paris asserts this position, emphasizing that it was he who killed Achilles (214). Again, self-consciously echoing Frazer and Freud, the prose voice insists on the anthropological and mythical veracity of this slaughter: "By tribal law, the young priest slays the old one, the son, the father" (215).

Paris accepts his role as son, able to heal old wounds through this: Helen, as his mother, will replace for him the imperfect mother who left him, as Oedipus was left, to die (217). Loving his mother, he must ultimately destroy her, as the son in the oedipal schema must inevitably do when he joins the adult masculine world. H.D. had kept to this schema in *Hedylus* also, for at the end of the novel, Hedylus leaves his mother for the previously lost father, and for the world. H.D. makes clear in *Helen in Egypt* that she refers to the oedipus complex here:

!

.....Hecuba like Jocasta

was overthrown (by Paris, by Oedipus,

the son); O the web is sure.... (184)

We return then to what the prose voice calls the "*inevitable triad*" which, if not psychologically, is found mythically satisfying to Helen:

incompatible in life,

yet in myth, completing the circle,

the triangle, the broken arc,

Dionysus-Paris; you were right,

he of the house of the enemy,

Troy's last king,

*is Achilles' son, he my first lover
was created by my last. (215)*

The satisfaction of this is perhaps due to its success according to the logic of memory, for out of Helen's encounter with Achilles her memories of Paris were born. In that sense, she gives birth to her first lover through her last. The opposition of Achilles and Paris however is held forever in stasis, unresolved (see 221). The orthodox Freudian status quo is maintained and, in this particular schema, there is no defeat for the power of the father's and son's competitive violence over the body of the mother. The question from *Pallinode* is still apposite:

O Child, must you seek your mother
while your father forever
attacks her in jealousy.... (28)

the sister dyad

When Clytaemnestra first appears in *Pallinode*, Helen assigns her a role within the Egyptian schema as Nephthys, sister of Isis:

I am not happy without her,
Clytaemnestra, my sister;
as I turn by the last pillar,

I find Isis with Nephthys,
the Child's other mother;
the two are inseparable

as substance and shadow are,
as shadow and substance are.... (68)³⁴

The mention of shadow and substance here recalls the Egyptian double or *ka* (see Chapter Two). Here, for a moment, the child (at this point, the word still connotes Horus) is the child of two twin mothers, suggesting a displacement of the mother/father/son trinity in favour of a trinity of two mothers and son, an attempt to escape the oedipal structure, which is quite quickly lost.

The desire for the sister, sameness rather than difference, is expressed in both this poem and those that follow.³⁵ In H.D.'s work as a whole, this desire is a consistent theme, especially stressed in *Paint It Today* and *Her*. In these novels, H.D.'s protagonists long for a double, a twin: "A sister was a creature of ebony

whose lithe hips made parallel and gave reflection of like parallel in a fountain basin" (*HER* 10).

Helen and Clytaemnestra were of course twins, and they are consistently portrayed as doubles in *Helen in Egypt*, springing from the same origin:

Clytaemnestra gathered the red rose,
Helen, the white,
but they grew on one stem,

one branch, one root in the dark.... (85)

They are also of course "twin sisters of twin brothers," the Dioscuri, and they married two brothers, Agamemnon and Menelaus (70-1). The two daughters of the sisters are one child through their sister mothers: "Hermione, my child,/ and Iphigenia, her child, are one" says Helen (69).³⁶ These daughters married Orestes and Pylades, not brothers as such, but portrayed as blood brothers, the closest of companions, especially in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* (70-1).

Aside from her identification with Nephthys, Clytaemnestra is additionally defined by her association with three further goddesses. The frame of a question emphasizes the absence of the sister:

but where is she,

my sister, Nepenthe?
where is Nemesis?
where is Astarte? (75, see also 68, 88)

This is another newly-created trinity, but is less of a schema for the enactment of the past than those previously mentioned. It still seems more than mere metaphor however, although, since the sister is lost, its full potential is not explored. Clytaemnestra-as-Nepenthe, who is also mentioned as "forgetfulness of the past,/ remembrance of childhood together," is the goddess of forgetfulness (72). Here she represents Helen's lost past which will again be lost. Clytaemnestra-as-Nemesis is the familiar figure of divine vengeance, and stands perhaps for Helen's struggle for the balancing of justice post-Troy. Nemesis was also said by some to be the mother of Helen, so the sister is also mother here. As Astarte, Clytaemnestra is the Syrian Isis and therefore Helen herself, or Helen's double.

The sister is never regained in the poem. Thetis' banishment of Clytaemnestra also involves a denial of the bond between the two sisters and of the semitic manifestations or doubles of Isis, Ashtoreth, Ishtar, Astarte (*HE* 98, 102; see Chapter Two). The possibility of the sister/lover, the fracturing of the male-oriented psychological schema or myth is also lost. Clytaemnestra's importance is often brushed over by critics, a blip in the traditional psychoanalytic journey in which Helen must make her break with the feminine. Gelpi, despite his largely psychoanalytic analysis of the poem, accords her only a couple of sentences and dismisses her (with relief?) thus: "As Helen's 'shadow' she has obscured her sister's quest for identity, but now Thetis directs Helen to self-discovery through a creative connection with the masculine" (240).

Yet, although the sister is lost, there is a continual reminder of her in the figure of the lost, sacrificed woman which haunts the book. Iphigenia and Clytaemnestra form the centre of this dynamic, and Iphigenia is also associated, as we have seen, with Helen's daughter, Hermione (see above). Iphigenia and Clytaemnestra are presented as a double: "they stood together/ as one before the altar" (74). The picture of mother and daughter affords another brief glimpse of a utopian female dyad, unbroken by the fracture of the oedipal stage or symbolic moment, in which the daughter must relinquish her bond to the mother. As with the sisters, the two roses on one stem, the bond is that of flowers:

She was a bride, my sister,
with a bride's innocence,
she was a lover of flowers

and she wound in her hair,
the same simple weeds
that Iphigenia wore;

.....

O Word of the Goddess,
O Harmony and Grace,
it was a moment

of infinite beauty.... (74)

The spectre of the lost woman also appears in the shape of Polyxena, Chryseis, Deidamia and Briseis, all marginal figures in Homer, but "all sacrificed in one way or another" for war and the pride of the War-lords (*HE* 172-3, see 218-9). Briseis and Chryseis are, as we have seen, representative of the many women

taken prisoner in war (see Chapter One). Briseis' lament for Patroclus is one of the few speeches by a woman in the *Iliad* and articulates the experience of women in war:

So it is always in my life, pain following pain. My father and honoured mother gave me to a husband, and I saw him torn by the sharp bronze in front of our city, and my three brothers, borne by the same mother, my beloved brothers all met the day of destruction. (330)

The women with her, seven women given to Achilles by Agamemnon, keen over the body of Patroclus: "the cause was Patroclus, but each of them wept over her own sorrows" (330). Deidamia, the daughter of King Lycomedes of Scyros, was made pregnant by Achilles when Thetis hid him in Scyros, and had his child, Pyrrhus. One legend suggests that Achilles stopped off in Scyros on his way to Troy to marry her.³⁷ Deidamia represents the women left waiting for many years for the return of their menfolk, often only to lose them altogether. Polyxena, Paris' sister, was sacrificed on Achilles' tomb to satisfy his ghost, a sacrifice dramatised with great pathos by Euripides in *Hecuba* and the *Women of Troy*.

The litany of the names of these lost women is repeated over and over in the poem, often echoing Clytaemnestra's words, "*remember Iphigenia*," uttered just before she was murdered by Orestes:

remember Iphigenia;
remember Iphigenia,
remember Polyxena,

remember that other and that other and that other
Briseis, Chryseis,
priestess of Apollo. (219)

These women represent the danger of reconciliation with the War-lords, the male order, yet, in their refusal to disappear in the text itself, they insist on recognition of the position of women in war. They also stand for the lost sister figure, a figure that H.D. herself regretted being unable to follow through in the text. In her 1955 journal she wrote:

I realise that the Clytaemnestra motive in the first section or book, is more important than I had thought. I would like to finish the last book, with a return to the sister motive. (CF 140)³⁸

Clytaemnestra is replaced, as Thetis demands, with the figure of Achilles, lover and brother. The exploration of dualism through opposition (male and female) replaces the exploration of doubleness through sameness. In the casting of Achilles as lover, H.D. takes up the theme of the son-lover first suggested through the figure of Paris. Here, however, Helen is the character being moulded. While it was *she* who created Paris in the image of son, here Achilles places *her* in the role of mother. It is through the figure of Orestes, the son and murderer of Clytaemnestra, that Helen returns to the male-female dynamic. The prose voice notes this transition from female to male figures:

She seems to have identified herself with her own daughter, Hermione, with her sister's daughter, Iphigenia, and with Clytaemnestra, her twin-sister, 'one branch, one root in the dark.' Now she seems to equate Orestes, her sister's son, with Achilles. She had said of Achilles, 'let me love him, as Thetis his mother.' Now of Orestes, 'has he found his mother? will he ever find her? can I take her place?' (91)

The role of mother to Orestes, chosen by Helen here, both replaces the girl-child (Hermione, Iphigenia) with the son (Horus, Orestes), but also reflects how the female lover is always, to the male, mother. In comparing Orestes to Achilles, and asking, "has he found his mother?," Helen indicates that the position of sister-lover is also that of substitute mother (91).³⁹ The real mother being lost, murdered, by the son in the symbolic contract, Helen desires to replace or reassert her ("can I take her place").⁴⁰ Although we might read Helen's motive here as an attempt to defeat the "iron-ring," to overcome death with love, this role of mother-lover to Orestes/Achilles is psychologically a masochistic Freudian one.

Through the book-long exploration of the Achilles attack in *Pallinode*, H.D., peeling back the layers of antagonism and attraction in the encounter, reveals the significance of Helen's role as lover-mother. In *Eidolon* Book III, which the prose describes as more concerned with the "*human content of the drama*" (255), we at last see how Helen functions for Achilles as a substitute mother. We realise that the moment when Helen invoked the mother and Achilles was "seized with terror" was in fact the moment in which Achilles was confronted, through Helen, with his mother (23), Achilles had thought that, like the flint, he had lost "that" (283, see 12). He has rediscovered here "maternal love ... the most occulted element in our civilisation" (DuPlessis, *Career* 115). The terror and violence of Achilles are a response to the threat this discovery makes to his

masculine identity, the identity founded on Freudian separation from the mother. This is the significance of the question, asked as the boundaries of his identity dissolve, "who am I?" (17). Here the after-death context allows for a reversal, a literal re-birthing process to take place.

In *Eidolon*, the figure of Thetis, the original mother, is explored. Troy itself, the whole story, it is explained, was nothing to Achilles' love for his boat, "my own, my beloved" (244). On that boat stands Thetis, the masthead, "a picture, an image, an idol/ or eidolon, not much more than a doll" (244).⁴¹ We can relate this doll-figure to H.D.'s reading of Euripides' *Ion*. In her commentary H.D. shows how the new Ion is born when he finds his mother through the "painted box" containing his birthright, a box he fingers "[l]ike a child with a box of toys from one dead" (109). The toy of (or as) the mother is one of the "childish things" which, in the Freudian schema, must be "put away" when the boy becomes a man (1 Cor. 13:11).

As a figurehead Thetis, like Helen and like Kreousa, has been set in an unmoving image:

was there a dash of paint
in the beginning, in the garment-fold,

did the blue afterwards wear away?
did they re-touch her arms, her shoulders?
did anyone touch her ever? (245)

She is an ideal, an abstraction, for Achilles, an erotic ideal. When he visits his mother's idol, he tends it, "feeling her flanks,/ tearing loose weed from her stern" (248).

However Thetis, "careless [literally] unspeakable mother" has "cheated" Achilles of his immortality. In *Eidolon* we trace him back to the caravel of death and hence to the Egyptian shore, only to find Helen. So the long prolepsis goes back to meet its beginning and the full horror of Achilles' recognition of Helen as the shadow of his own mother, Thetis, is recognised:

the mockery, after-death,
to stumble across a stretch
of shell and the scattered weed,

to encounter another
whose eyes slant in the old way;
is she Greek or Egyptian? (254, see 245)

It is as both Helen and as Thetis that Achilles accuses Helen of the deaths of his comrades, the burning of his ships and his own death (16-7). It is in the sexual act with Helen that Achilles finally confronts his mother and his own anger with her.

daughter/son/mother

While, to Achilles, Helen is the lover-mother, Helen herself rejects this position, taking on instead the role of sister to Achilles and daughter to Thetis. The sibling element of the relationship between Isis and Osiris is stressed in this emphasis on Helen and Achilles as daughter and son of Thetis, rivals for the mother's love.⁴² Both seek "access to the unifying mother" (DuPlessis, Thrall 417, see also Klopfer, *Mother* 164-5). The novel *Bid Me To Live*, begun in 1939, but only completed two years before H.D. began *Helen in Egypt*, sheds light on this (Friedman, *Web* 364). Julia reflects on her relationship with Rico (the D.H. Lawrence figure in the book) as follows: "I could not be your mother. Anyhow, I need a great-mother as much as you do" (*BMTL* 182).

Helen calls on Thetis to be her protector in the poem (165). She is urged by Theseus, just as she herself urges Orestes/Achilles, to "return to the Shell, your mother" (165, 170).⁴³ Helen too is in exile from the mother, attempting to return, but suspicious, like the little girl in the pattern described in *Tribute to Freud*, over whether the mother loves her as well as the son. The Thetis or mother figure has indeed proven problematic to Helen: it was she who forbade her union with the sister in favour of the brother, thereby censoring the feminine, in a sense doubly "occult" element. As the prose voice says: "*It has been Thetis from the first who reconciled Helen to Achilles*" (213 see 107-8, 185, 213, 210). The draw to Achilles from Thetis had suggested an alliance between Thetis and her son, perhaps supporting the male iron-ring, perhaps excluding Helen's attempts to transcend that violence.

These attempts of Thetis to draw Helen away from homosexuality (Clytaemnestra) toward heterosexuality (Achilles) are in collusion with Freud's theories of sexuality. Freud, in "Femininity" (1932), explained that the little girl must make a "more difficult and more complicated" journey into maturity than the boy (118).⁴⁴ For "normal" growth, she must transfer her pre-oedipal attraction to the mother (and her clitoral sensitivity) to attachment to the father

(and vaginal sensitivity) (118-126). She must turn away in hatred from the mother, a hatred based in Freud's famous theory that the daughter resents the mother for not providing her with a penis, this "penis-envy" leading her to masochistically renounce "clitoridal masturbation" and to develop a more passive character than the male (*Fem.* 121-8, *Sex* 195).⁴⁵ Female homosexuality, to Freud, was the result of continued identification with the phallic (pre-oedipal) mother, a persistent refusal of "normal" development and the attendant feminine passivity (130). In *Tribute to Freud* H.D. places especial emphasis on the fact that attachment to the mother does not always abate:

The Professor speaks of the mother-layer of fixation being the same in girls and boys, but the girl usually transfers her affection or (if it happens) her fixation to her father. Not always. (175)

H.D. goes on to stress that Freud admitted to her how "mistakes were made" in the early days of psychoanalysis -- that "it was not sufficiently understood that the girl did not invariably transfer her emotions to her father" (175).

In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. re-claims the attachment to the mother, without the attendant Freudian implication that this is a "masculinity complex," an abnormality (Freud, *Fem.* 130). Thetis is not only potentially fearful in the poem, but she is also cocoon (Leuké) and protector. It is she who, as Artemis saved Iphigenia, saves Helen from sacrifice. Like Agammemnon before him, Achilles, for the right to sail, has offered Helen as a second Iphigenia, "another white throat," to Thetis (244). In a moment that reminds us of Helen's desire to take the place of Clytaemnestra with Orestes, "*Helen herself seems almost ready for this sacrifice*" (245). Once again the events of *Pallinode* are replayed; Helen sees again the original attack as the moment when she might have become a sacrifice to the goddess:

nearer, nearer -
till I felt the touch
of his fingers' remorseless steel...

*for I have promised another
white throat to a goddess,
but not to our lady of Aulis.* (270)

In this re-remembering, Helen realises that Thetis was always her protector. Praying again, Helen realises Thetis had heard her prayer and saved her (273). Thetis is also revealed as collaborator in Helen's struggle against the powers of war. The story is told of Thetis hiding Achilles, dressed as a girl, in Scyros in

order to prevent him going to war.⁴⁶ Helen has an ally in Thetis then. Although the figure of Thetis remains psychologically ambivalent, she turns out not to be an enemy, as Achilles' jealous portrayal of his mother might have suggested. Although the sister (the homosexual thread) is lost, the mother is re-gained in the poem, not only in the psycho-sexual dimension, but also in the sacred (see Chapter Five).

the child

In *Eidolon* there is a new child (not Horus, not Paris, not Hermione or Pyrrhus) born to Helen and Achilles, the "*promised Euphorion*" (288). This miraculous child is not the child of Helen or the child of Achilles. It is Helen as child, the child whom Theseus stole away, and Achilles as child, the child whose mother was a goddess and a doll (289-90). Although essential mythic patterns are not definitively resolved in *Helen in Egypt*, the personal gain of psychology, the individual childhood, is achieved through the process of remembrance tracked in the first half of this chapter. Helen and Achilles are returned, through their sexual act, to their "primal scenes." For Helen, the rape by Theseus and, for Achilles, desire for the mother. Whereas Achilles' trail back in time is condensed in the final books of *Pallinode* into a compact collection of poems, Helen's is suffused throughout the poem.

The child also represents a psychoanalytic theory, or perhaps dream, of the equality of the pre-oedipal, and the hope of re-gaining that equality. This theory is, in one sense, Freudian, since, according to Freud, young male and female children both experienced identical love for the mother. Yet, it is also anti-Freudian, since it suggests that this stage can again be attained in adulthood, a flouting of psychoanalytical determinism. Through (being) the child, flexibility of roles is possible: Helen can be "father, brother, son, lover,/ sister, husband and child" (187). As DuPlessis writes: "The character Helen unites, comprises, and needs all the variants of the sufficient family" (Thrall 420).

We can relate this miraculous child to the "*gloire*" at the end of *Bid Me To Live*, a brief fantasy of an entity that is "rose ... neither red nor white," that is not man or woman, but "both and neither" (*BMTL* 176-7).⁴⁷ This being is clearly related to the pre-gendered bisexed bisexual being:

The child is the *gloire* before it is born. The circle of the candle on my notebook is the *gloire*, the story isn't born yet.
While I live in the unborn story, I am in the *gloire*. (BMTL 177)

In *Palimpsest* too we find the same fantasy, expressed by Helen Fairwood about Captain Rafton. In the rhythmic enclosed womb space of a travelling carriage, it was:

As if they in some strange exact and precious period of pre-birth, twins,
lovers, were held, sheltered beneath some throbbing heart. (220)

Once again, we feel the pull toward origins, toward the personal antiquity of pre-birth, the possibility of a new old space.

Yet, this possibility of a solution to the psychosexual dilemma is only momentary: the child is a fleeting hope.⁴⁸ H.D. makes it quite evident that she is by no means suggesting possible universal resolution of the entangled schematic processes of the poem. In the final pages of the book Helen herself, asking "What can Paris know of the sea" (299, 304), turns against Paris for precisely the sin Achilles had attacked her for, for daring to mention the name of Thetis, the mother:

how dared he say to me,
'call on Thetis, the sea-mother'?
I tremble, I feel the same

anger and sudden terror,
that I sensed Achilles felt,
when I named his mother.... (299-300)

With these words, then, the whole struggle begins again, as it ends, and therefore does not end. "*In this last phase or mood,*" the prose voice says, "*it seems inevitable and perhaps wholly human for Helen to turn on her Trojan lover*" (299). The "human problem" cannot be solved, only explored, through mythical schema which simply pose or set the problem. "*It is not so simple*" (299). The final lines of the poem evoke only the intensity of human emotion, its power to destroy as well as to create :

*only Achilles could break his heart
and the world for a token,
a memory forgotten.* (304)

The pattern in itself may amaze and, for brief moments, even satisfy: "*The pattern in itself is sufficient and it is beautiful*" (32). Yet, ultimately myth is an

activity that cannot be resolved, it is interchange, roleplay, drama. Schemata are only temporary still moments within the process of treading the family problem "round and round and round." Even in the final book of *Eidolon*, Helen becomes lost again in the turning wheel of the infinite and remorseless past:

my mind goes over the problem,
round and round like the chariot-wheel;
did I challenge the Fates
when I said to Theseus,
"the Wheel is still"?
my mind goes on,
spinning the infinite thread.... (297-8)

Chapter Five

The Questing Process

We have heroics which do not confuse
transcendence with domination.¹

Critically, *Helen in Egypt* has been classified as an epic, an assumption I discuss in my final chapter. Here however I concentrate on two epic elements, the hero and the quest. All are agreed that, as a woman, Helen is clearly an unconventional hero. The quest of the poem is also described as untraditional, being "centred not on the drama of war but on the search for identity after all action is past" (Wagner 529). In this chapter, I discuss Helen's subversive heroism and questing process. While it is clearly the case that Helen's quest takes place away from the sphere of action of the war epic, I challenge the idea that she seeks only her self in the poem, suggesting that she is in fact engaged in a spiritual questing process.

The creation of a female hero in *Helen in Egypt* was a provocative act indeed. Through her Helen, H.D. challenged both traditional epic legend and Otto Rank's Freudian interpretation of the hero in *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. In his book, Rank painstakingly explores the legends of heroes of many cultures.² He identifies the "standard saga" of the hero: his birth is prophesied to bring disaster, he is sent away from the family home (often in a box on water) and brought up by strangers, and returns to take revenge on his father and to achieve great honours and riches (61). In Rank we can find then the weight of both the ancient material and the current ideology or interpretation.

Rank's reading of the heroic saga traced the myth back to the Freudian oedipal fantasy of attraction to the mother and jealousy of the father by which a male child succeeds in separating from his parents (63-6). For Rank, the boy's infantile ego is itself the hero, and the adult creates the mythological character to enact his own childhood revolt against the father (81-2). Rank's notion of the hero is then totally dependent on both the masculinity of the hero and the violence of the son against the father. Knowing Rank's thesis, H.D. would have been acutely aware of the challenge she made, with her female hero and her

internalised quest to both the heroic tradition and to Freud, the father of the new science of psychoanalysis.³

The pacific nature of Helen's heroism is important, for it is in direct contradiction to the idea of the hero who makes his name in war. H.D., having lived through two world wars, tackles the association of heroism with masculine war-mongering. *Helen in Egypt* is written against the hero as fighter and the heroic scene as the battlefield, whether it be on the Trojan Plain or on Flanders Fields. Even before the First World War, Euripides' plays, with their grim exposure of the folly and misery of war, were perhaps the matrix of H.D.'s own anti-heroic stance. She writes in the tradition of many of the women characters and choruses of Euripides' plays who highlight the folly of war. The chorus in Euripides' *Helen* point out that, though the Greeks are the victors at Troy, there are as many mourning Greek wives and children as there are Trojan (Vellacott 170). "You who would ... in the clash of spear on spear/ Gain honour -- you are all stark mad!," they rail (Vellacott 171). The poem in the second book of *Leuké* which reflects on the fate of the returning Greeks, punished for their rape of Cassandra seems to echo Cassandra's prophecy in *The Trojan Women* of the miseries of the Greeks after Troy:

the Sea would revenge the wrong,
the Sea would take its toll,
remorseless, with Victory

as a mocking echo.... (121)

It was perhaps in his use of the legend of the phantom Helen that Euripides critiqued war most startlingly however, for he showed armies falling, literally, for nothing.

During the First World War, H.D. saw for herself the effects of war and the hypocrisy of war heroics. Richard Aldington's letters brought the misery of the soldiers close to H.D. and, when peace came in 1918, Aldington, like Euripides, emphasized the hollowness of success:

There will be people about you speaking foolishly and haughtily of 'victory.' Turn from them - remember, as I do, the myriad dead and give them, if you can, your tears, as I do. (14 October, 1918, Zilboorg 148)

Aldington's post-war novel, *Death of a Hero* (1929), was a powerful challenge to the notion of war heroism. The book spares the reader none of the details of life

and death in the trenches, and dwells on the hypocrisy of those in command. Aldington's "hero" dies out of suicidal desperation, rather than in brave defence of the motherland (287). Aldington ends his book with a classical analogy, a poem spoken by a veteran of the Trojan War. The speaker reflects on how the old are ignored by the young who have already forgotten what war means:

And I thought of the graves by desolate Troy
And the beauty of many young men now dust,
And the long agony, and how useless it all was. (288)

H.D. was concerned, not only with the horror of war, but also with values lost in war-time, as we saw from her review of Yeats' *Responsibilities* (see Prelude). Love of life, the spirit and literature were the victims of war ethics. In her novels, the central women characters cry out against the ethos that, in war, only death is noble:

All about her, people cried of nobility of sacrifice; all the world was led
to its devotion to sacred duty. All the world was splendid and heroic....
There was no love, save love of duty, love of sacrifice. (PIT 46)

During the Second World War, H.D.'s preoccupations were unchanged. In *Trilogy*, she directly challenged the heroics of war in a stand for life and the power of the spirit and the pen. H.D.'s concern over the heroic ethos did not die during her years in Switzerland. As late as 1955 she became absorbed in the scandal in the press about the new Aldington book, *Lawrence of Arabia: a Biographical Enquiry* (1955), which debunked T.E. Lawrence's heroism as deluded and self-created. H.D. saw this book as in the tradition of *Death of a Hero*, and was shocked by the horrified reaction of a public who still wanted its heroes:

They all say the same thing. Offence against taste, attack on the legend
and the hero who so tragically died, twenty years ago. Is this an attack
on this hero or on another or on all pre-conceived notions of the glory of
war? Why do I care about it? (CF 5)

We can read clearly here H.D.'s direct equation of heroism with "all preconceived notions of the glory of war."

"Mine was WAR too, transposed to the heroic," H.D. said of *Helen in Egypt* in *End To Torment* (58) and "[i]t is all Greek-Troy, superimposed on my own war experience," she wrote to Silvia Dobson on 16 December 1955.⁴ The references to creative processes of transposition and superimposition in these

two passages are of course to the scene of Troy, the stage on which she plays out her concerns about war heroics. The classic context, as Aldington intended in *Death of a Hero*, was surely intended to make all the more permanent and essential her challenge to "preconceived notions of the glory of war."

In the early pages of *Helen in Egypt* H.D. presents the heroic as fundamentally war-like. Achilles is the ultimate war hero, introduced to the Greek spirits, in lines mimicking the mounting rhythm of the fanfare, as:

your own invincible, unchallenged Sire,
Lord of your legions, King of Myrmidons,
unconquerable, a mountain and a grave,
Achilles.... (5-6)

In life, Achilles had been the "hero-god" of a "warrior-cult," one of a "*powerful war faction*," the "war-Lords" of Greece (9, 18-19). To the very end of the poem, he remembers how, at war, "there was never a braver, a better among the heroes" than he (287).

In the world of *Helen in Egypt* however, the "*whole heroic sequence is over, forgotten, re-lived, forgotten again*" (57). Helen supersedes Achilles to become the powerful figure in the poem and Achilles becomes a "postheroic man" (DuPlessis, Thrall 417). Their physical encounter can be read as a battle for supremacy in the poem, in which Helen defeats the old-time epic hero by refusing to die. Her centrality is then assured. Achilles' descriptions of her effect on him at Troy suggest not only his own obsession with her (see Chapter One), but also her growing prominence in the poem. Helen is compared to perhaps the greatest of all Greek heroes, "I felt Herculean strength/ return when I saw her face (61-2).

This is the place from which H.D. begins her inquisition into the heroic and the feminine. What kind of hero can Helen be? What kind of power can be wielded in an alternative heroism that seeks "transcendence" without "domination"? This struggle involves fighting against the temptations of male heroism, as well as attempting to create a "new" heroic. Helen expresses a desire to understand Achilles' heroism in *Pallinode* and, in one poem, runs through the heroics of war that Achilles might have perpetrated, including the rape of women, the luring of young men into battle and excessive pride (33-4). Helen's desire to "know" Achilles regardless comes close to an attraction to the masculine heroic. Again,

in *Leuké*, Helen expresses briefly to Theseus her "*heroic voice*" that loves war and extols the "beauty of arrows" (176-7). However, Helen's stance against masculine war heroism is maintained, supported by the haunting figures of Clytaemnestra, Iphigenia, Chryseis and Briseis.⁵

H.D.'s awareness of the oddity of the woman as epic hero shows in the partly parodic or ironic references to Helen as hero, especially during her encounter with Theseus, the great hero of Athens, who lauds in his memory, above all else, "the Quest and the Argo" (150). Helen's wounded feet when she reaches Theseus echo the wounded feet of male heroes from Achilles to Oedipus, yet, amusingly, these feet are only "*symbolically*" wounded (153, 155). Theseus' attempt to cover Helen with a fleece evokes Jason's golden fleece, but as a cosy eiderdown rather than a quest object (170). Troy and Achilles are described respectively as Helen's minotaurs, reminiscent of Theseus' minotaur, but also very different since they are psychic hurdles to be confronted in memory (167, 181).⁶

The humour of these lines lies in the internalised nature of Helen's quest, as contrasted with the physical, active nature of the male quest (155). Euripides might once again have been an inspiration to Helen here. His Helen defeats Proteus' son, Theoclymenus, by her mental adroitness, while Menelaus appears absurd in his desire for heroic action blustering that, "Twere best to die/ In some brave action than without a conflict" (Vellacott 128). H.D.'s Helen is a step further away from the heroic than Euripides', for she kills no-one to achieve her aim. While the comparison of quests might make for some amusement, behind it lies the suggestion that Helen's quest is comparable in importance and nobler in nature than the quests of earlier heroes.

In every (even peaceful) battle, there are two sides. In the case of *Helen in Egypt*, if the enemy is war, the hero is love. In her opposition of love and war in the poem, H.D. was perhaps inspired by a Sappho fragment (first published in 1914) which sets up the same dichotomy and cites Helen as an example of the power of love, perhaps even as a hero of love:

Some say that the fairest thing on the black earth is a host of horsemen, others of foot, others of ships; but I say that is fairest which is the object of one's desire.⁷ And it is quite easy to make this plain to all; for Helen observing well the beauty of men judged the best to be that one who destroyed the whole glory of Troy, nor bethought herself at all of child or parents dear, but through love Cypris led her astray.... And I now have called to mind Anactoria, far away, whose gracious step and

radiant glance I would rather see than the chariots of the Lydians and
the charge of accoutred knights.... (Oxyrhynchus 40)⁸

Sappho's Helen is moved by love, love that is directly contrasted with armed power. This is confirmed in the final lines in which Sappho declares that, to her, the face of the beloved is a more beautiful sight than all the armies of wartime. Here we can see a radical questioning of cultural values and of interpretations of the figure of Helen. Both Josephine Balmer and Bruno Gentili have noted the difference between Sappho's attitude to Helen and that of her contemporaries, especially her fellow lyric poet, Alcaeus, who contrasts the wickedness of Helen with the virtue of Thetis (Balmer 22, Gentili 89, (Alcaeus in) Campbell, vol. 1. 256-9, 332-3). Gentili stresses the power of Aphrodite in the poem, "an unstayable force exerted from without through the will of a god", and argues that through that will, Helen "becomes the incarnation of beauty and love" (88-9).

The same association of Helen with sacred love and the same stark dichotomising of war and love characterises the early poems of *Helen in Egypt*. In a letter to Pearson, written just after she had completed Book I of *Pallinode*, H.D. defines love and war as the central duality of *Helen in Egypt*, stressing the greater reality of "Love":

According to the old myth, Helen was never at Troy at all,
Euripides wrote this play on the theme, *Helen in Egypt*. It is the
'phantasmogoria' or unreality of war as against the reality of the
eternal and of Love. (23 September 1952)⁹

These words are echoed, in the text H.D. proceeded to write, in Helen's question about Achilles:

does he dare remember
the unreality of war
in this enchanted place? (30)

Both H.D.'s letter and Helen's words in the poem above insist that love and desire, despite their seeming intangibility, are more *real* than war.

Love and War are extended in the poem, via "eros" and "eris" (strife), to exemplify the even more fundamental forces of life and death. It is perhaps through Jane Harrison's interpretations of them that H.D. came to portray eros and eris as such basic elements (or even spirits), rather than as the Homeric characters we are more used to. Harrison argues that Eros and Eris were in fact

originally spirits of Life and Death, rather than representations of love and strife. Eris, she writes, was originally "another Erinys," (*Proleg.* 250) the Erinyes being ker spirits, the "Keres Angry-ones," who came in vengeance, often as ghosts of the "unrighteously slain" (*Proleg.* 213-4). By the time of Homer, the Erinyes were not ghosts, but figures of vengeance and were, like Eris, female (215). The Erinyes (usually translated as the Furies or Eumenides) of Aeschylus work ceaselessly with Clytaemnestra to achieve vengeance against Orestes (see Aeschylus 148-9).¹⁰ They will not let blood-guilt rest. In this, they resemble Typhon as portrayed in *Helen in Egypt*, the ceaseless whirling figure of destruction, who is indeed matched in the poem, appropriately, with Eris.

The winged Eros, argues Harrison, was also originally a form of Ker, the "Ker of Life" (*Proleg.* 631). The Orphics had adopted an ancient doctrine, Harrison suggests, in their winged bird-like Eros who sprang, like all other life, from the chaos of the world-egg (*Proleg.* 625, 628, see below). This Eros is a far cry from the later trivialised Eros of the Olympic pantheon. Eros then is both Love and Life; Eris, both Strife and Death. Paris and Achilles, represented at one level as rivals in war, each as blood-thirsty as the other, are also represented as eros and eris. Paris is Eros, not only love, but youth, flowers, springtime and new life. Achilles is death.

Helen then, in her heroic struggle to "gain spiritual ... ascendancy" over the destructive Typhon-Osiris cycle, meets her minotaur in eris, in Achilles (28). Like the Greek heroes of old, Theseus, Hercules, Orpheus and Odysseus, Helen has her underworld to visit, her monster to face (rather than fight). From Graves, in her notebook for *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. notes that, "Hercules, Orpheus + Theseus 'harrowed Hell'" (*Goddess* 425). The prose voice, when comparing Helen's quest with the quest for the Golden Fleece, adds "But in both cases, there was an enemy to be conquered, 'they called it Death'" (181). In the poem that follows, Helen suggests that she too, like Theseus, has been to her own underworld and struggled with her own minotaur (182).¹¹ In her case, Achilles' attack was the monster to be faced: "was Achilles my Minotaur?" (182).¹²

The encounter with Achilles, as I have said, symbolises both the hatred of Helen by Greeks and Trojans alike, and the violence of war. Helen's survival of Achilles' attack is perceived here as a defeat of death or a harrowing of Hell, but there is one crucial difference from the mythical tradition of fighting the monster. Generally, the monster gets killed. In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen, the hero

dedicated to love, responds to the attack of her minotaur, like Daniel in the lion's den, with prayer (HE 17).

Nevertheless, the universal legend of the hero with a dragon, minotaur or gorgon to slay is closer to *Helen in Egypt* than the war epic, for such tales are often read symbolically as a struggle for spiritual over base values. H.D. herself had used the legend of Perseus in this way in *Tribute to Freud* (see also note 6). In her account of the "Corfu Visions," she portrays herself as Perseus, the hero "fighting for Truth and Wisdom," who beheaded the Gorgon, "enemy of Wisdom and Beauty," with Athene's help (52-3). Helen is in this same tradition of a hero who fights for truth and wisdom. The love with which she must counter war is the inheritor of the spiritual "Beauty" that H.D. had contrasted with war in her early review of Yeats' *Responsibilities* (see Prelude). She is however no slaughterer of enemies, but a pacifier and a transcendentalist, struggling against the war-epic and contemporary notions of the warrior hero.

As a hero, were she not an "everywoman" rather than an "everyman," Helen has more in common with the spiritual questor of Dante's *Divine Comedy* or the Knights of the Round Table, than with the Homeric or modern war hero. H.D.'s comments about the Holy Grail Quest in *The Sword Went Out to Sea* suggest it is, in some ways, an appropriate parallel for *Helen in Egypt*:

The Argonauts were on a sun-quest.... The Knights of King Arthur were on the same quest, though their symbol was the cup or chalice. The Golden Fleece represents activity, valour. The Grail represents religious contemplation and dream. (189)

*weary of war,
only the Quest remains* (HE 158)

Although Helen's quest in *Helen in Egypt* is comparable with the quest for the Grail in that it is a quest of "religious contemplation and dream," it differs from the Grail quest in its inherently shifting nature. The word "quest," like the word "hero," is used in the poem, but its significance is shrouded in mystery (158, 181). No specific quest-object exists to symbolise Helen's spiritual struggle. The recurring image of the Sphinx, the riddler, is significant in this seeking of the heart of the mysterious.

This prevailing sense of the unanswerable, of mysterious quest, was identified by L.S. Dembo in conversation with Norman Pearson:

Helen in Egypt is a poem that seems to have only the idea of a quest as its structure; nothing is ever discovered; nothing is ever finally revealed. It's a work that seems to have at its very center the idea of mystery as well as being a mystery in itself. (Pearson 438-9)

At one level, Dembo's reading captures the tone of the poem. At the conclusion of both *Pallinode* and *Leuké*, we are told that the answer to the quest has been found, although we do not know exactly what it was. "Phoenix/ has vanquished/ that ancient enemy, Sphinx," says Thetis at the end of *Pallinode* (94). "What was Helena's task?/ do we know?/ only that it was finished," says Helen at the end of *Leuké* (206). The prose voice remarks wryly on the inconclusiveness of this poem: "'What was Helena's task?' She cannot altogether say..." (206). Each time the undefined task is of course by no means concluded, and the sense of quest continues: "do the mysteries untangle/ but to re-weave?" (HE 155).

Once again, then, the key word is process. The answer is continually deferred, yet there is a powerful sense of questioning, of seeking in the poem. The emphasis is on spiritual process and religious activity. From the first pages of the poem, Helen is engaged in such activity. She is described as a neophyte or initiate, and her interaction with other characters is punctuated by withdrawal. She becomes "rapt apart" in her own meditation (66, 112). Helen also prays throughout the poem, to "Amen, All-father," to Thetis, to the Dioscuri and to other male and female gods (12, 17, 86).

Although it is the seeking *process* that is emphasized in *Helen in Egypt*, certain principles do characterise this questing. The first principle is hermetic, the endeavour to "know the Sun,/ hidden behind the sun of our visible day" (34, see 29). This sun, as well as suggesting the sun of the Underworld and the "idea behind the idea" mentioned in Chapter Four, can also be read as an image for the hermetic endeavour to decode mystical symbols. These proliferating symbols or significant images are in a sense the multiple quest-objects of *Helen in Egypt*, just as Helen herself is a multiple subject.

The hermeticism of the poem makes sense of the mysterious quality of *Helen in Egypt*, for in the Hermetic tradition, the obscurity of such symbols is part of their significance. Throughout *Trilogy*, especially *The Walls Do Not Fall*, the

word, "secret," is used to refer to the hermetic layer of meaning: "we, .../ bearers of the secret wisdom" (CP 517); "we know each other/ by secret symbols"; "we are keepers of the secret" (CP 522); "here is the alchemist's key,/ it unlocks secret doors" (CP 533).¹³

In *Helen in Egypt*, we have the same sense that only the initiate can discover the mysterious answers to the frequently recurring questions of the poem:

how can you find the answer
in the oracles of Greece
or the hieroglyphs of Egypt?

you may work or steal your way
into the innermost shrine
and the secret escape you.... (83)

H.D.'s sense of a mysterious or secret realm in her own Moravian heritage is touched on in the chapter of *The Gift* called "The Secret," in the unpublished passages of *The Gift* and in the unpublished novel, *The Mystery* (written in 1951, shortly before *Helen in Egypt*).¹⁴ As Pearson said, the mystery of Moravianism could only be discovered by the kind of quest we find in *Helen in Egypt*:

It was a mystery that lay at the center of the world, a mystery that one tried to pierce through meditation and thought, and, above all, through love. (439)

For the adult H.D., this concern with secret knowledge developed into a fascination with the whole hermetic tradition.¹⁵ H.D. was especially fascinated by the idea that all the different components of hermeticism might be united into one vision, a vision in the same spirit as the Moravian vision of

[A] secret powerful community that would bring the ancient secrets of Europe and the ancient secrets of America into a secret union of power and spirit, a united brotherhood, a *Unitas Fratrum* of the whole world. (G 135).¹⁶

As Friedman first noted, these ideas echo those of syncretist writers such as Jean Chaboseau, Robert Ambelain and Denis de Rougement, all of whom H.D. read (*Psyche* 171). Chaboseau defined alchemy, tarot, numerology and astrology as part of a single tradition called "Hermeticism" -- "the more subtle side of Philosophy, the more mysterious," the aim of which is "Reintegration -- the conquest of divine knowledge."¹⁷ As in H.D.'s later work, hermetic significance, the sun behind the sun, could be discerned in everything (often retrospectively)

from events to symbols to words to numbers. As Friedman has noted, the occult is similar to the psychoanalytic tradition in this wise: Freud had insisted that every dream, joke and slip of the tongue was significant (*Psyche* 189).

The hermetic level of *Helen in Egypt* is associated with the Goddess. The Sphinx herself, who sets the questions, was, according to Robert Graves, a goddess before she was a monster (*Goddess* 417). Graves suggests that she was a Ura or Athene goddess figure, ruler of earth and air, before the patriarchal gods of both Egyptian and Greek cults took over her role (*Goddess* 417).¹⁸ The mysteriousness of the Sphinx is then, in part, the mystery of the Goddess. In *Helen in Egypt*, it is the Goddess (as Thetis) who urges Helen to "dare the uncharted seas," to enter the visionary dimension of perception (107, see Chapter Three). These "uncharted" seas yield hermetic buried treasure, occult clues on the journey to enlightenment, often words and objects with talismanic significance. Like Freud's images of gods, they are "treasures ... salvaged from the sea-depth" (97).¹⁹

The image of treasure recurs in H.D.'s work. In *Palimpsest* another Helen, Helen Fairwood, staying in Egypt, is offered some "trifles," including a scarab ring, which she believes might be ancient artefacts from a tomb, of a "special and peculiar power" (178). Her longing to hold them is expressed in terms of diving:

She wanted to dive deep, deep, courageously down into some
unexploited region of the consciousness into some common deep sea of
unrecorded knowledge and bring, triumphant, to the surface some
treasure buried, lost, forgotten. (179)

It is often a ring that symbolises occult knowledge. In *Helen in Egypt*, Thetis asks in her plunging sea poem beginning "A woman's wiles are a net":

what unexpected treasure,
what talisman or magic ring
may the net find? (93)

Again, when offered to Thetis, a "filigree ring of no worth," has "simple magic" (280-1).

In fairytales, the magic ring is often either a quest object or the key to the hero's success in destroying the dragon and gaining the princess. Several such stories are told in Andrew Lang's fairy books which H.D. owned, one of them being the story of Aladdin mentioned by H.D. in *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (see

above).²⁰ The ring is a powerful talisman then, but, often, can only be interpreted by the initiate. Solomon's ring, in "The Dragon of the North" for instance, has an inscription which can only be read by the very wise (Lang, Yellow 9-10).

If we explore the significance of the "talisman" and "magic ring" themselves, we find they refer us back again to the whole notion of the hermetic strain of hidden knowledge, pointing onwards, ever-deferring, to more hidden knowledge. In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D.'s reflection on a serpent and thistle ring leads her to muse about the signet, "mark, token, proof," or sign signifying something else, astronomically a zodiacal sign, or perhaps "sign-post - a direction post" (66).²¹ These signs or symbols, as in *Helen in Egypt*, all grant revelation through reflection, leading to new revelation. The "talisman or magic ring" is itself a sign-post for the initiate of H.D.'s work, ancient mythology and the occult. It suggests the experiential nature of the seeking process itself. The plunge into Thetis' sea widens the possibilities of vision, and of wisdom, although no ultimate answer to the sphinx awaits the seeker on the sea-bed.

The endless questions, endless possible answers and self-referential nature of the hermetic quest suggests again Kristeva's chora, for when the semiotic enters the symbolic unitary meaning is impossible. As DuPlessis has said of H.D.'s hieroglyphs: "the signs remain mysteries"; each sign acts as "portal, as entrance to the area where not reading, but readings will forever gush" (Lang. 97-8). Yet, perhaps DuPlessis goes too far when she writes in the same passage that "wisdom is not in translation or identification" for I would argue that H.D. (and Helen in *Helen in Egypt*) do seek wisdom through translation and identification, and that the reader is invited to do the same (97, see 101-2). The signs are not so much "ultimately unreadable," as DuPlessis says (of the signs in *Tribute to Freud*), but there are simply many, many readings all inter-related in an infinite network of signs and, again, more signs (98).

There is also, however, danger in the hermetic search for the plunging seeker. The questioner who cannot answer the riddle faces death. Of the "Man on the Boat" meeting, H.D. wondered:

Perhaps there is no answer to it or it may be dangerous to ask it, for the wrong answer (as with the Sphinx in Egypt) may bring death. (TF 161)

The ring in fairytale and legend is not always a boon. In the *Volsunga Saga*, part of which is related by Lang in *The Red Fairy Book*, the ring carries a death curse. In "Prince Ring," an Icelandic tale told in *The Yellow Fairy Book*, a prince reaches into a barrel for a ring and is swiftly sealed up in the barrel and put out to sea (237-8). Even auspicious rings with genii trapped inside them will obey any wearer, and are hence always a double-edged blessing.

The danger of the hermetic search is also double-edged, lying in its infinitely deferring nature. In the sea-depths of the Thetis poem lurks the "monstrous octopus" (93). The octopus can be read back through "The Walls Do Not Fall" in which, even as she urges daring, the poet relates the dangers of the sea:

so mind dispersed, dared occult lore,
found secret doors unlocked,
floundered, was lost in sea-depth,
sub-conscious ocean where Fish
move two-ways, devour;
when identity in the depth,
would merge with the best,
octopus or shark rise
from the sea-floor:
illusion, reversion of old values,
oneness lost, madness. (533)

The octopus here is the monster of madness, the madness that H.D. feared, the equivalent to the fear of linguistic nonsense discussed in Chapter Three and the mental delusions discussed in Chapter Four.²²

The seeker is in mortal fear of becoming utterly lost amidst a maze of signposts, Yeats' fear of being lost in a stream of occult images, "astray upon the path of the chameleon, upon Hodos Chameliontos" (*Autos*. 269-70).²³ Yeats' words could have been H.D.'s own: "It is not so much that I choose too many elements," he writes, "as that the possible unities themselves seem without number" (*Autos*. 376). These are the same fears as those articulated in *Trilogy*, the

riot of unpruned imagination,
jottings of psychic numerical equations,
runes, superstitions, evasions....
(CP 534)²⁴

Helen in Egypt's classical context often blinds the reader to the same dangerous journey in *Helen in Egypt* in which the ever-growing net of significant symbolism offers intermittant, flickering, changing revelation, some sense of which I shall now try to convey.

The first hermetic process that Helen becomes absorbed in is the deciphering of hieroglyphs, the central activity of the questing process in *Pallinode*. Her withdrawals to the temple in *Pallinode* involve meditation on the "Amen-script." In Book II, after intense interchanges with Achilles, she returns to the "Amen-script," and reads the thousand-petalled lily as the dead Greek spirits. Sending Achilles away, she says:

I feel the lure of the invisible,
I am happier here alone
in this great temple,

with this great temple's
indecipherable hieroglyph;
I have 'read' the lily,

I can not 'read' the hare, the chick, the bee,²⁵
I would study and decipher
the indecipherable Amen-script. (21)

Twice more, in Books III-V, Achilles speaks with Helen and twice more she returns again to the temple.

The reading of a hieroglyph is quintessentially mysterious, a gift from the goddess (13). Helen must be "instructed" to understand (22). Hieroglyphs in *Helen in Egypt* are not only pictures on papyrus, like the shadow-sun" which Helen interprets as the ensign of the death-ship of Osiris (22, 26). They are also images carved on temple walls and, even living, moving beings, like the night-bird recognised by Helen as Isis, a "life-symbol" (13). The attraction of the hieroglyph is in part its pictorial closeness to the real, stimulating the originary fantasy that it can actually *be* the real (see *Prelude*). This can only be achieved when the image is related to life, so the thousand-petalled lily becomes for Helen the spirits of the dead.

The process is echoed in the symbolising chain of the wider text when the heavily symbolised unravelling image of the veil becomes again simply a garment:

The symbolic 'veil' to which Achilles had enigmatically referred now resolves itself down to the memory of a woman's scarf, blowing in the winter-wind.... (55)

In *Helen in Egypt*, in interpreting the merged images of "Helen's" hieroglyphs and H.D.'s symbols, resolution can only ever be fleeting. As with the figure of Helen, consolidation is impossible.

The original Egyptian hieroglyphs themselves were designed, as DuPlessis explains, to be read pictographically, alphabetically and determinatively (Lang. 97). Helen's hieroglyphs can also be read many ways, producing "a plurality of readings, of reading tactics" (DuPlessis, Lang. 97). Two central readings, as we saw in the previous chapter, are the psychological and the sacred²⁶, but within either schema, symbols shift and change. H.D. notes that Freud "deplored the tendency to fix ideas too firmly to set symbols" when decoding the "*hieroglyph of the unconscious*" (TF 93). H.D. also deplored such an idea when deciphering sacred symbolism. Again, like Freud, she insists on the significance of individual interpretation. Readers are invited into the text of *Helen in Egypt* to follow their own clues, either through intertextual reading of H.D. or through drawing on their own knowledge of the underside of world religion.

Words are "anagrams, cryptograms,/ little boxes, conditioned/ to hatch butterflies," wrote H.D. in *Trilogy* (CP 540). If we "unhatch" the hieroglyphic image of the lily, we can begin to read the image as multi-functioning and inter-related in *Helen in Egypt*. The lily is, from the beginning, associated with the Amen temple:

... long corridors of lotus-bud
furlled on the pillars,
and the lotus-flower unfurled,

with reed of the papyrus.... (2)

The lily as lotus suggests an Eastern framework here, hinting at states of unreality through its association with Homer's and Tennyson's lotus-eaters.

This evocation of Western perceptions of Eastern mysticism attains a more attuned level with mention of the "thousand-petalled lily" (21, 25, 29, 104). The lily or lotus is used in Hindu writings and iconography to represent the seven chakras.²⁷ The thousand-petalled lily or lotus which floats above the yogi's head at the moment of enlightenment represents the seventh chakra, the final stage on the road to enlightenment in Kundalini Yoga. (Varenne 170). Here the lily suggests mystical experience, vision and enlightenment.

The effect of the changing inter-related significance of symbols in *Helen in Egypt* is that we have a symbolising process, rather than a series of set images, a process that also cuts across the differentiation of different works. Reading *Helen in Egypt* via *Trilogy* we find that the lily stands again for re-birth, appropriately, from war. In "The Flowering of the Rod" the fallen cities of wartime are metamorphosed into a lily, "a flower-cone,/ not a heap of skulls" and the seed of the lily, representing regenerative life, "having flowered,/ will flower again" (CP 584-5).²⁸ The different names for the lily in *Helen in Egypt* are clues to different meanings suggesting different cultures. As asphodel, the lily returns us to the underworld. As nenuphar, the lily functions as another gate to the East. Again, a different work of H.D.'s provides the clue, "Nénufar" (nenuphar) first appears in *The Sword Went Out to Sea* as a word spelt out by a dead spirit, decoded by Delia as "a Persian word," and hence "we approach India" (138).²⁹

Although the wider symbolising process of the poem does not diminish in intensity, Helen's specific hieroglyphic quest fades, as she moves on to new spiritual schemata. "Numerical equations" were one of the hermetic systems mentioned in the quotation from *Trilogy* above. In *Helen in Egypt* we can find hints of numerological thought in Helen's questing process. In her reflection on light and dark, Theseus, Achilles and Paris, Helen sees one answer to the sphinx in seven arcs:

the Sphinx? it is clear enough;
the snow-crystal reflects
the seven arcs.... (192)

Between light and dark are the seven arcs of the rainbow, colours that can be seen in a crystal, or in a vision, if we read the crystal as Helen's mind. Paris in this poem is the "rose-light" of the "prismatic seven" (204).

The emphasis on seven here reflects the sacred nature of the number expounded at length by the Curtisses in *The Key to the Universe*.³⁰ Seven, say the Curtisses, is the "most sacred of all numbers," the "*Number of Perfection*" related to the "*Mystery of Creation*" and the "*Mystery of Gestation*" (219). They equate the seven planets with seven Kabalistic symbols, seven angels, seven aspects of godhead, the seven virtues and deadly sins, seven sacred centres of the body and the musical scale of seven notes (220-3).³¹ All these are related in turn to the seven "Creative Rays" emerging from the white light, the "prism of manifestation" from which stems all creation and all colour (219-20, 223).

Seven, with its relation to creation and gestation, appears in *Helen in Egypt* at "real" moments of birth and revelation and is always associated with the light of creative rays:

the slats of the shutter make
a new pattern, seven and seven,
as the light moves over the wall.... (264)

Again, when Helen counts the zodiac beasts, she numbers them first as twelve, although "I might have counted seven/ and seven, like the bars of light" the shutters made (272). The seven here is not logically an alternative to twelve; rather the two numbers suggest alternative hermetic systems, astrological and numerological. Enlightenment might come, Helen suggests were she able to meditate on seven slats of a symbolic ladder:

I could assess, weigh and value
the secret treasure, as I count
the seven and the seven slats of the ladder
or the bars of light on the wall. (283)

This ladder of light, like the ladder H.D. saw in her "Corfu Visions, is "a symbol common to all religious myth or lore" (TF 53-4). It suggests Jacob's ladder on which the angels moved up and down, the very "gate of heaven" (Gen. 29.12-22). The rungs of the ladder suggest the "ladder of relative planetary sounds" upon which the ancient philosophers "based their 'music of the spheres'" – a system linking the musical scale with the seven planets (Curtiss 223). Once again, this pursuit of the ladder leads us to mystic experience. In the "Four Prose Choruses" the gold of "the song that is Unreason" is a "ladder to heaven" (16, see Chapter Three). In *Trilogy*, H.D. wrote:

music sets up ladders,
it makes us invisible,

it sets us apart,
it lets us escape.... (CP 560)

H.D. wrote seven into *Helen in Egypt* itself, with its seven books in *Pallinode* and *Leuké*.³² She called down the blessing of creativity on the poem, summoning Clio perhaps, muse of epic, poetry and history, to whom seven is sacred (Curtiss 228).³³ Through sevens the poem is dedicated to life, the seventh letter of the Egyptian alphabet. She also prayed perhaps for the poem to have eternal life, the number seven being a symbol of life eternal to the Egyptians (Curtiss 234).

Once again, Helen's quest moves on, and we come to star-gazing, another element of the hermetic questing process.³⁴ Early in the poem, Achilles is shown to read the stars framed in the mast of the caravel that took him to Egypt (12). While Helen's journey follows the "sea-roads," Achilles meditates on the sky, so that the astrological quest appears at first to be his alone:

I counted the flaming host

of the familiar stars,
the Bear and Orion's belt,
the Dragon, the glittering Chair;

the mast measured them out,
picture by picture,
the outline of hero and beast

grew clearer and clearer;
their names were Greek.... (57-8)

That "their names were Greek" suggests the stars read two ways in the poem. They are gazed upon in the quest for significance, but they are also represent old Greek heroes like the Dioscuri who became stars to guide sailors at night (HE 86).³⁵ Paris watches the stars from the falling walls of Troy, both trying to read his destiny and wondering too perhaps whether his fate is to become a star (132). The stars as fate are uncompromising: "Agamemnon and the Trojan War" are a "Star" whose course could not be altered (98).

At the end of *Leuké* Helen expresses a desire to join Achilles as he roams the sky, seeking to interpret the stars:

but I would see further,
I would renew the Quest,
I would bind myself with the Girdle,

the circlet, the starry Zone;
as I strove in the precinct,
to decipher the Amen-script,

.....
I would measure the star-space.... (205)

The mention of the quest being renewed, in the astrological vein, suggests the movement from one hermetic lore to another.

Achilles' astrological quest is paralleled in the poem with Hercules' Twelve Labours rather as Helen's own quest had been with the Slaughter of the Minotaur (206).³⁶ Hercules' Labours are often related to the Zodiac. In Helen's pacific quest however the move is to reconcile rather than destroy the twelve beasts. The stars as fate are eternal, unlike human time, "*star-time (eternal time)*" as contrasted with "*time in time (personal time)*" (202). The reconciliation of the star-beasts is, in part, a representation of Helen's successful meditation in which the wheel of star time, the "*great circle of the Zodiac*," is stilled (202).

In *Eidolon* Book VI, a reconciliation of earth and sky is represented by Thetis who gathers together what seem to be daemons who "wheeled and fell from heaven" and who now inhabit "the caves of the mysteries" (273) and grants each one "*a companion 'from the circles of heaven,'*" in other words, a star:

....the circle complete,
enclosing the day and the night;
under and through the sea

she had sought them out,
she had gathered the worshippers
from the caves, and the host of light

from the circles of heaven,
two and two, brothers and sons,
like my own twins, the Dioscuri;

a host of spirits crowded around the fire.... (275-6)

In *Eidolon* Helen looks back on a process (momentarily meaning nothing in the numbness of sheer memory) which we (and she) now see as a shifting spiritual questing process, making use of various hermetic systems or different ways of reading the "Mystery":

.....the corridors,
the temple, the temple walls,
the tasks of the star-beasts,

the words I had spoken before
to Theseus, and my prayer;
.....the Amen-script,

the Writing, the star-space,
the Wheel and the Mystery.... (258)

The journey Helen describes here is summed up by the prose voice as "*transcendental*," "*intellectual*" and "*inspired*" (258). Although the seeker might be ultimately in search of the "clearest fountain-head of highest truth," in *Helen in Egypt* it is the plunging or the tunnelling deep that is important in the hermetic element of the spiritual quest.

The image that the poem itself provides for the revelation that the quest can give is that of "Aphrodite's veil," described in the Morpheus sequence as the "talisman" of the seeker on the "sea-road" (CP 257). This veil, in the esoteric Blavatskian tradition, suggests the possibility of the veil lifted, of revelation.³⁷ Revelation can only be fleeting and, once again, experiential.³⁸ The veil that lifts, like the waves, must also fall:

let rapture summon
and the foam-flecked sand,
and wind and hail,

rain, sleet and the bewildering snow
that lifts and falls,
conceals, reveals,.

(the actual
and the apparent veil) (108, cf. 44)

*this is Love, this is Death,
this is my last Lover. (HE 268)*

The veil also plays its part in the second main questing principle of *Helen in Egypt*, the dialogical principle. This process begins (appropriately enough, where we have just ended) with the veil. Achilles' early question about dream and veil in *Helen in Egypt* (see Chapter One) provokes a questioning process for Helen: "I wander alone and entranced,/ yet I wonder and ask/ numberless questions" (HE 85). These "numberless" questions are usually framed as a pair of opposing coordinates which shift through many manifestations. They remind us of H.D.'s interpretation of the scroll pattern of S's seen in the "Corfu Visions" as "a series of question marks, the questions that have been asked through the ages, that the ages will go on asking" (TF 55).

The method draws perhaps on the Socratic dialogues, as described by H.D. and likened to Freudian analysis:

The Socratic method? That was a business of egging on an intellectual contest, almost in the manner of a fencer with pin-pricks -- wasn't it? -- or sword-pricks of prodding questions that would eventually bring the debatable matter to a head.... There was something of that in the Professor's method of analytic treatment.... (TF 84)

In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen indulges in this sword-fight both with herself and with her fellow-characters (who can be read as voices in her own head). The Sphinx, the riddler, is surely the goddess of this process. The Curtisses, in their interpretation of the tenth tarot card, the Wheel of Life, picture the Sphinx, who traditionally sits on top of the wheel, as follows:

Poised with outspread wings above the top of the Wheel is the Sphinx, the sign of calm, equilibrated Wisdom and Perfect Justice.... On the right side of the wheel we see Anubis, the Egyptian dog-faced god -- the symbol of good -- ascending, bearing in his right paw the Caduceus and having on his head the symbol of Mercury. On the left side of the wheel we see Typhon, the Egyptian god of evil and destruction, descending with a trident in his hand. (361-2)

The wheel turns, good becoming evil, and evil good, according to the "Law as *Karma*," but the Sphinx oversees all: "The balanced and reclining sphinx represents the supremacy and command which wisdom has over both good and evil" (Curtiss 362). The Sphinx then oversees the questioning, but also perhaps pricks the questions on with her sword.

In *Helen in Egypt*, the two sides of the sphinx take many forms. Characters are set against each other, often male and female in opposition. Achilles is fire, a "Star in the night" (77, 86, 185) or "lightning/ out of a clear sky" (140), whereas Thetis is the Goddess of sea and moon (197). Place is also polarised: Greece representing "*traditional philosophy and wisdom*" and Egypt, "enlightenment" (78).

Helen attempts to unify these opposites, and hence transcend them.³⁹ In the early pages of *Helen in Egypt*, Helen tries to resolve the two poles of thought associated with Greece and Egypt:

She again recalls the Greek scene. For it is through her Greek identity that she understands. She has accepted what she does not understand, 'this ancient child, Egypt.' But she would gradually, it would seem, bring Egypt and Greece together. (80)

Here she wishes to unite the intuition and revelation of Egypt with the reason and intellect of Greece. The duality is related to gender: the Goddess is associated with vision and with Egypt, and Theseus with Athens.⁴⁰ Theseus, exemplifying "Athenian reasonableness," (Gelpi, Hilda 241) strives to keep Greece unpolluted by Eastern influence. To him Crete is "magic" and Athens "thought" and, as the prose voice explains, "*the magic of Crete was inherited from Egypt*" (168-9). Whereas Helen's quest may be an attempt to unify the two poles, Theseus' quest had been to defeat the minotaur of Crete (and hence, Egypt, the East):

and was it true, as I argued afterwards,
that I slew Egypt?

Crete would seduce Greece,
Crete inherited the Labyrinth from Egypt,
the ancient Nile would undermine

the fabric of Parnassus.... (169)

This contrast of the East as transcendence and the West as critical reason had been played out in the frenetic dialectic of H.D.'s "Prose Corybantic": "Who are you, reasoning, to defy unreason?," asks the initiate of the "barbarian" Westerner (15). In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen wants to go "beyond reason," beyond Athens, the "suave and civilised" city of "moderation," as H.D. described it in the "People of Sparta" (1). This is in part the search for origins, Crete as "[a]ll oldest reality of Hellas" (AN), but Helen also attempts to bring the West with her to the East.⁴¹ The attempt to reconcile places or poles of thought

corresponds to Helen's never wholly successful attempts to deal with the "human problem," to unify male and female, Trojan and Greek (HE 184; see Chapter Four).

While Helen's desire to balance poles of thought might seem to us perfectly in keeping with her peace-making role in the poem, the uniting of dualities extends far further than the desire to bring Greece and Egypt together through Crete. It is not only the opposites of place that she pulls closer together in the poem, but also the dualism of love and death. This is at first confusing, for was not the clear opposition of life and death, love and war set up for us early in the poem, and was not Helen very firmly on the side of the angels?

Yet, the further we read into the poem, the more love and death become intertwined about each other, to become almost interchangeable, a veritable gordian knot. The dialectical questioning based on veil and dream is used to ask, "*Is the 'veil of Cytheraea' or of Love, Death? Is the disguise of Death or the 'veil' of Death, Love?*" (45). The knot is also linguistic: the sound-play on eros and eris and l'amour and la mort in the poem suggests that these two forces might be in fact the same force. Love, Helen seems to suggest, can only be found in death, "the Tomb of Amor,/ the Tomb of Love" (191).⁴²

Helen's attraction to death in the shape of Achilles, the lover "sought in the snow" seems to be in line with this trend (165). This desire strikes us as strange in the hero of love who challenged the minotaur of hate in her encounter with Achilles in *Pallinode*. Nevertheless, Helen quite clearly chooses Death as her lover:

O flame-tipped, O searing,
destroying arrow of Eros;
O bliss of the end,

Lethe, Death and forgetfulness,
O bliss of the final
unquestioned nuptial kiss. (183)

Helen's role as "Koré Persephone" and Achilles' as Hades or Dis, Underworld Queen and King, is a part of this death theme (151, 195, see Chapter One). Even when "*human content*" (255), psychological schemata and fragmented narrative reassert themselves in *Eidolon*, hints remain of Achilles as Prince of Death. When Helen relives the attack on the beach, in the final lines of her recollection,

she changes from past to present tense to say: "this is Love, this is Death,/ this is my last Lover" (268).

To understand how this thread of the poem, the inextricable tie of love and death, ultimately works toward spiritual transcendence, we must turn to the work of Denis De Rougement. In his book *Passion and Society* (1940), De Rougement exhaustively traced the desire for death, masked by love.⁴³ Behind the cult of passionate love, he argued, lay buried the secret desire for death.

Beginning with a detailed analysis of the Tristan myth, De Rougement traces this desire through the mystic love of Manichaeism, the troubadours, Gnosticism, Catharism, Sufism, Celtic Myth, Arthurian Romance, orthodox European mysticism and passion in European Literature. In this tradition, the Lady as chaste lover or as the feminine holy spirit of wisdom (Sophia or Maria) proves the inspiration -- an aspect of the argument in *Passion and Society* that especially attracted H.D.:

[T]here is EVERYTHING there, he ... traces the development of the troubadour worship of the 'Lady' right through the Druid and the Persian legends. I have read the book several times -- THAT is my bible, if you will.... (Letter to Viola Jordan, 30 July 1944)

The Lady was not new to H.D. Pound had introduced her to the troubadours and to Rossetti's translation of *La Vita Nuova* while she was still in Pennsylvania (see Prelude). Both Pound, in the *Spirit of Romance* (1910), and De Rougement portray Dante as a true inheritor of the troubadour tradition (Pound, 87, 90, 91-2, De Rougement 172-4). To De Rougement, Beatrice is the quintessential "symbolical lady" and Holy Spirit of Wisdom (173).⁴⁴ In her Dante notebook and in *H.D. by Delia Alton* H.D. noted the link between Dante and the Cathar doctrine, especially in their worship of the divine feminine (HDDA 197).

De Rougement's Lady is an important easily discerned source for the figure of the Lady in H.D.'s *Trilogy*.⁴⁵ In *Helen in Egypt* however, a startling reversal of male and female roles takes place. Achilles becomes, for Helen, the equivalent of the lady and Helen becomes the seeker, the troubadour, for whom Achilles means death. In making herself the hero striving for divinity and transcendence, and Achilles a death figure, H.D. challenges archetypes as powerful in the troubadour tradition as those of the hero in myth and legend. Through Helen's desire for death, H.D. explores De Rougement's ideas about the mystical philosophy behind passionate love. De Rougement argues that the

death-desire is rooted in dualistic mysticism in which the soul must transcend the sinful world to reach God. This dualistic trend in religion and philosophy divided spirit and body; urge (creativity, the divine spark) and demi-urge (matter, created by daemons); man and woman.

In making Helen the seeker, H.D. challenged stereotypes for, although Gnostics worshipped a feminine ideal or spirit, the female side of the Gnostic duality, as Friedman has shown, was equated with "darkness, passivity, matter, evil, flesh and death" (Goddess 151). The Cathars, in their "Church of Love," might have worshipped Maria, but they regarded fleshly women as the Devil's lure (De Rougement 76).

In classical thought, this dualism was associated with the Orphics and the Pythagoreans, with whom Plato often seems in sympathy. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates argues vehemently against bodily desires, insisting that they "cause[s] war and faction and fighting" and that "if we are to have clear knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body, and let the soul by itself behold objects by themselves" (47-8). In the later *Phaedrus* a similar division is suggested by the allegory of the soul as a chariot with two winged horses, good and bad. To ascend to heaven, the charioteer must nurture divine qualities, but control bodily urges which might damage the horses' wings (69-71).⁴⁶

It is clear from the warnings that other characters, especially Theseus, give Helen, that H.D. refers to this tradition. Theseus warns Helen that her desire for Achilles places her in danger of flaming out (161, 187). He calls her Psyche, soul, and tries to persuade her to "*be re-born, that is, her soul must return wholly to her body*" (162). Here Theseus argues explicitly against the Cathar and Gnostic doctrine that the psyche, the struggling soul, must escape the body in order to be re-united with the divine.

H.D. would have known about this idea in a Platonic context from Walter Pater's *Plato and Platonism* (1925), which she owned (Smyers, Classical 22). Although Pater mentions the same Christian heretics as De Rougement, Pater's line concentrates on the Western mystics and philosophers: Eckhart; Tauler; Thomas á Kempis; Spinoza; Descartes; Malebranche; Leibnitz and Berkeley (41). Pater (whose books H.D. knew) explains how Parmenides and Plato set the "European mind" on a "quest (vain quest it may prove to be)" for the Absolute, the One (40). The ultimate aim of the "socratic" method, as H.D. describes it in

Tribute to Freud, is to reach "the sea of super-human perfection, the 'Absolute,' as Socrates or Plato calls it" (84).

The desire for death in *Helen in Egypt* then, is not for material death, the death associated with war and domination, but transcendent death, the enlightenment of the thousand-petalled lily. We have already seen that such states are intermittant, flickering, glimpsed by Helen throughout the book (see Chapter Three). Once again then, we are talking about process, about the experiential. The language used in the meditations of the seventh book of *Leuké*, can now be placed in this Gnostic and Platonic tradition: Helen seeks "immaculate purity," "*Absolute of negation*," "the Dark Absolute" (195-6). This absolute we now see is not material death, but death to the world, access to the fourth dimension, a new space, envisaged here as flight:

could another touch you
after the Absolute?

hate? no; love? no;
nothingness? no, not nothingness
but an ever widening flight... (199)

Such moments are moments of love, moments when the wheel of time, and the dialectical wheel of the Sphinx, are stilled. At such moments, the still wheel replaces or transcends the chariot wheel of Typhon and the iron-ring of the war command (26, 51-2, 55, 61). The victory over war and death here is a balancing, a "victory of Love," as described in *The Sword Went Out to Sea*:

Love had tempered the arrows of madness and the sword-thrust of the victor, and Love had adjusted the quivering balance till finally it stood level and at rest.
There was no pro or con, no right or wrong any longer.... (218)

Dualisms are balanced, including the divide between East and West, since the theory of the absolute draws together elements of Western Platonic thought and Eastern mysticism and philosophy in precisely the way Helen had desired. Helen turns away from both Theseus' Athenian reasonable objections to the Gnostic tradition and Paris' arguments against "the transcendent plane" of the Eastern tradition – he argues that the draw to Achilles-as-death is "to myrrh, olibanum,/ storax, sandarac,/ the incense of magic" (214). In this argument, H.D. also defeats Western philosophers such as Pater who identify the Platonic doctrine of transcendence with the Indian tradition and hence declare it ultimately self-annihilating (40).

Such dualisms are destroyed in transcendence, as this poem, ostensibly about how Achilles and Theseus can "meet," shows:

Thus, thus, thus,
as day, night,
as wrong, right,

as dark, light,
as water, fire,
as earth, air,

as storm, calm,
as fruit, flower,
as life, death,

as death, life;
the rose deflowered,
the rose re-born;

Helen in Egypt,
Helen at home,
Helen in Hellas forever. (190)

The song-like quality of this poem reminds us of the name of the goddess poem (see Chapter Three). Not only is sound important, but also non-sense, for if we try to read this poem as about Achilles and Theseus on any rational level, it does not work. The coordinates are not lined up so that the left side signifies one meaning and the right another. The poem is like a chant. As Albert Gelpi has said, "the sound-echoes and rhythms of the words rock the lines to a resolution beyond words" (Hilda 243).

old, old, old, are the Mysteries (HE 155)

Despite Helen's draw toward transcendence, and intermittent experiences of absolute enlightenment, there are two important, related, elements of De Rougement's thesis that do not chime with *Helen in Egypt*. These will lead us back again to "the Greek," and to the Mysteries. The first point is that De Rougement stresses that courtly love of a mistress does not involve sexual possession of her (42-3). The second is that the lover who attains death and ascends to God in the Manicheist tradition is, according to De Rougement, physically negated forever: "It is *infinite transcendence*, man's rise into his god. And this rise is *without return*" (74). The soul of course survives, but the body,

especially the sexual body, which in Manicheism is associated with "absolute woe," must die (80).

At one point, De Rougement discusses the vast contradictions between the Eastern Manicheist tradition and Western Christianity. In the former, the soul flies up to God; in the latter God descends to humankind through the Incarnation and the Communion (84-6). H.D., invoking the Greek and Egyptian Mysteries, once again slides between this East/West dualism, for in the Mysteries a human can become a god (being totally absorbed in ecstasy, as in De Rougement's Eastern tradition), and yet can be born again while remaining alive. In *Helen in Egypt*, re-birth is a reality, which is why Helen can enter death and re-emerge more than once, an impossibility for the initiate in the Church of Love.

Contrary to both Christian and Gnostic traditions, the sexual act plays a part in the ritual of *Helen in Egypt*. It is not, as in Arthurian romance, a fatal sin against mystic love (De Rougement 137, 139). Perhaps Ezra Pound's convictions about the troubadour "love code" provided, at least in part, the link between the troubadours and the Mysteries for H.D. (Pound, *Spirit* 87).⁴⁷ In "Psychology of the Troubadours"⁴⁸ Pound, evoking a broader genealogy for the troubadours than that of De Rougement, suggested that their *canzone* were ritualistic, descending from a pagan love cult related to the rites of the "Hellenistic Mysteries" (*Spirit* esp. 89-90).

Returning to *Helen in Egypt*, in Helen's encounter with Achilles in *Pallinode*, although the sexual element can be read as violent assault in context of Helen's personal memory journey (see Chapter Four), in spiritual terms, it is a mystery. The language of the poem confirms this: in Egypt, Helen "found perfection in the Mysteries" and the blazing sun of Achilles in Egypt was the "Ultimate Mystery" (154, 205). To Theseus, Helen describes how, in Egypt, she was reborn through the fusion of dualistic elements, ice and fire:

my heart had been frozen, melted,
re-moulded, re-crystallized
in the fires of Egypt,

or in the fire of Death (156)

Re-birth here is perceived as attainable through sex. It is important to note that at this level, as when he plays the role of initiator, Achilles is extra-personal:

....the absolute, final spark

the ember, the Star had no personal,
intimate fervour; was it desire?
it was Love, it was Death.... (288)

This sexual mystery can be related to H.D.'s portrayal of the first stage of the Eleusinian Mysteries as sexual in both "Helios and Athene" and *Notes on Thought and Vision* (see Prelude).⁴⁹

If Helen's encounter with Achilles in Egypt can be seen as the first sexual Mystery⁵⁰, the riddling of the Sphinx and discussion with pragmatic Athenian Theseus represents the second, intellectual Mystery, and the Mysteries of *Eidolon*, the Greater Mysteries. In *Notes on Thought and Vision*, Egypt is actually described as "the act of love" and "the secret of the sphinx is the secret of knowledge" (37). Theseus' realm as, the prose voice says, is concerned with knowledge, and the "wholly intellectual and inspirational" (297).

This second mystery can be related to Graves portrayal of the "Lesser Mystery" of the Eleusinian Mysteries, "The Mystery of Dionysus," described by Graves as "highly intellectualized" (*Goddess* 404).⁵¹ Graves asserts that this mystery includes a re enactment of the ancient matriarchal rite of the death of the king (*Goddess* 404-5). Paris' role in *Leuké* as Adonis, "the dead or dying King," to Helen's as Cytherea can be read as part of the Gravesian Eleusianian Lesser Mystery (*HE* 136, see Chapter Four).^{51a} If the image of re-birth in *Pallinode* is that of fire, the image on Thetis' island, Leuké, is of water. In Leuké Helen is an emergent spirit, "wavering/ like a Psyche/ with half-dried wings" (166). This emergent image, read in the light of the plunging imagery associated with Thetis at the end of *Pallinode*, suggests the specifically female mystery of the *anodos* of the maiden. According to Jane Harrison, the *anodos*, or emergence from the water, is the original ritual behind both the myth of the birth of Aphrodite from the sea and the story of Aphrodite's yearly renewal of virginity in the river Inachus (*Proleg.* 309, 311). Harrison tentatively suggests that "we may venture to call" this rite "matriarchal" (*Proleg.* 314). Graves asserts that every initiate at Eleusis, in imitation of the *anodos*, took a cauldron bath before taking part in a love-rite with Aphrodite's representative (*Goddess* 395).

Looking back in the light of this reading, we can also see the hermetic process as fitting within this schema of the Mysteries. Helen's task is actually described

by the prose voice in *Pallinode* as being "to establish or re-establish the ancient Mysteries" (63). The occult quest can be read as the path, the "sea-roads" that lead to the Mysteries, the necessary "atmosphere" for re-birth. In *Tribute to Freud* H.D., "in spite of" her father and Freud, "or to spite them," reflects on the significance of the astrological season, images of gods, fairytales and childhood (143). "My findings are important to me" she insists, "and have an atmosphere," and a little later in the text, "[s]o I am back again in the mysteries" (143). Of the joy of discovery, she writes: "It is not a question of happiness, in the usual sense of the word. It is happiness of the quest" (145).

Even the image of intermittent revelation, the lifted veil may relate to the Mysteries. Jane Harrison describes two reliefs in which the *liknites*⁵², in their Dionysiac mystery, veiled the initiate before unveiling the *liknon* (harvest basket of fruits) set upon the altar (*Proleg.* 518-9, see 547). Harrison concludes from this and other ceremonies that the veil symbolises the dedication of the veiled ones, be they initiates, penitents or brides and grooms (522).⁵³ The beasts stilled in the zodiacal circle are also reminiscent of the changing beast forms of the gods, Orpheus and Dionysus, who appear as "beast-mystery-god[s]" in their rituals (Harrison, *Proleg.* 650).

Nor is Helen's memory process out of place in this schema of the mysteries. In "At Eleusis," the candidate for the Mysteries must confront their worst memory as part of the process of initiation:

think of the moment you count
most foul in your life;
conjure it,
supplicate,
pray to it.... (*CP* 179-80)

In *Helen in Egypt*, each stage, each mystery is a re-birth out of the past. Paris reports Helen's speech of the Egyptian Mystery:

....for that past, there was only one healing
(appeasement, death or awakening,
anodyne, incense) for the initiate,
(after the inevitable sequence of long tortures,
long waiting), the Mysteries of Egypt".... (144)

We can also relate the trinities of goddesses in *Helen in Egypt* to the three stages of the Mysteries. The trinity as generational is especially relevant to the seasonal

Mysteries. In her *Helen in Egypt* notebook H.D., connecting Arthurian⁵⁴ and Greek myth, notes under the heading "Arthur -- Three Queens": "Blanchfleur -- spring --/ a virgin : as Kore,/ Pallas Athene,/ Artemis"; "Great Mother -- summer --/ carries male child, son of the sun --/ Ceres,/ Aphrodite,/ Guinevere; "Old Mother --/ in winter seeks life of the slayer/ of her child, sacred flame,/ Hecate, Proserpine,/ revengeful Juno,/ Morgan le Fey."⁵⁵ In the same notebook, H.D. also took notes from Graves on the three goddesses as moons:

[T]he New Moon is the white goddess of birth and growth; the Full Moon, the red goddess of love and battle; the Old Moon, the black goddess of death and divination. (*Goddess* 70)

In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. seems to re-write this trinity. We can read *Pallinode* as the encounter with love and war, *Leuké* as the white egg-like realm of re-birth, and *Eidolon* as the place where death is encountered. The three certainly suggest however the same cycle of rebirth. In Helen's identification with, or transmogrification into, three different goddesses, we can perceive the same generational pattern. Helen appears first as Isis, the most ancient goddess; then as Aphrodite, the mother-goddess, and, finally, as Persephone Koré, the daughter. It is appropriate that she should move backwards in time, rather than conventionally forwards, since she follows a memory process, travelling backward in time (see Chapter Four).⁵⁶ The process also enacts the now familiar movement back toward origins. H.D., as Dianne Chisholm has suggested, reaches back here to the Eastern Great Goddess, Isis (*Poetics* 200).⁵⁷ Here the witch, Isis as Hecate, is reclaimed and embraced (see Chapter Two).

We must return now to the third Mystery of *Eidolon*. This corresponds to the "Greater Mystery" of Eleusis, that of Demeter and Persephone. Whereas, in *Pallinode*, Helen emerged through the sexual mystery of fire and, in *Leuké*, through Aphrodite's element of water, in *Eidolon*, she is Persephone emerging from the earth. A similar process can be traced in the "Chorus Sequence from Morpheus." In the first section of the trance of Troy, the dreamer indulges in Paris' kisses (*CP* 258). In the second, she becomes Cyprus (Aphrodite) in Dionysus' embrace: "me for a while,/ me for a vase, an urn, a thing for her only" (259).⁵⁸ In the third, she invokes:

Demeter at the gate
of hell,
awaiting springtime
and the host
of maidens chanting;
the Eleusinian coast
must flower again
with torch
and mystery;
the lost and lovely Daughter
must arise
and God must quicken hell
and Paradise
must be revealed to all.... (259)

"So having died,/ raise me again," (262) demands the initiate and, passing "out of the borderland of consciousness," utters an ecstatic chant, repeated several times:

I live,
I live,
I live.... (263, 264, 265)

In the very heart of *Helen in Egypt*, Helen is first described as "Persephone's sister" who must "wait - wait - you must wait in the winter-dark" (157). In *Eidolon* Book I Achilles sets the scene for the Mystery:

commanded to say, in Egypt,
we are in Eleusis,
Helen is Persephone,

Achilles is Dis,
(the Greek Isis-Osiris).... (209)

It is in this place, through this Mystery that Helen can unite the sexual Mystery of *Pallinode* with the intellectual Mystery of *Leuké*: "It is the same Amen-temple, at all times, whether they are symbolized by Athens, the intellect, or by Eleusis, the mysteries" (212).⁶⁰ The scene is set for what the prose voice refers to as the "innermost mystery of 'life-in-death'" (213).

Although the figure who commands Achilles, "the Initiator⁶¹, royal, sacred/ High Priest of love-rites" (208) is the priest who presides over the Mystery, the Eleusinian Mysteries of the Goddess signal a return to the Goddess: the temple of *Eidolon* is "dedicated to Isis,/ or if you will, Thetis" (212). H.D. believed (a note in her Hellenic Cruise notebook shows) that Isis and Osiris were worshipped at Eleusis (AN). Graves writes: "The mother of Eleusis was 'Daeira,

daughter of Oceanus,' ... and was identified with Aphrodite..." (157). Just as Helen, struggling with the human problem, returns to the mother in *Eidolon*, so Helen the initiate finds the Goddess in *Eidolon*, and plays the role of Persephone, the daughter.

"Eleusis signified the Advent of the Divine Child," wrote Graves (*Goddess* 159). Harrison also records the birth of the divine child or "mystery child" or "mystic child" to a maiden in the Eleusinian Mysteries (*Proleg.* 551-2).⁶¹ The miraculous child, Euphorion, born in *Eidolon* is this same symbol of re-birth, granted by the Goddess, the same child that we find in Egyptian, Greek and Christian iconography and in H.D.'s own *Ion* and Christ child in *Trilogy*.⁶² The child of the Mysteries represents fruitfulness and creativity, and is found in artistic representations rising out of the *liknon*, the basket of first-fruits, also a cradle (Harrison, *Proleg.* 525-6).⁶³ Harrison remarks that, for the *Liknites*, the child as first-fruit is a symbol, "in a mystical sense ... of new birth" (*Proleg.* 526). The name "Euphorion" suggests, as Susan Friedman has noted, the euphoria of mystic joy (*Psyche* 294). This mystic rebirth emerges from the death of the past, as these lines from *Winter Love* show:

Euphorion, Esperance, the infinite bliss,
lives in the hope of something that will be,

the past made perfect;
this is tangible
this is reality (*HD* 112)

The Mysteries, although they suggest one of the threads or patterns by which we may read the poem, can never contain the work as a whole, nor do they offer a climactic conclusion. As ever in *Helen in Egypt*, they point towards process, in this case, the cyclical process of winter and spring. With the Mysteries, H.D. returns from the borderlands of life and death to the natural world, to the seasons. Like Persephone, after the wait in the "winter dark," the initiate emerges into Spring. As H.D. wrote in "The Mysteries", in a voice that seems to be that of a Christ/Adonis figure⁶⁴:

the mysteries
are in the grass
and rain.

The mysteries remain,
I keep the same
cycle of seed-time
and of sun and rain.... (*CP* 304-5)

The seed is like the seed of the lily in *Trilogy* which will flower again. The "seed-time" reminds us of the final paragraphs of *Notes on Thought and Vision* in which the spirit is described as a seed which the initiate must nourish:

This is the mystery of Demeter, the Earth Mother. The body of the Eleusinian initiate has become one with the earth, as his soul had become one with the seeds enclosed in the earth. (52)

The process of the mysteries is ecstatic, but it is also bodily and earthly superseding or, perhaps, out-growing, the out-of-the-body experiences of dualistic Manicheism. Robert Duncan also felt this and recognised it in H.D. (this passage precedes a reference to *Trilogy*):

Thus, I say, 'Let the light rays mix,' and against the Gnostics, who would free the sparks of spirit from what is the matter, and against the positivists and semanticists who would free the matter from its inspirational chaos, I am glad there is night and day, Heaven and Hell, love and wrath, sanity and ecstasie (sic), together in a little place.
(Form 195-6)

The body creates the spirit, as H.D. recognised: "The oyster makes the pearl" (NTV 51). "Ritual is rooted in earth,/ ancient and blest," as H.D. translates Euripides in her chorus translations from the *Bacchae* (CP 228).

Reading the penultimate poem of the book stage by stage, we can see the spiritual lessons learnt through the Mysteries. Hermeticism (the secret) and Dualism are at least at this moment transcended:

so the dart of Love
is the dart of Death,
and the secret is no secret;

The complexity of the Troy-town maze, Helen's labyrinth, has been defeated by the simple cyclical movement from death to life, endlessly repeated:

the simple path
refutes at last
the threat of the Labyrinth,

Once again, as had happened mysteriously in *Pallinode*, and as will happen at every re-birth mystery, the Sphinx, the riddler, is overcome by the Phoenix, the symbol of new life:

the Sphinx is seen,
the Beast is slain

and the Phoenix-nest

reveals the innermost
key or clue to the rest
of the mystery

Most importantly, only in the meditative moment of being can re-birth exist, and that moment is not lasting but fleeting and ecstatic. Experience and vision, as ever, are all in the questing process:

there is no before and no after,
there is one finite moment
that no infinite joy can disperse

or thought of past happiness
tempt from or dissipate;
now I know the best and the worst;

the seasons revolve around
a pause in the infinite rhythm
of the heart and of heaven. (303-4)

In the final poem, Helen returns to the sea, repetition of the everlasting rhythm of the realm of the Goddess. "In our longing for the sea is our search for that large horizon in which we understand the opening and closing of life", writes Eileen Gregory (Margins 120). Both the Quest and the cyclical resolution of the Mystery have no end: the rhythm of the sea forever repeats; "you can not stay the sun in his course," as Thetis says to Helen (103); the branch always flowers again: "*There is a mystery but it happens all the time*" (131).

GENRES

Chapter Six

Voice, Polyphony and Identity

who set the scene?
who lured the players from home
or imprisoned them in the Walls,

to inspire us with endless,
intricate questioning? (*HE* 231)

The reader of *Helen in Egypt* is caught in a web of voices which complicate the poem, not only by their plurality, but also by the difficulty we have in defining them. From the words of the prose voice and the use of the first person singular in the first poem of the book, the poetic voice is established as Helen's:

Do not despair, the hosts
surging beneath the Walls,
(no more than I) are ghosts.... (1)

Yet, already there are complications. It is impossible to say whom Helen addresses (perhaps the reader?) with her reassurances, "Do not despair"; "do not bewail"; "fear nothing" (1-2). In the following poem, it is by no means certain even that Helen is still speaking and, already, another voice enters, speaking this time to Helen, "*O Helen, Helen, Daemon that thou art*" (4). This voice is a "they," at first unidentified except as fighters, soldiers.¹ In the fourth and fifth poems, italicised to suggest a change of voice, the Furies and Achilles himself speak, yet neither of these is clearly defined, leaving the reader to piece together clues as to their identity (8-9).

H.D. exploits here, and throughout the poem, the shiftiness of what Roman Jakobson, in his study of duplex structures, called "shifters," one of the last structures of language the child learns to control. Although shifters obey the conventional rules of language, in that the words refer to their objects, "I" can only designate the person using it and you the person spoken to.² In modernist texts the instability of shifters, their absolute dependence on context, their existential nature, is exposed. The safe conventions of the ground of the text shift beneath the reader in a semantic earthquake. By its very nature, an unidentified shifter can never be resolved in retrospect. In the line, "He, God, will guide you," the "you" floats unattached and can never be named, for if it

not clear in the present context who you are, it will not be clear later (2). The shifters will again have shifted. Grammatical sense depends on reliably attributed shifters; *Helen in Egypt* thrives on grammatical non-sense.

H.D. was well aware of the rich confusion ensuing from shifty shifters. Throughout her work, she emphasized the precarious nature of identity through the use of grammatical or linguistic paradox. The speaker of H.D.'s early poems is often unidentified. Pronouns stand alone, especially in *Sea Garden*. The epigraph of "The Shrine," "She watches over the sea," precedes a poem in which that "she," who becomes "you," is never defined (CP 7). "It does not seem to matter precisely who this figure is," Eileen Gregory writes advisedly, for there is little point in debate over the goddess' identity (Rose 541). Yet, it does surely matter that *we do not know* who it is, rather than that we should name her. In "Pursuit," "The Gift" and "Loss" the pursuer and the pursued, the giver and the receiver, the loser and the lost, the I and the you, are unnamed and out of all but their immediate context (CP 11-12, 15-18, 21-23). These examples involve two people in an interchange of some sort – giving, pursuing, losing. *Helen in Egypt* is a more complex extension of this, in which several voices interact.

In the novel *Her* H.D. played her finest and most self-conscious game of shifting pronouns. In *Her*, Hermione Gart's name makes nonsense of grammatical structure from the first page of the novel: "'I am Her,' she said to herself; she repeated, 'Her, Her, Her'" (1). How can "I" be "her"? Here, and throughout the novel, this conundrum exposes the split fragmented identity of Hermione.³ Although the capitalization of the "H" of Her indicates that Hermione is being spoken of/speaking, the double functioning of the word persists on any given page: "The gateway had been reached but at last the gateway had been slammed on Her" (HER 13). There is in such cases no reason why Her should not be her, why Her and her should not inter-change with each other: "Someone should have told Her that Bertrand Gart's anodyne would be alien to her" (HER 18). The split nature of language/sense is stressed through the doubly articulated nature of the name and the pronoun. Grammar is made nonsense of by its own rules. Where language plays such games, a reader may feel like Her herself, with "no a,b,c Esperanto of world expression" (HER 8).

In *Helen in Egypt* the pronouns of several characters or beings float, freed to a degree from their referents, and the reader grasps at contexts in order to establish who is speaking or being spoken to in the fragmented monologues

and dialogues of the poem. The reader is forced into active participation in the poem, into negotiating with mysteriously dispersed shifters. *Pallinode* Book VII opens with Thetis speaking, seemingly for the first four poems. The fifth poem opens:

She was Mistress of Magic,
you are Mistress of Fate;
are they the same? is there another?

I listened and heard you speak,
and Achilles answer you;
I could not follow your thoughts....
(101)

The work of the reader is then to establish from context and the preceding prose section that "She" is Clytaemnestra, Helen's sister, and that "you" is Helen herself. While this stanza could still be the speech of Thetis addressing Helen, the next verse shifts again into a remnant of Clytaemnestra's voice, speaking to Helen. In the fifth stanza the speaking position returns to an indirect voice again, presumably that of Thetis.

Some poems are impossible to attribute at all, such as the fifth poem of *Eidolon* Book II which is spoken by an unidentified "us" who refers to Helen indirectly (230-1). The final two poems of the whole book are ultimately unattributable, spoken by one, who could well be read as Thetis, but is simply named as one "greater than Helen" (303-4). Even when we do work out who is speaking in *Helen in Egypt*, identity and voice are still complex issues, with frequent splittings occurring. In the remainder of this chapter, I look first at the division between prose and poetry, and then at the various characters who appear in the poem.

The Prose Voice

The very first prose passage of *Helen in Egypt* is seductively knowing and authorial, contextualising Helen in myth and legend, and gaining the reader's trust:

We all know the story of Helen of Troy but few of us have followed her to Egypt. How did she get there? Stesichorus of Sicily in his Pallinode was the first to tell us.... (1)

It is easy to be lulled into an illusion that the prose voice is our uncomplicated authorial friend, and to set up a simple duality in which the prose voice represents H.D. and the poetic voice, predominantly, Helen. In critical writing on *Helen in Egypt*, this sometimes leads to a consequent lack of interest in the prose sections which are dismissed as either a vaguely benign neutral aid to understanding the poetry and/or as formal counterpoint to the lyric. The authorial assumption leads to other assumptions about the prose voice, one of the earliest being that the prose voice, as authorial, was narrative. Norman Holmes Pearson expressed this view in interview with L.S. Dembo:

It's almost as though you had the story told you in the prose and then had the meditation on that, the lyric on it, following.(440)

Similarly, Linda Welshimer Wagner comments that the use of the prose passages "is rather an effective way to avoid 'telling' the story in the poetry itself" (534). L.M. Freibert writes that, "[t]he basic narrative is carried in the prose headnotes which open each segment" (*Semblance* 167). Assumptions about genre come into play here: after all, lyric is supposed to be about feelings, prose about telling a story.

However, this perception of the voice is extraordinarily inadequate, not least because the prose passages were written after the poetry (I discuss this further below). Furthermore, the narratives in the poem are by no means told exclusively by the prose voice, which I would suggest plays a role both more informative and more interpretive than narrative. As early as the third poem in the book it is Helen, switching from the dramatic present tense to the epic or novelistic past tense, who takes up the narrative position: "I was alone, bereft .../ and he was shipwrecked" (7). From Helen herself, the narrative shifts again to Achilles, Paris and Theseus, with the sense that the prose voice is merely keeping up with, although at times clarifying, the stories as they are told. Most

importantly, there is in fact no clear narrative thread in this poem of multiple narratives told by multiple characters. The prose voice, I would argue, is itself one of those multiple perspectives. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis has noted, it does not always tell the same story as the current poetic speaker, making "events seem more elusive" and the reader "unsure whether or not something has occurred" (Thrall 417).

DuPlessis draws attention to this aspect of the prose voice as an exception to the rule: "generally the prose and poetry are simple retellings of the same events" (417). But I would stress that every comment of the prose voice, however much it may seem a "re-telling," is in fact an interpretation, as any summary of events must be. The voice implicitly provides another, though often sympathetic, viewpoint. It is opinionated. It even, at times, such as on questions of state of mind, seems to adopt a fairly cynical, perhaps Freudian, perspective on Helen's visionary states, as Claire Buck has mentioned (*H.D./Freud* 159; see Chapter Three). In the final book of the poem, it is the prose voice, before Helen mentions her own doubts, who suggests that Achilles and Paris might be *eidola*, seeming to draw its interpretation from the name of the book, *Eidolon* (208, 213). There is a touch of condemnation in the prose voice's comment about one of the poems in Theseus' voice:

There are new names, Chryseis, Deidamia, Briseis; they seem unrelated to our Achilles concept. Nor does the story of Polyxena ... seem altogether relevant....
(172)

We should not over-emphasize the critical however, since the prose voice is, as I have said, although differentiated from the poetic opinions, in general sympathetic.

Susan Friedman recognises this readerly element of the prose voice. Throughout *Psyche Reborn*, she describes the prose sections as "reflective" of the poetry: "H.D. *reflected* in the prose passage that precedes the story of Clytaemnestra...."; "In prose, H.D. *reflected* that Theseus was..." (*Psyche* 288, 295, emphasis added). Yet, as these quotations show, she always attaches the reflective activity to H.D. as author, the emphasis being on the poet as reader of her own work. While I agree that the prose voice has a readerly relationship to the poem, I think it is more fruitful to analyse the different elements of the voice, as one might any other voice in the poem. It is indeed readerly and

reflective, but, as I shall argue, it contains more elements within it than the evidently authorial.

Looking to H.D.'s own previous writing for antecedents, it seems likely that she might have modelled the prose sections, in part, on her commentary to her own translation of Euripides' *Ion* (1937) which is inter-leaved with the text in the same way as *Helen in Egypt*.⁴ We know that in 1954, when she began writing the prose passages, she was also emending her *Ion* translation for a BBC broadcast and her 1955 journal reveals that she wrote the prose passages with Euripides at hand (see Prelude).⁵ The *Ion* commentary is, like the *Helen in Egypt* prose passages, interpretive and reflective. As such, both are of course readings of their "texts."⁶ They are also however introductory; H.D.'s commentary to *Ion* introduces each following scene in the same way as the prose voice introduces each subsequent poem in *Helen in Egypt*. Such prose passages often resemble stage directions: "*Helen appears 'in rent veil'*" (145).

As commentators, both voices provide, to quote from the dust-jacket of *Ion*, "an invaluable aid to the understanding of the transitions, the feeling and the actions of the drama." The prose voice's comments on the poems about Clytaemnestra and Iphigenia are especially interpretive, drawing their own conclusions from the poem:

Why does Helen recall Iphigenia? Does she identify herself with her sister's child? Does she feel that she, like Iphigenia, was "a pledge to Death" and that like Iphigenia she had been rescued at the last moment? (72, see 74-5)

In keeping with the mention of "feeling" on the *Ion* dust-jacket, H.D.'s commentary to *Ion* provides, often in contemporary parlance, an interpretation of the emotions of the characters. Of Kreousa and Xouthos, her husband, she says:

The queen's unconscious hatred may stab out at her husband, in vituperative innuendo, nevertheless he stands there, solid, conservative, loyal.... She has lived only half a life with him. No doubt, he has guessed this, but his queen will never know it. (39)

The prose voice in *Helen in Egypt* also frequently concentrates on human emotions and interactions. Here, it reflects on Helen's attitude to Achilles, "*with her love, there is fear, yet there is strength, too, and defiance : not only of Achilles, but of the whole powerful war-faction*" (18). Long before Helen mentions Paris or Menelaus, the prose voice "surmise[s]" that Achilles's attack meant more to her

than their embraces (39). Both the commentary and the prose pieces have shades of psychoanalytic interest in them, occasionally betrayed in terms such as "subconscious," "neurotic" and "hysteria" in *Ion* and "race memory" and "suppressed memory" in *Helen in Egypt* (ION 39 [see above], 63, 76; HE 87, 109).

There is however, in both the classical commentary and in the *Helen in Egypt* prose sections, a more informative (rather than interpretive or narrative) function. This element of the prose voice has been noted by several critics, but often over-emphasized, so that the complex dynamics of the voice are portrayed as plain-speaking, a reliable guide through the mysteries of the poem. L.M. Freibert describes the "headnotes ... as an Apollonian counterpoint to the Dionysian intensity of the verse passages"(Semblance 167). Freibert's Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy suggests that the prose voice is reasonable, intellectual and cultural, while the poetry is instinctive, emotional and primitive. As Apollonian, the prose voice stands outside the text. In his introduction to the poem, Horace Gregory writes, "the arguments in prose act as a release from the scenes of highly emotional temper in the lyrical passages" (10). Although Albert Gelpi's description of the prose sections as "reflective commentary" is closer to how they read to me, he also emphasizes the contrast to the "lyric expression" of the poetry (Hilda 247).

Certain elements of the tone, vocabulary and content of the prose voice do fulfil these more formal commentating characteristics of objectivity, reason and knowledge. A brief account of the history of their composition suggests why this might be. In 1952, when she began the poem, H.D. had only thought of a couple of "descriptive paragraphs" explaining obscure sources and mystic concepts, as the following letters to Pearson show:

Maybe a short note might be indicated. According to the old myth, Helen was never at Troy at all, Euripides wrote this play on the theme, Helen in Egypt. (23 September, 1952)

But again, re note or notes, explaining the Helen phantom myth or the story of Achilles meeting her 'among the shades', can be left entirely to you. (30 September, 1952)

I could do [a] short descriptive paragraph, as the Helen in Egypt myth and the doubling of Helen is too metaphysical or mystical, I suspect, for most readers. (25 November 1952)

Later, she seems to have decided that these brief notes should be given in footnotes:

By the way, a * star-note to V-VI of H. in E. -- to the effect that Pylades did not marry Iphigenia, but Orestes' other sister, Electra.
(10 June, 1954)

It seems clear from these letters that H.D. relied on Pearson, the Yale professor, to advise on, even to write these notes. An early letter to Bryher also suggests this: "I had written N to prefix note or notes" (14 October, 1952). Later, she writes to Pearson that she feels the poem needs footnotes "like my portable Viking Dante" (24 July, 1954). From the start then, the prose was associated with academic distance, with providing specialised material or background to the poem.

In October 1954, immediately after the poetry was completed, H.D. writes again of possibly making a "few notes" as she works through the poem (1 and 14 October, 1954). In January 1955, at Pearson's instigation, she made a recording of selected poems from *Helen in Egypt*, with introductory comments before each group of poems. This recording led eventually to a full set of "captions" to the poem, completed in November 1955 when she wrote to Pearson: "I have the captions, the captions for the recording gave me this idea" (26 November). Here H.D. clearly states that the prose sections were her own idea. However, nearly fifteen years later, in his interview with L.S. Dembo, Pearson claimed that the prose passages were his idea.⁷

Either way, Pearson was obviously a powerful influence. In the same letter of 26 November 1955, H.D. refers to Pearson having asked her "to do some home-work" on *Helen in Egypt*. This phrase emphasizes once again his professorial capacity. Some years later, she wrote to Ezra Pound:

In a way, the captions can be read separately, but Pearson and Horace Gregory seemed to think the prose introduction to each poem was indicated. (18 November 1960)

We can never fully know the degree of influence Pearson or the idea of Pearson had on the prose passages, but, in thinking about them, he is surely significant as an academic model and, to some extent, the person for whom they were written. He had praised in the "Choragus" poems of *Pallinode* Book VII H.D.'s position as "spectator" and her "informed detachment" (letter to H.D., 30 April, 1953).

The prose sections do perform this informative role then, and this was the aspect of them that H.D. emphasized in her letter (significantly) to Pearson on their completion:

I think you will find that this whole set ... does hold the poems together, explain the at-times difficult 'philosophy' and put some of the mythological matter on the map.
(26 November, 1955)

The prose sections share with H.D.'s classical commentary a slightly self-conscious concern with the authenticity of legends.⁸ Both contextualise their "texts," supplying historical and mythical background. The first prose passage of all, as we have seen, refers the reader to Stesichorus and Euripides as sources for the poem. Before a poem of Helen's about the sea, the prose voice draws attention to Helen's Spartan "sea-faring" background as relevant (24). The background legends of Helen and Theseus and the story of the birth of Helen and Achilles' son are given by the prose voice (147, 109).

Information about mythological characters is given in both the *Ion* commentary and the prose sections of *Helen in Egypt*. Hermes, says the *Ion* commentary, is "god of writing, of orators, of the spoken word ... of wit, diplomacy, of games" (3). Similarly, in *Helen in Egypt* we have details given, at times in the tone of a reference book:

Philoctetes was also a suitor of Helen. He was a friend of Hercules who had bequeathed him his bow and poisoned arrows. An oracle had declared that Troy would not be taken without the arrows of Hercules. Philoctetes had started for Troy but had been left behind, because of a festering wound, caused by a snake-bite or one of his own arrows. (119)

In addition to her own *Ion*, H.D. also had Robert Graves' *Greek Myths* to hand when she wrote the prose passages. For the poetic text, she had made use of *The White Goddess*, as I have shown, but for the prose passages *The Greek Myths* (1955) was available. Page references in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* notebook show that she made use of *The Greek Myths* to make sure of her sources for notes on Stesichorus, Paris, Thetis and Helen. I think we can also see a glimmer of Graves's style in a passage like the one quoted above. The two possible explanations given for Philoctetes being left behind are also common to both academic commentary and to books like *The Greek Myths* in which every possible version of a story is collected.

This pseudo-scholarly prose voice can even be, at times, rather pedantic. As H.D. suggested it should in her letter to Pearson, it corrects the poetry about Pylades' marriage: "*Actually, Pylades did not marry Iphigenia, but Electra, the older sister of Orestes*" (70). It was this professorial, sometimes patronising, element of the prose pieces that Josephine Jacobsen in her review of *Helen in Egypt* for *Poetry* found so irritating:

The 'narrative interludes' are less narrative than hortatory, explaining to us not only the problem and how it will be handled, but, in the language of the classroom, how we must react. (189)

No doubt the "we" often adopted by the prose voice contributed to Jacobsen's annoyance. The first person plural is also adopted by the *Ion* commentary. It reads at times as an academic affectation, especially used with a verb like "judge." "Does *Ion* envy these young priests their early-morning, ritualistic liberation? We judge so", says the commentator of *Ion* (12). Similarly, the prose voice in *Helen in Egypt* states, "*we judge that this is intuitive or emotional knowledge, rather than intellectual*" (13). A further habit of the prose voice which can be read as academic convention is the frequent quoting of poetry to make its point (see *HE* 80, 91, 160, 210).

Often this academic and reasonable prose voice attempts to clarify and connect, to explain, to "make sense" of the illogical. Here it telescopes the different, seemingly contradictory stages, in the memory journey leading to recognition of Paris:

It is true that Love "let fly the dart" that had sent Achilles to her, but it was Paris who was the agent, medium or intermediary of love and of Troy's great patron, Apollo, the god of Song. (112)

Yet the prose voice is by no means wholly separate, scholarly and authoritative in its attitude to the poetry. Admittedly less often than the *Ion* commentary, it soars to lyrical heights: "*There is a mystery but it happens all the time*" (131); "*The child of light will strive to redeem the child of darkness*" (187).⁹ Most often the lyricism is in the judicious quotation of the poetry, but this in itself blurs too easy a generic distinction between the two (see chapter seven).

It is not only the lyricism of the prose voice that blurs its objectivity. Its constant re-interpretation of the text prevents conclusions being made, as Susan

Friedman (recognising the significance of the fact that the prose pieces were written after the lyrics) has noted:

The prose insets in *Helen in Egypt*, written after the lyrics were completed, do not provide authoritative readings of the lyrics, but rather, in their rhetoric of indeterminacy, emphasize the Penelopean endlessness of (re)interpretation and inscription. (*Web* 358)

This impression stems in part from the fact that the voice moves more frequently by questions than by statements. These questions are not only rhetorical, but often involve an admission of ignorance. After Achilles has asked Helen his enigmatic question about veil and dream, the voice asks, "*What does he mean? She does not know. We do not know*" (37). Similar questions run through the poem and, although sometimes the prose voice answers its own questions, often the reply is mysterious, disclaiming knowledge: "*Had they met before? Perhaps.*"; "*Has her knowledge made her happier? Perhaps*" (7, 26). The voice makes frequent use of the word, "seems," which stresses its uncertainty and subjectivity: "*Theseus seems to argue*"; "*Helen seems to start awake*" (169, 220). This suggests that the prose voice's apprehension of the meaning of the speech of the other voices is unreliable and that it does not know for certain what is actually *happening* in the poem, for Helen only "seems" to awaken.

At times, even in its informative role, the prose voice is misleading. At the beginning of *Leuké*, it asks: "*Why Leuké? Because here, Achilles is said to have married Helen who bore him a son, Euphorion*" (109). Yet, while the figure of Euphorion becomes important in *Eidolon*, *Leuké* is dominated by the figures of Thetis, Paris and Theseus, and there is certainly no marriage with Achilles. The prose voice seems to be giving the information as to the significance it would expect, knowing its sources, *Leuké* to have. The poetry takes a completely different turn. The deeper into the book we proceed, the more the prose voice disclaims comprehension and knowledge: "*For us, 'this is no easy thing to explain.'*"; "*Helen understands, though we do not know exactly what it is she understands*" (184, 191). The very last prose passage of the whole book stresses the inconclusiveness of the prose voice: "*one greater than Helen must answer, though perhaps we do not wholly understand the significance of the message*" (303).

If we read, as DuPlessis (like Friedman) does, the "mysterious prose passages of summary and rumination" as being "in the poet's voice, as the poems seem to be in Helen's," then this mysteriousness can be frustrating (*Career* 108). We feel we are being teased by partially revealed fragments. There is a sense of knowledge

hidden from us. The style even seems reminiscent of a detective story, the author providing only clues and hints, but never telling all. The fact that the prose voice is always one poem ahead, has already read what we are about to read, can even make for a paranoid reader. This interpretation would suggest that the voice is all-knowing, but just not all-saying, that of a wily author hiding a few salient facts up her sleeve.

Although I would not wholly deny this response, I would suggest that, more often than not, the inconclusiveness of the prose passages suggests not the wily authorial voice, but the voice of the common reader. It succeeds, by this ruse, in leading us (the readers) into the poem:

*The great Amen, Ammon or Amun temple still stands, so we may
wander there with Helen. She and we need peace and time to reconstruct
the legend. (11)*

Here the voice literally steps into the text in the present tense, blurring the inner/outer divide. The "we" in this passage can be read as representing the readership of the poem, being more intimate than an academic first person plural. Once again, we find a similar process in H.D.'s *Ion* commentary in which the academic "we" often takes off into the involved, immediately responsive "we" of an audience:

*[W]e ask ourselves what can this all signify; is this a worthy theme
for great religious drama...? But before the thought actually has
time to crystallize, the silver rhythms of ... God's messenger
silence us. (6)*

This "we" seems also to suggest an initiated, interested group of readers, who already know a certain amount: "*We all know the story of Helen of Troy*" (1); "*Lethe, as we all know, is the river of forgetfulness*" (3); Cassandra was "*dedicated to prophecies which, as we all know, were never believed*" (121). This "we" is always problematic however. While "*we presume*" may strike us as pompous, "*we feel*" seems to include us, yet both sit side by side in the same prose piece (20).¹⁰ Equally, even as the prose voice claims that Achilles and Paris are fantasies, it plaintively articulates our doubts: "*But we do not feel that Achilles and Paris were 'a voice within' her. They were disparate beings, separate from each other and separate from Helen*" (225). The important word here is "feel," stressing our emotional need as readers to be safe in an unselfconscious fiction.

Claire Buck also argues that the prose voice "orchestrates the reader's reading of the lyric," although she emphasizes that it is still authorial, the "author as reader" (159). She also however seems to contradict herself by extending her suggestion that the prose voice is "modelled on Theseus and Freud" into an idea that the prose voice plays the role of an analyst in the poem, working, with its endless questions, on the "actual reader" of the poem, as an analyst might (159). However, the questions asked by the prose voice are all about the characters in the poem, predominantly Helen. Therefore, if it were analysing anyone, it would be Helen (or another character). This does not tally. Were the questions directed to Helen and, to any degree, responded to by her (an impossibility of course, since the prose was written after the poetry), then the analytic model for the prose voice would be more convincing. Although some of the questions could be read as directed to the reader, they are not about the reader. How then can the reader be said to be in analysis with the prose voice? Combining her two pictures of the voice as "reader as author" and as analyst, Buck further claims that the voice is in the "role of master," as her original word, "orchestrates," also suggests (159).

I would argue that the voice, when veering toward that of common (rather than commentative) reader, successfully conveys the illusion that it speaks with the "actual" reader, being more inclusive in its attitude than "masterful." The prose voice, although one poem ahead, seems to move at the same speed as a reader might, conjecturing and wondering as it travels through the poem. "*We feel*," states the headnote before one poem in *Helen in Egypt*; "*We were right*," it affirms before the next (20, 22). Again, before one poem the prose voice wonders whether Achilles has broken the "Command," and before the next, answers itself: "*It seems so*" (61, 63).¹¹ Being one poem ahead does give the prose voice some commentative distance, but the fact that it is *only* one poem ahead conveys the sense that it is in constant touch with the process of the poem. The questions the voice asks are those a reader, rather than an authorial persona might ask her/himself. Of the rent veil that recurs mysteriously throughout the book, the prose voice asks,

Is the garment of the apparition synonymous with the 'veil' of Helen? Is the torn garment in both cases, a symbol? (145)

When a new and unknown name is spoken of, the voice asks the question the reader asks, "*Who is Formalhaut?*" (212).

As well as being in keeping with H.D.'s *Ion* commentary, the collective "we" is also in keeping with certain passages of H.D.'s cinematic criticism in which the common cinema-goer is evoked:

We are presented with Jeanne d'Arc in a series of pictures, portraits burnt on copper, bronze if you will ... bronze of that particular medieval fanaticism that says no and again no to any such weakening incense as Fra Angelico gold and lilies of heavenly comfort. Why did and why didn't this particular Jeanne d'Arc so touch us? (Joan 15)

This connection is interesting, since the emphasis of the collective voice of the *Helen in Egypt* prose is very often on the visual scenes and "minute by minute" action of the poem. This is especially true of the Paris passages:

But now we are in King Priam's palace before the death of Paris, or rather we are with Paris who in his delirium sees Helen as he saw her for the last time. (123)

Paris says to Helen, 'now it is dark upon Leuke,' so we imagine them together -- we do not know where. (125)

H.D.'s use of the word "captions" for the prose sections, with its cinematic connotations, seems appropriate here -- the voice "capturing" the poetic scene it sees before it.

At times the prose voice seems to come even closer to the poetry in its degree of involvement, almost (but only almost) evoking a voice that is within the poem itself. Of Theseus' words in Book IV of *Leuke* the prose voice reports, "*The love-stories, he tells us, have grown dim and distant*" (149). The prose voice appears to be actually listening in to Theseus here, rather than simply reading about his words. When Theseus changes direction to talk about Chryseis, Deidamia, Briseis and Polyxena, the prose voice says that he "*seems deliberately to have stepped out of the stream of our and of Helen's consciousness*" (172). Here the voice, with its own consciousness, almost participates. Just as the objective and academic affectations of the prose voice imply the persona of a commentator speaking from outside the text, so its characteristics of immediacy and subjectivity, at their most extreme, hover around the idea that the voice is actually involved in the text.

At such times, at its closest to the poetic text, the prose voice draws perhaps on the voice of the Greek chorus with its dual place both within and without the

drama. H.D.'s interest in the "choros" (sic) was, as I illustrated in my Prelude, sustained. Reception and reaction were accented by her concentration on chorus alone in her early work. It is interesting that H.D. originally intended to have a "choragus" voice within the poetic text of *Helen in Egypt*:

I wrote you, by the way, that I did a last section of *Helen in Egypt*. It is to wind up that series -- so choragus, as impersonal leader-of-chorus, indicates that the sails are set....
(letter to Pearson, 14 April, 1953)

By May, she had changed her mind, and writes to Pearson of Thetis: "I find that she, like Proteus, could change her form, magically, so my Choragus might be Thetis, herself" (11 May, 1953). In the published edition of *Helen in Egypt* the first poem of *Pallinode* VII is attributed to "*Choragus: (Image or Eidolon of Thetis)*," bearing witness to these deliberations (93). H.D. might have intended to punctuate the text (possibly for the final book of each part of the poem) with poems from the choragus or chorus, adapting the dramatic convention so well known to her. However, she did not do so, and while it could be argued that both Thetis and Theseus are to some extent detached from Helen, after *Pallinode* VII the "impersonalised" voice dies out in the verse, perhaps to return in the prose passages.

This comparison between prose voice and chorus should not be over-stressed, since there are two fundamental elements of the dramatic chorus which are obviously incompatible with the prose voice: firstly, the chorus is a poetic voice and, secondly, it can take a part in the dialogue and even action of the poem, as in the scene in *Ion* when the chorus advise Kreousa to take sanctuary at the altar of Apollo (97). Yet, the Greek chorus is, like the prose passages of *Helen in Egypt*, a strange mixture of the personal and impersonal, as H.D. herself remarks in *Ion*. At times, she explains, the chorus can be a "complete and logical comment, on the play's progress"; at other times, "purely decorative" and, at still others, "curiously 'human,' startlingly personal" (46). While the second function is not one I would ascribe to the prose passages of *Helen in Egypt*, the first and last are. Other comments of H.D.'s about the chorus prove strikingly relevant to our analysis of the prose voice:

The chorus in a Greek play is, in a sense, a manifestation of its inner mood, expression, as it were of group consciousness; subconscious or superconscious comment on the whole.
(Translator's Note, *ION* 10)

The chorus is, as it were, an outside voice, punctuating and stressing moods. It is the play's collective conscience. However, from time to time, speakers of strophe and antistrophe merge, informally, with the actors, or serve to bind contrasting moods. (ION 22)

These comments, taken together, convey the sense of a voice both within and without: both a "manifestation," a presentation or materialisation of the "inner mood" of the play and an "outside voice, punctuating and stressing moods." Here, then, we have a tension or balance between inner and outer, writer and reader or commentator, reader and participator that we can recognise from the shifting of distance and involvement of the prose voice in *Helen in Egypt*, even to the extent of it "merg[ing] informally" with the "actors" or "characters" of the poem, although this is always a passive merging where the prose voice is concerned, since it does not (and cannot) take part in the dialogue.

H.D.'s use of the words, "subconscious," indicating the hidden subtext beneath the manifest text of the poem, and "superconscious," suggesting an over-text that overlooks the apparent text, evoke a similar duality. As "group consciousness," Greek chorus articulates society's comment on the scene played out before it. This too is characteristic of certain of the prose voice's attitudes and speeches, as we have already seen in its attitude to Helen's visionary experiences. In *Ion*, the chorus questions Apollo's reputation and his probity:

too much is said of this god,
too much is sung,
too much of the sacred spring;
what of his deeds in the night? (85)

H.D.'s commentary rather mocks the way in which the chorus "reviles the sun-god" for his "spiritual sin": "Who is he anyway? No such things, we can imagine them thinking, ever happen in our holy city.... A god should know his place, all values have been reversed" (83-4).¹² In *Helen in Egypt*, there is a similar indictment of a god in a passage preceding a poem about the cause of the Trojan War in which the prose voice seems to represent the status quo: "fundamentally it was the fault of Thetis, the mother of Achilles ... a goddess marries a mortal, some social discord is sure to arise" (111). Here, significantly, the prose voice plays the parts of both chorus and commentator both condemning the god and yet seeming simultaneously to satirise its own condemnation.

Critics have assumed, with Buck, that, because the prose voice takes up, at times, a position of authority or privileged knowledge and because it is one step ahead of the reader, that the voice must, ipso facto, be authorial (161-2). Yet, why should not the prose voice be a construct, a character of sorts, as the Greek chorus is. I would conclude that it is more character than author in its elusive passages which suggest commentary, collective readership and choral voice. This shifting character, like the shifty use of pronouns in the poem, destabilises our sense of linguistic coherence and clear identity.

It is noticeable that in the *Ion* commentary, despite frequent use of the involving "we" of the common theatre-goer or reader, H.D. does identify herself as the author/translator of the text by use of the first person singular, including a reference to a past visit to Delphi, by direct address to the reader and, above all, by comments on her methods of translation (51, 93, 12, 32). In the *Close-Up* criticism, she uses "I" more frequently than we, avoiding academic affectation of any kind, and drawing unselfconsciously on her personal experience. In the *Helen in Egypt* prose passages she never identifies herself as author or uses the first person singular. I would suggest that the fact that she does not identify herself explicitly with the prose voice is significant and that, while H.D. obviously pulls the strings, the prose voice, like the other voices in the poem, is a veritable chamber of voices and identities which draws much for its character on H.D.'s previous work on the Greek drama.

The Poetic Voices

Earlier chapters have already revealed an intricate net of voice positions and identities co-existing in the poetic text of *Helen in Egypt*. In the central section of this thesis, I have treated Helen, to some extent, as a speaking subject, the narrator of her own story. I have referred to Achilles, Paris, Thetis, Theseus and Clytaemnestra as figments of Helen's memory-haunted imagination or, to employ the Tibetan Buddhist term, "thought-forms." Yet, at other times, I have referred to them as dramatic, Helen's fellow-characters, be they ghosts or gods, alive or dead, on the elusive shifting stage of the poem.

Being as "true" to the text as possible immediately suggests such contradictions, contradictions which we are not intended to solve. From the very first poem of the book onwards, Helen refers to herself both directly and indirectly, saying,

"the scene is empty and I am alone," but ending the same poem, "here there is peace / for Helena, Helen hated of all Greece" (1-2). When she addresses the Greeks on the subject of "she whom you cursed," the sense of her extraordinary dual status is as powerful as the linguistic split in the novel, *Her* (5). This is further confused by the elusive shifters in the poem, constantly causing us to doubt whether we know who exactly is speaking. In the first seven verses of the sixth poem of *Eidolon* Book V for example, Helen is indirectly referred to as "her":

It was a treasure beyond a treasure
he gave her, no buckle
detached from his gear,

a trophy to prove to others,
Achilles had loved her.... (282)

In the seventh verse, there is a transition and Helen unexpectedly, even awkwardly, starts to speak as "I":

and he only remembered it,
remembered and wanted it back,
when it was gone?

that I only remembered and treasured
the gift I forced from him,
long after.... (283)

Just as the reader is lulled into a sense of smooth-running narrative, the question of voice again asserts itself. Either the first speaker is an undefined narrative voice or, more likely, the poem suggests that Helen is both speakers, both subject and object, narrator and character of/in her own story. Genette describes such "double focalization," which he finds in the modern or avant-garde novel, as "polymodal" or "polytonal" (208-9). "[I]t defies realistic illusion and a 'law of the spirit' requiring that one cannot be inside and outside at the same time," he writes (210).

However H.D.'s Helen defies even more "laws of the spirit" in her interaction with other characters. At times, dramatic dialogue between characters takes place, especially in the poems of *Leuké* Book IV in which Helen and Theseus converse. At other times, her fellow-characters appear to Helen, to the prose voice, and to the reader, to be within her own mind. As we have seen, Helen can be read as summoning Achilles to mind and memory. Yet, other phrases suggest he appears, bidden by a "spirit-master" and, when Achilles attempts to

throttle her, phantom or no, we are inclined to feel that we are dealing with a dramatic scene between characters, reminiscent of Orestes attempt to kill Helen in Euripides' *Orestes* (15-7). Similarly, Helen's transitions between interaction with different characters can be read as her internal journey through memory or as precipitated by the drama, as when she is "summoned" or "recalled" out of Egypt by Thetis (158, 185).

The different perceptions of the prose and poetic voices add to this complexity. At the beginning of *Eidolon* the prose voice describes Helen as being called "*back to Egypt*" by "*image or eidolon of Achilles*," who has been in turn "*commanded*" by Theseus (208). Yet, in the following poem, Achilles remarks that Helen "*never left Egypt*," suggesting that her journey has always been internalised (209). The second poem has a very physical (slightly absurd) description of Helen being borne on Theseus' couch from *Leuké*, but the third names the current scene as a temple holding purely symbolic attributes (212). The reader is confronted with an ever-shifting perspective in the poem, constantly generating questions in our mind as to *how* to read and interpret the poem.

To further confuse the issue, it is not only as dramatic characters that Helen's fellow-speakers interact. They also take over from Helen the position of narrator, substantial sections of the poem being spoken by voices other than Helen's, especially by Achilles (*Pallinode* Book IV) and Paris (from the final poem of *Leuke* I to the end of Book III). It is particularly noticeable when Paris tells his story, that Helen does not respond as a character, making only a sudden appearance, followed by quick disappearance, at the end of his account (145-6). This appearance is itself ambiguous, suggesting either a mirage in the dying eyes of Paris, possibly an *eidolon* created by Aphrodite, or a brief flash of the dramatic in the midst of the narrative. Each character narrates the story, or rather their story, from their own perspective, as speaking subjects, a common novelistic technique which in some modern novels dominates completely. In William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* for instance events are re-played through each individual pair of eyes, with no explicit authorial intervention.¹³

Critics have noticed of course that there are other speakers in the poem, but have stressed the position of Helen as central consciousness. Gelpi remarks that she is "not only the point of view but the subsuming consciousness" of the poem which takes place "in Helen's psyche" (Hilda 234). However, little exploration has been made of the contradictions or cross purposes of the shifting voice

positions in the poem. A Bakhtinian model seems to me useful in exploring this anomaly in which Helen appears as both "subsuming consciousness" and narrative voice, and yet is also one of the characters in the poem. It also sheds light on how these characters too play a double role, at times, interacting with Helen and, at other times, take up the position of narrative voice and central consciousness themselves.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929) Bakhtin coined the term "polyphonic," citing Dostoevsky's novels as exemplary. H.D.'s Helen corresponds here to Bakhtin's idea of the author of the polyphonic novel. H.D. renounces authorial intervention, making her hero's point of view or consciousness the writing position:

At a time when the self-consciousness of a character was usually seen merely as an element of his reality, as merely one of the features of his integrated image, here, on the contrary, all of reality becomes an element of the character's self-consciousness. The author retains for himself ... not a single essential definition ... he enters it all into the field of vision of the hero himself.... (Bakhtin 48)

In the same way, H.D. grants Helen the position of speaking subject in whose consciousness we can read the whole poem as taking place, whose mental state can be read, as we saw in Chapter Three, as reality within the world of the text. Helen is, as Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky's hero, "not an objectified image, but rather an autonomous discourse, *pure voice*; we do not see [her], we hear [her]" (53). The author was portrayed by Dostoevsky himself as simply capturing the words of his hero and reporting them:

If a stenographer could have listened to him and taken it all down, it would have sounded rather less smooth and finished than my account, but I do believe that the psychological sequence would probably have been the same.¹⁴

Although H.D.'s Helen was H.D.'s own self-confessed "double" or "alter-ego," nonetheless, H.D. does relinquish authorial intervention in Helen's word. Indeed H.D. achieves the Bakhtinian unity of the hero's and author's utterance (ie: the author knows nothing that the "pure" voice does not) *through* this very sense of sameness or doubling. She refuses to complete Helen, abandoning monological control of her voice. We can compare H.D.'s visits from the "muse" or the "un-conscious or what-not," her loss of control while writing (see Prelude), with Dostoevsky's stenographer. Despite differences, the effect is the same. Whether H.D. is or is not Helen's "double," she does not speak *through*

Helen, to the extent that we can create our own imaginary scenario. Were she to do so, we should find it hard to create a picture of H.D, like Dostoevsky, having her poem dictated to her.

Bakhtin, citing Dostoevsky himself, goes on to say that the stenographer is of course (like our image of Helen as muse) "fantastical," for it is impossible for the author's vision to be wholly overtaken by the mind of his/her character (Bakhtin 44-5). The freedom of the hero in Dostoevsky's novels is, of course relative and created, argues Bakhtin, but nonetheless the author is true to the "dominant" of the hero's representation, following through the inner logic of the text:

A character's discourse is created by the author, but created in such a way that it can develop to the full its inner logic and independence as *someone else's discourse*, the word of the *character himself*. (Bakhtin 65)

H.D.'s Helen is similarly granted her own inner logic. The inner world of the text is *her* inner world, close as that may be to H.D.'s. The radicalism *à propos* the place of the author in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin is also implicit in H.D.'s poem. He demands a "new *authorial position*" which acknowledges that "*internally unfinalizable something in man*" (57-8). Helen exemplifies this unfinalised hero, for she never stagnates, always successful in her attempt "to destroy that framework of *other people's* words about [her] that might finalize and deaden [her]" (Bakhtin 59). The author and the hero relate "dialogically," according to Bakhtin: they are in dialogue "in the *real present* of the creative process" (Bakhtin 63).

Bakhtin's analysis concentrates much of the time on the central characters, or heroes, of the Dostoevskian novel, but, as the term suggests, his polyphonic novel was a "fundamental plurality of unmerged consciousnesses" (9). Each character in the novel, according to Bakhtin, were granted by the polyphonic author "an astonishing internal independence" (13). As in *Helen in Egypt*, perception is not wholly monological, either through the eyes of author or central character. In *Helen in Egypt* we have the voices of not only the other characters in the poem, but also of the prose voice, allowed to speak independently and, through this, a critique, at times almost explicit, of the absolute author and/or central protagonist. There is always another pair of eyes, whether it be Achilles eyes watching Helen on the walls of Troy or the "eyes" of the prose voice coining its "captions." The eyes are attached to voices

and these voices, as I have noted, both speak independently or "unmerged," but they also interact dramatically or, to sustain this Bakhtinian reading, "dialogically," orchestrated as little as possible by the author. This is why, at points in the text, the intense sense that we are witnessing a drama overtakes us. Each voice remains unfinalised, characterised by its own "peculiar indeterminacy and indefiniteness" (Bakhtin 61). This produces what the prose voice termed "*dynamic intensity*" (225).

Yet, the characters in *Helen in Egypt* still do not quite fit into the puzzle, for they are, as we have discovered, also portrayed as being within the mind of Helen. This is the Helen as "*subsuming* consciousness" (emphasis added) that Gelpi defined, the Helen who is more than one among many polyphonic voices, the Helen *in whose own mind* the voices seem at times to appear, the Helen who actually converses with these internal phantoms of her own mind. The characters here are performing two roles within the Bakhtinian scheme. They not only appear as polyphonic voices, but also as Helen's internally dialogistic word.

Even when the other voices do not speak, Helen carries out with herself what Bakhtin calls a "microdialogue," in which, within her one voice, is contained knowledge of all the other voices in the poem (73-5). There is a continual "sideward glance" in Helen's word at the other voices about her: "deep traces" left by the words of others are always found within her word (Bakhtin 196-7). This "internal dialogism" within Helen's own word is so powerful in *Helen in Egypt*, that, as I described in Chapter One, the Helen who is a hieroglyph or cultural sign must continually take on the other's word about her, before she can escape it.

When (within this internalised Helen) the other characters begin to speak and Helen's voice merges with theirs to become one voice, then we have a more powerful sort of "double-voiced" word in which Helen is both self and other. Her word cannot be read as direct or object-orientated. It does not operate within a monological context. The idea of a change of eyes is often used in the poem, as when Paris begins to speak in *Leuke*: "*But we see through the eyes of Paris, an earlier Helen*" (125). We can read this as either, simply, Paris' eyes, or as Paris eyes through Helen's eyes as (like Dostoevsky's "Underground Man") she "looks at [her]self ... in all the mirrors of other people's consciousness" (Bakhtin 53).

She herself is the writing (HE 22, 91)

The Helen who hears voices in *Helen in Egypt* also seems at times to manipulate her voices, taking up a role somewhere between the positions of author and character involving characteristics of both. Here we enter an area outside the Bakhtinian framework, and the doubling of H.D. and Helen again becomes significant. Susan Friedman describes H.D.'s relationship to Helen as "analagous to the self-portrait of an artist painting herself painting a self-portrait" (*Psyche* 83). It is the artistry of that statement I want to draw on here, above all the artistry of Helen. I want to suggest that H.D., in making her Helen both "autonomous," in Bakhtinian terms and, yet, a double of herself, created a writerly Helen who can be read, in addition to the other readings suggested here, as the creator, the spinner or weaver of her own poem.

Weaving is an image for creation, for plot, in *Helen in Egypt*. "God does not weave a loose web," says Helen as she explores the "*beauty and proportion of the pattern*" (82). The gods and the fates are arch-weavers, but Helen is weaver too, attempting to design her own pattern. "Do not strive to re-weave, Helen,/ the pattern the Fates decree," warns Thetis (97). This image of Helen as weaver is not without classical precedent. H.D. would have known Theocritus' eighteenth idyll in which her fellow-maidens praise Helen's weaving and singing: "none other smites the lyre, hymning Artemis and broad-breasted Athene, with such skill as Helen within whose eyes dwell all the Loves" (Lang 143).

The image of Helen as writer in *Helen in Egypt* can first be perceived in her study of hieroglyphic symbols in *Pallinode*. This suggests the writer's struggle with language and representation, the need to "know the writing" to match the "living hieroglyph" with its representation or image (23). Working backwards to the source of language, Helen translates the signified or symbolised into the signifier or symbol. Even as she "writes" the poem as narrator, she reports her own efforts to translate the symbols into their significance (poetic language) and to tell the story of this process (narrative). She both reads and writes her own story.

The prose sections in particular draw attention to Helen's writerly aspect. The prose voice, as commentator *within* the poem *on* the poem, seems to regard Helen, rather than H.D., as the writer. The prose voice's account of Helen's task

in the Amen temple stresses the writerly: she must "*reconstruct the legend*" and "*realize the transcendental in material terms*" (11). The prose voice also traces Helen's wielding of her own imagery in the poem, describing her as one might a symbolist writer: "*Her vision is wholly Greek, though she returns to the sacred Egyptian lily for her final inspiration*" (24); "*But Helen refers to the caravel, the death-ship, as a suitable attribute of Osiris*" (26). Helen is much more here than speaking subject; she is a writing speaking subject. The flurry of imagery in the following poem suggests that Helen claims her own images in a reconstructive fashion:

mine, all the ships,
mine, all the thousand petals of the rose,
mine, all the lily petals,

mine, the great spread of wings,
the thousand sails,
the thousand feathered darts

that sped them home,
mine, the one dart in the Achilles-heel,
the thousand-and-one, mine. (25)

Here, as much as she is asserting her ambivalent significance in the story of Troy, she is also asserting her own vision, the right to her own story, told through her own imagery.

In *Leuke*, Helen and the imagery she spins are at their most writerly. The whiteness of "*l'isle blanche*," as I have said, suggests the blank sheet of the writer or the white screen of the cinema, on which pictures and images will flourish. Thetis' summons to Helen can be read as a summons to a new imagery: "*There are other hieroglyphs, Thetis has reminded her, a grasshopper, a flying fish, an octopus - - these are Greek symbols of a Greek sea-goddess -- "Helen -- come home"*" (107). Here Thetis is muse or inspiration to Helen, and her images are taken up by the poet-Helen. In the final poem of *Pallinode* Thetis proffers the shell as new image:

a simple spiral shell may tell
a tale more ancient
than these mysteries.... (107)

A few pages later, in *Leuké*, Helen is shown to take up this symbol in the poetry. The prose voice makes clear, "*It is Thetis who has given this image to her....*" (114). The poem follows:

O the womb, delicate sea-shell,
rock-cut but frail,

the thousand thousand Greeks

fallen before the Walls,
were as one soul, one pearl.... (114)

The deaths of the Greeks, which have been perceived as the Egyptian lily or hieroglyph in *Pallinode*, now become a shell: womb, pearl and tomb. The "Cypris Cypria Amor" poem of *Leuké* Book IV is also described as inspired, inspired perhaps by a muse-figure: "O voice prompting my strophies" (180).

The meditative Book VII of *Leuke* in which Helen, "a-drift" and "at rest," achieves the "[a]bsolute of negation" can also be read as a reflection on the creative mind (194, 195). In the sixth poem of the book, when Helen contemplates the astrological hermetic system, her mind is seen as a "white crystal" which "will reflect the past/ and that present-in-the-past" (204; see Chapter Five). Here, the mind is a filter for experience, which can transform the past into different creative scripts and attempt to read in "eternal" scripts the symbolism of the past. Helen reflects on the writing of the text we are reading, even as she remains a construction of that text. In the white world of the mind opened to meditation, creative colour enters. Paris becomes a colour, a symbol, "rose-light," selected from the "prismatic seven" (204). His character is re-created, given a new significance, by Helen. Colour is seen by the writer Helen here as born out of white, as white writing. The crystalline nature of the prism makes the mind of Helen the crystal/prism in which the past and present can reflect each other, the colourless open mind or prism of meditation in which all colour is possible.¹⁵

Eidolon is perhaps the most self-consciously writerly section of *Helen in Egypt*, the Greek word itself meaning insubstantial image, phantom, spectre, and suggesting representative language itself, the spectre or phantom of materiality. In the case of the Stesichoros/Euripides tradition, as the first prose section of *Helen in Egypt* states, the image or eidolon of Helen was said to be a creation of the gods. Poetic language is the centre of creation. The god Proteus who, like Thetis, shifts and changes shape, becomes an image of imagery itself in the first book of *Eidolon*. As Formalhaut, he appears in a shifting poem which unites the places and inspirations of the poem as one in Helen's mind. The temple in this poem becomes merely "another portal, another symbol" (212). If we read this poem as writerly, then we can see a unifying of Helen's poetic influences, both Greek and Egyptian, taking place. The temple is dedicated to the figure of Isis of the hieroglyphs and Thetis the goddess-as-muse who gave Helen the image-

island of Leuke. Together, these goddesses and places form one existence, themselves "another symbol," a way through, a "portal," a symbol surely of writing, of representation itself.

In the last poem of *Eidolon* Book I Helen, reflecting on her journey as both character and writer, suggests that the script which began her struggle with history and writing was "a Snare" and in Book II she asks who would set such a snare:

Was it Apollo's snare
so that poets forever,
should be caught in the maze of the Walls
of a Troy that never fell...? (232)

The god Apollo, god of song, is seen as a trickster here, luring unwary poets into the trap of illusion, of image, of the struggle with representation Helen has been fighting as writer of her own poem. Yet, once again, mention of Apollo pulls us back to song, to the self-consciously writerly aspect of Helen, for she is not only plaything of the gods, but also the poet figure caught "in the maze of the Walls" (232).

In the fourth book of "Eidolon" Helen seems again to stress the perilously fragile art of weaving the story's pattern, the risk of writing:

As a circlet may break
in the heat of the smelting-fire,
or a plate of armour crack

or a buckler snap
or an axle-tree give way
or a wheel-rim twist awry,

so it seemed to me
that I had watched,
as a careful craftsman,

the pattern shape.... (262)

The extended list of similes here build a precarious pattern, a self-consciously crafted series to convey Helen as craftsman. The prose section to this poem refers back to the study of the hieroglyphs in Egypt: "*she could never have done this, if she had not had the arduous, preliminary training or instruction of the Amen-script*" (262). The following poem also returns to the Egyptian pictures. Through

colour symbolism it refers to the crafting of the piece. Creative vision and writing are visually represented. The Egyptian hieroglyphs are "*bright primary colours*." Superimposed on these colours are "*the "marble and silver" of her Greek thought and fantasy*" (264). In the poem itself the symbolic nature of the very plot of the poem is conveyed. Helen's wanderings as a character parallel her writing passage:

the old pictures are really there,
eternal as the painted ibis in Egypt,
the hawk and the hare,

but written in marble and silver,
the spiral-stair, the maze
of the intricate streets,

each turning of the winding
and secret passage-ways
that led to the sea.... (264)

The line of the narrative and the line of the writing are again one as the stair grows physically into the poem out of the image of Greek thought as "marble and silver." The character of Helen goes on to flee from Troy; the writer is learning the details of the "intimate labyrinth" of the walls and pathways of her own representation.

Certain conventions within the poem substantiate this idea of Helen as authorial. The poem begins with the single voice of Helen ("I am alone"), suggesting that she is the primary, perhaps the only, speaker. When the other characters speak, they are introduced by headings, following a theatrical convention. Each major section in a different voice is introduced in this way: "*Achilles:*"; "*Choragus: (Image or Eidolon of Thetis)*"; "*Paris:*" and "*Theseus:*" (49, 93, 119, 147; see also 208, 213). Between each of these sections spoken in different voices Helen seems to take over the speaking position again, but without the theatrical introduction (66, 99, 174). There is one exception to this which I shall discuss below. This position of Helen as overall or "subsuming" voice suggests that she can be read as not only the speaking subject in the poem, but also as the writer herself who creates the speeches of the other characters, creatures born of her own imagination.

Reading Helen as writerly provides yet another interpretation of the relationship between Helen and her fellow characters. The "magic greater than the trial of arms" with which Helen summons Achilles in *Pallinode* can now be

read as a reference to the magical powers of poetry, in addition to or as alternative to those of sorcery or memory (5). Helen can be seen to manipulate the actions of the characters in the poem, including her own. This is one meaning of the prose voice's words: "*She would re-cr  ate the whole of the tragic scene. Helen is the Greek drama. Again, she herself is the writing*" (91). Like Prospero at the close of the *Tempest*, Helen reflects in the last book of the poem on her manoeuvres and manipulations:

but why was it Paris who spoke?
and why did I call him back?
what formula did I plot,

like an old enchanter? (297)

Helen, as reader of her own status, can articulate other perceptions of herself. In *Pallinode* Helen perceived Achilles' perception of her (as vulture, hieroglyph) and could subsequently speak this perception in his voice in *Pallinode* Book IV (23). We can read the occasions when Achilles and Paris are portrayed as being within Helen's own mind as references to Helen as authorial, imaginative, creator of other voices. When these voices appear most independent of Helen, we could say that she is then most successful in her portrayal of them, that the reader is most convinced, as when the prose voice says plaintively that we "*do not feel that Achilles and Paris were 'a voice within' her*" (225). Here, just after the *Eidolon* Book I speeches of Achilles and Paris, Helen is portrayed as co-ordinator of the action, bringing together Achilles and Paris as voices, successfully creating other voices.

To return to the Bakhtinian model, we can now read Helen herself not only as the independent voice created by H.D., but also as the creator of her own independent voices (Achilles, Thetis, Paris, Theseus), as herself the model of a polyphonic author. H.D.'s monological perception is ceded in favour of Helen's and Helen herself abdicates her own perception in favour of the other characters in the poem who are allowed to exist as a plurality of "unmerged voices." The change of lens, or change of eyes, is a double gesture of authorial abandonment. The prose voice says, when Achilles begins to speak in *Pallinode*: "*So at last we see, with the eyes of Achilles, Helen upon the Walls*" (49). "At last" here suggests the relief of Helen's abandonment of her own voice as writer. When the other characters speak, the other eyes see, both H.D. and Helen are yielding their monological authorial power in favour of polyphony.

Polyphonic writing is described by Bakhtin as a new kind of realism in which the author is not the source of truth, but a realist of the depths of the other's perception (49). H.D. reflects, through her exemplar, Helen, on this process. H.D. may be Helen's stenographer taking down each word of her hero's speech, but Helen, H.D.'s mirror, is also portrayed as stenographer taking down each word of her characters' speeches in the same way. Particular to H.D. is the sense of a muse as a part of abandonment of authorial control: where Helen might be read as H.D.'s muse, Thetis might be regarded as Helen's.

As I have said, according to Bakhtin, author and hero relate dialogically in the polyphonic novel, they are in dialogue "in the *real present* of the creative process" (Bakhtin 63). In *Helen in Egypt*, this dialogue is three-way between author (H.D.); the character who performs the role of surrogate author (Helen) and the other characters or polyphonic voices (Achilles, Thetis, Paris, Theseus). H.D. relates dialogically to Helen, and Helen, in the present of the creative process, relates dialogically to the other characters in the poem. As Bakhtin writes, "essential authorial 'surplus'" is denied either author or single character, be it in the prose voice, in Helen or in Paris (Bakhtin 72-3). Polyphony succeeds in the poem in producing a conflicting plurality of truths as perceptions, without regulation, in constant contradiction and freedom. Another element of Greek drama, the *agon*, or set piece debate, particularly emphasized in Euripides' plays, is suggested by this pattern.

In *Helen in Egypt* we can say that H.D. not only writes a polyphonic text, but that she also, through the figure of Helen as writer, examines the process of such a writing practice, the process whereby the author steps back to allow another voice the self-conscious position. There is a self-referential and self-conscious element to the poem then, in which writing itself is in part the subject of the text. Helen's words, as we have seen, are intrinsically and internally double-voiced, as she is always speaking in several capacities, either shifting within her own roles or handing over the narrative to other characters.

Helen's identity unconcluded...

How does this study of voices effect the question of Helen's identity? In Chapter One, we saw how Helen's multiple pasts created a Kristevan balance between the sense of an ego and a position which seemed to "deconstruct subjectivity and identity altogether" (Moi 13). In Chapters Three-Five, the sense of Helen's remembering and questing processes, on one hand, suggested that Helen could be read as speaking subject, rememberer of the past, in other words, an "ego." On the other hand, we saw that such processes were continually in motion, containing only flickers of a psychologically coherent self and, paradoxically, of the transcendence of self, leading to sense of wholeness rather than fragmentation. Otherwise, the Helen that moves is the only Helen we can identify. In addition to this, we had always to remember that Helen has no single past and no single story in *Helen in Egypt*, only multiple pasts and stories.

Helen's complex textual position in the poem effects our swaying balancing act between readings of Helen's identity, for her textual identity is continually problematised, tipping the balance of the reader's scales first in one direction then another. For example, in *Eidolon*, just when Helen seems at her most writerly and the other characters have been described as her imaginative creations, we are reminded of Helen as character when she is, for the first time, introduced with the heading, "*Helen:*" (220, 222). This places her on the same level as Achilles and Paris who have been introduced similarly in *Eidolon* Book I: she becomes one of a group of dramatic characters. The prose voice emphasizes this by describing her in terms of the already written drama:

*So Helen remembers her part in the greatest drama of Greece and of all time.
She seems almost to speak by rote, she has grown into her part. (234)*

Yet, even as the balance tips in the direction of Helen as character rather than writer, her ability in the following poem to break off, as the prose voice tells us, "*from the recorded drama to remind us of the unrecorded*" tips the balance back again (234).

From Helen's complex textual position, we can extend the argument suggested in Chapter One that Helen's knowledge of her multiple pasts enables her to escape encapsulation in a particular story and, hence, a particular identity. This Helen in motion or "in-process" never attains an identity as such, but is

perpetually involved in a process of understanding or identifying throughout the poem. We can now see this Helen as the readerly Helen whose self-consciousness enables her, like the Bakhtinian hero to escape entombment in another's image. Bakhtin extends his image of the hero who "looks in all the mirrors of others' consciousness and knows all the possible refractions of his own image" as follows:

But he also knows that all of these definitions, both biased and objective, rest in his hands and cannot finalize him, precisely because he perceives them; he can go beyond their limits and make them invalid.... His self-consciousness lives on in its unfinalizedness, its open-endedness and indeterminacy. (43)

Helen has knowledge not only of the past (the ancient hieroglyphs), but also, like the Bakhtinian hero, of the current text that she is a part of. When Achilles attacks her and, through her reading of his perception of her, she becomes a hieroglyph, an "inked-in shadow," she is the reader/writer of another's viewpoint (23). Then, in an instant of reading-time for us and Helen (reading Achilles), she actually becomes that hieroglyph and reads/writes herself as hieroglyph. The prose section of this piece is its own both clarifying and enigmatic "explanation" of the poem, itself a reading/writing of Helen as both symbolist and symbol:

Helen herself denies an actual intellectual knowledge of the temple-symbols. But she is nearer to them than the instructed scribe; for her the secret of the stone-writing is repeated in natural or human symbols. She herself is the writing. (22)

The final sentence of the prose voice, stressed by a change of font, "She herself is the writing," locates the site from which Helen speaks in a remarkably condensed phrase. Helen is a hieroglyph, the writing to be read. She is then the writing, but to be the writing, must also be the reading of it. As writer, writing and reading she is the process. She plays, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes in succession, all the roles; speaking subject/narrator, writer/reader, writing/reading. She is her self perceiving herself: "She is a kind of thought thinking itself whose veil always wavers in the wind and eludes capture" (DuPlessis, Thrall 420). Yet she is "herself" in a tentative insistence on identity, even in engima. As Toril Moi writes, "The Kristevan subject is a subject-in-process (*sujet en procès*), but a subject nonetheless" (13). Helen's self-referential ability to read in her own text, to see dialogically through the eyes of the other

characters, confirms her Bakhtinian "open-endedness and indeterminacy," precisely the characteristics of Kristeva's subject-in-process.

The text here enacts the breakdown of the thetic distinction between subject and object, for Helen is both weaver and woven, and we cannot separate the threads. This status may be much older than H.D.'s text, for when we first see Helen in the *Iliad*, she is weaving battling figures on purple cloth (III:127, 87). As Linda Lee Clader has shown, this Homeric Helen is associated with weaving and poetry in a self-consciously referential way. She is playing an authorial role in her weaving here, weaving a design related directly to what is going on outside the walls (a duel over possession of Helen herself), even though she could not have known this (Clader 7). There is a suggestion then that Helen is weaving her own story:

The vision of Helen at her loom, then, seems to be a profoundly self-conscious statement by the singer. Within the context of the action, Helen is both author and subject of her work.
(Clader 8)

The Helen of *Helen in Egypt* is also both referee and referent, artifact and artist and, hence inescapably textual. As DuPlessis has identified:

Helen is both 'writer', reader and main character a curious status which has at least one theoretical effect -- of collapsing subject-object distinctions between the thing scrutinised and the viewer. (*Career* 109)

This collapse of the thetic distinction between subject and object is precisely one of the effects and the causes of putting the subject "in process" or "on trial."

Yet, the existence of the subject as authorial maintains the thread of identity through the thread of creativity, the very process of unravelling being itself creative. The plurality of Helen could be compared interestingly with that of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* who closes her "autobiography" with a teasing reflection on her "million other" selves described by Mary Jacobus as an "irrepressible diversity ... multiplicity of shifting selves" (23).¹⁶ Jacobus identifies these selves as pluralised not only by Orlando-as-woman, but Orlando-as-writer (23-4). Helen too teases her readers: in her shift from cultural, legendary past to past and from textual position to textual position, she refuses to be identified, either by her fellow characters or by the the reader who can only read her in her flowing present tense.

The two images we have for Helen as subject-in-process then are her plurality or multiplicity and the "delicate balance" described by Toril Moi. Yet, even these two terms are too stable as descriptions of Helen. The notions of plurality and balance do not express her fluid, transitional character. Like H.D.'s Kreousa, Helen steps out of stone and, once she is alive, only stays so by her movement through the text. Only in movement can both the icy freeze of identity and the utter dissolution of fragmentation be avoided. This is H.D.'s own insistence and image. As early as the nineteen-tens, in her "Notes on Euripides," she describes Helen as melting snow:

This is another Helen yet the same Helen. As the white snow that melts
upon the desert is still the snow though it rushes, a river toward the sea,
this is not Helen, yet still Helen. (NEPGLP I:Helen 4)

Snow, river and sea have separate identities, and yet contain the same particles; they are both one and many. The image of the melting snow explains the movement, the process of unfreezing the static symbol of Helen which, alive again, continually moves and changes.

Again, in the 'thirties, the "miracle" of identity suggested in "The Master" is not only bisexed and bisexual, but is also ultimately fluid (CP 454). Again, the woman melts into being:

a woman sheds snow from ankles
and is warm;
white heat
melts into a snow-flake
and violets
turn to pure amethysts,
water-clear.... (CP 454)

The sea is the element, as we have seen, of discovery (see Chapter Three), but it is also an image for fluid self-dissolution. Even when she tilts the balance of the poem toward Helen as speaking subject, H.D. always emphasizes the fluid, unfixed nature of consciousness. Memory and quest in the poem are portrayed as remembering and questing processes in which self is as much lost as gained through the super-real, overwhelming experiences of engulfment in "waves of rapture." In the "Chorus from Morpheus," as in *Helen in Egypt*, Helen leaves Sparta and casts her self on the "sea-road leading/ to a mightier sea" in a circling "again,/ again,/ again" (CP 258). Sea is travel, but not necessarily arrival.

Helen throws herself on the sea, on the old beat of the heart of the sea-mother. We find in *Helen in Egypt* that the texture of the poem is the body and that the body is again the thread of identity that does not let go. The second image in "The Master" of the "miracle" of identity is the dancer whose dance is not only spiritual and sexual, but, as it is first introduced in the poem, is also "hieratic," a dance of words, a textual dance to achieve the "impossible":

how could he have known
how each gesture of this dancer
would be hieratic?
words were scrawled on papyrus,
words were written most carefully,
each word was separate
yet each word led to another word,
and the whole made a rhythm
in the air,
till now unguessed at,
unknown. (CP 454)

The dancer has a body, but her dance is "hieratic." Words and images are the place where the miracle can be worked, but only words as sequence ("each word led to another word"), words not over-defined, the "whole" being not an argument, but "a rhythm/ in the air."

Chapter Seven

The Genres of Helen in Egypt: Classification and Modernity

I was to have told a story or set a scene
of a blue world. I will tell it in my own
time, in my own way. (PIT 25)

The tendency, when classifying *Helen in Egypt*, has been to use the term "epic." At its simplest, this view merely acknowledges that the poem is long and perceives it as the culmination of H.D.'s involvement with the Greek, a magisterial conclusion to a career that began with brief Grecian lyrics. The generic classification of epic has been assumed by many critics (Wagner 529; Larsen 88; Mandel, *Image* 36). Some, however, have registered their awareness of the limited suitability of such a classification by labelling the poem "neo-epic" (Freibert, *Semblance*) and "pseudo-epic" (Hirsch 439; Hogue 87). Neither Hirsch nor Hogue however go on to discuss *in what way* the poem qualifies as "neo-" or "pseudo-."

Where the label "epic" is qualified in work on *Helen in Egypt*, it is often the difference of subject, rather than form, which is stressed. Freibert and Wagner indicate two important differences from the traditional subject matter of the genre: that *Helen in Egypt* is "about a woman" and that it is "centred not on the drama of war but on the search for identity after all action is past" (Wagner 529). Albert Gelpi appears to concentrate on the formal qualities of the poem in his perception of it as a fusion of epic and lyric, however his discussion in fact focuses on the femininity of lyric as a genre, an assumption he does not question:

In the long, tortuous, fragmented history of women writing about their womanhood, the supreme distinction of *Helen in Egypt*, with all its idiosyncracies, is that it transforms the male epic into the woman's lyric sustained at a peak of intensity for an epic's length, and the woman's myth it evokes posits the supremacy of the mother: Helen self-born in Thetis, Hilda self-born in Helen. (Hilda 250)

Once again, it is the centrality of the female figures of Helen and Thetis, H.D. and her mother, that Gelpi finds most radical. *Helen in Egypt* is an "anti-epic" according to Gelpi precisely because it is centred "on a heroine" (Hilda 234).

Despite the provocative term "anti-epic," at times Gelpi seems to suggest that the poem remains within the epic genre "assuming and redefining the grounds of the epic" (Hilda 233). Although he raises the issue, he never quite defines his position on genre and *Helen in Egypt*.

Susan Friedman, having used the term "epic" about *Helen in Egypt* in her earlier work (see *Creating* 164-5, *Psyche* 59-61), takes the issue of genre further in her interesting essay, "Gender and Genre Anxiety: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H.D. as Epic Poets." Friedman's starting point is a questioning of the divide that Gelpi set up, but did not challenge: the masculinity of epic and femininity of lyric. Friedman regards *Helen in Egypt* as a "deconstruction of the binary gender system underlying poetic genres, norms personified by Homer as the father of the epic and Sappho as the mother of the lyric" (222). In *Helen in Egypt*, Friedman argues, "the heroic was redefined in female terms, while the personal [previously associated with lyric] was made public" (Genre 217). Friedman's argument relies then on the assumption that *Helen in Egypt* is epic, and by being so, challenges the generic status quo.

Although Friedman does note important differences of structure between *Helen in Egypt* and the epic (see below) she maintains that H.D. remained within the epic genre "self-consciously reformulat[ing] epic conventions to suit [her] female vision and voice" (203). *Helen in Egypt* then is a "feminized epic" (206). Once again, it is particularly the "centrality of women" that Friedman identifies as the "radical re-vision" of epic in *Helen in Egypt* (Genre 217)¹ Friedman sees this as an "anti-patriarchal and anti-fascist" project, written against Pound's *Cantos*, a "foil" for H.D.'s re-vision of "epic convention ... in the service of women's experience" (Genre 216).

As I have already argued, H.D. certainly did self-consciously re-vision the heroic in *Helen in Egypt*. She presented women as excluded from the male heroic realm:

what did we know of any
of our lords activities?
we lived alone and apart (84)

Her concentration on the woman's perspective is evidently untraditional. However, it is I think a mistake to over-emphasize the personal in *Helen in Egypt*, whether one regards this as signifying an extended woman's lyric (Gelpi) or a woman's epic (Friedman). Yet, criticism of *Helen in Egypt* has relied on, not

only Helen's femininity, but on the personal element of the poem. This association of the feminine and the personal reflects an important contemporary re-valuation of women's personal experience as significant, and an interest among twentieth century critics in the processes of psychoanalysis. So it is that, according to Friedman, it is the "*personal* woman-centred narrative" that makes *Helen in Egypt* a "feminized epic" (Genre 206, emphasis added). The personal is then set against the heroic epic, and a binary structure sustained.

However I would argue that *Helen in Egypt* breaks down this divide between the personal and the universal, the specific and the general, both in its treatment of human psychology and, most particularly, in its mystical questing process. This process breaks down the opposition of impersonal epic and personal "feminized epic" with a third genre, the spiritual quest poem, neither wholly universal (and certainly not heroic), nor wholly personal. Helen's quest, like Dante's quest, like the journeys of the Egyptian and Tibetan after-death spirits, and like the quest of the Arthurian Knights for the Grail, is both personal, and beyond the personal. Such quests are exemplary, mirroring the universal journey for essential spiritual truths in one person's journey. They are designed, not so much to entertain through the story of the adventures of an individual, but to instruct through the example of the questing figure: "if I can get across the Greek spirit at its highest," said H.D., "I am helping the world. It is the highest spiritual neutrality" (see Prelude). Yet, the character, though exemplary, is also individual.

I am certainly not denying that the creation of a female questing figure was not a radical inversion, leading to a further radical inversion of the doctrine of the mystical lover and an emphasis on the Goddess, rather than the God. Even this radicalism is only radical by modern standards however, H.D. and Graves would argue, for the ancient matriarchal religions worshipped the Goddess above all. Even Helen's perception of Achilles as her initiator (the equivalent to a troubadour's Lady) and her ritualistic sex with him is not a travesty of the ancient tradition, but of the modern. In the ritual of the Killing of the King on which Graves argues the Mysteries were based, the Queen had ritual sexual relations with the King. Helen's radicalism is then based on her status as *everywoman*, rather than *everyman*.

The personal aspect of Helen's journey in *Helen in Egypt* is particularly stressed in the memory journey, which dwells on the specifics of Helen's life. While this

element of the poem is vital to any reading of it, the interpretation of the memory journey as a successful quest for identity is, I think, mistaken. This is a common view in criticism of the poem, most clearly expressed by L.M. Freibert who sees *Helen in Egypt* as a linear journey from semblance to real and ideal to selfhood, an epic journey ending in the successful achievement of the goal.² Yet, as I have argued in Chapter Five, Helen attempts to achieve loss of self in mystical transcendence. In such states, fragmented identity is absorbed in absolute transcendence, but such re-birth experiences only occur, as the final poem of the book affirms, in the brief "finite moment," the "pause in the infinite rhythm/ of the heart and of heaven" (304). Like the spiritual quest, the exploration of the past in memory is a process. The two processes are intertwined in the poem to produce a fusion, a balancing, of the personal journey with the exemplary spiritual and psychological journey. Taking a particular poem (*Eidolon* Book VI:1) which has been used to suggest that *Helen in Egypt* is a poem of the personal, we can see that in fact that poem suggests the fusion of personal and universal journeys.

This poem begins with a reference to Helen's relationship with Achilles which insists that the "Star" between them had "no personal,/ intimate fervour," but rather "it was Love, it was Death" (288). This star is the death-to-life transcendence through love that we have described in Chapter Five, as the prose voice says, "*the ultimate experience, La Mort, L'Amour*" (288). Helen's relationship with Achilles here is no different from Dante's with Beatrice -- both are about access to the divine, rather than the personal (although in Dante's Christian poem, the mode is chaste worship of Beatrice, and in Helen's Greek poem, transcendence is through the rites of the Mysteries). The capitalisations emphasize that Helen is talking here of essential forces, rather than personal emotions.

Helen then asks:

but what followed before, what after?
a thousand-thousand days,
as many mysterious nights,

and multiplied to infinity,
the million personal things,
things remembered, forgotten,

remembered again, assembled
and re-assembled in a different order
as thoughts and emotions,

the sun and the seasons changed,
and as the flower-leaves that drift
from a tree were the numberless

tender kisses, the soft caresses,
given and received; none of these
came into the story,

it was epic, heroic and it was far
from a basket a child upset
and the spools that rolled to the floor....
(288-9)

Here she evokes the personal, what we might see as the psychological sequence of remembering and forgetting. This sequence is the background of life, in which the transcendent experience occurs. This is the part of the poem in which Hermione spills her spools, the important personal memory discussed in Chapter Four. This personal element of the poem is differentiated from the epic, heroic scheme, "the story" of the *Iliad*, but it is not differentiated from the spiritual quest. In the final lines of the poem, the two are interwoven, balanced as elements of the poem which inevitably proceed in tandem. In these lines, Helen suggests that the "*promised Euphorion*," the mystic child of the Mysteries, is in fact two children, herself and Achilles (288-9). These children, as I have said in Chapter Four, are the children found again by Helen and Achilles in their two psychological journeys, but they are also the Euphorion, the mystic child of joy born in the Mysteries. The poem indicates that this mystic child who is found is the very child (self) of the questor who sought. Yet, once again, this is not a solution or end to the search, but a seasonal re-birth within the process of the Mysteries.

Whilst the poem is certainly "different, untraditional, unheroic" (DuPlessis, Thrall 416), when measured against epic standard, when it is measured against the genre of mystic or religious quest poem, it is much less so. Again, while the telling of the personal tale(s) forms a part of the journey, that journey tells a more elemental tale of mystical quest. Not unusually for H.D., we have a balancing act here in which the general and the particular are fused to illustrate universal conclusions that she believes can be drawn. Susan Friedman sees *Helen in Egypt* as a "personal story set in the historical and mythic contexts of the larger cycles of death and birth, love and war" (Genre 215). The "larger" issues however are not the setting, but the very process and journey of the poem, as I have shown in Chapter Five. The journey is not just a personal

journey, but at the same time, and often through the same individual poems, a "larger" journey.

We have confirmed that, while the subject of the poem is not heroic, the scope is epic in terms of the largeness of the ideas, even though its epic quality is in the realm of the spiritual and psychological, rather than the war-like. At the same time, we have also seen that the personal is not relinquished, but fused with the archetypal figure of the questor in the poem. As such, the poem straddles the traditional subject matter of the personal and impersonal genres.

I want to suggest that, in matters of form, *Helen in Egypt* also straddles generic boundaries, refusing to remain within the formulaic confines of epic, just as it refused the traditional subject matter of war. If we see the poem as related to genre at all, it can only be described, I suggest, as trans-generic or multi-generic. We have already glimpsed this in the last chapter in which we saw how H.D. rejected epic monologism in favour of dramatic polyphonic interaction between characters, interspersed with passages of single subject narrative, reminiscent more of the novel, than the lyric, in various voices.

Brief glimpses or movements toward this view can be found in critical writing on the poem. Horace Gregory, in his brief introduction to *Helen in Egypt*, draws attention to the generic complexity of the poem:

Her poem is written in a series of three-line choral stanzas; it is a semi-dramatic lyric narrative.... Her poem is not an epic; it borrows nothing from the essay or the novel. (8, 11)

Although I would not agree that the poem borrows nothing from essay or novel, nonetheless Gregory moves away from epic, and draws attention to drama, lyric and narrative as important.

While Gregory denies the influence of the novel, Susan Friedman draws particular attention to the modern novel as influential on *Helen in Egypt*. At times, when she describes *Helen in Egypt* as a "generic fusion of the novel and lyric with the epic" and even a "hybrid form that fused the epic, the novel, and the lyric," she almost comes close to a denial of her own claim that the poem remains within the epic fold (Genre 215, 222). Unlike Gregory however, she does not mention the importance of drama.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes the poem as "epic deconstructed" and describes H.D. as writing across the epic tradition in theme, in structure, and even genre while alluding to it with every step" (*Career* 18, see also Thrall 415). In her highly condensed book she does not have the space to explore this comment, but her words "even genre" must indicate one of the first attempts to break loose from the confines of reading *Helen in Egypt* as epic.

It is important to note H.D.'s own ambivalence about the generic forms open to her as a young writer, particularly about epic. The speaker of the "Chorus Sequence from Morpheus" pronounces herself dissatisfied with the regularity and triumphalist rhythm of epic:

O I am tired of measures
like deft oars;
the beat and ringing
of majestic song.... (CP 253)

In "Calliope," Sappho and Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, converse. Sappho attempts seductively to lure Calliope to her ways, but the latter, Artemis-like, rejects her advances, scorning love, the flesh and song (CP 286-8). In "A Dead Priestess Speaks" H.D.'s Delia of Miletus, scratching at her "tablet-wax," also dismisses epic verse, even though she seems to be in awe of Homer's famous formula:

for I looked over the sea-wall
for the further sea --
dark, dark and purple;

no one could write, after his *wine-dark sea*,
an epitaph of glory and of spears (CP 372)

There is more than a hint here of anxiety of influence, perhaps as much generic and gender-related as generational.³

In the novel *Paint It Today*, Midget is seen to struggle between epic and lyric stereotypes "bored" by "large epic pictures" and drawn (like the Sappho of "Calliope") by lyric "songs that cut like a swallow wing the high untainted ether" (11). Du Plessis begins *H.D.: The Career of that Struggle* with the following quotation from the novel, highlighting H.D.'s awareness of the cultural insignificance of the woman writer and elevation of the masculine "I" of epic:

Rome and the outposts of Rome. That runs in my head, arma virumque, that beats down the battered fortress of my brain, cano. I sing of arms and a God.... What do I sing? I don't know what I sing. What anyhow does it matter what I sing, I, a nebulous personality without a name. (PIT 26)

Paint It Today is written against epic, against Virgil's "arms and the man."⁴ However, it is also written against the Lyric "I," despite the attraction that song holds for Midget:

But I will not let *I* creep into this story. I will not let *I* go on banging the tinkling cymbal of its own emotion. (26)

Lyric is not only then "empowering," as Friedman suggests (Genre 214). It is also restrictive. Midget would escape the epic form, associated with "arms and the man," but she would also escape the lyric, "the minor note and the confabulations of the heart," traditionally seen as the milieu of the woman poet, but avoided by H.D. (Gelpi, Hilda 233).

What Midget wants, and what I suggest H.D. achieves in *Helen in Egypt*, is a new kind of writing defined here by colour rather than words: "I was to have told a story or set a scene of a blue world. I will tell it in my own time, in my own way" (PIT 25). The new way to "tell a story," I suggest, is not just that the subject, as a woman, will be new, but also that the form will be new, as a closer look at Midget's comments on genre show:

Large epic pictures bored her, though she struggled through them. She wanted the songs that cut like a swallow wing the high, untainted ether, not the tragic legions of set lines that fell like black armies with terrific force and mechanical set action, paralyzing, or broke like a black sea to baffle and to crush. (PIT 11)

Susan Friedman correctly notes that in this passage "H.D. explicitly overlapped gender and genre within the context of history," associating epic with "war, armies, death and betrayal" (Genre 214). But the passage is also, and fundamentally so, to do with form, rhythm and weight. The epic is a trap not only of war and masculinity, but of sameness of lines, of the formulaic, of crushing tradition.

H.D.'s experiments with different genres began very early in her writing career. A glance at her books of the early twenties, *Hymen* and *Heliodora*, show the influence we might expect to find of Sappho and Theocritus, but they also

reveal experimentation with dramatic forms including masques, Euripides translations and dramatic monologues, choral pieces, and dialogues (see Prelude). By this time, she had also composed her "Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets" and *Notes on Thought and Vision*. She had written two novels, *Paint It Today* and *Asphodel*, and begun work too within the genre of the short story.

Her sense of lostness in the 'thirties seems to reflect the feeling that she did not know in what form to write:

She can not write as she would, but she will go on writing. We are through with experimenting.... [T]here must be a new means of expression, of self-expression, of world-expression. (HDDA 211)

When H.D. came to write *Helen in Egypt* in the 'fifties, she had already composed one long poem, *Trilogy*; she had published two plays and written several novels and short stories. *Helen in Egypt* turned out to be unique, a hybrid structure I would argue, which drew on all these forms, in search of the "new means of expression."

H.D.'s own way of referring to the poem while she was composing it seems to reflect her doubts about its classification. Friedman substantiates her argument that H.D. remains within the epic tradition by drawing attention to the identification of *Helen in Egypt* with Pound's *Cantos*: "Following closely the unfolding of his [Pound's] *Cantos*, she repeatedly called *Helen in Egypt* 'my Cantos,' paralleling his life's work with her own achievement," writes Friedman (Genre 216).⁵ I would argue that, although Pound identified himself as within the epic tradition, H.D. did not, and that the comparison with Pound's *Cantos* was Pearson's, rather than H.D.'s.⁶

In *End To Torment* we sense resistance to the label on the part of H.D. She distances herself from it, making clear that it was Pearson's classification⁷ rather than her own:

It all began with the Greek fragments – and living in seclusion in Lugano and Lausanne (and here too) I finished, 1952, 1953, 1954, the very long epic sequence, my 'cantos', as Norman called them. (ETT 41)

This "definition" suggests a confusion, even entanglement, over classification: "the very long epic sequence, my 'cantos.'" Too many words are piled together

to refer to the poem, suggesting uncertainty, perhaps even a desire not to classify at all.

Paul Smith refers to "the implicit sacrifice to male creativity in H.D.'s description of the poem as 'my own *Cantos*'" (Smith, *Wound*. 119). Yet when we turn to Smith's reference, the context tells a very different story. H.D. in fact writes of "the *Pisan Cantos*": "No there is no resemblance. But I completed my own *cantos* as Norman called them, again in the Greek setting" (*ETT* 32). The statement is in fact a disclaimer, and here again, she specifically distances herself from the label "*cantos*" associating it once again with Pearson. H.D. goes on to say that the only resemblance between the two poems is the setting of the Trojan War, in which Achilles, important in *Helen in Egypt*, fought alongside the Odysseus of Pound's *Cantos* (32).⁸

It is interesting to see which of the various components of H.D.'s description of *Helen in Egypt* above, "the very long epic sequence, my 'cantos', as Norman called them" was used by her while she worked on the poem, and immediately afterwards. Contrary to Susan Friedman's suggestion that she "repeatedly" referred to the poem as her cantos we find that by far the most common term she used in her frequent letters to Pearson was simply "Helen" or "the Helen," hence avoiding classification at all.⁹ When she did favour a term, it was "the Helen sequence" or the "sequence" and, once, "the Helen series" that she used.¹⁰ Only a very few times does she refer to "cantos," and again we sense hesitation in her about this term, for instance in her reference to these "so-called Cantos" (11 May, 1953). On another occasion when she uses the term, it is to designate the parts or sections of the poem as "cantos," rather than to call the poem as a whole "Cantos."¹¹

To Bryher, the poem is first introduced as "this Helen sequence" (23 September, 1952) and thereafter referred to almost exclusively as "the Helen" or "Helen".¹² To Richard Aldington, Sylvia Dobson and Ezra Pound the poem is again a "series" or "sequence"¹³ To no-one except Pearson does H.D. refer to the poem as cantos, which suggests she used the term only because he did so. Nowhere in her correspondence does she use the term "epic." The word "sequence" which she seems to favour is not a generically loaded one. It suggests simply movement, process, "the following of one thing after another" (OED).

We have already begun to see how H.D. fused different generic forms in *Helen in Egypt*. It is also important to note the heterogeneous influences on the poem. As Bakhtin wrote in the chapter of *Dostoevsky's Poetics* on "The Characteristics of Genre":

But the logic of genre is not an abstract logic. Each new variety, each new work of a given genre always enriches it in some way, aids in perfecting the language of the genre. For this reason it is important to know the possible generic sources of a given author, the literary and generic atmosphere in which his creative work was realized. The more complete and concrete our knowledge of an artist's generic contacts, the deeper can we penetrate the peculiar features of his generic form and the more correctly can we understand the interrelationship, within it, of tradition and innovation. (157)

This paragraph comes within the creation in the book of a new generic area by Bakhtin, the "serio-comical," a generic umbrella under which many smaller marginalised genres shelter, all connected by the influence of "carnival," and by their diversion from the monological "serious" genres (134). I shall return to "carnival" below, but first I would like to note Bakhtin's stress in this quotation on the importance of what feeds into an author's mind. Throughout this chapter, he draws attention to the variety and peculiarity of influences, both ancient and modern, on Dostovsky. Throughout this thesis, I too have indicated the bewilderingly diverse influences on H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, influences which lead to a particularly complex "interrelationship" with "tradition and innovation."

I shall attempt to summarise them here. H.D. made use of Greek and Egyptian poetry (epic and lyric); drama; myth and legend; histories and travel guides. She also drew on contemporary academic books, both literary (Butler) and classical/anthropological (Farnell); reference books (Graves) and classical commentary. The legends of the afterlife and Books of the Dead of various cultures were vitally important to the cosmology of the poem. In the background, we find the influence of Dante and the Arthurian legends of Tristan and Iseult and the Holy Grail. Novels, ancient (Apuleius' *Golden Ass*), and modern, were an influence on her, including E.M. Butler's *Silver Wings*, a novel in the detective genre (see below). Books about mysticism, esoteric religions, the occult and philosophy, both ancient and modern, read over many years, were her essential background. We have also seen the influence, from outside the written word, of film, psychic experience, and ritual. H.D.'s "generic

roots," as Bakhtin would describe them stretch back (like Dostoevsky's) into antiquity and forward to the new popular culture of cinema (105-6).

Bakhtin's "serio-comical" generic umbrella proves a useful yardstick for works which transgress the classical genres. Carnival, he wrote "constantly assisted in the destruction of all barriers between genres, between self-enclosed systems of thought, between various styles..." (134). Although I shall not argue that *Helen in Egypt* is contained within the serio-comical, it has much in common with Bakhtin's new generic tradition and with some of the genres that he identifies with it. Firstly we should note that, in form, the serio-comical genres are "multi-styled" (108). *Mennippea* especially often includes both prose and poetic speech (118). Bakhtin shows how "epic and tragic distance" are destroyed in the serio-comical, both by the dialogical tradition (124, see below) and by deliberate parody (127). H.D. too is self-consciously aware of her own genre-bending, parodying heroic epic in the conversations between Theseus and Helen (see Chapter Five). Attention is also drawn in *Helen in Egypt* to Helen's "heroic voice" and "lyric voice" (176, 178).

Bakhtin stresses that characters in the serio-comical live in the "open-ended present" and process of the text (108). They are liberated from legend: the heroes of myth are "contemporized" and the relationship to legend is often "deeply critical, and at times even resembles a cynical exposé" (108). Both these factors apply to Helen to a degree, especially the sense of an open-ended process of the present. The past does haunt Helen, and there is a greater attachment of meaning to ancient myths than in Bakhtin's serio-comical. Nevertheless, Helen refuses to be contained by legend, and cultural perceptions conditioned by legend are critiqued in the poem.

The Bakhtinian genre of the serio-comical also specialises in psychic borderlines, in "the unusual, abnormal moral and psychic states of man ... insanity ..., split personality, unrestrained day-dreaming, unusual dreams" (116, 147). In my chapter on states of mind, we saw how Helen's state exists on the borders of madness, vision, and the supernormal, all discussed in terms of "dream." Bakhtin also emphasizes what he calls the "*crisis dream* ... the theme of a man's rebirth and renewal through a dream vision" enabling him to see a new way of living, even a paradise vision (152-3). The possibility of re-birth through mystical experience is persistently evoked in *Helen in Egypt*.

These psychic borderline states all contribute to the "unfinalized" quality of identity in the serio-comical and *menippea* (Bakhtin 117). This unfinalized self is especially characteristic of Helen as subject-in-process, as I have argued in Chapters One and Six. Bakhtin uses the evocative phrase about a Dostoevskian character, "he is not equal to himself," an especially appropriate phrase for the endlessly multiplying Helen of *Helen in Egypt* (163). Bakhtin draws particular attention to the dialogical relationship with the self in the serio-comical, especially the diatribe (in which the hero converses with an absent figure) (120). This dialogical relationship with the self breaks down the lyric, epic and tragic image of the "whole [wo]man" (120, see 154) Bakhtin also draws attention to the phenomenon of doubles (117, see 154). We have seen how the diatribe and the double dominate the portrayal of Helen in *Helen in Egypt*. She is painfully aware of both her own "other" voices, and the voices of others which might yet be her own (see Chapter Six). She is also, of course, endlessly doubled.

The serio-comical realm is also characterised by carnivalistic reversals, posing of oppositions, collapses of hierarchies and attempts to found new modes (Bakhtin 118, 115, 123). In *Helen in Egypt* we see Achilles and Paris fall from their roles of hero and king and the collapse of the hierarchy of the masculine iron-ring of war, giving way to the search for a new mode within the realm of the female Goddess. Innumerable oppositions posed in the person of Helen, from rich to poor, goddess to ghost, loved to loathed. In Dostoevsky, illogical love combinations form part of the carnivalistic spirit in his work (173). Troubadour loves are equally illogical. The relationship that is set up between Achilles and Helen is, by the standards of the world and their own histories, incongruous, but, in the mystical realm, it comes to make its own non-sensical sense.

Time, space and reason disappear in serio-comical genres. Carnival time, Bakhtin writes, is not "epic time," but finds room within itself for an "unlimited number of radical shifts and metamorphoses" (175-6). Time in *Helen in Egypt* is similarly elastic. Bakhtin notes how Dostoevsky concentrates on moments of crisis when "the moment loses its temporal restrictiveness" (149). In *Helen in Egypt* we have seen this happen again and again, although in this case, through meditation and supernormal experience. In space too Dostoevsky makes use of thresholds and public places, avoiding defined space (149). In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. creates similar limbo spaces, like the beach, the temple. Her thresholds are those between life and death, the lower and upper earth. Space functions

symbolically in both carnivalised texts and *Helen in Egypt*, often symbolising a transition from one state to another, "where one is renewed or perishes" (Bakhtin 169). This sense of the "fourth dimension" where the normal rules do not count is particularly reminiscent of *Helen in Egypt* in which H.D., like Dostoevsky, "often leaps over elementary empirical norms of verisimilitude and superficial rational logic as well" (Bakhtin 149-50). As Susan Friedman has succinctly said: "Space and time, reality and causality, are never established definitively" in *Helen in Egypt* (Genre 217).

Dialogue often takes place in the serio-comical genre on the threshold of an extreme situation. In the Socratic Dialogues, Bakhtin notes, an "extraordinary situation" is created to draw out of characters the "deepest layers of thought" (111). Bakhtin especially draws attention to the brink of death situation (111, 147) and the after-death situation (112, 116, 140), especially in the "Dialogues of the Dead" in which "people and ideas separated by centuries collide with one another on the dialogic plane" (112, see 140, 142). Although H.D.'s characters come from the same legendary era, as in Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*, they are not always the characters one expects to find speaking to one other. The whole of *Helen in Egypt* is an exploitation of the potential of the brink of death and after-death situation, as I have discussed in Chapter Two. We think particularly of Paris on his deathbed and Achilles and Helen meeting in the Egyptian post-death scenario.

Truth is dialogical in the serio-comical realm. The carnivalistic influence relativizes all that was "externally stable, set, and ready-made," revealing the unfinalized nature of human thought and routing ideas from their "self-enclosed hierarchical nesting places" (166-7). Socratic dialogue and, to some degree, the dramatic *agon* (see 125, 132), debates which I have already suggested as relevant to the dialogism of *Helen in Egypt*, contribute to the serio-comical refusal of "singleness of meaning" (132). The Socratic dialogue produced a new kind of hero, Bakhtin argues, the "hero-ideologist" or seeker for truth (111). At the basis of the genre of Socratic Dialogue is the "notion of the dialogic nature of truth, and the dialogic nature of human thinking about truth" (110). In Chapters One and Three, I drew attention to precisely the same questioning of "singleness of meaning" in *Helen in Egypt*, especially in the repeated questions based on the coordinates of veil and dream.

Oppositions were continually set up through this dialogical questioning, which Helen attempted to transcend through her mystical meditation. The "carnival image," writes Bakhtin, "strives to encompass and unite within itself both poles of becoming or both members of an antithesis: birth-death, youth-old age, top-bottom..." (176). In Dostoevsky this becomes a principle by which everything "lives on the very border of its opposite," especially love and hate (176):

Everything must be reflected in everything else, all things must illuminate one another dialogically. Therefore all things that are disunified and distant must be brought together at a single spatial and temporal 'point.' (177)

This single point reflects again the fourth dimensional visionary moment in *Helen in Egypt*.

As in *Helen in Egypt*, the questions that are contemplated in both Mennippean Satire¹⁴ and carnival are the "ultimate questions," especially those of life and death (115, 134). In Dostoevsky these questions include deliberations about the after-life (140) and the testing of the idea that nothing exists (151). Both these ideas are constant elements of the philosophical challenging of reality in *Helen in Egypt*. In the *menippea*, truth is tested through extreme and fantastic situations, often involving descent into the underworld where, it is not the character that is tested, but the idea (114-5). Similarly, in *Helen in Egypt*, the extreme situation brings to the fore "ultimate questions."

Bakhtin shows how human norms of morality and shame are put to the test in the serio-comical (152). Dostoevsky explores the position of the social outcast, hated by all, in his work (138). The exploration of guilt and judgement in *Helen in Egypt* through Helen's dialogical trials of the treatment of her fellow characters, especially Clytaemnestra, performs the same testing of social norms (see Chapter Two). The extreme situation of the final judgement is used to bring the question of cultural guilt to a head. Helen herself, like Clytaemnestra, is a hated figure who is given her voice in the poem.

Bakhtin emphasizes the roots of carnival in the "primordial thinking of man, and the fundamental basis of it in action (122). "It is syncretic pageantry of a ritualistic sort" in which "everyone is an active participant," he writes (122). Its participants "live in it" rather than perform it (122). Roles are lived out in, for example, the mock crowning and de-crowning of the king (124). This feeds in to carnivalistic literature, Bakhtin claims. This element of active role-playing,

based in ritual, is fundamental to the dialectical energy of *Helen in Egypt*, as we saw in Chapter Four. It lies behind the metamorphoses, including apotheoses, of the characters in *Helen in Egypt*, the shape-shifting element of the poem.

The activity of carnival is the *fundamental common ground* which bonds together the different sub-genres within Bakhtin's new genre of the serio-comical (160). Bakhtin, as we have seen, links carnival to dualistic images, images which are ultimately about death and re-birth (126-7). Fire, as in *Helen in Egypt* plays the role of both destroying and renewing in carnival (126). Bakhtin associates this with folk debates between life and death, winter and summer, darkness and light (132). He even briefly alludes to the Eleusinian Mysteries in his discussion of the Mystery Plays as carnivalistic (147). Here we come very close to H.D.'s emphasis on ritual and the Mysteries in *Helen in Egypt*.

However, *Helen in Egypt* is fundamentally pulled back from the carnivalistic spirit by its greater degree of both seriousness and unearthliness, the "eerie" feeling DuPlessis picks up in the poem (Thrall 416). Although the "mystical-religious element" is present in *menippea*, Bakhtin notes that it is always offset with "slum naturalism" (115). Everyday life, "slum naturalism" and "profanation" does not intrude in *Helen in Egypt*, as it does in both carnival and the *menippea* (115, 123, 153, 158). Although the hero is debased in *Helen in Egypt*, he is not "brought down to earth," as in Bakhtin's *menippea*, but remains in the strange limbo-land of the poem (133). While *Helen in Egypt* explores relativity, it is not the "jolly" relativity of the carnival (107, 132). Although there is some parody in *Helen in Egypt*, it is not to be compared with Menippean satire which is always comic and always parodies its own poetry and itself (114, 118, 142). Nor are the characters in *Helen in Egypt* tempered with eccentricity (150).

Ritual, rather than carnival (ritualistic as it may be), is the active process that underlies *Helen in Egypt*, and the sacred is not challenged or debased. Furthermore, the power of the personal past has an important, uncarnivalistic, presence in the poem. Bakhtin makes clear that carnivalistic texts are not concerned with the personal and the psychological asking *only* ultimate questions (134). Nevertheless, the many parallels that we can draw within these provisos about *Helen in Egypt* drive home its transcendence of the three "serious" genres in its mystical ancient-and-modern over-turning of the generic and social status quo.

The question of narrative structure is not one that especially concerns Bakhtin in his discussion of genre, although he does note the destruction of historical time in the serio-comical genre. In considering *Helen in Egypt* however, we must consider the "new" genre of the novel, for if it is not epic, lyric, or dramatic, perhaps we can read it as a narrative of a sort? Of course, we cannot, for *Helen in Egypt*, like E. M. Butler's *Silver Wings*, is a narrative that refuses to hang together, a detective novel which is never solved. The book was acknowledged by H.D. as an influence on *Helen in Egypt*; although most of her friends did not like the story, she read it "at least, ten times" (CF 21). The appeal for H.D. must surely have been its refusal to be a story. In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. plays the same game with her readers, continually reminding us of the unreliability of her own story.

Helen in Egypt creates a narrative which Genette would describe as being at the "limits of narrative's coherence" (109). Its ellipses are frequently "hypothetical," impossible to localise, and only understood afterwards by an analepsis that completes them (Genette 109). *Helen in Egypt* is also full of "repeating narratives" in which an account of something that happened only once is repeated several times, often with variations of point of view (Genette 115). This is also described by Genette as a central technique of the avant-garde (115). Often first person narratives reach a final convergence of time in which the narrator returns to the point where she/he began the story (Genette 221). In *Helen in Egypt* there is a mockery of this convention in which Helen returns to the beach in *Eidolon*, but once again, we do not know if this, or any event in the story, is actually happening or merely being remembered. Equally, there is a build up of tension toward the return to Troy, but once again, when we reach Troy, the story is utterly fragmented.

Helen in Egypt reaches outside the bounds of what Genette can describe in his narrative theory for one reason: *there is no coherent story behind the text*. Jonathan Culler, in his introduction to *Narrative Discourse*, makes clear that all classifications of narrative discourse are based on the underlying notion of reality, the belief that the story is based on certain events that "take place both in a particular order and a definable number of times," events in which the character either experiences things or not and "stands in a definable relationship to the events he recounts" (12). This assumption is completely overthrown in *Helen in Egypt*, defying Genette's self-defined "scientific effort" (Genette 263).

This overthrowal of narrative structure is based, in *Helen in Egypt*, on the multiplicity of stories in the poem, a multiplicity which is self-consciously exposed. There is a moment, when we read the first page of *Helen in Egypt*, when we think that we are going to be told a coherent, if alternative (Egyptian), narrative. Yet, when we look back we see that the prose voice never claimed that Stesichorus' story was to be the "plot" of the poem. It simply relates the legend, only the first of many. Just as "there is always another and another and another" Helen in the poem, so there is always another story. DuPlessis' statement about Helen's different selves, that they are presented as "not just a both/and of dualisms overcome, but a triple play of both/and/*and*," is just as relevant to the different stories themselves in the poem (*Career* 113). H.D.'s attraction to Pausanias' *Description of Greece* and Robert Graves' *Greek Myths* is interesting in this light, since both writers record every tale they hear in a mass of contradictory information.¹⁵

The multiple legends of the poem destroy any coherent sense of time, for the timings of events will never fit together: has it ever happened,/ or is it yet to come?" asks Helen about Clytaemnestra's story (69). The very fact that Helen's past includes "what I have taken years/ or centuries to experience," makes us aware of the unreliable past (*HE* 80). The prose voice makes merry nonsense of time when it says, "[s]he re-tells a story that may be in the future" (70). Above all however, the multiplicity of legends de-stabilises the notion of a "true story" in *Helen in Egypt*. "There were other stories," reminds the prose with reference to Paris' version of the death of Helen (129).

Roland Barthes, exploring Franz Kafka's technique, concludes that the only possible activity for the artist is to:

[E]xplore possible significations, each of which taken by itself will be only a (necessary) lie but whose multiplicity will be the writer's truth itself. (137)

The shifting explorations of multiple stories in *Helen in Egypt* suggest the same process, and the same recognition of the story as a lie. The very word "story" is used in such a way as to emphasize stories as fictive, even lying, activities: "is it all a story?" asks Helen of the Clytaemnestra legend (88). In an attack on his own central defining legend (the slaying of the minotaur) and his own previous telling of the tale, Theseus asks, "was he myth or fiction?" and "was it true, as I

argued afterwards,/ that I slew Egypt?" (169). A central question framed in the text from Theseus to Helen undermines our smug assumption that history tells the truth:

how do you know that?
can you read the past
like a scroll? (173)

Memory is just another form of unreliable history, both biased and uncertain. Helen is not even sure if Troy lasted seven years or ten (*HE* 235, 236). The "real" memory constantly changes and, conflicting with the equally unstable memories of others: "do I remember what you remember?" Theseus asks Helen (172).

Affirmation comes only in the process of the poem, in the movement of memory, in the enactment of roles, in mystical questing, and in the very destruction of the encapsualtion of legend. In *Eidolon* Book IV, in a poem that at first denies the significance of her questing process, Helen ends with an affirmation of the power of memory:

and the anger of Paris
was only a breath to fan the flame
of thoughts too deep to remember,

that break through the legend,
the fame of Achilles,
the beauty of Helen,

like fire
through the broken pictures
on a marble-floor. (258-9)

The "thoughts too deep to remember" are the very thoughts that she has dared to think which, like the carnivalistic or Heraclitan fire of destruction and renewal, have destroyed the old legends to repeatedly replace them with new, and again, with new.

The "serio-comical" characteristics of *Helen in Egypt*, its resistance to narrative structure, refusal of single meanings and, above all, its self-consciousness makes classification of any classical generic kind an impossibility. The very slipperiness of the poem however, our sense that perspective, order and representation are challenged by its unorthodox tricks with time and history, voice and identity, brings the poem within the realms of more recently coined

definitions of the avant-garde text. Even as we approach the idea of modernity, we must always be aware that much of what we call modern was associated by H.D. with ancient mysticism. She writes of Euripides:

There is a waywardly mystical tone in this classical writer as if he, like his hero-daemon or god-villain, had mixed time and space, played fast and loose himself with convention of here and now. (ION₉₃)

Nevertheless, aware of this balancing factor, I want to explore here the extent of the generic modernity of *Helen in Egypt*, taking Roland Barthes' and Julia Kristeva's definitions of the avant-garde text as my aides. I use particularly Barthes' idea of "text" as opposed to "work" and "writerly text" as opposed to "readerly text," and I draw also on the Kristevan concept of the semiotic, first introduced in Chapter Three. Barthes' definition of "text," as defined in "From Work to Text," is that it is "a methodological field," existing only in "the movement of a discourse" and "*experienced only in an activity of production*" (156-7). The text is text "for the reason that it knows itself as text" (157). Furthermore, the text has a "subversive force in respect of the old classifications" (157).

As a poem concerned with process, which self-consciously recognises itself as textual and which subverts old classifications, the modernity of *Helen in Egypt* is confirmed in Barthes' definition of text. Also in keeping with Barthes' definition of the "work," as we have often seen, the poem breaks its own boundaries into the wider field of H.D.'s *oeuvre*, and beyond:

[T]he text cannot stop (for example on a library shelf); its constitutive movement is that of cutting across (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works). (157)

We think here, not only of the continuum of H.D.'s wider work, but of the reach in *Helen in Egypt* toward other texts and, further, toward other media, notably drama, film, colour and music: the polyphony of voices and clash of the *agon*, the cinematic technique, the "blue world" and the repeated phrase and rhythm of the song.

In *S/Z*, Barthes clarifies the position of what he now distinguishes as the "writerly," as opposed to classical "readerly text," as regards the reader: "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (4). Thus, the writerly book exists in a "perpetual present" in which we are "*ourselves writing*," and hence it rejects

system, narrative structure, grammar, logic and genre (5,6). Such a text is "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one" (5). While "systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text," their "number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language" (6). The interpretation of it can only consist of "asserting the very existence of plurality" (6). Barthes stresses that no text can be completely plural or "polysemous" (6). The criteria of readerly and writerly can only be a continuum of "the *more or less* each text can mobilise" (5-6).

Helen in Egypt is certainly much more than "modestly plural," Barthes' description of "classical" texts such as Balzac's *Sarrasine* (which he goes on to analyse in *S/Z*). System, narrative structure, grammar, logic and genre are certainly challenged in the poem. The reader of the poem must assist in the production of meaning, for meanings and codes of reading (the psychoanalytical, the spiritual, the anthropological) are irreducibly plural in *Helen in Egypt*. Even when we adopt a reading code, the thread is always crossed with multiple other threads, so that we must always (consciously or unconsciously) choose our thread, creating our own reading in the strands we choose to follow. Each of our readings is then a re-writing, just as each of Helen's memories is a re-telling. As Barthes goes on to say, "these named meanings are swept toward other names" in a "metonymic labor": "I name, I un-name, I re-name: so the text passes" (*S/Z* 11). Our reading is forced to take account of this process.

We are pulled back however from the end of the continuum where the imaginary completely pluralised text lurks, for, at some levels, the poem is carefully designed to be read as an unfolding as well as a circling process. Certain threads are designed to be followed through. I am thinking especially of the thread of memory and the thread of the Mysteries. Although the patterns are multiple in *Helen in Egypt*, there are patterns among them which require a linear reading. As ever, however, these are counterbalanced. At the intertwined level of symbolism and visual imagery, the poem does not require linear reading. While the repeated lines in *Helen in Egypt*, reminiscent of H.D.'s poems on Sapphic fragments, and the repeated visual images, reminiscent of cinema, can be read within the linear processes of the poem, they can also work alone. Such phrases and images become almost floating signifiers in the poem and are free from definitive interpretation, in part, because of their very plurality.

The multiple and multiplying symbolising process in the poem is self-conscious: "*Again the veil motif*," says the prose voice" (138). Through Helen, ever-symbolised, a polished hieroglyph of others' perceptions, the poem is aware of its own powers of closure. Such closure is resisted: the sequence actively practices what Barthes defines in "From Work to Text" as "the infinite deferment of the signified" (158). We have only then the *hope* of a temporary transcendence, of an *original* magic lamp behind the substituted "new lamps for old" of the Aladdin story, an *original* word to work the magic of Ali Baba's "Open Sesame," and let us into the gleaming cave of treasure, and, even once we are in, how can we be sure that the images we see are not Plato's cave-shadows, reflections, again, of the ever-deferred original? We cannot, of course, be sure, and so the poem is flooded with waves of symbolising (be they lilies or veils), waves that we can throw ourselves on and ride at any stage.

So we can take our "pleasure," in the Barthian sense, or our joy (*jouissance*, as Kristeva would say), of the text, lingering on whatever linguistic or occult echoes we may choose (see Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*). Here we are again close to Kristeva's eroticised semiotic, and, hence, to the *sound* of *Helen in Egypt*. We have already identified places in the text, especially the play on the names of goddesses, where *Helen in Egypt* seems to be motivated by the drives of the Kristevan chora (Chapter Three). However, the places mentioned were not many. Where on the level of Kristeva's continuum of poetic language can we site *Helen in Egypt*? To what extent has it escaped into the free babble of the semiotic?

At first glance, *Helen in Egypt* appears to be a highly structured text. Its three line stanzas however, perhaps echoing Dante's *terza rima*, do not obey any scheme as rigorous as his eleven syllable line and strict rhyme scheme. The poem certainly escapes the "tragic legions of set lines that fell like black armies with terrific force" and "broke like a black sea to baffle and to crush" (*PIT* 11). Norman Pearson, receiving the book in instalments, admired the "sense of freedom" in the lines of *Leuké* Book II: "the differences in lengths of line, stanza form, and the rest, which float or are a little jagged, swirling" (11 November, 1953). As Pearson's comments suggest, H.D. used the check of the stanza form (rather as she used myth and legend) as a base from which to improvise. In *Helen in Egypt*, she is most at ease with her distinctive free verse line characterised by its echoing sound-play and its flexible variability of length,

able to wax and wane to encompass and express silence, rhetoric and emotion. Yet, this is an old line, a line which she was already developing, and May Sinclair was already praising, in the nineteen-twenties:

The *vers libristes* have revived the trick of beautiful assonance as a substitute for rhyming.... Is it not more satisfying than the tight, clipping, recurrent rhyme? It is a hint, a dawn of rhyme that hangs back, letting the rhythm pass on till the one closing rhyme clinches all. (465)

Helen in Egypt is written to be said aloud, or perhaps, as H.D. recited it, to be chanted. Avoiding the heroic regular crash of the epic sea, as evoked in *Paint It Today*, it re-creates a gentle, irregular "lap-lap" of the Euripidean chorus as sea (see Prelude). The sea ends *Helen in Egypt* as indefinable, as simply rhythmic or semiotic, as it began: "its beat and long reverberation,/ its booming and delicate echo" (304). For the Greek audience, the chorus' "words ... were hardly intelligible to the audience, the rhythms, the metres were more important," H.D. wrote in her discussion of Euripides' *Helen* (NEPGLP I:Helen 11). Ultimately, regardless of all possible analyses, the rhythm, the repetition and the assonance carries her poem too, displacing the epic idea that the story should, alone, carry the poem.

Involved as we are, as readers, in the production of meaning in *Helen in Egypt*, if we *choose* to forget the prose and to listen to, rather than to interpret, the poetry, the dialectical debate and grand issues become lulled or perhaps submerged in the tides of semiotic sound. As any "conclusion" to *Helen in Egypt* must inevitably do, this brings us back to the borders of ancient and modern, for H.D. would have seen such chanting, and the trance invoked, as the sound, not of the semiotic text, but of the rites of antiquity.

*I was to have told a story or set a scene
of a blue world
I will tell it in my own time, in my own way.*

NOTES

PRELUDE

1 The "Autobiographical Notes" are a brief unpaginated record of significant events in H.D.'s life prepared, Susan Friedman suggests, for Pearson in 1949 (*Web* 18).

2 This production took place at the University of Pennsylvania. See Carpenter (n.p.) for a photograph of Ezra Pound as a maiden of the chorus.

3 H.D., letter to Gemma D'Auria, qtd. in Guest 20 (no date given). I was unable to read H.D.'s early correspondence during my visit to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University and am therefore reliant on Barbara Guest's citations in *Herself Defined*. Letter references in the rest of this thesis for the later period of H.D.'s life before and during the writing of *Helen in Egypt* are precise, as I was able to read these manuscripts *in situ*.

4 *Tanglewood Tales* (by Nathaniel Hawthorne) was also mentioned as important and originary by H.D. in a letter to Thomas Burnett Swann, 8 February, 1960, qtd. in Swann 10.

5 This was not all the reading that Pound brought for H.D.: his "avalanche" included Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Shaw, "Yogi books," Swedenborg, Balzac and Hilaire Belloc's translation of *The Romance of Tristram and Iseult* (ETT 23, 45-6). While Indian philosophy, the legend of Tristan and Iseult, and Dante (see Rossetti's translation of *La Vita Nuova* [Rossetti 325-85]) were to prove important to H.D., when first left to her own devices in England, it was the Greek that she pursued. Pound's ideas about the troubadours, hatched during these years, are also significant (see Chapter Five).

6 In this, H.D. may seem to have rejected her Christian upbringing, however she was soon to integrate Christianity into her own syncretist spirituality.

7 Rosalind Carroll discusses the significance of the lily as a lesbian symbol in Flower 13-16.

8 See David Roessel's "H.D.'s Troy: Some Bearings" for an interesting argument that scholars' comparative neglect of Helen after the discovery of Troy might have been a spur to H.D. to write *Helen in Egypt*. Roessel argues that the theory that Helen was an ancient tree spirit was a denial of her "reality" -- I argue (in Chapter One) that this theory fascinated H.D. as much as all other theories about Helen and that she was particularly inspired by the questioning, rather than affirming, of Helen's reality (Roessel 38).

9 H.D. was later to own W.R. Paton's translation of the whole anthology (there is a copy in the part of H.D.'s library held at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library), but the five volumes of his edition were not published in the *Loeb Classical Library* series until 1915-18. She probably used J.W. Mackail's translation, two copies of which (1911 and 1938 editions) are among her books, in these early days (Smyers, *Classical* 21).

10 In the "*Troy-town taken*" of *Helen in Egypt* we hear an old echo of Rossetti's chorus, "O Troy's down,/ tall Troy's on fire!" (9-12).

11 H.D. would also have been interested in Landor's work on Dante, especially *Pentameron* (1837), in which Boccaccio and Petrarch discuss Dante, and *Imaginary Conversations: Italian* (1846).

12 Pound did not see it quite this way, regarding *The Green Helmet* as placing Yeats in the "same movement" as himself, a book in "[t]he spirit of new things" (Letters to Margaret Cravens, 30 June, 1910 and 27, November, 1910, Pound and Spoo 41 and 61). Nonetheless, the early influence of the Pre-Raphaelites on Yeats cannot be denied, and H.D. clearly saw a connection.

13 These might have been social occasions organised by Pound who, in 1913, lived in the same house as H.D. and Aldington, or she might have attended Yeats' "Tuesday evenings" at home.

14 This review remained unpublished until the 1987-8 "H.D. Special Issue" of *Agenda* where Gary Burnett puts its "earliest probable date" of composition as 1916.

15 In 1946-7 she wrote "The White Rose and the Red" (unpublished), a tribute to Morris' Pre-Raphaelite circle. See *HDDA* for a brief account of this book (194-6). As the years went by, it was more for Morris' esoteric interests that she valued him than for any influence on her work (see *HDDA* as above). Her re-discovery of Yeats in later years (she read his *Autobiographies* in 1955, the year of its publication [CF 90-3]) was also more to do with his experiments in the paranormal than his ideology or poetics.

16 For a discussion of the effect of this attitude on H.D.'s literary reputation see Friedman, Buried and Collecott, Remember and Memory.

17 See Moody 81-2 for more detailed discussion of this.

18 Roessel notes that in April 1914 the Allies were actually fighting on the site of Troy (40-1).

19 Aldington's "To Helen" appeared in *The Dial* on 6, June 1918.

20 In *Asphodel*, Bryher is portrayed as summoning H.D. back to the Greek at a time of crisis – a war-time pregnancy and uncertainty about the future (167-9). Hermione's relinquishing of the Greek is seen in this passage as an escape, the direct opposite to Bush's view.

21 Collecott, Inversion 236-258, 253. This essay also elucidates the biographical context of the poem.

22 In *Paint It Today* the Pound character condemns Midget and Fayne (the H.D. and Frances characters), declaring that they would have been burnt as witches at Salem (9).

23 Important new editions of *The Greek Anthology* (1915-18), translated by W.R. Paton, and the *Lyra Graeca* (1922-27), translated by J.M. Edmonds, came out in the *Loeb Classical Library* during her first decade of serious writing.

24 Stesichorus too, whom H.D. was to invoke at the beginning of *Helen in Egypt*, survives in only a very few brief fragments.

25 In "A Note on Poetry" she actually describes her own poems as "fragments" and then "finished fragments" (71, 73).

26 Letter to John Cournos, summer 1916, qtd. in Guest 79 (no full date).

27 Yeats also connected creation with the subconscious and, interestingly, used the term "daimon" with reference to his spirit/subconscious. When a friend in a trance gives him a message through a symbolic personality, he believes it is from "my own daimon, my own buried self" (*Autos*. 371).

28 This letter was printed by Pearson, with emmendations, as a "Note on Poetry" in the *Oxford Anthology of American Literature* (1938). I quote here from the original letter, edited by Diana Collecott, and published in the *Agenda* "H.D. Special Issue."

29 This poem was first published and glossed by Adalaide Morris in the *Iowa Review* "H.D. Centennial Issue" 150-63.

30 Perhaps DuPlessis' term, "epigrams" is more appropriate (*Career* 39).

31 H.D. owned copies of Farnell's *The Cults of the Greek States* (1896) (which she dated 1919 and annotated heavily) and *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality* (1921), both now in the Beinecke Library's collection of her books. She was familiar with the ideas of Frazer whose *Golden Bough* was published between 1890 and 1915 (see *TF* 182). It is difficult to establish whether or not she read Harrison (whose most famous books, the *Prolegomena* and *Themis*, were first published in 1903 and 1912). There is a remarkably close relationship between their ideas and interests. Swann suggests H.D. did know Harrison's work, but gives no evidence of this (8). H.D. might have discovered Harrison through Gilbert Murray: he quotes Harrison in *Euripides and His Age* and in his 1914 lecture on Hamlet and Orestes. A. W. Verrall, whose translation of *Ion* H.D. read, refers warmly to Harrison in his preface (7-8). Whether H.D. read her or not, Jane Harrison's ideas were definitely a part of the cultural climate of the time. See also Gilbert Murray's *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (mentioned in note 41 below).

32 Ogilvie insists that spiritualism was merely a "language" used by Dowding to convey his ideas about special powers as a whole (12). Nonetheless, we do know that spiritualism was important to H.D. (see the unpublished novel, *The Sword Went Out to Sea*).

33 Moody puts forward a clear case for the re-assessment of Imagism as a whole, bearing in mind the "paganism" H.D. shared with Pound at its inception (88-9). See also Gregory, Rose 538-50 for a reading (which I cannot do justice to here) of *Sea Garden* as a whole, as a book of "ritual intent" (538). Gregory also shows how the androgynous anonymous "characters" of *Sea Garden* can be read as spirits or nameless gods for whom the pursuer longs (Gregory, Rose 537, 542-3; see esp. "Pursuit" and "The Cliff Temple" [CP 11-2, 26-8]). The love poem as embodiment of mystic longing was to prove a lifelong fascination for H.D. (see Chapter Five).

34 A forty page account of her "recent writing" prepared for Pearson in 1949-50, first published, introduced by Adalaide Morris, in the *Iowa Review* *H.D. Centennial Issue*, 1986.

35 In *The Gift*, H.D. suggests the child watching drama understands that all drama is intrinsically and originally religious: to Hilda, watching a play is "like being in church" and the (inevitably) older narrator records that "it was the very dawn of art" (16, 18). Hilda is also able to slip into the role she has seen acted on stage and concludes that "a play and to play were the same" (19).

36 This work was, Susan Friedman suggests, written between 1916-1920 (Web 361). In her "Author's Note" to *NEPGLP*, H.D. writes, "The EURIPIDES section was assembled in part before 1918, but was not finished until some years later." The third section covers Meleager, Theocritus, Anacreon and Sappho. The text is not published as a whole, however the translations from *The Bacchae* and *Ion*, an article on Pausanias ("People of Sparta") and the Sappho piece (renamed "The Wise Sappho") have been published, all with some emmendations.

37 The Helen piece is entitled "Helen in Egypt," although Euripides' play is called simply *Helen*. It is the only one which does not include translations of passages from the Euripides text, being pure visualisation and reflection.

38 The representation of Helen in this text is discussed at greater length in Chapter One.

39 An interesting side issue in relation to the development of H.D.'s thought is the attitudes of the two men to the East. In an earlier article on "Anti-Hellenism" Aldington shows his prejudice against the "sensuous barbarian Eastern races" for their "corruption" of pure Hellenism and compares the current interest in "Egyptian things," "Indian things," and Buddhism, to "the strange religious cults professed in Rome at the time of Claudius" (35, 36). Pound, in his "Caressability of the Greeks," mocks this attitude, pointing out that each culture produces its own "masterpieces," strange as this might seem to "Victorian or Pateresque culture" (117). This last comment shows up the Britishness, as well as the nineteenth-century aspect, of Aldington's Hellenism. Once more, H.D. has more in common with Pound's attitudes than Aldington's here. Her work will very soon begin to show the influence of "Egyptian things," "Indian things," and Buddhism. See esp. Chapters Two and Five.

40 Having said this, "Paterine sentimentalesque Hellenism" is a rather harsh judgement of Aldington's Hellenism, set out by Aldington himself in "Anti-Hellenism." Although he defends the sculptors against Pound, his own literary Hellenism is characterised above all by a Theocritan love of "simple beauties" (Anti. 35).

41 H.D. was familiar with both Gilbert and Margaret Murray work. In her remaining library we find Gilbert Murray's translation of *Hippolytus; Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy; The Five Stages of Greek Religion* (which she reviewed) and *Aristophanes. A Study*. H.D. quotes from *Euripides and his Age* at the beginning of her *Ion*. There are also copies of Margaret Murray's *Ancient Egyptian Legends* and *Egyptian Religious Poetry*. See also H.D., letter to Thomas Burnett Swann, 8 February, 1960 in which she says she read "Gilbert Murray's prose rather than his poetry" (qtd. in Swann 10).

42 Letter to Bryher, Winter, 1934/5, qtd. in Guest 219 (no exact date).

43 This is probably Leconte de Lisle's translation -- there is a copy in the collection of H.D.'s books at the Beinecke Library, Yale University.

44 The B.B.C. confirms this date. The broadcast was not in 1956, as Guest states (312).

45 This is a fictionalisation of H.D.'s stay in Cornwall with Cecil Gray in 1918.

46 Brown's "A Filmography for H.D." provides a useful list of early films (identified partly from references in her writing) that he believes H.D. saw (20-1).

47 Kenneth Macpherson had been H.D.'s lover since 1925 and Bryher's husband since 1927.

48 In Chapter Four I discuss the relevance of filmic techniques to *Helen in Egypt*.

49 Although this was H.D.'s first visit to Greece she seems to have regarded her visit to Capri in 1912 with Richard Aldington as a first introduction to Greece because of its association with the *Odyssey* and its island status -- an interesting and typical conflation of the literary and the geographical (Note 73).

50 "Schliemann said Atlantis is Crete," she notes. This was Paul Schliemann, grandson of Heinrich, whose claim is generally agreed to be a hoax (de Camp 13-14). Nevertheless, H.D. was fascinated by Atlantis, which figures in several works, including *Trilogy* in which it is portrayed as the central island of the "Islands of the Blest" (see *CP* 601).

51 H.D. had heard about archaeological excavations in Egypt and Crete before visiting these places, from Peter Rodeck who had worked on both sites and whom she met on the boat out to Greece in 1920 -- see Chapter Three for further mention of this meeting. H.D. had probably also consulted Bryher's copy of Ronald M. Burrows' book, *The Discoveries in Crete* (1907), inscribed 1913 (Smyers, *Classical* 17).

52 Qtd. in Guest 156 (no date given).

53 This is not to say that H.D., and Bryher too, did not make connections between the coastlines and the flowers of Greece and Cornwall and California, as the *Bid Me to Love* passage above suggests. See Collecott, *Images* 158 for further discussion of this. It was in California that H.D. wrote the Pausanius section of "Notes on Euripides, Pausanius and Greek Lyric Poets" (AN).

54 From H.D.'s notebook account of "Hellenic Cruise -- 1932" (AN).

55 These include C.M. Bowra's *The Greek Experience* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1958); Baldson's *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (London, Bodley Head, 1969); Franz Cumont's *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York, Dover, 1960) and the Quennells' *Everyday Things in Homeric Greece* (London, B.T. Batsford, 1929) (Smyers, *Classical* 15-25).

56 Later in her discussion of Pausanius, H.D. describes herself as one of "those who care for what they may not see," mentioning the Eleusinian Mysteries that Pausanius intended to write about, until he was prevented from doing so by a vision (*NEPGLP*: II:Sea 3).

57 Not many individual poems are dated in this text which suggests that H.D. regarded the "Morpheus poems" as a significant poetic sequence. Choruses XI-XIII first appeared in *The European Caravan. An Anthology of the New Spirit in European Literature* (1931).

58 Gary Burnett discusses this in depth with reference to "Hymen" in Chapter Three of *Image*.

59 See Walsh, Flash 139-41 for a discussion of the relationship to Euripides' original texts of *Hippolytus Temporizes* and *Ion*.

60 One Sapphic poem was published in *Hymen* (1921) (CP 131-2) and four in *Heliodora* (1924) (CP 165-8, 173-5, 181-4, 187-9). There are also three "Sapphics" unpublished in H.D.'s lifetime, of which "Amaranth" and "Envy" (CP 310-15, CP 319-21) are revisions of earlier poems and "Eros" is new (CP 315-19).

61 See Gregory, Rose for further discussion of this piece (esp. 534).

62 I shall be referring to both the prose and poetic works of the 'thirties and 'forties in the main body of the thesis, where relevant.

63 Unless otherwise indicated, all letters referred to are held in the "Norman Holmes Pearson Collection," Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

64 Letter to Bryher, Winter, 1934/5, qtd. in Guest 219 (no exact date)

65 Might H.D. be responding, as Diana Collecott implies, to Douglas Bush' *Mythology and the Romantic Imagination* which was published the same year she wrote her "Note on Poetry" (Memory 66).

66 See BMTL 48 for a description of Rafe (modelled on Aldington) kicking books around the floor after an air-raid.

67 Perhaps there is also here a veiled criticism of the task Pearson has set her to name times and places.

CHAPTER ONE

1 Jerry Clack has put forward the unprovable but plausible belief that H.D. might also have drawn on the memory of a production of the Strauss/Hofmannsthal opera, *Die ägyptische Helen* (which she could have seen whilst in analysis with Freud in 1933). This opera would have brought to the fore similar themes taken up in *Helen in Egypt* as those influenced by Goethe and Euripides (29-30).

2 H.D. might also have been aware of Goethe's translation of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1787).

3 Guest also remarks on the relevance of this book, and notes that E.M. Butler visited H.D. in 1949 (290-1).

4 H.D. would have known another Helen in confusion about her state. In Landor's "imaginary conversation" between Achilles and Helena, Helen is wafted out of Troy by Thetis and Aphrodite, at Achilles' plea, to meet Achilles on Mount Ida (vol.1 1-5). (Pater) seems to draw here on the Cyprian lay which relates how "Achilles desires to see Helen, and Aphrodite and Thetis contrive a meeting between them" (*Cypria* 495). Thetis is also of course the match-maker between Achilles and Helen in *Helen in Egypt*. In Landor, Helen's first words on seeing Achilles are, "Where am I?," closely followed by "Was it a dream?" (1).

5 *Faust* II, 11. 8838. This is Butler's translation (234) -- Philip Wayne has wraith (171).

6 Clytaemnestra was to have played a more important role in *Helen in Egypt* as Helen's double or "shadow sister," as the drafts of *Helen in Egypt* held at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, indicate. See Chapter Four, note 38.

7 Just as the philosophical seriousness of Euripides' *Helen* has been neglected in favour of regarding the play as a comedy or romance, so the comic aspect of this recognition scene has been neglected by H.D. scholars in favour of the earnest discussion of questions of identity.

8 The veil is inextricably connected to H.D.'s portrayal of Helen: Helen wore veils in H.D.'s account of Euripides' *Helen*, as she does on the Walls at Troy in *Helen in Egypt* (NEPGLP I:Helen 5). When his Helen sinks into the Underworld in Goethe's *Faust*, Faust is left holding only her veil (210). See Chapter Five for further discussion of the veil.

9 Isocrates' *Helen* sets out to praise Helen for her beauty and power, rather than exonerate her, so is less relevant here.

10 In Herodotus' version the war is fought literally for nothing, as there is no Helen (not even an *eidolon*) in Troy at all, but the Greeks do not believe this, although the Trojans tell them so.

11 The latter plea of Aphrodite's powers of persuasion is the one Helen makes to Achilles in Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* (vol. 1 4).

12 Classicists do not know whether Euripides had read Gorgias. Butler mentions Goethe's Euripidean sources, *The Trojan Women* and *Helen*, in her *Fortunes of Faust* (234). H.D. already knew both plays of course, but Butler might have reminded her of the relevance of particularly the *Trojan Women*. H.D. read this play again before writing *Helen in Egypt* and particularly notes the *agon* scene in her notebook for *Helen in Egypt*.

13 Significantly in *Helen in Egypt*, an alternative to Patroclus' death as the cause of Achilles entering battle is proposed: Achilles is said to have made a bargain with Thetis that he will fight if she allows a swift return for him -- his power on the battlefield is said to be hers (247-50).

14 Sukuki's book, *Metamorphoses of Helen*, in which she interprets the figure of Helen through Homer, Virgil, Spenser and Shakespeare, has been an inspiring background for my own reading of H.D.'s Helen.

15 Clader ascribes this to the heroic nature of the poem, stressing that it is important that the heroes die for glory alone, and therefore Helen must be unworthy.

16 The name Midget may relate to the Midget of Walter de la Mare's *Memoirs of a Midget*, published the same year as H.D. was writing *Paint It Today* (1921). In this novel an actual midget is similarly enslaved by a fascinating dark woman, Fanny. The novel was a favourite of H.D.'s (Dobson 32).

17 See Roche 101 for further discussion of the madonna and the whore in *Trilogy*.

18 This line echoes Midget's words in *Paint It Today* about the enthralling, dangerous Josepha: "It was not that the girl Josepha, was beautiful..." (8).

19 Although this is mainly the Greek perception, there are elements of this demonic Helen in Paris' account in *Leuké* of a "vibrant, violent Helen" (125).

20 This passage has been taken (from Herodotus onwards) to suggest that Homer did know about Helen's stay in Egypt, but simply chose not to use that legend.

21 We remember Selene, whose tale is briefly told in *Helen in Egypt*, killed by her desire to see Zeus, Helen's father.

22 H.D. would have been familiar with this notorious myth from an early age since it featured in the *Tanglewood Tales* (G 39).

23 There is perhaps a note of ambiguity though in his comment that "Helen, having become, if she was not born, a goddess, is made to work the same tree magic" (31-2).

24 See Graves, *Goddess* 261-2 for discussion of the apple as sacred to Aphrodite.

25 Interestingly, Marius also envisages the Euripidean chorus as "bird-women" or "cold bird-spirits" (16). Midget in *Paint It Today* is also portrayed as a small bird (4, 6).

26 We can read this as a spiritual allegory, as well as in its own terms (see Chapter Five).

27 Scholars have suggested that the worship of Helen with her brothers is related to the cult, Indo-European in origin, based on the fertility myth of the Sun-princess and the Dioscuri (Clader 69-82). However, here, Helen receives immortality after Troy.

28 See the section of Chapter Four entitled "the sister dyad" for discussion of the sister motif in *Helen in Egypt*, and evidence that H.D. felt she had neglected the sister in the poem.

29 We are reminded again of the *Ion*. When Kreousa is transformed becoming "Kreousa the goddess" the commentator asks, "The price? Kreousa the woman" (77-8).

30 The name Cytheraea evolves from the name of the goddess local to the island of Cythera. She is one of the three Korai or maidens from whom Aphrodite is said to descend. Cythera became a centre of worship for the goddess.

31 We shall see this "stable ego" Helen again in my discussion of state of mind and memory in the second part of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

1 Duncan, Challenge 32.

2 See Chapter Six for discussion of Thetis as Muse.

3 This interest seems to have dated quite far back, at least to the 'twenties, for in *Palimpsest*, Helen Fairwood remarks to Rafton that Isis and Aphrodite are the same goddess (177).

4 Bryher owned this book in the Robert Graves translation quoted here (Smyers, Classical 16). H.D. would almost certainly have read it, given her interest in Graves. It might well have been among the parcel of books H.D. thanks Bryher for on 16 October 1952. Her notes on this particular passage could however come from Graves who quotes it in *The White Goddess*, describing it as "the most comprehensive and inspired account of the goddess in all ancient literature" (70-3).

5 Harrison believes that the maidens, who originally had mothers, lose them in order to become trinities with their fellow *korai* (*Proleg.* 289). In *Helen in Egypt*, as we shall see, Helen becomes a daughter figure, having lived through three goddess-manifestations.

6 In *The Sword Went Out To Sea* H.D. relates the three goddesses to Love and to her personal "intricate pattern": the Moon brought her a dream of Love; the "goddess of the Parthenon" [Athene] brought justice, "a victory of Love," and Love had "tempered the arrows of madness," leaving her again well, "the quivering balance ... level and at rest" (218).

7 Although H.D. draws so extensively on myth and secondary material, this creative attitude to her divinities reminds us of her memoir-novel, *The Gift* in which she describes the children of her family making models for Christmas-time: "we created Him as He had created us, we created Him as children will, out of odds and ends ... we knew our power" (31). H.D.'s "odds and ends" are her wide-ranging reading and fragmentary notes from which she pieces together her own pantheon.

8 This book, along with *The Wisdom of the Chinese* and *The Wisdom of the Egyptians*, is among H.D.'s books held at the Beinecke Library, Yale University. Inscriptions indicate that Bryher gave these books to H.D. in 1922-3, indicating her early interest in the East. Other books on Hinduism (including the *Bhagavadgita*, given to her by Pearson in 1932) are to be found among H.D.'s books, but she appears to have become more interested in Buddhism than Hinduism, perhaps in the forties – see below.

9 Graves suggests that Thetis was one of fifty nereids chosen to marry Zeus, who, at Hera's insistence, was married to Peleus instead (*Goddess* 128). He associates this myth with a ritual at the shrine of the "Moon-goddess Artemis, alias Nereus, or Thetis, at Ioclus" in Thessaly where of fifty priestesses, one was chosen to represent the goddess every fiftieth month (*Goddess* 128). Thetis becomes Artemis, "Moon-goddess" in *Leuké* (HE 193, see above).

10 See Gregory, Thetis. In this telling piece, Gregory shows how the second part of the *Hymen* "Thetis" draws directly on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and how, in the Ovidian context, the poem forms a part of H.D.'s reflections on rape and virginity in *Hymen* as a whole.

11 Whitman reads the scene in the *Iliad* in which Aphrodite forces Helen to bed with Paris as simply Helen's own feelings given the name Aphrodite (223-5). The scene, Whitman suggests, "follows with infallible precision the psychology in the woman's mind with its three phases of temptation, disgust and finally fear" (224).

12 The parcel of books that H.D. thanks Bryher for on 16 October 1952 included "Murray, G. & M." – H.D. describes the "little Egyptian books" as "treasures." Margaret Murray's *Ancient Egyptian Legends* (1920) and *Egyptian Religious Poetry* (1949) are both in the Bryher Library (Smyers, Classical 21). Later in *Helen in Egypt* the "vulture-helmet" of the goddess is referred to. This was worn by the Queens of Egypt in ancient iconography (Watterson, 36-7).

13 H.D. owned over ten books by Budge on Egypt and Egyptian religion, literature and hieroglyphs, some now in the Beinecke and some in the Bryher Library (see Smyers, Classical and Books).

14 Graves reminds his reader of this scene in *The White Goddess* and gives details of Hecate as "mother of witches" and a dominant figure in British witch-cults (*Goddess* 194, 200, 400-1). H.D. notes in her note-book for *Helen in Egypt*: "Nephthys – Egyptian Hecate." Nephthys is of course Isis' twin.

15 Farnell finds this goddess' associations with sorcery and magic so extreme, that he suggests she could not have been Greek in origin at all, but Thessalonian or Phrygian-Thracian (*Cults*, vol.2 505, 507). He sees her worship as "one of the evil things that grew up into prominence with the decline of Hellenism" (519). We are reminded of Aldington's attitude to the East – see Prelude, note 39.

16 Paul Friedrich's *The Meaning of Aphrodite* has provided a useful background to this chapter. Friedrich mentions H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* as an "inspired and suggestive literary statement" of the view that Isis was a major source for the semitic and Minoan goddesses and for Aphrodite (213 n.8).

17 Friedman, *Web* 362.

18 He is occasionally called simply God (*HE* 283).

19 Formalhaut is a star of first magnitude.

20 The Theban god, Amen, took on the qualities of the older Egyptian gods, including Ra, the sun-god, with the rise to power of the priests of the Amen-cult at Karnak, at its peak during the XVIII Dynasty (see Budge, *Heaven* vol 3 18). As with the Greek goddess in *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. incorporates the shifting history of the gods in *Trilogy*.

21 H.D. herself elevated her own ancient and modern "heroes" to semi-sacred status. In her reflections on Pausanias she describes the young victors of the Isthmus Games as "brothers of the Dioscuri, brothers to Perseus and Heracles ... sacred beings" for their physical and intellectual prowess (*NEPGLP* II: "Megara", 2). H.D., while acknowledging here that the victors are god-like only after their noble deeds, insists that they have a sacred character.

22 See also Pausanias vol. 2, III:xx:8, 129-30 and xxiv:5, p153 for descriptions of two Laconian sanctuaries of Achilles.

23 In her poem "The Master," based on her relationship with Freud, H.D. continues this argument with Freud when she writes, insisting on an afterlife for the "Master," "O God,/ let there be some surprise in heaven for him" (CP 452). The "surprise", for Freud, would be heaven itself.

24 This passage forms part of an evocative portrayal of a child's meditation on death.

25 She also owned a facsimile of the British Museum papyri of the *Book of the Dead*. See Smyers, Classical 16-17 for reference to both books.

26 See *The Sword Went Out To Sea* and the poem, "R.A.F." (CP 485-492). See Friedman, *Psyche* 172-5 for an account of H.D.'s spiritualism, and Ogilvie for a critique of this account.

27 Ogilvie describes the Dowding circle with which H.D. was involved during the war as concerned with the "Atlantean Theme," the "yearning for 'Westernness,' 'Tartessus,' Isles of the Blest, Hesperides, Cities of the Sun..." (10-11).

28 Augustine, East 2. This book belonged to Bryher. Buddhism seems to have been a shared interest of the two women: some of the Buddhist books in Augustine's list are owned by Bryher, others (such as Alice Getty's *The Gods of Northern Buddhism* [1914]) by H.D., and some are not inscribed at all. In the forties, H.D. was interested in Tibet: she refers to the "priests of Tibet" in the 1943 poem "Ancient Wisdom Speaks" (CP 482) and in 1945, she wrote to Silvia Dobson, asking whether Silvia had read James Hilton's *Lost Adventure* (1936) and adding, "I have got rather Tibet-minded -- but it's too much of a trip and very dangerous" (Dobson 33). Given H.D.'s interest in both Tibet and the afterlife, it seems unlikely that she would not have read the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and she certainly would have known of the Tibetan doctrine of re-birth.

29 Interestingly, Egyptian funeral artists sometimes depicted paradise as "Islands of the Blest", as well as "Fields of Peace" (Budge, *Heaven*, vol. 3, preface 8).

30 Later texts replace Ra's boat with Amen-Ra's boat. See note 16. This summary is based on the *Per-Em-Hru* ("The Book of Coming Forth by Day" or the "Theban Recension of the Book of the Dead") in Budge, *Dead*, and the *Am Tuat* and the "Book of Gates" in Budge, *Heaven*.

31 Friedman, *Web* 363.

32 The following summary draws on Richardson's essay, "Early Greek Views about Life after Death."

33 Even in Homer some heroes have special treatment: Menelaus, for example, is told that he will go to the Elysian plain where Rhadamanthys lives because he was married to Helen, and Odysseus is promised immortality by Calypso if he will stay with her (*Ody.* 79, 91).

34 Herodotus however claims that the Egyptians were the first to believe in reincarnation, the mysteries stating that, in a three thousand year period of transmigration, the soul makes the round of all living things before becoming a human again (vol. 1, II:123, 425). There was an esoteric tradition of reincarnation then in all three of the cultures mentioned here, always related to the Mysteries in Greece and Egypt, but in Tibet, a universal conviction.

35 Robert Graves (in 1955) conflated Pausanias' account with Philostratus' to form a vivid picture of the heroes of the Trojan War relating tales of their great deeds to each other: "But some say that there is another Fortunate Isle called Leuce in the Black Sea, opposite the mouths of the Danube, wooded and full of beasts, wild and tame, where the ghosts of Helen and Achilles hold high revelry and declaim Homer's verses to heroes who have taken part in the events celebrated by him" (Graves, *Myths* I, 121).

36 "Achilles `marries' Helen on the island of Leuké, according to one tradition," wrote H.D. to Norman Holmes Pearson on 11 May, 1953.

37 This is actually a misquote – Aesop says "amaranth" in Landor (vol.1 15). See Spoo 15-16 for a discussion of the relevance of the Landor quote and its context to *Asphodel*.

38 Smyers, Classical 16. H.D. also owned Bowra's *On Greek Margins*.

39 According to the OED, the word caravel is derived from the Greek *karabos*, meaning "horned beetle," as well as "light ship." The caravel is related then to the familiar sacred image of the Egyptian scarab beetle, a connection perhaps known to H.D., although not referred to in the letter quoted.

40 Such a state is common to H.D.'s earlier female protagonists, and is often the result of male attitudes to their mental and emotional dissociation through trauma, often associated with war. See especially Hipparchia in *Palimpsest* who is persistently regarded as a phantom by Marius (11, 16, 26, 31, 64-5).

41 I trace the moment of revelation of Achilles' death in detail in Chapter Four.

42 The *ka* is often accompanied by it's *ba* ("heart-soul") at this stage -- yet another double. See Budge, *Dead*, vol. 1 58-63 for a list of all the names for different elements of the dead in the Egyptian tradition.

43 Sources for this summary are Budge, *Heaven*, vol. 3 50-7, 158-60; Watterson 82-6. For the "Negative Confession" itself see Budge, *Dead*, vol. 1 165-7.

44 We can even question whether she goes to the right isles, since Thetis actually mentions Paphos and the Cyclades as destinations, but I suspect this is being too literal (107).

CHAPTER THREE

1 In the Egyptian after-life the dead are reunited with their families and slaves in the Underworld.

2 Under strain, H.D. knew, such things might be possible. Aside from her own experiences detailed below, an interesting letter to H.D. from Aldington during the First World War records an hallucination of Margaret Anderson, a mutual friend who had committed suicide: "These eidola have no existence in themselves, but are real beacuse of the emotion that creates them" (23 June, 1918, Zilboorg 80).

3 The white island echoes the unwritten book of *Trilogy*, except that, in *Helen in Egypt*, the rhythm of inscribing, erasing and re-inscribing is more notable, hence my image of the cinema screen.

4 H.D. was also familiar of course with the divine daemonic madness of the *Bacchae*. In his commentary to the *Phaedrus* Hackforth suggests that the idea of divine madness originates from the religion of Dionysus as portrayed in Euripides' *Bacchae* (58).

5 Susan Friedman reads Achilles himself as based on Dowding (*Psyche* 260), but this relates to his personal relationship to H.D. and her association of him with the war, rather than his work as a spirit medium.

6 In the *Sword Went Out to Sea*, "Delia" (H.D.'s *nom de plume*) writes: "The Manisis and Gareth [the Bryher character] alike, went straight into another world when we left the table. I felt there should be some margin inbetween, in which to readjust and recover" (14).

7 "Preface to Third Edition" (1955) 31. Bryher owned an earlier edition, so H.D. was unlikely to have read this preface and could not of course have read it before writing *Helen in Egypt* (1952-5). However these conclusions are easily drawn from the text.

8 Yeats description in his *Autobiographies* of "dreams that differed from ordinary dreams in seeming to take place amid brilliant light, and by their invariable coherence" is strikingly similar (378).

9 Similar ambivalence is reflected in Helen Fairwood's remarks on her "psycho-hysterical visionary sensations" in *Palimpsest* (187).

10 Rachel Blau DuPlessis's view that H.D. sought to bring the visionary within the sphere of the psychoanalytic, as a gift to Freud is relevant here (Lang. 103).

11 Yet again, perhaps through scientific means, spiritualism could be proved, could be placed on "a scientific, practical basis" (270). This appeal to science echoes Dowding's book, *Many Mansions* (1943) in which the author discusses spiritualism with a reasoned objectivity (reminiscent of Freud) and refers frequently to science. An example: "It does not do violence to our reason, therefore, to suppose that out of scientific study might emerge a form of psychic radio which would increase our powers of contact with the spirit world and clarify our communications" (19). In "H.D. by Delia Alton" H.D. compares spiritualism to using a telephone (199).

12 Although I identify the prose voice as taking a Freudian line here -- a role Claire Buck also identifies it as playing (*H.D./Freud* 159) -- I am by no means suggesting that it always adopts that role. See Chapter Six for detailed discussion of the prose voice, and further reference to Buck's interpretation.

13 Gregory, *Margins* 113.

14 DuPlessis has also noted this passage from Woolf as comparable with H.D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision* in her suggestive meditation on H.D. and Woolf in *Lang*, 91.

15 See also the "psychic coral-polyps" (*TF* 133) mentioned above.

16 See also DuPlessis, *Lang*, 92-3 and Friedman, *Web* 122-3.

17 The edition quoted here is the Hogarth Press edition of 1930, the first English edition (the first edition, in German, having come out at the end of 1929). H.D. saw Freud first in March 1933. I have no evidence as to whether she knew this book or not, although in 1932 she wrote: "I begin intensive reading of psychoanalytic journals, books and study Sigmund Freud" (foreword, *TF* 7).

18 Judith Roche also mentions this difference between Freud's and H.D.'s interpretations of religious feeling in her fascinating essay on "Myrrh: A Study of Persona in H.D.'s *Trilogy*."

19 In *The Sword Went Out to Sea* Delia reflects in retrospect on the ecstasy of madness: "Now I know how ill I was and how happy I was" (98).

20 Kloepper, *Flesh and Mother*; DuPlessis, *Career* and *Lang*; Friedman, *Return* and *Web*. Further details follow in text and notes. Jane Marcus has identified the presence of the semiotic in Virginia Woolf's novels in the chapter of her book, *Virginia Woolf and the Language of Patriarchy*, entitled, "Moaning and Crooning: The Charwoman's Song."

21 For identification of the semiotic in *Her* see Friedman, *Web* 112, 119; in *Asphodel*, see Friedman, "Return" 245 and *Web* 187; in *Nights*, see *Web* 276.

22 See DuPlessis, *Lang*, 88 for more on the relationship of semiotic to symbolic in *Tribute to Freud*.

23 This line also echoes the earlier sound trinity: "Ashtoreth,/ Ishtar,/ Astarte" (*HE* 102).

24 This line looks forward to the Isis, Cypris, cypress sound-play a few poems later (*HE* 191).

25 See Chapters Four and Five for further discussion of the Moravians.

26 See Chapter Five for further discussion of "mystic joy."

27 DuPlessis also notes that this passage is relevant to H.D.'s writing as Kristevan chora (*Career* 84). A small point: DuPlessis suggests that the *writing* of "Advent" caused H.D. to reflect on this "rhythmic" writing, whereas I would suggest that this reflection took place *during* the analysis, as well as during the writing-up, and that it was brought about by the experience of free-associating on the couch.

CHAPTER FOUR

1 In her own life, H.D. had been aware of such self-defeating remembrance, entrapping her both personally and literarily, in the past. It was to escape this trap, to free herself "from repetitive thoughts and experiences" that were "beating in [her] brain," as well as to learn how to enable others to do so, that she entered analysis with Freud (TF 13). In *Tribute to Freud*, she sees herself as an Ancient Mariner figure, telling and re-telling her story as she plucks at the garments of the wedding guest with her "skinny hand" (TF 40).

2 A similar slow remembrance of the battle scene to the remembrance of Paris could be traced in the poem, were there room here, through Helen's flickering memories of the deaths of Paris and Achilles; the stage when all she can remember is a "fight on the stairs" (HE 157); Book V of *Leuké* when she seems on the verge of remembering (177) and finally Book II of *Eidolon* when the real remembering begins: "I am called back to the Walls/ to find the answer" (232).

3 An interesting text to compare with *End to Torment*, although a modernist long poem several steps away from memoir, is Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts* (1965) in which his relationship of fifty years before is reviewed.

4 This also happens in H.D.'s accounts of her childhood memories of father, brother and mother in *Tribute to Freud*, see especially 20, 21, 24, 27-8.

5 Involuntary memory is contrasted in Proust with voluntary memory, a remembering similar to the blocked memory I discussed earlier in which habit conditions the events remembered. They do not enter the present, but remain frozen in the past.

6 22, May 1913, qtd. in Hayman 371.

7 When, many pages later, Helen asks herself "*What had she lost? What had she gained?*" from the flight from Sparta with Paris, her answer is again given in sensory terms, touch, sound, vision: brushing hands, petals or wings over-lap each other, evoking perhaps sexual pleasure, new sensations or freedom and interplay of symbolisms: Helen as lyre being stroked, as rose invited, as touching and touched, whispering and whispered to (229). There is a sense in this poem of flickering memory, only half realised. The light lines work on an associative rather than factual level: they are not reasons for Helen's flight from Sparta, but unconscious associations with the half-remembered. The language is purposefully vague and ungrammatical allowing a range of simultaneous associations. The poem is a skilful portrayal of the mind at the stage between wholly unconscious and conscious remembering.

8 In "Sacred and Secret Knowledge" Rosalind Carroll has spoken of H.D.'s exploration of the power of empathy in *The Gift*, pointing out that the child Hilda was able to empathise even with events she did not experience (such as the death of her baby sister before she was born), and that her empathetic powers are especially focused on her mother, the implication being that empathy is an especially (even specifically) female gift.

9 We are reminded of the photographic montages created by Kenneth MacPherson for H.D. and discussed in Diana Collecott's "Images at the Crossroads: H.D.'s 'Scrapbook'" (see Prelude). Perhaps these, alongside the films she had seen, were also a conscious or unconscious influence on H.D. here.

10 I am indebted here to Rosalind Carroll's unpublished essay, "Schemas and Scripts: The Witness," which includes a thorough investigation of H.D.'s rewritings of the incident of her father's headwound.

11 Although "Advent" was written some years after *The Gift*, the analysis itself occurred before H.D. wrote *The Gift*, so I start with the account given within the context of the analysis in "Advent."

12 In this discussion, I shall use the name Hilda to refer to the child-narrator of *The Gift*, and the writing signature, H.D., to refer to the writer of the book, the adult H.D. H.D. herself described the book as "autobiographical, 'almost'" (HDDA 188). On the other hand, at the end of the book, H.D. does reflect as an adult on her writing process, referring to the remembrance and recovery through writing of "memories and terrors repressed since the age of ten and long before" (G 139).

13 DuPlessis describes this as "an oblique moment of childhood sexual assault" and links it to Virginia Woolf's *Moments of Being* in her suggestive meditation on the two writers (Lang. 89, 88-94).

14 The memory of her father's accident is evoked by the discussion with her grandmother of "*Wunden Eiland*" (100; see below) and it leads at the end back to the blasts of the war itself (during which H.D. writes) which in turn evokes again her grandmother's secret (131).

15 In H.D.'s own life it was the threat of war in the nineteen-thirties, reinvoking the traumatic First World War, that took her to Freud's consulting room and the Second World War that blasted her past into consciousness in *The Gift*.

16 The first section of Part II of *The Sword Went Out to Sea* is called "Iphigenia" and is haunted by the figure of Iphigenia (148, 186, 206- 210, 216, 217).

17 Here, and in her later account of Helen being stopped by a sentry from escaping the burning walls of Troy, H.D. draws perhaps on Helen's claim in Euripides' *Women of Troy* that she tried to escape Troy: "The sentries on the city walls, could testify/ That more than once they found me slipping secretly/ Down from the battlements by a rope" (Vellacott 121).

18 See *Psyche*, Ch. 2, esp. 60-67.

19 Claire Buck seems to accept this at face value, including Theseus in her list of "Helen's three lovers," but taking her discussion no further (H.D./Freud 146).

20 Gelpi recognises that Theseus suggests himself as a possible lover, but sees this as a "touching and tender suggestion," ultimately "beside the point" (242).

21 This incident recalls the sympathy of the young *Ion* for the birds he is meant to kill (18-21).

22 This is comparable with the child Hilda's account of her encounter with the milkman in *The Gift*, partial revelations interspersed with ellipses (128).

23 Judith Roche shows how, in a similar way, the bitter story of Myrrha lies behind *Trilogy*.

24 Friedman has noted that, for the modern reader, Helen is violator of "a taboo far more intense in our culture than rejection of a husband" (*Psyche* 64).

25 There are also two explicit references to the phenomena of race memory: Helen recognises the hieroglyph of Isis "from the depth of her racial inheritance" and has a "race memory" about Achilles and Iphigenia (13, 87).

26 H.D. describes, with fascination, Freud's early patients acting out roles in *Tribute to Freud* (78-9).

27 Edmunds also neglects to mention the interactive nature of the process.

28 It is important however not to fall into the trap of reading *Helen in Egypt* as H.D.'s own self-analysis, as many critics intermittently do. Albert Gelpi, for example, whose very essay-title, "Hilda in Egypt," implies this fallacy, reads Helen's relationship with Thetis as a healing transformation of Hilda's own relationship with her mother, Helen and so on (238, see also 241, 248-50).

29 See Rose, "Femininity and its Discontents."

30 It is not until the end of *Tribute to Freud* that H.D. allows her oblique criticism of Freud's attitude to myth and legend to become more direct. Speaking of the fairy tales she described as her "foundation or background", she writes: "The miracle of the fairy-tale is incontrovertible; Sigmund Freud would apply, rationalise it" (187). The word "miracle," like "mystery," keeps its place in H.D.'s vocabulary well into her final works: in *Helen in Egypt* Helen watches and wonders by the temple lake, "awaiting the miracle" (92).

31 Duncan, pursuing the same course, was especially attuned to recognise this -- see Duncan, *Truth*.

32 I do not of course suggest that the personal element is not powerful in the poem. There is some truth in Judith Roche's suggestion that what was new in H.D. was "the integration of the personal with the Eternal," as distinguished from Yeats' (and perhaps Pound's) attempt to transcend the personal to reach the eternal (105). See Chapter Seven.

33 Theseus, for the masculine status quo, objects to this, insisting that it is natural for the two men to be opposed, obviously Paris "hated his rival in War" (159).

34 The line about Nephthys as the "other mother" of the child might refer to a ritual that took place before the new Pharaoh could be consecrated as king: "a ceremonial birth in which, in the primitive form, the two goddesses, Isis and Nephthys acted as mothers, so that the king was born of the goddess of each main division of the country (M. Murray, intro. 39).

35 There is also, once again, the factor of guilt about the plight of other women. Helen, once again, is the woman who got away. The prose voice notes that Helen, identifying with her sister and her sister's child, recognises that she "has been so signally favoured", as her apotheosis will confirm (74). Helen questions the justice of the disparate fates of the two daughters. Were they not both guilty?: "Does she possibly feel that her desertion of Menelaus is comparable to her sister's murder of Agamemnon?" (75).

36 There is a possible allusion here to a story which Pausanias claims was told by Euphorion, Alexander and Stesichorus, that Iphigenia was the daughter of Helen and Theseus and that the Argives tell a story that Helen gave the child to Clytaemnestra who was already married, to raise (Pausanias vol. 1, II:22:6-7, 365-7).

37 Graves, *Myths*, vol. 2, 280, 284. There is no mention of this affair or marriage in Homer: indeed Achilles seems to declare himself unmarried (*Iliad* 174).

38 In H.D.'s manuscript draft of *Helen in Egypt* at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, there is a substantially different draft of *Pallinode* Book VII (the book in which Clytaemnestra is banished in the published version) and a Book VIII which does not exist at all in the published version. The feelings of longing for the sister emerge earlier and are more powerful in these poems and there is an intense inter-change between the sisters of sisters in which Clytaemnestra gains her own voice. I hope to work further on these poems in the future, but, in this thesis, I work only with the published text.

39 In *Iphigenia in Tauris* the desperate wandering Orestes, tormented by the Furies, can only be saved by his sister, Iphigenia. H.D. re-read Euripides' *Iphigenia* while she was writing *Pallinode*, as a letter to Bryher of 16 October 1952 confirms, although it is not clear whether she read *Iphigenia at Aulis* (which relates the tale of the attempted sacrifice) or *Iphigenia in Tauris*, or both.

40 In Euripides' *Orestes*, Orestes actually attempts to kill Helen herself.

41 This Thetis may have her origins in the "Niké of Samothrace" or "Victory," looking like a ship's figure head, that made an impression on H.D. on her first visit to the *Louvre* (see *A* 125). In her 1955 journal, written shortly after completing *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. refers to her muse as an "old doll" (CF 62).

42 The recognition between Achilles and Helen in *Pallinode*, as I have mentioned, is via the sea-enchancement of Thetis in their eyes (35, 54). This emphasizes that Thetis is their common mother. Thetis as sea-mother seems to have been an early identification of H.D.'s, for in her piece on Pausanias, "People of Sparta" (1920), she wrote: "Further on is a temple to Ino, sea-goddess, who like Thetis seems nearest to a child's ideal of a queen-protectress or sea-mother" (5-6).

43 This advice mirrors the advice Freud gave women "stuck" at the pre-oedipal stage, as H.D. knew. She wrote to Bryher on 23 March 1933 that Freud had told her to get "back to the womb."

44 See also Freud's "Three Essays on Sexuality," especially III:4. Dianne Chisholm advances an interesting argument that Freud could not contain female sexuality or jouissance within his theories and that H.D. realised this and, hence, gained from it (see esp. *Poetics* 195-213).

45 In *Tribute to Freud* and her poem, "The Master" (CP 451-61), as DuPlessis and Friedman have shown, H.D. took (encoded) issue with the concept of penis-envy (Perfect 421-3).

46 The tale is told of how, once he went to war, Achilles had forgotten the old idol or eidolon of his mother (292). Thetis knew then her son would die, although she obtained his renowned armour from Hephaestus (296).

47 The "gloire" concludes the "theoretical debate about sexuality and creativity" (McNeil, intro. 16) that Julia carries on throughout the novel with Rico, a debate presumably echoing H.D.'s own discussions with D.H. Lawrence. This dialectical meditation with the now-absent adversary is characteristic of H.D.'s writing, especially her writings about Freud, as we have seen. See McNeil 16-17 for further discussion of the H.D.-Lawrence debate in *Bid Me To Live* and "Eurydice" (CP 51-5).

48 I have to disagree with DuPlessis who seems to see the child as solution and closure to the psychoanalytical dilemma, although I do not disagree with her conclusions about H.D.'s attempts to create a "sufficient family" (Thrall 424).

CHAPTER FIVE

1 Moore, Hymen 82.

2 These include the Old Testament Moses; Karan of the Hindu Mahâbhârata; the Greek Oedipus, Paris and Perseus; the Persian Kyros; Tristan; the Roman Romulus; the New Testament Jesus and Siegfried, the German equivalent to the Sigurd of Norse saga.

3 It seems likely that Freud recommended this book to H.D. after hearing about her "Princess dream" in which she watches the Egyptian Princess descend to the river, while the baby lies in its basket waiting to be found (TF 36-7). Freud asked H.D. whether she thought she was the baby and she originally thinks not, but, in retrospect, asks herself: "am I, after all, in my fantasy, the baby? Do I wish myself to be the founder of a new religion?" (TF 37). We cannot be sure what Freud intended H.D. to "take away" from Rank.

4 Certain references in *Helen in Egypt*, to, for example the "allies" and the "holocaust" strike the twentieth century reader with their modernity, reminding us of H.D.'s contemporary source for the war material of the poem (HE 51, 229). Susan Friedman has suggested that *Helen in Egypt* was written "partially in answer to the fascism in Pound's *Cantos*" (Love 232, Genre 260).

5 It is interesting to note that H.D. is not in fact interested in Amazonian women fighters in her work. Only Telesila, the Fifth Century leader of the Argive women against Sparta, features in one of her poems. Telesila was also a love poet and illustrates in her one person the polarisation of war and love that H.D. was to explore in *Helen in Egypt* itself ("Telesila," CP 184-7).

6 In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. sees herself as a *psychically* heroic figure, bearding Freud, "the dragon, in his very den" (16). See Susan Friedman's discussion of H.D.'s analysis, *Psyche* 23-6. There is also humour (not usually noted) in Theseus and Helen's comparison of their status as lovers. They "balance or match Helen's Menelaus, Paris, Achilles" with Theseus' "Ariadne, Phaedra, Hippolyta": "There was always another and another and another,/ shall we match them like knuckle-players/ with bones or stones for counters....?" (162).

7 The subjective nature of the reality of love is not a hindrance to Sappho's argument, but is stressed, even celebrated in the poem: "but I say that is fairest which is the object of one's desire". This tallies with H.D.'s emphasis on the experiential nature of both passion and mystic revelation, "this enchanted place." Balmer's 1984 translation particularly emphasizes the subjective nature of experience over the cultural: "I say it is what-/ ever you desire" (55). Gentili finds this "too modern an interpretation" which will not sit with his reading of the poem mentioned above. Nevertheless, this reading can, I think, be balanced with his urge to remember the deity, perhaps through Plato's concept of passionate, yet divinely inspired, love in the *Phaedrus*.

8 This poem is now referred to as Fragment 16. I quote here from the literal translation accompanying the first publication of the text of this poem in the Egypt Exploration Fund's "Oxyrhynchus Papyri." In the same year J.M. Edmonds published his version of the poem, with considerable emendations, in the *Classical Review* (May 1914) (see also Edmonds' 1922 *Lyra Graecae*). Edmonds' version provoked some criticism in the June and September issues of the *Classical Review*. One of the critical articles was by one of the translators of the "Oxyrhynchus Papyri," A.S. Hunt. H.D. might well have been aware of the discovery of this poem and the controversy over its translation. If she was not, she would have read both the poem (based on Edmonds' version) and a brief account of the controversy in Edwin Marion Cox's *Sappho* (1925) (74-8) which she reviewed for the *Saturday Review of Literature* in March of that year. Judging from the anti-academic tone of her review of Cox, I suggest that, armed with her own knowledge of Greek, she might have preferred a simpler, less "interesting and scholarly" (Cox 78) version than that of Edmonds. Edmonds "reconstructs" lines on the frailty of woman ("for woman is ever easy to be bent when she thinks lightly of what is near and dear"), creates a third person other than Anactoria and Sappho, and concludes with a confusing couplet (pieced together from fragments which may belong to the next poem on the papyrus -- see Campbell, vol. 1, 67) on how it is better to miss the past than forget it (Edmonds, *New Lyric* 75). Recent translations of the poem have abandoned Edmonds' interpretation: see Balmer 21; Barnard 41; Campbell, vol.1, 67; Gentili 88; Rayor 55 and Snyder 22.

9 The same basic duality plays in and out of the pages of *The Sword Went Out to Sea* and it is resolved with the same affirmation: "there was love and hate. Love was eternal, hate was ephemeral" (100).

10 H.D. mentions the Erinyes and Aeschylus' interpretation of them in *NEPGLP II*:Megara 1.

11 In comparing Theseus' Cretan labyrinth to Helen's streets of Troy as both underworld and quest terrain, H.D. might have drawn again on *The White Goddess* where Graves refers to the Troy Town maze as the place where the sacred sun-hero or king goes after death (329, see 111).

12 Theseus' journey to the Underworld with Perithous is seen by Graves as the same original myth as Theseus' defeat of the Minotaur in the Cretan labyrinth, the myth of "the hero who defeats Death" (*Goddess* 106). See Chapter Two.

13 See also CP 534, 538, 541.

14 Moravianism descended from a mystical sect which had been persecuted in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and had itself been hidden, become occult, until its revival by Count Zinzendorf in the early eighteenth century. "Lots of people do not know the things we know", says the young Hilda in *The Gift* (67). In "The Secret" Hilda's grandmother imparts to her granddaughter information about what she calls "the secret" (79). See Augustine, Moravianism for an account of H.D.'s relationship with Moravianism, and a description of *The Mystery*.

15 This was first identified by Susan Friedman in *Psyche Reborn* (esp. Ch. 6: "Initiations"). Friedman also notes H.D.'s secrecy about her interest in spiritualism, astrology, numerology and the like, for fear that she might be thought mad (*Psyche* 201-2).

16 See Morris, Relay 74-5 for a discussion, based on the first typescript of *The Gift*, which clarifies this idea of a hermetic community that might have saved the world, and relates the Moravianism of *The Gift* to Denis De Rougement's *Passion and Society*. See Augustine, Moravianism for discussion of same in *The Mystery*.

17 Chaboseau 19-27 in Friedman's translation, *Psyche* 171-2.

18 In his later *Greek Myths* Graves suggests that Oedipus, who defeats the Theban Sphinx in Sophocles, might be a "thirteenth-century invader of Thebes, who suppressed the old Minoan Cult of the goddess" -- the wings of the sphinx indicate that she was originally the "Moon-goddess of Thebes," he claims (vol. 2, 13).

19 There are frequent references to buried treasure in *Tribute to Freud*: watching the Corfu visions, H.D. struggles to keep hold of "priceless treasure" (53); Freud's words reveal "hidden treasure" (75).

20 Smyers, Bryher 21. H.D.'s copies were published in the late nineteen-thirties by Longman, Green, London, so she probably bought them in London between then and 1946 when she was taken to Switzerland. Stories with auspicious rings include "The Copper Ring" and "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp" in *The Blue Fairy Book* and "The Magic Ring" in *The Yellow Fairy Book*. "The Prince who wanted to see the World" in *The Violet Fairy Book* and "The Dragon of the North" in *The Yellow Fairy Book* are stories in which a ring is a quest object.

21 See TF 87-90 for further reflection on the serpent and the thistle.

22 In *Compassionate Friendship*, we can perhaps glimpse how H.D.'s meditations could lead her near to madness. She begins to fear her analyst, Erich Heydt, whom she sees as a spy-ring member being controlled by a medium. She later recognises in notes added to the text that this was: "Paranoia - on my part?" (CF 111) and "sheer melodrama", "fantastic" (115).

23 H.D. read the *Autobiographies* when it was first published in 1955, after writing *Helen in Egypt* (CF 89). It sparked a resurgence of interest in Yeats and William Morris, whom Yeats discusses in the book, in her last few years.

24 Aware though H.D. is of the mental dangers in such a sea, she writes in *Trilogy* that she would "rather drown remembering" (CP 582).

25 In *Palimpsest* Helen Fairwood sees hieroglyphs of chick, giant bee, lotus and reed (206, 229-30, 234). This line also seems to touch on Graves' accounts of the rite, which became the basis of the Lesser Mysteries at Eleusis, in which the king is yearly killed: "The love-chase again: the soul of the sacred king, ringed about by orgiastic women, tries to escape in the likeness of hare, or fish, or bee; but they pursue him relentlessly and in the end he is caught, torn in pieces and devoured" (405). The relevance of this reference to matriarchal mysteries becomes apparent in the text (see below).

26 In the reading experience of course, the processes of psychological and spiritual interpretation work in tandem in the poem. I have, to a degree, been forced to untangle them in this thesis. H.D. wrote of this second book of *Pallinode*: "there she will refuse to consult the oracle but will find the 'answer' or 'answers' in the memories + the stone pictures, as per (a bit) the Amen poems in *The Walls*" (letter to Bryher, October 10, 1952).

27 It is Freud's statue of Vishnu which reminds H.D. of a half-lily and hence of the story of the miraculous lily in *Tribute to Freud* (120).

28 The lily image comes to rest in *Trilogy* as "heal-all, everlasting," the tree of life (which in turn becomes the rood) (585-6). The process of reading the lily can also be read back into H.D.'s life. In *The Gift* and *Tribute to Freud* the young Hilda is chosen from a group of otherwise male children to choose a flower from a garden and she chooses a lily (G 49-50, TF 120-1). In *Tribute to Freud* the incident is linked to the sense of being chosen, and that to Freud's comment that H.D. wanted to found a new religion (120-1). In *The Gift* the lily chosen is (in memory at least) a miraculous lily since it is flowering in snow and, further, Hilda plants it on her grandfather's grave (49-50). This lily then is the ultimate regenerative power of resurrection, out of the ruins of war, the icy cold of snow or even, it is implied, death itself.

29 In *The Sword Went Out To Sea* as a whole, we find many parallels to the lily motif in *Helen in Egypt*. Once again, a carved image inspires the initiate. The lily first appears as a design on William Morris' old table, used by Delia for her seances. It gives rise to a long meditation on the Egyptian, Greek, Indian, South American (especially Aztec) and Cretan lily as plant motif (235-241, see 244). Delia finds her own connection through the American water-lily (246). The Annunciation Lily is also mentioned as a symbol of the "certainty of resurrection," a "consolation" (241). The lily passage also sheds light on the personal process of such meditations. The lily the "innermost circle ... the Venus fly-trap if you will, pulsing 'to trap unwary and unpredictable notes of memory,' its petals being memory 'magnets' (235, 252). It is also "a sort of lodestone, like the wishing ring or lamp of Arabian legend" drawing out from Delia her "most secret desires" (252). Like the hieroglyph of Isis in *Helen in Egypt*, once related to her own life, it "becomes by the alchemy of memory, an actual flower" (247).

30 In the section of his introduction to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* entitled "Esotheric Buddhism" Evans-Wentz also dwells on the significance of the number seven, with relation to the forty-nine days of the *Bardo* (6-7).

31 In *Trilogy* H.D. refers to the seven angels and the seven joys and sorrows, "delights" and "spear-points," of Mary (CP 563, 569).

32 Seven was enormously important to H.D. She wrote of Freud's age in *Tribute to Freud*: "We have talked of his age; his seventy-seven symbolized occult power and mystery to me.... it is important to me, that seventy-seven, and I have a seven or will acquire one a few months after his May birthday" (42). In *The Sword Went Out to Sea, Compassionate Friendship* and a letter to Silvia Dobson, H.D. looks back on her life as having fallen into cycles or "spirals" of seven years (SWOTS 83; CF 88; letter of 8 Sept, 1953).

33 There is some evidence in the manuscripts for *Helen in Egypt* held at the Beinecke Library that a seventh book of *Eidolon* was planned. this would have created a strong numerological structure of three sevens (see my discussion of trinities Chapter One).

34 For a discussion of H.D.'s interest in astrology, see Friedman, *Psyche* 161, 166-70, 184-6.

35 See *The Gift* 27 for the child Hilda's fascination in how Castor and Pollux could be both mythological character and stars.

36 In her notebook for *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. notes from Graves' *White Goddess* that Hercules is god, demi-god and celestial figure.

37 When Paris sees Helen in torn veil, the prose voice describes this as a "partial revelation," perhaps alluding to the High Priestess' veil, partially covering her, in the Tarot (145).

38 In *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, this image is also used for time-transcending revelation: "The veil, I think, is the word for it, was very thin. One saw right through it. Or, like a curtain before a play, the veil was drawn aside from time to time, and one looked on scenes of the near or far past or even of the future" (SWOTS 135). When the veil lifts, Delia enters the "fourth dimension": "Geographic boundaries" and "boundaries of time" dissolve and "past, present and future became one" (135).

39 Susan Friedman has traced the attempt to unify dualities throughout H.D.'s life and work in the chapter of *Psyche Reborn*, "Poetics of Conflict and Transcendence".

40 We find a similar gender dualism suggested by Delia in *The Sword Went Out to Sea*: "my mother represents the emotional, creative or dream-self while the father represents the intellectual, critical or constructive self" (144).

41 Crete was also, we remember, the place where "women were equal." H.D. notes this in her note-book for *Helen in Egypt*, as well as in her Hellenic Cruise Notes, 1932 (see Prelude). In *Compassionate Friendship* H.D. traced the roots of *Helen in Egypt* ultimately back to the Minoans of Crete (32, see also Friedman, *Genre* 215-6).

42 Friedman draws attention to Freud's belief (noted by H.D.) that Love and Death ruled both the unconscious and civilization (*Psyche* 156-7).

51a I should note that these views of Robert Graves as to the nature of the Eleusinian Mysteries are unorthodox. Nevertheless, we can trace them in H.D.'s own highly individualised mysteries and we know that *The White Goddess* features in her notes for *Helen in Egypt*. From Carl Kerényi's thoroughly researched *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* we learn that the Lesser Mysteries of Eleusis are in fact regarded as "sexual" or physical in contrast to the more "spiritual" Greater Mysteries (45-6). Kerényi does concur with Graves that the Lesser Mysteries were connected with Dionysus (51-2), but associates this with Dionysus' marriage feast (with a possible phallus as ritual object) rather than with intellectualism or the Killing of the King (57). The Lesser Mysteries of Eleusis seem to have more in common then with H.D.'s first sexual mystery and Graves' unorthodox account of the Lesser Mysteries seems to have contributed to H.D.'s second intellectual mystery and the allusions to the Killing of the King in *Leuké*. That H.D. has three Mysteries rather than two suggests that she was not attempting to be authentic in her references to the Eleusinian Mysteries which are (despite the scrupulous research of such as Kerényi) still by no means fully revealed to the world. I would suggest instead that she used the idea of the Eleusinian Mysteries of the Goddess as an inspiration, a springboard for creating her own three Mysteries both in earlier work and in *Helen in Egypt* (see Prelude 22).

43 Friedman records that H.D. owned and marked all three versions of this book, the French first edition, *L'Amour et L'Occident* (1939); *Passion and Society* and the expanded and revised English edition, *Love in the Western World* (*Psyche* 309, n. 30). I refer in this thesis to *Passion and Society*, since *Love in the Western World* was not published until 1956, after *Helen in Egypt* was completed.

44 De Rougement refers the reader to Dante's comparison of Beatrice to Sophia, the mystical Jewish feminine spirit of wisdom.

45 Other possible connections have been noted by Albert Gelpi, who reads the Lady in *Trilogy* as "woman troubadour" (Mother 329), and Kathy Hopewell who suggests that the meeting of Mary and Kaspar in "The Flowering of the Rod" can be read, via De Rougement, as a courtly love scenario.

46 This view should not be taken as a constant in Plato however. As Hackforth argues in his commentaries to both the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* this extreme dualism is modified in Plato's later works, especially *The Republic* (*Phaedo* 48-50; *Phaedrus* 69-74).

47 H.D. must have known about Pound's beliefs, held since 1906, according to his biographer (Carpenter 136). See Carpenter 166-7, 331-2, 346, 419, 511-13 and *Cantos* 36, 39, 59 for evidence that this belief of Pound's was sustained. Carpenter (adopting the attitude H.D. feared from observers of her own esoteric interests) relates these convictions of Pound's to his ambivalence about sex and to his later irrationality and loss of judgement (see all refs. above, esp. 167, 513).

48 This was a lecture given to the Quest Society in 1911 and published in the revised edition of *The Spirit of Romance* 87-100.

49 See also *Palimpsest* in which Marius is re-born through sex with Hipparchia-as-Demeter (12, 20).

50 Unfortunately Norman Holmes Pearson becomes stuck at this stage, failing to see the significance of the lover figure, confusing H.D. with Helen, and neglecting the fact that the Mysteries, certainly in *Helen in Egypt*, take place under the auspices of the Goddess: "Some people are after Grails; it seems to me H.D. was after a thing that might be called in the broadest sense the lover. This could be a physical lover; it could be God the Father as lover, or Father the God as lover within her own family, or even Freud the lover -- the almost Neoplatonic sense of love. She was ... a very womanly woman, and her way of symbolizing what she was searching for was through males" (445). All this despite H.D.'s statement in *H.D. by Delia Alton* that the search for the lover leads eventually back to "the drowned or submerged Isis" (182).

51 H.D., in her notes on the Hellenic Cruise of 1932, notes that the "worship of Dionysius -- thought in G[reek] religion" (AN).

52 Dionysus was worshipped at Delphi as Dionysus Liknites (Harrison, *Proleg.* 401, 523).

53 See H.D.'s masque, "Hymen" which seems to owe much to the Dionysian mysteries (CP 101-110). The bride is a "veiled symbolic figure", her head "swathed in folds of diaphanous white" (105). The veil is stressed further in the song of the maidens, and young women bring baskets of the first flowers (106-7). At the end of the masque, the figures enter behind the curtain of the palace before which the scene is played (110).

54 Very little work is to be found on H.D.'s interest in Arthurian legends, but her novel *Asphodel* and several of the notes in the *Helen in Egypt* notebook suggest that it was significant.

55 See the poem "Triplex," first mentioned in my discussion of trinities in Chapter Two, for an earlier generational trinity (CP 291).

56 Both Susan Friedman and Albert Gelpi have recognised that Helen identifies with a trinity of goddesses, Gelpi remarking that she encompasses the "whole feminine archetype" (Hilda 245). Gelpi sees the goddesses concerned as the traditional "mother-daughter-maiden," Demeter-Persephone-Kore, although Helen is only once, by Theseus, identified with Demeter (Hilda 245). Friedman argues, closer to my own view, that the three are "Aphrodite, Thetis, Kore" (Goddess 154). I place Isis as the first goddess and do not describe Thetis as one of the goddesses identified with by Helen for the following reasons. Firstly, Aphrodite and Thetis are portrayed as on an equal level in the poem, neither more senior than the other, whereas Isis is the most ancient and all-encompassing goddess. Secondly, Helen is quite clearly identified with Isis in *Pallinode* and with Aphrodite in *Leuké*. Thirdly, Thetis is certainly a mother-figure in the poem, but is presented as Helen's mother, not Helen-as-mother. Helen is never "doubled" or identified with her as she is with Aphrodite in *Leuké*.

57 Interestingly, Chisholm compares H.D.'s project to that of Martin Bernal in *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Western Civilisation*.

58 This is reminiscent of the priestess in "At Eleusis" whose hands and knees tremble, for she is "a mortal, set in the goddess' place" (180).

59 While Susan Edmunds does reflect dualities of place set up by H.D. in the following summary of place in the poem, it is important to realise that the two poles are united, in Crete, in "absolute" vision and in the Mysteries: "H.D. adjusts her long-standing poetic use of ancient geography to equate Parnassus and Athens with 'reality,' 'Greek creative thought' and 'the delight of the intellect,' and to link Egypt, Crete, and Eleusis as common strongholds of 'dream,' 'magic' and the 'Mysteries' of the mother goddesses Demeter and Isis" (Edmunds 485).

60 "Initiator" was the word H.D. used to describe the series of men, perceived as Hermes figures, through whom she saw the divine (CF 24-5). For a discussion of H.D.'s "spiritual relationships" with her initiators see Morris, *Relay* 67-9.

61 The child is also confirmation of the union of Egypt and Greece, for Greece becomes the child of Egypt, "Hellas re-born of death" H.D. writes in the earlier poem, "Egypt" (CP 141). A similar image had been used in *Notes on Thought and Vision*: "Egypt in terms of world-consciousness is the act of love. Hellas is the child born" (37).

62 In Goethe's *Faust*, it is Faust and Helen who have a son called Euphorion.

63 As fruitfulness, the child is perhaps also a celebration of the gift of creativity given to Helen, and/or, as Adalaide Morris has suggested, to H.D. herself (*Relay* 69-70).

64 The poem "Sigil" (CP 411-418) also unites "Galilee" and "Delphi" -- in both poems the Christian communion is a central mystery.

CHAPTER SIX

1 The ambiguity of the identity of this voice is evident -- Susan Friedman reads it as the voice of the "helmsman" mentioned in the previous stanza (*Psyche* 254).

2 Discussed by Roland Barthes' in *Elements of Semiology* 22-3.

3 This fragmentation is in part resolved through Her's love for Fayne Rabb which temporarily establishes Her's feminine identity: "I know her. Her. I am Her. She is Her. Knowing her, I know Her" (*HER* 158). See Friedman and DuPlessis, *Two Loves* for discussion of this passage (3).

4 The term, "commentary" has been used for the prose voice before, although the comparison with H.D.'s classical commentary has not been drawn. Jeanne Larsen adopts the term "commentator" for the prose voice, although she does not explore it (89, 93, 97). Albert Gelpi describes the structure of the poem as a "counterpoint of lyric expression and reflective commentary," but again this is all he says (*Hilda* 247).

5 By "volumes," H.D. probably also referred to *Hippolytus Temporizes* which she was working on in February 1955, but which does not have a prose commentary, although it does have stage directions (CF 27).

6 For H.D. to create a commentator, complete with "character," for her own poem is a splitting not uncharacteristic of the author of "H.D. by Delia Alton."

7 "I wanted a recording of H.D.'s voice; she made it for me.... She chose excerpts of *Helen* for the recording, and she introduced the excerpts by a few of these prose passages. I was so struck by the effect they made that I suggested to her that she write them as interludes for every song, and she did it" (440). Pearson did indeed write to H.D. on 17 February, 1955 suggesting that she might work some introductions, similar to the ones on the tape, into the poem itself. However, she had already, in October 1954, been writing of making some notes for the poem, as I have shown.

8 This must be seen in context of male-dominated academe, especially in *Ion*, where H.D. was daring to enter the established academic field of Greek Literature and was bound to be compared to Gilbert Murray, just retired in 1937 from the post of Regius professor of Greek at Oxford, and eminent translator of Euripides.

9 Reading *Ion*, one feels that the passionate lyricism, constrained both by the necessity of truth to the text in H.D.'s translation and by the particular kind of translation she pursued, burst out into her commentary. In *Helen in Egypt* of course, the poetic "text" was her own.

10 See also the feeling prose voice's comment on Oenone: "Our sympathies are with her..." (119).

11 See also the headnotes to *Pallinode* VII:5-6 (103-5).

12 See also H.D.'s film review of Noel Coward's *Boo* in which she satirises the response of hypothetical critics to "the seducer, the Anglo-Italian boy ... certainly (say they) a bounder, a cad and certainly no gentleman" (46). These critics would have treated with the same "opprobrium" "the young wine-gods" or Dionysus himself, claims H.D. (47).

13 I do not know whether H.D. read this particular Faulkner novel, which takes the technique to its extreme, but she was familiar with *Absalom! Absalom!* which intermittently employs the same technique interspersed with omnipotent narrative (Dobson 31).

14 Dostoevsky, *A Gentle Creature*, X, 378-379 qtd. in Bakhtin 55.

15 The crystalline metaphor used for H.D.'s poetry is also being re-written here -- see Prelude.

16 Cynthia Hogue has Helen as split by the familiar Trojan/Greek dichotomy (87, 93) which she relates to H.D.'s own split as a bisexual and decodes as a "bisexualized" text (95-6). She ends her article however with a reference to this Jacobus quote which suggests a greater plurality of selves than Hogue herself does previously (99).

CHAPTER SEVEN

1 See Genre 218-end for an extended discussion of this woman-centredness, and interesting parallels between *Helen in Egypt* and *Aurora Leigh* in this area.

2 At times, in *Psyche Reborn*, Friedman also seems to see Helen's quest as a quest for self and wholeness "modelled substantially on the experience of psychoanalysis" and suggests that the final book of *Eidolon* "records Helen's slow process of synthesizing dual selves in a search for wholeness" and that Helen becomes "Helen, at peace, with a fully healed, conscious self" (*Psyche* 65, 61). Although this statement seems unequivocal, it is rather difficult to fully ascertain Friedman's views on this subject, since a few pages later she comments: "In H.D.'s psychoanalytic epic, action is process, not event.... H.D.'s emphasis is on the search itself, never on the answer or the end result" (66).

3 Friedman coined the term "anxiety of genre," acknowledging her own debt to Gilbert and Gubar's expansion of the concept of "anxiety of authorship" in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Genre 203, 223 n2).

4 "I sing of arms and the man" becomes in *Paint It Today* "I sing of arms and a god," a "prophecy" perhaps of *Helen in Egypt*'s concern with the sacred (27).

5 Barbara Guest also suggests that the *Cantos* were "the ferment ... of what would become H.D.'s own book of cantos, *Helen in Egypt*" (290).

6 There is some evidence to suggest that *Cantos* for H.D. suggested Dante, rather than Pound. Only a couple of years before writing *Helen in Egypt* (and a couple of years after the appearance of the *Pisan Cantos*), H.D. does use the term, "Cantos," about her work. She questions whether *The Moment* might

not be "really a series of lyrics, or if we may return to Dante, of Cantos" (HDDA 206). To Pearson, of course, *Cantos* meant Pound.

7 In his very first letter about *Helen in Egypt*, written after receiving the first batch of Helen poems, Pearson adopts the term "canto" for the poems which will become *Pallinode* Book I (2 October, 1952).

8 She goes on to speak of how the characters inter-relate "in life" which I interpret as a discussion of personal relations between the "characters" of importance in the lives of herself and Pound (32).

9 For references to *Helen in Egypt* as "the Helen" see letters to Pearson of 25 November 1952; 28 December, 1952; 9 January, 1953; 8 April, 1953; 25 November 1953; 4 June, 1954; 10 June, 1954; 14 October, 1954; 20 October, 1954; 7 February, 1955; 3 August, 1955; 26 November, 1955; 24 December, 1955; 17 January, 1956; 28 March, 1956; 21 May, 1956.

10 For references to *Helen in Egypt* as "the Helen sequence" or "the sequence" see letters of 3 May 1953; 7 March, 1956 and 9 January, 1953. The poem is described as "the Helen series" in a letter of 23 September, 1953. It is on 14 April 1953 that Helen is first mentioned to Pearson as "Helen in Egypt" and this was a title which, when she completed the poem, H.D. had to fight Pearson to retain (see letters of March and April, 1956). H.D. did achieve the title and sub-titles she herself desired in the end: although her original idea for the third section was "Thetis Wings," H.D. was pleased with Pearson's suggestion, *Eidolon* (letter to Pearson, 14 October, 1954).

11 See the letter to Pearson of 24 July 1954 which refers to having posted "Cantos I and II of Book III."

12 For references to *Helen in Egypt* as "the Helen" or "Helen" to Bryher see letters of 26 September, 1952; 6 October, 1952; 10 October, 1952; 13 October, 1952; 18 October, 1952; 2 September, 1952; 17 January, 1955. The word "sequence" is used again on 2 September, 1954.

13 Letters to Aldington of 29 January, 1955; 14 January, 1955 and 15 November, 1955. Letters to Dobson of 2 October, 1952 and 25 November, 1955. Letters to Pound of 24 November 1955? and 23 February, 1957.

14 Bakhtin's description of the conditions out of which *menippea* grew are very much like those H.D. felt herself to be in: "It was formed in an epoch when national legend was already in decay, amid the destruction of those ethical norms that constituted the ancient idea of 'seemliness' ('beauty,' 'nobility'), in an epoch of intense struggle among numerous and heterogeneous religions and philosophical schools and movements, when disputes over 'ultimate questions' ... had become ... an everyday mass phenomenon.... It was the epoch of preparation and formation of a new world religion: Christianity" (119). H.D. had the same sense of the decay of ancient ideals during the two World Wars. Although the numerous different religious movements were not so popular a phenomenon, she surrounded herself with disparate religious and occult systems, and had the sense that she was trying to find, if not found, a new religion out of the old. See *Tribute to Freud* 37: "Do I wish myself, in the deepest unconscious or subconscious layers of my being, to be the founder of a new religion?"

15 *The White Goddess* is more of a wielding (at times, manhandling) of myths to fit Graves' thesis than a presentation of alternative stories.

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