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Emily Dickinson—H.D. Dual Centennial Section

San José Studies invited participants to submit essays developed from or related to presentations to Companions of the Flame: Emily Dickinson—H.D. Dual Centennial Colloquium sponsored by the San Jose Poetry Center and San Jose State University, October 22–25, 1986.

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SUPPOSE we take seriously Emily Dickinson’s declaration that she “did not print” (L 316, early 1866) and recognize that she was deliberate, not desperate, when she “replied declining” to someone who requested that she “aid the world” by allowing her poems to appear in print (L 380, late 1872?). If, in fact, she devised her own method of publication, which was to send her poems out in letters, then the manuscripts themselves, not their printed versions, should be the locus of study. After all, if she was publishing herself, then her pencil or pen was her printing press and her orthography her typeface; and holographs like that of “The Sea said/“Come” to the Brook—” (Set 11; P 1210), in which the “S’s” are shaped like waves and the “T’s” formed to resemble choppy seas, indicate that eschewing that foul auction, conventional publication (P 709), freed her to appropriate even calligraphy for her poetic practice.2 Such strategies are, of course, lost to us in printed transcriptions. Further, to study Dickinson’s major correspondences in transcription is made especially problematic by the evidence that—at least according to his lover Mabel Loomis Todd—Dickinson’s brother, Austin, changed his sister’s epistolary record by scissoring and erasing passages about his wife that he deemed too private to print. These and other gaps have

*Emily Dickinson’s manuscripts are quoted by permission of the Trustees of Amherst College and by permission of the Houghton Library and will be indicated by “A” and the appropriate library catalog number. The Amherst College numbering system usually designates leaves of a given manuscript, beyond the first, by the main number followed by “a,” “b,” “c,” etc., and references to specific leaves reflect this system (e.g., of L 233 the first leaf is numbered 828, the second 828a, etc.). Occasionally, however, the verso of a leaf is lettered. In all cases I have followed the actual numbering, indicating the verso of a leaf by superscript “v.”

I would like to thank John Lancaster, Special Collections Librarian, Amherst College Library, and Rodney G. Dennis, Curator of Manuscripts, Houghton Library of Harvard University; without their cooperation, this study, in which examination of the holographs made such a profound difference, would not have been possible.
Emily Dickinson at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, 1847 or 1848. Photograph used by the courtesy of the Amherst College Archives.
caused distortions in the critical treatment of Emily Dickinson, and have in turn prompted this study, the focus of which is principally on the imposed silences about the poet's love for her sister-in-law and which closes with attention to her attachment for her mother.

Sitting in the Frost Library at Amherst College, poring over erasures, gazing at scissors, I was aghast that, just as Thomas Johnson had said, it was really true: some of Dickinson's letters and poems had been "mutilated" and otherwise tampered with. Especially penetrating was the pencilled "like you" that I found in the "Master" letter beginning "If you saw a bullet hit a Bird" (L 233). Three drafts to an addressee or addressees unknown, the "Master" letters are also Dickinson's most well-known correspondences. Some have taken them as documentation that poor Emily had her heart broken by some man. But an apparently negligible detail, noticeable only in manuscript, had raised the vital question of whether the real or imagined addressee of a couple of drafts was indeed, as I, as well as most others, had always assumed, male. Despite other difficulties noted by critics in getting Dickinson's writings correctly from her page to the printed one, no printed representations or critical commentary reproduce two crucial words—"like you"—as they appear on the holograph. Pencilled in above the inked line, the phrase is plainly an addition—and I think not necessarily by the poet—to a line once considered finished.

This failure to indicate the nature of the interpretation, "like you," is especially important, for some critics hinge part of their interpretations of these letters on readings limited by it. These critics accept the idea that these two words seem to confirm that this frustrated love letter could only have been written to a man. Johnson reproduces in print that, addressing Master as "Sir," this letter's speaker cries, "but if I had the Beard on my cheek—like you—" (L 233). Along with many critics, John Cody recognizes that Dickinson was in love with her sister-in-law, Sue. He also notes, with critics such as Richard Chase, Charles Anderson, and Rebecca Patterson, that in Dickinson's love poems, "the figure of the beloved man lacks presence," then proposes a dilemma: "If 'Master' existed and was close enough to Emily Dickinson frequently enough to feel he might proffer offers of sexual intimacy with her, why does he appear so insubstantial and unindividualized in her verse?" But when he evaluates Patterson's "hypothesis" that Dickinson's "lover was, in reality, a woman," an assertion that "would explain the lack of a distinct masculine image in the verse, while at the same time it would account for the sexual fears and reservations" so evident in writings like the "Master" letters, he dismisses this conjecture saying, "The 'Master' letters alone are sufficient to explode this theory. In these it is clearly stated that 'Master' has a beard; the relationship the letters picture is that between a small, fragile, immature female and an older, parental, kindly, somewhat formidable male." Yet holograph study of these letters that have so often been used to docu-
ment Dickinson's passionate and unrequited love for a man indicates that his rebuttal is insufficient, for it is not so "clearly stated" that Master has a beard.

**Why Crucial?**

So why are those two pencilled words so crucial? In a transcription so scrupulous, where another pencilled addition, above the line, like this two-word emendation, is carefully denoted by parentheses, it is odd that, when the two pencilled words "like you" reach print, they are presented as if they were part of the original sentence, when it is absolutely clear that they were not. When the "like you" is treated as a solid part of the letter, the line becomes conventional in that it is necessarily heterosexual. But without it, Dickinson might be saying to a female lover—"If I had the beard on my cheek”—if I were a man—"and you had Daisy's petals”—and you were a woman—if, in other words, ours was a conventional, "normal," heterosexual romance, then would it be acceptable to speak our love? Unfortunately, the possibility that Dickinson, like her beloved Shakespeare, may have been disguising her characters by dressing a woman up in masculine pronouns and names has been made very difficult to recover in all available transcriptions of these drafts.

In effect, there is a silence surrounding that pencilled change, a subtle erasure that partially hides, as Susan Howe puts it, "Dickinson's brilliant masking and unveiling, her joy in the drama of pleading." This silence, this erasure, obscures unconventional, possibly even lesbian interpretations of these letters in which the imploring rhetoric most resembles, not the rhetoric of her letters to Samuel Bowles or her male correspondents, but the beseeching rhetoric of many of her letters to her beloved Sue. Why this silence? Was it merely an oversight? Is there any significance to this gap? Of the letters' design and purpose we can never be certain. These "Master," these most popular of all her letters are love letters on the order of who knows what. They might be to a man, they might be to a woman, they might not be to anyone in particular at all. Reading the "Master" letters, we would be wise to remember Dickinson's imaginative power and her amazing ability to transform experience, and, of the most familiar (even the Mother Goose-y), make the surprising and wonderful. And we would be wise to entertain seriously suggestions like Howe's that the "Master" letters may be modelled on the pleading letters of Dickens' "Little Em'ly" and "were probably self-conscious exercises in prose by one writer playing with, listening to, and learning from others."

Perusing the facsimile printings in Ralph W. Franklin's *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, one sees that Dickinson's directing her dashes up or down was, as Edith Wyler argued, intentional, and not, as Johnson
and his assistant Theodora Ward had claimed, an accident of emotional
"stress." For example, the dash at the end of "I dwell in Possibility /"
(F 22; P 657) dances up. This comic sensibility is lost to us in
conventional transcription, as are Dickinson's unusual experiments with
lineation. In the holograph of the much talked about "One need not be a
Chamber \ / to be Haunted \" (F 20; P 670), her lineation elicits a
chuckle. In this ghost story of a poem about psychic fragmentation,
Dickinson has a little fun with the third stanza's scheme:

Ourselves behind Ourselves—
Concealed—
Should startle—most—
Assassin—hid in Our Apart—
ment—
Be Horror's least—

What we expect is not what we get: the unanticipated mid-syllable line
ending is not haphazard but is a deliberate breaking of form. Mimicking
the lyric's sense, the lineation acts almost as cartoon. Yet this prosodic
experimentation has not previously been transcribed, and, until
Franklin's Manuscript Books, had been lost to Dickinson's public. I
wondered what might be lost to us in the transcriptions of the "mutila-
tions" (L 80 n.).

As "Austin's" work with scissors and erasures shows, not all of the
silences imposed on Dickinson's texts are so subtle as the misleading
transcriptions of lineation (which to date have assumed that the stanza
and not the line is her basic poetic unit9), of dashes, and of "like you." A
glance at the first couple of fascicles in the Manuscript Books provides
excellent examples of what a review of Dickinson's correspondence to
her brother makes clear: "Austin" sought to expunge every affectionate
reference to his wife, the woman whom Dickinson herself acknowl-
edged as, "With the Exception of Shakespeare," (L 757) her greatest
teacher. In an effort to blot out a loving poem about Sue, the text of "One
Sister have I in the house" (F 2; P 14) is inked over. In this case,
"Austin's" attempt proved futile; Sue had her own copy of the poem and
it survives, intact. Both Mabel Loomis Todd and her daughter, Millicent
Todd Bingham, said that Austin was responsible for mutilations of his
sister's work. Bingham says:

... Mr. Dickinson stipulated that if Emily's letters to him
were to be used, the name of one of her girlhood friends must
be left out—that of Susan Gilbert, his wife. But omitting her
name was not enough. Before turning over the letters he went
through them, eliminating Susan Gilbert’s name and in some instances making alterations to disguise a reference to her.

Thus many of the letters to Austin are altered, and the changes always appear near adulatory mention of Sue.

**Words Lined Out**

A March 7, 1852, letter shows that when Dickinson talks of sending Sue flowers, the words are lined out:

I have been hunting all over the house, since the folks went to meeting, to find a small tin box, to send her flowers in... (A 587, 587a; L 80)

Johnson records the erasure but not that the most affectionate words are censored, overlaid with pencilled lines. Neither does he note that when “Austin” sought to obfuscate his sister’s erotic expressions, the change sometimes borders on the absurd, as an April 16, 1853, letter makes plain. There “Austin” alters the singular pronoun from feminine to masculine, evidently in an effort to disguise reference to Sue. “Austin” erased “her” and wrote “his” over it and erased the “s” from “she,” so that a sentence about Emily and Sue reads:

... I shant see him [her] this morning, because [s]he has to bake Saturday, but [s]he’ll come this afternoon, and we shall read your letter together, and talk of how soon you’ll be here [seven lines erased]. (A 601; L 116)

Johnson creates yet another gap when he records that there was a change, but does not note that the apparently hostile “Austin” went so far as to change pronouns and, therefore, in effect, to give Sue a “beard.”

After Austin and Sue trysted for the first time at the Revere Hotel in Boston, Dickinson wrote her brother an angry letter. In its most telling paragraph, “Austin” tried to erase “Susie,” the name of his sister’s love:

Dear Austin, I am keen, but you a good deal keener, I am something of a fox, but you are more of a hound! I guess we are very good friends tho’, and I guess we both love [S]us[ie] just as well as we can. (A 597; L 110)

Although he does not represent it in the text (L 110), Johnson notes that an “attempt has been made to erase ‘Sue’ in the second paragraph above
the signature.” His misdescription of the erasure is slight, but what it overlooks about the holograph is significant. It appears that it is “Susie,” not “Sue,” that is erased from the text. Not all the letters are erased, but only the first one and last two, leaving “us.” So the sentence reads “I guess we are very good friends tho’, and I guess we both love us just as well as we can.” Obviously this is an attempt to remove a record of Sue being at the center of the conflict between himself and his sister. Why was “he” so sensitive about this woman-for-woman love when, “for centuries, within Western societies women’s love for one another was considered to be one of women’s noblest characteristics”?12 Why have so few critics talked about these silences imposed on Dickinson’s expression? Is it that “Austin’s” self-consciousness is so painfully clear? Does Loomis Todd’s declaration that her lover Austin had grown very bitter toward his wife account for his actions? Her unavoidably biased account must be questioned. It is not only that of the mistress, but it is also hearsay: Mabel said that Austin... 

As several studies have shown, by the end of the 19th century, men were no longer “convinced of their own representations of (their) women’s basic purity and asexuality,” and “Austin,” well aware of his sister’s intense devotion to his wife, may have simply been trying to protect Dickinson from the speculations of “the malignant.”13 Yet anxious editing of Dickinson’s declarations to Sue persists, even in recent feminist criticism. Thus, in one of the most informative and widely read essays about Dickinson’s love for Sue, a curious silence is imposed which in effect excises not “Austin’s,” but Dickinson’s own self-consciousness. In “Emily Dickinson’s Letters to Sue Gilbert,” Lillian Faderman chastises Austin and Sue’s daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, for editing Dickinson’s letters in a way that masks her aunt’s love for her mother and points out that post-Freudian Bianchi excises the sensual ‘‘How vain it seems to write, when one knows how to feel—how much more near and dear to sit beside you, talk with you, hear the tones of your voice, ... Oh what will become of me? Susie, forgive me, forget all what I say.” Yet Faderman’s own selective quotation edits out and disguises Dickinson’s self-consciousness, which appears long before “Austin’s” actions at the end of the 19th century. She stops quoting as if the letter ends with “forgive me, forget all what I say.” But this letter, which, like others of this period, speaks of wanting to hold, kiss, and caress Sue, continues, and Dickinson seems well aware that her feelings for Sue are unacceptable. She urges her beloved to ignore her loving speeches and take up tales of holy virginity:

Susie, forgive me, forget all what I say, get some sweet scholar to read a gentle hymn, about Bethleem and Mary, and you will sleep on sweetly and have as peaceful dreams, as if I had never written you all these ugly things. (L 73).14
In light of this complete quotation, the fox-hound metaphor in the letter to Austin, somewhat obscured by “his” editing, suddenly is perfectly appropriate: where women’s erotic love is, when not denied or silenced, formally or informally punished, and where heterosexual love is a conquest and men the conquerors, Dickinson casts herself as the sly one in her love for Susie, while representing Austin as a bounding, stalking hunter. The most self-conscious part of the sentence is that which encourages Susie to embrace patriarchal normalcy and to act “as if” Dickinson “had never written . . . all these ugly things.” Calling remarks about her affection “ugly” seems to make Dickinson’s anxiety clear, yet in her attention to Bianchi’s self-consciousness, Faderman overlooks the degree to which Dickinson sees her woman-for-woman love as transgressive.

Dickinson’s Love

When analyzing Dickinson’s love for her sister-in-law, it is important to keep in mind both Adrienne Rich’s range of “woman-identified experience,” which embraces on a “lesbian continuum” many “forms of primary intensity between and among women,” and Catharine Stimpson’s insistence that lesbianism “represents a commitment of skin, blood, breast, and bone,” that “carnality distinguishes it from gestures of political sympathy with homosexuals and from affectionate friendships in which women enjoy each other, support each other, and comingle a sense of identity and well-being.”16 Although the sisters-in-law’s desire for one another may have remained un consummated, with Emily renouncing acting on her passion and Sue displacing hers onto Austin (see Cody’s After Great Pain for a more thorough discussion of Sue’s “homosexual panic”), Dickinson’s correspondence to Sue, frequently expressing her wanting to caress and kiss her beloved (L 96 is one of the many examples) and imagining orgasmic fusion with her (L 288, about 1864), speaks a carnal as well as emotional affection. Therefore, even Stimpson’s “conservative and severely literal” definition of what can and cannot be called lesbian is appropriate to consider. Yet that this was an emotional devotion of a lifetime is also important, so that Rich’s insistence on primary emotional intensity between women is also vital to our understanding. If Dickinson herself had not been so self-conscious about it and if Sue had not acknowledged that some of Dickinson’s expressions of love for her were “too adulatory to print,” this woman-for-woman love might comfortably fit under the umbrella of Smith-Rosenberg’s 19th century female world. Yet because we need to connote both the eroticism and difference of Dickinson’s affection, that loaded gun of a word that both Stimpson and Rich use is most appropriate for characterizing this relationship that has been ignored and trivialized over the last century.
Faderman is right to exhort us to remember that "lesbian history has been buried even more deeply than women's history," that it is difficult to trace its evolution, and that we must be very careful when applying the label to instances of woman-for-woman love in centuries and circumstances different from those of our own. Yet her definition for "the fairly common type of situation which we label 'lesbian' today" could be appropriate for describing Dickinson's relationship with Sue: "two women living together in an affectional relationship over a long period of time and sharing all aspects of their lives." In a well-tempered analysis of the severe limitations imposed by the fact that a number of Dickinson biographers and critics embrace the hearsay testimony of an opportunistic Mabel Loomis Todd while ignoring the "Dickinson revealed in her letters to" her primary correspondent "Sue," Dorothy Huff Oberhaus points out that Dickinson's relationship with Sue was "loving and lifelong" and notes that "Sue possessed an understanding of Dickinson's solitary life, her reluctance to publish, the uniqueness of her voice, her wit, her reifying and emblematically visual imagination, the movement characteristic of so many of her best poems, her love of nature, her reading habits, and her religious sensibility and reverential attitude toward life and poetry." 17

Interpreting her own definition, Faderman insists on 20th century terms, for "women living together" means women setting up a separate household together. However, as she points out, in a century so different from our own, where "economic reasons alone" made such arrangements between women "extremely rare," lesbian arrangements would not necessarily resemble the heterosexual arrangements of marriage. Even while Faderman pronounces Dickinson's affection for Sue homoerotic, she masks the degree of Dickinson's self-consciousness about her feeling by excising part of her expression. By erasing, Faderman directs our attention away from the fact that Dickinson's most important lifelong relationship was the one with Sue about which the young poet in her 20s seems to have felt guilty, and yet another portion of lesbian history is left unearthed, for just how important this relationship was to Dickinson is partially disguised. Sue was the most important person in Dickinson's life, not just for the "five years" that Faderman accounts, but in and throughout Dickinson's life. Although their situation does not fit our 20th century notions, the two women lived together and shared intimate details of one another's lives for decades.

Gaps like that created by Faderman, inevitable in the enterprise of criticism, can be filled. And when they are, Dickinson's love for Sue becomes less mysterious. Other gaps can also be filled. Readers contemporary with Dickinson expected a woman writer to be especially capable of profound emotion but to remain undefiled by eros. And "Austin" was not just anxious about Dickinson's affection for his wife. The
drafts of letters that he brought to Mabel Loomis Todd and said had been intended for Judge Otis P. Lord indicate that he sought to silence more than his sister's erotic woman-for-woman desire. He sought to silence all her erotic expression, apparently even the heterosexual. Sacrilegious and sexy, a letter that declares, "when it is right I will lift the Bars, and lay you in the Moss—" has a whole top of a sheet cut off just before she writes:

... to lie so near you longing—to touch it as I passed, for I am but a restive sleeper and often should journey from your Arms through the happy Night, but you will lift me back, won't you, for only there I ask to be— (A 739; L 562)

The correspondences to Sue and Lord show that Dickinson was writing much more about love than about the woes of "secret sorrow."

Other Gaps

Still other gaps, some of which have existed for more than 60 years, can be and have been filled. Yet few have noticed that these erasures of cultural blasphemies existed in the first place and few have pondered the significance of such shushings. The publication history of the following shows what I mean:

A solemn thing—it was—
I said—
A woman—white—to be—
And wear—if God should count me fit—
Her blameless mystery—

A timid thing—to drop a life
Into the mystic well—
Too plummetless—that it come back—
Eternity—until—

I pondered how the bliss would look—
And would it feel as big—
When I could take it in my hand—
As hovering—seen—through fog—glimmering
And then—the size of this
"small" life—
The Sages—call it small—
Swelled—like Horizons—in my
breast—
And I sneered—softly—"Small"!

(F 14; P 271)

A 19th century lady would never utter the final two stanzas, would never sneer, and, although Thomas Higginson, the Atlantic Monthly editor with whom Dickinson had initiated a correspondence in April, 1862, had written “Let us alter as little as possible” during Loomis Todd’s and his editing of the first posthumous volumes of Dickinson’s poetry in the 1890s, when Loomis Todd printed the poem in 1896 she edited those stanzas out and titled the poem “Wedded.” In the version produced by Loomis Todd, to be married is a holy thing for women, and that “Solemn thing” is a “hallowed” mystery. In Dickinson’s version, marriage is a solemn state indeed, and, she is careful to mention, one for which women cannot be blamed. Loomis Todd’s changes are gender-determined in that she edits out the erotic poet who blasphemes the social order. In Dickinson’s poem, the unmarried speaker ends, not pining to be “A woman—white,” but, by comparing her unwed state to what she imagines bridal “bliss” to be, she sneers at those who would pity her. Unapologetic, unashamed, the spinster is made huge and powerful by her unorthodox contentment.

Like Emerson’s eye—“the first circle” and “the horizon which it forms,” “the primary figure repeated without end”—the speaker’s way of seeing makes her “Swell” so “Horizons” are “in” her breast, not somewhere far off, at some rainbow’s end. This powerful “She” who snickers at romantic conventions that would usher women through life and make them brides would never make a poetess who celebrates husband and “Wedded” domestic circumference. Like the speaker of “Wild Nights,” a woman who says such things is out of order. Unlike the ballerina who cannot dance upon her toes (P 326), this woman does not even pretend to be conventionally coy. Nor is her message heavily coded. This voice, like that which utters the breathless sexuality of “Wild Nights,” is unequivocal, and champions female power.

When Thomas Johnson printed his variorum edition in 1955, that gap created by Mabel Loomis Todd was filled (as those created by Johnson himself are now being filled by Ralph W. Franklin). Other gaps, like those imposed by “Austin,” can only be partially filled. Although we can see that someone sought to silence her powerful sexuality and produce in print a more conventional woman than Dickinson’s written record would allow, we must live with the fact of these gaps. Their context shows what
was the nature of the excised expressions, and sometimes, as in the case of “One Sister have I in the house,” we can know exactly what is beneath the blot. Yet we must be careful when studying erasures. It is well-known that Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* was one of Dickinson’s favorites, and it offers, perhaps, the best advice to keep in mind when pondering such forced silences. When the poem’s Marian Erle learned to read, she had to depend on a “pedlar” to provide mutilated volumes. He would

Toss her down
Some stray odd volume from his heavy pack,
A Thomson’s Seasons, mulcted of the Spring,
Or half a play of Shakespeare’s torn across
(She had to guess the bottom of a page
By just the top sometimes,—as difficult,
As, sitting on the moon, to guess the earth!

(III 972–78)

When forced to sit on “Austin’s” moon to guess Dickinson’s earth, our crescent of reading lacks (P 909).

When something is cut out of a letter, there is not the same there there anymore. Yet to ignore the imposed silences now there is to create yet another erasure. We do not ignore the “Master” letters because they create more gaps than they fill. In fact, critical attention lavished on them perpetuates the erasures and widens the gaps initiated by “Austin.” Problems with publishing and representing Dickinson not only began our first century of reading her, but they also have closed it. The most recent anthologies, for example, indicate that Dickinson’s primary correspondences were with Higginson and Master. Yet Dickinson wrote more letters and sent more poems to Sue than to anyone else. And while we know that she systematically ignored Higginson’s advice, we also can be sure that she wrote four different second stanzas to “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers” trying to please Sue.

**Primary Correspondence**

But that primary correspondence is most often ignored while attention is lavished on the letters written to men; and the word of the other woman Mabel Loomis Todd, about the wife, “dear Sue,” has been treated as fact and, as Oberhaus notes, has worked “to obscure Sue’s close relationship with Dickinson.” Dickinson’s most powerful relationship—personally, poetically, even politically—was with her beloved friend and sister, Sue. Intimate for nearly 40 years, their relationship knew anger as well as joy, ambivalence as well as clarity in feeling, periods of intense
daily interactions and periods of separation. This relationship makes, therefore, a good standard of comparison for all of Dickinson’s others. Yet over the past century, one misrepresentation has led to another, and the cycle continues. So, many gaps in her texts have been created by efforts to hide Dickinson’s blasphemy, be it lesbian or disrespectful of the patriarchal bastion of marriage. And those gaps have been imposed on our reading.

Reminding us that Mary Wollstonecraft was much maligned for exercising sexual freedom and “that Barret Browning was praised for her blameless sexual life,” Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note the eroticism of Dickinson’s “A Word made Flesh” and say that traditionally “genius and sexuality are diseases in women, diseases akin to madness.” From the beginning, those who have loved Emily Dickinson or found themselves somehow invested in her virginal image have sought to excise her powerful sexuality and, by reading the expression of her eroticism as submission, helplessness, and feminine, unrequited emotion out of control, have sought to spiritualize and “normalize” what she says. As the inordinate attention to the “Master” letters evinces, attempts to hide the range of Dickinson’s love and sexuality have not furthered our understanding and reading of Dickinson. On the other hand, recognizing Dickinson’s love for women and her lesbian desire clarifies and enhances our reading. Her cross-dressing characters and speakers, her impassioned rhetoric to Sue, “Austin’s” response to those inflamed expressions, and the rhetoric of similarity in many of her love poems make a new sense: the “Garnet to Garnet—” and “Gold—to Gold—” of “Title divine—is mine!” (P 1072), images glittering and enticing but hardened and cold, are perfect for articulating lesbian desire thwarted in a heterosexist culture.

Read with Dickinson’s love for Sue in mind, Dickinson’s “Calvary of Love” poems, replete with a rhetoric of similarity, long noticed and of late getting considerable attention, are not so mysterious. In fact, for a woman who was in love with a woman whose exotic religious interests are well-known, the poems are most befitting. “Title divine—is mine,” the most famous of these, is usually discussed when one is proposing Samuel Bowles as a lover or as a candidate for Master because he was one of only two Dickinson correspondents whom we know received the poem. Yet when Dickinson sent Bowles a copy she appended to it a note of entreaty—“You will tell no other?”—clearly asking him to keep one of her secrets. I propose that when she sent Bowles the poem, she was confiding in him, telling him about another situation, not about her feelings for him. Sue was the other recipient of a version of this poem; and Dickinson simply signed that copy “Emily”: 15
Title divine, is mine.
The Wife without the
Sign—
Acute Degree conferred
on me—
Empress of Calvary—
Royal, all but the Crown—
Betrothed, without the
Swoon
God gives us Women—
When You hold Garnet
to Garnet—
Gold—to Gold—
Born—Bridalled—
Shrouded—
In a Day—
Tri Victory—

"My Husband"—Women
say
Stroking the Melody—
Is this the Way—

(P 1072, 1860s)

Obviously this poem is about a love not sanctioned by public vows. Titles are filed in the clerk's office, not worn around one's finger or atop one's head like a crown, that public ornament signifying royalty. Anyone who could write such a poem is self-conscious about her love and Dickinson acknowledges that she is not like a woman

in swoon,
To whom life creeps back in form of death,
With a sense of separation, a blind pain
Of blank obstruction, and a roar i' the ears
Of visionary chariots which retreat
As earth grows clearer... slowly, by degrees...
(Aurora Leigh 1559-65)

Hers is not the deathlike state that she attributes to conventional marriage where women are enamored with the sounds of their title—"My Husband," Mrs.—and stroke the melody, caressing those rather than the corporeal spouse. Nor is the relationship she describes a completely uncomplicated, blissful union. In such a wedlock, she says she is "Born—Bridalled—/ Shrouded." Using terms reflecting her apparent
ambivalence, in but a day she is both born again and dressed for death when she is adorned like a bride. Juxtaposed here are life and death with the "Bridalled" state sandwiched between them. Bridal connotes a wedding feast or festival and the jollity associated with bride-ale. Yet it puns on bridled. The newlywed woman may swoon, but in accepting the vows of a 19th-century wife—to love, honor, and obey—the bride already has a bit in her mouth. Her desires must be curtailed to meet the approval of her husband. Faced with such circumscription, many a woman bridles. Shroud's connotations are multifarious as well. Women are shrouded behind their wedding veils; the dead are shrouded in winding sheets. Here nuptial images, supposedly full of life, are synonymous with those of death. In “I’m ‘wife’—I’ve finished that—” (F 9; P 199), Dickinson declares women eclipsed by their husbands, and, with shroud, she also calls to mind Polonius behind the arras and notions of being hidden. In this poem, love is not a happy, publicly celebrated affair, but a secret and a crucifixion.

A Calvary Experience

It is nothing new to recognize that Dickinson depicts her love as a Calvary experience. Sewall, among others, has suggested that this is possibly a poem in which she is “the imagined wife of Samuel Bowles,”25 a poem in which a love that can never be realized crucifies her. Sewall observes, “There are scores of poems from the late 1850s, many of them clearly love poems, that Emily did not send to Bowles.” Her loving remarks of the late 1850s and the early 1860s were to Sue. In spite of his intimacy with the Dicksons, Bowles may or may not have understood the poem that Dickinson forwarded to him. More surely Sue understood the poem when Dickinson forwarded it to her; for in context of their correspondence, the poem makes sense.

In Sue’s version, an odd line appears. For her beloved, Dickinson adds “Tri Victory—.” By itself, this alteration befuddles: is Dickinson punning on “try” and recommending that Sue attempt to celebrate her wifely circumference or is she speaking of some three-way triumph? Considering the line in context of some of her other writing offers illumination, if not an answer.

Around February, 1861, when Dickinson tells Bowles that Vinnie, Sue, and she all hope he is recovering from his sciatica, she proclaims it a “tri-Hope” (L 229). If she uses a similar formula in the poem, are the three people involved Bowles, his wife Mary, and Emily? If so, why is the “Tri-” line not included in his copy? The most intense triangle in which he was involved was with his wife and her cousin, his intimate, Maria Whitney. Since the poem articulates the reality of secret betrothal, of that which cannot be publicly acknowledged, and since the imagery is, as in “Like
Eyes that Looked on Wastes—" (P 458; F 32) where Queens make each other Queens (not Kings), a rhetoric of similarity, not difference, this “Tri” may be punning off the fact of her triangle with her sister-in-law and brother. To speak that situation of homoerotic/incestuous bonding, such rhetoric is apt, as is the metaphor of crucifixion.

Like Jesus, who had to be nailed to a cross to become a Messiah, and like the Queens, who find only a wasteland for their love “reign” by “perishing, the Empress proclaims her royal realm the site of the Cross. Thus do crucifying images accompany this rhetoric of sameness. In “Title divine,” the poem’s speaker says this secret title confers “Acute Degree” and that her Golgotha makes her “Empress.” Acronymically A.D., the phrase signifies that she lives not “in the year of our Lord,” but in a time lorded by her grief; when her anguish was born, her senses were made raw.

Considering the kind of copies Dickinson sent to each of them, “Title divine” is more likely to be about Dickinson’s love for Sue than for Bowles. Certainly many of the rest of the “Calvary of Love” poems support such an interpretation (see P 313, 322, 348, 364, 549, 553, 561, 568, 577, 620, 725). Dickinson made fair copies of all these poems in the early 1860s; all show lovers who are equals; and all emphasize a love crucified. When Dickinson chooses images in these, the crimson and gold colors that reflect the blood of crucifixion as well as the royal weeds of an Empress, they do not reflect the hierarchy and difference of heterosexual relations, but the sameness and equality of lesbian relations. In “There came a Day [perhaps the day she was born, bridalled, and shrouded] at / Summer’s full—” (F 13; P 322), “Each was to each—the sealed church—” and “Each—bound the other’s / Crucifix—.” “Each to each” echoes “We learned the Whole of Love—” (F 28; P 568) and the

Think of it Lover! I and Thee
Permitted—face to face to be—

of “If I may have it, when it’s/dead” (P 577; F 15). As Emily and Sue often mirror one another—in their descriptions of literature’s power to make one feel extraordinary (see L 238 and L 342a), in Sue’s highly allusive obituary of Emily—so do the lovers in these poems. As far as we know, only “Title divine” and “There came a Day” were “published” by Dickinson to any of her contemporaries. Higginson, who received “There came a Day,” and Bowles got one poem each; Sue got copies of both poems. This fact, viewed in light of the mutilations to Dickinson’s affectionate expressions for and about Sue and of their lifelong intimacy, suggests that, unless Dickinson’s Calvary of Love was a fiction, Sue was the primary object of Dickinson’s erotic desire.

If all these letters and poems and especially the erotic and seductive
expressions had been sent to a man, little doubt would remain that he was the “Master” so many have spent so much time looking for. Yet the majority, or “Corporation,” (L 233) recoils from Dickinson’s powerful lesbian eros. Dickinson sent many poems to Sue about perception and its power, and it seems that the various assumptions that label homosexuality as neurotic, maladjusted, and underdeveloped have determined the way that Dickinson’s love for her sister-in-law has generally been perceived. At best, such love has been seen “as a real tragedy”; at worst, it has been denied and erased. Like any lifelong love relationship, the love between these two women knew its ups and downs. Although tension in such an intense involvement is to be expected, any voicing of friction between these two has been used to discount their 30 years of living side by side. Dickinson seemed aware that such love may well call for defenses and for each woman to be a fortress for the other:

Without a Formula we fought
Each was to each the Pink Redoubt—
(P 1529, about 1881)

After three decades, when she characterizes their love to Sue, she does not compare it to the adolescent, swept-away passion of Romeo and Juliet, but to the sophisticated, persistent, if tired, love of Antony and Cleopatra. Talking in Shakespeare, Dickinson tells of the problematic relationship of this love between two women, between the one who put a woman before all others and the other who loved her friend and sister but took a husband:

Susan’s Call are like Antony’s Supper—
“And pays his Heart for what his Eyes, eat, only—”
(L 854, about 1883,
Antony and Cleopatra II ii
225–26)

Persistent Questions

Many unanswered and probably unanswerable questions persist about Dickinson’s relationship with and affection for her sister-in-law, yet it is certain that the poet’s expressions to and about Sue provoked censorship. It can probably never be known who ordered whom to do what when or who did what when; nevertheless, to arrive at some understanding of the nature of these mutilations is crucial to an understanding of what Dickinson meant and to whom she referred when she employed the title “Master.” These erasures are, in the words of Tillie Olsen, “not natural silences,” and some of the gaps created by them need not be perma-
nent. At the advent of a second century of reading Emily Dickinson, scholarly attention should be focused on filling what gaps we can.

To fill a Gap
Insert the Thing that
Caused it—
Block it up
With Other and ‘twill
yawn the more
You cannot +Solder an
Abyss
With Air—

+ Plug a Sepulchre—

(F 31; P 546)

Many today are working to fill those gaps created by critics who emphasized her heterosocial relations at the expense of obscuring or even denying her relations with women. The latter attempts cloaked Dickinson in mystery, befuddled critics, confused issues, and closed texts to us. But recognizing woman-for-woman love unveils, focuses, and opens texts to us. As in the case of H. D., the erotic power of Dickinson’s love for women was also creative power. If a woman in patriarchal culture is to recover and recreate herself, she must look through women’s eyes and not through male depictions of women. H. D. claims that she sees through Bryher:

And yet, so oddly, I knew that this experience, this writing-on-the-wall before me, could not be shared with them—could not be shared with anyone except the girl who stood so bravely there beside me. This girl had said without hesitation, “Go on.” It was she really who had the detachment and the integrity of the Pythoness of Delphi. But it was I, battered and disassociated from my American family and my English friends, who was seeing the pictures, who was reading the writing or who was granted inner vision. Or perhaps in some sense, we were “seeing” it together, for without her, admittedly, I could not have gone on.28

Dickinson proclaims that she tastes and feels through her beloved Sue:

I could not drink it Sue,
Till you had tasted first—

(L 287)
Take back that "Bee" and "Buttercup"—I have no
Field for them, though for the woman whom I prefer,
Here is Festival—Where my Hands are cut, Her
fingers will be found inside—(L 288)

As both Dickinson and H. D. mature and their creation of self as poet
becomes stronger and stronger, seeing and feeling through women
becomes more and more important. Union with mother, toward whom
each felt ambivalent, becomes, therefore, desirable, even necessary. In
later life, both articulate a need for reconciliation with their mothers.
H. D. writes:

But one can never get near enough or if one gets near, it is
because one has measles or scarlet fever. If one could stay near
always, there would be no break in Consciousness—

Much has been made of Dickinson's dissatisfaction with her mother, but a
gap has been created by ignoring remarks that she made about her
mother. When the elder Emily Dickinson died, Dickinson the daughter
poet says that she was temporarily robbed of the facility she most
cherished, having her way with language: "I hoped to write you before,
but mother's dying almost stunned my spirit" (L 785 to the Norcrosses).
Learning to care for her mother taught Dickinson something about
loving:

We were never intimate Mother and children while she was
our Mother—but Mines in the same ground meet by
tunneling and when she became our Child, the Affection
came—When we were Children and she journeyed, she
always brought us something. Now, would she bring us but
herself, what an only Gift—Memory is a strange Bell—Jubilee,
and Knell. (L 792 to Elizabeth Holland)

As one discovers mineral treasures by tunneling the earth, so
Dickinson found hidden treasures in taking care of her mother. This pat­
tern of ambivalence toward mother followed by a need for reconciliation
is part of woman's recovery of women's experience, and vital to a practice
of woman-centered poetics. Here one is reminded of Louise Bernikow's
assertion: "Modernism was not a male enterprise. We need the women,
but not each is isolation. We need them in their connection, which were
many forms of love." 29 Without union with other women and this reunion
with Mother, Psyche—woman recreating herself and making herself
over in her own image—cannot be reborn; and without acknowledg­
ment and recovery of the insufficiently explored and examined relation­
ships of Dickinson with women, the gaps in her texts, and then in our
own, will be the wider. 30
Notes


2 Poems as represented by Thomas H. Johnson in The Poems of Emily Dickinson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955) are indicated by “P” and the number assigned by Johnson. If they are also reproduced by Ralph W. Franklin in The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981) their location is indicated by “F” or “Set” and the fascicle or set number (given by Franklin) only.

In her slide lecture at the Emily Dickinson/H. D. conference at San Jose State University, “The Illogic of Sumptuary Values,” Susan Howe first called my attention to Dickinson’s orthographic techniques in this particular poem. In conversation with Martha Lindblom O’Keefe (who in 1986 privately published This Edifice, a study of the structure of Dickinson’s fascicles) my reading of this holograph has also been enhanced.

3 According to Thomas Johnson, this is the second “Master” letter; according to Ralph W. Franklin, it is the third. See “Introduction,” The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson (Amherst: Amherst College Press, 1986), for extended discussion of the dating of these letters. The pencilled handwriting of what Franklin calls “Letter 2” (L 248; A 829) matches that of drafts supposedly written to Judge Lord (L 559; A 735). Since Johnson said these documents were written at least a decade apart, all sorts of questions arise and need to be addressed about the dating of Dickinson’s manuscripts. Dating has been determined in part by the type of stationery used. Yet Dickinson herself points out a problem with this method. Writing her cousin Louise Norcross, she notes: “This little sheet of paper has lain for several years in my Shakespeare, and though it is blotted and antiquated is endeared by its resting-place” (L 340).

4 The facsimile of the letter in question here in Millicent Todd Bingham’s Emily Dickinson’s Home: Letters of Edward Dickinson and His Family (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954), 423–429, shows clearly that the copies are drafts, and I knew that Jay Leyda and Richard Sewall were right when they pointed out that the bit of verse printed at the end of this “Master” letter really belongs in the middle of the text:

No Rose, yet felt myself
a’bloom,
No Bird—yet rode in Ether
(A 828c)
should be printed just after the letter's speaker has mused on the result of Master having given something other than "Redemption" and says "I forgot the Redemption and tired—no more—" (A 828a). See Leyda, The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1960), II, 22, and Sewall, The Life of Emily Dickinson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), 514.


6 Susan Howe, My Emily Dickinson (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1985), 27. David Copperfield's nickname, it should be remembered, was, like that of the speaker of the "Master" letters, "Daisy." Likewise, Margaret Homans has noted "a literary source in the manipulation of power [similar to that evinced by the speaker of the 'Master' letters] in the relationship between Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester," Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, and Emily Dickinson (Princeton, 1980), 205.


8 In referring to the mutilator as "Austin," all I have is Mabel Loomis Todd's word that Austin was indeed the perpetrator; so I use quotation marks to denote hearsay. Franklin's notes on F 2 state: "Intact when transcribed in 1889 and 1891, this fascicle when indexed about August 1891 had been mutilated, apparently by Mabel Todd, and six poems were missing: 147, 56, 14, 1730, 57, and 1729." Several others have discussed Todd's rewriting the record left by Dickinson. See, e.g., Franklin, "Three Additional Manuscripts," American Literature L (1978), 113–116; Dorothy Huff Oberhaus, "In Defense of Sue," Dickinson Studies 48 (1983), 1–25; Anna Mary Wells, "ED Forgeries," Dickinson Studies 35 (1979), 12–16.

9 Franklin evidently assumes that the stanza is primary, as is shown by his remarks in a June 5, 1985, letter to Susan Howe: "Doesn't much of your argument depend on your assumption that one (she) reads in lines or parts of lines? What happens to it if the form lurking in the mind is the stanza? Personally I am not convinced that the placement of run on lines is more than arbitrary convenience." See HOW(ever) Vol. III, No. 4, 11.

10 I examined this fascicle before beginning to study the letters because I was familiar with the facsimile in Franklin's Manuscript Books and wanted to see if the extensive mutilations of this poem would yield any clues about the mutilations of the letters to Austin.

11 See Bingham, Emily Dickinson's Home, 54.

12 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in


Thomas Higginson’s remark about the speculations of “the malignant” is quoted by Millicent Todd Bingham in Ancestors’ Brocades: The Literary Debut of Emily Dickinson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945), 127.

14 In both her article, “Emily Dickinson’s Letters to Sue Gilbert,” Massachusetts Review 18 No. 2 (Summer 1977), 197–225, esp. 213, and Surpassing, 175, Faderman edits out the self-conscious “all these ugly things.” Although I am discussing a problem with Faderman’s essay here, I consider her work invaluable and essential to lesbian/feminist studies; her analysis of Bianchi’s anxious editing is particularly elucidating.

15 See “ED’s Letters to Sue Gilbert,” 201.

16 One might think of Stimpson and Rich as at opposite poles of a continuum of lesbian interpretation. “The Lesbian Issue” of Signs (Summer 1984) Vol. 9, No. 4 is a useful source for beginning to survey recent lesbian literature.

17 Oberhaus echoes Sue’s obituary for Dickinson (Springfield Republican May 18, 1886). No less than half the memorial depicts Dickinson the writer. The obituary is quoted by Bianchi in The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 100–103.


19 Thomas Johnson says that “Mrs. Todd mistook the alternate for ‘timid’ as one for ‘blameless’ in the line preceding.” A glance at the facsimile in the Manuscript Books calls this point into question. Like the variants for “mystic” and “until,” “hallowed” is written directly above (and quite close to) “timid.” See F 14, p. 289, and Johnson’s note on P 271.


21 That Sue was a powerful political influence is plausible when one considers the printings of Dickinson’s poems during her lifetime. If we compare the printings Dickinson witnessed to the versions that Sue had in her possession after the poet’s death and remember that Sue hosted many an editor at her home, the Evergreens, some of whom printed Dickinson’s verse, it is reasonable to conclude that it was Sue who “turned love to larceny” (see Sue’s obituary) and “robbed” (see L 316)
Dickinson of select poems, forwarding them to publications, one of which, the *Drum Beat*, was a Civil War publication used to raise support for Union soldiers.

22 In Cynthia Griffin Wolff's *Emily Dickinson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), the degree of Sue's importance is not acknowledged, although the over-privileging of Mabel Loomis Todd is: "This all-too-well documented love affair between Austin and Mabel is of such vivid human interest that it occasionally threatens to obscure the cold truth: Mrs. Todd never met Emily Dickinson face to face . . . and although she played a central role in preserving Dickinson's work for future readers, neither her character nor her relationship with Austin had any bearing on his sister's poetry" (p. 8).


25 This and the following quotation are from Sewall, *Life of Emily Dickinson*, 405 and 496, respectively.

26 Richard Sewall, as quoted by Rebecca Patterson, "Author's Preface," *Emily Dickinson's Imagery* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), xv.


28 This and the subsequent quotation from H. D. are from *Tribute to Freud* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1956), 48–49 and 33, respectively.


"omitted centers": Dickinson’s Metonymic Strategy

Sherri Williams

In choosing a fragmented, metonymic rhetorical mode of contiguity, partiality, particularity, Emily Dickinson champions the incidental: the fly, the zero, the sigh. This strategic formal structure foregrounds her larger thematic plan: her slanted truths, her circumscription of meaning, her "omitted centers." I wish, first, to discuss Dickinson’s metonymic rhetorical structure and its relations to another possible strategy, that of metaphor, and, second, to consider whether there is a relationship between her preferred rhetorical mode and gender. The latter question is why, as a woman, she chose to de-structure traditional syntax and de-rationalize the metaphoric development of meaning.

I.

Jay Leyda writes in the introduction to his comprehensive artifactual biography that:

A major device of Emily Dickinson’s writing . . . was what might be called the "omitted center." The riddle, the circumstance too well known to be repeated to the initiate, the deliberate skirting of the obvious—this was the means she used to increase the privacy of her communication; it has also increased our problems in piercing that privacy.¹

Leyda then drives on for some thousand odd pages, searching through fragments of letters, summaries of contemporary newspaper and periodical articles, reports of numerous daily events, and other pertinent
information, looking for "the obvious." Leyda is one of a number to seek in Dickinson's poems religious, biographical, literary, epistemological equivalences, hoping in some way to unify her thematic diversity. Yet these various methodologies, each in some way designed to fill Dickinson's thematic void, overlook the importance of their discovery: Dickinson's intentional movement away from a poetry of wholistic, universal truths and onto a rhetoric of partiality and particularity. My intent is not to minimize the important and extensive scholarship that illuminates the biographical, religious, and literary sources for Dickinson's poetry. But often, in an effort to justify Dickinson's cultural value and literary authority, the dynamic power of her work is avoided. Dickinson employs a stylistics of fragmentation and particularity. Her voice is evasive, illusive, uncenterable. She writes of telling the truth but telling it slant, of ratio, "Of Opposite-to balance Odd-", of circling around her ideas. As she said in her 1862 letter to T. W. Higginson: "My Business is Circumference." Instead of the traditional metaphorical system of totality, centrality, equivalence, Dickinson uses a language of partiality, contingency, comparison.

I wish to build a scaffolding around Dickinson's work similar to the ones with which she circumscribes her ideas, and through which can be identified what I see as her dominant rhetorical trope: the metonymic movement away from a central meaning. My use of the term metonymy is derived from Roman Jakobson's supposition that linguistic discourse develops along two very "different semantic lines." One word, phrase, or sentence leads to the next "either through their similarity or through their contiguity. The metaphoric way would be the most appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic way for the second. . . ." Contiguity describes the way that words touch, creating meaning within the connection between them rather than because they are substitutes for the actual objects they describe. David Antin, in "Some Questions About Modernism," applies Jakobson's ideas to clarify metonymy as "a figure in which an object is evoked by naming an object closely related to it, the way 'lock' might be evoked by a 'key' or a 'horse' by a 'cart' or a 'spoon' by a 'fork'." It is the relationship between words or phrases that produces meaning, rather than the commonly understood similarity of meaning between the word, or phrase, and its alternate, or metaphor.

Metonymy is also created through the relationship of different elements in a setting, or context, or through the words and phrases that appear both before and after a word or phrase and determine its meaning. In the phrase, "the grey mare grazes," each part of the phrase modifies each other part to produce a consistent meaning. We can use the word "grey" to stand for "mare," because of the contiguous connection in the phrase, and produce an understandable meaning when we say "the grey grazes." Yet "grey" is only a part of the actual object: the horse.
Metonymy can be more fully understood if one thinks about Jakobson's other participant in the semantic scale, metaphor. With metaphor, the attempt is to communicate by selecting, from a group of words commonly understood to represent the same meaning—a substitution set—the particular word or phrase that best describes that which the desire is to replace, so that the specificity of the description of an idea or an object will be enhanced. The original object remains, or peeks through, or stands behind, the word or phrase as an implied comparison. The meaning of the metaphor is understood because of the consistency of the signified object that links it. In the phrase "the old horse grazes," a metaphor could be found for the word "horse" to describe her more closely. "The old mare grazes" presents "mare" as a metaphor for "horse" with the understanding that they both signify the same object.

Collages of Words

In her poetry, Dickinson combines, or collages, non-equivalent words and phrases, evoking through the contiguous relationships of the signs she chooses a spectrum of possible meanings. Her words and ideas share a common edge and are thus connected through their shared contact. They touch but cannot be substituted as equivalents. Words or phrases from one particular context suggest, metonymically, other words and phrases from a different context. And, though the autonomy of her ideas remains uncompromised, the link between her words or ideas and an exact, specific signified, opens up. The various contexts flicker back and forth, constantly modifying each other, changing the reader's interpretation of the poem. Dickinson's poetry evokes an image of a chain of spaces, connected by tangible signs that govern an endless deferment of meaning, which helps explain the difficulty the reader has in superimposing a single reading upon any of Dickinson's poems. There is no central meaning: the center is omitted.

A comparison of two of Dickinson's poems can demonstrate her development of the metonymic character of her work. I quote them now, using Johnson's numbers and approximate dating:

135
Water, is taught by thirst.
Land-by the Oceans passed.
Transport-by throe-
Peace-by its battles told-
Love, by Memorial Mold-
Birds, by the snow.
c. 1859 1896 (63)
The first lines of these two poems contain immediate parallels. In each, something is being taught by something else. There exists here the idea that knowledge—of enlightenment, or of satiety of thirst—exists within an arrangement of comparison. To know a thing, one must also know a correlating, other side. But, though the structures of these lines vary as to the position of the grammatical objects or the things being taught, the connection between the two can be drawn, first, through their sharing of the word "taught," then through the number of words in each of their first two lines, their rhythm, and their development of the common theme of, as Margaret Homens says, the "instructional value of relativity." In other words, the ratio or difference—the space—between, say, water and thirst, land and ocean, birds or springtime, and snow or winter, teaches and expands the value and the meaning of the one or the other.

Except for the third line of the first poem, "Transport-by throe-" which is the most obvious leap from the language of the first to the language of the second, poem number 135 uses the passive tense and unambiguous language to examine what I have already described as their common theme: the "instructional value of relativity." Again, except for that third line, the language of the first poem is quite straightforward and descriptive. But the impulse behind "The Zeroes-taught us-Phosphorus," while similar to the first poem, is highly ambiguous and ironic. A further difference lies within the contrast between the first poem's parallel grammatical structure and the second's variability of structure. The systematic balance of "Water, is taught by thirst" is undermined in "The Zeroes-taught us-Phosphorus-" by a grammar of uncertainty. In this later poem the verbs never quite appear; the connection between the subject and objects of Dickinson's comparisons vanishes: the center falls away.

In "The Zeroes-taught us-Phosphorus-" Dickinson chooses specific words that create meaning through their relationship within multiple contexts. One of the contexts in which "Zeroes" exists outside of this poem is within the line of negative and positive numbers, as the mathematical notation that represents an absence of anything, nothing—the signified, 0. If one of the ideas Dickinson is trying to establish is a situa-
tion of nothingness—an abyss—then, instead of using the words “nothingness” or “abyss,” she super-charges her expression by using a numerical term to embody that conceptual state. The understanding of her term comes from a shifting from one context to another: from a tangible, mathematical context to an emotional, psychological one. Her metonymical description exists within the interplay of two contexts: one involving numbers and the other involving emotional states.

“Phosphorus” is a chemical element, no. 15, symbol P on the periodic table, and exists within “an arrangement of the chemical elements according to their atomic numbers, to exhibit the periodic law by their groupings.”6 In Dickinson’s context, “Phosphorus” suggests enlightenment, the same luminous qualities exhibited by the element. Certainly, the phonetic relationship between “Phosphorus” and “phosphorescent” further loads her usage. As with her choice of “Zeroes,” the conjunction between a natural, scientific environment and a psychological, intellectual enlightenment suggests that meaning is developed through context rather than metaphorical substitution.

Contiguous Associations

As the reader grasps these contiguous associations, the poem reveals itself and some common understandings emerge. The first line of the poem “The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus—” states that the ratio, between 0, an utter void, and illumination, enlightenment, enhances the meaning of both. The rest of the poem supports this reading by positioning near opposites against one another: “Fire” and “Glaciers”—a metonymic term for ice—“White” and “red,” “Paralysis” and “Vitality.” Of course, these comparisons only imply opposites. They aren’t actual opposites; the opposite of white is black. But the linkage between these comparisons, the spaces between them, form an arena for the development of further comparisons. As the poem is read through, these words have an implied relationship that supplies them with additional meaning. Thus, an internal context appears, giving its own, unwritten context to the words of the poem. Because of the metonymic representations Dickinson chooses, her words, like a kaleidoscope, overlap, blur, focus, then blur again. Although the signs remain the same each time one looks at the poem, the relationship between the contexts shifts, producing an alternate image.

“I heard a Fly buzz—when I died” demonstrates how metonymy works within the overall context of an individual poem. Here, Dickinson describes multiple events that articulate a moment of acute awareness before death:
I heard a Fly buzz—when I died.

The Silence in the Room
Was like the Silence in the Air
Between the Leaves of Storm.

The Eyes Around had grown dim
Or—

And Porcupines were gathering in
For that Cool—One in the King
For out—New in the Room—

I rolled my Hips—Signed away
What portion of me—
Assignate—and when it was
Then intrenched a Fly.

With Blue—Uncertain Stumbling Run—
Between the Figure and the—
And when the Windows failed and now
I could not see it—
I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air—
Between the Heaves of Storm—

The Eyes around—had wrung them dry—
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset—when the King
Be witnessed—in the Room—

I willed my Keepsakes—Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable—and then it was
There interposed a Fly—

With Blue—uncertain stumbling Buzz—
Between the light—and me—
And then the Windows failed—and then
I could not see to see—

The various occurrences in the room at the time of this death—the buzz of the fly, the "Stillness," the sighs of the attendants—do not stand as substitutes, or metaphors, for the death experience. Instead, they are non-equivalent, particularized representations of an individual encounter with death. The reader must construct a reading of this poem by filling in the spaces between the various contiguous events. Each individual occurrence develops significance as each successive occurrence is described. The meaning of this poem exists within the "Stillness" of the spaces, "Between the Heaves of Storm—" or between the designated incidents. Vivian Pollack describes this process as follows:

By showing us what happens within a sentence that skips across stanzas and whose grammatical swell underscores the disintegration of meaning, she renders any further commentary superfluous. "Between the Heaves of Storm—" is exactly where she remains, at the point of maximum instability between that heave anterior and then posterior to the text.7

I would add that the "disintegration of meaning" Dickinson might "render" in this poem demonstrates its lack of metaphoric unity. Dickinson reinforces the importance of personal context, shifting attention onto the individual death experience, defusing a metaphorically universal concept of dying. The narrator speaks from the other side of the
grave, not to tell the living what it is like there, but to iterate the meaningfulness of each solitary occurrence in life.

Each of the incidents in this poem works metonymically as a part for the whole. The buzz of the fly, the dried tears, the "Stillness" are each a fragment of the whole experience. The quotation of the first line, "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—" recalls the whole poem in much the same way that referring to "the grey" evokes a particular horse. The cohesion in this poem evolves through its context rather than through a concurrence with a single, understood object, or the universality of an idea: through metonymy rather than through metaphor.

II.

Is there a relationship between Dickinson's choice of a metonymic rhetorical mode, a language of ratio, contiguity, and partiality, rather than of a more traditional metaphoric rhetorical system of equivalence, similarity, and totality—is there a link between her choice and her being a woman?

One side of the story is found in the position that Dickinson acted in direct response to what she saw as the overwhelmingly oppressive masculine poetic tradition. Based upon self-centered universalist assumptions, most 19th century American male poets represented themselves, their experiences, and their philosophies from a totalizing point of view. The culturally defined role of the 19th century woman as a passive, domestic counterpart to a man, abruptly bumps up against a conception of a unified, vital self. While a woman might conceive of herself within this supposed universal model, she is designed by Romantic philosophy as the muse, the complementary image intended to sustain the Romantic masculine myth of natural gender hierarchy. Unable to project the voice of the universal man, expected to exist as only a fragment, a part, of that "other," whole being, Dickinson, in order to speak truthfully of her political and psychological location as a woman, creates an alternate rhetorical form. She quite self-consciously undermines a language from which she was excluded, omitted. And she does this by destructuring traditional syntactic order and restructuring and parodying traditional meter, rhyme, and rhythm.

But I am never quite satisfied with this position because there seems to be something missing from it, something underneath, something on the other side. There is so much more to this poet's production than formal reactionary gestures. Dickinson meditates a semantic multi-sexuality in which she circumscribes both "he" and "she." When I lie awake at night, wondering what it is about this most enigmatic poet that is so captivating, some words from Luce Irigaray begin chasing each other around in my brain. Although Irigaray's outline of a theory of feminine language
production postdates Dickinson's rhetorical instinct, Irigaray illuminates Dickinson in writing that:

"She" is indefinitely other in herself. This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious... not to mention her language, in which "she" sets off in all directions leaving "him" unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand. For in what she says, too, at least when she dares, woman is constantly touching herself. She steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper, a sentence left unfinished... When she returns, it is to set off again from elsewhere. From another point of pleasure, or of pain.9

If I read the "she" of this passage to be Emily Dickinson, I realize that Irigaray is describing Dickinson's intellectual multi-sexuality. The idea that Dickinson's language encompasses not only "her-self" but "her-other" reveals one impulse behind Dickinson's semantic role reversals, her switches between masculine and feminine gendered voices. One example of this gender switch appears in "The Zeroes-taught us-Phosphorus-" when she says that the knowledge gained came to her when she was "a Boy-".

Contradictory Language Pattern

Further, Dickinson's language pattern is contradictory when compared to traditional grammatical order: it "sets off in all directions," constantly undercutting itself, approaching a sometimes unreasonable, "somewhat mad" syntactic pitch. Again, I think of the twisting and turning syntactic order of "The Zeroes-taught us-Phosphorus-". And Dickinson's poetry defies "ready-made grids". Rarely can there be agreement on an interpretation of one of Dickinson's poems. The multiple contexts already identified in "The Zeroes-taught us-Phosphorus-" subvert an attempt to fix the poem with a definite reading, portraying the difficulty in fitting an "elaborated code" upon Dickinson's poems.

Irigaray sketches what I call Dickinson's metonymic linguistic quality. Through her comparative touching together of words or ideas, Dickinson creates a poetics of contiguity. Her use of partial grammatical structures, incomplete sentences, "left unfinished," and then her return to ideas and their expression within different contexts, set her intentions off from another point of experience, "From another point of pleasure, or of pain."
as can be seen through her comparisons within “Water, is taught by thirst” and “The Zeroes-taught us-Phosphorus.” Irigaray continues:

One would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an ‘other meaning’ always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them. For if “she” says something, it is not, it is already no longer, identical with what she means. What she says is never identical with anything, moreover; rather, it is contiguous. It touches (upon). And when it strays too far from that proximity, she breaks off and starts over at ‘zero’; her body-sex.

Here, Irigaray posits a semantic model that describes one of the generating instincts behind Dickinson’s metonymic form. Dickinson’s heterogeneous sexuality, in contrast to the homogeneous masculinity of her American contemporaries, opens up her language and her meaning. In contrast, Walt Whitman’s work provides many examples of just such an obliteration of sexual difference. In the opening lines of “Song of Myself,” for example, Whitman frames his urge for unification, rather than particularizations; sameness rather than difference:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.¹⁰

Whitman articulates his desire to unify “myself” and “you” under his vision of the communal sharing of the same atoms, rather than considering the possibilities that manifest themselves at the recognition of difference. Risking a cursory reading of this complex poem, I would argue that Whitman seeks to amalgamate sex, age, race, class into one, unitary whole, all the same: “the smallest that same and the largest the same.”

But Dickinson considers the various ranges of difference. Her intellect circumscribes both her-self and “an ‘other meaning’” as exemplified, again, by her gender switches, her fluid, evolving levels of ideas, her creation of meaning through context, contiguity: metonymy. Dickinson’s meaning does not emanate from a universal, totalizing center. Her poetry is not linked metaphorically to a knowing, knowable referent, as Whitman’s is linked to “myself.” Rather, her meaning evolves through presentation of partial knowledge, comparative experience, particularities. Her philosophy “is never identical,” never equivalent to something else, it continually changes, fluctuates.

Around Dickinson’s poetry, there exists a cultural/biological matrix
that both places her as a 19th century New England woman and within a feminine body, identifying itself through a rhetorical expression designed to represent her unique, feminine intellect. Indeed, Dickinson circumscribes her philosophy of particularities, partialities, and contingency—of "omitted centers"—with a language designed to match that philosophy.

Notes


2 This, and the next following quotation, are from Jakobson, Roman. Fundamental of Language. Morris Hale, 1980. 90.


8 It is difficult to trace this idea to any one source, because so many feminist critics inform this point of view. Margaret Homans, Cheryl Walker, Joanne Feit Diehl, Vivian R. Pollack only begin the list of feminist critics to whom I am indebted.


Mina Loy's "Love Songs" and the Limits of Imagism

Carolyn Burke

It would not have been misleading to call Mina Loy the only English language Futurist in 1914, even though she later denied membership in that band of aesthetic radicals and satirized their movement. In a general way, the Futurists' reorientation of artistic attention to the modes of modern life prompted Loy's turn from fin-de-siecle aestheticism to an engagement with modernist art and poetry. More specifically, her first published work was provoked by F. T. Marinetti's program for the transformation of all "passatista" habits of mind: this well organized and publicized opposition to passe social and artistic conventions stimulated Loy's own realization that her contemporaries were experiencing a "crisis in consciousness." A manifesto set like a long poem, her "Aphorisms on Futurism" appeared in the January, 1914, issue of Camera Work, along with writing by her friend Gertrude Stein; in it Loy speaks as a Futurist prophet, proclaiming the inadequacy of social and artistic conventions:

TODAY is the crisis in consciousness.

CONSCIOUSNESS cannot spontaneously accept or reject new forms, as offered by creative genius; it is the new form, for however great a period of time it may remain a mere irritant—that molds consciousness to the necessary amplitude for holding it.

CONSCIOUSNESS has no climax.
Although Loy's call for "new forms" to express "the crisis in consciousness" is exactly contemporary with Ezra Pound's parallel attempt to conceptualize an aesthetic that would translate the dynamics of modern consciousness, Loy's writing is rarely discussed in relation to the history of Imagism and Vorticism in these years, let alone as an idiosyncratic response to Futurist theory.

Yet Loy's highly visual and kinaesthetic version of Futurist poetics suggests a continental alternative to the relatively static Imagist epistemology that Pound tried to repack in Vorticism. Paradoxically, Loy's vision of "the new form... that molds consciousness" is enacted in the long sequence of love poems that she wrote between 1914 and 1915, where she uses this traditional genre as a means to examine the psychological and linguistic consequences of the failure of romance. In these little-known "Love Songs," Loy's Futurist-inspired version of collage poetics embodies both her speaker's awareness that the forms of the past no longer obtain and her unavoidable nostalgia for more traditional codes of male-female relations. The sequence is an implicitly modernist critique of the spiritualized visions of art and sexuality that she had absorbed as a young woman in fin-de-siecle London, when she memorized the poems of Dante Gabriel and Christina Rossetti and learned to paint like a female Burne-Jones.

Before examining Mina Loy's syntactic strategies in "Love Songs," however, it is worthwhile comparing her Futurist-inspired aesthetic with that of the Imagist movement as Pound characterized it in 1913, when he too sought to throw off the inheritance of the pre-Raphaelites and the Symbolists. At first, Pound described Imagism as "the sort of poetry where painting or sculpture seems as if it were 'just coming over into speech.'" Its images sought to approximate the wordless condition of the visual arts, their concentrated signifying ability and presentational immediacy. Such images would "present an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," in contrast to poetry that depended upon the unfolding of meaning through the deployment of syntactic structures. However, Pound's concept of the image in 1913 was still colored by the same Symbolist ideas that he later rejected. Until he absorbed the implications of the Futurist art that he saw in London and, with the help of Gaudier-Brzeska and Wyndham Lewis, formulated Vorticism as an antidote for Imagism, Pound conceived of poetry as a static sculptural arrangement of images in juxtapositions that might posit equations for complex mental states but that could not enact movement through emotional tension to any change or resolution.

Pound also urged would-be Imagists to "go in fear of abstractions." Because he wanted to rid poetry of moral attitudinizing and heighten lyric intensity, this precept offered a useful corrective at the time. This conception of poetry restricted the kinds of subject matter that could be
spoken of, however; for in practice, the Imagist who followed Pound's directives was limited to the projection of emotional states onto selected images, resulting in a kind of poetry that was nearly as solipsistic as the post-Symbolist verse that Pound was reacting against. If all abstractions (or related concerns with the problems of perception and cognition) had to be excised from poetry as so much "slither," then one could only conclude of Imagism in general as Amy Lowell observed of H.D.'s poetry (with which she was, nevertheless, in sympathy): "This is a narrow art, it has no scope, it neither digs deeply nor spreads widely... 'There are more things in Heaven and Earth' than such poetry takes cognizance of." Because of its limited focus, Imagism could not take cognizance of the need for a more conceptual language to convey the poet's reflection upon the emotional states conveyed through the images. Its style and subject matter frequently led to the "flat Hellenic perfection" that William Carlos Williams soon described as the consequence of Pound's doctrine.

In the immediate pre-war period, however, alternatives to this early Anglo-American modernism were available to the few writers for whom contact with continental art movements suggested other ways of positing the connections between poetry and painting. In 1914, both Pound and Loy sought to reactivate poetic form by stressing movement, process, and change, even though these emphases might threaten the stability of the image as coherent center. Both writers found their way out of the stalemate of post-Symbolist aesthetics in their different responses to Futurist art and the provocative manifestos that accompanied the Futurists' assault on the cultural scene. As is well known, Pound responded to this challenge with his notion of the "VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which ideas are constantly rushing," and held great hopes for the energizing effects of Vorticist doctrine. After "Aphorisms," her initial response to the Futurists' call for the artist to enter modern life, Loy took care to keep a certain distance from the movement even when she participated in its activities: unlike Pound, she was not interested in inaugurating or participating in new "schools." She responded, rather, as a practicing artist who understood the Futurists' reactivation of pictorial space and as an idiosyncratic feminist who felt it urgent to reply to their contradictory declarations on sexual difference.

As an artist trained in London, Munich, and Paris and a member of the influential Salon d'Automne, Loy approached the blank page as if it were a canvas. She was, like Apollinaire, a "poète fondé en peinture." While Pound's sense of the artist's relation to form focused on the poet-sculptor's forceful mental imprint upon matter, Loy was more concerned with the physical properties of language as the "belle matière" itself. By 1912, although resident in Florence, Loy was sufficiently familiar with Cubism and had read enough of Gertrude Stein's early manuscripts to grasp the implications of these "new forms," for both poetry and prose.
When the Futurists arrived there in 1913, she had already been thinking about a kind of writing in which point of view, like perspective in painting, could be displaced, the structure of the line or sentence loosened, and punctuation discarded so that words might lie side by side. In a sense, Stein’s writing had prepared the way for Loy’s response to Futurism, while Marinetti’s volatility and contradictory assertions about woman’s role in the transformed future stimulated her to write. (Not long after dismissing Marinetti in 1920 as a “conjuring commercial traveller” with “novelties from Paris in his pocket,” Loy published her poetic homage to Stein as “Curie of the laboratory of vocabulary” in the transatlantic review. This appropriately unpunctuated tribute suggests that the modernist project to unearth in writing some liberating linguistic energy could, in fact, be combined with a “feminist” project of changing consciousness.)

Loy’s vision of psychosexual and syntactic connection was, however, the negative or other side of Stein’s more positive view of the years 1913 to 1915, most likely because Loy’s marriage unravelled during these years and she became involved in a complicated emotional dialogue with the Futurists. Unlike Stein’s poems in celebration of the domestic happiness suggested in G.M.P. and Tender Buttons, the broken syntax of Loy’s “Love Songs” embodies a disillusioned vision of psychosexual relations that reflects their period of composition, during the first year of the Great War. Loy’s syntactic strategies take into account Marinetti’s parole in libertà, words set free from the constraints of formal and grammatical conventions, without, however, espousing his voluntarist and misogynistic ideology. Where Marinetti rejects romantic love as a “passatista” idealization of sexual relations, Loy writes instead of the psychic and social disconnectedness that results from a love affair come apart at the seams.

With none of the Futurists’ modernolatria (worship of the modern), Loy nevertheless incorporates the imagery of the modern city as the cultural context of this failed attempt at union. But like the love affair that unravels in “Love Songs,” these urban images also prove unstable in their new configurations within the poems. Although Pound appears to have had faith in the image, or artistic form in general, as numinously given, Loy, a trained artist, knew that images were inherently unreliable and no more numinous with meaning than anything else. She also knew that images could dissolve, shatter, break into their components, fade out, or prove unrecognizable from different angles of vision. Her contacts with the Futurist painters Carra and Balla, who broke images and figures in motion into a painterly version of the successive frames in a cinematic sequence, demonstrated that the poetic image was what the mind determined it could be: it had no fixed objective reality. It might or might not be mimetic or representational, and, more likely than not, it resembled those unstable mental pictures being discussed by the new theory of psy-
choanalysis. For Loy, images partook of the other reality that in "Aphorisms" she called "mental spatiality," an autonomous realm quite unlike Pound's model of intellectual activity. While Pound's critical writing in these years emphasizes the energizing consciousness of the artist's mind, her "mental spatiality" suggests, rather, a model more like a painterly version of the Freudian unconscious, in which images and meanings lie dormant yet accessible to the artist through a creative process that is a kind of self-analysis.

 Appropriately, Loy began her sequence of what would be 34 "Love Songs" within this subjective "mental spatiality":

Spawn of Fantasies
Silting the appraisable
Pig Cupid his rosy snout
Rooting erotic garbage
"Once upon a time"
Pulls a weed white and star-topped
Among wild oats sewn in mucus-membrane

Although one recognizes some of the familiar images and language of romantic love, an unsettling effect is created by their extreme dispersion. Not only are there no clear subject-verb relations to provide us with a sense of a statement being made, but there is also no apparent speaker or lyric voice, as we might have expected from the title of the sequence. To whom these love songs are addressed is also unclear: neither partner in the love relationship appears to be present within the first poem. Furthermore, there is no punctuation except for the quotation marks around "Once upon a time" and the hyphens connecting the two compound words. Syntactic modes such as agency, subordination, and completion of statement are lacking. Words and phrases float on the white space of the page in a loosely connected pattern, like a free-floating collage in which the elements stick onto the surface with relative and changing degrees of adhesiveness. These images may themselves be spawned by fantasy, thus undergoing the process of appraisal or sorting ("silting") by a speaker who seeks to understand them.

In the next stanza, the tentative way in which the first-person speaker makes an appearance works to identify the difficulties of knowing with the uncertainties of perception:

I would an eye in a bengal light
Eternity in a sky-rocket
Constellations in an ocean
Whose rivers run no fresher
Than a trickle of saliva
Although this desiring "I" is crossed chiasmically with its homonym, the "eye," the speaker knows that the images seen are the spawn of the fantasy, and, therefore, in flux and unreliable. The experience of sexuality—the encounter with the phallic Pig Cupid and the descent from the garden of romance to the very physical geographies of "mucous-membrane" and "saliva"—has resulted in a flash of illumination (probably orgasmic fulfillment) that is too quickly deflated. It is then seen as only another illusion following a moment of heightened consciousness. Critics who try to identify one image or another with the "male" and "female" of this momentous but deflationary sexual encounter typically run into trouble, since Loy's love song itself envisions the momentary loss of fixed identities—a blending or exchange of "images" which then fall back into their old oppositions.

The speaker then makes the first declarative statement in this poem, which characteristically voices a wary distrust:

These are suspect places

I must live in my lantern
Trimming subliminal flicker
Virginal to the bellows
Of Experience
Coloured glass

Two things may be stated: first, the "places" of love, and reflection upon it in poetry, are "suspect," not only because of their nature but also because of the rhetoric of "once upon a time" with which the speaker has been taught to understand romance. Second, she—for we may now offer a qualifier of this unknown "I"—decides therefore to be a wise virgin, preparing her lantern (once again the apparatus for perception and vision) for her god's return. The unusual setting of the phrase "coloured glass" off to the right with a marked space between the two words suggests that, although the first poem places its colors, textures, and allusions like so many shapes in a stained glass window, its juxtapositions more nearly resemble the temporary image patterns of a kaleidoscope; for without the divinely given illumination that shines through a church window, meaning comes only in "subliminal flickers."

In a series of abrupt changes of focus that resemble those of a kaleidoscope or a cinematic montage, the next poem moves from the "I" 's withdrawal from the "suspect places" of sexuality to a close-up look at another image of Pig Cupid, the male principle, and then shifts back to a more idealizing interpretation of the lover's mind, the sanctuary on whose threshold she is forced to wait:
The skin-sack
In which a wanton duality
Packed
All the completions of my infructuous impulses
Something the shape of a man
To the casual vulgarity of the merely observant
More of a clock-work mechanism
Running down against time
To which I am not paced
   My finger-tips are numb from fretting your hair
A god's door-mat
On the threshold of your mind

The "wanton duality" may be the primary fact of sexual difference, the source of the insurmountable division between "I" and the "you" addressed in the last three lines. Their different conceptions of sexual love, as well as their different desires and natures, keep her at the threshold of what she imagined to be the kingdom of heaven, where she would find completion. As in the first love song, however, the dominant mode is that of incompletion: no whole or complete statement is possible given this vision of sexual non-connectedness until the speaker steps back from the experience in the final section of the first poem. Here too the emphasis on vision as opposed to "the casual vulgarity of the merely observant" contrasts the ideal of romantic love and mutual divinity with the actual failure of sexual union and difficulty of overcoming this primary division. Non-union is reflected on the page in the poem's incomplete statements and non-closure. In contrast to Pound's voluntarist theories of the poet's intellectual powers at this time, Loy's scepticism considers the mind's conscious efforts insufficient to bridge such gaps, let alone create a "happy" ending.

The third poem posits a "we," the lovers as a couple, and a form of communion set in an imaginary past that never was attainable, thereby mocking the naivety of "Once upon a time."

We might have coupled
In the bed-ridden monopoly of a moment
Or broken flesh with one another
At the profane communion table
Where wine is spill't on promiscuous lips

We might have given birth to a butterfly
With the daily news
Printed in blood on its wings
Through the repeated use of the past perfect subjunctive, Loy conveys the idea of a psychosexual completion imagined but unreachable. "We might have coupled.../We might have given birth...." These verb forms suggest possibilities that are even more out of reach than those envisioned by the conditional "I would" of the first poem. What might have been a form of sacred communion has been profaned by their mechanical coupling, the "broken flesh" of this disunion which is the sexual act shorn of all emotional and spiritual meaning (much as the Futurists imagined it in their denunciations of romance).

The rest of the sequence spells out the unexpected ending of the story that began with the romantic formula "once upon a time." Although the lovers' "ephemeral conjunction" is figured in the synaesthesia that characterizes the imagery of poems 8, 10, and 11 (where the cosmos is transfigured with "colored voices/And laughing honey"), their temporary consonance turns into the "dissonance" of poem 12 and the despair that follows in poem 14:

No love or the other thing  
Only the impact of lighted bodies  
Knocking sparks off each other  
In chaos

As the speaker's view of relations between the sexes becomes increasingly bleak, her voice becomes even more detached and ironic. By poem 29, their coming together is a mere "clashing" of "incognitos," and she imagines that he sees her as only an annoying "busybody." But to her, their failed communion suggests more than the non-meeting of "a man and a woman/In the way." (poem 27) As opposites, the lovers also embody the insoluble polarities of mind and body, physical and spiritual, inner and outer. In failing to bring these opposites into fruitful complementarity, both fail at their separate quests for integrity and wholeness.

At the same time that the romantic vision of fulfillment recedes from the speaker's imaginative grasp, the sequence stages her inch by inch withdrawal from language, the medium of their misunderstanding. (She equates the lover's emotional stinginess with his verbal stinting: in his "professional paucity," he is "the prig of passion.") The final poem needs only a single line to mock the entire romantic tradition: "Love———-the preeminent literateur." But it also acknowledges the speaker's realization that the loved one has been a stimulus to her imagination, that erotic desire has moved her to the use of words. Thus, Loy's Futurist-inspired aesthetic allows her to depict stages in the mind's shifting attempts to understand both the emotional riddles posed by intimate relationships and the cultural conventions that shape our responses to them. However, rather than rewrite classical myth as a series of metaphors for emotional
states, as H.D. did, Loy drew instead on the tempo and imagery of the urban metropolis, combining a receptivity to its jagged rhythms with a heightened awareness of its unstable intensity. This way of bringing painting "over into speech" not only favored the use of urban images; it also recognized the poet's need for sustained reflection upon their significance in the larger context of modern life.

By contrast, contemporary Imagist counsels of crystalline perfection seem to issue from a more restricted conception of poetry's aims and possibilities. Looking back on the war years and developing modernist doctrines, the American Imagist John Gould Fletcher recalled the effects of such restrictions:

It was the fault of imagism never to let its devotees draw clear conclusions about life and to force the poet to state too much and to deduce too little—to lead its disciples too often into a barren aestheticism which was, and is, empty of content.11

What Fletcher missed in Imagism—"the human judgement, the human evaluation"—was already appearing in different guise, however, in poetry that, like Loy's, looked for inspiration to continental art movements where the quintessentially modernist issues of perception and representation were first and most clearly raised. But like Gertrude Stein's writing from the pre-war period, Mina Loy's poetry has seemed difficult or inaccessible until quite recently. For in order to pursue her epistemological concerns, she risks imperfection and what Hugh Kenner calls a "refusal ... to cozen her readers by appeal to feeling."12 Startled by her poetry's still contemporary, even "postmodern" quality, a younger critic observed recently that "reading it is like defusing an old but still live bomb" and concluded that her critical neglect has caused "a lacuna in the history of English modernism."13 One hopes that the current resurgence of interest in the female modernists will restore Loy's reputation and resituate her poetry within the appropriate context of modernist experimentation.

Notes

This essay elaborates upon some material first presented in my "Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual Difference," American Quarterly 39:1 (Spring 1987).


Loy’s “Love Songs” are cited here from the 1917 texts as published in Kouidis, *Mina Loy*, and not in *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, where her spacing and line breaks are often regularized in ways that minimize the collage aspect of her modernism. For the complete text of “Love Songs” and a balanced discussion of the sequence, see Kouidis, 59–85.


H. D. wrote *Tribute to Freud* in the fall of 1944, ten years after her final session with "the Professor." Some have categorized the book as a memoir. H. D. considered it to be a setting forth of her impressions of Freud and of what transpired during their time together. In the beginning she writes, "I do not want to become involved in the strictly historical sequence. I wish to recall the impressions, or rather I wish the impressions to recall me. Let the impressions come in their own way, make their own sequence." (p. 19) Thus "impression" describes both the quality of the book and H. D.'s method. She expresses no desire to clarify details or dates by consulting the notes she wrote at the time. Clearly she does not intend to produce a chronological record of historical events. Rather, she will proceed by impression.

Certainly the impressions are within her and will be written as she calls them forth. Yet there is also a sense in which H. D. is in her impressions. As she calls them forth and writes them down she will be encountering her self. Later in the book she writes, "You are contained in the things you love." (p. 150) H. D. loved words and the process of writing. She knew that she was contained in her words and in the impressions they could convey, and that as she wrote the impressions they could re-call her to her self.

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In the Christian tradition one speaks of having been "called" by God to do something. Thus a call can be a sacred invitation, and the sort of invitation that one does not refuse easily. A call can be sacred because it comes from the gods or simply because it comes from deep within where the "I Am" of the soul resides. The call to which H. D. responds comes not from an external source but from deep within.

Originally I wrote this essay to present at a conference panel entitled "Quest for Spiritual Identity." Such a quest leads one within oneself. One's spirituality is more than a matter of belief or conviction. Spirituality concerns the life of the soul and those things that enliven one and make one whole. One's spirituality is the embodiment of what one values most deeply. It is expressed in that which one loves, to use H. D.'s words: "You are contained in the things you love." (p. 150) And just as spirituality is the expression of that which one loves most deeply, it is also the self who loves. One's spirituality is also the expression of one's deepest, most authentic sense of self.

To speak of identity is to ask the questions "Who am I?" and "Who do you say that I am?" It is a question both of one's personal sense of self and of how that is influenced by the existence of others. One's identity is shaped and has meaning in a context beyond oneself alone. Yet to speak of one's spiritual identity is to focus on the self alone or upon what it is that makes one somehow unique, more than a mere reflection of one's context. To speak of a spiritual identity is not to stop with or dwell upon the question, "Who do you say that I am?" It is rather to make the age-old affirmation, "I Am." In other words, to speak of one's spiritual identity is to name oneself.

H. D. is aware of both aspects of her identity—both of the "Who do you say that I am?" or the named, and of the "I Am" who names. In the beginning she tells us that she exists in a context that includes family, her friends, and "circumstances" and that to some degree they "own" her. (p. 17)

But I had something. Say it was a narrow birchbark canoe. The great forest of the unknown, the supernormal or supernatural, was all around and about us. With the current gathering force, I could at least pull in to the shallows before it was too late, take stock of my very modest possessions of mind and body, and ask the old Hermit who lived on the edge of this vast domain to talk to me, to tell me, if he would, how best to steer my course. (pp. 17-18)

To some degree she is owned, or possessed. To some degree her context, her family and friends as well as circumstances, the current which is gathering force with all the signs of imminent war, possess her. She is
H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)

Photograph used by the courtesy of Perdita Schaffner, H.D.'s daughter, and of the New Directions Publishing Corporation.
who they say she is.

Yet she is also herself. Before she goes to Freud, the Hermit on the outer edges, she feels uprooted and dry. Her writing has stopped. She feels trapped, even silenced by her context. Thus she moves away from the geographical context which names her and which by implication has contributed to her uprootedness. She goes to Vienna to see Freud. She does this for those whom she loves: her family, her friends, the world, and, not least, for her very self. She senses that her happiness as well as her ability to be of assistance in her broken world rely on her ability to recover herself or to re-root her self in her own "I Am."

Her movement out of a context which has the upper hand so extremely that it has uprooted and dried her out has a parallel in H. D.'s use of language. Speaking of a friend of Freud's, a man who described himself as a "captain of horses . . . in the earlier days before his English became so set," H. D. mourns the change:

"Captain of horses" conveyed more to me than "cavalry officer" or "officer of the guards," just as "needle-tree," to which he referred one day, than "pine" or even "evergreen." So the impact of a language, as well as the impact of an expression, may become "correct," may become "stylized," lose its living quality. (pp. 19-20)

Words, like human beings, can become entrapped in contexts that flatten, conventionalize, and deaden meaning. In *Tribute to Freud*, H. D. consciously seeks to prevent this from happening. As I noted earlier, she employs a method of recollection by impression. "I have said that these impressions must take me, rather than I take them," she writes. (p. 145) In this context she wishes to be "taken" not as an object is taken or possessed, but as a traveler is taken by a vehicle. The impressions will take her somewhere. She will travel with them. The impression is a mode of transportation into one's self, the means by which her quest for the "I Am" of her soul proceeds.

Impressions can take one traveling. So, too, can words. What is the relation between impression and word? Describing her first impression of Freud and the occasion of their meeting, H. D. writes that she experiences something like "a feeling, an atmosphere—something that I realize or perceive, but do not actually put into words or thoughts." (p. 146) The impression is prior to the word. In order for an impression to be conveyed, it needs words or some other concrete form of expression. H. D. refers to "picture-writing," which expresses the spirit of writing and its constituent words and cadences as bearers of the overall picture, vision, or impression that moves the writer to write. (p. 65) Words can express and create impressions. The word's power to express and create can be
limited and even deadened by the force of convention. In this way the richness of “captain of horses” gives way to the somewhat bleak and militaristic “cavalry officer,” and picture-writing gives way to straight-line drawing.

H. D. speaks of conventional thought as a constricting pattern which had distressed her and contributed to her sense of uprootedness. This is the oppressive power of the word, entrapped by conventionality, which no longer hears the call of the impression but determines what the impression is going to be. When this power takes hold, not only do words lose their living quality, but also the speaker or writer, no longer free to shape those words, feels deadened. The impression, the true voice of the soul, is shut up.

For H. D., the impression is a mode of travel. She communicates her impressions through words and the pictures they write. Here is one such picture: The room in which she has her sessions with Freud is bounded rather unremarkably by four walls. Yet the wall that H. D. considered to be the fourth featured an open door that led into or out of a dark, inner room. This fourth wall, the portal, becomes for H. D. a metaphor for a fourth dimension in time and space. The fourth dimension is a portal which opens to the beyond and which enables passage between here and there. The fourth dimension is not past, present, or future, but as passage and as a portal it is a dimension that can contain them all. It is this dimension that characterizes her work, indeed her travels, with Freud.

Crossing the portal into the beyond, from the ordinary into the extraordinary, is transcendence. The origins of the word “transcendence” are Latin and mean “to climb across.” This is quite different from its common meaning, which connotes rising above and claims for the transcendent an ontologically prior or original status. In the Christian theological tradition and in common assumption, transcendence tends to be understood dualistically: one rises above the base self into the realm of transcendence which is ultimately real, absolutely pure, and definitely better. While I am not arguing in favor of one original and therefore true definition of the word, for H. D. transcendence is understood more appropriately as climbing across and the transcendent as richness of meaning. Climbing across implies hard work, certainly, yet work that one can do with body and soul. To the contrary, rising above suggests disembodiment. H. D. did not leave her London context in order to rise above it. She left hoping to re-root her “mind and body” in her self. (p. 17) This process was her only hope for being able to return and to be of some use, not to mention happier.

 Impressions contain the potential for climbing across. All they need is H. D.’s participation or willingness to travel in order to work for her, and the same is required from the reader if they are to work for us. For instance, H. D. writes this memory from the late 20s. On a hotel wall in
Corfu, an island off the Western coast of Greece, she saw an image of a three-legged stand—one image in an extraordinary, dream-like series which she called "picture-writing on the wall." (p. 65) That image, she realized, had its real or present-life counterpart in the three-legged stand that stood on the shelf above.

This most ordinary little metal frame fits into the small saucepan and is used as a support for it when we boil water for that extra sustaining cup of tea. (p. 68)

Yet it is also a pun, she says, "For the three-legged lamp-stand in the miscellaneous clutter on the wash stand is none other than our old friend, the tripod of classic Delphi... symbol of poetry and prophecy." (pp. 67-68)

Thus in the travels of this impression, one passes through the portal and back, and in that passage the ordinary and the extraordinary are linked. A mundane metal stand which sustains life with warmth and flavor opens inward and reveals itself to be the seat of the Priestess of Delphi. She is the one known for this oracle: "Know thyself." Yet as H. D. notes, "the famous Delphic utterances... could be read two ways." (p. 75) In this particular context, "know thyself" can be read as a personal injunction, certainly, but it also can be read as a linguistic injunction. Let us take the latter first. "Know thyself." The three-legged stand is also the tripod. The extraordinary, the transcendent, lies within the visual image—within the very words. The way to the extraordinary lies within the ordinary. We are reminded of the symbolic power of the simplest images. In this way the impression and the words whereby it is conveyed always contain the call to look within, indeed to seek truth beyond surface appearances.

"Know thyself" is also a personal injunction with communal or social implications. The impression contains the oracle that re-calls H. D. to herself. She believes that to know oneself is to know something essential about the human race. This is so because self knowledge requires familiarity with what she has called the supernormal, or the subconscious which generates the dream language that she believes is universal. The language is the same, although the dreams or sequences and even the guises of images may differ according to the social and personal context of the dreamer. Still, the language of the dream is essentially human. The language of the dream dwells in the fourth dimension which mingles past, present, and future and which makes the present-day dreamer continuous with the one a thousand years dead. The artist taps this source of images, speaks this language, and produces art that speaks to the heart of humanity. H. D. goes deep within herself. As Freud says, "to-day we have tunneled very deep." (p. 139) She goes deep within and
yet returns with the pearl of great price, which she gives to us. Her art, then, is both an intensely personal and ultimately social encounter.

How well does H. D. know herself? Freud considered the dream-like sequence in which H. D. saw the image of the three-legged stand to be a "dangerous symptom." (p. 61) These are his words. H. D., however, held her vision to be inspirational and of the highest personal value. She writes that Freud was "the greatest mind of this and perhaps many succeeding generations. But the Professor was not always right." (p. 25) Later in the book she makes the qualification that he was always right but that she and he interpreted meanings differently. The point to be made is that in spite of what the book's title might suggest, she does not worship Freud nor does she grant him absolute power and authority. She is aware that she is in charge of her own personal quest. Freud may be the hermit on the outer edges of the normal and the guide to the supernormal, the transcendent within, but only she can name her self. Only she can say "I Am." That she considers her vision inspirational even in the face of Freud's negative judgment indicates that H. D. knows herself well.

To return for a moment to the fourth dimension that H. D. believed was within the word, as expressive of the impression, as she remembers watching the picture-writing on the wall in Corfu she tells us, "there is no clock-time, though we are fastidiously concerned with time and a formal handling of a subject which has no racial and no time-barriers." (p. 70) The subject is the fourth dimension. There are no time-barriers because the fourth dimension contains and intermingles future, past, and present. So she can be sitting at her desk in London recalling Freud's comments of ten years ago, her dream sequence of 20 years ago, and a tripod on which sat a priestess in a Delphic temple several thousands of years before the clock was invented.

Yet "we are fastidiously concerned with time." (p. 70) More than once in the course of H. D.'s narrative she reminds herself (and us) that "it is the general impression that concerns us, rather than the historical or political sequence." (p. 89) She records the beginning and the end of her sessions with Freud in approximate chronological terms. She does not emphasize particular dates in chronological sequence. History as a chronological sequence is linear. It progresses in a straight line—one might say on one track. History describes existence in terms of linear patterns. Speaking of friends and acquaintances who subscribed to a similarly linear logic in their analysis of world politics, she wrote that "their theories and their accumulated data seemed unrooted, raw. But this, I admit—yes, I know—was partly due to my own hopeless feeling in the face of brilliant statisticians and one-track-minded theories." (p. 86)

A kind of bondage to or battering by linear logic contributed to H. D.'s feelings of uprootedness and hopelessness. Linear logic kept her from herself. In *Tribute to Freud* her method would have to be different, non-
chronological, and so it is. The impression could re-call her and her readers because it contained the fourth dimension which is not bound by the power of Chronos. Indeed, the fourth dimension as a kind of time characterized by the portal and passage transcends chronological time. Just as the three-legged stand opens inward to the tripod, the chronological time in which the three-legged stand of every-day life exists opens inward to the time of the fourth dimension, which is eternity.

The dreams and memories that H. D. found most meaningful "become almost events out of time," she writes. (p. 61) Like the Delphic oracles this, too, can be taken two ways. The power of these dreams and memories had nothing to do with chronological time, or rather had everything to do with the disruption of its potentially coercive line. In this sense the dreams and memories and the impressions that bring them back stand outside, or out of chronological time. Outside of chronological time they stand in passage, as portals, which is to say that they stand within the fourth dimension. They are out of this time in the same way that we are out of our mothers. In this sense "out of" refers to origins and to birth—origins in the fourth dimension, which includes the transcendent side of the portal, and birth perhaps as one aspect or stage of passage between.

What more can be said about passage as birth? Again speaking of the picture-writing on the wall, H. D. describes the intensity of concentration, the great exertion of effort that it takes for her to see the sequence. Furthermore, she credits her companion, Bryher, for giving her encouragement and strength, both verbally and simply in her physical presence, to go on and see the sequence through. H. D.'s passage takes great personal strength. It is also facilitated by the supportive presence of another. Freud may have been the hermit guide, but Bryher shares the credit for this impression. She sustains H. D. on the journey. Again, H. D.'s quest appears as something more than a walking alone. In Bryher's presence, as the dream-like sequences pass before her eyes, H. D. realizes this:

I must drown completely and come out on the other side, or rise to the surface after the third time down, not dead to this life but with a new set of values, my treasure dredged from the depth. I must be born again or break utterly. (p. 80)

This is a metaphorical characterization of the work that she is doing with Freud. The work involves death and rebirth of self. The process of death and rebirth describes passage between the ordinary surface of existence and the transcendent depths within.

Passage as death and rebirth also describes the potential of the impres-
sion. In order for her to see and experience the tripod, the three-legged stand must die. It is reborn in new richness of meaning. H. D. spoke of her father and Freud as ones who possessed sacred objects. "But," she writes, "the shape and form of these objects, sanctified by time, were not so identified." (p. 36) For instance, her father's magnifying glass was just that: a magnifying glass. Only later did she see in its form the ankh, Egyptian symbol of life. The conventional definition of the object, the "magnifying glass," had to give way, to die, in order for the ankh to emerge and for the continuity of life long past with the present to be restored. As a poet, H. D. enables the death and rebirth which is passage. She wrests objects out of conventional contexts that flatten their meaning. She frees the muzzled ordinary from the contexts that deny it speech, and she bids it sing.

I have described H. D.'s personal quest for her self and the parallel quest of the word for the transcendent within. Of course the word itself does not really seek; the word gives voice to human seeking. The impression is a mode of travel for H. D., and the words that convey the impression can take one traveling. One travels within, whether a self or a word, to find the portal and passage to the transcendent. What one learns from H. D.'s exploration of the transcendent is that it is not static. She does not identify the bedrock or the eternal definition, the absolute essence of her self nor of the word. Indeed, it does not seem possible that there could be such an essence because the fourth dimension is portal and passage. It is a realm in which images from past and present intermingle. It is a realm of recombinant image and sequence making, where the future is born. For H. D. it is this process which is eternal and which is the common link binding humanity.

In the end, her impressions carry her back to the beginning. Chronos is not king here. She recalls a childhood story about Captain January, keeper of a lighthouse, who takes a ship-wrecked child home. In Roman mythology, Janus is "guardian of gates and doors, patron of the month of January which was sacred to him, with all 'beginnings.'" (p. 151) Freud is both guide and keeper of the portal. At least, this is what he is to H. D. In the childhood story she finds a narrative context that participates in the fourth dimension because it not only describes what she accomplished with Freud ten years before but it also indicates that her quest is ongoing. "We have only just begun our researches, our 'studies,' the old Professor and I," she writes, years after his death. (p. 152) The book ends. Passage continues.
"Love Is Writing":
Eros in HERmione

Rebecca Blevins Faery

My text, my word, my body, the collective with its agreements and struggles, bodies that fall, flow, burn, or resound just as I do, all these are only a network of primordial elements in communication with each other.

Michel Serres

HERmione, when H. D.'s novel bearing her name opens, is a young woman "drowning," trying "to hold onto something." (3) She is "nebulous" (3), "an unincarnated entity" (10), floating, inchoate and formless, in the watery flow, the primordial sea, of her unnamed perceptions. We see her first perched in a tree as a kind of tree-sprite, disembodied, engaged in a frantic effort to discover her identity by naming herself. "Names are in people, people are in names" (5) is her refrain, but her crisis is precisely one of naming. Although she repeats her name over and over, she cannot see herself, find herself, in the name she bears. She cannot reach through to the world through words; even though she feels herself "clutch toward something that had no name yet," (8) she can "put no name to the things she apprehended." (13) She strains toward the possibility of some artistic expression of what she sees and feels, but she is mute; the narrator, who, it is evident, knows Hermione very well, tells us finally, "it had not occurred to Her to try and put the thing in writing." (13) "Love," we are told, "had not yet touched her." (11).2

The novel HERmione chronicles the quest of this artistic consciousness for a means of expressing itself. Completed in 1927 although not published until 1981, it is an autobiographical exploration of H. D.'s achievement of her identity as a writer through her erotic relationships with Ezra Pound and Frances Gregg (George Lowndes and Fayne Rabb in the novel). H. D.—this time as "H. G.,” Hermione Gart—finds her tongue in
that incarnation, her discovery of Eros.

It was not a new theme in H. D.'s writing. In *Notes on Thought and Vision*, written in 1919, she asserts again and again the importance of the body, of sexual experience, in the attainment of spiritual vision: "We must be 'in love' before we can understand the mysteries of vision," she says (22); and again, "the love-mind and the over-mind are two lenses. When these lenses are properly adjusted, focused, they bring the world of vision into consciousness. The two work separately, perceive separately, yet make one picture." (23) Only one who has experienced the seduction of the senses and thus has known the pleasures of the body is ready for the "second stage of initiation," which is "to look into things with your intellect." (31) The initiation complete, such a person is able through the intellect to realize the "over-conscious world," and it is that realization that "is the concern of the artist." (40)

*HER*mione is, then, the account of that first stage of initiation, that encounter with the body, which gives the poet voice and vocation. Her Gart's initiation begins conventionally enough, with an engagement to George, a young expatriate poet who returns from Europe to Pennsylvania to (re)claim Her. His name indicates his monarchic character; he casts Hermione into the role of muse, occasion and object for his verses. He calls her "hamadryad," (107) as Pound did H. D., confining her in her tree-sprite identity; she is with George not the speaker but the spoken-to, spoken-of. He is Orpheus to her Eurydice—who, we recall, was also a dryad. From the beginning, Hermione knows something is wrong; she "can't love George Lowndes properly." (65) Why, then, does she engage herself to George? Precisely out of her intense need to name herself, to find identity and purpose; as she tells herself, "One has to do something." (5) The prospect of marrying George is the thing that requires the least effort, the least exercise of imagination. Her, with her half-formed sense of self, glides into the relationship without resistance, but also without enthusiasm.

"Cushion of Forest Moss"

George's kisses, significantly, "[force] her into soft moss," (73) the "cushion of forest moss" on which she lies with him. And moss is the image repeatedly associated in the novel with Her's mother, Eugenia, who with her "mossgrown fibres" has "grown into the subsoil" of her domestic landscape. (9) George's kisses "smudge" Her out, smudge out both herself and her perceptions; (73) marriage to George would turn Her into her mother, into one of the women who "have justified themselves in having children." (179) Eugenia sits and knits in the darkness so as not to disturb her husband, who wants the room dark except for the circle of light in which he works, who, says Eugenia, "can work better if
I’m sitting in the dark.” (79)

Eugenia is self-effacing, the moss that grows on the shaded side of the tree. She is also, though, the source for Hermione not only of her physical life but also of life-sustaining moments that nurture her growth toward her identity as a poet. “Hermione. You say such pretty, odd things. You ought to go on writing,” says Eugenia (80); and again, when she has surprised Hermione by using a vivid and lovely image to describe her daughter, Her sees Eugenia in a new light: “My mother is a poet. . . . Eugenia is a poet.” (126) Hermione thus realizes that she has a poetic heritage from her mother and not just a scientific one from her astronomer father. She can, then, identify with Eugenia on a new plane, can turn, in turn, to her own muse, to the “sister,” the “fleet sweet swallow” (124) who will move her to sing. That muse is Fayne Rabb.

Fayne is another creature “fey with the same sort of wildness” (50) as Hermione. In loving Fayne, Hermione loves herself; she is “Narcissa” (170) who, in gazing upon the beloved, sees and knows herself. Most notably, in contrast to George’s kisses which “smudge her out,” leaving her silent and breathless, “The hand of Fayne Rabb dragged words out of the throat of Her Gart.” (145) After the scene in which Fayne and Hermione kiss for the first time, Hermione has a turning-point evening with George in which she predicts playfully that she will never be his wife, and then she begins, oddly in the context of the scene, to sing:

She achieved a note, a song note that brought her back to a body that was vibrating, that was static yet vibrating here and there. . . . Fire and water made rhythm in Her and she caught a note in her throat and she hurled it forth. . . . [George] hadn’t a voice really. It was George with his volumes who was wordless, who was inarticulate, not Her Gart. . . . (170)

As a result of her encounter with Fayne, mouth to like mouth, Her becomes no longer an object but the speaking subject, able to articulate her desire, to name both herself and the object of that desire. The “reality of concentric circles,” Her’s image for her intimacy with Fayne, “slashed like a knife so that she talked volubly.” (169) The knife slashing across her throat is, of course, an ominous image and predicts the wounding betrayal Hermione will suffer at Fayne’s hand. Nevertheless, it is her love for Fayne that fills Hermione with poetry, that first loosens her tongue.

Inwardly Hermione rejects George, repudiates her alliance with him, but she retains the experience he has given her. George throughout the novel is an ambivalent figure, a “harlequin” (34, 43, 66, 67, 69, 82, etc.), black and white, positive and negative, with whom she “almost” achieves ecstasy,” (65–66) but not quite. In Notes on Thought and Vision, H. D. points out that both “the world of death” and “the world of vision” are repre-
sented by the image of the serpent (40). In HERmione, George's mouth is a "serpent," (167) a bivalent image signifying both the death which continuing the relationship with George would be for Her, and the vision of voice which he in his role as writer and lover offers Her. George, she observes, wants "to incarnate Her"; (64) when he kisses her, mouth to mouth, it is language which is the token of exchange. She thinks of Fayne but also embraces the carnal moment, along with the idea of poetry, in the person of George. Reaching a slim hand inside his shirt to feel his skin and the thud of his heartbeat, Hermione finds the "clear smooth marble" of classical statuary, of an altar—and in that moment she has "tasted words":

She did not know that all her life would be spent gambling with the stark rigidity of words, words that were coin; save, spend; and all the time George Lowndes was his own counter, had found her a way out. . . . Her mind, could she have so formulated thought, would have conceded: I have tasted words, I have seen them. Never had her hands reached out in darkness and felt the texture of pure marble, never had her forehead bent forward and, as against a stone altar, felt safety, I am now saved. Her mind could not then so specifically have seen it, could not have said, "Now I will reveal myself in words, words may now supercede a scheme of mathematical-biological definition. Words may be my heritage. . . ." (75–76)

Scientific "Heritage"

It is a moment of dedication specifically religious in its intensity, Her leaning against George "as against a stone altar." Hermione's phrase "mathematical-biological definition" is in part a reference to the "heritage" she has received from her father, a renowned astronomer. She has failed to measure up to this scientific "heritage," having failed "conic sections" at college just before the novel opens. (5) It is this failure to succeed in the father's terms that has precipitated Her's crisis of identity and prompted her to enter the engagement to George in a desperate attempt to "do something." Significantly, though, in this moment of awareness, it is biology—and not just mathematics—which Her determines to move beyond. That is, she discards her two earlier attempts to find an identity, first as a scientist and then as George's future wife, one of the women who "justified themselves in having children." (179) In George's embrace, paradoxically, she moves beyond the man but retains the gift which the experience of sexual awakening has brought her—her incarnated body as source and agent of artistic identity and vision.

Discovering sexuality and finding her tongue are not sequential for
Hermione but essentially identical: in George’s arms, "... she was suddenly overcome with the enormity of her discovery. ... there was hope in block of substantiated marble, words could carve and set up solid altars. ..." (76) She does not equate her new knowledge with George, does not assume that it is dependent on him. Nor are we meant to assume such dependency. From the beginning, her awareness is that the knowledge is separable from him, recoverable from the sensual intoxication of his embrace. After George’s mother tells Her that in her green dress she is "'Undine, or better, the mermaid from Hans Andersen,'" Hermione describes Undine as "a mermaid" who "wanted a voice or wanted feet," (112) and asks her mother, "'You mean I have no feet to stand on?'" (112–13) Lacking "a voice," the poet remains mute, unrealized; the "feet" suggest the independence to which Hermione’s question refers, as well as the metrical "feet" of poetry, which Hermione lacks as long as she remains allied with George, who tells Her that her poems are "rotten." (167) Grasping toward her determination to speak, Her says "'I am not Undine':"

Undine ... couldn’t speak after she sold her glory. I will not sell my glory ... I have always known this, she said to herself, that I can not sell my glory. Hibiscus kisses smudged me over. Yes, I did completely several times let go, give in; I may for a bit let go, give in, but it won’t be forever ... (120–21)

Hermione clearly knows that yielding permanently to George would silence her, so she holds back and yet takes from him the “tasted words” which are her future. What George gives Hermione is a vocabulary of experience and sensation, a syntax with which to articulate herself and her desire, sexual and artistic. End to Torment is H. D.’s memoir of her relationship with Pound, written nearly 50 years after the events fictionally recounted in Hermione, at the time of Pound’s release from the mental hospital and so of his “end to torment”—as well as the end of H. D.’s own “torment” over that unresolved relationship, finally healed in her writing of that text. There she names a small red-haired boy whom she sees in a railway station as “Eros,” (51–52) implicitly her child with Pound, the product of their union. It is, I believe, Eros in the broad sense—the vital force of joining, of union, that invests moments of most intense experience, sexual, artistic, and mystical—of whom H. D. speaks. Her other image for Pound’s influence in End to Torment is “the head, the tawny wheat-colored hair ... scattering grains or seeds.” (38) The images from the two texts are linked; in both End to Torment and Hermione, sexual moments and images serve metaphorically to represent the fertilization of the imagination.

Having drawn knowledge from the serpent lips of George, Hermione
turns to Fayne, the "sister/swallow" of Swinburne's "Itylus," the poem in which he reworks the Procne-Philomela myth, lines from which are woven throughout the novel from the time Hermione and Fayne meet. And just as in the myth Tereus comes between the sisters, so in the novel George comes between Hermione and the woman, her sister/her self, whom she loves. Fayne's betrayal precipitates another crisis for Hermione, this one a prolonged illness that is a kind of death. Like Philomela, Hermione loses her tongue, her voice, when she falls ill with "a sore throat or something" (193) upon learning of the deception by George and Fayne. The resulting breakdown plunges her again into the maelstrom of perception, robbed of the "glory" of her own voice. Gradually, though, her inchoate babblings coalesce into the project of ordered speech: "A project had formed in her head, a project and a determination. I will tell someone. When I have told someone it will fall from my forehead, heavily and visibly like the very scriptural millstone... Solid and visible form was what she had been seeking. I will put this into visible language..." (213) "Visible language," of course, is writing; the "telling someone" is the novel HERmione.

Hermione's struggle to regain her sanity brings her out of her sickbed in a complete recovery from the earlier Undine image of the mermaid with no voice and no feet: "Now standing on her feet, she realized that she liked her feet." (221) Looking out on the lawn whitened with snow, Her remembers the storm of the previous summer when the "white chalk" of lightning—heat lightning—had scrawled jagged lines on the dark "blackboard" of the sky. (83) That memory is the negative image of the present moment. Then, the summer storm had been the occasion for Eugenia to tell Hermione about her having been born in such a storm; now, healed and upright on her own two feet, reborn from her three-month illness, a Hermione resurrected by her determination to write looks out on a world "spread with white on white. Everything had been erased, would be written on presently." (221–22) And the writing does come, the scribal power shifting from "some cruel and dynamic unseen hand" (83) to Her's very feet:

Her feet were pencils tracing a path through a forest... Now Gart lawn and Gart forest and the Werby meadow and the Farrand forest were swept clear. They were virginal for one purpose, for one Creator. Last summer the Creator had been white lightning brandished against blackness. Now the creator was Her's feet, narrow black crayon across winter whiteness... She trailed feet across a space of immaculate clarity, leaving her wavering hieroglyph as upon a white parchment. (223–24)
First "written on" by the "heat lightning" of the erotic, Hermione, now charged with poetic power, becomes the instrument for creating her own text, her body the hieroglyph inscribing her story on the blank whiteness of the world's page. Had she remained Eurydice to George's Orpheus, she would have been condemned to silence, to the dark underworld of a half-life, like Eugenia; object of Orpheus' gaze, she would have been not the striker of the lyre but the silent occasion for its song. Free of George, she escapes the underworld; healing herself of the wound of Fayne's betrayal by her achievement of independence, she is reborn, through pain and loss, madness and delirium, as a poet, wing-footed messenger of the gods.

And it is love with all its heat, passion, and peril that has brought Hermione to this precise point where she can inscribe on the virginal blankness of her earlier, inarticulate life her artistic perceptions, marked by the movement of her body through time across the parchment of the world. In this, too, George erred: "'Love doesn't make good art, Hermione,'” he says; in reply, she thinks, although at that point cannot speak aloud, "Writing. Love is writing." (149) Having learned through George the syntax of love, she turns to Fayne to utter its language; silenced by Fayne's betrayal, she is cast, like Eurydice, like Philomela, into a hell of inarticulateness. But as with Philomela, for Hermione it is writing, her story woven into the telling tapestry, that releases her, that is for her the saving grace.

The Artist's Quest

We would be mistaken, though, to see HERmione as the telling of the whole of the artist's quest. Sex and creativity in H. D.'s work are not related in a simple equation that proves the final answer; not without reason is it "marble altars" which Her discovers in passion and the possibility of language. Coming to speech through the experience of the body is but one phase of the real quest that preoccupied H. D. in all her writing—the quest for spiritual vision and renewal, for the place that she calls in Notes on Thought and Vision "the over-conscious world." (40) The physical body, like the making of art, is but "a means of approach to ecstasy.” (46) The larger task is to move through and finally beyond sexual experience to the final realization of that vision, the intimate meeting with the god of many faces. This is the phase of the quest documented in Nights, H. D.'s recently republished novel.

The imagistic interweavings of HERmione, Notes on Thought and Vision, and Nights are, typically in H. D.'s work, striking and extensive; again and again the text of Nights echoes and re-echoes both of the others. Nights is presented as a posthumously-published story of and by Natalia Saundersen, a writer living in Switzerland. Her husband Neil has left her to
pursue an affair with a young man; Nat remains with Neil’s sister Renne, who has been Nat’s “half-lover.” (92) Natalia, wounded by Neil’s rejection, begins an affair with a young visitor in the house, David. The novel chronicles the twelve nights of that relationship, twelve nights leading up to what I believe we are to see as the epiphany of Natalia’s suicide, achieved when she skates across a frozen mountain lake and breaks through the surface of the ice into the lake’s bottomless depths. Her skates leave lines, “two parallel lines,” which meet “in a dark gash of the luminous ice-surface.” (5)

The image is an echo of the closing pages of HERmione, where Her, in her crayon-footed trek across the white countryside, steps onto a frozen runnel and waits to see if the ice will hold her (224–25); it cracks but does not yield. The scene is one indication of Her’s progress in the novel; unlike the “drowned” picture we have of her in the opening pages, she now stands above the water and writes her way through the world, fueled with sexual/poetic knowledge. Nights, on the other hand, begins with Natalia’s plunge through the ice, told in a prologue by “John Helforth,” both H. D.’s pseudonym for this novel and a character within the fiction. We know as we read the chronicle of Natalia’s nights with David that beyond the story’s final broken-off sentence in which the sea draws her “—out—” (106), beyond the silence at the story’s end, is Natalia’s death by drowning. The two novels are in a sense mirror-images of each other: Hermione’s story begins with an imagistic “drowning,” moves through sexual experience and poetic awakening, and ends with the ice bearing her weight as she writes herself across the winter landscape; Natalia’s begins with the “writing” of her skates across the ice of a lake which has no bottom, “exactly no known depth,” (8) moves through sexual experience and the writing/recording of that experience in the “diary” of the nights which forms the bulk of the novel, and ends with the silence of our knowledge of her fall into the dark water.

How are we to read that death? Introducing Natalia’s text, Helforth stresses again and again both her spiritual depths and the activity of her writing. “She could kill herself but not the spirit in her,” he says, and “Her pencil ran away with her; if she stopped writing, she was numb.” (4) Also, Nat’s lover David calls her “Neith,” (33) the name of the ancient Egyptian personification of femininity who was the mother of Ra, the sun god. These suggest that Nat’s death is an element in her spiritual quest, sought through the bodies of her lovers, through her own body, through her written words.

In another echo of HERmione, Natalia’s experience of sex is represented again and again in the novel as “lightning,” the manifestation of “her deity,” (51) whom she can meet only when she is alone. The body of her young lover stirs her, excites her, but with him she cannot come to orgasm. Night after night she sends him back to his room after the
lovemaking which for her is preliminary; alone, she pursues the "blue-
lavender, refracted light" which "eat[s] its way" up and across her body
(50); alone, she experiences the "aura of radiant light" (53) which is
sexual pleasure; alone, she writes; alone, she can sleep. "Would she," she
asks herself, "die sometime in some such shock-aura of pure light?" (53)
The prologue speaks of the "lightning-realism" of her writing: "She
wanted the realism of white lightning, of the "radium ray" she spoke of.
She wanted truth of that order, and she was not the first to want it." (26-
27) Helforth compares Natalia to Semele, the woman who "would drag
down fire from heaven" (27)—Semele, burnt to ashes when Zeus grants
her wish to see him in all his glory as a bolt of lightning. These considera-
tions suggest that we are meant to see Natalia's death not as the darkness
of self-destruction but as the ultimate moment in her quest for light.

_Nights_ shares with _HERmione_ that powerful and memorable image of
the female body writing as she moves over a frozen whiteness. Hermione's
life as a poet has just begun when that novel ends—Eros has
awakened her to artistic life and opened the Pandora's box of her body;
what comes out is words. For Natalia, though, the writing has come to an
end; she has written her way through sex to vision, to "over-mind con-
sciousness." Writing has led her out of her body and into the vision world
of the spirit. For Natalia as well, the "serpent" symbolizing both vision
and death are joined into one. Writing her final sentence, she glides
across the ice and breaks through to the new plane of consciousness, out
of time and into the lake that has no bottom. Her body "a sort of pencil,
(14) she disappears into the gash in the ice which forms the period to her
life. She has succeeded, through sexual ecstasy and through writing, in
going "out." And so she falls—through the milk-white ice of the lake,
through the heat of sex, the red-hot volcano at the earth's heart, and
beyond, to return to the amniotic sea, site of birth and rebirth, to be born
again—who knows?—perhaps as Helen, perhaps as Aphrodite, in the
green foam of a sun-struck sea on the other side of the world.
Notes


2 Other critics have also considered the development of erotic awareness in HERmione. Rachel Blau DuPlessis in “Romantic Thralldom in H. D.” (Contemporary Literature 20:2 [Summer 1979], 178-203) discusses the relationship between George and Hermione as an example of the dominant/submissive love between people of unequal status (as is heterosexual love within patriarchy) to which H. D. was susceptible throughout her life, and Her’s relationship with Fayne as “a twinship between spiritual sisters.” (181) Susan Friedman and DuPlessis in “I Had Two Loves Separate: the Sexualities of H. D.’s Her” (Montemora 8 [1981], 7-30) explore the heterosexual/lesbian tensions in the novel and place H. D.’s unpublished (in her lifetime) novels of lesbian eroticism in their literary-historical context. Deborah Kelly Kloepfer in “Flesh Made Word: Maternal Inscription in H. D.” (Sagetrieb 3:1 [Spring 1984], 27-48) sees “the essential conflict” in HERmione as one “between two versions of the mother,” (37) tying Her’s struggles with language to her efforts to resolve her conflict-ridden relationships with Eugenia and Fayne, defining the “sense of space out of which [H. D.] will be able to write and in which she will be able to take a poetic identity” as “one associated with the body, specifically the maternal body.” (48)

Works Cited

The Pursuit
of Spirituality in
the Poetry of H.D.

I did know that I must keep faith
with something; I called it writing.
write, write or die. . . .

I. Pursuit of the Poem

The poet's decision to write is an illusory one; there is, in fact, no con­
cscious choice involved. Poetry issues, as Rainer Maria Rilke says,
from a disposition of the soul. With H.D., "disposition" seems far too tame
a word. The poems speak of their writing as an act of survival, a way of life
that H.D. led fully to the end, with the poem always ahead, a little out of
reach, or behind, prodding, prodding:
do you hear me? do I whisper?
there is a voice within me,
listen—let it speak for me.

The ability to listen to this voice—either passively or actively—is the
subject of a portion of the poetic H.D. articulated in Notes on Thought and

*Dawn Kolokithas

*All numbers given in the text refer to page numbers in the source, with the
exception of Hermetic Definition where the Arabic numeral refers to sections 1, 2,
and 3, and the Roman numeral refers to the number H.D. gave to the poem. Key to
parenthetical abbreviations: CP = Collected Poems; HEL = Helen in Egypt; HD =
Hermetic Definition; N = Notes on Thought and Vision.
Vision. There she gropes for a physiological, material explanation for what is usually spoken of in metaphysical terms. “If we had the right sort of receiving brains,” H.D. says, we would be able to receive information from great works of art, such as the statue of the Greek Charioteer (N 26). “Receive” is used here in her double sense, as both creation and appreciation of the art form. In this metaphor, the brain is the “telegraphic” center. The visionary apperception is spoken of in terms of “dots and lines” or “dots and dashes.” It produces a message that can be read. But visual or literary or musical or whatever, the process is the same. The “overmind,” as she calls it, is the part of consciousness capable of receiving the visionary, artistic perception.

For H.D., the visionary and artistic were integrated into one pursuit: the poem. In this she was not unlike other poets, such as Arthur Rimbaud, Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse), and William Blake. Few poets in our own time tread the visionary path, a dearth that was apparent to H.D. in 1919. Referring again to visual artists, she says in Notes:

But the world of the great creative artists is never dead. The new schools of destructive art theorists are on the wrong track, because Leonardo and his kind are never old, never dead. Their world is never explored, hardly even entered. Because it needs an overmind or slight glimmering of overmind consciousness to understand overmind consciousness.

(N 24)

From the available evidence, it seems that H.D. was proud of her overmind ability, and she wanted to share that experience with her readers. Like Helen in Egypt, H.D. sought “to establish or re-establish the ancient Mysteries.” (HEL 65) But to speak of the Mysteries, one must first be initiated—or rather, once one is initiated, one is forbidden to speak. The visionary discipline revels in contradiction. But the poems, while displaying a yearning for or translation of the visionary, are not handbooks to a new religion. They are poetic documents of a Hermetic character.

II. Pursuit of Hermetic Knowledge

Even casual readers of H.D. know that she had more than a passing knowledge of ancient Egypt, the archaic and classical Greeks, and, to a lesser extent, Assyrian civilization. While it is doubtful that H.D. approached the material in a systematic, scholarly fashion, she certainly was conversant with the art, cult, and literature of these peoples.

The occult tradition is fueled by the idea that the ancients had access to information that we no longer possess. Consequently, with the rise of
European interest in the occult, when the sciences of alchemy, magic, Kaballah, and Sufism were flourishing, the leading exponents turned back, in the Renaissance fashion, to the ancient world. This tendency continued off and on into the 19th century when Friedrich Nietzsche and others touched off a renaissance on a much smaller scale, an enthusiasm that H.D. shared. Add to this her Moravian background with its peculiar brand of Christian mysticism, as well as the popular form of spiritualism practiced around the turn of the century, and the basic ingredients of what I call the Hermetic dimension of H.D.'s work are taken into account. Hermeticism partakes of animistic, pagan, magical, and nonsectarian models of thought. It pursues, as Helen in Egypt, the synthesis that is more than the sum of its parts. It turns to history to rework the material over and over. "I tell and retell the story," says Helen, "To find the answer." (HEL 87)

Helen looks back with good reason. In the past lies an implicate order which includes the present and the future, physical and metaphysical dimensions. It is the visionary's task to uncover the clues to the whole, to risk the tricky business of interpretation. Whatever answers the Graeco-Egyptian Helen uncovers pose new questions:

Helen—Helen—Helen—
there was always another and another and another;
the rose has many petals[...]

(HEL 194)

The petals are endless, as are the questions and answers they partially symbolize. Characteristically, the Hermetic tradition foregrounds the temptation to seek at the same time that it issues warnings not to do so. One is not, apparently, supposed to inquire too deeply; therefore Thetis necessarily counsels Helen:

Seek not another Star,
O Helen, loved of War,
seek not to know

too much[...]

(HEL 90)

But for a poet such as H.D., one certainly does want to know—precisely the kind of information that one is not ready to receive. The tradition explicitly and repeatedly states that such hubris leads only to madness. It is perhaps not outlandish to suggest that the warning has a curious echo, given the chronic emotional instability that led H.D. to seek help from Sigmund Freud, among others. However, not all initiates suffer so, as William James points out in Varieties of Religious Experience. (404) Some,
in fact, are on record as being strengthened, not weakened, by the experience.

Yet whatever the side effects, the meaning of the visionary apperception is rarely readily apparent. It is said to be communicated in the language of symbol. These icons, like the poems in which they are found, rarely, if ever, admit definitive explication.

> how can you find the answer
> in the oracles of Greece
> or the heiroglyphs of Egypt?

> you may work or steal your way
> into the innermost shrine
> and the secret escape you[...]

(HEL 85)

H.D.'s incorporation of Hermetic material, while superbly implemented in Helen, is most accessible, exegetically speaking, in Trilogy, where she synthesizes information from diverse vectors of pagan, occult, and nonsectarian inquiry, in addition to documenting her own lucid dreams and visions. For those well-read in the area, Trilogy does not present much of an obstacle; but for those of more rational disposition, the book is troublesome, if not closed, largely because of the alternative model to cognocentrism it presents. H.D. was aware of the problematic nature of her subject. Critics past, present, and future are addressed in several poems in Trilogy. To take one example:

This search for historical parallels, research into psychic affinities, has been done to death before, will be done again; no comment can alter spiritual realities (you say) or again, what new light can you possibly throw upon them?[...]

but my mind (yours) has its peculiar ego-centric personal approach to the eternal realities, and differs from every other in minute particulars,
as the vein-paths on any leaf
differ from those of every other leaf

in the forest, as every snowflake
has its particular star, coral or prism shape. (CP 539)

The appeal to individuality expressed above is consistent with the emphasis on subjectivity made 25 years earlier in H.D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision*. Matters of interpretation do not sport pre-packaged commodities of meaning. It is incumbent upon each poet or aspirant to make sense of the visionary material, each in his or her own way. This emphasis on subjectivity makes the proof of the reality of the visionary experience difficult at best, which is one reason why its rejection among intellectuals has been, and remains, thoroughgoing. While other sciences propose objective experiments which, when repeated, are interpreted into data that are instituted as facts until a newer, more sweeping model emerges, the subjective visionary apperception affords little objective data, given current tools of measurement. Yet such apperception does have one advantage—it persists. While the components are subject to variation, the testimonies of individuals from all times and places remain more or less constant, both in the genesis of the Hermetic tradition and as demonstrated in the life of a single visionary poet such as H.D.

H.D., Egypt, 1923

Photograph used by the courtesy of Norman Holmes Pearson and the New Directions Publishing Corporation.
III. The Pursuer and the Pursued

Within H.D.'s lifelong pursuit of poem and vision, the images, objects, and symbols representative of the sought-after take many forms. One of the easiest and most traditional and obvious categories to cite is the pursuit of place: the multiple location of the temple, the Hesperides, Odysseus' Ithaca, Helen's yearning to merge Egypt and Greece, and the islands sought by Achilles are among examples that come readily to mind.

At the next level of the pursuit are H.D.'s classical Greek females, chased relentlessly, in the notorious Greek fashion, by a single lover or multitude of men. Some scholars believe that the devolution of the goddess into mere plaything is the natural outcome of the eclipse of the matriarchy by the ascending patristocracy. In this respect it is worth noting the high frequency of myths created to justify male actions. (Harrison 285) The figures, quasi-historical or mythological, representing the pursued female in H.D. include Eurydice, Iphigenia, and Leda. But chief among them is Helen. The latter is thrice pursued: once by Theseus, once by Paris, and then by the confederation of the Mycenean army. For those who believe the Trojan War really did occur, Helen stands as the most pursued female in history.

At the other end of the hunt, the pursuer is nearly always male, save for Aphrodite's conquests and Sappho's roving eye. The male is identified, perhaps, with Eros, Achilles, or even Kaspar. But sometimes this anthropomorphism is not even necessary; one presence that seeks Helen, for example, is a "voice" or "message." (HEL 187/90) But more often than not, the pursuer is the speaker of the poems and the pursued god is Hermes or Osiris-Sirius-Amen or Theseus or, as often is the case, an unidentified being whom the protagonist chases pell-mell through the landscape.

H.D.'s first book, Sea Garden, contains a number of poems illustrative of the pursuit motif. Here the poet often writes of giving offerings to the gods in the archaic fashion of "tendence"—I do something for you, you do something for me. (Harrison 3ff) The speaker is willing to sacrifice, entreat, threaten, and yield in order to come face to face with something or someone who continually eludes or evades. "They say," H.D. writes in Sea Garden, "there is no hope / to conjur you..." (CP 29) Running, shouting, praying, giving, the sought-after stays ahead. "For ever and ever," the poet writes in "Cliff Temple," "must I follow you /... you are quicker than my hand-grasp." The poem continues:

Over me the wind swirls
I have stood on your portals
and I know—
you are further than this
still further on another cliff.  

This direct and indirect address of the pursued gods continues throughout H.D.'s career, though noticeably with a greater accommodation of the Christian end of the spectrum. The frenzy of the pursuit diminishes as the poet ages. By the end of her life, H.D. does not have to chase the gods, but can call elegantly from her chair.

Raphael, Michael—why are you there?
would you guide me with dignity
into a known port?
would you champion my endeavor? 

IV. The Trail

In keeping with the archaic sensibility that advocates a continual awareness of nature, the trail is often outdoors. Through meadows and woods, fording rivers, on the beach, over the waves, the path is there and the pursuer loyal to the chase.

can you follow the hound trail,
can you trample the hot froth?

Spring up—sway forward—
follow the quickest one.
aye, though you leave the trail
and drop exhausted at our feet 

The trail is a trial. The going is often rough, always challenging. Perhaps only the few can endure. The god will not be easily had, as Martin Heidegger in "What Are Poets For?" points out. (94) But of all the incarnations and disincarnations that H.D. pursued, Hermes was the only one who let her catch up. He is the god who has waited "where sea-grass tangles with / shore grass." (CP 39)

As patron of roads and travellers, Hermes appears in the first book, Sea Garden. Possibly he is also the tall god referred to in the final book, Hermetic Definition:

... but I must finish what I have begun
the tall god standing
where the race is run
"Race" is a good word to use for the pursuit because it implies competition, or abrasion, with the other or the trail itself. The arduous nature of the pursuit is consonant with Nietzsche's idea of the Homeric contest, where struggle is viewed as a spur to greater activity (32), as it was for the famous Christian trail-blazers, the Knights of the Round Table.

Any pursuit without gain, however, would be a despairing one indeed. Consequently there is some headway to be made, as in the poem "The Pursuit," in which H.D. writes:

I can almost follow this note
where it touched the slender tree
and the next answered—
and the next.  

( CP 11)

As alluded to above, the trail might be the poem itself, with "notes" instead of markers. This quotation informs another, equally important observation on the polysemy or multi-dimensional import of the path: "Our minds are winged, / though our feet are clay." (CP 498) There are many feet and footprints in H.D.'s poems, from the taunting impressions of the huntress' heels to the faint marks left by Helen's purple sandals, from the pitiable impression of Achilles' wounded heel to the prostrate votives worshipping at Aphrodite's feet. It is the human, material part that leaves the print and, indeed, metrical feet are the material trail of the poet's ethereal pursuits. To take this point a bit further, the references to "Ge-meter, De-meter" (CP 596) emerge, in my reading, as concerns for the earthly trail of the poem.

In ancient cultures, the path made on the sand by the dancers and priests was a temporal document plotting the coordinates on the trail to an invisible world. (Levy 16, 38) Whether H.D. read this material—which is likely—or whether her intuition of the prints issued from the writing itself, I do not know. Yet wherever she got it, the information does tally with interpretations of Paleolithic cultures:

Gather for a festival
bright weed and purple shell;
make, on the holy sand,
pattern as one might make
who tread, with red-rose heel,
a measure[ ... ]  

( CP 277)

In "The Dancer," written ten years later than "Songs from Cyprus" quoted above, H.D. compares the dancer's body to a "Stylus" and reads the movement, as any good semiologist would, as a text. (CP 440)

But, as the exasperated Achilles, who attempts to prophesy by reading
Helen's footfalls on the towers, knows, recognizing pattern is an altogether different task from interpreting pattern. Matters of interpretation concentrate in Helen. Including but in no way limited to the hieroglyphs of footprints, Helen's interpretation of pattern returns again and again to the hieroglyph of the Amen-script. From her arrival in Egypt through the rest of the book, Helen seeks to understand the message:

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,
I would study and decipher
the indecipherable Amen-script. (HEL 22)

Helen wishes to decode the script and formulate a reading that would provide the answers she seeks, not by source or by instruction, but by intuition. Although progress is made, the bulk of Amen-script remains impenetrable. Much later Helen will say, "The heart accepts / ... the undecipherable script." (HEL 89)

Accepts, but not with pleasure. The hieroglyph, the key to ancient understanding of the Mysteries, must be decoded, but possibly Helen is not the one to do it. Like the exhausted trail hound who gasps for breath in "Sheltered Garden" (CP 19) or the indignant Mary in Trilogy (CP 592), Helen, for a while, gives up:

it was nothing, the Amen-script,
the Writing, the star-space,
the Wheel and the Mystery;
it was all nothing,

[... ] like fire
through the broken pictures
on a marble floor. (HEL 268)

In Helen's pursuit of meaning, she often substitutes one pattern for another—for example, the Amen-script for the fire on the floor. But a convenient substitution is only a brief side-step on the trail. Near the end of the book, she realizes that the meaning is "very simple." (HEL 272) In other words, she has made it far more difficult than it really is.
V. Ecstasy

The culmination of all visionary pursuits is the vision of the divine. In mystical terms, it is spoken of as ecstasy; in the language of ancient religions, it is the sacred marriage, *mystica unica* or *heiros gamos*, which takes several forms in the poetry of H.D. In *Helen*, for example, the *mystica unica* resides chiefly in the mind of Thetis; for the goddess, the half-human Helen, and the immortal Achilles are one. (HEL 105) *Hermetic Definition* develops a variation of the theme, in which the speaker’s divine mate is the “*hachish superieur of dream*” (HD 1:XVIII) referred to elsewhere as “*Seigneur*.” (HD 2:IV)

But nowhere does the *mystica unica* surface more clearly than in *Trilogy*. In each of the three sections of the book, the union between divine and human worlds is the central development. In *The Walls Do Not Fall*, it is Osiris-Sirius-Amen who rewards the poet’s striving:

O, Sire, is this the path[ . . . ]
O, Sire, is this union at last?  

(∗CP 542)

In the second book, *Tribute to the Angels*, it is the lady who appears to H.D. in a lucid dream. (CP 562) And in *Flowering of the Rod*, it is an object, not a person, whom the protagonist, Mary, pursues—myrrh, which, like other objects in the poems, such as the rod and sword, is symbolic of the spiritual aspiration:

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

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

the fragrance came from the bundle of myrrh
she held in her arms.  

(∗CP 612)

What Mary has sought for, she has had all the time. This discovery simplifies the quest indeed.

The idea of finding within what was sought without is as old as Heraclitus and is an important part of the Sufic tradition where an aspirant looks within to find the higher self or daemon. Although the pursuit may be long and difficult, the actual contact is said to be effortless. As H.D. says in *Notes*:

We are important only insofar as we become identified with
the highest in ourselves—“our own familiar daemon.”  

(∗N 37)
Is this the unknown being pursued so fervently in *Sea Garden*? In the second book, *The God*, the sculptor asks in "Pygmalion," "am I the God / or does the fire carve me / for its uses?" (CP 48) I cannot help echoing the questions. Who is doing the pursuing? Who is the pursuer and who is the pursued?

"O be swift," the poet writes early in her career, "we have always known you wanted us." (CP 5)

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**Works Cited**


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The Spell of the Luxor Bee

Rosie King-Smyth

If we bear in mind that a text is "a woven thing" and then that we speak of poets and witches and such as weaving a spell, it will prepare the way for showing how H.D., in her Trilogy poems, brings us under the spell of the Luxor bee.

Near the end of The Walls Do Not Fall, the first book of the Trilogy, H.D. appeals to her fellow scribes, saying, "let us...entreat Hest,/ Aset, Isis, the great enchantress," "let us substitute enchantment for sentiment." (poems 34, 35) The great enchantment of Isis, of course, was to bring the fragmented body of Osiris, Egyptian god of light, back to life. In the Trilogy, Isis is a figure of the poet. H.D.'s great work in the three books of the Trilogy is to enchant herself, and us, back to the life of poetry. And it is fitting that her first enchantment carries us to Egypt:

An incident here and there,
and rails gone (for guns)
from your (and my) old town square:

mist and mist-grey, no colour,
still the Luxor bee, chick and hare
pursue unalterable purpose

in green, rose-red, lapis;
they continue to prophesy
from the stone papyrus:

there, as here, ruin opens
the tomb, the temple; enter,
there as here, there are no doors:
the shrine lies open to the sky,
the rain falls, here, there
sand drifts; eternity endures:

(poem 1)

To locate ourselves in these opening stanzas we take clues from H.D.'s title page dedication: "To Bryher/ for Karnak 1923/ from London 1942." The year 1923 was the year of H.D.'s visit to Egypt with her friend Bryher. There she saw the ruins of the great temples of Amen-Ra at Karnak. London, 1942, was World War II London, after the Battle of Britain. For H.D., the memory of Egypt is a source of strength and of wonder as she lives through the bombing of London and as she writes this first book of her Trilogy: "there, as here," the walls do not fall. And it is from the walls of the ruins at Luxor, across the Nile from Karnak, that she takes the image whose power to endure and enchant combats the disappearances of wartime London.

As we can learn from some of H.D.'s prose works preceding the Trilogy, particularly from "Secret Name," the third of three books in her novel Palimpsest (1926), "the Luxor bee, chick and hare" are hieroglyphs actually, carved huge and in color on the walls of the ruins H.D. visited at Luxor. She writes in a passage from The Gift:

A bit of me can really "live" something of a word or phrase, cut on a wall at Karnak. But really "live" it, I mean. Then I am for a moment (through a picture carved on a wall, tinted with just such bright colours as we had in our own paint box) Egyptian; a little cell of my brain responds to a cell of someone's brain who died thousands of years ago. A word opens a door...

In the first of the Trilogy poems, these ancient word-pictures appear like magic out of the mist of war-time London. They come in threes, the pattern of the poem set in miniature. Against the power of guns, they represent the power of imagination. And they weave a spell: they make us wonder, what is it they "pursue"? what is their "unalterable purpose"? what do "they continue to prophesy"? They make us curious to know what they mean, and so, like the herald bees of H.D.'s earlier prose, they announce the quest for meaning which becomes the process of the poem.

Chick and hare serve as initial suggestions of fertility and, in their evocations of Easter egg and rabbit, of resurrection. Unlike the bee, however, they do not return in the poems that follow. Bee, the creature able not merely to reproduce itself but to make a new substance, honey, is akin to the shell-fish that makes the pearl and the worm that becomes the butterfly in poems 6 and 7 of The Walls Do Not Fall. As creatures who are
also makers, these three are associated with the poet-alchemist and with the process of making the new resurrected body which becomes, in one of its manifestations, the poem itself. The work of the honey-bee in this process happens with less obvious elaboration on H.D.'s part than that of shell-fish and worm. And yet its affinity with these creatures, the hiddenness of its meaning as hieroglyph at the beginning of the Trilogy, and the pattern suggested by its appearances in the rest of the poem—all make the bee especially intriguing.

In following several lines of inquiry, I would like first to trace the pattern of the bee image, then to comment on the Luxor bee as it relates to H.D.'s cryptic references to Samuel and to the Pythian in the opening poem, and then to decipher the Luxor bee, chick, and hare as hieroglyph.

After the Luxor bee, the bee image appears three more times, once in each of the three books. Each time it carries us to a center of revelation and nourishment. The pattern that H.D. weaves is one in which the honey-bee becomes associated with each of the three figures—god, goddess, and poet—whose resurrection she is celebrating.

First, in poem 29 of The Walls Do Not Fall, the bee is associated with the Osiris/Amen/Christ figure to whom the poet prays:

Grant us strength to endure
a little longer,

now the heart's alabaster
is broken;

we would feed forever
on the amber honey-comb

of your remembered greeting,

O, for your Presence

among the fishing-nets
by the beached boats on the lake-edge;

when, in the drift of wood-smoke,
will you say again, as you said,

the baked fish is ready,
here is the bread?
Already, in poem 16, the poet has met the amber eyes of "Ra, Osiris, Amen," "the world-father" whose eyes "very clear with amber/shining" are for H.D. also those she meets in the painting of "Velasquez' crucified" in poem 19: "and they are amber and they are fire." Now these honey-colored eyes become associated with the "remembered greeting" of the post-crucifixion Jesus. Honey, the only food that will not spoil, now becomes a precise metaphor for the Word of the gospel, the good news of the resurrected body, "the amber honeycomb' on which "we would feed forever."

The bee next appears in poem 15 of Tribute to the Angels, the book whose work redeems the name of the goddess "Venus, Aphrodite, Astarte." Here, after bitter labor in the crucible, the new name of Annael, made, by H.D.'s spelling, the only female of her seven Angels, comes as "a breath, a whisper," and suddenly we are with the poet in Venice and the bell-notes are ringing all the Angel names

until it seems the whole city (Venice-Venus)
will be covered with gold pollen shaken

from the bell-towers, lilies plundered
with the weight of massive bees...

The new name becomes the lily-bell, and the gong inside is heavy like a huge bee, like the poet plundering the images of old religions.

The last appearance of the bee in the Trilogy comes in poem 7 of The Flowering of the Rod, as part of H.D.'s celebration of "the hunger/ for Paradise":

Yet resurrection is a sense of direction,
resurrection is a bee-line,

straight to the horde and plunder,
the treasure, the store-room;

the honeycomb;
resurrection is remuneration,

food, shelter, fragrance
of myrrh and balm.

This "bee-line straight to...the honeycomb" invites us to move with the poet as plundering bee "onward...into the Golden Age." (poem 8) And appropriately so, for the "bee-line" carries us both "forward" and "backward" in the time of the poem. Its link with the "fragrance of myrrh and
"balm" signals and describes in miniature the new sense of direction that comes to the poet in this third book as she approaches the telling of her story of the myrrh-merchant and the Magdalene. The "bee-line...to the honeycomb" also gathers up its own earlier image-relations, bringing back "the Luxor bee," "the amber honey-comb" eyes and greeting of the risen Osiris/Amen/Christ, and the "gold pollen/shaken from the bell-towers," the lily, bell, bee cluster of the redeemed Venice/Venus, to release them in a whole new context of clarity and exhilaration. Here, in the third book of the Trilogy, the poet is no longer only yearning to "feed forever/ on the amber honey-comb" or only remembering the "gold pollen" music of the bell-towers. Now, having "withstood...the bitter fire of destruction" (poem 1) of the first two books, she is actually moving "into the Golden Age." She is leaving the ruins and following the way of the bee to Paradise:

I am so happy,
I am the first or the last
of a flock or a swarm

(poem 8)

Her "bee-line" fulfills the promise of "the Luxor bee," and so shows how deeply this third book is in touch with its beginnings in the first.

What makes the news that the "bee, chick and hare...continue to prophesy" so promising is the sense both of the universality of what they signify and of some further hidden meaning that they might be conveying as hieroglyphs. They come alive in the first place as creatures we know, and it is wonderful to think that these same creatures were alive over 7,000 years ago, so alive and speaking that they became part of the language of a whole civilization. That H.D. might be doing more with this ancient picture-language than meets the eye is suggested by the fact that the Trilogy poems ask us to pay attention to "what words conceal"; we are advised that the secret of the gods "is stored/in man's very speech." (poem 8) The poet assures us:

I know, I feel
the meaning that words hide

they are anagrams, cryptograms
little boxes, conditioned

to hatch butterflies...

(poem 39)
One way of figuring out what the Luxor hieroglyphs mean comes from noticing that they initiate the first pattern of historical reference in the poem. The news that "they continue to prophesy" reverberates when H.D. tells us, a little further on in the opening poem:

so, through our desolation,
thoughts stir, inspiration stalks us
through gloom:

unaware, Spirit announces the Presence;
shivering overtakes us,
as of old, Samuel:

trembling at a known street-corner,
we know not nor are known;
the Pythian pronounces—we pass on ....

The "Luxor bee, chick and hare" are linked in some interesting ways with Samuel and the Pythian. Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek: all are prophets. Theirs are the only proper names to appear for the first nine stanzas. Each one calling up a lost world, their very names are sources of power. They enlarge the world of the poem as it approaches "Pompeii," the volcanic ruin of the late Roman Empire, a few stanzas later. They help us sense the simultaneity of times and places which is so strong in the poem. Speaking out of the mist of 20th-century London, these "cryptograms" make the deep past of antiquity immediately present to us, together creating that texture of recorded history that H.D. will describe in the next poem as a "palimpsest." Most important, they evoke whole cultures that kept a living connection with the supernatural.

Samuel and the Pythian, H.D. refers so easily to them; they let us see how close she is to her heritage as a poet. Her choice of them shows how deeply, and with what rich sources, she is making connections in these poems. Samuel, meaning "name of God," was the child born to Hannah who was barren and who prayed for a son, promising to give him to the Lord. Samuel was the prophet who anointed David, youngest of the seven sons of Jesse, from whose house descended Mary the mother of Jesus. "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse" was Isaiah's prophecy of the messiah. And so in the mere mention of Samuel, H.D. plants a seed for her Flowering of the Rod.

The Pythian was the oracular priestess of Apollo at Delphi. Her name links her to the python killed and expropriated by Apollo, god of the sun, prophecy, music, medicine and poetry. But she was also called, we discover from a text that H.D. might have known, the Delphic Bee. Jane Harrison's Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion quotes from the
Homeric Hymn to Hermes a passage that Hermes' "first gift of prophecy came from three maiden prophetesses," the Thriae, described in detail in the hymn as bees. Harrison also notes that "not only the priestesses of Artemis at Ephesus were 'Bees,' but also those of Demeter, and, still more significantly, the Delphic priestess herself was a Bee." Finding these "hidden" connections—of Samuel with the flowering rod and the Pythian with the bee—helped urge me on to treat the Luxor creatures as hieroglyphs and to look for them in E. A. Wallis Budge's Egyptian Language and in his translation of The Book of the Dead. H.D.'s combination of bee, chick, and hare becomes particularly suggestive, once it is seen what kinds of words the Egyptians made with them.

Chick and hare, to begin with, are quite common in Egyptian hieroglyphic texts. They are used sometimes together, or interchangeably, as forms of the verbs "to exist" and "to be" and they combine frequently with other signs, often in verbs having to do with being alive in time or with moving up in some way. Chick appears in combinations that stand for rising, shining, praising, and rejoicing. Hare appears, running as always, in the word for "hour" and in a verb translated as "lift up the legs" in a prayer that asks for Osiris' agility in the underworld. H.D.'s celebration of the resurrected body in poem 9 of The Flowering of the Rod, I am an entity like bird, insect, plant or sea-plant cell; I live; I am alive may be echoing what she found in Budge's introduction to The Book of the Dead:

the body does not lie in the tomb inoperative, for by the prayers and ceremonies on the day of burial it is endowed with the power of changing into a sahu, or spiritual body. Thus we have such phrases as, "I germinate like the plants," "My flesh germinate," "I exist, I exist, I live, I live, I germinate, I germinate"...

Budge is translating hieroglyphs whose reproductions feature a number of chicks and a hare.

Further elucidation of the hare hieroglyph can be found in John Layard's The Lady of the Hare, which reveals how the Egyptian hare-deity became connected with the idea of uprising, with the sun and moon, and, as H.D. apparently discovered, with Osiris, whose kingly name Unnefer begins with the hieroglyph of the hare.

As for the bee, in Budge's work its picture appears rarely and only in
the word which translates "The King of the South and North." For the Egyptians, the bee was, in fact, the sign of royalty. As A. E. Fife reports in a now classic but still unpublished dissertation on the sacredness of bees: "In Egypt, from the first Dynasty on, the bee was associated with the kingly power of sovereigns. The hieroglyph for the King of both upper and lower Egypt was accompanied by a bee and a reed." One version of H.D.'s refrain in *Tribute to the Angels* includes this reed:

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this is the flowering of the rood,
this is the flowering of the reed,
where . . . we pause to give
thanks that we rise again from death and live.
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(poem 7)

With the help of those like Budge, who first deciphered the hieroglyphs, each Luxor creature can now be given the meaning it had for the scribes of ancient Egypt. We can read "King" for "bee." And yet, with equal precision, we can read "Queen," remembering H.D.'s reference to the Pythian, one of antiquity's many Bee priestesses, not to mention the many Queens of Egypt (H.D. celebrates Hatshepsut, whose "name is still circled/ with what they call the cartouche" in poem 9 of her first book in the Trilogy). The sovereign bee is the queen bee, the great mother of the hive, although, as H.D. would have known from another favorite text, Maeterlinck's *The Life of the Bee*.

Except for the Greek Xenophon and Germanic tradition which treated her as a female, up until the Renaissance, the entire learned world had assumed that the queen was a male.

That Queen as well as King must be her meaning for the bee-sign, that she would sanction both readings, is suggested by the joy H.D. takes throughout the Trilogy in celebrating the many figures of the goddess equally with those of the god, and particularly by the ease with which, in the closing poem of *The Flowering of the Rod*, she is able to present the visit of the Magi to the Christ child and at the same time to link "young" Mary and "the bundle of myrrh/ she held in her arms" with "Mary-myrrh" the Magdalene, whose hair has given off the light in which Kaspar has his vision of the triple Queen of Heaven.

With the readings of both King and Queen for "bee" in mind, we can go on to read *exists*, or *lives*, or *is alive* for "chick and hare"; we can add the Egyptians' other meaning for the chick/hare hieroglyphs, *uprising*; and if we let the meaning of "Luxor" come from *lux*, the Latin word for *light*, then
the whole prophecy comes clear.\textsuperscript{11} “The King/Queen of Light is alive! is risen!” What “the Luxor bee, chick and hare” spell at the beginning of \textit{The Walls Do Not Fall} is what H.D. shows us with her spelling Osiris near the end:

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

Osiris,
the star Sirius,
relates resurrection myth
and resurrection reality
through the ages... (poem 40)

Might she also have remembered, from Maeterlinck’s bee book, Pliny’s speculation on the origin of honey, a substance “engendered from the air, mostly at the rising of the constellations, and more especially when Sirius is shining”?\textsuperscript{12} In any case, by letting us find the link between the Luxor bee and the resurrected god of light, H.D. shows the way to

recover the secret of Isis,
which is: there was One

in the beginning, Creator
Fosterer, Begetter, the Same-forever

in the papyrus-swamp
in the Judean meadow. (poem 40)

This is the “secret... stored/ in man’s very speech.” (poem 8) “The King/Queen of Light is alive, is risen indeed!” This is the prophecy that the whole work of the \textit{Trilogy} is to realize. Appearing here at the very threshold of \textit{The Walls Do Not Fall}, the Luxor creatures are heralds celebrating in miniature what H.D. gives thanks for in \textit{Tribute to the Angels} and celebrates fully in \textit{The Flowering of the Rod}. Made whenever a “bee, chick and hare” were first carved on the walls of the ruins at Luxor, their prophecy announces the same event, the perpetual rebirth of the Deity of Light, “the flowering of the rod” that Samuel initiated when he anointed David. At the beginning of the poem, the Old Testament child, Samuel, born to Hannah who was barren; at the end, the New child, “bundle of myrrh” in the arms of Mary; these become images for the birth of the
poem itself. The Luxor creatures and the spell they weave make the first of H.D.'s “cryptograms” for the miracle of the gospel, the good news “that we rise again from death and live.” And this is also the miracle of her poetry.

Both the prominence of “the Luxor bee, chick and hare” at the opening of the Trilogy and the centrality of their meaning in the poem as a whole are perfectly expressive of the fact that after her Egyptian experience, H.D.'s relation to images reaches a different level of consciousness. On the temple walls in Egypt she finds images not only outside herself, as in nature, but huge, writ larger than life. The kind of “reading” she is doing by bringing in these hieroglyphs is not esoteric or exotic but basic and open to all of us. We have not merely Budge’s texts but our own common sense to appeal to. What the texts show is just that the Egyptians took the most common things in their world to write with; long before they were symbols, they were presences. And this is just the way it is in our own lives. When we are children we meet things first as live bodies, immediately; we don’t need them to make up meanings with until later. The giant “bee, chick and hare” must have been for H.D. the kinds of dear familiar objects that grow with us and share our history and at a certain point, perhaps even several times, give their meanings back new. If Egypt could make these creatures a symbol for their whole culture, then she is no longer merely in the realm of the personal but also in what has meaning to other people. In creating her own symbology, she finds substantiation in the hieroglyphs, and this frees her to speak in the kinds of word-pictures she now can believe will speak with authority. As she tells us:

our joy is unique, to us,
grape, knife, cup, wheat
are symbols in eternity,
and every concrete object
has abstract value, is timeless
in the dream parallel
whose relative sigil has not changed
since Nineveh and Babel.

(poem 15)
Notes

1 H.D., "Dark Room" Montemora, VIII (1981), p. 70. This is one of the passages not included in the New Directions edition of The Gift.


4 Budge, p. 158.

5 Ibid., pp. 132 and 159.


8 Budge, Egyptian Language, p. 71.


10 Ibid., p. 30.

11 In "Morning Star," Chapter 7 of The Gift, remembering that her grandmother had called her Lucy, H.D. writes, "I was Lucy, I was that Lux or Light..." p. 135.

12 Fife, p. 35.

13 I am indebted to Jan Robinson for conversations in which she shared many of these ideas.
Myth & Glyph in Helen in Egypt

Jeanne Larsen

In February of 1953, Ezra Pound wrote to Hilda Doolittle, who was working on her epic poem Helen in Egypt,

of course you did wrong to
go reading other languages when you
had a start on a good one. (Robinson, 422)

The "good" language was surely Greek. It was a language Pound himself could lay claim to. It was the language that inspired the early poems of "H. D., Imagiste," poems that for decades received the most critical attention, while the great epics of her later years were largely ignored. It was the language of "Dryad" (as Pound called Doolittle in their courtship days), the woman whose full name Pound crossed out in favor of genderless, near-anonymous initials. It was the language traditionally reserved for educated males and a very few privileged daughters, what Walter J. Ong has called patrius sermo, the language of the Fathers (quoted in Gilbert and Gubar, 532).

What was the new code, the one Pound did not want H. D. to explore? He knew which symbol system informed her current work in progress: the multi-valent, reversible hieroglyphs of Egypt. H. D. found in signs with such multiple and shifting significances the means for a deconstruction of myths central to the Western patriarchal tradition and the model for a new understanding of the nature and possibilities of language itself. In Helen in Egypt, H. D. continues a process central to the movement of her earlier epic, Trilogy, an exegesis of hidden meanings in received sign-systems—whether words, images, or myths—and a search for a language that bases its authority outside the hegemony of the patrius sermo. As she writes near the end of the first of the three sections of Helen, her heroine "is the writing." (22) She is the "hieroglyph" too long wrongly
read. And it is the reinterpretation of the traditional story of Helen of Troy that ultimately makes possible the verbal text-web of the female poet who refuses to be silenced or mis-read.

What are the objects of H. D.'s "revisionist mythmaking"? (Ostriker, 13) The whole epic is a subversive rendering of a heterodox tradition, the story of the supernatural "translation" (Helen, 1) of Helen from Troy to Egypt. It also reevaluates the glorification of war and of male bonding among warriors, a myth that two world wars had made H. D. far too familiar with; Susan Stanford Friedman has pointed out that the poem is "partially in answer to the fascism in Pound's Cantos." (Friedman, 1985, 236) And a more recent mythological system, that of H. D.'s friend and mentor Sigmund Freud, is re-viewed as the poem explores new understandings of sexual anxiety. Finally, in correcting the masculinist mis-readings of the figure of Helen herself, the poet not only reassesses her personal past (and consequently her very selfhood), she also reverses the phallogocentric concept of woman-as-sign, giving birth to the idea of a rich, new, womanly language.² Of course, Helen in Egypt may be read for its lyrical beauty, for its challenging and compelling narrative, or as a poetical roman à clef, but to slight these other, more radical, aspects of the poem is to miss its vital center.

Helen's beginning announces that we shall be examining the multiple levels of possible meaning beneath the surface scratchings on the palimpsest. The first of the prose commentaries that preface each of the 160 sections starts—in a characteristically ironic tone—by telling us that there is something to be learned if we are willing to dig more deeply into a familiar tale: "We all know the story of Helen of Troy but few of us have followed her to Egypt." (1) The few sentences that follow include words or phrases that function as emblems of the central concerns of the epic to come: the repeated mis-readings of Helen in the male-dominated tradition of stories that denigrate her; the mis-application of language, not as hieroglyph rich with potential but as verbal warfare on woman, "injurious against Helen"; and blindness, which is first the literal blindness of slandering Stesichorus, then the figurative blindness of the false imaginative vision of another of Helen's literary detractors, Euripides, and—one figurative meaning suggesting the possibility of more than one—the "blindness" of castration or sexual impotence. Finally, by telling us that the Helen seen in Troy was "a phantom, substituted... an illusion," this first passage begins the whole epic's undermining of whatever belief we may have had in the Adamically simple nature of signs.

Helen meditates on the mis-readings of her life and her self, at the start of the second of the epic's three movements.

I am not nor mean to be
the Daemon they made of me...
let them sing Helena for a thousand years,
let them name and re-name Helen . . .

they will never understand. (109-110)

Achilles has certainly mis-read Helen. Much earlier, we learned how, waiting outside the walls of Troy, he took the phantom Helen who walked the ramparts as “a new oracle” in a “‘game of prophecy.’” (53) But he has misinterpreted the power of this woman-sign: he does not get the simple flip-of-the-coin, yes-or-no answer he was looking for but rather the glance that—in this non-canonical version of the story—seals his soul to hers.

Nor is Achilles the only one to mis-read. A Trojan sentry names Helen “adultress,” to the Greeks she is “the wanton,” and for Achilles’ Myrmidons she seems to have become no person at all, merely “the simple password . . . Helena.” (123, 125, 248) Paris himself acknowledges that he killed her off linguistically after the destruction of Troy, although in fact this too was a mis-reading, for actually Zeus had taken her away, to Egypt. Paris says:

I am the first in all history
to say, she died, died, died
when the Walls fell;

what mystery is more subtle than this?
what spell is more potent? (131)

Thus are Achilles and Paris, among others, shown in their patriarchal colors: woman is object, is signifier, is read not as what she is but as what a male reader might project upon the screen of her body. But what explains the vehemence and the persistence of the mis-readings of the beautiful, erotically charged figure of Helen? Begin with Paris, since he was so quick to kill her, if “only” imaginatively.¹

It is no surprise that Paris is concerned with the “potent” spell of his words. In the next section, he tells Helen that he knew, as he lay wounded on a fragment of the ruined walls of the city, that she had not “gone . . . the long road to Hades.” He knew something else, too:

... I knew

you were never satisfied . . .
I had not satisfied you;

when she finds fulfillment,
I said, she will come back. (132–33)
The “satisfaction” that Paris could not give to Helen clearly includes the sexual. He is specifically identified with Modernism’s favorite symbol for impotence, “the dead or dying King, the Adonis of legend.” (136) Theseus, the Freud-figure in the epic, repeats this identification and tells Helen that Paris “hated the blight of the spears.” (159) Bearing in mind H. D.’s use of the word “Egypt” as hieroglyph for “the sexual act,” one finds it small wonder that Paris feared Helen’s “final translation to the transcendent plane, the fragrance of ‘Egyptian incense wafted through infinite corridors.’” (213)

A fear and a hatred of women founded in sexual anxiety is hardly unique to Paris. As Troy falls, the soldiers in pursuit of the phantom Helen are terrified of what is ostensibly a stairway but sounds very much like their vision of the female reproductive organs. We hear their voices in fragments:

“—it’s only a winding stair,
a spiral, like a snail-shell”;

“—a trap—let the others go—”
“—into the heart of earth,
into the bowels of death—stand back”— (128)

But the clearest example of misogyny born of anxiety is Achilles, Helen’s lover in this heterodox version of the myth. The central action of the poem, examined again and again in Helen’s meditations, is Achilles’ grasping of her neck in a stranglehold and the subsequent transformation of this murderous connection into an embrace. Achilles has been drawn to Egypt, and Helen expresses her desire for him, although she is forced to use the debased verbal coinage (“words” that are “the graded weights of barter and measure”) that is the only expression of female lust available in patriarchal language.

Achilles’ vulnerable spot has been pierced by “Love’s arrow” so that he “limped slowly across the sand.” (9–10) Yet although, like Paris, Achilles has been wounded, he has recovered his potency. Helen speaks:

“I am a woman of pleasure,”
I spoke ironically into the night,
for he had built me a fire,

he, Achilles, piling brushwood,
finding an old flint in his pouch,
“I thought I had lost that”. (12)

Evidently, Achilles can still strike sparks, despite his wound, with the “old
flint in his pouch." Much later in the poem, Helen tries to understand the reason for Achilles' attack:

and was this his anger,
that something forgotten or lost,
like the flint in his pouch
("I thought I had lost that"),
was taken from him,
and he only remembered it,
remembered and wanted it back,
when it was gone? (282–83)

These lines suggest that Helen at least considers the possibility of Achilles' anger being derived from his perception that she had taken his sexual potency from him. But the real problem seems to be that he blames Helen for his loss (or potential loss) of something else, something "like" his sexuality. We know she has not castrated him because a previous stanza has just described the "treasure beyond a treasure" that Achilles gave Helen as "no buckle / detached from his gear." (282) Rather, he is enraged by what he perceives as a threat to his very identity.

To see how Achilles can feel threatened in this way, we must know about his idyllic early relationship to his mother, the sea-nymph Thetis, in that blissful time when she was his. The next section suggests that Achilles misses two things: his childhood power over his mother ("He could thunder, entreat and command, / and she would obey") and his early sense of his sexual powers, which was closely connected to his worship of the first woman he knew.

... this thing
that worked magic, always answering,
always granting his wish or whim;
he hid it in moss, in straw,
in a hole in the cave-wall

or in the tree by the cave-door,
and stone by fitted stone,
he built her an altar (284)

Why does the memory of this by-gone time anger Achilles, and why does he blame Helen? Although she tried to "conceal her identity" with the ironic naming of herself as desirous and female in the only terms
wherein those two qualities conventionally may be united ("I am a woman of pleasure"), when Achilles finally sees the signs that cannot be erased—her particular eyes and face—he erupts into a panic of confused identities and threatened autonomy. First, he asks if she is "a witch" or perhaps something equally untrustworthy, "a vulture, a hieroglyph, / the sign or the name of a goddess." He then breaks into a babble of questions of "where" and "who," finally doubting his own identity: "who am I?" When Helen, responding, reminds him that he is "child of Thetis," he attempts to silence her to death, i.e., to strangle her. (15-17) "There seems this latent hostility," the voice of the prose commentator dryly notes, and some time later, Achilles too "seems grudgingly to apologize for his first boorishness, 'I was afraid.'" (18, 47)

What's so scary? By mentioning Thetis, Helen becomes for Achilles a sign of the goddess who is his mother. Helen herself comes to realize how threatening that adored figure is to him, imagining the Sphinxlike, frightening power of Thetis over her son:

Did he fear her more
than I could ever fear
the pad of paws on the sand,

the glare of eyes in the fire,
the lion or the crouching panther? (271)

The commentator's voice concurs that Achilles' rage is born of fear: "That fear creates the tension that he expresses in his attack." (273)

Is it, then, as Freud—who articulated for the culture the myth of female castration—would have it, the terrifying sign of the "castrated" mother's genitals that so frightens the boy within the man? Or is it not rather her power, especially the awesome force of her distinctive identity from which the male child must clearly separate himself or suffer the emasculating scorn of the patriarchy? Achilles—who faces the emblem of his mother and says "who am I?"—would seem to be a case of male ego-anxiety, that is, the scrambling of issues of individuation and dependency with the issue of masculine identity. While female Helen, like H. D. herself, can rejoice in shifting, multiple identities, finding greater meaning in the complexities of a Helen who is (the poem tells us) Clytemnestra who is Iphegenia who is Hermione who is Hilda Doolittle who is her mother Helen Wolle Doolittle, Achilles thinks he must kill the woman representative of the mother he perceives as potential swallower of his anxiously-defended ego. Unlike the capable reader of multi-valent signs, he cannot understand how two people, the Helen who spent the ten years of the Trojan war in Egypt and the "Helen upon the ramparts," are "together yet separate." (63) Burdened by the necessity to maintain a
rigidly demarcated self, what he fears is not the "castrated" female's supposed sexual disempowerment (which in the world of Helen in Egypt does not exist); rather, he fears his own desire to merge with this avatar of the mother, because he sees in such merging the extinction of the self.

This critique of Achilles' problem with individuation is not the only sign that one task of Helen in Egypt is a deconstruction of some of the central Freudian myths. Theseus-Freud thinks Helen to be a limping Oedipus; he "finds that Helen's 'feet are wounded.'" In many ways, Theseus comforts Helen and treats her as an intellectual equal, as "Papa Freud" did H. D. But the poet retains her right to disagree. Certainly, she rejects the notion that Helen is to be regarded as lacking something unwounded men possess. Although the commentator's voice tells us that "Theseus will laugh at her and her presumptions and her borrowed 'gear';" he seems to fail to see that when Helen talks to him, "a goddess speaks." (153) And he too is bound by a fear of intimacy; what to him is becoming "entangled" in a net, Helen re-names "Love." (154)

H. D. reverses another Freudian myth. Freud's "On Female Sexuality" tells us that "the final normal female attitude" involves a "turning-away from [the] mother" toward the "father-object," from the clitoris to the vagina. His complacent comment is that "hand in hand with this there is to be observed a marked lowering of the active sexual impulses and a rise of the passive ones." (230–32, 237, 239) But Helen in Egypt inscribes a far less contented attitude toward the female experience of heterosexuality. In presenting a woman's perspective on the story of the sacrifice (or murder) of Iphigenia at Aulis—betrayal by "the false bridegroom" Achilles, who agreed to the plan of summoning Iphigenia there, supposedly for their wedding—H. D. indicates that the virgin finds a consummation that is death. (80–81) Similarly, the hieroglyphic images in "The Book of Thoth" signify Helen's frightening, but not helpless, vision of intimacy with Achilles:

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. (66)

Indeed, at the first mention of Achilles, Helen imagines drawing "from the bruised and swollen flesh, / the arrow from its wound." (8)

Paris confirms this reading of Helen's relationship with Achilles, telling her: "you fell on his spear, / like a bird out of the air." (139) So the phallus is no privileged signifier; again and again in the epic we are shown the sign of the "flame-tipped . . . searing, / destroying arrow of Eros."
The last section of the epic, a meditation on the “Message” that these hieroglyph-poems encode, states, “the dart of Love / is the dart of Death.” “La Mort” and “L’Amour” are one, the “ultimate experience.” “But,” says the commentator, “Helen . . . fully realizes the price of that ultimate.”

Does this understanding of heterosexuality as potentially murderous undermine the reading, above, of male anxiety about sexual difference by presenting us with the same story re-cast in female terms? I think not. The dangerous thing in this feminine version is not a threat to one’s identity, and not persons of a specific gender, but rather the phallus itself. It is an emblem not of maleness so much as of maleness not balanced by an equally empowered femaleness, of maleness that would subordinate femaleness, of a duality become hierarchical. Helen knows “it was Love’s arrow” that killed Achilles.

Indeed, the whole destructive phenomenon of war that so concerned H. D. is explicated as being grounded in a masculinity that rejects the feminine. Love, to the warriors of Greece, is female, mysteriously powerful and malign, a “charm,” an “evil philtre,” the “curse of Aphrodite.” “So they fought,” Helen tells us,

forgetting women,
hero to hero, sworn brother and lover,
and cursing Helen through eternity.

“The Command or the adamant rule of the inner circle of the warrior caste” was, says Achilles,

bequest from the past,
from father to son . . .
the Command was my father, my brother,
my lover, my God.

This early association of war with gender is repeated at the end of the epic, when Helen wonders,

could a woman ever

know what the heroes felt
what spurred them to war and battle,
what fire charged them with fever?

Again, the hieroglyph for battle-lust is the phallus, evoking the “flint” of Achilles’ sexuality:
the spark from their sword and steel;

O spear of light,
O torch of one brandished spear
that enflames a thousand others.

To the warriors, the emblem of the act of war is a "merciless" act of heterosexual intercourse for the sake of a Greece encoded in specifically female terms:

let us live to strike
merciless strokes for the Flower

that is Greece (293-94)

Even Paris realizes the dangers of maleness unbalanced. Together with Helen in a "small room" that is a "haven," he asks rhetorically "what is Helen without the spears, / what is Love without arrows?" and answers, in far more positive images, that it is a flickering, fragrant fire, "no blaze of torches, ... no clamour of war-gear," and "peace." (140)

H. D. questions the androcentric, mythological structures of the culture in other ways. Theseus, the father-lover-guide to whom Freud said the "normal" female must transfer her full allegiance, is not altogether to be trusted; his perspective is both incomplete and essentially other. When Theseus is instructing Helen, perhaps inaccurately, about past events, the commentator's voice tells us that he "seems deliberately to have stepped out of the stream of our and of Helen's consciousness." (172) Like the sky-father Zeus, he never, during the course of the epic, appears in the ideal realm of "Egypt." Indeed, he dogmatically, and one-sidedly, favors "Greek" rationality—and (identifying with Paris' warlike rivalry over Helen) the Trojan cause (159)—over the "magic" of Egypt and Crete; that is, he prefers the patriarchal and orderly to the realm of the primordial, fertile, subversive Goddess, for

Crete would seduce Greece...
the ancient Nile would undermine

the fabric of Parnassus. (169)

Yet Helen's task, the task of the whole epic, is to look beyond the false inscribing of duality and the making of hierarchies which that inscribing entails; she must "bring Egypt and Greece together." (80) When Theseus tells her stories of women sacrificed, she drifts "outside" his mythic world of woman-as-victim, saying to him, "there is a voice within me, / listen—
let it speak for me.” (175)

Nor is Paris to be trusted. He would silence woman’s memory, claiming that his deserted lover Oenone need only “forgive [and] forget.” But Helen’s extended re-reading of the hieroglyphs that figure forth her past tells us that the seeker after psychic growth must “reconstruct,” “re-assess,” and “re-create” her experiences. (91, 112) Only in this way can one avoid the bitterness of unforgiving Oenone, trapped in resentful memory. Hence Helen’s prayer to Theseus: “teach me to remember . . . teach me not to remember.” (207) The proper course for dealing with past pain is not the repression Paris advocates—at least for others—but understanding.

Yet the epic presents us with a questioning of patriarchal views of language that goes beyond the illumination of the ideological flaws of mixed characters such as Theseus and Paris. Helen in Egypt inscribes woman as a true reader and creator of language. In the temple of the father-god Amen, Helen’s reading of the hieroglyphs is superior to the reading taught by the priests. The commentator tells us:

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)

Helen will not blindly accept the meanings assigned by the fathers, meanings that literally bring her down. When, still within the temple, she conjures up the territory of the phallocracy—Achilles in “his fortress and his tower . . . built for man alone”—she “seems to doubt her power, or the magic of the goddess. . . . or the power of women in general.” And although the commentator tells us there “is no good in this,” the self-doubt encoded in “the riddle of the written stone” weighs Helen down. (30–31) Yet her response is neither silence nor defeat. Helen takes on for herself the role of priestess, flinging away the “riddle” of the meanings others have ascribed to the hieroglyphs. The commentator notes, “It is not necessary to ‘read’ the riddle. The pattern in itself is sufficient and it is beautiful.” (32) The section ends with Helen’s prayer that she may see the greater reality beyond conventionally defined signs: “let me . . . know the Sun, / hidden behind the sun of our visible day.” (34)

But Helen’s—and H. D.’s—project does not call for woman to remain ignorant of spheres of knowledge traditionally reserved for men. The prayer quoted above was to Amen-Zeus (although in the epic as a whole, Helen calls more often on the Mother-Goddess, especially in her avatar as Thetis), just as H. D. translated from the patrius sermo, Greek, and believed certain men to be useful guides in her life. The patriarchal worldview can provide useful building materials, once deconstructed;
the task then is to go beyond. We are told that Helen could not have seen “the pattern shape” that is “Achilles’ history” “if she had not had the arduous, preliminary training or instruction of the Amen-script.” (262)

Men, too, need to move beyond their traditional sphere. Just as Paris tells Helen he only saw what she saw, as the Greeks rushed into King Priam’s palace, when he “swerved” (127), so Achilles, strait-jacketed in his enraged and fearful masculinity, does not have her holistic vision. Strangling Helen, Achilles again identifies her with the Goddess and with the language of Egypt, not of Greece: “O cursed, O envious Isis, / you . . . hieroglyph.” (17) But Helen has no envy, no Lacanian “lack.” In the very moment of his attack, she says, “I was not instructed, but I ‘read’ the script.” (25) Indeed, it would seem that it is Achilles who feels an envy of the more complete language of woman, figured in the complete female genitalia, for what Helen reads as the cause of his anger is that she has both “the thousand petals of the rose, / . . . all the lily-petals” and “the thousand feathered darts / . . . the one dart in the Achilles-heel.” (25) As Achilles describes the restless questionings of the warriors outside Troy, it is apparent that one of their fears of Helen is that she can dream in a language outside the writings of patriarchal culture; they ask:

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?

This fear of what Helen might do if allowed to utter words in non-patriarchal language seems to explain why, as Thetis tells us, “the Lords of the Hierarchy” have tried to inscribe Helen into their own language, by “decree,” making her

the syllables H-E-L-E-N-A
. . . the name of Love,

begot of the Ships and of War;
one indestructible name,
to inspire the Scribe. (95–96)

Thus woman becomes sign, and in H. D.’s reversal of the phallogocentric myth that privileges the phallus-as-signifier, it is the hieroglyph of the vulva that is powerful. What summoned the heroes to Helen, she tells us, was “a hieroglyph, repeated endlessly, // . . . the thousand-petaled lily.” (20–21)

Thus deconstructed are myths of sexuality, of gender and identity, of
the nature of love and of war. But the ultimate myth that *Helen in Egypt* challenges is that woman does not have the power to use signs, that she is merely a simplistic signifier, to be simply understood. The erotically-charged veil or scarf of Helen, inscribed again and again throughout the epic, is the hieroglyph that encodes this truth. It enchants Achilles (139); it is the compelling image that Paris remembers from the moment before he is struck by Philoctetes' arrow. It encodes a power greater, and truer, than that of "the purely masculine 'iron-ring'" of war and death. (55–56)

This womanly language of which the veil is emblem has the double nature of Helen herself, Helen who is both reality and phantom, in both Egypt and Troy. It is "the actual / and the apparent veil." (108) It can be "sombre," and deceptive, hiding "Helen's eyes," but it does not hide—for indeed it is "Helena's passionate speech." (265) Like all the fluid identities of the epic, all the twins and doubles and multi-valent symbols, the signs of this language veil reality, obscuring it—and in so doing, weave the very web that makes reality visible to our eyes.

Thetis confirms the female nature of this language of multi-leveled signifiers, telling Helen that Proteus (who better?) has decreed:

*Helena* shall remain
one name, inseparable
from the names [that are] many,
as you read the writing, the script,
the thousand-petaled lily. (104)

Further, this alternate language—born of the vulva-mouth—has priority over the rites and decrees of the fathers:

a simple spiral-shell may tell
a tale more ancient
than these mysteries . . .
[life waits;] beyond these pylons and these gates . . .
the mystery of a forest-tree . . .
holds subtler meaning
than this written stone
or leaves of the papyrus;

let rapture summon. (107–108)

Mother Thetis, "in complete harmony with Helen," again identifies the life-giving vulva, the nest of the Phoenix, with the text-web of language in an exquisite lyric passage, rich with images of the sea-goddess, beginning "A woman's wiles are a net; [a] mesh." (93–94) Although at the
deathly wedding of Iphigenia, "a war-Lord / blighted [the] peace" encoded in the "Word of the Goddess" (74), it was not the name of the father but the powerful name of the mother, Thetis herself, that saved Helen from Achilles’ attack and welded him to her. (277–78) Thus it is that in the penultimate section of the epic, "the pitiful heap of little things, / the mountain of monstrous gear"—composed of the death-dealing phalli of the warriors and the "torn nets" of women whose truest signs are abused and mis-read—all vanish. The final "Message" (303) of the whole complex web of signs that compose this womanly epic is a lyrical exultation. Helen, and H. D., have confronted the old false myths: the warnings against entering the Labyrinth of the unconscious to find the true readings of signs, the mother-Sphinx misconceived as death to the male ego, the purportedly righteous domination of the Beast of the phallocracy, the misogynist silencing of the vulva-mouth which is the nest of the Phoenix:

the simple path  
refutes at last  
the threat of the Labyrinth,

the Sphinx is seen,  
the Beast is slain  
and the phoenix-nest

reveals the innermost  
key or the clue to the rest  
of the mystery. (303)

Notes


2 Jonathan Culler discusses Jacques Derrida’s definition of phallocentrism as follows: "the term asserts the complicity between logocentrism and phallocentrism. ‘It is one and the same system: the erection of a paternal logos . . . and of the phallus as a ‘privileged signifier’ (Lacan) . . . . In both cases there is a transcendental authority and pointed reference: truth, reason, the phallus, ‘man’.” (172).

3 Janice S. Robinson has identified Paris with Richard Aldington (41) and Dr. Erich Heydt (351), H. D.’s psychoanalyst and friend during the time when she was working on Helen, and Albert Gelpi associates Paris with Heydt and Pound (77). My interest in Paris and other figures in the epic is not biographical, however, but lies at the level of the palimpsest on
which the family romance—in H. D.'s re-reading of Freud—is inscribed.

4 Robinson writes, "in H. D.'s lexicon, Egypt represents the sexual act." (366)

5 Some two decades after H. D. wrote Helen in Egypt, Nancy Chodorow included the following among what she sees as "four components of the attainment of a masculine gender identity": "First, masculinity becomes and remains a problematic issue for a boy. Second, it involves denial of attachment or relationship, particularly of what the boy takes to be dependence or need for another, and differentiation of himself from another. Third, it involves the repression and devaluation of femininity on both psychological and cultural levels." (51)

Works Cited

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Dear Nils,

The last week has been a merry one in Amherst, & notes have flown around like snowflakes. Ancient gentlemen, & spinsters, forgetting time, & multitude of years, have doffed their wrinkles—in exchange for smiles—even this aged world of our's, has thrown away its staff—and spectacles, & now declares it will be young again. It is a criminal thing to be a boy in a godly village. . . . Is there not a sweet wolf in us that demands food?

I suppose the pain is still there, for pain that is worthy does not go so soon. An ill heart, like a body, has its more comfortable days, and then its days of pain, its long relapse, when rallying requires more effort than to dissolve life, and death looks choiceless. When the best is gone, I know that other things are not of consequence. The heart wants what it wants, or else it does not care.

You speak of "disillusion." That is one of the few subjects on which I am an infidel. Life is so strong a vision, not one of it shall fail. I suppose that the street the lover travels is thenceforth divine, incapable of turnpike aims. Every day the world seems mightier, and what we have the power to be, more stupendous. Love will not expire. There was never the instant when it was lifeless in the world, though the quicker deceit dies, the better for truth, who is indeed our dear friend.

Valentine's sun is setting now however, & before tomorrow eve, old things will take their place again. Another year, a long one, & a stranger to us all—must live, & die, before its laughing beams will fall on us again. . . .

Pardon my lengthiness—if it be not unpardonable.

Sincerely, your cousin,  
Emily E. Dickinson

P.S. You remember my ideal cat has always a huge rat in its mouth, just going out of sight—though going out of sight in itself has a peculiar charm. It is true that the unknown is the largest need of the intellect, though for it, no one thinks to thank God. . . .

The above is a montage of quotations from the marvelous letters of Emily Dickinson. My excuse is that sometimes I think of literature as a letter written to me. Nils Peterson
Waiting for the Light
I was walking down San Carlos
to a lecture at San Jose State

at Fourth St. the light is very
slow in changing and I can ob-
serve a girl student who is
waiting on the other side to
cross she is neither beautiful
nor homely there is no eye con-
tact between us but in the mo-
ment of waiting I construct the
whole life that lies before her
her story is neither noble nor
tragic it has only its little
intricacies its small risings
& fallings I shall not tell her
story because it might be yours.
The Party on Olympus
When soul love & scrunch love
are united that's when life
seems better than anyone de-
serves it must have been a
good party that night up on
Olympus when the old sores
of the psychomachia were
soothed by ambrosia when
Hermes flirted with the Cyp-
rian beauty and no one went
squealing to Zeus about
wrongs to be righted we
here below the beneficiaries
of such benignity can only
be grateful hoping it will
happen often that there will
be more parties on Olympus.
The People Boxes
In Chile after the earthquake
I met a specialist in disaster

repairs he is famous for having
repaired disasters all over the

world the earthquake in Chile
didn’t harm the new houses of

the rich but it crumbled the
adobe hovels of the poor so

the specialist was building
thousands of wooden people

boxes he makes them in three
sizes for different sized fami-

lies they have one door one
window and one chemical facili-
ty water in buckets from the
fire hydrant and cooking on

the ground outside but the
supply of lumber is running

out so many poor people will
have to wait for their boxes.
Like the Octopus
I would enfold you in my
tentacles but believe me

my embrace is loving not
injurious some say that

to confuse his prey the
octopus sends out a kind

of ink to cloud the wa­
ter so too the poet e-

mits ink (much ink) on
his beloved but it is

not noxious his poems
may be bad but their in-
tention is affectionate
they are part of his oc-

topode nature they are his
submarine squeak of love.

The Person inside the Body
has gone away his friends
have not seen him and he
doesn’t get in touch when
they telephone the service
takes a message but there
is no answer and letters
are not answered either
where has he gone & what

is he doing they hope it
is just a trip and not

permanent disappearance.
The Reply
I was married for twenty-nine years,
and said to the backside of her cancer,
"I lit candles for fifty,"
to which the reply pain.
I spoke to my dead mother
about Dad and the crying, "I'm sorry,
I was just beginning to shave and
earn money and fuck and your dead partnership
was not the peril of my life,"
to which the reply pain.
And then I spoke to the living
of my World Wars, and to those only half
living on my street, and to those without
a good morning within sound of my care,
to which the reply pain.

The Blue Robe
Now that you are in Hopedale Village Cemetery,
I wear your resplendent blue robe,
I am still wet from our showering,
after thirty years no towel dries the morning words
on my mind and heart, and the blue robe
is you at breakfast meeting your granola,
and the blue robe is the reading, the novels
of Barbara Pym, Maigret and Agatha,
propped on your bed, obedient to the cigarette,
the turning of the pages grained conversation.

In the blue robe I understand the I hate
to cook, to clean, in the blue robe
I understand why it was never fully slipped off
your shoulders, why its eyes shut just before
the flash of any camera, in the blue robe
the bed of duty was mussed and I was taught
how to tie it neat, for you provided
a learned marriage, and in the blue robe
I am still alone but not alone.
Josephine Miles
What was this? Cornflakes in a poem?
And "neo-Spanish neatness of design"?
Not far from my surroundings there lived someone who sometimes said my very turn of mind.
Later up at Berkeley I would see her still young, already crippled, but with smiles shuffling through the hallway light of Wheeler, a poet after my heart, Josephine Miles.
Then, though, I had only checked her out and read her early wryness with delight—not a close and old acquaintance yet, only a starry shining in my night, who, if she had known me, would have said "Change that last line," or "Harold, it's all right."

The Lady or the Tiger?
That's the way my life, too, had become—a vast arena and it had two doors—I heard the watching world intently hum; behind one door a dazzling girl, of course, a hungry tiger snarling behind the other and there I was, having to make a choice. She'd told me, as she'd been told by her mother, which one to open not to feel the jaws—become a G.I. and she'd marry me some day, anyway—if I wouldn't fight, for all she cared the beast could carry me off to a corner and chew out my gut—but I knew better—she and the tiger both were crouched behind the door I never chose.
Style and Proportion: Josephine Miles As Example

Suzanne Juhasz

STYLE and Proportion is the title of my favorite among Josephine Miles's many books, and the categories upon which it focuses—style, proportion—are helpful in defining not only the aspects of literary language she studied for 40 years but her own excellences as a literary critic. Professor Miles demonstrated in a series of studies how proportion organizes style at its most fundamental and also most artful levels. But even as these terms may be used as well with normative and evaluative purpose—"with style"; "due proportion"—so it is the salutary nature of Miles's own style, both of prose and of presence, generated by her sense of proportion, that makes her an example for women critics today. It is a style modest from the stringencies of accuracy; elegant in the control of its material; resonant with a delighted concern for its subjects. It is a style that persistently effects a liaison between concept and event, definition and example; demonstrating how knowledge is at essence a matter of relation, or proportion, between entities that need to be weighed and balanced rather than cancelled.

There is no reason, of course, why professor Miles cannot serve as an example for all critics, men and women alike, especially because her researches remind us of consistencies, continuities, and indeed values amid our post-modernist conflictions. Yet because she was a woman, a woman who became a first-rate critic in an overwhelmingly male profession, and because the women who work today to change that particular proportion are especially desirous of examples, I want to propose Josephine Miles as one particularly felicitous for women who are literary critics, not only because of her success but also because of the wisdom she attained while achieving it. For her stress on the value of distinctions
rather than dichotomies in negotiating experience has direct applicability
to our continuing search to understand the use and misuse of gender dif­
ference in our professional lives. Understanding that while difference is
real enough, it might create plurality rather than dualism, her particular
experience as an academic woman both supported and extended her
general philosophic stance. For Miles shows us how gender, too, exists as
relation, so that positive-negative, this or anti-this may be less useful a
mode of definition than proportion’s directive towards context and
association.

“Proportion,” she writes in Style and Proportion, “is a concept important
for the analytical study of an art because it concerns not only the struc­
ture in the discernible parts of the material and not only the content or
reference of the parts but also the relation between material and struc­
ture, the relation between what and how in how much what?” She goes on
to offer an example:

So, for example, an architect will care not only about the
character or function of the room he is designing and not only
about its links to other rooms but also about its own propor­
tions and its proportionate relations, in shape, size, and
arrangement. Or a cook will care not only about the order of
combination of salt and sugar in a sauce but also about the
amounts of salt and sugar, the proportion of one to the other
for very different effects.¹

So, too, the sense of proportion that orders Miles’s own style is based in
the relationship between material and structure: between the way you do
something and what you use to do it. Like a cook or an architect, she, too,
designs: adjusting words to observed phenomena, balancing the compli­
catedly conceptual with the ordinary and tangible in language to dis­
cover, as she puts it, “predominances.”²

“The best way to find out is to count,” she announces at the start of her
continues, “the abundance might have its being in the sensitivity of the
reader rather than in the stress of the writer.” In doing criticism, Miles
works against the tendency of the critic to write about her/himself instead
of the subject under consideration by looking at some of the most readily
apparent and most basic features of what lies before her—and counting
them. Thus she has studied poetic vocabulary—adjectives, nouns, and
verbs; clauses and sentences, seeking to ascertain quantity and distribu­
tion. She has described the language of five centuries of English and
American poetry and based her further observations upon this accumu­
lated information.³
In baldest form, I think one may count certain words or types of words in a poet's work, to discover predominances. One may observe the contexts of these words to find recurring types of connection and alliance. Words and contexts most used by a poet or a period of poetry are apt to name just those combinations and relations of things which are important to that poet and time, and which are therefore worth the trouble, dignity and force, all the special qualities, of a poetic form.  

Counting leads ultimately to a consideration of some of the most philosophical questions about the nature of language, art, and experience. Yet Miles gets there via the homely world of so-called ordinary experience, her precise expression of concept always grounded in, both balanced and extended by, the use of examples drawn from the rest of life, as in her definition of proportion, which looks at architects and cooks to see something about material and structure. The proportion is thus a sense of the relation between the worlds of thought and sensation; and it is as well a sense of the significance of procedure to subject; a sense, finally, of the relative weight and value of questions and their answers. The counting keeps things under control, in sharply defined focus, precisely because the stakes are so high; and the characteristic modesty of tone is really a careful accuracy, a not claiming everything so that one may take full possession of something that at the time is proportionately smaller.

In the early Major Adjectives in English Poetry, 1945, Miles defines her purpose: "in the large 'to give some proportion to the description' of poetry, and in the small to make haste slowly in this direction by an indication of the relative frequency of adjectives, in the work of some representative poets." In 1964, in Eras and Modes in English Poetry, we hear the same tone, but in the 20 years that have accrued the haste made slowly has allowed a widening in the area of examination.

I propose to establish here not a whole view of the style, not the special patterns given the material by figure and association, but merely some of the bases for discrimination of style, in the simplest material of language as it is selected and arranged: the most used referential words, metrical structures, and sentence structures.

Yet in these presentations of critical purpose we hear as well another tone, the one that, in giving the other half of the proportion, the what in relation to the how, lets us know what exactly has been claimed by the procedure. For proportion, as she defines it, is "an aesthetic, a sensory interest, as this relates to interest in identity and function." Thus she
writes, "I think that an art gives shape and stability to valued materials of life, in order that they may be stressed, attended, preserved." Or, "my purposes are understanding, use, and enjoyment. Students and scholars, no less than artists, enjoy knowing how things work, and perform the better for the knowledge." And in 1974, in Poetry and Change, we hear:

If we can see how the process of art in language, as well as in the process of language itself, has an order to it, a stability and regularity, then we may accept change more readily, move with it more easily. Pattern shows us how. It does not crack, shatter, and reform: rather, like a texture of existence, it lets some strands go as it takes up others, and takes up none so many that the continuity of old sustaining new cannot be maintained. The chief vocabulary of English poetry at any one time reveals persistent strands, recurrent losses, incipient gains.

Comments such as these indicate how principles both widely-inclusive and deeply humane inform the careful attention to grammar and syntax, a concern with teleology that sustains the charting of quantity and that structures the ways in which this data is understood.

2.

On June 9, 1984, I spoke with Professor Miles for several hours at her home in Berkeley, California, about her work and her situation as a woman critic. Miles, who attained the rank of University Professor of English, was then retired from the University of California at Berkeley. She still kept regular office hours at the University and pursued her research with her customary zeal. In a freewheeling fashion, our talk encompassed topics as general as the state of scholarship in the 20th century to those as personal as her student days at the University of California at Los Angeles. When I asked her about her own work—her ambitions for it, her assessments of it—answers came in various forms. Here are two, which taken together may serve as a framework for understanding the way she talked about herself as a critic. For Josephine Miles, achievement was conceived in terms of curiosity and satisfaction; of continuity and reliability.

I would like to be among those scholars who have pointed out the qualities that they are studying in such a way that they are able to say those qualities are there from whatever perspective you are stressing in looking at them.
I just wanted to do one little thing, and if you look out the window, you'll see what it was. That is, I like to sit in the sun.

I didn't want to work in the stacks. . . . It was a simple physical pleasure, in working on books in the garden.

Although the two remarks are superficially quite different, they are in fact two approaches to the same issue: the question of what makes the study of literature possible and useful. The first remark is abstract and conceptual, the second concrete and clearly oriented towards the physical; but both exhibit that characteristic understatement, or modesty, that finds its basis in accuracy. That is, when working on books in the garden, it may be possible "only" to come to terms with the number of adjectives a poet has used, but that adjective count is at once verifiable (the adjectives are there, however you want to use them later) and potential, pointing towards numerous questions about language and reality. Those philosophical properties are based in the adjective count, and the adjective count is based in the pleasures of reading literature. "Sitting in the sun," "working on books in the garden" are statements that in no way belittle the enterprise of criticism; nor do they belittle Miles as a critic. Rather, they point to the necessary connection between body and mind, and to the reason one reads literature in the first place: because, like the sun, it helps and serves our human needs. The full statement about sitting in the sun goes as follows:

When I started studying like this, no, I didn't feel any danger in the system. The system was so much bigger than I was, that I just wanted to do one little thing, and if you look out the window, you'll see what it was. That is, I like to sit in the sun— I love to sit in the sun. I didn't want to work in the stacks. . . . It was a simple physical pleasure, in working on books in the garden. Now that's how simple my life was. And so I wasn't worried about systems; I wasn't worried about proving anything—methodical, or so on. But on the methodological side— I then realized that I wanted whatever I found out about certain poets or certain poetic histories or eras or whatever— I wanted it not to be refutable by somebody who just had a different opinion.

They would all say: why in blank blank blank do you bother about—of course, all those satires on my work were written about, you know, studying the upper half of the question mark. And I would say: sitting in the sun and reading poetry are both great. And I would find out that some poet said that he wanted to do X, and that he did do X; and then noticing that
all the critics never mentioned X—this was interesting to me. And exciting. And so I really loved being able to say what I thought was truer in some ways than what other people had said before.

To sit in the sun and work on books lead to the creation of methodology, because the way one works results from an intersecting between the needs of the discipline and of the person working in it. If we look next at the full statement about professional ambitions, we can see how alike the two remarks really are, not only in content but in form. Here again an idea is exemplified with situations seemingly unrelated, then doubly revealing when that relationship is understood.

I would like to be among those scholars who have pointed out the qualities they are studying in such a way that they are able to say those qualities are there from whatever perspective you are stressing in looking at them. That if you say you're crazy about bananas and this poetry has no bananas in it or some bananas, or it has bananas but they don't count because the poet said he didn’t want them to count—or whatever. That’s the kind of thing I think is fascinating.

In other words, to get a liaison between—I don’t like the words objectivity and subjectivity, but—they’re good for this purpose of saying, if we can see the world that we see, and that also if we can see the world that can be seen by everybody unless they’re color blind, I think we’ve got something good. It’s hard to do; but I have a couple of friends who are color blind, and it’s a very dangerous situation to be in, unless you discount it because you know you’re color blind, and an awful lot of critics don’t know that.

In these remarks we are struck not only by the humor with which she approaches these serious matters but also by how that very attitude helps to create the “liaison” of which she speaks. Between objectivity and subjectivity. Or between the general and the specific. Or the idea and the example. Establishing a proportion. So “working on books in the garden” is balanced by wanting “whatever I found out not to be refutable,” and “pointing out the qualities they are studying in such a way that they are able to say those qualities are there” is, in the same fashion, examined with the stories about bananas and color-blindness. Idea plus example is thus understood to be not just rhetorical strategy but a way of being in the world. High-flying thought is yet grounded in physical presence, which provides an assurance. The books in the garden, the bananas in the poem can validate and justify.
"I don't know Madame Curie from the man in the moon, but—she discovered wonderful things, and probably you can lean on 'em."

"I love a proposal which then can be checked. Don't you think that's nice?"

Quantity is a basic value, I think. . . . What did that mean? How many? Something or nothing? So then I have to look at another poet, to see how many he has, if we're taking this word "quantity"—and maybe, half as many as the first poet. Now that to me is, oh, it's exciting. That's exciting because that means really major emphasis, by saying something over and over and over.

When Josephine Miles talked, she had a homespun style that kept everything down to earth, with herself in its midst and in the middle, sitting in the garden. "Oh, I can be a little more highbrow here," she quipped. But the fact that she could and wasn't helps us to see how criticism itself can be an extension of living one's life in a satisfying but always inquisitive fashion.

3.

When Josephine Miles wrote, her style, much more compressed, is best characterized as elegant. Idea and example, the story-teller's brightly colored strands, turn into aphorism, then parable—or often the one distilled into the other. At issue always is definition. This is a style so neat, so modest, if you will, that each word and sentence does the work of many.

Consider these brief remarks:

In prose, there is less possibility of play of one frame across another, because the frame of measure is not so firmly established. Not foot-foot-foot-foot as in marching, but the swing of leg in hip and knee, as in less regular, more variable, walking. 9

The range from a word to a belief is a vast range, but a word itself may span the distance, as an adjective suggests, a verb conveys, a noun essentializes, in symbol, figure, or norm, the fullest possible resources of understanding. 10

In the first two-sentence unit we will recognize the characteristic idea plus example. The idea is a definition that might well take a full paragraph, or a whole book. It is that most exemplary of topic sentences, in which the rest of what will follow is already present. What does follow
is a startling illustration, not really of marching and walking, but of how language works. For suddenly we think of language not as concept but as event; or rather, we think of the two simultaneously.

Similarly, though perhaps more complicatedly, because more compressed, the second sentence offers idea and example. But here the examples are located within the concept, as words like range, span, distance, suggests, conveys, essentializes assume the active shapes which are indeed their own but which are usually subsumed into more abstract implication.

This manner of definition uses surprise to illuminate. Relating the example to the idea not only makes the idea clearer but helps us to see the kinds of connections that exist between the two modes of experience. In longer passages which also rely on this model, the proportion realized between concept and example is given greater opportunity to inform and influence the kinds of intellectual discovery that occur. In other words, style functions, not as ornament or mask, but as a way of knowing, which is why this particular style is so generous.

If each definition is itself a kind of vision (for each provides both a sight and an insight), then Miles's work as a whole builds towards larger units of perception. In discussing the evolution and change of poetic kinds across the centuries, for example, the eras and modes that are the subject of one of her most important later volumes, she writes:

It is not so much necessity or loss, then, which seems the mother of invention, as a turn to new material, a refreshment, it may be, from classical literature, or from natural world, or from inner self, or from an objective correlative. Only after the new world has been named and recognized, is the old explicitly repulsed, and most strongly in the third, the old, generation when omission is for a while almost as strong as innovation, until both subside to a minimum of activity before the new youthful period of search. We cannot draw here a parallel to the seasons; we do not find a tentative spring, then a full summer, then a slow decline; but rather we see repeated in four centuries the pattern of sudden burst of new energy—summer at once—then stages of lessening and consolidation, more as we think of the human analogy.11

Here theory finds a body in implicit analogy, and analogy shapes a body of theory, as geographical exploration (the new world named and repulsed), human development (the old generation), and seasonal cycles (summer at once) all explicate the nature of poetic change. Poetic change, in response, becomes, as we think about it, integral to the human experience at large. Especially, as we have observed before, strongly active
words that supply a human element—refreshment, named, recognized, repulsed—stimulate the liaison between versions of experience.

*Style and Proportion*, subtitled *The Language of Prose and Poetry*, moves in the late 1960's into an even wider vision, when all that Miles knows about poetic style serves as perspective and contrast for a look at prose. The poising of prose against poetry creates proportions that provide insights into language at large as it functions in patterns of art and meaning. Long sequences in this book are structured by the mode I have been describing. My own favorite has always been her discussion of metaphor, which begins, "As for figurative language: What is it trying to figure?" In six dense pages, metaphor’s "sense of relative position within a group or class" (for metaphor is itself a proportion, "a partial yet double statement, an as and an if") is studied. The example is a running joke about the relationship between cabbages and doves that is impossible to reduce to a paragraph-length quotation, so rapid and compact is its argument and verve. Here is a portion of the final paragraph.

But foreign need not necessarily mean hostile or opposed; that is, the alien category need not be contradictory, or contrary, thus setting up paradox or tension by negation; but is, rather, simply different, irrelevant until made relevant by context. That is, again, the extraordinary transfer is not based on central, ordinate characteristics but on peripheral, subordinate characteristics in relatively similar or proportionate position; not from dove to anti-dove or to hawk, but from dove to cabbage. The world of metaphor is not so much a world of vehicular tension as a world of holiday, of variety, of free-wheeling, where within the familiar limitations of the everyday a word can move and transport us, making first qualities last and last first, in the crosscurrent of values.

This proportional point of view enables us to see how metaphor as concept works, works out, works upon; for this discussion has been initiated, we are reminded by the vocabulary of its conclusion, by a definition from etymology, from the Greek *metapherein*, to transfer, as well as a look at current metaphors for metaphor, like *vehicle* and *tenor*, all pointing toward the necessary activity of metaphor. At the same time, Miles's explanation for the source of metaphor's power, the value of difference instead of contradiction, is itself central to her philosophy at large.

We find some of these same attitudes informing an analysis of negation in the same volume.

In application to terms, then, negatives may be simple denials, *not a boat* or *non-boat*; or antithesis, *anti-boat*; or contrasts, *a car,*
not a boat; or just differences, perhaps even irrelevant, a statue, not a boat. These are separate and distinguishable enough; but because of current confusions about phenomena in the physical world, we seem to confuse the language for them, also. A geographic pole, a magnetic field, a strained muscle, an electric current, a plant cell, a political election—all offer examples of opposition and tension that we do not clearly discriminate.

My fear is that we keep letting negatives, contrasts, and even differences fall into antinomies because we wish to, because we wish a simple dualistic pro or con evaluation with us on the good side and nobody worth anything on the bad. We destroy plurality, multiplicity, variety by a verbal sleight-of-hand which reduces some’s to all’s or none’s and reduces directions and interplays to final confrontations. Etymologically our anti’s were once and’s, and our contra mere con; even our disjunctions allowed for positive choices, while the positive-negative choice is merely this or anti-this.

This is astute language description and codification, but it is also political/philosophical assessment worth heedng. It succinctly identifies what are indeed prevailing modes of thought and suggests another perspective that is both provocative and challenging. Because the social thought is grounded in the linguistic analysis, in the counting itself, it brings with it a kind of verifiability that carries weight.

When, as a young critic, in books like Wordsworth and the Vocabulary of Emotion and Major Adjectives in English Poetry, Miles so determinedly limited her scope, she was in fact preparing a foundation, forming the basis for a knowledge that has resulted from accumulation. Thus she quietly proposed "that quantitative emphases are of some importance in the description of poetry,"14 Thinking about quantity, always in terms of proportion, enables her many years later to make suggestions like these about the value of plurality itself, ways in which the negative can mean a difference that is helpful, not destructive.

4.

These important ideas about difference itself have applicability to the situation of women in academia. For they suggest a way of acknowledging the fact of difference, not denying its significance but using it for the purposes of amplification rather than ideological warfare.

Although Miles was never an active feminist, she came to support the women’s movement in creative writing and in academia, and she did not
underestimate the significance of gender in affecting one’s position in the world. “I have learned,” she told Naomi Clark, who interviewed her in 1980, “working in a campus community, that there are real oppressions, suppressions, lots of difficulties.” When we talked about her experience as an academic woman, it became clear that for her the matter had always been complicated by what might be called the priorities of difference. That is, her lameness had presented a more pressing difficulty than her gender.

Because I was always lame, always limited to a wheelchair or crutches or what have you, I avoided the problems of feminism. Now you can say I missed; missed would be “too bad, you didn’t get ‘em.” Avoided is a kind of perhaps humorous, but a real sense of on the other side. Since I’m not crazy about categories, and since I’m not crazy about imposing too wide models on people, when I think back on my life and think of all the nice things that have come to me because of my lameness—it isn’t Pollyannism—it’s just—and I’m not going to go into what I’ve obviously missed in the way of children and husbands and lovers and so on, but I had—my friends in high school could be both boys and girls. And many times in high school the girls didn’t get to know the boys because they’re all protective; so in high school I had a lively bunch of friends that were boys and girls. And I didn’t even realize how lucky I was.

Remembering such experiences, Miles pointed to the positive effects of her situation, because the fact that lameness overshadowed gender gave her what she saw as certain privileges denied to other women in academe: “All my life, I’ve not been forced to make the exclusions that you have to make.”

My particular circumstances made for, on the one hand, my greater admiration of groups that did get along together, because I was more impatient with the feuding. I wasn’t the occasion for it; since I didn’t threaten people, sexually, I was spared a lot of dislike, sabotage. Isn’t that interesting, though? I was freer, in some ways.

What she stressed about the problems induced by gender difference is enlightening: exclusions, feuding, dislike, sabotage. Both between men and women and among women themselves, struggling for a place in a male domain, the difference of gender has often been responsible for, as Miles sees it, pro’s and con’s, antinomies, “with us on the good side and
nobody worth anything on the bad." But, as she proposes in *Style and Proportion*, difference might equally well occasion the positiveness of plurality, multiplicity, variety. Over and over, her descriptions of academia identified antipathy and her own dislike of it.

Gradually as I developed all those years at Cal, I guess all that time I was happy when the situation was such that it wasn't forcing people to be antipathetic to each other. . . . Because so many circumstances have forced—the Vice-Chancellor, who forced crises, not by conflicts of interest, which could be interesting, but by isolating one guy from another. In other words, it's the isolation, it's the separation of one interesting idea from another, that tends to destroy, that tends to erase.

Miles's special position thus gave her insight into the difficulties of women in academia and an ability to resolve them for herself that are surely instructive for us all, especially those who have not experienced her extra burdens. For example, listening to her talk and reading her work, we come to see how the isolation of which she speaks, isolation that denies and destroys, might cease to be if things were understood to exist as part of some proportion; for both sides, both parts are required to make a relation, and it is the relation that supplied the meaning. So the masculine has no meaning, really, without the possibility of the feminine (something the literary profession has not historically understood). But, by the same token, as we struggle to define the feminine, thus to understand our needs, our potential contribution, our goals for women as professional literary critics and teachers, we might well take into account the significance of all we are not, because it does indeed help to define all that we are and might be. The idea of gender existing in proportionate relationship, in other words, allows for the possibility, at any rate, of that world of variety of which Miles has written.

She reminds us of how "we keep letting negatives, contrasts, and even differences fall into antinomies because we wish to, because we wish a simple dualistic pro or con evaluation with us on the good side and nobody worth anything on the bad." She reminds us of how "we destroy plurality, multiplicity, variety" and reduce "directions and interplays to final confrontations." There has surely been a tendency in feminist as well as patriarchal thought in these directions; and Miles helps us to see, not that we should all be happy androgynes together, for she does not advocate the disregard or annihilation of difference, but how we might make a place for ourselves as women in academe based on complex rather than simplistic knowledge of what that difference means—and on an ability to co-exist, even interact, because of it.
Sitting in the sun, working on books. From this vantage point, somewhere between the domains of idea and incarnation, of theory and practice, of structure and material, Josephine Miles showed us the proportions of things. Hers was not a dualistic view, in which parts become extremes that conflict and have the potential to cancel one another out. Rather, she saw how lines of relationship connect everywhere. Both multiplicity and continuity are the result, as the parts combine and recombine in patterns that can be described.

Her own style, with which she manifested her perspective, is, at best and at heart, the shape of wisdom. It is a wisdom equally modest, elegant, and resonant. Why should she not serve as an example? A wise woman sitting in the garden, counting what she sees, is someone of great value.

This essay represents the fruition of a long-standing desire to write about Josephine Miles. It was written nine months before her death on May 12, 1985. Not only do I believe that she has yet to receive the full appreciation due her work and her presence, but I have wanted to express my personal indebtedness. I have concentrated here upon her contribution as a scholar and a teacher. She was, of course, a wonderful poet, as well.

Born in 1911, she was University Professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, where she taught for more than 40 years. Among her honors were fellowships and awards from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Academy of American Poets.

Notes

2 This quotation and the next are from *Wordsworth and the Vocabulary of Emotion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942), 5.
3 Her books of criticism are *Wordsworth and the Vocabulary of Emotion* (1942); *Pathetic Fallacy in the Nineteenth Century* (1942); *Major Adjectives in English Poetry: from Wyatt to Auden* (1946); *The Primary Language of Poetry* in
the 1640’s (1948); The Primary Language of Poetry in the 1740’s and 1840’s (1950); The Primary Language of Poetry in the 1940’s (1951) these last three volumes published together as The Continuity of Poetic Language [1965]; Renaissance, Eighteenth-Century and Modern Language in English Poetry: a Tabular View (1960); Ralph Waldo Emerson (1964); Eras and Modes in English Poetry (1964); Style and Proportion: the Language of Prose and Poetry (1967); and Poetry and Change: Donne, Milton, and the Equilibrium of the Present (1974).

4 Wordsworth and the Vocabulary of Emotion, 5.
7 This and the next two quotations are, respectively, from Style and Proportion, 12, v, vi.
9 Style and Proportion, 121.
10 Eras and Modes in English Poetry, 212.
11 Ibid., 220.
12 Style and Proportion, 122.
13 These and quotations in the next two paragraphs are from Ibid., 124, 127, 128, 129, 136.
14 Major Adjectives in English Poetry, 305.
Summer on Ararat

Robert Wexelblatt

1.

The earth is standing up stoically to a thunderstorm and, so far, this doll's house of Raszka's is too. I wonder what Annie Perreault is doing next door in all this tumult and if her room is, as I suspect, precisely the same as my own: small, dainty, with fancy plywood moldings and leaky, old-fashioned windows. It could be that she is writing too, perhaps a letter to a sister or even her boyfriend, but more probably a set of notes for a thoroughly sober treatise. She does not strike me as the "Dear Diary" type. She is not happy enough.

When I met Raszka before, I met a reputation; today I got some clearer impressions of him in what I suppose is as natural as habitat as he has. Obviously, he is not one for spending time on amenities or orientations, but you wouldn't expect him to. He strikes me as the sort of person who is always peering around your head during a conversation, the kind who looks around the next corner of a street or an argument. I expect some day he might die of sheer impatience. Driven yet reasonable men are usually deficient in self-understanding, but they make swell achievers. Raszka would have been a good basketball coach, the apoplectic kind, or an expert trial-lawyer, adept at red-faced, finger-raising indignation. Another impression: he is full of physical energy, but this is more exasperating than contagious, like the jumpiness of an untrained puppy. There seems to be a lot of wasted motion. Some of his colleagues have criticized Raszka for being too flighty professionally, even too dilettantish, but I discount such criticism. I suspect his enemies tend to imagine him as a bright but weightless insect who refuses to alight long enough in one place only because they wish to swat him.

There are five of us here: Haglund-Raszka, myself, and Annie Perreault. Then there is Dr. Anil Prasad, the permanent assistant and detail man. He is around 30 and seems to me an ironically deferential post-graduate whose veneer of politeness does not succeed in covering up essential arrogance. He relished giving Annie and me orders a bit too much, like a new sergeant. Finally, there is Raszka's wife, or rather his
child-bride. Rachel Haglund-Raszka looks to be all of 17. Prasad informed me admiringly that she is astoundingly gifted with the animals. I haven't seen much of her yet; she missed supper with an alleged headache.

There are a lot of animals here. Assume Noah was a scientist rather than a virtuous if bibulous patriarch, the ark a sort of gingerbread summer house converted to accommodate laboratory facilities, that curiosity rather than salvation motivated him to gather in a menagerie, and you will have some notion of conditions here. Perhaps Raszka really is like Noah (or vice versa): both obey something very different from public opinion; both seem willing to observe not only the power of meteorology but the inundation of the world with detachment—happy if they can eventually come to rest on the high ground, morally and professionally. Who knows? Maybe Noah also eagerly straddled his deck with stubby sea-legs and filled up with work the ennui of his long bobbing, converting everyone aboard either into an assistant or a subject. Today I saw three kinds of small monkey, rodents from beavers to yoles, frogs, newts, snakes, dogs, cats, two goats, a couple of horses, an enormous array of insects and spiders as well as a crowded little greenhouse. Rachel Raszka must spend a good deal of her time just feeding things.

When we arrived (Annie P. gave me a ride up in her station wagon which, like its owner, is neither old nor comfortable), Raszka met us in the drive and turned us over almost at once to Prasad, vanishing himself into the greenhouse. Prasad took us through a number of smallish rooms in the laboratory wing after giving us about 30 seconds to unload our luggage. In the first room, the hottest, were the reptiles, amphibians, and the insects. I asked what experiment they were part of and Prasad said simply, “The individuality experiment,” and pointed us into a second room, a tiny well-lit cafeteria where off-color cultures were subsisting in rows of petri dishes. “Yeasts, mostly,” remarked Prasad for my benefit. “Is this for genetic work?” asked Annie P., as if fearful of being underinformed. “Of course,” said Prasad perfunctorily and then, scuttling and bowing like a head waiter, conducted us into a third chamber which was whitewashed and bare except for five metal tables and a stack of cages of the sort found in pet shops.

“Professor Haglund-Raszka has assumed that you would want to begin at once. This room must be set up to accommodate a newly weaned litter of labrador pups. There is a good deal to do beyond preparing the cages. To begin with...”

Here I interrupted to ask what the individuality experiment was. For an instant Prasad appeared nearly embarrassed for me and then turned to Annie. “Perhaps Miss Perreault would like to explain it,” he said with a sneering smile, like an elementary school teacher who finds explanation beneath him. “I gather you've been keeping up with the Professor's work, Miss Perreault? And I believe you audited his course last term?”
Annie nodded and, extending her arms behind her like a diver, launched into the tepid pool of her account which, of course, began, “It’s very simple, really.”

2.

For the last couple weeks I have been running around the house like a record underneath a worn needle. What I had defensively and romantically hoped would be a spell of splendid isolation and profound reflection after which things would come right turned into a period of inanition and loneliness. At first I dutifully thought about why I was alone but soon I took to thinking about nothing whatsoever. The big questions simply began to bore me, and nothing in my education had prepared me for that. I began to watch television, even the kids’ shows.

When one becomes bored enough there are really only two possibilities: either you resign yourself to the boredom—that is, you organize it, construct yourself a positive routine around it—or else you do something out of the ordinary, something contrary to the ordinary is more like it. Like most relatively busy people I have always supposed that boredom was like a headache and could be relieved by doing any number of ordinary things, popping aspirin, going for a stroll, or even by doing nothing. Evidently I had not yet been sufficiently bored, or bored for long enough; I had no grasp of the subject. All the ordinary things—calling up friends, taking in a movie, swimming some laps, bicycling in the country—are suddenly much too boring to contemplate. Of course, you consider doing such things—I did—but whatever intrinsic allure they have is sucked up at once by the boredom, which is a kind of mental vacuum cleaner, a spiritual black hole. You even forget that you are demoralized, until the only conceivable escape is a total break and even then you only run the risk of converting the unfamiliar into the newly boring, a mere exchange of external fullness which does nothing to fill your emptiness. For a moment you think, well, there is always that slow boat to China, the package tour of the Hebrides. The mania of academics for summer travel (this colleague is off to Tanzania, that one to Tasmania) I now judge to be a measure of the occupational hazard of boredom. They are attempting to run from it but generally end by packing it up and lugging it along with them to those pensions they brag of in Fiesole or Bergen. It would be more just and more interesting if people had to make an honest disclosure of spiritual possessions as well as material ones at all international frontiers.

Anyway, the truly anti-ordinary cannot be made to happen or travelled to; you can’t conjure it up. Bored as you are, you have to wait for it and recognize it when it shows up, as a hibernating skunk one fine morning senses the smell of spring down in its burrow and slowly unfurls its tail.
I had achieved sleeping skunkhood when, out of the blue, Raszka telephoned—brisk, loud, and completely unaware of my capacity for stinking.

"This Dean Spaglio?" he asked.

I heard my ridiculous title with disgust and irritation; it was my vacation, after all.

"Yes?" I answered as if I might not actually be answering the question.

"Look, Spaglio, this is Ronald Haglund-Raszka. You know who I am?"

He brought this off rather well, I think. It might seem egotistical to ask such a question—what if I didn’t know the name; would it make me a fool? In fact, he asked with an air of efficiency, disposing of essentials; the question was, upon retrospection, either humble or absent-minded. He might easily have assumed that I would know the name. Not only is he a campus celebrity, but I have been introduced to him on three occasions. Some impression I made.

"Of course I know who you are," I said politely enough, thinking: you are the famous crackpot of the Biology department, the oratorical scourge of faculty meetings, the ogre who rises up in the worst nightmares of premeds, the most untidy ornament of our generally and stiflingly tidy campus.

"Good. Your boss gave me your number. He said you might just be able to help me out."

My usual job is student advising and paper-pushing. I tell students what to take, then they fill out a form saying they are taking it and give the form to me. I thought of my customary services to the faculty with displeasure. They always contrive to express the view that work like mine is parasitical. Quite suddenly, I found I feared losing my boredom, if only because it was all mine. "Help you in what way?" I asked anxiously.

"I need a couple of assistants for two weeks or so. I’m up at my summer place and there’s just too much to do. Seems our department’s graduate students are all bent on a summer of hedonism; anyway my chairman says he can’t find anybody willing to come up here and work. But I don’t really need any specialists. I just want a couple of willing, halfway intelligent people trained in basic science. I can put them up and feed them, but I’m afraid I can’t afford to pay anything. Stumberger said you’d be most likely to know who’s around."

How good of Dean Stumberger, I thought, realizing yet once again what it means to be an associate. Who was it said the chief distinction between administrators and faculty is that the former return phone calls? The first whining associate dean, I imagine.

"Okay, let me have your number. I’ll check around and get back to you."
Raszka pushed. "I'd like to know by tomorrow."

"Look, I'll do what I can. The place really clears out in July, you know. In fact, I'm on vacation myself this month." A protest—as if he cared. Besides, I ought to be in Timbuktu or the Transvaal. I ought to be on a beach, watching.

"Well anyhow, if you find anyone let them know the work is interesting, will you?"

On her chairman's hunch that she might be around, I scared up Annie Perreault. Annie is midway through her course-work in anthropology, has yet to begin her dissertation. It turns out she carried an undergraduate minor in psychology and claims to be something of a fan of Raszka's. During the ride up she guardedly confessed that her summer plans had fallen through at the last minute. My guess is somebody jilted her. She said she was willing to assist Raszka for the experience and, I suspect, to escape something like skunkhood. So far it has done nothing for her misery.

There was absolutely no one else. A few candidates laughed at the idea of slaving in July and a couple made up excuses from badly concealed terror.

Nineteen years ago—dreaming of brilliant if purely potential theories, the adulation of an awed world, and fat international prizes—I had declared a major in physics. Well, what little boy wants to grow up to be an associate dean?

3.

Haglund-Raszka spent this morning with his polyphyloprogenitive yeasts, Prasad with a cohort of newts; the elusive Mrs. H-R vanished shortly after breakfast for a swim in a nearby lake, while Annie P. and I became quite absorbed in puppy-work. We ate our salads on the job. The work really is interesting.

Prasad gave us our marching orders just before we got up from breakfast. During the meal Raszka tendered me a sermonette on academic politics, taking for his text the proverb: never tenure anybody who isn't better than the people already there. "That's how departments are built," he said stoutly, with sententious blimpishness. I quietly told him that, while his position made some sense, I had nothing whatever to do with tenure decisions. Raszka laughed and, in his off-balancing way, told me he'd merely been trying to provoke me, that the ancient proverb was faulty since there was no convenient way to compare 30-year-olds to 50-year-olds. Annie didn't laugh but Anil Prasad did. Raszka got up, slapped me familiarly on the back, kissed Rachel and left. Rachel hadn't laughed either.

Prasad said we would be working in the puppy cell-block. "You can
carry out the tests in any order you like," he began, "but let me stress that we must have the clearest and most complete observations possible. We want you to do six tests: the maze, the mirror, the ball, the stuffed toy, the walk, and the freedom test. The dogs are already numbered for you. Your job is to record the behavior of each. Don't anthropomorphize and don't please, include any judgments or interpretations in your report." At the lab he showed us the two tests which were set up inside (maze, mirror) and explained the four to be done outside. The maze was a moveable contraption made of plywood. Prasad had already prepared it and placed it on the laboratory floor. The mirror, the kind shoe-stores have, was fixed to the wall with a couple of brackets.

This individuality experiment is really an extensive series of experiments with a common theoretical aim. It is unorthodox and intriguing and, perhaps, a little bogus—rather like its perpetrator. As I understand things, biologists have in general concentrated on understanding species and classes—that is, collective behavior, organic structure, taxonomy, etc. The problems that have interested them are all generic ones. The mystery of individuality they either ignore or consider trivial—that is, metaphysical or theological. This was true of physics as well, of course, but perhaps with more excuse. Galileo dropped a ball from a tower. No one cares about that ball's specific qualities, its shape, its irregularities. To ask about them would have gotten you thrown out of class. Utterly unscientific.

After supper tonight—we keep a vegetarian diet here, it seems—we talked about music, baseball, flowers, cooking. Once we had all finished with our favorite Northern Italian herbivorous plates, I asked Raszka how he had become interested in his analysis of individuality. Though I recalled the lesson taught me over breakfast, I judged the tone of his surprising reply to be frank.

"Oh, one afternoon I found myself wondering how many or what kind of brain cells are required before an organism is capable of feeling shame."

So, he studies his objects for signs of subjectivity—then, for all I know, he cuts them up and looks inside. Beavers, mice, fruitflies, yeasts, spiders, labrador puppies, even jade plants and guppies maybe—all genetically identical, all of an age, all commonly bred—these are the material of Raszka's pursuit of shame. But why shame? Why not a tendency to sneer at experimenters, a penchant for turning left where everyone else turns right?

I watched Rachel closely tonight. She is a pretty thing, but moves ungracefully. No doubt Raszka had his driver's license before she was born. A second marriage to a student, I suppose; it's common enough. I wonder if she is capable of shame. Rachel has the innocent look of the animals. They are wholly at ease in their skin whether perplexed in front
of a mirror or sniffing a stuffed bear. The whole-heartedness of animals is
matchless; I had forgotten. A puppy is infinitely more sincere and
innocent than, say, a coffee table. Rachel Raszka seems to me like that. She
is friendly enough but easily distracted. I think Annie is trying to get close
to her. Annie looks as if she could use a confidante.

A last note: The more I consider it, Raszka’s remark seems to me a
philosopher’s rather than a biologist’s, or do I imagine distinctions with a
coffee table’s sinister lack of innocence, a dean’s bureaucratic, half-
hearted respect for the discretion of the disciplines?

4.

Gestures

1. Prasad opens his left hand wide (as one might to lift and balance a wad
of papers) and then rubs it up and down his chest, massaging his lungs.
2. Annie characteristically holds her head down and to the left side, a
position full of tension. It looks as though she were being pushed from
behind and is unsuccessfully resisting. She walks slowly but with long,
mannish strides, eager to cover the ground but not too rapidly.
3. Rachel moves her weight constantly when not actually walking or run-
ning. While listening, she rubs her right index finger against the side of
her mouth and puckers her lips, as one does, not to kiss, but to blow
smoke rings. (She also blows smoke rings. I was surprised to see her
smoking this afternoon.)
4. Raszka can’t help looking at himself in the two mirrors hung on either
side of the fireplace in the living room, but frowns when he does so. He
stiffens visibly when looking at his wife. His volatility seems to coexist
uneasily in his body with its gravity; you can see it in the way he sits—
nervously, with a lot of leg-crossing and rubbing of knees and thighs,
shuffling of feet; yet he sits stolidly too, with his rear-end at the very back
of his chair so that sometimes his feet rise off the floor.

Statements

Prasad (pompously): “It is important to get enough salt in the summer,
but too much will make you torpid.”

Annie (earnestly): “But I’ve never seen what irony’s good for.”

Rachel (gigglingly): “Ronald thinks I’m a fish!”

Raszka (seriously?): “First it’s curiosity and love that make a scientist—
not detachment or counting. Curious lovers want to see every detail,
don’t they?”
1. The gravitational pull of an elephant on a flea, of identical twins on one another.
2. Why virtually all of our answers turn out to be to non-essential questions.
3. The mathematical laws which govern the perceived regularity of coincidences.
4. Why white supremacists like to become suntanned.
5. The relationship between a woman’s menstrual cycle and the phases of the moon.
6. Why insects are more attracted to dark colors than light ones, but to light more than darkness.
7. Why the universe is so extraordinarily conservative.

Another thunderstorm tonight. We are perched on a northern mountain but cursed with a subtropical climate; the air we breathed today was inside a used-car salesman’s mouth down south yesterday. Apropos of the humidity, Raszka mentioned that an incorrect scientific theory is not always a foolish or ineffective one. For example, he said, it was long believed that miasmas directly cause disease. This incorrect theory led to the clearing of swamps which did indeed decrease the incidence of disease by lowering the mosquito population.

An unrepressed thought: If Jocelyn has written to me, her letter is sitting uselessly in the mailbox; if she has phoned, the empty ringing can only make her imagine things.

Didn’t Faust wind up draining a swamp? Didn’t Noah also wait for the water to go down?

5.

The day of rest and still a hot one. Hot and surprising. Some sabbath.

Prasad drove in this morning for bagels, cream cheese, and two newspapers. Annie, evidently more depressed than ever, looked only cursorily at the front page of one of them and Rachel at none of it, but Prasad and Raszka went at both papers with the elan of a couple of cryptographers. Raszka even put on a record—“to read by,” he said. It was Schubert’s C-Major Quintet, impeccably tasteful. While I waited my turn at the sports section, I read reviews of three new movies, all made expressly for 13-year-olds, and two new plays, one about homosexuality and incest, the other about incest and alcoholism. There was also an account of a recital by a passionate young defector from Prague who, after the Liszt, Bach, and Chopin, was called upon to play six encores. He chose a half-dozen Gershwin songs and smiled through each of them according to the
reviewer, who might perhaps have written “smiled shamelessly.”

Why shouldn’t it be possible to perform a structural analysis of shame? It is a phenomenon like any other, and probably has some physical base or other. First you break it down into its components—remembering that, like a stereo system, you cannot get music out of the thing while you are analyzing it. Then you assert definitions, distinctions: shame is not embarrassment, shame is not wounded pride, shame is not humiliation . . . at which point you suspect language is failing you because you are taking it too seriously. Still, Raszka is right. In identical circumstances some people feel shame and others do not. Biologically we are all two things: ourselves and mere examples of our species. All members of our species breathe air and micturate, but all of us do not feel shame. Moreover, two ashamed people may not feel the same things, or for the same reasons. We are constructed oddly—to be individuals and to be anything but. And what is a yeast cell’s sense of time, for example? Does the quick copulation of two mayflies seem to them to last as long as the Liebeost? More to the point, how do creatures like ourselves, so divided, so “tricked-out,” manage to live together—eh, Mr. and Mrs. Spaglio? Only errantly?

Rachel, restless as ever, announced her intention of doing some feeding, cleaning out some cages, and then going for a ride on one of the horses. Despite the mugginess and the undeniable yank of my inertia, I asked if I could ride with her, though I haven’t been on a horse since before the first oil embargo.

Rachel looked quickly at her husband, who nodded, and returned to his second sports page. Annie excused herself and went up to the bathroom we share. On her way out, Rachel said she’d let me know when she was ready for the ride. I offered to saddle and bridle the horses.

“Do you know how?” she asked.

“Well, not really,” I admitted. “But I grew up on westerns.”

She made a face at me. “I’ll call you when the horses are ready, all right?”

I felt, well, ashamed.

Rachel wore a cassette Walkman as we rode. She must have been playing it very loud; I could hear the faint tinkling back-beat at a fair distance and over the sound of hoofs on gravel. The horses walked slowly in the heat as we made our way down the long sloping drive to the dirt road. It ran past the small lake where Rachel swims and by some farms spread out at the foot of our picturesque mountain—rich people’s farms, city people’s, without crops but with conveniences.

Rachel urged her horse into a canter and looked around at me with a smile of encouragement or scorn, as the case may be. I was unable to make my horse see the point in keeping up with her. She took the cut-off
that runs around the far side of the lake, waiting long enough to make cer-
tain I saw her. Five minutes later, well into a case of saddle sores, I saw her
horse cropping the high grass beside the road.

She was sitting on a rock by the water with two joints, one in her mouth
and the other in her hand, both lit. I took the one she offered and chose a
soft grassy spot. She was still listening to her cassette and looked at the
lake, not at me.

We smoked for a few minutes and then she removed the earphones. I
had my shoes off and was bathing my feet in the lake, watching the
minnows get used to them being there. Her voice was low and almost
angry. If there were church bells in the village with bagels and news-
papers, I couldn’t hear them. Rachel drowned them out.

"Prasad's gay and Ronald won't even let me see him naked anymore, so
what do you say, Dean Spaglio?"

I have been trying to recall the last thing Jocelyn said before she took off
with the car and the dog—my car, her dog. Some clothes dangled from
one hand while, with the other, she was trying to restrain Portia (preten-
tious name for a West Highland bitch). Portia, despite her attorney’s
handle, probably had no idea this was to be a trial-separation and merely
supposed she was in for an ordinary walk or at most a ride to the beach.
Anyway, it looked rather as if Jocelyn were being towed out of our
marriage by the dog. The parting shot, I think, had to do with my infuriat-
ing lack of sensitivity, an old, old subject, well worn by custom, like my
mother’s cast-iron skillet. Jocelyn finds me cast-iron crude; I am a clod
next to her. Jocelyn needs to pick over nuances, diddle the clouds.

"Trial-separation" is an interesting phrase: a separation which is also a
trial, a trial which is likewise a separation. "What's new with you and
Jocelyn?" "Oh, we're having a trial-separation." "Ah, I see." People batten
on these labels, particularly for relationships the labels cannot accurately
describe; but then, these days people like to wear labels on the outside of
their clothing. Even sensitivity requires a knowledge of shorthand.

I have never committed adultery before, nor, for that matter, made love
in woods by a lake—not excepting even the one time I prevailed on
Jocelyn to go camping with me. Mayflies shamelessly perform the
Lieberstod for themselves; the species can claim the unconscious excuse of
reproduction.

Rachel is actually 24. She was never Raszk’a’s student; and, though I
was right about the second marriage, I didn’t suspect it was her second
too. She was first wed at 17, but that less-than-eternal bond seems to be
lost in a miasma of drugs, alcohol, and rancid idealistic-orgastic com-
munal life. So, she allowed her parents to rescue her when she was 20,
spruce her up, lecture her, and send her forth to wait tables during the day and take courses at our tidy university's night-school. She said she met Raszka one evening in a lobby while she was waiting for GL 107 to convene. ("Ah," I said, "Environmental Geology I: Geographic hazards and Hostile Environments—earthquakes and plate tectonics. Volcanic eruptions, floods, erosion, water pollution. Coastal hazards. Four credits.") He was waiting for a cab and asked her if she always dressed that way. And so, they found each other four years ago. Not, I would have to say, a good match. On the other hand, judge not: at least they are still under the same roof.

It's pretty clear that Rachel doesn't regard what we did as any more consequential than I do, at least not in any personal sense. Perhaps also it just wasn't a very good bout, not up to her standard. One could hardly be flattered by such a seduction, or by the first thing she said afterwards:

"I guess you'll be off in about a week, huh?"

The indifference was in the tone, the gesture (rolling away, looking up at the sky), her mayfly nonchalance which was neither sweet nor bitter. The life-story was told as much to the reeds and clouds as to me, I suspect.

If Rachel was telling me the truth, then it is Raszka who has rejected her. This child of nature—whom sex, drugs, rock and roll, marriage, and GL 107 have not transformed or converted—is perhaps not to his taste?

I found it hard to look at Raszka this evening and came up here early. I can hear Annie pacing next door; the old timbers squeak and crack. Some of the dogs are barking and the crickets are making a racket.

I would rather not record the details. I am looking for the sense of having done wrong but cannot find it and do not wish to look too closely either.

7.

Various contributions to Science today. This morning I prepared slides of spider eggs and put away a small consignment of chemicals which arrived during our Spanish omelettes at lunch. This afternoon I performed some sort of qualitative analysis of goat excrement. I have no idea what all this is for and neither Prasad nor Raszka (who personally directed me to the excrement) seem inclined to tell me. The two of them were closeted together most of the day, first in the greenhouse and then, after lunch, in the last of the labs—the one with the centrifuge, microscope, pipettes, bunsen burner, etc. Perhaps Raszka was punishing me with the goat shit. It's possible. The punishment really ought to fit the crime. I was supposed to look for signs of sulfur.
During the morning, Annie kept busy helping Rachel in the house and with the animals, who were rather ignored yesterday. Did Rachel talk? I doubt it. She doesn't seem to like Annie. Yesterday she asked me why Annie was so miserable all the time and called her "the lemon-sucker."

In addition to the box of acids, reagents, and plasmids that came during the Spanish omelettes, there was also a letter for Annie. She did not seem surprised but excused herself at once and took it up to her room. Shortly after, she came down and announced that, if it was all right with everyone, she was going for a swim.

"But where's your bathing suit?" Prasad wanted to know.

"Under my clothes."

"Well, be careful," said Raszka. "I don't approve of swimming alone. Would you like one of us to go with you?"

"I do," said Rachel from the sink.

"You approve and you swim alone," Raszka mumbled, wiping his mouth and getting to his feet. He motioned for his sidekick and me to follow him and quite ignored Annie.

She came back very late in the afternoon, with dry hair and no sign of a damp bathing suit. She was most quiet during supper, though both Raszka and I directed a number of remarks and questions to her. She tended to stare at her glass and answered us curtly, distractedly. As for myself, I felt for the first time the falseness of my position when Rachel asked over dessert if I would like to go riding again tomorrow. I said I didn't know. Associate deans needn't be decisive.

Despite the threatening sound of thunder, I asked Annie if she would like to go for a walk after dinner—just as far as the lake and back. At first she declined, but then changed her mind. After all, Rachel shows no interest in her and an academic advisor is always an available substitute. Sure enough, she opened up by the lake.

"I sat there," she pointed, "and thought of drowning myself. It was childish, really. It's childish to imagine the effects of your death like that, and spiteful. But then spite's childish too, isn't it? It was just because I couldn't manage to feel angry, which would have helped. The whole thing's so simple; really a cliche. When it came to it, he couldn't leave his wife and kids—not for me, anyhow. You know, it's the cliche part I really can't stand, and that's what hurt me the most in his letter, that it was a sort of generic brush-off. I'd have liked a little more uniqueness, I suppose."

There was a little crying/laughing from her and so, to calm her down, I told Annie about Jocelyn and me. "You see," I said, "another cliche." But I didn't mention Rachel.

Then it began to rain and we came back to our rooms.
Prasad killed one of the beavers today. He was injecting it with something and caused an embolism. I heard him swear a little then go to fetch his boss. Raszkę came in from the far side of the building and was already beside himself. He did indeed look like an apoplectic basketball coach abusing a referee. I stood frozen in the adjacent room, getting things ready to play Berlioz for some mice, and had a good look at the two of them.

"Imbecile!" Raszkę began. "You know what you just did?" It went downhill from there, and for quite a long while too—so long, in fact, that I had to wonder if some of such wrath were owing to me, or Rachel. "That beaver’s life was in your hands," Raszkę said at one point, as if Prasad had just botched a child’s appendectomy. "Do you think we can be careless with these animals just because we’re supposed to be goddamned scientists? Is that what you think?" Soon the knife began to cut closer to the bone. "Real hot shit, aren’t you, Anil—with your Third World Ph.D. Christ!"

When Prasad started weeping (those long, monistic, oriental sobs were all the time under that polished, dualistic, occidental veneer), I left and headed for the house through the rain. It had gone on all night and had saved me from taking any position on equestrian excursions. Rachel was at the door.

"What the hell’s going on?" she asked.

"Prasad accidentally killed one of the beavers."

"The beavers?" Her hands came up.

"The female, I think."

Rachel began to cry too.

Annie came down the stairs. Rachel turned to her, woman to woman. "They killed one of the beavers," she said in her most horrified vegetarian tone. I noticed the "they."

I went back outside to get good and wet, to walk for a while in the mud.

Prasad went into hiding for the rest of the afternoon. Raszkę and I wound up in the lab listening to the Symphonie Fantastique together with a dozen busy mice. After the waltz he apologized for the scene, rather pointedly. I admitted I was a little shocked by it and had the temerity to ask if it was the loss of a good subject which had upset him so much or something else.

He flushed a little and said, "It was the completely unnecessary death of the animal through incompetence—or didn’t you hear me?" He looked at me hard.

I looked back hard. "Are you sure?" I guess I wanted to have things out.
“Look, Spaglio,” he sighed, handing me his clipboard and turning the cassette over, “did you ever wonder what happened to the animals when we got ourselves tossed out of Eden?”

“Huh?”

“The animals—you remember, the lion and the lamb.”

“No. I never have.”

“They got thrown out too, that’s what. The difference is, most of us know why.”

“But not quite all of us.”

“No. Not all.”

Tonight I borrowed an old Bible from Raszka’s scant library—about three dozen select classics—to read some Genesis. There’s no mention of the animals being tossed out of Paradise, but they probably were. Then I turned a few pages and read about Noah. There were lots of things I didn’t know. For example, there is this prophecy Lamech, Noah’s father, makes at his birth:

Out of the ground which the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.

In my opinion this fits your modern technologist better than your primeval inventor of agriculture—or even the first Bräumeister.

But apropos of Raszka’s strange remarks about Eden, there is this about the Flood. God’s motive for it was, of course, the incorrigible evil-doing of humankind, and yet He says:

I will blot out . . . man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I made them.

A common fate. Raszka would probably say the story confirms our responsibility. (Later on, incidentally, God tells Noah he is free to eat everything he has saved. Not a good verse for the herbivores.) Anyway, every species gets its corner of the ark—even, I suppose, the termites, the adulterers, the Third World Ph.D.’s. And Noah’s in charge.

9.

When you look at a room—look, as opposed to live in—its whole aspect changes. It becomes opaque, exclusive, virtually two-dimensional. The room ceases to be a space and becomes instead an epoch. The rooms you find reconstructed in museums or preserved in historic buildings are like that too: roped off icons, dessicated and lifeless. “In this very room, boys and girls, the Declaration of Independence was signed.” And you
stand behind a railing which marks time more than space, looking at the useless pink chairs.

My assigned room in Haglund-Raszka’s summer institute and vacation retreat is quite small and all wooden. The floorboards that squeak are broad; the paneling is old-fashioned, probably the original oak. The furniture is indeed doll-house simple: a wooden bedstead, an oak table, a wing-chair with a hideously flowered slipcover and skirts, a small pine chest-of-drawers, two tiny casement windows through which I get little air but can plainly hear the rain and see the flashes and count the seconds before the thunder. There is a single picture on the wall, and I rather like it, have grown fond of it. It’s a 19th-century pen-an-ink drawing of a brook, bare November trees, sedge—but I only just realized it is on silk, not paper. The light from the desk lamp catches it and, though the picture is pretty faded, its surface shimmers silkily. The drawing was done with quick lines, like a rapid sketch (you can almost hear the hurried steel-point catching on the fabric). There is a large, elliptical hooked rug on the floor, and that’s it. No closet, no fireplace. A place for a young child, for a not-very-important cousin perhaps.

Rachel drove into the city today; in fact, she was gone before I got up, so there was no horseback riding. Prasad and Raszka have made it up, and Annie is less brooding. I think we are both getting ready to leave, preparing to return to our respective hackneyed trials-by-separation. She’s had her near-suicide and I my near-adultery.

“Everything that is on the earth shall die,” says God to Noah, who was 600 years old when the waters started rising. God excludes the fish, of course.

“Ronald thinks I’m a fish!”

Individuality experiments all day. Hamburgers for dinner, in honor of Rachel’s absence. Raszka enjoys barbecuing; he became quite jolly and even got a laugh out of Annie. Prasad, though attentive, remains subdued. I told the joke about the Russian mathematician. Raszka and I talked baseball, not as fans, but as former players, as men who have been on the same field when they were boys. We finished a six-pack together. I explained associate dean

It’s after two a.m. and I have only just gotten Raszka to bed. I’m not sleepy myself, not in the least, not even after the whiskey. Jocelyn would have liked it had I suffered from insomnia more often; then I would have stayed awake to play my role in her intricate analyses, her “chewing more than she bit off.” Perhaps Jocelyn has been masticating the vagaries of our marriage with her mother these last days and nights. In that respect, as in so many others, she is her mother’s sharp daughter, even if she did go to law school like her dear dead dad. (I still miss him; I would like to talk to
him again; I would like to be able to take his advice, glow under his understanding gaze.) Anyway, I'll bet Portia falls fast asleep at their feet, like me. Portia, however, has nothing to be ashamed of.

Rachel did not come back until late this morning. Unfortunately, we were all outside with the goats and saw her arrive. I would say she looked more than adequately dissipated. It's a lucky thing she didn't crack up in the car.

Raszka, whose high spirits of last night seemed to persist through breakfast (a good act), either took or followed his wife straight inside the house—I'm not sure which. He staggered a little in the doorway when she pushed him.

The light drizzle which had been falling off and on through the morning stopped. It became close and hot. Annie, Prasad, and I finished up with the goats and then, as Raszka hadn't emerged to give orders and Prasad was at a loss—his confidence and composure still quite shaken—Annie and I decided to walk down to the lake and swim. We invited Prasad to join us, but he declined: "I think I'd better stay here, don't you? I mean, Professor Raszka might wish to continue working."

"Well, would you rather we waited too?" Annie asked.

"No, no. You go on. There's plenty for me to do here."

Annie persisted. "In that case, would you like us to help?"

Prasad, embarrassed now, looking furtively at the house, just about pleaded for us to go to the lake—and so we did. There wasn't a sound in the house when we went in for our suits. "They're holding their breath," I whispered to Annie.

About a dozen other swimmers were at the lake, including a couple of young matrons with noisy toddlers. Two men were fishing from a rowboat. The sun broke unambiguously through the parting clouds.

"Look!" cried one of the toddlers, pointing behind us to the top of the mountain.

It was a double rainbow, nearly perfect. I decided to show off my new Biblical scholarship for Annie: "God's mnemonic device," I said.

"What?"

"After the Flood God swore never to do such a thing again. The rainbow was to be the sign of His covenant with Noah—with the whole biosphere, actually. It would remind Him. Apparently absent-mindedness is an occupational hazard there too."

I had forgotten that Annie's specialty was anthropology. "Did you know that the ancient Hebrews believed the rainbow was actually a divine weapon? That's why it's called a bow. They thought God shot arrows of lightning with it."

"Really? But the rainbow comes after the storm. It doesn't seem very
logical of them."

"Wrath abated?" she suggested, getting up to head for the water. She turned, "Like Raszka's yesterday," she added. "At Prasad."

Prasad had made eggplant, just in case. Raszka came in to have supper with us.

"She's sleeping," he explained. He sat with a lot of foot-shuffling.

The professor had a fairly full whiskey glass in his hand and drank it with his dinner instead of the iced tea Annie had made.

There was a weighty circle of silence around the table. Out of duty, or perhaps whiskey, Raszka tried to liven things up. He told an awkward story about a famous woman scientist who had been invited to address a feminist convention.

"She really read them the riot act," he said. "Told them to stop whining and get off their asses."

"Just like any self-made man," said Annie.

"You bet," said Raszka, raising his glass to her.

The meal ended quickly, as everybody was eager to get away from everybody else. I started clearing as soon as Raszka lay down his fork and Annie made for the sink.

"If she wants to eat later I can get her something," poor Raszka said, heading for the bedroom.

Annie found a couple of decks of cards and I taught her to play Spite and Malice. She was very taken with the name of the game and played with great determination—plenty of spite, loads of malice. Prasad went off to feed animals and see to the shutting up of the labs. When he came back, seeing that nothing had changed, he went to his room and got the book he was reading—a pulp science fiction novel.

"I think we should leave tomorrow, Annie," I said, dealing out our second hand.

"Yes."

Prasad didn't say anything. For the first time it occurred to me to wonder if he were really gay.

We were all in bed by eleven. The air is drier and cooler than it has been for a week. Relief is pouring in from the polar wastes and for the first time I used one of the two blankets which had been lying on the chest-of-drawers when I arrived. I tried to read a little more of Genesis (why not?) and made it through some of the descendants of Noah, also the Tower of Babel ("Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves ..."), but dropped off in the middle of the generations of Shem's progeny.

I woke to a peculiar thudding noise behind the wall. My room is
between Annie's and the bathroom, so I could tell at once where it was coming from. I threw on my damp bathing trunks, which I had draped on the window-sill to dry.

Once out in the hall I could hear more clearly. The sound was sickening. Thunk, thunk—slow and rhythmic.

"Annie—is that you? Annie?"

I took hold of the doorknob.

"What is it?" I heard Annie call breathlessly behind me as I opened the unlocked door and struck Rachel's thigh.

She was crouched naked by the toilet. The seat was up. Vomit and blood lay mixed on the tiles with some sort of pills. The whole side of her forehead was gashed, bleeding. Overcome by the stench and surprise, I let her hit herself one more time before I grabbed her. Annie screamed.

"You know what I loved about her first, Spaglio? Well, not loved—doted on in my infatuation, eh, in mon amour fou. Her fingers. She was always biting her nails. Hard to understand? Those poor little fingers, she'd bite right down to the quick. I wanted to kiss them, suck out the pain and the sweetness—like crabs' legs. Also, her overbite. It's not a big one but it's endearing, don't you think? Imperfections, departures, small individual failures to measure up, the margins of guilt, and pain, and love. Rachel's like loving an animal. People call people animals very thoughtlessly. We are all animals, of course, but only in a way, really only for a time. Rachel never really stopped, that's all...."

I sat up with Raszka in the living room, a fresh bottle of Scotch between us. Why not? Having finished off the first since dinner, he was in no condition to go to the hospital with Annie and Prasad. He didn't even protest. Everything moved too fast for him. They took the station wagon. Prasad would be holding Rachel wrapped up in my extra blanket while Annie drove. I hope she thinks to call. I stayed behind and let Raszka talk until he dropped off. He went on for about an hour, his bathrobe open, his feet bare as gaffed fish.

"I once told her I didn't want her to see me naked. I felt ashamed in front of her, which is odd since, by ordinary reckoning, she had more to be ashamed of than I did. When she looked at me I felt old, old as the Egyptians, old as the Jews...."

He kept drinking and so did I.

"I've actually been married three times, Spaglio: to science and two women. Too much curiosity, too many commitments, maybe? I'm always trying to reclaim the truth. That's how it seems to me, anyhow—reclaiming, not discovering. That's my problem, though. You don't marry—you marry yourself to something. So I looked for the truth, but there's something more to it, something unreckonable, if it's going to work. And then there's all the responsibility. I'm as responsible for what
happens to Rachel as I am for all those poor animals out there—responsible for the smallest spider, for Prasad too. I've got a 15 year-old daughter I haven't seen in half a decade. Don't you think it's odd she went upstairs? Maybe she was trying to get away from me, or to get to Annie, or you. Anyway, it's all wreckage and flotsam, isn't it? Mostly things don't come out right, you know, in or out of the lab. What do you think, Spag—was it the drugs or me, or me and the drugs? Or me—there was time for four or five of them yesterday, I guess. I watched her sleeping all afternoon. Dead innocence personified. When she woke up she said I had to let all the animals go. Funny, we were fighting about it before she went into town, you know, on account of the beaver. I was mean to Anil about it—maybe because I knew what she'd say. Funny because she cares about the life of everything and wants to destroy herself. A good case for the individuality experiment, eh? Maybe it's just pain, individuality. Look to the mysteries and doubt everything. An excellent credo. I shouldn't have made those hamburgers, either. It was a betrayal.

I wanted to tell Raszka what happened at the lake and all about Jocelyn and me, but I'm glad I didn't. There was no need. Besides, I would have been ashamed. So I let him talk and drink himself into oblivion—let him build his tower and tear it down.

No creaking timbers, no storms tonight, and if the rainbow is still up there no one can see it.
Contributors

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