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ERODING THE PALIMPSEST**

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FOREWORD

In the context of modern poetics, Charles Baudelaire alludes to the notion of the palimpsest as critical paradigm, not simply referring to the brain as a physical structure but also underscoring the referential status of poetry itself: “What is the human brain, if not an immense and natural palimpsest?” he asks. “My brain is a palimpsest, and yours too, reader. Innumerable layers of ideas, images, and sentiments fall upon your brain, as softly as light. It seems that each [new layer] buries the previous one. But no layer has perished” (*Paradis artificiels* [*Artificial Paradises*]).

Baudelaire draws the palimpsest metaphor from a common practice in the ancient and medieval worlds in which costly parchments were often scraped down to enable new text to be written over the old. This overlaying technique of palimpsest masked the original texts but never truly effaced them, and modern technology is now capable of exposing these earlier layers of text. Similarly, contemporary theory, academic discourses, and new media forms find themselves imposing modern directions over earlier ones, overwriting the “original.” Past models appear effaced while simultaneously serving as the foundation for innovative thought.

In particular, we explore the various ways in which reality, theory and knowledge are remade as part of a never-ending human search for new meaning, conceptual reconfiguration and reinvention. In this issue, we observe the existence of this phenomenon in the study of new media language and literature. Specifically, in “Form and Function in the Social Perception and Appreciation of Web Sites,” Emmanuel Alvarado highlights the role of function in the aesthetic appreciation of Web sites within the context of contemporary society while acknowledging the traditional importance of form in aesthetic theory. This issue also considers the role of the palimpsest in the study of the Mayan language. In “Rethinking the Maya: Understanding an Ancient Language,” Rhianna C. Rogers presents how the historical study of Mayan language and glyphic systems has been consistently romanticized by Eurocentric interpretations, “masking” the underlying cultural characteristics of the Mayan people. In the realm of literature, Michele Braun’s “Indelible Ink of the Palimpsest: Lan-

FOREWORD

guage, Myth and Narrative in H.D.'s *Trilogy*" and Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick's "Mary-ing Isis and Mary Magdalene in 'The Flowering of the Rod'" analyze the way in which H.D. reclaims female types and reinvents them to counter the exclusion of women from master narratives and to reconcile her own art with her personal experiences. Still within literary studies, Colbey Emmerson Reid's "Mina Loy's Design Flaws" emphasizes metaphorical incongruity as Mina Loy's method for replacing old forms by recombining them with new forms as a mode of ontological recovery. In doing so, she transforms formlessness into the possibility of new formal combinations, thus generating a renewed sense of being. The present issue also explores the complexities found in the search for "original meaning". In particular, Val Czerny's "Monarch of All I Can Sway: 'Crusoeing' Alongside Oscar Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying'" celebrates the fictional lie inherent in every backward search for original meaning. Czerny argues that the search for origins is paradoxical because every time meaning and reality are "remade," the foundation of the new structure necessarily involves a certain masking through the erosion of accepted constructs.

We hope that the reader benefits from our analysis on the process of "reconstructing" reality.

ARTIST'S COMMENTARY

Cynthia Zaitz

The painting portrayed on the cover of this issue is called Alcheme 1 because it represents the alchemical/autobiographical process that occurs during creative acts and because it is the first in a series of alchemists who are both the instigators and recipients of positive transformational forces. This palimpsest incorporates Maori symbols in the dreamscape, to the alchemist's left, mirroring the abstract and creative right brain, and objects forming in the material realm, to the alchemist's right, mirroring the more literal left brain. The Maori words working inside the retort, "kia kaha, kia toa, kia manawanui," translate to "commit, persevere, and be patient."

Cie, Auckland, New Zealand, June 2008

INDELIBLE INK OF THE PALIMPSEST: LANGUAGE, MYTH AND NARRATIVE IN H.D.'S *TRILOGY*

Michele Braun

*As a modern poet, H.D. struggled to reconcile her art with her personal experiences and reconcile modern life with literary and mythological tradition. *Trilogy* rewrites myth as a means of recuperating images of Judeo-Christian, Egyptian and Greek patriarchy into a narrative of female resurrection that draws upon H. D.'s experience as writer, classicist, woman, and poet. H.D. remakes reality in the process of resolving the conflict between the myth that precedes her poem and her own experience by recognizing the continuing power of myth to influence, while revising it to suit her own ends.*

your stylus is dipped in corrosive sublimate,
how can you scratch out

indelible ink of the palimpsest
of past misadventure?

H.D. *The Walls Do Not Fall*

How *can* a poet scratch out the indelible ink of the palimpsest? For a poet like Hilda Doolittle in *Trilogy*, there is an underlying desire to understand the relationship of the poet to a past that is distanced and unavailable, yet always present and pressing. Sometimes the past evokes nostalgia and a longing to close the gap between then and now, while at other times, the gap protects the poet from the constraints of past literary production. Some other modernist poets sought to reconcile past and present by exploring the relationship between traditions and modern reality, producing texts like Marianne Moore's "To a Steam Roller" which attempts to make technology a subject of poetry, or Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" which seeks to articulate and understand the limits of language in the modern age. As a modern poet, H.D. struggled to reconcile her art with her per-

sonal experiences and to reconcile modern life with literary and mythological tradition. Susan Friedman notes that H.D. “as one of the ‘keepers of the secret, / the carriers, the spinners,’ ... did not conceive of the poet as a passive receptacle for the images and symbols of tradition...Instead, the poet engages in an active, dialectical process of weaving traditional and personal revelations into new patterns of vision” (226). The shadows of her predecessors do indeed form a kind of indelible ink of the palimpsest that cannot be fully erased, and H. D. resolves the conflict between the myths that precede her poem and her own experience by recognizing the power of mythic influence while revising it to suit her own ends.

Trilogy rewrites myth in order to recuperate the images of Judeo-Christian, Egyptian and Greek patriarchy into a narrative of female resurrection that draws upon H. D.’s experience as writer, classicist, woman, and poet. H.D.’s poems treat narrative as many other modernist poets do, as a string of lyrical fragments that “shifts [narrative] to another level, becoming the invisible ‘master-narrative’ that, present nowhere *in* the text, nevertheless ensures the text’s ideological (if not formal) coherence” (McHale 162). But unlike Eliot’s *The Wasteland*, in which narrativity produces meaning more or less consistently throughout, in *Trilogy*, there is a strategic shift in the text. The early stanzas of the poem exhibit the clear and crisp description of an Imagist poet, but as the images repeat, they build momentum, erupting into narrative. In early narrative eruptions, the reader does much of the work of narrative construction, seeking patterns in the repetition; however, by the end of the poem narrative repetition is replaced by temporal narrative markers that impose linearity on the images, ordering the action in the final stanzas.

The disjunction between past and present that other poets might seek to mend, or at least understand, is less troubling for a poet like H.D. She does not wish to increase the gap to the past, nor does she see myth as simple nostalgic longing. Her poetry celebrates the possibility myth holds for the individual’s understanding of his or her own history: “H.D. made the poet’s creative interaction with seemingly dead mythological traditions the framework of the poem and her existence within those traditions the core of her self-definition as an artist” (Friedman *Psyche* 209-10). In *Trilogy*, the nostalgia for the past is not for the values and ideals of that past, but for the coherent structure that mythology uses to explain why the world operates the way that it does. H.D. uses the stable structures of myth as support for what is more important in the poem, the quest for a resurrection

myth that would merge individual experience with established narrative. Her effort to marry these two modes of understanding – the personal and the mythical – expresses a desire to open up the potential for interconnectedness, contingency and fluidity between the literature of the past and the experience of the present.

Hilda Dolittle's literary reputation rests solidly on her work as *H. D. Imagiste*, the name Ezra Pound suggested she use for her poetry. But her literary output far exceeds her participation in the Imagist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century; recent critical attention has turned to examining her prose and film work, as well as her later poetic output. The three poems of *Trilogy: The Walls Do Not Fall*, *Tribute to the Angels*, and *The Flowering of the Rod*, which will be discussed in the following pages, were composed between 1942 and 1944, during H. D.'s stay in London during the Blitz (Guest 268). Between her earliest work as an Imagist in 1913 and these later poems, H. D. produced several prose works, as well as performing in film and writing film criticism (Friedman *Psyche* 6). Her versatility as both a novelist and poet is evident in the structure of the poems of *Trilogy*, particularly in the final sequence of the poems, in which the images and language introduced earlier are re-formulated as narrative. The story of Mary, Kaspar and the jar of myrrh recounted in the final poem of *Trilogy* brings together the fragments of myth and experience that have been presented in the earlier stanzas, providing a model for the integration of the mythic and the personal.

The critical reception of H.D.'s poetry has followed as varied and winding a path as her artistic output during her life. Identified as an Imagist early on, her sparse prose attracted and repelled critics through her "perfection," as well as "exquisite otherworldliness and 'true' Greekness" (Friedman *Penelope's Web* 60). Her reputation as an Imagist overshadowed her later work, and it was only in the 1980s that feminist critics recuperated her poetry as well as her prose, celebrating its fragmentation, authenticity, and self-alienation (Edmunds 3). Post-structuralists speak of the generativity of her poetry and the cultural work that her poems do, while Lawrence S. Rainey dismisses her as a pawn in the wars of identity politics. Frequently, H.D.'s poetry is associated with multiplicity, as when Susan Edmunds speaks of the "twisted body of history and narrative and the radiant body of epiphany" that characterize H.D.'s "two bodies," (Morris 2-8) or when Susan Friedman describes the symbiotic relationship between her prose and poetry, and the personal and the impersonal (*Penelope's Web* ix).

Rather than being forced to choose among these critical approaches, I would like to turn back to the time at which H.D. was writing to explore how she reconciles the mythic traditions of the past with her experience as a modern woman. H.D. wrote and published *Trilogy* during World War II, a time when archetypal criticism was emerging, with Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* published in the following decade. It is within this critical climate that H.D.'s mythic project was created and understood. Frye identifies two possible methods of myth reference: original myth, what he calls "unadulterated myth" and stories that have altered those original myths by using them in realist or romantic modes which dilute or adulterate the original. This second reference, the kind found in H.D.'s poetry, he calls "displaced myth."¹ H.D. directly references myth in *Trilogy* to merge stories of divinities such as those of the Greek pantheon with stories of humans, including not only figures like Mary and Kaspar, but also the female poet. The "displaced myth" in *Trilogy* emerges in a quest for a myth of resurrection. The trope of the quest narrative does not seek so much to reveal a pre-existing resurrection myth as to create it through the images and narrative of the poems.

Archetypal criticism insists on the isolation of literature from the context in which it is produced; the structure of literature will be surmised solely by a study of its archetypes (Frye 134), thus it fails to fully account for the myth in *Trilogy*, which would seem to require a critical approach that recognizes how "the poet engages in an active, dialectical process of weaving traditional and personal revelations into new patterns of vision" (Friedman *Psyche* 226). The storytelling that emerges in H.D.'s long poem clearly re-tells earlier stories, which implies a witness, a storyteller who can testify to how the new revision might be an appropriate replacement for the old. In the absence of clues as to who this witness might be, this storyteller becomes associated with the poet, which invites into the poem autobiographical considerations regarding the poet while simultaneously destroying the master narrative of the myth because true myths do not have authors, they simply exist as they always have.

Another possible approach, that of the anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, uses the metaphor of the *bricoleur* as a way of explaining mythopoesis and revision over time and across cultures. The *bricoleur* works by using the bits and pieces left from earlier myths; thus, in revision, "the possibilities always remain limited by the particular history of each piece and by those of its features which are already determined by the use for which it was originally intended, or the

modifications it has undergone for other purposes" (19). In imagining the mythmaker as *bricoleur*, it might seem possible to account for the traces of earlier myths found in later revisions, those echoes of the palimpsest that cannot be erased, like the traces of the Egyptian, Greek and Biblical figures that abound in *Trilogy*. Susan Stanford Friedman identifies two opposing forces in H.D.'s mythic revision: a poetic vision that would transcend modernist nihilism, and a female quest for validation and self-awareness that could transcend tradition (212). Levi-Strauss's description of the *bricoleur* as "someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman" (16) seems to match the kind of activity that a female poet's revision of the primarily patriarchal texts of Greek gods and Biblical figures might also employ.

While the *bricoleur*, with his/her devious scouring of the metaphorical shop floor for materials with which to create new myth in many ways echoes the frustrations of many female poets attempting to mark their own way through the doubly treacherous masculine provinces of literature and myth, it is also limited in its usefulness as a trope for understanding H.D.'s work because it presumes the suitability of the patriarchal myths used by the *bricoleur*. The theory does provide the flexibility needed to discuss the literary implications of H.D.'s use of myth in her work but falls short of explaining the literariness of those myths themselves in the way that Frye's archetypal theory could accommodate the myth within literature. The anthropological roots of the metaphor limit its possibilities when it is transported to the complexities of literary production in a culture that not only has its myths, but also embraces (frequently gendered) literary and social conventions as well. The presence of the personal in H.D.'s poetry introduces an element not recognized by Levi-Strauss's *bricoleur*, since there is no way of accounting for personal experience in a theory that imagines the mythopoeic agent, the *bricoleur*, as simply an assembler, rather than a contributor of new material.

A final possibility for understanding H.D.'s new myth lies in a narratological explanation of the transmission of stories. In *Palimpsests*, Gerard Genette proposes five potential modes of interaction between texts, one of which is useful for our purposes. "Hypertextuality" is broadly defined as "any relationship uniting a text B...to an earlier text A...upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary." This relationship can be derivational, which includes commentary, but also moves beyond simple commentary to describe a relation in which the second text could not exist without

the original, even though it does not perceptibly evoke that original, a process that Genette calls “transformation” (5). Thus Joyce’s *Ulysses* and the the *Aeneid* are both transformations and expressions of hypertextuality (albeit different ones) in relation to the *Odyssey*. H.D.’s explicit use of myth in the images and narrative of *Trilogy* clearly owe something to those myths that preceded the poems of the collection and thus could be considered an example of what Genette calls “hypertextuality.” The problem with Genette’s “hypertextuality” is the difficulty in analyzing whether it might apply to a writer like H.D. In Genette’s book of palimpsests, the lack of a female presence in the texts he examines is particularly striking. Of the hundreds of texts mentioned, only a handful have been written by women, and in analyzing the relationship between women’s texts and others, Genette makes no apparent attempt to recognize of the role gender might play in the inheritance of literary forms and themes.

Archetypal criticism, the *bricoleur*, and Genette’s hypertextuality all provide some means of understanding the relationship between the writer and the material used to create a new myth. While they have value in understanding potential relations between a writer and the texts that have come before him, they are limited as tools for approaching H.D. in two ways: they restrict their analysis for the most part to the influence of earlier text on a (male) writer who responds to it, and they focus their attention primarily on the sustained narratives of drama, the epic poem, and the novel.

In *Trilogy*, the poet’s personal experience is integrated with the mythic, and this distinctly female personal experience sometimes conflicts with the mythic material it employs. H.D. also juxtaposes myth fragments from several mythic traditions, creating conflict between the meanings traditionally associated with those fragments or images, a conflict she uses fruitfully in the final narrative of the poems to destabilize the identity of the “Mary” of the poems. She was fascinated by her mother’s Moravian beliefs, which, in their unique religious orthodoxy, frequently led her to feel separated from others, even within the tight-knit Moravian community. This disconnectedness and her later move to England “would explain some of the tensions that shaped her life,” and thus by extension, her poetry (Guest 11). One way this tension expresses itself in *Trilogy* is through alchemy, a mystical science that seeks to blend science with magic.

In *Walls*, the alchemist is introduced as the keeper of secrets and a companion to the Mage in the desert, while in *Tribute*, science and art merge in the image of the Hermes, and finally, in *Flowering*, we

return to the keeper of secrets, the Magus, who can interpret the “legend...contained in old signs and symbols” (151) and who acts as keeper of the jars of myrrh. The connection between the Magus and Hermes of the second poem is typical of many of the connections that run back and forth throughout these poems. Hermes, the “patron of alchemists; / his province is thought, / inventive, artful and curious” is also poet and orator, who must “collect the fragments of the splintered glass / and of your fire and breath, / melt down and integrate, / re-invoke, re-create” (63) in an action that is curiously like the restorative action of the mysterious, feminine Presence “spectrum-blue, / ultimate blue ray, / rare as radium, as healing” (20) earlier in the poem.

For Friedman, alchemy is an appropriate way to understand H.D.’s work because it “serves as metaphor for cultural purification as well as for linguistic restoration...The alchemy of a mythmaking poetic purifies tradition of its misogyny and releases the regenerative powers inherent in ‘Star of the Sea, / Mother’” (249). The alchemist and a healing blue light blend the mythical, mystical and personal so that this alchemical approach to mythic revision exceeds the possibilities of archetypal criticism, the *bricoleur*, and Genette’s hypertextuality. *Trilogy* has to work against the tendency of myth to exert a powerful hegemonic influence as antecedent to the poem. The more prevalent and pervasive the myth within the culture in which the poet writes, the more strongly that influence is felt. The poet who can contain the power of previous meaning can reap rich rewards through revision. Therein lies the challenge for revisionist mythmakers. H.D. takes on some of the biggest myths in *Trilogy* when she invokes the muses of Hermes, Thoth, and the stories of Christ’s anointing and birth, but she balances these myths in such a way that no single one is privileged as a source for her revised myth, and thus none are capable of exerting a stranglehold on the meaning of the images, symbols, and final narrative of the poem.

Another problem for the female poet who employs myth is surmounting its irrelevance in many cases to her own personal experience. Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes this problem as a need to balance the “domestic tasks of immanence with the spiritual and literary tasks of transcendence,” (3) a description which succinctly summarizes the opposing tensions within the poetry of someone like H.D. who has been trained in classical translation. Susan Gubar describes the primary activity of feminist revision of myth as “the need for imagistic and lexical redefinition, an activity closely associated with

the recovery of female myths,” (199) though H.D. moves beyond simply recovering an already existing female myth.² H.D. situates each myth within the context of multiple mythic possibilities, so that the individual myth is no longer unique and its power as a homogeneous and authoritative way of ordering the world is reduced.

These original stories or myths frequently must have their power reduced in order for them to be available for the female poet since when myth tends toward universalization, it not only does not allow for the personal, but the types and characters it employs as universals are often male. Recuperation of myth requires revisions that allow for universal types that *could* be female or male. Thus in revision, the female poet “simultaneously deconstructs a prior ‘myth’ or ‘story’ and constructs a new one which includes, instead of excluding, herself” (Ostriker “Thieves” 72). The kind of activity, which Ostriker has identified and defined as “revisionist mythmaking,” is the female appropriation of the high culture of myth in order to integrate the personal and the domestic within its grand narratives. The shadows of the palimpsest allow for this kind of revision by neither entirely abandoning, nor reifying, any of myth’s narrative incarnations.

The dual revision of both form and content inherent in hyper-textuality is demonstrated in the treatment of writing in the tenth section of *The Walls Do Not Fall*:

But we fight for life,
we fight, they say, for breath,

so what good are your scribblings?
this – we take them with us

beyond death; Mercury, Hermes, Thoth
invented the script, letters, palette;

the indicated flute or lyre-notes
on papyrus or parchment

are magic, indelibly stamped
on the atmosphere somewhere,

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

your Triumph, however exultant,
must one day be over,

in the beginning
was the Word. (17)

Within these lines, we find reference to three predecessors H.D. draws upon: Thoth, the Egyptian scribe, Hermes, his Greek descendant, and Mercury, the Roman name for Hermes, all of whom are credited with inventing writing. However, the passage ends with the first part of John 1:1 of the Christian gospel, which reads in full: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In appropriating only the beginning of the verse, the identification of the Word with the trinity (it was both with God and God himself) is lost; the capitalization of “Word” in the poem can be read as merely that, a capitalization for emphasis, instead of reflecting the tradition of capitalizing the name of the divinity.

This passage also negates the importance of chronology since the progression, “Mercury, Hermes, Thoth” reverses the chronological emergence of the belief systems to which each of these figures belongs. The final tradition, the Christian one, is the most recent, but the placement of the biblical passage at the end, removed from its sacred setting, implies a temporal hierarchy that returns the Word to its position “in the beginning.” Additional temporal play emerges in the apostrophe to the Sword, which alludes to the description of the word of God in the New Testament as “sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing the soul and spirit” (Hebrews 4:12). It is not in the beginning, since it is the “latter-born” and must hence follow the older writing of the Egyptian, Greek and Roman deities named above it. The subject matter of the verse: eternal power of “scribblings,” the magic of music and the indelible stamp it leaves on the atmosphere (a vague and amorphous space for inscription), and the ability of those scribblings to transcend death, all act to negate the importance of chronology, since the act of writing transcends the temporality of death. Hypertextuality as a theory accommodates the kind of source tracing that this sequence of the poem seems to invite; however, in H.D.’s hands, the tracing moves both forward and backward in time, confusing and making irrelevant the issue of which text came first.

Trilogy’s prevailing mode follows H.D.’s imagist impulse, which produces poetry that eschews sentimentality for “hard, classical

lines” that are “crisp, precise, and absolutely without excess” (Friedman *Psyche* 2). They draw much of their force from the weight of multiple meanings concentrated within them. Within as few as four or five lines, allusions to stories from multiple myths may accumulate, taking on new meaning through the concatenation, as in section 22 of *Walls* where the speaker says, “pale as the worm in the grass, / yet I am a spark / struck by your hoof from a rock: / *Amen*, you are so warm, / hide me in your fleece, / crop me up with the new grass” (31). The worm recalls the biblical serpent, the references to sheep recall Christ as shepherd, *Amen* refers both the end of prayer and the association with Ra that was built up in the previous section, the desire to be consumed with the grass invokes folk mythologies of vegetative gods being consumed and resurrected again,³ and in the speaker’s wish to be hidden in the fleece, echoes of Odysseus’s escape from the Cyclops can be heard. The desire to hide, or to be hidden, expressed in this passage is also represented in the images of shells and cocoons found throughout the first poem (8-9, 12, 22, 30, 44). In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard describes the shell as the “dominant form of life” that transgresses the boundaries of inside and out (108). Nests and shells are protective spaces that the imagination seizes upon when looking to hide, cover or seek shelter and “the imagination sympathizes with the being that inhabits the protected space” (132). The shell is also a symbol of resurrection, the theme of the third poem in *Trilogy*, and is thus an image carried through the entire poetic sequence. Here, as elsewhere, the dense juxtaposition, repetitions, and weight of multiple mythologies, reduces the power of any single original story to dictate the form of the final palimpsest produced.

This proclivity for multiplicity emerges later in *Trilogy*’s narrative where two mythic events seem to occur simultaneously. The Magus who provides the myrrh to Mary (who is herself the herb) to anoint Christ’s feet before the last supper is the same Magus who brought myrrh to him as an infant, and the story of Mary’s anointing and the subsequent betrayal of Christ are provided before the scene of the nativity, a reversal of the biblical chronology; this disrupts the linearity of the narrative to emphasize the importance of the final scene, the nativity, as a necessary precursor to the resurrection, as well as the relative unimportance of temporal sequencing to revisionist mythmaking.

Inventorying the fragments of myth and images used by the poet reveals a mix of the personal and the literary. The first image of *The*

Walls Do Not Fall compares the bombed out landscape of London to the ruins at Karnak in Egypt, and then later to Pompeii. The poem then immediately links a third mythology, that of the Biblical story of Samuel to those ruins in terms of a “Spirit [that] announces the Presence” (H.D. *Trilogy* 3). Samuel is “a prototype for the modern poet” because the Spirit allows the poet to “name her own experience” and connect it to a mystical tradition (Friedman *Psyche* 213). The biblical story describes how the young Samuel, newly consecrated at the temple, hears a voice calling to him in the night. Having been told three times by his teacher, Eli, that it was not he who had called, the young boy lies down again; the next time he heard his name called, he responds, “Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth” (I Samuel 3:9). In *Flowering*, the Presence causes Samuel to shiver, just as one might imagine the poet shivering in recognition of the shared Spirit of the Muse at Karnak, London, and the temple at Jerusalem. Here, the poet would seem to be calling to a Muse common to each of these three mythologies saying, “Speak, Muse, for I am listening.” The Muse H.D. is listening for is not the patriarchal father of the trinity who calls to Samuel, but rather a four-part Muse of Egypt, Greece, Christianity, and her own experience as a female poet. The pre-existing myths are internalized, and their combination with the personal experience of the poet means that this Muse is not an external force to which the poet must yield, but arises from within, so that the poet exercises control over how this Muse inspires. To control the Muse might seem to be part of feminist revisionist mythmaking.

Inspiration juxtaposes words and images, redefining etymologies for many of the words the poet uses. H.D. reinvigorates language by tracing the common usage of words back to their origins as a way of re-investing those words with their original meanings, not to erase meaning, but to multiply the connotative weight those words can carry. The most sustained linguistic experiment occurs in the poet’s use of the name and image of Mary, first in *Walls* and then in *Flowering*. This naming passage includes a build-up of terms: alchemy, natural elements, appellations, translations, before the final name is revealed at the end of the section:

Now polish the crucible
and in the bowl distill

a word most bitter, *marah*,
a word bitterer still, *mar*,

sea, brine, breaker, seducer,
giver of life, giver of tears;
Now polish the crucible
and set the jet of flame

under, till *marab-mar*
are melted, fuse and join

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

Star of the Sea,
Mother. (71)

The cascade of accumulating words all meaning either sea, bitter or mother, are not only merged, but modified as a result of that merging; the movement through the m-words in this section of the poem is a microcosm of a similar movement throughout the poem in which images borrowed from various myths are “melted, fuse and join / and change and alter” because of their proximity to the other images surrounding them.

The juxtaposition of so many images provides a rich conglomeration of visual expressions of myth, but this melding together of so many disparate images could deteriorate into nonsense without some kind of order to control and shape the images. As the poem progresses, the possibility of unity emerges as the fragments of Egyptian, Classical and Christian stories gradually begin to coalesce around one figure, Mary, and in the narrative of Kaspar, Mary and the jar of myrrh in the last poem. Here too, there is a cataloguing of the linguistic elements integral to Mary’s and myrrh’s naming, but their location within a narrative, a discernable story that moves through time (even if it occasionally moves backward through time), starts to shape the random linguistic play into some semblance of a new myth. The tension between fragmentation and the unity of narration is demonstrated in Mary’s story of her naming:

I am Mary, she said, of a tower-town
or once it must have been towered

for Magdala is a tower;
Magdala stands on the shore;

I am Mary, she said, of Magdala,
I am Mary, a great tower;

through my will and my power,
Mary shall be myrrh;

I am Mary – O, there are Marys a-plenty,
(though I am Mara, bitter) I shall by Mary-myrrh;

I am that myrrh-tree of the gentiles,
the heathen; there are idolaters,

even in Phrygia and Cappadocia,
who kneel before mutilated images

and burn incense to the Mother of Mutilations,
to Attis-Adonis-Tammuz and his mother who was myrrh;

she was stricken woman,
having borne a son in unhallowed fashion;
she wept bitterly till some heathen god
changed her to a myrrh-tree;

I am Mary, I will weep bitterly,
bitterly...bitterly. (135)

Here, linguistic play is controlled by a conscious effort to locate the multiple meanings implied by that word play within a narrative. The Mary-myrrh is bitter, just as she was in the mer-mere-mater-Mary sequence earlier, but now her bitterness is explained by the imposed metamorphosis and “unhallowed fashion” in which she bore a child. Mary’s identity, or her essence remains ambiguous; she appears both as agent of her own transformation and victim of enforced metamorphosis. The speaker says, “through my will and power, / Mary shall be myrrh” but also that the Mother of Mutilations “wept bitterly till some heathen god / changed her to a myrrh-tree” (135). The passage begins to shape the form that this new myth takes, where the Christian Mary Magdala of the tower town becomes indistinguishable from the classical Myrrha, mother of the beautiful but tragic god. Even while she is located within this story, the imprint of her previous incarnations remains and “Mary” be-

comes a compilation rather than an individual woman, a move that generalizes by means of the common name “Mary” without simplifying the woman signified into an archetypal “type.” For Susan Schweik, H.D.’s transposition and splitting of the Marys, which “emphasizes the inward variance and instability in any feminine identity” (260), is critical for a female poet seeking to revise myth to include personal female experience. The location of the multiple incarnations of Mary within one body in the poem allows a depth within the character that would not be possible if she were only a type, as she would be within an unaltered myth.

H.D.’s work in *Trilogy* relies on a tenuous link between images, experience, and the poem itself so that symbolism in these poems is frequently slippery, where an image used in one manner at one point is used in a different manner at a later point. For example, myrrh is associated with the name of the Mary who approaches Kaspar, and it is the name of Adonis / Tammuz’s mother and thus represents a tradition of generative or vegetative myths, but it is also the ointment that is both presented to the infant Christ and used by Mary to anoint the sacrificial Christ before his crucifixion. Because myrrh occupies both a physical space in the poem as the ointment, and a referential space as the name of a woman and a goddess, it does not have a fixed meaning that can be traced from one reference to the next, making it unsuitable to the *bricoleur* since that metaphor requires a pool of materials with relatively stable identities that can be identified and traced as they are rearranged. The transformative properties of myrrh are brought to the foreground in the last narrative, which also draws the reader’s attention to the structure of that narrative. Myrrh is no longer solely a mythic symbol, but is now a commodity capable of being exchanged by those operating behind the scenes of the better known anointing scene recounted in the gospels.⁴

This stabilization of the symbol within narrative is characteristic of the way narrative makes sense of, and orders our lives. In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks describes the ubiquity of narrative and its ability “to summarize and retransmit narratives in other words and other languages, to transfer them into other media, while remaining recognizably faithful to the original narrative structure and message” (3). *Trilogy*’s project is also a retransmission, merging the personal with the mythic to create a story that is relevant for the modern woman. Brooks goes on to note that Modernism became suspicious of plot and of master narratives, and one might say that as a Modernist woman poet, H.D. became doubly suspicious of them. Yet, her

efforts in the poems to supercede the limitations of myth must employ myth to that end. H.D.'s unique approach to the problem is to fragment myth into a series of images that are introduced, revised, juxtaposed, altered, re-examined, and subjected to linguistic play in the early sections of the trilogy and then draw upon them, with the multiplicity of meaning that then inheres in those images, within the narrative of the anointing and nativity in *The Flowering of the Rod*. At the same time as these fragments of myth are woven into a narrative, they retain the shadows of their earlier manifestations, threatening to return to their origins, or even rearrange themselves in yet other narratives.

Genette's hypertextuality provides a potential model for this shifting multiplicity. In hypertextuality, the relationship between earlier and later text is "complex and indirect" with transformations that change either the elements or the style of narrative while retaining the "pattern of actions and relationships" (Genette 6). In differentiating between these possibilities, Genette identifies two potential responses of a writer to mythic material: the material can be altered in detail but retained in style and form, in other words, something recognizable as myth, or, it can be altered in style while maintaining internal patterns.

In *Trilogy*, H.D. exploits the flexibility and multiplicity inherent in hypertextual relationships by refusing to employ only one method of approaching the mythic material from which she draws; at times, she changes details of the myth while maintaining an overall recognizable structure, and at other times, the details are retained through the structure has changed. But what is most fruitful in H.D.'s use of myth is her willingness to move between these two potential modes of mythic revision. This fluidity seems to arise less out of a desire to play with the possibilities of both approaches, and more from a need for vacillation in order to accomplish the kinds of revision she imagines for the female poet and reader in approaching the Egyptian, Classical and Christian mythological figures and stories in order to reduce their authority without undoing it entirely.

The story of Mary and the Magus begins as she enters his booth in the marketplace to inquire about myrrh. But he has none for sale, and she ignores his hints that she must leave. She introduces herself but her scarf slips from her head revealing her hair, and the image is visionary, prompting him to change his mind, sending her the myrrh she desires. The narrative then moves to the story familiar from the biblical account of Mary anointing Christ's feet before he dies. What