H.D. and the Religion of Writing

A Thesis Submitted to
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“On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this thesis.”
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Abbreviations

CP: Collected Poems
Gift: The Gift
WDNF: The Walls Do Not Fall
TA: Tribute to the Angels
FR: The Flowering of the Rod
TF: Tribute to Freud
CS: Compassionate Friendship
Dedications

[To the ones]
…who knew that H.D. wasn’t T.V.: The Briarcliff Posse, my London flat mates, and Taylor McPherson. Ashley Humbert deserves special thanks for hearing more about this project than anyone else. Janet Boller has also been a mentor and friend throughout this process.

[To Payne Hall]
…for being a haven over the past four years. Professors Pickett, Miranda, Smith, and Gertz in particular have fostered my self-confidence as a writer/scholar/person. I also can’t imagine Payne or my own college experience without Mrs. O’Connell’s laughter, advice, affirmation, and gifts of dark chocolate.

[To Professor Gavaler]
…for helping me step back and uncover the palimpsest that was this thesis and for assuring me that I “make sense.” I am also very grateful for his steadfast kindness and creative writing instruction. “Kings” gave me the incentive and the courage to change for the better.

[To Professor Wheeler]
…for her patience, for reading four years’ worth of my academic and creative writing, for spring term 2012, for being the professor in this introduction, and for helping me learn how to go where I love and where I am loved. I cannot thank her enough.
“It is wonderful to feel one’s work grow apart from one’s self—a great temple to shelter and protect.”

–H.D. in a letter to Frankie S. Flint, August 6, 1916

“I am burning all the time like an early Christian, like a mad fanatic in the desert, well, like a poet.”

–H.D. in a letter to John Cournos, September 6, 1916

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I go where I love and where I am loved,

into the snow;

I go to the things that I love,

with no thought of duty or pity.

-H.D., Trilogy
Introduction

H.D.’s presence in my own life has always been sacred. I first read Trilogy two years ago, in a modern British poetry course titled “Skeptics and Mystics.” My future thesis advisor’s instructions were: read the whole text once through without stopping, then go through it once more, consulting endnotes as needed. During my initial reading, I was hypnotized. My instinctual understanding of the poems also delighted me. I, like H.D., found poetry a welcome escape.

Then, as instructed, I read Trilogy again through a more analytical lens. I annotated. It was a stormy winter day, and the power in my apartment went out halfway through this process. Then it began to snow. The brightness outside entered through a window, giving my small bedroom enough light to read by and to pencil notes such as “walls do not fall” (and later “walls do not fall!!”), “word = religion,” “resurrection—love—heaven,” “poetry,” “types of poetry?” “POETRY,” “heathen,” “healed of soul,” and “I have a soul” into the margins. These thoughts are now partially written over by notes in blue pen that I took in class. My copy of Trilogy became a palimpsest.

A few months later, I worked as a summer research assistant for the same professor, who was writing a scholarly book about speculative poetry. Ever since “Skeptics and Mystics,” I had envisioned myself writing an honors thesis on H.D., though I had no idea what shape my argument would take. Perhaps picking up on this, she recommended that I read more H.D., and I did. I stumbled through The Gift. Sea Garden moved me to tears. I re-read Trilogy. I once again situated H.D. into my interests at the time—the research I was helping with—thinking that
certainly *Trilogy* in particular was speculative. Its poems took me to another world that helped me frame my own reality.

This past summer, I had the privilege to conduct archival work on H.D. at Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. If reading *Trilogy* was otherworldly, then seeing material penned in H.D.’s hand was pure magic. I worked my way through close to twenty boxes of correspondence, manuscripts, drafts of poems corrected by H.D., photographs, and, in one special, extra-wide box, H.D.’s personal scrapbook. Reading a typed draft of *Tribute to the Angels* gave me prolonged chills. I took notes on material that I thought might be of scholarly use and documented along with information that was valuable simply for the fact that it was written in H.D.’s own hand. For instance, I inscribed lines from “The Poet:” “A butterfly has antennae / is moral / and ironical too.” I also jotted down anything that simply made me happy (a nameplate: “H.D., loved of love”), sad (from a diary entry dated 1914: “Spring—confinement”), or laugh (H.D. on scansion: “Some things are best left forgotten”).

While mapping out my thesis at the start of this school year, I already knew that I wanted to write on *Sea Garden*. In weighing texts for chapters 2 and 3, I re-read my worn copy of *Trilogy* for the first time since my research assistantship. I had forgotten about and was embarrassed by my naïve pencil notes, scrawled in what I then saw as a desperate attempt to relate my personal view of poetry to H.D.’s.

However, during the actual writing process, a series of questions grew more and more crucial to shaping my argument on her poetic and female empowerment: what is the purpose of H.D.’s religious syncretism? What does religious practice mean to her? Can this practice heal? Reading back through my initial annotations, re-thinking the thoughts I had had two years ago, I realized that I had a better initial understanding of H.D.’s work than I thought.
I will argue that H.D. discovers and promotes creative power to connect and heal through occult questing, thereby empowering herself as a female poet. H.D. was born Hilda Doolittle on September 10th, 1886, and she spent her early years in the close-knit Moravian Christian community of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Despite her distinctly Christian upbringing and upper-middle class, Victorian upbringing, H.D. was a “country girl” who loved adventuring in the woods and rocky beaches of New England and New Jersey. While attending Bryn Mawr College, she met and befriended William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, two young men who would join her as key figures in the modernist movement.

Pound, a key figure in the Imagist and modernist movements, shaped H.D.’s early career more so than Williams. Pound was a key figure in the Imagist and modernist movements (and H.D.’s fiancé for a brief time). He also introduced her to Richard Aldington, another Imagist and H.D.’s soldier-husband at the time during which she wrote *Sea Garden.*\(^1\) However, it was Pound who famously crossed her name off of the bottom of a draft of “Hermes of the Ways” and replaced it with “H.D.” Though the instigator of this act remains unclear, Pound went on to try and make H.D. “the perfect imagist” or poster girl for his movement (Friedman *Penelope’s Web* 38). In a first typed draft of one of her memoirs, *Compassionate Friendship,* H.D. describes Pound in this scene as the first of “not a very long line of...initiators” (*CF* 18). In an early typed draft of this memoir, H.D. crossed out “not a very long line” as though to take away from Pound’s significance in her early career (MSS 1, 18).

H.D. became interested in the occult from as early as 1912, perhaps prompted by the readings of W.B. Yeats that she attended with Pound in London (Guest 31). However, it was her

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\(^1\) See Barbara Guest’s thorough biography of H.D.’s life, *Herself Defined: H.D. and Her World.*
trip to Greece in 1920 that solidified her immersion into the occult. In Greece, H.D. underwent three visionary experiences: one aboard a ship, where she believed that she saw the figure Peter Van Eck; the second on her hotel room wall in Corfu (referred to by H.D. and critics as “the writing on the wall”); and thirdly a “possessed” experience wherein “H.D. found herself enacting for Bryher,” H.D.’s life-partner Annie Winifred Ellerman, “a series of dance tableaux” (Sword 122). Though many critics have thoroughly outlined the significance of these events to H.D.’s occultism, none address writing as part of a larger religious mission, particularly in the works that I treat here.

My thesis examines how, throughout her career, H.D. seeks to express creativity in reality through occult writing. I trace this goal in H.D.’s major war-inspired works, Sea Garden (1916), The Gift (1944), and Trilogy (1944). Each text marks the progression of her dually feminist and religious quest, from search for to discovery and then creation of a sacred text. This quest brings creativity into reality, a unity that heals and, in the process, empowers women and H.D.

This thesis therefore revolves around sacredness, reality, religion, and the occult as H.D. sees them. The Encyclopedia of Religion states that, at a basic level, “religion is present when any distinction is made between the sacred and the profane” (Long 7326). For H.D., sacredness is creativity, a power within all humans and inherent in nature. She views the profane as man-made divisions such as war and gender. She bridges the sacred and the profane through the occult practice of writing. The Encyclopedia of Religion defines the occult as fundamentally interested in “the diverse modes of passage from one world to another,” such as between the
sacred, natural world and the profane, man-made world (Faivre 6783). Writing is H.D.’s mode of passage.

Several scholars theorize about the role of religion in the modernist movement. Lara Vetter in *Modernist Writing and Religio-Scientific Discourse* outlines intersections between art and science that resulted in what she calls a popular spirituality in the twentieth century. This spirituality permeated prevalent discourse at the time and modernist writings specifically. She shows how twentieth-century materialism and violence drove writers towards new ways of conceiving both religion and science as a response to this reality. Vetter calls this change both a “rejection of the scientifically realistic object and a desire to make art serve a spiritual purpose” (Vetter 9-10). As Vetter points out, H.D.’s work critiques twentieth-century materialism. However, her discussion focuses more on H.D.’s use of scientific and geometric discourse, which relates to but does not define religion as H.D sees it.

Helen Sword also traces the modernists’ views of religion, particularly how it responded to elements of religion rejected by the late nineteenth century. In her introduction to *Ghostwriting Modernism*, she proposes,

Modernist writers were intrigued and attracted by spiritualism’s ontological shiftiness; its location of authorial power in physical abjection; its subversive celebrations of alternate, often explicitly feminine, modes of writing; its transgressions of the traditional divide between high and low culture; and its self-serving tendency to privilege form over content, medium over message. (Sword 9)
Sword does not elaborate on what she means by “explicitly feminine” in form. However, as I argue in Chapter 2, H.D.’s treatment of women in *The Gift* also evokes modern spiritualists’ favoring of women as mediums—physical bodies through which the sacred joins reality. Similarly, in *Religion and the Modernist Novel*, Sinclair Lewis asserts that both modern poets and modern novelists’ treatment of spirituality encompassed …borderline states of consciousness, forms of the divided self, the process of conversion, the function of ritual, the magical potential inherent in words, moments of sublime experience, and the relationship between social life and sacred power. (Lewis 5) Lewis is correct, though he ignores H.D. as a crucial figure in the modernist movement and in the religious concerns that he presents. And, like other critics, often uses words such as religion and occult as synonymous with spirituality. He also mentions but does not define what he means by “borderline states of consciousness” and “forms of the divided self.” In the coming pages, I hope to show how H.D. believes that creativity requires liminality. Thus, her work glorifies liminal spaces as a means of accessing this power and fostering healing, meaning unification, of the profane “social world” as she sees it. This thesis also treats occultism rather than spirituality. For H.D., writing harnesses this “magical potential inherent in words;” it mitigates the divide between sacred creativity and the profane. Writing is H.D.’s religion (5).

Similarly, Leon Surrette’s *The Birth of Modernism* ties the occult practices of Yeats, Pound, and Eliot to literary modernism (Surrette 6). Surrette also overlooks H.D. as a central figure in this intersection—she was a well-documented inner member of the circle of poets that he describes—but his summary of occultism in the context of modernism applies to her:

Occultism sees itself as the heir of an ancient wisdom—either passed on from adept to adept or rediscovered in each new generation by mystical illumination. This self-
perception generates a bookishness within the occult that brings it into contact with imaginative literature and authors at many points. The most important point of contact is in the field of myth studies, for the occult movement regards myths as records of contacts between the human and the divine. (Surrette 7)

H.D. studied mythology of many traditions and origins throughout her career and especially in the three works that I examine. She exhibits Surrette’s assertion through her engagement with myth—from “Hellenic sources” in Sea Garden to fairy tales to family lore in The Gift and finally mythological and Christian allusions and narratives in Trilogy. If H.D. sees writing as an occult practice, then the result of this practice is a text that bridges reality and the sacred. Texts allow for the passage of creative, regenerative power into the divided world, a connection that heals. Myths, being stories, are the “points of contact.” H.D. both engages with and creates her own myths in and through Sea Garden, The Gift, and Trilogy (7).

Surrette goes on to define the modern occult as tied to but transcending straightforward theological and philosophical positions. It was a mainly Western practice, rarely monotheistic. He adds that “even when it is monotheistic it retain[ed] all sorts of supernatural agencies in addition to God,” making it monist in the sense that it theorized a “single realm” encompassing both spiritual and material realities. Furthermore, participants in modern occultism were of the firm belief that wisdom is “hidden from all but initiates” and passed down from adept to adept (11-13). Notably, this wisdom was thought “incommunicable,” making one of occult writing’s chief concerns to express the “lives and teachings of enlightened individuals and of the communities of ‘seekers’ after illumination” (14). I believe that H.D. saw herself as one of these enlightened individuals, a communicator of sacredness.
Adalaide Morris in *How To Live, What to Do* points to the heart of this thesis. Generally speaking, Morris’s scholarly work argues for the role of poetry in enacting cultural change. In her discussion of *Sea Garden*, Morris states that H.D.’s poems “throw out bridges to the sacred” (Morris *How To Live, What to Do* 54). However, Morris’s argument focuses on cultural studies and sound-play. My thesis will elaborate upon H.D.’s perception of sacredness and of texts as bridges, how her work projects or “throws out” these bridges and why, and specifically how this goal appears in the three key works I treat here, how these works map a quest. I theorize that H.D.’s mission was to find sacred power and, through occult writing, project it outward.

To trace this quest, I have chosen three works that were each written largely in response to a World War, times that epitomized H.D.’s view of profanity. She therefore associates sacredness with nature—especially flowers—throughout these works. I read H.D. as the speaker, and I point out how the texts talk to one another with their motifs and imagery.

In Chapter 1, I read *Sea Garden* as a map of H.D.’s imagination. H.D. seeks an empowered identity as a female poet, and the four poems that I examine are landmarks in this search. “The Shrine” (*CP* 7) and “The Cliff Temple” (*CP* 30) take place in landscapes representing gendered extremes: a maternal ocean followed by a masculine mountaintop. However, both poems end with a sense of achievement. In “Hermes of the Ways” (*CP* 36) and “Sea Gods” (*CP* 37), H.D. addresses sacred deities rather than man-made altars from the coast, the area between the land and sea that symbolizes androgyny. There, she speaks directly to the gods, demonstrating her achievement of creative autonomy. These poems highlight H.D.’s journey from fear to confidence. This accomplishment within the collection makes *Sea Garden* the first step in her mission to heal divisions and empower herself.
Chapter 2 addresses H.D.’s major World War II prose work, *The Gift* (1944). *The Gift* takes the creative empowerment of *Sea Garden* and uses it to exalt women and specifically mothers. *The Gift* glorifies them as storytellers and as transmitters of giftedness, meaning sacredness. *The Gift* also blends literary genres—fantasy and memoir, poetry and prose—creating a text that is formally in between, evoking the liminal coasts of *Sea Garden*. I (and H.D.) call this genre autobiographical fantasy. *The Gift* brings aspects of fantasy to autobiography in the same way that H.D. attempts to use writing to bring sacredness to reality, a connection that heals by fostering peace.

Finally, in Chapter 3, I discuss how H.D.’s discovery of a creative identity in *Sea Garden* and embracing of maternity in *The Gift* results in *Trilogy*, H.D.’s greatest empowerment. In *Trilogy*, H.D. as the speaker leads a band of poet-initiates on a journey that revises patriarchal tradition. The text is full of puns, allusions, and symbols of androgyny and sexual unity—all facets of H.D.’s feminist, religious vision. H.D. in *Trilogy* also symbolically links poetry with healing and, at the end of the text, with Jesus. Just as Christ brings Christianity, *Trilogy* brings H.D.’s religion to reality. *Trilogy* is therefore the sacred text of H.D.’s religion of writing.

A cover page that features a sketch H.D. drew as a young woman (when her signature was still “Hilda Doolittle”) precedes each chapter. I like to believe that these images foreshadow the role their depictions play in her later career. The first sketch, a closed flower, represents the closed-off, Victorian femininity that initiates *Sea Garden*’s search for sacredness. Flowers associate with femininity but are in fact androgynous plants. As a part of the natural world, they also connect to H.D.’s view of sacredness. In a similar way, H.D. sees herself as an androgynous woman who expresses creativity through writing. I pair an illustration of a church with my discussion of *The Gift*, as it likely depicts a Moravian Church, the religious vision that H.D.
responds to and alters in *The Gift*. Finally, a drawing of an open flower introduces Chapter 3, as blossoming flowers are a trope in *Trilogy* and represent H.D.’s personal poetic flourishing.

*Sea Garden, The Gift, and Trilogy* mark H.D.’s religious beliefs and goals. H.D. sees sacredness as creative power that is natural and good. She believes writing is occult, the in-between practice and the means of accessing this power. Texts, therefore, create bridges, thereby connecting all people in unity and in love. And she was successful: her work continues to speak both intellectually in the classroom and intuitively in a small bedroom illuminated by the soft snow outside.
Chapter 1: *Sea Garden’s* Liminal Landscapes
*Sea Garden* begins H.D.’s occult journey. Some poems illustrate wild, wooded settings while others take place on the beach or by the ocean. The land in *Sea Garden* represents the masculine gender traits of freedom and strength, and the ocean symbolizes maternity. Many of the poems reference mythic beings or deities. In poems that take place on ocean cliffs or on windy mountaintops, H.D. calls out to man-made altars that embody the profane. Conversely, in poems where the land and the sea mix, H.D. as the speaker actively pursues or calls out to the collection’s deities, which represent creativity. Within *Sea Garden*, H.D. searches for a creative vision: one that is androgynous and thus empowers her as a female poet in the male-dominated modernist movement.

Scholarly responses to the role of the collection’s settings and deities vary. In her article “H.D.’s Romantic Landscapes,” Cassandra Laity describes *Sea Garden* as H.D.’s feminist response to the Romantic poetry that she read with Ezra Pound in her Bryn Mawr days. According to Laity, the collection responds to this tradition by revising the Romantic “Venusberg” garden, thereby critiquing the Victorian femininity. Specifically, she argues that H.D. subverts Romanticism’s patriarchal poetic tradition by making *Sea Garden* a “regenerate landscape” of harsh elements rather than one like the Venusberg, which symbolically suffocates, stifles, and prevents “psychic unity.” Laity is correct in her assertion that *Sea Garden* aims to regenerate or revive H.D., however she does not elaborate on the centrality of creative power in and to this process or the importance of “unity” to H.D.’s work. She may also overestimate the importance of Romanticism to *Sea Garden* as a whole (Laity 112-113).

Similarly, in *H.D. and Hellenism*, Eileen Gregory argues for the prominence of the poet Walter Pater in *Sea Garden*. She asserts that H.D. engaged with Pater’s writings about the “lost” Greek gods and “envisioned poetry as a means of their recovery” (Gregory *H.D. and Hellenism*).
To Pater and to H.D., the “rehabilitation” of these gods meant returning “a sense of the sacred” Hellenic spirit to life (79). Gregory does not define “sacredness” here, though she does stress the prominence of Sappho in H.D.’s early lyrics in her essay “Rose Cut in Rock: Sappho and H.D.’s Sea Garden.” Gregory describes Sea Garden as a “polytheistic world” with “no one figure of god or goddess” (Gregory “Rose Cut in Rock” 132). She then posits that H.D. draws inspiration from Sappho’s eroticism and uses the collection to engage with and exalt Sappho as a muse. Sea Garden, she writes, also draws subtly on Sappho’s motif of salt, which for the Greek poet and for H.D. represents a harsh but necessary element that heals (132). While Gregory is correct to point out H.D.’s concerns with female eroticism and healing, she likely overemphasizes the significance of Sappho in this collection: though H.D. studied and even in her later work imitated Sappho, this collection does not revolve around her, nor is she H.D.’s central muse in Sea Garden.

Prominent H.D. scholar Susan Stanford Friedman elaborates on Gregory’s illustration of the poems as “modern pastorals.” Friedman gives them a strong biographical reading, arguing that Sea Garden codes H.D.’s “expatriation” from America and her childhood. They mirror “her flight from her father’s house” and “her exile from…conventional feminine norms” and childhood insecurities (Friedman Penelope’s Web 55). However, Annette Debo and Alicia Ostriker’s similar take on Sea Garden is the most compelling. Both argue that while H.D. draws inspiration from Hellenism, Sea Garden’s primary landscape is American and particularly emblematic of the coasts of New England and Point Pleasant, New Jersey, where H.D. spent time as a child: “the scenes are made ‘Greek’ but left generalized to stress that the poet describes an imaginary landscape” that is also “a map of the poet’s mind” (Ostriker Writing Like a Woman 14). Sea Garden’s personal and mythic references, allusions, and natural imagery do paint a
portrait of H.D.’s imagination. However, neither critic remarks on the significance of the unnatural elements in *Sea Garden* and especially how they relate to H.D.’s conception of sacredness, the creative power of the imagination.

Friedman also asserts in *Penelope’s Web* that H.D. purposefully creates a genderless and disembodied poetic voice to avoid a biographical reading of her work (46). H.D.’s voice in *Sea Garden* is disembodied, but it is not genderless—it is genderfull. H.D. desires positive qualities of both genders: masculine freedom and wildness and nurturing femininity. As Cyrena Pondrom and others have shown, H.D. suffered romantic rejections from both Pound and Gregg, sought to abandon her Victorian lifestyle and felt unstable as a young, American woman living in London. She struggled to find a role as poet rather than poster girl for Imagism (Pondrom 99). Furthermore, Donna Hollenberg argues that H.D. also wrote many of the collection’s poems during the period immediately following the birth of her stillborn baby. The combination of these factors gave H.D. anxiety her creativity, both as a writer and as a mother (72).\(^2\) Hollenberg asserts that H.D. uses classical allusions in *Sea Garden* as objective correlatives for guilt about this stillbirth, “breathing new life” into the collection to replace the life she couldn’t support (71). She goes on to trace this anxiety throughout *Sea Garden* and H.D.’s later work. Hollenberg successfully points to H.D.’s anxiety about creativity, but she misses the link between and her linked sense of creativity and sacredness as well as the strength present in *Sea Garden* and in the other texts that she examines. H.D. writes *Sea Garden* to empower herself and heal the divided, materialist, and violent World War I reality that she sees; the collection springs less out of guilt and more out of endurance, desire, and hope.

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As seen in “Sheltered Garden” (CP 19) and “Garden” (CP 24), Sea Garden critiques conventional, Victorian femininity and female oppression represented by garden spaces. Though the collection’s ocean and cliffs scenes represent freedom and strength, H.D. fears these places as well: man-made altars placed in those locations conceal sacredness from her. Friedman thus describes the “transcendental” quality of H.D.’s lyric—H.D. leads a communal band on a search for this sacredness (Friedman Penelope’s Web 55). When she posits that only the collection’s manufactured elements “transport the poet into the realm of the sacred,” she is partially correct. It is H.D.’s endurance despite these obstacles that transport her into the sacred realm (51). Thus, poems that take place on beaches combine the land and sea—landscapes towards the end of Sea Garden that are without man-made altars—allow H.D. to address not altars but the deities themselves. Both Friedman and Morris call the collection’s deities “beings” but do not specify what they represent (55). And, most importantly, neither scholar defines what sacredness means to H.D. and how it links to poetry in Sea Garden. Rather than one tradition of mythological deities or one specific muse, H.D. seeks creativity. Through the religious act of transcribing this search, H.D. finds and communicates it through her poetry, making Sea Garden itself a bridge to the sacred.

In essence, H.D. desires liminality. “The Shrine” and “Cliff Temple” both take place on mountain or ocean cliffs with man-made places of worship, representing the difficulty of being a woman writer in a man-made (patriarchal) world. However, active pursuit of creativity despite the danger and fear that these places incite within her allows H.D. in “Sea Gods” and “Hermes of the Ways,” the poems that take place in liminal territories, to converse with living gods. She calls out to and meets these deities on the beach—an in-between landscape free from divisions and
borders—demonstrating her androgynous creative vision and the empowerment that it brings her. Writing *Sea Garden* thus begins the quest that characterizes her career.

“The Shrine” illustrates H.D. pursuing creativity within a maternal landscape. The poem begins with an epigraph, “She watches over the sea,” evoking a nurturing presence, though the identity of this “she” is remains unclear. In *H.D. and Hellenism*, Gregory assigns this phrase to an epigram entitled “The Shrine By the Sea” by Anyte of Tegea, a Hellenic poet (Gregory 234). H.D.’s poem pays homage to a female poet, the identity that H.D. desires. The man-made altar of the shrine prevents H.D. from fully seeing or speaking to this poet. “The Shrine” also implies that the shrine it within and a part of coastal cliffs, a notion emphasized by formal division and imagery of danger and destruction. Yet the end of the poem shows H.D.’s strength—she continues, despite fear, to pursue the empowered identity of poet and mother.

Apostrophe within each section underscores H.D.’s desire to emulate Anyte despite hindrance from the ocean (maternity) and the profane (the shrine itself). H.D. personifies this “you” but meshes her with the cliff and the coast. H.D. cannot directly address Anyte and must refer to her altar. The poem opens: “are you graded—a safe crescent…are you full and sweet, / tempting the quiet / to depart in their trading ships?” These lines portray the addressee as seductive, “tempting” the ships with her “full” and “sweet” femininity, alluding to both Laity’s stifling Venusburg and the confining feminine gender ideals from which H.D. fled (Friedman 55). The next stanza answers, “Nay, you are great, fierce, evil,” negating this characterization. The men who seek the shrine “perish” on her “cliffs,” implying that division kills. H.D. goes on to describe the “evil” of the male gaze at the shrine’s “quiet presence,” her safety “from the
wind-blast,” where wind connotes grief and hardship. These lines critique men’s attempts to appropriate women and shows divisions as dangerous.

The following stanza praises the figure for her defiance of the men. The shrine is “unsheltered,” evoking the harmful and oppressive garden in “Sheltered Garden,” and “cut with the weight of the wind,” wounded by masculine oppression and sadness. Despite this might, H.D. wants her to remain “tender” and even “enchanted” as well as powerful, just as H.D. wants to be a mother and a writer. The next lines’ varying length and repetition create changing pace, echoing waves pounding of maternal grief for H.D. She wants to “lift” with the sea and let it engulf this grief. She wants, in the manner of the anonymous goddess, to swell with its “blast,” growing stronger from its power, and then sink “as the tide sinks.” This juxtaposition of power and peace mirrors the desired combination of strength and maternity. Repetition of “sink” and enjambment on “strikes” heightens this momentum as well. Later, diction of sounds such as “thunder” connotes power and also connects H.D.’s beseeching of the shrine to her desire for poetic empowerment, as “sound” implies a lyric. Morris posits that H.D.’s violent images and action verbs in Sea Garden as a whole “testify to a sacred power and promise in the universe” (Morris How to Live 97). H.D. believes in the creative force that this man-made altar houses. The final stanza in this section reads:

You are useless—
when the tides swirl
your boulders cut and wreck
the staggering ships.

These lines stress the danger of the cliffs surrounding the shrine. Repeated diction of “useless” stresses H.D.’s desire to be useless to the landsmen, the entitled men who try to traverse the sea.
The next section’s mournful “O grave, O beautiful” furthers this reverence of the goddess: maternity is both serious—even deadly—and beautiful.

The poem continues, “the wind sounds with this” message that she has “heard” about the shrine. Diction of “sounds” alludes to poetry. In “the sea…rollers shot with blue / cut under deeper blue.” Repetition of “cut” again evokes borders, and “shot” connotes violence, but “blue” represents holiness. In the same way, the shrine creates a border between H.D. and its goddess. However, “we,” H.D. says, “have found” the shrine. Communal pronouns here and elsewhere in Sea Garden and her later works emphasize H.D.’s desire for human connection through poetry. H.D. and her band the uniqueness of its androgyny, the poetic identity that is unique and “cut apart from all the rest.” They bring offerings of “freesia” for the shrine’s “shelf,” an act that represents the bridging of sacredness with the profane. She then emphasizes that she has not forgotten the goddess, the “plunder of lilies” and the “sweet salt stretch” of her beach, the place without the landsmen, the ships, or the man-made shrine that confines her. As Gregory has shown, salt for H.D. symbolizes a necessary and holy cleansing (Gregory “Rose Cut in Rock” 142). She writes, “this salt experience and the wisdom and beauty born of it are the central mysteries to which…Sea Garden allows access” (142). Gregory captures the importance of salt in Sea Garden, but she misses the fact that the salt experience—the suffering and cleansing it provides—results in clarity of poetic voice.

H.D. then reiterates her band’s “terror” after seeing the destruction enacted upon the “men in ships.” The goddess’s power scares H.D. even as she desires it, the “bright shaft” that is a dually enlightened, holy symbol and a phallic symbol. Describing the shrine in masculine terms following the description of her tender beauty furthers the trope of androgyny. Visceral, painful images follow, such as “sorrow, splitting bone from bone” evoked by the “splendor before [their]
eyes / and rifts in the splendor / sparks and scattered light.” Here, H.D. describes the pain—both physical and emotional—that seeing the shrine evokes in her. She agonizes because the shrine itself is full of “rifts.” These rifts hurt H.D. Next, she mentions the men who “warned” of this. She knew that the pain was immanent. Yet H.D. and her group “hail” the shore despite the violent “grind” and “cut” of the journey, representing her continued pursuit of creative empowerment. In the last stanza, reference to the shrine’s “eyes” personifies it once more, conjuring an image of the sacred being, Anyte or some other divine female figure, who lives within its walls. Because the group ventured towards her—because H.D. searched for this poetic identity—the being “pardoned” her “faults.” She cleanses and forgives them, and the “waves” will no longer dispel them from her “ragged coast.” H.D., in pursuit of maternal strength, has been pardoned and allowed to remain on the coast, the liminal, natural, and therefore sacred place.

“The Cliff Temple” describes a similar search, but rather than taking place on ocean cliffs, it situates on a mountain cliff apart from the land and surrounded by wind. Barbara Guest writes that this poem likely evokes and was even written on the Island of Capri, which H.D. visited with Aldington, linking the site of the poem to H.D.’s poet-husband (Guest 53). “The Cliff Temple” also alludes to the temple of Apollo, the god of light, meaning, to H.D., the god of clarity and vision (Gregory “Rose Cut in Rock” 149). As in “The Shrine,” this poem engages with a deity—Apollo and, to a lesser extent, Aldington—who embodies elements of sacredness to H.D. housed in a man-made altar. Again, this altar blocks H.D. from speaking directly to the deity, signifying the patriarchal obstruction of H.D.’s poetic autonomy. It also takes place on a cliff, once more symbolizing division. Additionally, “The Cliff Temple” appears later in the collection than “The Shrine,” after the sequence of poems about Victorian femininity and
directly following “Sea Violet,” a poem about female sexuality and endurance. Placement of a poem about the pursuit of masculinity after this sequence demonstrates H.D.’s figurative liberation from those gardens. It also shows her enacting strength of the sea flowers. The path of this pursuit is dangerous, though it results in empowerment. The poem captures the physical and mental strength required for an independent, woman poet in the modernist movement.

“The Cliff Temple” begins with a description of the temple as though H.D. stands below it, looking up and describing it to her band of initiates. It reads:

Great, bright portal,
shelf of rock,
rocks fitted in long ledges,
rocks fitted to dark, to silver granite,
to lighter rock—
clean cut, white against white.

The “Shelf of rock” alludes to the altar in “The Shrine,” yet this shelf is a “bright portal,” where brightness references Apollo. Here as in “The Shrine,” repetition of “rocks” emphasizes the path’s roughness and danger. “Shelf of rock” also locates the temple on a cliff, again connoting borders. The rocks grow from silver and “dark granite” to “clean cut, white against white” as they grow closer to the shrine. This progression and the repetition of “white” emphasize the power of the “portal” to sacredness to purify reality. Diction of “portal” underscores how the temple, though man-made, contains a passage to another realm. H.D. then details how, as she and her band draw closer to it, the portal is “high—high” where “no hill-goat tramples.” The repetition of “high” with fast-paced dashes evokes tired breathing. It also accentuates the sense of fear and exhilaration from being so close to the sacred presence that the temple guards.
Indeed, the portal itself “lifts” to the “sky-arch.” Diction of “lifts” evokes the power of the shrine to lift and swell with the waves. In the same manner that the goddess in “The Shrine” swells with the ocean and the storm, this temple gains strength from the wind. Unlike the “quiet presence” of the shrine, this temple has no watchful or nurturing presence. It is “silent.” Additionally, “sea hawks” and “gulls” sweep past in this place, representing H.D.’s yearning for freedom and flight.

In the fourth stanza, H.D. stands on the “fissures” that permeate the “earth;” she describes the “jagged cliff” on which she stands and can see a small tree crowned with white flowers. Gregory describes this specific section of the poem as a “processual,” meaning that the section encapsulates a narrative separate from the rest of the poem (Gregory *H.D. and Hellenism* 124). She states that this narrative augments the “illusion of the poem as a liminal passage,” and in this case, a journey towards sacredness (124). H.D. complements the intense division that she sees with the image of the flowering tree, a trope for creative strength in *Trilogy*. It offers “white flowers” even as the wind “booms” and “growls” like an animal over the earth. This tree also references the poplar in “Mid-Day” (*CP* 10), where H.D.’s thoughts dry up like “shriveled seeds” and lie split and scattered along a path. The tree in “The Cliff Temple” also dries out under the heat of the mid-day. However, in “The Cliff Temple,” wind allows the tree to flourish—it pushes flowers that “are fragrant as its height” as it reaches towards the temple and blooms, foreshadowing the blossoming flowers of *Trilogy*. This stanza represents H.D.’s desire to journey from division to empowerment within the poem, paralleling her broader goal to foster unity and healing.

Before H.D. can achieve this goal, she expresses self-doubt. She laments: “for ever and ever, must I follow you / through the stones?” This line emphasizes H.D.’s weariness and the difficulty of her path as a woman writer. Like the enchanted tenderness of the sacred being in the
shrine, this being is “dear—mysterious—beautiful” though the path he leads her down leaves her “splintered and torn.” She then questions whether a “daemon” could “avenge this hurt.” H.D. often refers to her creativity as her “daemon,” especially in letters to Aldington.³ Here, then, she doubts whether writing can heal her and codes her doubt over Aldington’s love and support. She also questions her religion. And in the third section, she wonders if she should “hurl” herself from the cliff, repeating, “Shall I” as though to emphasize her desire for her addressee to stop her. She asks to be saved. Has the male deity within the temple has “heard” how she “climbed the rock?” Does anyone hear or see H.D.? She has attempted this journey and seeks validation for her struggle, for her writing. Repetition of “have you heard” and “I” in these lines creates a sense of frustration. Gregory links this third section to a translation of “Ovid’s Heroides 15.173-220, where “Sappho contemplates hurling herself from the Leucadian cliff” that H.D. drew from (Gregory H.D. and Hellenism 235). Sappho was undoubtedly a muse for H.D. Reference to her suicide symbolizes H.D.’s contemplation of abandoning her search for poetic autonomy.

The third section ends after H.D. again asks whether the god has “heard” how far she had to “walk” to his “house,” his temple. The sectional divide conjures a breath or a lapse in time, allowing the final section to begin with a calmer observation: “over me the wind swirls.” H.D. does not admit defeat; she has returned from her pursuit, recognizing that remaining on a masculine path, a path created by figures such as Pound and Aldington, could silence and metaphorically kill her. The poem ends, “I have stood on your portal / and I know—you are further than this, / still further on another cliff.” H.D. recognizes that the vision of creativity evoked by Apollo is not her poetic identity—it will forever connote the cliff-like divisions and

danger. Yet “The Cliff Temple” does not end in defeat, though. It demonstrates H.D.’s acceptance of this notion. Rather than giving up, she begins a different path.

Almost directly following “The Cliff Temple,” “Sea Gods” lays out this path. The poem responds to “The Shrine.” It abandons the Island mountaintop and returns to the sea; however, this poem is free of the profane. H.D. reveres anonymous deities, and the poem presents an offering to multiple gods. As Gregory has suggested, “Sea Gods” calls out to the lost gods of Pater’s theophanic tradition. Whether or not H.D. had Pater in mind, the poem calls out to beings “who embody the assertion of imaginative power” and lift “experience into vision.” This poem demonstrates H.D.’s acceptance and enactment of her unique creative identity, away from gendered extremes; the beings are emblems of sacredness (Gregory H.D. and Hellenism 83). This landscape allows her to speak directly to the gods, who are no longer housed within profane temples. She seeks and finds shelter and protection from deities who are simultaneously maternal (sea) and masculine (gods).

Formally, this poem, like “The Shrine” and “The Cliff Temple,” divides into sections, allowing for change in tone and evoking the trope of division in H.D.’s life and work. Unlike “The Shrine” and “The Cliff Temple,” apostrophe in this poem calls out to a divine being or beings. Gregory explains H.D.’s apostrophe as contributing to her “effort to rehabilitate the ancient gods,” meaning her desire for the renewal of art in life. According to Gregory, they “embody the assertion of imaginative power…they are reflections of the strong imagination that is lifting experience into vision.” H.D. seeks out these unnamed gods to bring their power into her work and thus to “transfigure the ordinary,” patriarchal reality. Gregory ties H.D.’s apostrophe to H.D.’s desire to transmute her own experience into strength, though, like many, she does not elaborate on creativity or the importance of writing to the strength and renewal that
she describes (83). In “Sea Gods,” the gods represent H.D.’s vision of creative androgyny—her own vision of divinity. She calls out to them to embody their power in her writing, to promote unity and consequent healing.

The first stanza evokes “The Shrine.” It also introduces the sense of hopelessness that H.D. will respond to:

They say there is no hope—
sand—drift—rocks—rubble of the sea—
the broken hulk of a ship,
hung with shreds of rope,
pallid under the cracked pitch.

The poem immediately juxtaposes H.D. with the “they,” the landsmen who inhabited the broken barge. She returns to the destruction of ships—patriarchal reality—enacted by the ocean.

Repetition of “they say there is no hope” beginning the second stanza emphasizes the distinction between H.D. and the “they” as well as the notion that what “they say,” that “there is no hope / to conjure” the sea gods’ power—is incorrect. Men tell H.D. that the sea gods do not have the strength to stand in and withstand the “stress” and “beats” of the waves, to be a part of but not consumed by the ocean. This diction also corresponds to the musical beats of the poem itself, with this stanza’s monosyllabic spondees and the rhyme of “hope” and “rope.” They say that H.D. does not have the power to write. The final stanza of this section returns to “The Shrine”’s “ragged beach.” The landsmen in this poem do not believe that the sea gods are any stronger than that beach. They do not understand the power of its in-between landscape.

The second section shifts from the image of the sea to an offering to the sea gods. H.D. and her band “bring violets…single and sweet,” alluding to the violet of “Sea Violet” that
precedes “The Cliff Temple.” H.D. offers the delicate strength of her earlier poem as an offering to these gods. And if she sees the flower as a representation of herself, then this image links H.D. with the sacred sea gods. The last stanza of this section reads, “We bring the hyacinth-violets” that are “whiter than the in-rush / of your own white surf.” These violets contain this purity and might like the rocks leading up to the cliff temple. Again, H.D. combines the holiness of the land and surf together. This connection again evokes the androgyny of sea gods as well as the collection’s title, *Sea Garden*, the liminal, sacred space between nurturing and strength.

The last section concludes the poem with hope: H.D. acknowledges that the gods “will come.” Unlike the being within the cliff temple that silently ignores H.D.’s questions, H.D. is certain that these gods will answer her prayer. They will “haunt the men in ships,” meaning work their magic in reality. They “will trail across the fringe of strait,” the liminal place and “wash” the “rocks,” alluding once again to the cleansing salt that H.D. associates with creativity (Gregory, “Rose Cut in Rock 147). Then, she envisions the gods joining the “storm” and getting “fresh strength” from it. H.D.’s power will renew her and give her “weight” to pile upon the beach at the edge of the sea. The gods will “thunder along the cliff,” the border. She repeats that they will “get fresh strength / gather and pour weight upon the beach.” H.D. emphasizes the strength and power of these gods, of her own creativity. Moreover, in pouring sand onto the beach, making it equal with the cliff and thereby assuaging the cliff’s danger. It will become “sand-shelf,” a shrine that is natural and hallowed. H.D. believes that they will “paint / the lintel of wet sand with froth.” The gods have the artistic power to “paint,” and they will bring this power to the liminal landscape with their “white” froth, their holiness. Repetition of “you will come” in the last stanza compounds H.D.’s deep belief in her inner sacredness, the gods that she calls out to in this poem and in all of *Sea Garden*. Like the goddess of “The Shrine,” these
gods—H.D.’s creativity—will “break the lie of men’s thoughts,” the masculinist and war-driven mindset that surrounded H.D. Not only does H.D. symbolically escape from those thoughts, but she breaks them, pursues truth.

Finally, “Hermes of the Ways” illustrates H.D. calling out to a named deity in a liminal landscape. This poem appears towards the end of the collection, and it speaks the sea gods’ response to her commitment to power and the truth of her creative vision. H.D. calls out to Hermes by name; he is an androgynous god and the god of writing. She therefore appreciates him, and he will play this role in Trilogy as well. Her progression from addressing multiple, anonymous gods to a singular god who is also emblematic of her creative vision represents her achievement of Hermes’s identity, her empowerment. She addresses him directly because she views him as her equal. The poem contains only two sections, signifying this increased confidence in creative power and its connectivity. The poem begins with a sense of personal longing that ends in triumph as H.D. meets Hermes. By the end, she has reached the sacred at the borderland of wildness and maternity.

The poem opens with a description of the beach. Its sand is powerful. When the sea “breaks” over it, it is “hard” and “clear as wine,” where “clear” represents H.D.’s clarity of vision, and “wine” makes this vision holy, at least in terms of H.D.’s Moravian Christian upbringing. H.D. sees “leagues of it.” “It” refers to the sand and “the many-foamed waves of the sea.” H.D. describes “the wind, / playing on the wide shore” and piling “little ridges” that “great waves / break over.” Varying line lengths evoke the in-and-out momentum of the tide, as in “The Shrine.” However, here, diction such as “playing” and “little ridges” empowers her and diminishes the wind and the ridges. She identifies and no longer fears the “great waves.” However, “more than” the sea that she understands and embraces, H.D. knows “him / of the
triple pathways, / Hermes, who awaits” her. This stanza shows Hermes as a god of pathways and of journeys. H.D. embraces a multiplicity of paths yet is certain that he, unlike the god in the cliff temple, “awaits” her no matter which route she chooses—as long as the choice is hers. The next stanza describes Hermes as “dubious,” emphasizing his ambiguity and connection to liminal spaces and identities. He embraces “wayfarers” such as H.D. The “sea orchard,” another borderland, shelters him, and he has the strength to weather the “sea wind” and “great dunes.” H.D. then places herself within these dunes: “wind rushes” over them, and the “salt-crusted grass / answers. Again, salt refers to cleansing, and the triumphant “Heu, / it whips round my ankles!” proves that H.D. has been cleansed. Now, having found and called out to Hermes, her poetic identity, she too can embrace the wind: it “whips around her ankles” but does not sway her.

The second section alters the location. H.D. reflects, from her new and empowered stance, on the small, “white” stream that flows from the “poplar-shaded hill” of “Mid-Day.” Though this stream is small, its whiteness makes it pure and clear, and its journey makes it “sweet,” conjuring the “sweet salt stretch” of the beach in “The Shrine.” This contrasts the “hard,” “small” apples in the next stanza, apples that “too late ripened / by a desperate sun / that struggles through sea mist.” These apples recall the smothered fruit in “Sheltered Garden” and what H.D. sees as the result of conventional femininity. Apples on “small trees” will experience “struggles” that keep them trivial and unfeeling. H.D. wants to take up space, like the wind and the ocean. She wants clear pathways, like the stream and like Hermes, as opposed to the “twisted…bafflings” and “twisted…small-leafed boughs” of the trees confined to their orchard. These lines stress stress the wrongness of the orchard, its “twisted” suffocation. She then links the shadow of these trees to “the shadow of the mast head” and “the torn sails,” which refers to landsmen and her fear of escaping her Victorian girlhood so as to fall into the hands of landsmen.
And yet, the final stanza ends with thanks to Hermes, who “waited” for her in the regenerative space “where sea-grass tangles with / shore-grass.” This poem captures H.D.’s journey within the collection and her life. Her androgynous, creative power waited for her despite the ocean’s “teeth” that evoke the animalistic wind in “The Cliff Temple.” Now, she can write without fear. She stands in the “shore-grass” where wind whips around her ankles and the “sea-grass” tangles with it. She has arrived at the sacred landscape where her creative ego greets her.

Critics agree that “Hermes of the Ways” masks H.D.’s personal struggles, yet many miss this positive ending. Morris does state that while “H.D.’s lyrics have sometimes been read as cries out of a fragile, over-wrought isolation, they in fact enact ritual prayers or cries out to the sacred (Morris “H.D.’s Visionary Powers” 416). However, she does not elaborate on what sacredness means to H.D. or how, exactly, these ritual prayers take place. Though “Hermes of the Ways,” like “The Shrine,” appears in the first person and has no reference to a communal “we,” H.D. seeks “union” with the gods in both of these poems, making them “inclusive” and regenerative. Cyrena Pondrom also contends that H.D. draws strength from Hermes, as his “myth…embodies those skills to which she turned for the strength to remain at the boundaries of her life,” namely, the skill to write and to express empowered qualities of both genders (Pondrom 99). Terminological differences aside, these critics recognize H.D.’s strength and pursuit of the sacred in the collection and particularly in this poem.

In sum, though “Hermes of the Ways,” in the manner of Sea Garden as a whole, is “intense” and “concentrated,” it is also life giving (Friedman Penelope’s Web 54). It is healing. The fact that these poems live “outside the social order” makes them bridges to sacredness, a bridge that heals. They are not as impersonal and cold like the reality they depart from, as Friedman and others have argued. H.D. channels her unique creativity into and through these
poems; she writes her longing to be a poet but also to face the elements. They enact the spirit of
the young woman who, as William Carlos Williams famously described, ran out into the ocean
and let the waves beat her into unconsciousness. Their hardness doesn’t make them impersonal.
It makes them strong, strong enough to weather the waves, to weather struggle of being a poet in
the male-dominated modernist movement, the strength of being a woman on her own—the
strength to overcome a stillbirth and a war. Finding this strength within the collection’s
landscape helped H.D. find strength through occult writing and granted her a place in the
modernist movement; it healed and strengthened her.

H.D. carries the positivity of “Hermes of the Ways” into “Pear Tree” (CP 39) and finally
“Cities” (CP 39), the last poem of the collection. In “Cities,” she offers a glimpse of the new
world she wants to help create with her art, a world of “new beauty” and “young future
strength.” Friedman correlates this ending with the collection’s biographical response not just to
gender, but also to World War I. This poem “ushers the reader back into the social order of
civilization…the setting is mythic, the full narrative of violence is veiled, but the omnipresence
of struggle is fundamental” (Friedman Penelope’s Web 62). Here and throughout her career,
H.D. writes in response not just to personal trauma, but also to the trauma of war. H.D.’s search
for sacredness within the collection represents her desire for poetic empowerment and creativity
to unify her psyche and her culture; Sea Garden shows that she has found this power. H.D. ends
on this turn to profane reality, to take the power that she searches for in “The Shrine” and “The
Cliff Temple” and exalts in “Sea Gods” and “Hermes of the Ways” and bring it into reality.
Closing the collection with an image of a materialistic, patriarchal, war-centric world saturated
with beauty represents her belief in the positive power of occult writing. This poem closes the
collection with a sense of hope, foreshadowing the continuation of her quest to enact this sacredness.
Chapter 2: Sacred Storytelling in *The Gift*
H.D. uses the achievement apparent in *Sea Garden* to empower women in and through one of her major prose works, *The Gift*. Written during World War II and intertextually with *Trilogy*, *The Gift* narrates H.D.’s imaginative return to the Moravian community of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and it revolves around the mysterious “gift” that she believes she has inherited from her artistic mother and maternal grandmother. As many critics have pointed out, *The Gift* draws on H.D.’s understanding of Moravian Christianity, especially its espousal of peace and the notion of the human soul as feminine. Jane Augustine and others theorize that H.D.’s understanding of what she calls “the gift” in the text refers to this notion. However, H.D.’s view of sacredness is grounded in but does not revolve around Moravianism. Giftedness refers to a creative power that extends beyond organized religion. In *The Gift*, giftedness means women’s storytelling ability, a power that connects and heals.

Morris’s essay “A Relay of Power and Peace: H.D. and the Spirit of the Gift” points to this concept of giftedness, which she calls “the spirit of the gift.” Morris links H.D.’s goal of passing on a gift to transcend market economy and create spirituality to that of the New Zealand Maori gift economy (Morris “Relay” 52). Though she doesn’t extend this argument beyond *The Gift*, Morris makes a compelling argument for the way in which the memoir combats what H.D. saw as a destructive market economy and the patriarchal culture of war (59). According to Morris, H.D. centers her model of the gift exchange on a retelling of the rituals present in H.D.’s childhood informed by myth, legend, and sacred history. Her discussion of economy and exchange are key, highlighting the reciprocal nature of H.D.’s religious quest to bridge reality and the divine through texts. Morris also points out the resultant peace and healing from this exchange. Her most persuasive point about *The Gift*, though, is her statement that “because some of these rituals are accessible through the imagination, *The Gift* combines these two routes to
create a mix H.D. herself named autobiographical fantasy” (71). That said, Morris does not expound upon the significance of H.D.’s “autobiographical fantasy.” Just as H.D. mixes land and sea in Sea Garden, she mixes literary forms in The Gift.

H.D.’s use of fantasy conjures a variety of genre criticism. In Fantasy and Mimesis, scholar Kathryn Hume broadly defines fantasy as any piece of literature that is deliberately abnormal or unreal. She then adds to this definition her theory of “world-building” through mimesis in fiction (Hume xii). Fantasy creates a separate world in which readers enter through the text. Scholar Brian Attebery categorizes it as a mode of writing wherein the author constructs another world, often dream-like, that differs from normalcy or reality with the aim of enriching the reader’s life (Attebery 294). Renowned author Ursula K. Le Guin believes that fantasy in literature constitutes dream: “a different approach to reality an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence” (Le Guin 145). According to Le Guin, fantasy literature doesn’t require magic. It requires only a distinct sense of different both from standard narrative form and from narrative realism. The Gift’s lyrical prose and abrupt jumps between past and present, fact and fabrication, and dream and reality satisfies these definitions in their broadest sense. Its narrative reads sometimes like a dream and almost always in a child’s voice.

However, The Gift is not entirely a work of fantasy. It also evokes memoir—many critics have classified it as such—in its report of and reflection on H.D.’s childhood memories (Friedman Penelope’s Web 73). Friedman describes H.D.’s prose style in The Gift as a “cycle of repetition” that oscillates between memory and reflection, similar to the standard memoir but with an elliptical narrative (282). Yet Friedman, like DuPlessis, does not note the importance of storytelling both as a narrative style and as a trope within the text. H.D.’s fusion of memory and fantasy accentuates her belief in the religion of writing. Just as Sea Garden illustrates sacred
borderlands, *The Gift*’s combination of fantasy and autobiographical genres parallels her desire for the creativity to permeate reality.

Within this unique form, *The Gift* also glorifies women and especially mothers. Friedman and other H.D. critics cite *The Gift* as a feminist text and definite source of psychological healing for H.D., though they overlook the significance of storytelling within the text to this healing or to H.D.’s female empowerment. Augustine points out how H.D.’s immersion into astrology contributed to her feminism in *The Gift*. H.D. studied astrology in the 1920s and 30s, learning that the “New” or Aquarian Age began in 1910 and after the appearance of Halley’s comet. Thought of as a Woman’s Age, the Aquarian Age replaced the “patriarchal mythos of the universe” with a “female mythos centered on a mother goddess figure.” H.D. wrote *The Gift* in response to this coming of a “woman-centered mythos” (Augustine 11-12). While *Sea Garden* empowers H.D. and her androgynous vision of creativity, *The Gift* elevates the maternal elements of this vision.

Morris also gives a strong description of *The Gift* in her essay “Autobiography and Prophecy: H.D.’s *The Gift*,” where she details H.D.’s deviation from the typical definition of memoir. Morris accounts for H.D.’s “moments of self definition” that punctuate *The Gift*. She asserts that these instances “occur almost exclusively in the realm of myth,” which she calls “another dimension” apart from the material world—a sacred realm (Morris “Autobiography and Prophecy” 228-229). She does not define “the realm of myth,” although in the context of her argument, it refers to the fairy tales, Greek myths, and other stories that Hilda frequently references. In *The Gift*, not only does H.D. allude to and name these and other tales, but she also appropriates them for her own vision of religion—of stories as religion. And, just as storytelling

In essence, the act of storytelling by women and mothers in *The Gift* represents for the child Hilda what the adult H.D. views as religious practice. H.D. writes to blend sacredness into reality, just as fantasy and memoir mix in *The Gift*. Specific passages show Hilda frequently confusing fantasy stories and memories as well, and H.D.’s writing style hovers between poetry and prose. As Augustine puts it, *The Gift* “is primarily the record of a religious quest” (Augustine 3). It is a record of H.D.’s religion of writing. H.D.’s writing of *The Gift* is occult, making it a bridge that accesses the sacred, assuaging harmful divisions and empowering both women and H.D.⁴

In an early typed draft of *The Gift* stored at Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, H.D. expresses in prose the notion of sacredness blocked by the man-made world, liking *The Gift* with *Sea Garden* and with *Trilogy*. Here, in line with her sanctioning of maternity in *The Gift*, these deities are women and mothers. She states,

Beneath every temple to Zeus, in the Peloponnesus and along the western shores of Greece, there was found on excavation, without exception, some old cell or cellar or the rough ground-work of some primitive temple to the Earth Goddess, to Gaia or Maia…Beneath the externally imposed columns and corridors and polished pilasters of

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⁴ In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. reflects on division in her childhood: “There were two of everybody (except myself) in that first house on Church Street. There were the two brothers who shared the same room; the two half-brothers might turn up at any time, together; there were the two maids who slept in the room over the kitchen; there were my two parents in their room. (There was a later addition to this Noah’s Ark but my last brother arrived after this pattern was fixed in the consciousness). My father had married two times, so again, there were two wives, though one was dead. Then in later life, there were the two countries, America and England as it happened, separated by a wide gap in consciousness and a very wide stretch of sea (*TF* 31).
intellectual achievement and inheritance, is the deeper layer, the deeper temple; the cell or cella dedicated to the first deity, the primitive impulse, the primitive desire, the first love, Maira, mama, Mutter, Mut, mamalie, mimmie, Madre, Mary, Mother. (MSS 1, 43-44)

The female figures listed here have been buried. The “Earth Goddess” in particular recalls H.D.’s view of sacredness as natural and strongly associated with women. “Primitive desire” for these women likely refers to H.D.’s desire for connection with her own mother and and related longing for creative power. The entire concluding list—“Maira, mama, Mutter, mut, mamalie, mimmie, Madre, Mary, Mother” ties The Gift, which is passed on through her grandmother Mamalie, with Trilogy, which empowers the Virgin Mary. These allusions connect to Sea Garden as well: the “primitive temple” that has buried these women represents the man-made altars in Sea Garden, the presence of the profane in reality. “Imposed columns…and corridors of intellectual achievement” signify the man-made borders and divisions that contrast the sacred “earth that made us,” evoking the cliffs in “The Shrine” and “The Cliff Temple.” Intellectual achievement and rigidity also connects to the received narrative form and H.D.’s refusal to stick to the confines of genre, namely, standards imposed by men. Now, with even more strength, H.D. calls out to and embraces these women and will go on to abolish those patriarchal barriers.

The tie between gender and giftedness appears in the very first chapter of The Gift. H.D. narrates this chapter, “Dark Room,” from the first-person perspective of herself as a young child, Hilda. In an early passage, she describes observing her mother, Helen, and her grandmother crying over Fanny, Frances, and Edith, daughters who died before Hilda was born (Gift 36). Hilda believes that she has inherited the lives of these daughters, realizing that if she was “indeed

5 See Wheeler, Friedman, and Hollenberg for further discussions of H.D.’s relationship with her mother, Helen Doolittle.
Frances come back,” then she “would be like Mama; in a sense, [she] would be Mama” (my emphasis). Hilda feels a sense of inheritance and kinship with her mother and the women in her family that transcends normal familial bonds. She wants to be her mother; she wants to be gifted. She then wonders “why was it always a girl who had died?” (37). This question refers to both past daughters and to the unnamed “girl who was burnt to death” in the Bethlehem seminary near her home (35). Hilda concludes, “the gift was there but the expression of the gift was somewhere else” (37). Though she does not explain what the gift means here, she is certain that it passes through the maternal line. This passage initiates her search for understanding of the gift, a knowledge that The Gift communicates.

If women transfer giftedness, then it makes sense that The Gift subverts patriarchal narrative style as well as specific men’s expectations for H.D. as a writer. Prominent H.D. critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis explores H.D.’s motivations for beginning to write prose in her feminist analysis of H.D.’s life and work, H.D.: The Career of that Struggle. Because Aldington and other male peers discouraged her from writing prose, crafting The Gift constituted a large risk for H.D. “Gender and genre” thus “intersect” in H.D.’s prose. H.D.’s series of memoir writings exhibit her breaking away from the cycle of “romantic thralldom” that DuPlessis believes, perhaps narrow-mindedly, inhibited H.D.’s feminism before World War II. Though she does not point out specific moments or examples of this empowerment within the content of the text, DuPlessis is right to point out how H.D. in The Gift “claims” her female “otherness in writing prose,” especially autobiographical fantasy, instead of poetry, the form that first defined her (DuPlessis 34).

In Penelope’s Web, Friedman agrees with and expands upon DuPlessis’s description of H.D.’s feminism in The Gift. Friedman describes H.D.’s prose in The Gift—with its frequent
repetition, lack of clear temporal context, odd syntax and grammar—as a semiotic, subversive, and consequently feminist narrative. Friedman describes the clear boundaries between the real world and the poet’s mind in H.D.’s imagist work, contrasting it with her feminist prose that “perpetually engages with both the modern world and with the unconscious” (Friedman *Penelope’s Web* 82). She doesn’t account for the very real presence of a profane reality in *Sea Garden*, with its man-made altars and vision of regenerated London in “Cities.” However, her discussions of H.D.’s maternal transference and the presence of H.D.’s sessions with Freud that underlie her glorification of maternity in *The Gift* are useful. According to Friedman, this “talking cure” that H.D. experienced in her extensive sessions with Freud stimulated what she calls H.D.’s “writing cure” or self-empowerment in *The Gift* and in *Trilogy* (93). Storytelling heals H.D.

Friedman’s earlier work expounds upon the subversive nature of H.D.’s prose as a response to her discourse with Freud as well. She asserts in *Psyche Reborn* that H.D. bases *The Gift* on Freud’s belief in “a universal unconscious mind unifying all peoples of the world” and manifesting itself in “sensitive” persons, especially those in Bethlehem’s history labeled “gifted,” and that H.D. saw herself as one of these few (Friedman *Psyche Reborn* 8). This notion of the universal unconscious mind speaks to H.D.’s goal of fostering unity through writing. She notes but fails to elaborate on the exact meaning of “gift” or “gifted” to H.D. She focuses her thorough analysis on the psychoanalytic processes H.D. underwent with Freud as represented by tropes in *The Gift*. Friedman and DuPlessis both point to the exaltation of otherness and lyrical discourse in *The Gift*. However, neither critic details the rationale behind this particular discourse, the purpose behind the liminality in H.D.’s view of religion. Both critics may also underestimate the importance of religion—of writing as religious practice—to H.D.’s feminism.
Hilda describes the sacred power of words and stories in a later passage in “Dark Room,” when she recounts a memory of playing a spelling game with her brother. The game “was a way of making words out of words, but what it was, was a way of spelling words, in fact it was a spell” (Gift 42). In this scene, Hilda does not refer to spoken words, but rather to words that are *spelled*. Diction of “spell” links written words with magic; words have the power to incite creation and change. Like her older self, Hilda sees the magic inherent in words and word play. The adult H.D. sees also words as hermetic clues interspersed throughout the world and her own texts, as made apparent in *Trilogy*. Moreover, in a subsequent period of reflection, she states, “in these flash-backs, we have the ingredients of the gift” (42). “Flash-backs” again suggest the dream-like quality that makes *The Gift* autobiographical fantasy: it describes the memory of a memory. Stating that “flash-backs” create or access the gift means that *The Gift*—itself a flash-back—enacts the magic that it describes.

Later, Hilda connects this power to art and to women. She asks her Uncle Hartley about the gift, to which he replies, “Artists are people who are gifted.” Uncle Hartley is a talented musician, satisfying his own definition of giftedness. Though H.D. certainly thinks that men can be talented artists, giftedness in *The Gift* necessarily incorporates and exalts women: they carry giftedness inside of them and pass it on. Hilda then asks Uncle Hartley if “ladies can be just the same as men.” This question shows the young H.D. questions gender roles, aligning with adult H.D.’s goal of communicating “female otherness,” as DuPlessis has shown, as well as her androgynous identity in *Sea Garden* (DuPlessis 34). It also reveals the link between women and giftedness: Uncle Hartley replies, “Why, yes, ladies write books…like Louisa Alcott and like Harriet Beecher Stowe,” female authors (Gift 34). The expression of the gift means women’s creative expression through a story, whether told, or in this case, written.
The mention of Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* later in “Dark Room” reinforces this notion. Hilda suggests that the play itself participates in story’s sacred work. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* also implies that contacting the divine through the story incites healing: both the novel and the play aim to promote racial equality. Indeed, while watching *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a play in Bethlehem, Hilda feels as though she is “in Church,” a reverence that the local university boys cannot understand (46). Likening this experience to Church makes her experience holy. Next, she relates the character of “Little Eva” to “a princess in [her] fairy-book.” It is a book that “the University boys didn’t have…they didn’t know how to look at pictures, or to see things in themselves and then to see them as if they were a picture” (47). This scene conflates plays, stories, and religion and exhibits Hilda’s female self-empowerment.

Next, Hilda again emphasizes how it is stories themselves that bring her to this divine place. She calls this place the “kingdom” of “living inheritance,” a heaven that is open to all, foreshadowing her journey to this heaven in *Trilogy*. This phrase connotes the kingdom of heaven and the text’s trope of inheritance. The divine gift is passed from mother to child and rains alive in the world. Additionally, it has been “buried under the accumulated rubble of prescribed thinking,” where “prescribed thinking” is tradition (50). Since rubble alludes to the destruction of war, Hilda connects patriarchy and violence as hiding the shared and sacred place. This place

is one of those things you really do actually find in your Grimm or your Andersen; it is not just glimpsed in a crystal-gazing ball, out of an Arabian Night’s story; it does exist. (50)

Stories allow creativity to “exist” in reality. Use of the second person here as elsewhere invites the reader to think that H.D.’s story, *The Gift*, is also real, despite its departure from reality and
from historical accuracy (the latter becomes apparent in Chapter 5). H.D. aims to make The Gift “one of those things,” one of those communal and sacred truths, that “you really do actually find” while reading a fairy tale. She wants her texts, like these stories, to transport the reader into the kingdom of living inheritance, the world that is open to all who are living. She wants The Gift to foster human connection.

The next passage clarifies this goal. Hilda reflects “there must be a beginning, there is a Gift waiting, someone who must inherit the Gift which passed us by,” emphasizing the importance of transference to the text, as the gift passes from Helen to Hilda as well as the reason that H.D. writes The Gift. She writes to create a portal to the sacred. “Someone,” she declares,

…must reveal secrets of thought which combine a new element; science and art must beget a new creative medium. Medium? Yet we must not step right over into the transcendental, we must crouch near the grass and near to the earth that made us. And the people who created us. (50)

The “Medium” is the storyteller. The image of crouching near the earth points to H.D.’s vision of the natural world as sacred and free of profane divisions. Crouching near the earth means turning inward to one’s mind where this same sacredness wholeness dwells. This creativity is natural, like the grass. Diction of “must” implies that storytellers and writers’ duty is ordained, which H.D. emphasizes in Trilogy. Here, she notes, “we must not step right over into the transcendental,” she refers again to the necessity of a go-between, as in Sea Garden’s liminal landscapes and the form of The Gift itself.

H.D. then writes, “a bit of me can really ‘live’ something of a word or phrase, cut on a wall at Karnak,” alluding to her trip to Greece and the associated visionary experience. Hilda
connects vision to words’ ability to transport readers and listeners. They aren’t just visionary. Stories are regenerative. Through words and phrases in stories,

…a little cell in [her] brain responds to a cell of someone’s brain, who died thousands of years ago. A word opens a door, these are the keys, it is like that little flower that Mrs. Williams called a primula, that Mamalie called himmelschlussel or keys-of-heaven. (51)

Words unlock portals to heaven, making it a safe haven that never ceases to exist, even as physical bodies die. H.D. makes this reference to the “keys-of-heaven” not to imply a Moravian heaven, but rather a world healed by creativity. Stories access creative power and they bring it to reality, where it is natural and beautiful, like blossoms.

H.D. continues to illuminate the power of stories as *The Gift* progresses. A chapter omitted from the *New Directions* edition and titled “Fortune Teller” recounts a scene from her mother Helen’s memory. Specifically, it narrates Helen’s visit to a psychic, reinforcing the aforementioned trope of vision to *The Gift* and H.D.’s occultism generally: though Helen has not yet met or married H.D.’s father, the fortune teller informs her that she will have a child who is gifted. Later references to this chapter show that Hilda (H.D.) sees herself as this child. This chapter underscores the maternal transference of giftedness. The epigraph, “…tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, Sermons in stones, and good in everything,” outlines H.D.’s view of “books” as religious. It also tightens the knot between sacredness and the natural world (*Gift* 56).

In the following chapter, “The Dream,” Hilda describes a nightmare (83). This chapter represents H.D.’s use of liminal genre in *The Gift*: describing a nightmare coupled with the elliptical narrative itself recalls both Le Guin and Hume’s definitions of fantasy—a deliberate departure from reality within fiction’s already mimetic world. Relating a moment from H.D.’s
own life with the purpose of opening up this experience to readers evokes memoir as well.

Again, this in-between genre underscores the text’s goal of joining fantasy—creativity—with reality. Before detailing the nightmare, Hilda cautions that “thought wedded or welded inviolably to the word…may give no true expression of the emotion or of the dream-picture.” Rather than describing the dream, the “dream-picture” must be “projected by the mind,” through stories. It must “photograph the very essence of life, of growth, of the process of growing.” The “dream-picture” represents a text. A text cannot—must not—aim to capture sacred power, but rather must project it. Religion is the “process of growing;” it is creative, natural, and good: *Trilogy* will connect this process—the sacred—to metamorphoses and love (83).

This scene also demonstrates H.D.’s narrative goal. DuPlessis argues that “the otherness” or strange, sacred element of “psychic events” during her trip to Corfu heightened H.D.’s fascination in “the movement of the mind through memories, visions,” and “dreams.” It thus makes sense that she chose to add “The Dream” to her text. The idea of writing “a particular but incontrovertible real event in thought, imagination,” or “memory” obsessed H.D. (DuPlessis 34). H.D. wrote to communicate not facts but truth. In a later passage, H.D. calls this process “myth-making,” relating it to the image of the “branch of mock-orange blossom.” Hilda sees this branch as representative of “creation in the truer sense.” Creation in its truer sense is the sacred realm, the “the un-walled province of the fourth-dimensional” reached through storytelling in *The Gift* (*Gift* 84). This flowering branch evokes the blossoming keys-of-heaven and their connection to words and stories. Mythology here does not refer to a specific religion or myth but rather the idea of myth, of a story that is fictional yet attempts to illustrate a timeless, allegorical truth. Hilda then concludes that, through storytelling, “Mythology [becomes] actuality.” Stories bring sacred truth into reality filled with the “lie of men’s thoughts” (*CP* 31).
The next scene stresses the importance of women in this transfer and the hope that it results in. Hilda describes the childhood memory of being read from *Tanglewood Tales* at school, stating, “Pandora let all evil things out of the box but there was one good thing left; Miss Helen explained it was a myth. The good thing left was hope” (*Gift* 94). The fact that this teacher shares H.D.’s mother’s name is no coincidence. This passage also articulates the central goals of *The Gift* and *Trilogy*: to create a myth that dispels evil, leaving the reader with hope. Shortly afterward, Hilda’s mother accidentally gives away a treasured book of fairy tales. Hilda recalls how, while “it was only an old book,” the loss distressed her. “The pictures came true in [her] head” as she read the book. The story enters into Hilda’s mind and becomes real, paralleling H.D.’s goal for *The Gift*. Hilda also remembers her mother telling her “Grimm was the children’s Bible.” Tales empower mothers and maternity. The young H.D. likens stories to religion. To Hilda, Grimm “was fairy-tales…so was the Greek myth *Tanglewood Tales*.” Fairy tales and myths are “the same kind of thing.” They are “real” (101). Hilda also remembers that it was her mother who introduced her to this relationship between religion and storytelling, just as her mother read her the myth of Pandora’s box.

Chapter 4, “Because One Is Happy,” serves a similar purpose. It opens with a return to the present day. As in “Cities,” H.D. brings her narrative back to a profane reality as a reminder of the purpose that writing should serve. First, she describes an “intolerable” noise that makes her feel suffocated. But in this moment when her body is “frozen,” she discovers that her mind has “wings” and can depart from this enclosure. She exclaims, “fate out of an old Myth is beside me, Life is a very real thing, Death a personified Entity.” Stories allow H.D. to live without fear of death, in this case by bombing. With this realization, “exaltation rises like sap in a tree,” and she feels “happy.” Diction of “exaltation” reinforces myths as bridges, as religious (110). The
concluding pages return to a childhood memory. In an early typed draft of *The Gift*, H.D. elaborates on the concluding scene of “Because One if Happy,” where she and an old man are in rowboat and she observes a multitude of lilies. Hilda describes the feeling of her “mousy unimportant duck-tails turned up slightly, leaving her neck free to that almost scimitar feeling of the sun across it.” However,

…such a scimitar was held, threateningly aloft, in one of the smaller pictures or tail-ending to a chapter in their *Arabian Nights*. Some lady would, but didn’t, have her head cut off because she went on telling stories; fairy-stories or some sort of story-telling saved her life. Life is saved in such moments. In such a moment, life was made. (MSS 1, 33-34)

Throughout *The Gift*, H.D. proves that the conclusion she drew as a child remains true. The woman in *Arabian Nights* saves her own life through storytelling, just as H.D. seeks to unify and save her own culture through writing. In the published text, Hilda reads *Arabian Nights* with her caretaker Ida and asks if Aladdin is a girl. When Ida says no, Hilda concludes that perhaps “it is only a boy who may have a wish” by rubbing the wishing lamp (*Gift* 113). Hilda questions gender roles that would inhibit her ability to elicit magic, the question answered in *Sea Garden*. This detail precedes a description of the nightmare. Her voice slips into the adult’s narrative, praying to “Mary, Maia, Mut, Mutter,” saying “this is Gaia, this is the beginning.” She asks these goddesses to “pray for us,” using the inclusive first-person of *Sea Garden* that continues into *Trilogy*. Hilda’s nightmare connects to the aforementioned fear of noise, of death by bombing. H.D. writes this prayer for herself and for her readers (113-114, my emphasis).

The pivotal Chapter 5, “The Secret,” elucidates H.D.’s goal of showing the healing power of stories within *The Gift* and making *The Gift* one of these stories. This chapter also proves
Morris’s proposal of H.D.’s “gift economy” and her broader argument that H.D. animates her work with “imagination and love” to promote peace (Morris “Relay” 59). The chapter tells the story of a story; it recounts the scene in which Mamalie tells Hilda the story of the Moravian Sifting Time, when the Moravian missionaries in America allegedly formed a peaceful treaty with the Native Americans in Bethlehem. H.D. writes of this chapter in her notes to the complete text: “the child through the grandmother makes a link,” a medium, between the various significances of “Seidel.” These meanings included her family name as well as the common German word for tankard, a vessel, which in turn alludes to lots or ballot-boxes (Gift 260). Playing on Seidel’s multiplicity of significances leads H.D. to “drawing lots” as her mother did “when she was caught up in her own reverie,” similar to Mamalie in this chapter (261). Allusion to her mother’s trance connects her mother to Mamalie and to Hilda, further tying maternal influence and the power that it brings. Furthermore, as Chris Gavaler has shown, the historical accuracy of the story as H.D. tells is certainly flawed, in that the Moravians never appropriated Native American reveals as her story in The Gift suggests (Gavaler 96). H.D. narrates her idealized version of gift transmission to make her own text, The Gift, a myth or parable like the ones that she references, namely, a text that enacts harmony. H.D.’s notes reveal that, in writing The Gift, she researched the “Myths and Legends of the North American Indians,” revealing again her value in stories as religion (Gift 247). Taking on Native religious practices mirrors her desire to enact the sacred in reality and heal.

H.D.’s glorification of storytelling appears even before Mamalie begins the tale. When she enters a trance-like state and confuses Hilda with other of their female relatives, Hilda urges her along. Mamalie’s entrance into a trance also suggests that she herself is in the liminal place; she is a medium. Hilda tries to calm her grandmother with a fairy tale. She says to Mamalie,
“I was thinking I’d ask you to read. I was thinking, I’d get my new fairy-tales…I’ll get Hans Christian Anderson.”

I said again, “I’ll get Hans Christian Anderson.” (Gift 153)

The story of gift exchange revolves around Anna von Pahlen, wife of the head Moravian missionary, and Morning Star, the wife of the Indian chief. Like Morris asserts about The Gift broadly, Gavaler points out that this story constitutes an “ambiguous mixture of reality and fantasy” (Gavaler 96). H.D. deliberately muddles her narrative to make it all the more dream-like, allowing The Gift as a whole to serve the same purpose as the stories it mentions.

A passage in the following chapter exemplifies this tactic and the ways that it empowers women. Hilda states:

…the Indians took Anna von Pahlen into their mysteries in exchange for Morning Star. I mean, Anna was Morning Star in their mysteries, and Morning Star…was Angelica which was another name of Anna von Pahlen, who was really Mrs. John Cammerhof…

(Gift 88-89)

According to Augustine, Anna von Pahlen is woman with whom “H.D. most identifies.” H.D. envisions “her as the Gift’s chief bearer who unites in peace the Native Americans and the European settlers” (Augustine 13). This sense of identification emphasizes women’s ability to promote healing, or in this case, peace. It therefore makes sense that Hilda describes Mamalie as “talking like something in a book.” (Gift 156). Similarly, when Mamalie confuses H.D. with their other female relatives, H.D. feels interwoven with those women. After Mamalie tells her the story of the gift transference, Hilda concludes:

Now I understood I had another name; now I was Agnes, now I would really be Agnes and Aunt Aggie’s name was Agnes Angelica, so perhaps they had named her Angelica
because of Anna von Pahlen, then I would be part of Anna von Pahlen, too, and I would be part of the ceremony at Wunden Einland and I would be Morning Star along with Anna. (164)

Immersed in the story, Hilda sees herself as a member of this chain of women, recalling her desire to “be” her mother at the beginning of the text. She finds this relationship through the act of storytelling, like the occult writing that characterizes her career. In this scene and through The Gift, H.D. attempts to place herself in the context of the story being told. Hilda tries, through verbal storytelling, to become a medium. Likewise, by writing the scene, H.D. attempts to make The Gift a bridge.

Friedman highlights the significance of Mamalie as the storyteller in Penelope’s Web, writing, “Mamalie’s gift fills in the gap in consciousness left by Helen’s inability to read the signs of her daughter’s talent…She embodies as well the Great Mother to whom the little girl appeals in the snake dream,” and, later, the “Great mother to whom the narrator prays during the bombing raid” (Friedman Penelope’s Web 345). When Mamalie tells the story and transfers the gift, she becomes a medium. Additionally, Mamalie’s position as the storyteller, the authoritative position that Hilda takes on as well signifies The Gift’s broader female empowerment. After Mamalie concludes the story, Hilda randomly recalls and recites the opening line of the first poem that she memorized. She realizes that this recitation relates to Mamalie’s story, to the gift: “this is something like that.” The words of the poem “were acting something” (Gift 169-170).

Again, H.D. shows words as portals. They can (en)act sacredness. Mamalie’s story felt to Hilda “as if she had been there at that meeting” between the Moravians and the Indians (170). Mythology is actuality. The story transports her to a scene that H.D. views as sacred. Hilda sees herself as physically present at the passage of the gift between the Moravians and the Indians,
just as H.D. sees her texts as links between reality and the sacred. Then, Mamalie says, “it was cool in the room...[she] felt that [she] wasn’t burning up any more” (177). Telling the story soothes her.

In the final chapter, H.D. recalls the story of the Sifting Time “clearly” amidst the intense fear that she and Bryher feel during the London Blitz (213). Augustine writes “H.D.’s greatest fear” throughout The Gift is “death by fire in a bombing raid,” as this would result in “the loss to the world of [her] legacy...the divine Gift” (Augustine 24). She fears primarily that Bryher—her “heritage”—and her daughter will be killed (Gift 217). Referring to Bryher as her “heritage” along with her own daughter accentuates the same sense of maternal kinship that she experiences when Mamalie tells her the story of the gift transference. It also references the “kingdom of living inheritance,” the link between women, divinity, and truth (50). She fears that she will lose the sacredness she has found in her female companions. The fear displayed in this passage reveals H.D.’s fear of a reality without stories. Yet, in the following passage, separated by a page break to signify a time lapse and a mental shift, the act of writing strengthens her. She realizes that she has not lost the gift. Rather, “she found it and passed it on,” and “it is a victory gift, finished a few weeks after D-Day” when “American joined Europe to end the nightmare of war and make way for the dawn of a peaceful world” (Augustine 24). Just as Sea Garden ends with hope, as H.D. the speaker finds her sacred power, The Gift ends with the victory of completing a story.

Reading The Gift as a feminist text that promotes storytelling and maternity emphasizes H.D.’s religion of writing and the mission of career. As seen through her blending of genre and her treatment of in The Gift, this religion is writing. Sacredness is the natural creativity that,
when discovered, heals and fosters hope. Since Hilda narrates this notion throughout the text, *The Gift* both describes and enacts sacredness. It also empowers women and H.D. Writing *The Gift* “clear[ed] up the tangles of brushwood in the forest” of H.D.’s memory. It allowed her to “step into the clearing as the clairvoyant poet of *Trilogy*” (Friedman *Penelope’s Web* 282).

H.D. states this goal in an often-cited scene in *Tribute to Freud*, where she tells Freud about a dream wherein she sees the Princess who discovers the baby Moses afloat in a basket. His interpretation of this dream prompted her to ask: “Do I wish myself in the deepest unconscious or subconscious layers of my being, to be the founder of a new religion?” (*TF* 37). The answer is yes. As Augustine, after connecting the Moravian conception of femininity with giftedness in *The Gift*, writes, “H.D., the initiate, becomes a conduit by which that consciousness” shared by all peoples “may descend, bringing light to our dark, dense, material world. In this context, she might have wanted at least unconsciously to ‘found a new religion’” (Augustine 8). Indeed, as *Sea Garden* introduces, *The Gift* elaborates on, and *Trilogy* completes, H.D. very consciously wanted to found a new religion. *The Gift* heightens the empowerment of *Sea Garden*; it furthers her quest of finding and bringing back sacredness “to a world in need of healing” (Friedman *Penelope’s Web* 312). Storytelling in and through *The Gift* builds upon the message that she searches for in *Sea Garden* and endows her with the strength and vision of this creativity that she projects in *Trilogy*, the text of her religion of writing.
Chapter 3: Founding a New Religion in Trilogy
Between 1941 and 1946, H.D. wrote to her close friend Norman Holmes Pearson, “you know that the ‘writer’ is the original rune-maker, the majic-maker [sic]:” her “words are sacred” (Hollenberg 31-32). Here, H.D. states the core of her own quest, which culminates in Trilogy. Originally published as three separate long poems, The Walls Do Not Fall, Tribute to the Angels, and The Flowering of the Rod, Trilogy creates a feminist text that shows writing as religious, an idea expressed metaphorically in Sea Garden and through storytelling and memory in The Gift. It also unifies the tropes and concerns of the aforementioned texts. Part of this achievement derives from Trilogy’s focus on female gender authority, it differs both from the male-centered poetics of her male contemporaries and from the more implicit feminism of her earlier works.\(^6\)

Specifically, Trilogy shows how patriarchal Christianity and the English language itself devalue women. After redefining gender in Sea Garden and exalting women and maternity in The Gift, Trilogy is the sexual act of H.D.’s career. It becomes more than a conduit; it becomes an instructional text that outlines and enacts H.D.’s religion of writing.

In The Walls Do Not Fall, H.D. leads a band of initiates who show the necessity of writing to create unity and counter war. Alchemical transformation in Tribute to the Angels creates a feminist language, consequently resurrecting a Lady who is emblematic of a distinctly feminine, creative power that is open to all: she is H.D.’s emblem of sacredness. Finally, The Flowering of the Rod takes this new language and with it retells the story of Christ’s birth, re-centering the epiphany on Mary Magdalene and Kaspar, two minor characters from the scriptural story. Revising this story confirms her view of poetry as salvation and therefore marks H.D.’s completion of her quest. H.D. empowers women, poets, and, through this process—through the resultant (pro)creation of Trilogy—she empowers herself.

\(^6\) See Friedman’s Psyche Reborn 211-212.
Many H.D. critics have traced the feminist and/or religious goals that motivate *Trilogy*. In *Psyche Reborn*, Friedman explores H.D.’s occult research, visions of the 1920s, and psychoanalysis with Freud, citing all as stimuli for *Trilogy*. She argues that these influences come together in a hermetic mysticism grounded in the speaker and her band of initiates’ search for a religious wisdom “born of one mother,” a maternal power that Friedman analyzes in psychoanalytic terms (Friedman *Psyche Reborn* 214). Friedman also points out that these initiates “are all poets,” that H.D. parallels the “condemnation of poetry as escapist” with the condemnation of the occult. She calls this “H.D.’s defense of religious poetry,” but her argument overlooks the significance of this religious poetry or, rather, poetry as religion to H.D. in *Trilogy* and in her career (222).

DuPlessis focuses on H.D.’s feminism in *Trilogy* and specifically what she calls H.D.’s “assumption of female gender authority” in the long poem. This authority builds throughout the first two sections, resulting in “female revelation” with the vision of the Lady at the end of *Tribute to the Angels* (DuPlessis 86). She also lays out H.D.’s goals within *Trilogy*: affirming the necessity of art, religion, and medicine in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, subverting the dominant narrative of male gods in *Tribute to the Angels*, and “rebalancing the religious and prophetic tradition between the genders” in *The Flowering of the Rod*. These descriptions as well as DuPlessis’s conclusion that H.D. “is an anti-patriarchal symbolist” are accurate yet perhaps too narrow in scope. As in her discussion of *The Gift*, Duplessis’s argument does not link these feminist motives with H.D.’s occult quest motives, namely, her goal of unifying both men and women while showing writing as religious practice (89).

According to prominent feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Trilogy* represents both H.D.’s female and poetic empowerment, specifically, her entry into the male
modernist circle and thus her “rebirth” as a poet (Gilbert and Gubar 188). They outline this development in the third installment of their series No Man’s Land, labeling H.D. in Trilogy a “poet-priestess” on a quest of “spiritual growth” in Trilogy. “Priestess” comes from their discussion of H.D.’s allusions to the Pythoness at Delphi. According to Gilbert and Gubar, the speaker of Trilogy, like the Pythoness, serves as a sharer of “hidden knowledge” as well as an “interpreter of the divine” (188-9). This characterization of H.D. as a divine interpreter is strong, and their analysis of Trilogy laid fundamental groundwork for H.D. scholars that have followed. However, Gilbert and Gubar cite Trilogy as the first example of H.D.’s poetic empowerment, negating the H.D.’s strength in Sea Garden. And, more generally, their approach to H.D.’s feminist and religious motives is not holistic; they do not define what they see as “divine” or “hidden knowledge,” and, like other critics, they do not detail the importance of writing and the way that it informs (and accesses) this divine knowledge.

In her article “Signaling: Feminism, Politics, and Mysticism in H.D.’s War Trilogy,” Morris details the central argument of How to Live, What to Do: that cultural reconstruction is the central goal of H.D.’s work. Morris points out critics’ overlooking of the interplay of feminism and mysticism in Trilogy (Morris 127). After outlining the joint cultural and anthropological research informing her argument, Morris asserts,

The [religious] politics of Trilogy engage us not as isolated inward individuals but as citizens who share...[a set of reflexive languages] that construct our collective desires and possibilities. What makes H.D.’s epic remarkable...is that these desires and possibilities are not only mystical and political but feminist as well. (129)

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7 The Pythoness was an oracle at the temple of at Delphi who made prophetic utterances on a golden tripod (Barnstone 173).
Morris contends that H.D. in Trilogy signals readers to consider their violent, materialist “impulses that bring culture into crisis,” calling for communal action against these impulses (133). She charts H.D.’s combined concerns with feminism, religion, and politics as well as her mission of unity and healing. That said, she does not mention the centrality of writing and poetry to this signaling act that Trilogy performs. Specifically, her essay does not explain how occultism and occult writing in particular work to enact the cultural healing and community building that she describes.

Elizabeth Anderson builds upon many of Morris’s proposals in her exploration of the work of H.D. and Helene Cixous, H.D. and the Modernist Religious Imagination. A significant portion of Anderson’s work explicates the role of Hermeticism and H.D.’s reference to and worship of Thoth/Hermes and Hermes Trismesgistus, especially in Trilogy. Her most compelling reading of Trilogy occurs in her explanation of H.D.’s use of ritual: Anderson asserts that, in Trilogy, “the connection between writing and ritual is emphasized by the invocation of Hermes/Thoth as sacred inventor of writing and the alchemical transformations” of words that occur in Tribute to the Angels. Anderson is right to explore the role of Hermes in H.D.’s work, although she underestimates the importance of writing apart from Hermeticism to H.D.’s view of religion beyond Trilogy. H.D. glorifies Hermes in Trilogy because of his identity as androgynous god of writing and therefore emblematic of her overarching religion (Anderson 83).

Building upon Sea Garden and The Gift, Trilogy demonstrates what H.D.’s belief in the regenerative power of writing, especially poetry. As evident in The Gift as well, H.D. cultivated this characterization of sacredness partially from the Moravian teachings that the soul or anima is feminine. As in the aforementioned texts, H.D. also glorifies women’s creative power as mothers

8 Thoth was the scribe of ancient Egyptian Gods.
and as writers. In essence, H.D. does not just revise mythology and religion. She creates a new, feminist language and demonstrates how to use it. Through her religion of writing in and through *Trilogy*, H.D. completes her religious quest of fostering human connection through writing while empowering women, writers, and herself.

**The Walls Do Not Fall**

In *The Walls Do Not Fall*, H.D. lays *Trilogy*’s foundation, showing how Christianity and the English language debase poetry and women, both of which are necessary for healing. The first poem sets the stage for those that follow and introduces the text’s formal and thematic concerns. It begins:

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…

These lines locate *The Walls Do Not Fall* in World War II London, the reality that *Trilogy* responds to. This poem contains images of violence (“guns”) destruction (“incident” refers to a
bombing) and industry (“rails”). This profanity contrasts the frequent connection of gods and goddesses with the natural world that weave throughout the section and increase as Trilogy progresses. In addition, “manna” connotes hunger. Hunger, a result of wartime rationing, is a motif in The Walls Do Not Fall, connoting both physical and religious deprivation.

This poem introduces Trilogy’s formal patterns as well. Parentheses allow linkage between H.D. and her poet-initiates and “you.” In The Gift’s final chapter, where H.D. writes, “I knew the wall outside (not our wall) had fallen,” using parenthesis and first-person pronouns to imply the safety of herself and her female companions (Gift 210). In Trilogy, H.D. aims to unify an entire culture in kinship. Parentheses represent Trilogy’s central trope of partial enclosure, of openness within a strong, contained unit such as a jar (or a text). In addition, triplets highlight the sense of partial enclosure incited by parentheses, as does the fact that Trilogy is a book in three parts.

This poem also presents Trilogy’s thematic concerns with endurance and search, concerns present in H.D.’s work since Sea Garden. H.D. observes that “the Luxor bee, chick and hare” continue on an “unalterable” journey in spite and because of surrounding violence. As mythological symbols of fertility, they also represent H.D.’s concern with creativity and procreativity. Diction of “unalterable” in relation to their journey contrasts the overarching concern with metamorphoses and change that H.D. seeks to enact with her new religion. For instance, the image of a “stone papyrus,” which connotes writing and, more specifically, an ancient tablet quite literally set in stone, symbolizes the traditions that H.D. in Trilogy will alter. H.D. commences her use of the communal pronouns “us” and “we” these lines as well: here as in Sea Garden and The Gift, they contribute to her goal of harmony. H.D. presents the need for resurrection of the soul—the middle line of a triplet or the word within the parentheses. She
wants redeem “the heart” that World War II has “burnt out,” to unify “fissures,” to answer the series of questions initiated by “what saved us, what for?” (WDNF 1).

The following poems begin the poet-initiates’ quest to answer these questions. The change from triplets to couplets marks this first step. Use of the couplet form, as many critics have shown, connects H.D. to the Pythoness, a poet, Priestess, and visionary figure that H.D. relates to. In her essay “No Rules of Procedure: The Open Poetics of H.D.,” Alicia Ostriker argues that Trilogy’s form enhances its inclusive message. Ostriker continues that, while Trilogy is in free verse, its couplets create “a fairly high degree of…order, experienced visually on the page and audibly in the mind’s ear.” H.D.’s constant play of sound and rhythm enacts Trilogy’s religious doctrine of human connection through poetry. The lines are also, generally speaking, nonmetrical, which results in a “form that is neither fixed nor free, but a combination” (Ostriker “No Rules” 339-340). Trilogy operates in an in-between form, representing the occult means of accessing divinity stressed in Sea Garden and The Gift. Her form mirrors her desire for unity. Ostriker also points out how this closed-but-open form recalls but does not replicate the tight lyrics of Sea Garden. This difference makes sense, as Trilogy expresses H.D.’s embracing of poetic autonomy and is thus by nature more open than Sea Garden, despite the definite empowerment of the latter.

Couplets also correspond to this first section’s tropes of doubleness. Repeated puns, references to poetry and writing; images combining male and female symbols appear consistently throughout Trilogy and especially in The Walls Do Not Fall. For example, “Dev-ill” puns devil, or evil, with illness. The religious figure of evil connotes to the illness that H.D. heals with poetry, with Trilogy. The second poem references Hermes as one of the “gods” who “always face two-ways.” In Trilogy, as in Sea Garden, these ways represent, broadly, men and
women. Unification of these “ways” is “the true rune, the right-spell,” which then, in the next lines, links to the beauty of fertility goddesses “Isis, Aset, or Astarte” (WDNF 2). “Isis” is especially important; she “was…a mother goddess, goddess of fertility, magic, and beauty,” and was “widely worshipped for her ability to counter evil spells” (Barnstone 174). As a goddess of fertility and magic, she also recalls H.D.’s fascination with and linking of word spells and maternity in *The Gift*. These lines connect writing, fertility, and the magic of words that have the “ability to counter evil spells,” patriarchal discourse. Puns and layered meanings here and elsewhere in *Trilogy* gives H.D. and the reader “access to the language inside the language,” a hidden meaning that is both “suggestively occult” and “suggestively female” (DuPlessis 92). However, as the rest of *Trilogy* will show, this creative power is also feminist; it empowers women to for gender and sexual unity and (pro)creation, a notion represented visually by couplets.

In the second poem, H.D. distances herself from “you,” wondering, “how can you scratch out / indelible ink of the palimpsest / of past misadventure,” where “past misadventure” refers both to war and the historical, literary oppression of women. In the same manner as the stone papyrus, “palimpsest” represents H.D.’s quest in *Trilogy*: to create a language and a guide to use it, a feat accomplished by undoing the “past” myths and “values” that cause this “misadventure.” The image of a palimpsest also represents *Trilogy* itself, with its multitude of allusions to other religions and mythologies. Notably, this poem exemplifies how apostrophe in *Trilogy* relates to and differs from apostrophe in *Sea Garden*. Rather than calling out to deities, H.D. questions an unknown but common (that is to say, not divine) entity. This person could be a member of her band, or they could be the reader. Either way, H.D. commands them yet guides them, inviting them on her new adventure (WDNF 2).
H.D.’s authority increases in the next poem as she commands “let us, however, recover the Sceptre, / the rod of power,” which signifies the medicinal caduceus and, by association, Hermes. Healing thus connects to writing. The rod of power is also phallic, suggesting that H.D. will both appropriate male-dominated texts and “recover” them, meaning restore them to health. She will accomplish this feat with the “lily head” that “crowns” the rod, the first of many combined male-and-female images in Trilogy. Flowers here and throughout H.D.’s work represent her androgynous female creativity, her poetic identity. This image also foreshadows the flowering of the rod in Tribute to the Angels and the enactment of this triumph The Flowering of The Rod. The “lily crown” also links flowers with royalty. Indeed, the crowning of the rod encapsulates H.D.’s vision in and for the rest of Trilogy: exalting a religion that, with her own writing, resurrects buried female figures from male texts, a unity that, in “evoking the dead…brings life to the living” (3).

The shell poem highlights this vision. Many critics focus on the tropes of enclosure and self-commentary that this poem presents, specifically the ways that it advises against isolation and perhaps refers to the tightness of H.D.’s imagist lyrics. For instance, Morris in How to Live, What to Do also points out that the “shell-jaws” snapping “shut” in this poem stresses H.D.’s belief in the harm of divisions and invulnerability, initiating the poet’s duty to “break open” shell jaws (Morris How to Live, What to Do 47). Sandra Gubar’s essay “The Echoing Spell of H.D.’s Trilogy” designates the poem’s couplets as a “tomb of form” that mirrors the shell itself: strong but closed-off (Gubar 301). Gilbert and Gubar together acknowledge that the couplets are “distinctly unheroic,” subverting the poetic form used by her male contemporaries and showing H.D.’s feminist revision at work (Gilbert and Gubar 192). What they fail to note is how this form therefore mirrors both H.D.’s feminist poetics and Trilogy’s message of sexual unity.
H.D.’s empowerment appears within the poem’s imagery as well. The poem opens, “There is a spell, for instance, / in every sea-shell.” As in The Gift, “spell” refers to wordplay and H.D.’s association of magic with writing, a notion reinforced by the rhyme of “spell” and “shell.” H.D. then describes the thrust of the ocean on the shell, which “snaps shut” to protect itself.  

This image, with the diction of “thrust,” perhaps alludes to a woman’s fear of heterosexual intercourse. Next, she declares, “so I in my own way know / that the whale can not digest me,” followed by the advice, “be firm in your own small, static, limited / orbit.” If this poem comments in Sea Garden, then H.D. here acknowledges the power of those poems despite their “sculpted” and “chiseled” nature. These lines command self-confidence and strength despite limitations and enclosure. Despite her religious message of growing and creating, H.D. understands the difficulty of enacting this vision, how it requires strength and resolution. Through the first person, H.D. aligns herself with the shell, which also represents art, Venus, the Virgin Mary, and female genitals. In the coming poems, she will center on and tie together each of these significances. This poem therefore encapsulates H.D.’s poetic strength as well as her feminist goals in Trilogy (WDNF 4).

H.D. also highlights her goal of creating a new religion of poetry in this poem. The image of the shell associates with art and specifically poetry—Hermes transformed a shell into a lyre (Gubar 301). These lines thus symbolize the already introduced motifs of goddesses, androgyny, writing, and endurance. This endurance in the midst of pressure—such as pressure from her male contemporaries from the time of Sea Garden and onward—endows H.D. with a “pearl of great price.” This pearl is the soul, a biblical reference locating the discovery of the human soul with

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9 For a full discussion of the motif of shells in H.D., see Wheeler’s The Poetics of Enclosure.
10 In a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson in 1955, H.D. described her Sea Garden lyrics as such (Friedman Penelope’s Web 53).
discovering the kingdom of heaven through Christ.¹¹ In *The Flowering of the Rod*, H.D. replaces Christ with myrrh. As poet-critic Aliki Barnstone points out, “because of its association with immortality, sacredness, and resurrection,” H.D. “sees as poetry” (Barnstone 176). In sum: a shell, an emblem of joint femininity and strength, creates a pearl. So too H.D., an empowered woman, creates poetry in the midst of fear and challenges, and this art is sacred. Like Christ for Christianity, poetry will save H.D. and the world at war. This replacement of Christ with myrrh—with poetry—foreshadows the conclusion of *Trilogy*, a connection overlooked by the aforementioned critics. The shell poem acknowledges the empowerment of her earlier poetics and points towards the achievement of *Trilogy*. It therefore elucidates H.D.’s personal empowerment as well as her religion of writing and the goal of the entire text, of her entire career (*WDNF* 4).

The following poems reinforce the significance of the caduceus. The fifth poem refers to a “Love, a new master,” foreshadowing the resurrection of the Lady in the following sections. This master comes through a “half-open hut-door,” signifying the partial enclosure of H.D.’s religious vision and her poetic form, and he will bring “Myrrh,” poetry, linking poetry and love (5). Friedman contends that the industrious “worm” (6) in the sixth poem represents the Gnostic “soul whose human ‘garment’ is a shroud” of the profane, furthering that the seventh associates H.D.’s religious search with her desire for personal metamorphoses, as the worm turning denotes rebirth (Friedman *Psyche Reborn* 216-218). Similarly, Morris in “Signaling” makes a strong argument for H.D.’s view of writing in relation to feminism in these poems. She reasons that

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¹¹ “Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it…” (Matthew 13.45-49)
H.D. equates artists with cultural workers, a belief that H.D. learned from her Moravian upbringing.

Indeed, according to Morris and H.D., artists have “a ‘sacred power’ of the meek, weak, and humble and a special freedom within which they were expected to speculate about matters the tribe considered its ultimate questions” (my emphasis). Morris also points out that artists—specifically writers—in H.D.’s view, had a “position betwixt and between;” they “brought together the forces we have come to call sacred and secular, mystery and history, poetry and politics,” and “Trilogy is filled with these liminal beings,” these writers. This notion connects to Sea Garden’s liminal landscapes as well as The Gift’s genre and treatment of storytelling. Each text treats borderlands as the home of creativity, and Trilogy confirms that writers must inhabit those places. Morris is correct to highlight the importance of cultural unity in connection to the liminal beings and spaces of H.D.’s work. However, she does not fully elaborate on the connection between writing and sacred power, focusing her persuasive argument on the positive cultural outcome of H.D.’s religion. Nor does she negotiate the difference between political feminism in terms of writing and how it contributes to her view of gender authority and gender equality—Trilogy exhibits both but emphasizes the latter (Morris “Signaling” 125).

As The Walls Do Not Fall progresses, so does H.D.’s religious vision, primarily through increased use of natural imagery. For example, in the seventh poem, H.D. connects her religious quest with creatures that are lowly yet, like the worm, able to see “magnified beauty” of the grass, the ground (WDNF 7). Because the worm and its grass blade also allude to the caduceus, this poem suggests, like the third poem, that H.D.’s writing is sacred, beautiful, and restorative. This same tactic appears again in the twenty-third poem, where H.D. calmly states “take me home,” to the place “where the grasshopper says Amen, Amen, Amen,” linking prayer with
insects and repetitive insect chirps (23). H.D. goes to great lengths to not only argue for writing as religion but also that this religion is natural, available to even the smallest of creatures, and healing.

Morris discusses this prayerful nature of Trilogy in relation to its use of the natural environment as well. Citing anthropologist Victor Turner, she writes, “the [sacred] politics of Trilogy derive from a double-ness inherent in ritual, for ritual always, in one way or another, brings mystery to bear on the mundane” (Morris 128). Writing as religion brings creativity, which is natural, into reality, the mundane. Her essay, however, may overlook the importance of this “double-ness,” how it relates to creativity in Trilogy and in H.D.’s work more broadly. Nor does she address the contribution of poetic form to this ritualistic, meaning prayerful and repetitive, feeling. In the seventh poem, brief and non-metrical stanzas also create an incantatory and instructional tone that augments Trilogy’s religious purpose.12

The seventh poem also points to the power of the poet to read the palimpsest of “ancient rubrics,” texts that “promise…protection for the scribe.” These rubrics harken back to the stone papyrus and palimpsest of earlier poems; Trilogy describes and creates these new rubrics that protect writers for their divine work. H.D. then condemns those who denounce poets as “useless,” connecting heresy to the condemnation of poetry and writing to religion. This poem illuminates the need for a new language, one that will uncover “what words conceal,” meaning the inherent power of language to divide or to unify. In this quest, poets signify the “authentic relic, / bearers of secret wisdom.” While the writer seeks for this arcane knowledge, she also acts as relic. She embodies this relic, this text, just as Trilogy both exalts poetry as a place of access

12 According to Ostriker, “Trilogy frequently contains feminine endings, so that unstressed syllables tend to outnumber the stressed ones,” a practice that accentuates femininity while also enhancing the air of slightness [intimacy]” with the reader (Ostriker “No Rules” 245).
to the sacred and itself creates a bridge (8). In the ninth poem, H.D. implies that part of the power that words conceal—part of the “secret wisdom”—relates to female power. She references the “persistence” of Hatshepsut, a female pharaoh, symbolizing female authority that cannot be erased by patriarchal language. Again, “persistence” here points to the broader trope in *Trilogy*: H.D. calls writers to action and bids them (and herself) to endure the violence and destruction that they face during World War II. She wants her new language and religion to endure as well.

Soon afterward, H.D. exalts “Mercury, Hermes, Thoth” for the second time, stating that these figures “invented the script, letters, pallet,” alluding to scriptures and word-spells. As before, Hermes references her redefinition of gender in *Sea Garden* and her religious practice of writing. “Invented” foreshadows her new language in the following section. In the manner of the spells in previous poems and in *The Gift*, these writings are “magic” in their ability to last “on the atmosphere” as stars visible through the poem. Finally, H.D. commands that the Sword remember that “in the beginning / was the Word.” Apostrophe to the sword—a phallic, violent weapon—accentuates H.D.’s vision of the profane as man-made material. She commands an object, just as she addresses the temple or shrine that blocks her from sacredness in *Sea Garden*. As in the shell poem and others, H.D. transforms the language of scripture for her own use, elevating her scripture, *Trilogy*, over violence for its power as a word, a text, not as law of a patriarchal Christian interpretation of this text (10).

In a later poem, H.D. reminds her initiates what will result from their work: the “charm, spell, or prayer” of language can invoke “healing” (24). This sequence accentuates the connection between poetry, magic, and religion. Spells create words, and words can restore. Likewise, towards the end of *The Walls Do Not Fall*, H.D. points out that even traditional poetry itself, “fixed indigestible matter / such as shell, pearl, imagery” has been “done to death,” calling
for new writing, new poetry, while also confirming that the shell, the emblem of women, poetry, and healing in the fourth poem, will result in “nonsense…clash…fight” and death if it remains “indigestible,” meaning hard and unyielding (31). She then commands that poets “rededicate” their “gifts to spiritual realism,” a communal religious vision reached through occult questing (35). The thirty-fifth poem concludes with a biblical verse, “be ye wise as serpents,” to which H.D. adds both “Asps” and “scorpions,” again paying homage to Isis and Serget. As DuPlessis observes, “snakes” and other “spirals” in Trilogy evoke healing (DuPlessis 90). It should be also noted that this association is made possible by serpent’s symbolism of the fluidity of borderlands and liminal spaces, which H.D. exalts. Towards the end of the section, the couplet “my mind (yours), / your way of thought (mine)” once more accentuates H.D.’s belief in unity despite differences represented visually by parentheses. This vision allows for “every snow flake” to reach “its particular star” (WDNF 38). Snowflakes characterize H.D.’s view of religion: though each is different, they come from a unified, natural and therefore sacred, source. In the manner of H.D. in Trilogy and throughout her career, they journey towards their own source of light in darkness. Their connection to H.D. increases in this section with the image of “mist of snow: little white flowers,” and it will continue to have this significance for the rest of Trilogy (41).

This concluding image also expresses the necessity of finding similarities in differences or divisions—the goal of H.D.’s quest, a goal enacted through “occult” writing (31). The “schism in consciousness” must be “bridged over” through poetry (36). H.D. describes a need for change as she makes this change at the lexical level: the fortieth poem’s revision of “Osiris” to “Sirius” calls for the recovery of Isis. This word play represents the need for the recovery of women’s authority and writing from patriarchal discourse. The first section of Trilogy ends with
momentum. It appears entirely in italics, which, in this section, create a serious, almost prayerful tone, and the section that follows confirms that Trilogy’s quest has begun (43).

**Tribute to the Angels**

*Tribute to the Angels* takes the aims set out in *The Walls Do Not Fall* and puts them into action. This section weaves explicit references to the New Testament books of John and Revelation with H.D.’s vision of a mysterious Lady, a vision incited by her transformation of the English language. As in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, the first poem gives a roadmap for what the section will accomplish. It reads:

Hermes Trismegistus

is patron of Alchemists;

his province is thought,

inventive, artful and curious,

his metal is quicksilver,

his clients, orators, thieves and poets;

steal them, O orator,

plunder, O poet,

take what the old-church found

…
re-invoke, re-create
opal, onyx, obsidian,

now scattered in the shards
men tread upon. (TA 1)

Hermes Trismegistus relates to Hermes the god. He also embodies a multitude of texts, making him a suitable patron for what many critics call the “alchemy of language” that occurs in this section, the act that conjures the Lady and her embodiment of religious pluralism and openness. The idea of alchemy of language captures these poems’ processes of re-invoking sacredness that has been lost by the “old-church” and “tread upon” by male-dominated language and tradition. *Tribute to the Angels* transforms words into jewels and then back again, a lexical change that mirrors the chemical process of alchemy. H.D.’s alchemy elevates women to equal status with men, thereby elevating herself as a woman poet initiating this change (Anderson 78).

The poem begins by designating the alchemists as “orators and poets.” H.D. then continues in the authoritative first person. As she muses upon and then corrects text from John, the empowered writer becomes the empowered feminist writer revising Christian texts written by men. Initially, italics in this section separate these biblical phrases from H.D.’s text. H.D. views her own writing as equally sacred with those verses. She unifies *Trilogy* with the bible. Unlike the bible, *Trilogy* will heal through connection and growth rather than patriarchal oppression and apocryphal fire, death, and “bitter, unending wars.” These references to Revelation connect the bible to World War II London and thus escalate the need for a new religion to assuage violence (TA 1).
The early poems of *Tribute to the Angles* also refer to the seven stars, seven angels, and seven churches of Revelation. Reference to the number seven also further aligns *Trilogy* with a sacred text—Norman Holmes Pearson wrote that both H.D.’s book and the book of John contain “cited sevens…even the 43 poems of each third of H.D.’s *Trilogy* add up to seven” (Barnstone 185). It is thus fitting that the end of the seventh poem illustrates the pivotal moment of this section: H.D. declares, “this is the flowering of the rood, / this is the flowering of the reed, / where, Uriel, we pause to give / thanks that we rise again from death and live.” The flowering of the rood, also known as a cross, signifies resurrection of sacredness. Blooming flowers, emblems of H.D.’s sacred identity, join with a phallic rood, evoking the first section’s caduceus crowned with a lily head. This image of the rood “flowering” affirms that this unity creates life (*TA* 7).

The eighth poem demonstrates H.D.’s religion. In it, H.D. begins her alchemy of language, and it should therefore be quoted in full:

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 jet of flame
under, till marah-mar
are melted, fuse and join

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

Star of the Sea,
Mother. (8)

Similar to literal alchemy, H.D.’s alchemy of language is visible, methodical, and it occurs in the smallest details: letters. With it, H.D. combines and changes two distinct substances for a divine result, much like her conflation of gender in Sea Garden. Repetition of “now polish the crucible” shows H.D.’s authority as well as Trilogy’s instructional nature. Later, H.D. will show her poet-initiates what to do with this new language. Each of the following stages altars traditionally negative, sexist associations with Mary, from “bitter” to “star,” which connotes holiness and light, to “Mother,” a role that no longer brings “tears” for H.D. Here, H.D. states what she has accomplished in Sea Garden and exalted in The Gift: “Mother” brings “life.”

Apart from the trope of maternity, the sequence “mer, mere, mater, Maia, Mary” in this poem and H.D.’s body of work often represents the empowerment of female creativity that characterizes her view of sacredness. “Brine,” appearing in towards the middle of the sequence, bears significance as well, evoking the necessary salt cleansing in Sea Garden. The central commandments of this poem—central both visually and in meaning—“join,” “change,” and “alter” represent the core of H.D.’s quest: to foster unity while altering patriarchal oppression of
women through language. In her detailed discussion of this poem in the context of H.D.’s alchemy of language, Anderson asserts that H.D.’s alchemy of language illustrates words as

…material substances that can be physically manipulated. Associating that same process with Venus, Maia and Mary indicates not only that both divinity and humanity are subject to transformation, but also that we participate, with the divine, in the web of signification. We are not separate from language. (Anderson 87)

*Trilogy* levels humanity with the divine; both are connected and subject to positive change. In *Trilogy*, H.D. accesses this “web of signification” to foster this connection through language. She spins this web, as Anderson alludes to but does not state, through the religion of writing.

In the eleventh poem, H.D. instructs her initiates to “swiftly, re-light the flame” to continue the process of alchemy. She then addresses Venus, whose “name” has been “desecrated…the very root of the word shrieks / like a mandrake.” This simile ties language to the natural world: H.D. will pull out this screaming root and plant new words. The following poem begins again with “swiftly re-light the flame.” The lack of a comma in this iteration of the commandment increases H.D.’s urgency, for Venus, “hull and spar / of wrecked ships,” has “lost [her] star.” Diction of “hull” and “wrecked ships” recalls the ocean that lures and destroys men in *Sea Garden* that is sacred in *The Gift*. H.D. thus negates denigration of women as “lascivious” and instead calls her “holiest one, / Venus whose name is kin / to venerate, / venerator.” The duality of “venerate” and “venerator” implies that there is an even greater female power that Venus worships, a link emphasized by alliteration. This momentum created by linguistic kinship builds to the coming appearance of the Lady. The relation between Venus, Aphrodite, and Astarte evokes the religious syncretism and female empowerment of H.D.’s religious vision.  

13 It

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13 H.D. makes frequent allusions to Aphrodite in her earlier work as well.
also foreshadows the journey towards love—the ultimate result of H.D.’s religion—in *Trilogy*’s final section.

Additionally, full rhymes such as “flame” and “name” and “spar” and “star” followed by the slant rhyme “dawn” and “one” augment *Trilogy*’s magic. These rhymes also imply that, though the Lady will not be named, she is a “star” like the “star of the sea” in the eighth poem and the “individual star” to which snowflakes travel. Though H.D. will not “name” the Lady, she ties her to natural, light-giving substances such as stars or “flame.” The rhyme of “flame” and “name” strengthens this connection. The idea of Astarte losing her star underscores the necessity of poets to find it—the star, the Lady—and return “light at dusk” to the world at war, a divine journey contrasting the “spar” of war. Natural light in *Sea Garden* and light from Moravian candles in *The Gift* signifies divine, creative experience and enlightenment; it serves the same purpose here. The following rhyme sequence “dawn” and “one” as well as “one” and “kin” ties these three words in sound as well as meaning: the Lady, the one, will be the dawn of light (11-12).

Dialogue between H.D. and Hermes in the thirteenth poem furthers the notion of not naming as well H.D.’s equal status with Hermes. Here, H.D. observes how the alchemical jewel—which, as the result of linguistic alchemy, represents H.D.’s new language—“lives” and “breathes,” emitting “fragrance” (13). “Fragrance” associates with flowers, emblems of H.D. and her religion. She then concludes that, though Hermes asks her to name it, “there is no name” for this jewel. He concedes to her, saying, “invent it,” confirming what H.D. has already accomplished—the alchemy of language (*TA* 13). The seventeenth poem underscores this connection as well: H.D. relates “the most beautiful garden” with its “may-tree” and beautiful leaves. These leaves are “like” the “jewel in the crucible,” accentuating the link between holiness
and the natural world (17). By illustrating the garden as a sacred space, H.D. also exhibits her growth as a poet. As Anderson puts it, the flowering tree offers “an image of redemption, divinity and vision. H.D. brings together destruction and renewal and declares that divinity may be found in multiple places.” Specifically, H.D. appropriates and exalts the space that she feared and fled from in *Sea Garden* (Anderson 133).

In the following poem, H.D. describes her desire to “dematerialize” until she is “drawn into” the jewel. She does not want to capture the jewel—she wants to undo the oppression and entrapment of sacred power. Gilbert and Gubar give this poem a strong feminist reading, asserting that H.D.’s desire to dwell in the word “empowers her to add her not-named words in an ongoing process of revelation” in response to sexist biblical texts (Gilbert and Gubar 194).

While Gilbert and Gubar point out the inherent empowerment of H.D.’s revision of patriarchal scripture and language, they understate the empowerment of adding her new words to “the word” accentuates the significance of writing to H.D.’s new religion as well as the importance of ongoing-ness. These poems posit that sacredness can only be sensed and experienced through language, through texts, and that writers must continue to write. This new language is natural and therefore “growing,” like the orange-blossom of *The Gift*. It is never stagnant or completely shut off. H.D. hopes that, with her language (and with *Trilogy*), patriarchal discourse will never again oppress women’s creativity, just as H.D. will never again be enclosed by the Victorian garden. She hopes that war will never again divide the earth, that bombs will never confine her to her flat. Like a blossoming flower, she continues to write, and she encourages her initiates to do the same.

It therefore makes sense that when H.D. finally sees the Lady, she attempts to describe her but understands that she cannot capture her with words. Established depictions cannot
apprehend or “suggest her as I saw her,” says H.D. “She bore none of her usual attributes; / the Child was not with her” (32). This Lady appears to H.D. in a vision, and she is not the traditional Christian Mary. Visions here evoke the pivotal scene in The Gift where Mamalie tells Hilda the story of gift exchange in a dream-like trance. Liminal spaces—whether physical or, in this case, mental—allow access to sacredness. Moreover, displacement of the traditional maternity image illuminates Mary apart from preexisting portrayals of her and thus apart from tradition. H.D. sees the Lady “through an open window” (30). This metaphor ties the Lady to the natural world. She is also open and colorful like H.D.’s new religion and unlike the “no-colour” that begins The Walls Do Not Fall. Windows to the outside world are also a motif in The Gift. This connection evokes nature and openness as well. These poems also designate poets as those who conjure the Lady. She appears “pleased with” the group of poets, “the straggling company of the brush and quill / who did not deny their birthright,” where “birthright” stresses H.D.’s view that not only should poets continue to write and foster creativity in reality—they must.

The thirty-sixth poem begins with an allusion to The Gift: “Ah, (you say), this is Holy Wisdom, / Santa Sophia, the SS of the Sanctus Spiritus…the incarnate symbol of the Holy Ghost…smouldering—or rather now burgeoning / with flowers” (36). H.D. appropriates the Christian Holy Spirit to exhibit the Lady, sacredness embodied. This Holy Spirit harkens back to the “Holy Spirit…open to everyone” that acts as an occult “go-between” and “interpreter” in The Walls Do Not Fall (WDNF 20). Likewise, apostrophe to the reader emphasizes how this power lives within (a point emphasized by her articulation of this apostrophe in parentheses). This abstract image of the human soul also burns with its own power, “burgeoning” with new flowers. Here as in the end of section one, “flowering” signifies sacredness and its constant growth and change. Flowers also allude to Sea Garden’s flower poems, where H.D. equates her desire for
beauty and strength, early objective correlatives for her own identity. Trilogy’s flowers grow and take up space, filling the world with fragrance. This change in the nature of the flower image corresponds to H.D.’s personal, female, and poetic metamorphoses. H.D. concludes that The Lady is “Psyche,” the soul, “the butterfly, out of the cocoon.” This metaphor emphasizes the trope of personal and cultural growth and change in Trilogy. Indeed, just as H.D. transformed language in prior poems, so too has she transformed as a poet (38). Like the Lady, H.D.’s Psyche is whole. Like a butterfly, H.D. is vibrant and winged for flight from patriarchal oppression.

H.D. then personifies the Lady as “the new Eve who comes / clearly to return, to retrieve” and reclaim the power stolen from her in the book of Genesis. To recall her power, the Lady “brings the Book of Life.” Female empowerment requires a new story, a story that becomes a part of life. As DuPlessis states in her discussion of this section, “the sealing of [a] book is a trope for the silencing of women,” meaning that the oppression of women and women’s writing are linked in Trilogy. H.D.’s subversion of this sexist trope also means that the image of the blank book in the Lady’s arms signifies “the whiteness of multiplicity, pluralism, and a Christian polytheism” as well as “the possibility of female gender authority and women’s speech” (DuPlessis 94). Polytheism, meaning H.D.’s practice of unification, occurs through occult writing. And anyone, man or woman, male or female, can write with H.D.’s new language, can participate in her new religion, a religion that is still holy but now open and inclusive, “the same yet different as before.” Notably, the Book of Life contains pages that “will reveal…a tale of a jar or jars.” Trilogy tells this tale of jars, a tale of sacredness that can no longer be contained (TA 39). H.D. links women, women’s speech, and vitality in one transcendent image.
H.D. continues to describe the Lady, or rather, what the Lady is and is not, for the rest of *Tribute to the Angels*. She is “white” as the book’s blank pages, connecting her to the book of life and once more linking H.D.’s vision to writing. She is not “a painter’s white,” but rather a bright whiteness of “fresh-fallen snow (or snow / in the act of falling)” (*TA* 40). According to Barnstone, the lines “white as snow” and “so as no fuller on earth / can white them” evoke biblical descriptions of Christ (Barnstone 190). H.D. appropriates Christina scripture to equate the Lady with Jesus and to stress her vision of sacredness as natural. Similarly, the “act of falling” connotes the process of growing as well as one of *The Gift*’s final scenes, where, while H.D.’s physical body might be frozen with fear, her “mind…has its wings,” and she feels “on [her] own, as in the beginning,” the time before Eve (*Gift* 110). H.D. later describes her as “satisfied with [their] purpose, a Tribute to the Angels.” The Lady affirms H.D.’s new language; after all, it is this language that conjures her.

The final poem in this section locates the Lady in “point in the spectrum / where all lights become one,” the point that “is white and white is not no-colour,” like a butterfly (*TA* 43). Again, the Lady’s aura of whiteness associates her with snow and the Book of Life, a whiteness that encompasses all color, which again connotes pluralism and openness. H.D. then describes the Lady’s face, first with what it is *not* like, in line with her dedication to not-naming: “when the jewel melts in the crucible” and the alchemy of language is complete, “we find not ashes, not ash-of-rose, / not a tall vase and a staff of lilies, / not *vas spirtuale*, / not *rosa mystica* even.” Repetition of negatives here reaffirms H.D.’s principle of not capturing the Lady while simultaneously affirming that the alchemy of language has conjured her. Rather, she uses similes and natural images such as “a cluster”—a multiplicity—“of garden-pinks” with “a face like a Christmas-rose.” Flowers once more recall the “pink stalks” that connote “beauty without
strength” in *Sea Garden*, yet, because she has reclaimed and sanctified the garden, this setting demonstrates her empowerment (*CP* 20). The section ends with the direct allusion to Christmas to foreshadow the coming narrative of *The Flowering of the Rod*.

**The Flowering of the Rod**

In *The Flowering of the Rod*, H.D. takes her new language and uses it to revise the epiphany, the central story of patriarchal Christianity as she sees it. This section empowers Mary Magdalene while also pointing out the significance to the story of Kaspar, one of the three wise men. First, H.D. elaborates on her central message in *Trilogy*. The opening poems describe geese circling around Atlantis. Geese, who fly in flocks, fit perfectly with H.D.’s flight from anxiety and wind-grief in *Sea Garden*. As wild animals, they also connect to her vision of sacredness as natural. The geese try to reach “haven, heaven”—symbolizes *Trilogy* and H.D.’s quest (*TA* 43). Atlantis also answers a question posed in the first section, “are we born from island or oasis?” (*WDNF* 26). Atlantis is both. Significantly, these poems contain highly varied line lengths, returning to and loosening the triplet form that opened *Trilogy*. Now that H.D. has resurrected the Lady through alchemical fusion, represented by couplets, she can return to a form that represents release of the Lady’s power. The Lady is open, like H.D.’s line lengths and tone, yet she has a divine center, the middle line. She is a “haven” for safety and strength and “heaven” to search for.

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14 An island of Greek legend described by Plato as a utopia, much like the sacred, purified world that H.D. envisions here. Islands are a motif in H.D.’s work, from her early poems “The Islands” to *The Gift*, where she connects England to the wounded Island of Moravian history (*Barnstone 194*). She likely appreciates the fact that they are natural, surrounded by the ocean and often by other islands, making them individual yet communal. As Guest writes in her discussion of H.D.’s first trip to Greece, “When the woman who would soon be called H.D. was intense, she was very very intense, and islands seemed to heighten this state…she was both frightened and enchanted by Islands” (*Guest* 52).
These poems also make explicit the link between the “resurrection” of Venus and the Lady (FR 1). The second poem elaborates upon this connection and encapsulates H.D.’s religious quest. H.D. declares,

I go where I love and where I am loved,
into the snow

I go to the things that I love
with no thought of duty of pity;
I go where I belong, inexorably,
...
I have given
or would have given

life to the grain;
but if it will not grow or ripen

With the rain of beauty,
...
Let us leave

The place-of-a-skull
To those who have fashioned it. (2)
H.D. journeys to where she is loved, “where she belongs.” She accomplishes this journey by doing what she loves: writing. As seen in Sea Garden and the preceding poems of Trilogy, she seeks this place with endurance and strength, “inexorably.” She abandons the “grain that will not ripen” despite her efforts. She turns away from “the place-of-the-skull,” referring to the place of Jesus’s crucifixion and thus Christianity, leaving it to the narrow-minded men who “fashioned” it. For H.D., writing is more than a “duty.” It is a necessity and a passion. It is also her religion. “Snow” confirms that this occult love is oriented to a common, female source, “one mother,” the Lady (WDNF 26).

H.D. and her band of writers therefore “fly…to find happiness” and “Paradise,” the place where they love and are loved. They “hunger” for this paradise, alluding to the spiritual hunger introduced in Trilogy’s opening poem. Resurrecting the Lady—H.D.’s religion of writing—will satisfy this hunger. She advises against pitying the “golden apple-trees” whose fruit will “drop / one-by-one,” alluding to the stifled pear trees and thus the conventional, confined garden of Sea Garden (FR 5). H.D. then states, “I remember…I remember” the Lady who has been buried; she states, “I am seeking heaven,” the Paradise full of “love’s fire,” such as the alchemical fire referenced earlier and the scriptural fire that she revises (6). “Yet,” she says, “resurrection is a sense of direction.” Like the migration of the geese, H.D. will lead her band to this resurrection. This resurrection occurs through writing, and it results in “fragrance” of “myrrh,” meaning poetry. Poetry is “balm:” it heals (7).

In the eighth poem, H.D. describes herself as “full of new wine” and “branded with a word” (8). These descriptions bear great significance in the context of Trilogy and the coming action of this section specifically: “Branded with a word” connotes the oppression of female figures in traditional biblical “word,” and “wine” refers to Christ, who, “with her background in
psychoanalysis, the wound (and blood),” H.D. connected with “woman” (Friedman “Religion Question”). “Wine” connotes this feminized Christ, who is an explicit rendering of the flowering rood. By describing herself as a jar, she also foreshadows the jars that conclude Trilogy and its dualisms of partial enclosure, safety and religion, “haven” and “heaven.”

The tenth poem of The Flowering of the Rod returns to The Walls Do Not Fall to affirm H.D.’s religious ideal. The first four couplets read:

It is no madness to say
you will fall, you great cities,

(now the cities lie broken):

it is not tragedy, prophecy

from a frozen Priestess

a lonely Pythoness

who chants, who sings

in broken hexameters…(FR 10)

As in the final poem of Sea Garden, cities locate Trilogy in war-torn England. This poem visualizes what will occur without H.D.’s religion. The cities “will like broken,” will descend into “madness.” Most saddening is the image of the “lonely…frozen Priestess,” perhaps representing H.D., who will continue to sing songs, but they will be “broken.” In response to this desolation, H.D. then points out that her religion of writing “it is a simple reckoning, algebraic, /
it is geometry on the wing.” She points out that her religion is rational, a stereotypically
masculine gender trait. Additionally, just as poetry provides hope for England in *Sea Garden*, the phallic “flower-cone” and sacred “lily”—like the lily that crowns the rod—“will flower again.” The flower-cone alludes to the feminized Christ, a symbol of H.D.’s religion. As before, this unity will foster connection, will “heal-all,” foreshadowing *Trilogy’s* final image.

The following poems begin H.D.’s most complete scriptural revision. The retelling of an entire story demonstrates H.D.’s confidence and her belief in the power of stories, which she exhibits in *The Gift*. H.D. appreciates the story of Christ’s birth, but she does not at all appreciate how it values women. The narrative works backwards in time from an imagined interaction between one of the three wise men, Kaspar, and an “unbalanced, neurotic woman,” Mary Magdalene. Kaspar, who is also a merchant, represents H.D.’s view of the profane as man-made. In addition, this negatively gendered description gives the narrative an ironic tone. H.D. begins, “So the first—it is written, / will be the twisted or the tortured individuals, / out of line, out of step with world so-called / progress.” The phrase “it is written” followed by “so-called” makes the ironic tone more critical. It also foreshadows the way that she will revise the negative description of Mary. She takes the alchemy of language and applies to an entire story. The stand-alone line “progress” visually centralizes idea of positive change—moving forward towards unity through writing—H.D.’s quest (12).

H.D. then describes Kaspar through Mary’s perspective: “it was easy to see that he was not an ordinary / merchant” (14). This shift implies that, though she sees women as sacred, H.D. desires sexual and gender unity.15 It is thus fitting that Kaspar carries two jars. Mary notes that these “jars were sealed,” but their “fragrance got out somehow” (14). Fragrance evokes flowers,

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15 Many critics argue compellingly for Kaspar as representative of Freud, meaning that this scene reflects not just the empowerment of women, but H.D.’s critique on Freud’s misogynistic psychoanalytic practices as well as her view of herself as equal to him (see especially DuPlessis and Friedman).
myrrh and thus H.D.’s religion of writing. These jars are structurally enclosed, but their content escapes, reflecting the triplet form of this section. Trilogy itself is a container of sacredness, which it expresses through poetry. H.D.’s earlier comparison to “a jar of new wine” stresses this notion. Poets have divinity within them; they create texts that allow for crossing. The sixteenth poem accentuates the significance of myrrh as well as Mary’s agency, which increases as the poem progresses. Primarily, Mary speaks her identity. She is “a great tower,” and “through [her] will and [her] power, Mary shall be myrrh.” Mary becomes poetry, a feat described by and accomplished in Trilogy. She also empowers herself; she “compels [Kaspar] to acknowledge her power” (DuPlessis 95). “Magdalene” also means “tower” in Hebrew. By Mary transforming herself into myrrh, H.D. dually empowers her and appropriates Christian scripture (FR 16).

Next, Mary endows herself with the power of alchemy described in Tribute to the Angles. Kaspar’s grandfather and great-grandfather were also alchemists. He does not trust his patriarchal, scientific secrets with Mary, a “lady” (13) and “a woman” (14). Kaspar describes Mary as a lady here and elsewhere in the early poems of this section. He does not trust her; she is “not pretty” and seems “unpredictable,” defying gender norms (14). However, their paths continue to cross, and in the fifteenth poem, Mary speaks—another perspective shift. In the nineteenth, she states: “I am Mary, the incense-flower of the incense-tree, / myself worshipping, weeping, shall be changed to myrrh; / I am Mary, though melted away, / I shall be a tower...” (FR 19). These lines reinforce her role as emblem of poetry and healing in H.D.’s religion. Italics, which elsewhere in Trilogy designate scripture or serious, visionary utterances, reinforce this significance. The line “I shall be a tower” following the transformation emphasizes the notion of “same yet different as before;” Mary will be myrrh but own her the “power” of her name. Additionally, emphasis on motion and movement stresses the two distinct components of
H.D.’s religion: *Trilogy* as text about sacredness and *Trilogy* as a sacred text, in other words, writing as verb and writing as noun (Anderson 87).

H.D. then retells the Last Supper. Simon relates Mary Magdalene, sitting on the floor of the supper, to a mermaid “seated on the sea-shore / or on a rock…a maid-of-the-sea” singing a “fatal” siren song. These lines critique the denigration of women’s sexuality. They also reference the liminal landscapes and search for sacredness in *Sea Garden*: she sits on a “rock,” a “forbidden sea-temple,” and “the wake of” her “hair” causes men’s ships to “wreck” (*FR* 22). The mermaid is a woman who is free from sex and gender constraints, echoing H.D.’s vision of creativity in *Sea Garden*. Because mermaids live in the ocean, they also represent *The Gift*’s veneration of maternity. In this way, connecting Mary to a mermaid connects H.D. to Mary and empowers both of them.

The narrative continues with a description of Mary through Simon’s eyes. She “looked like a heathen,” making Simon feel free enough to worship the earth goddesses listed in *Tribute to the Angels*, which, as H.D. has shown, are sacred. He therefore believes that Mary, the “un-maidenly mermaid…was healed of soul,” because “out of her, the Master / had cast seven devils,” devils are in fact “daemons” (*FR* 25-26). The exchange of devils for daemons, which, as in “The Cliff Temple,” represent sacred inspiration, compounds the importance of occult writing, which allows Mary to be “healed of soul.” The poem then describes how men have crossed the threshold of the “un-lovely temple.” Characterizing the temple with the same diction used to describe Mary connects them in meaning. Men “crossing” over into this temple foreshadow Kaspar’s connection with Mary at the end of *Trilogy* and thus H.D.’s hope that men will be a part

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16 Morris calls this practice “cultural feminism” (see “Signaling” 130).
of her religious vision, a notion compounded by “crossing over” and its connotation of bridges, texts.

As Trilogy draws to a close, journeying the farthest back in time, its connections to Sea Garden, H.D.’s earliest poetry, grow stronger. Kaspar, in Mary’s presence, sees the resurrected universe that opens Flowering of the Rod, describing how “the flower, thus contained, opened petal by petal,” an image of continuity and unity that also highlight flowers as emblems for H.D.’s religion, a religion that is contained in a text but open to all (FR 31). This vision precedes what Gilbert and Gubar call a “series of poems that celebrate a magical landscape” (Gilbert and Gubar 206) that includes the “cliffs,” “sea-roads,” and “sea-rocks” of Sea Garden (FR 32). While other critics have also commented the feminist revision of “Paradise / before Eve,” they may overlook the subtler significance of Kaspar’s vision. He sees “terraces and the built-up inner gardens,” and the “sound as of many waters…fountains and sea-waves washing the / sea rocks.” These images evoke Sea Garden’s confined spaces and liminal landscapes once more (32).

However, Kaspar understands the words of the ocean “as it transmuted its message / through spiral upon spiral of the shell / of memory that connects us / through the drowned cities of pre-history” (33, my emphasis). Diction of “words” and “messages” highlights the significance of writing and language, and as “shell” represents poetry, these lines show poetry as a medium for connection between man and woman as well as the present and “pre-history.”

Then, H.D. returns to her role as speaker. She tells how Kaspar believed that he “must sharply differentiate, clearly define the boundaries of beauty,” the two landscapes that she blends in Sea Garden. He believed that he must “defend the innermost secret,” the sacred, with “fortresses” and “hedges” that divide. Or, “so his mind thought” (FR 34). As the section concludes, H.D. confirms that Kaspar has joined her in her religious vision: “what he thought was the direct
contradiction of what he apprehended,” meaning what he thought was holy defied sense (35). In the same way, H.D.’s religion of writing is open and logical, unlike patriarchal Christianity.

In the final poem, Kaspar therefore places a jar on the floor of the stall, a jar whose “seal is unbroken” yet emits “a most beautiful fragrance / as of all the flowering things together” (43). It is “his gift,” referencing creativity in The Gift. The image of Kaspar, a man, giving this gift to Mary solidifies H.D.’s vision of unity and

as well as the forging or transference of this connection through a gift—a jar—a text.

The “fragrance” that comes from the bundle of myrrh / she held in her arms” means that Mary, the established signifier for communal language and female empowerment—of H.D.’s religion—holds poetry in her arms. This poetry, like Trilogy, has a “fragrance” that connects to the blossoming flowers and the healing balm referenced up until this point. Poetry has the power to exist on an off the page, healing all who encounter it. Additionally, according to the teachings of Count Zinzendorf that H.D. read and studied extensively, “the sexual union of wife and husband should be regarded as a sacramental enactment of the union of the soul with its Savior” (Augustine 10). H.D. consequently “saw sex as a sacrament” (Vetter “Religion Question”). Trilogy’s final scene of Kaspar and Mary symbolizes this sacrament. With this final image, H.D. shows how sexual and gender unity can and will occur through writing, a notion reinforced by return to the couplet form. Poetry becomes salvation; “Amen is our Christos” (WDNF 27).

Trilogy does not conclude with a scene of Christ’s birth. It concludes with H.D.’s birth as an epic poet.
Conclusion

In essays interspersing *Within the Walls and What Do I Love*, her recent compilation of H.D.’s prose written between the second and third sections of *Trilogy*, prominent H.D. scholar Annette Debo points out the often overlooked significance of everyday wartime London to H.D.’s work, how the pieces reveal her immersion in the war lifestyle. *Within the Walls* also reveals the significance of writing itself to H.D. during that time. Writing—as comfort, as necessity, as meditation—helped H.D. survive the World War II. As *Sea Garden, The Gift*, and *Trilogy* show, it was her religious practice.

It is plausible to assert that a full treatment of H.D.’s views of religion and sacredness requires an examination of her texts that revolve around or address her visionary experiences, such as *The Sword Went Out to Sea or Tribute to Freud*. These works certainly respond to and reveal fascinating aspects of H.D.’s occultism. However, I believe that her religion of writing transcends all other occult practices that she partook in. One could also argue that H.D.’s poetic empowerment appears most strongly in her later long poems, such as *Helen in Egypt*, a feminist revision of Greek myth, or *Sagesse*, her last and most hermetic work. While these works are undoubtedly major and rich poetic accomplishments, I see the culmination of her quest, the quest that defines her poetic career, occurring in *Trilogy*.

In fact, it is the creation of *Trilogy*, her sacred text, that allows for the strength of her later works. Without exalting writing as religious practice that heals in *Trilogy*, a feat made possible by *Sea Garden* and *The Gift*, I do not think that H.D. herself would have the self-confidence to go on to write the epic works that followed. Through her religious empowering women and writing, two key facets of her identity, she also empowered herself.
“Dream of a Book,” one of the vignettes in *Within the Walls*, elaborates on the
significance of writing to H.D.’s conception of religion. She states: “I have had through the
years, dreams of a book, a book that I have written…had to be alive,” referring to the Book of
Life that is central to *Trilogy* (Debo 114). Moreover, she continues,

…pages I type at random, are not my conception of a book. They are the words of the
spell: no matter how haphazard, how apparently unrelated, how profuse, how illogical,
they are the words that in a sense—this is what it is—keep me alive. Obviously, this
to live, must go back to the first book, the first spell or spelling. We all forgot our first
book…the real spell must relate and derive from the pre-spelling book days. (114)

This “typing at random” occult writing that creates a “living book.” In *Trilogy*, H.D. revisits *Sea
Garden*, her first spelling book, as well as *The Gift*, her book about power of spells and their
ability to create and transfer the magic of stories and of words. *Trilogy* extends the quest for
sacredness begun in *Sea Garden* and exalted in *The Gift* in order to find that power to create her
own language, the language from her pre-spelling days. *Trilogy* shows that she has found this
power and used it: it is her book of life. As Morris puts it, *Trilogy* acts as a signal; it is a poem
that “not only means but does” (Morris “Signaling” 221).

As seen in these three works, H.D. creates and enacts her vision of writing as religion that
fosters human connection. Reading her combined feminism and religious syncretism as a
religion of writing allows H.D.’s work to continue to build bridges, empower women, and heal.


H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)


- Compassionate Friendship. N.D. T.S. Box 32. Writings. H.D. Papers. Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.


    Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven CT.


- The Gift. N.D. T.S. Box 42. Writings. H.D. Papers. Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.


Works Consulted


I began with unalterable purpose.
I wanted my thesis to be good.
However,

I felt the pull of perfectionism even then, and my mind stirred as I spun

a shroud of neon tabs across Collected Poems.
As it turns out, my proposal was a dream

wrapped up in
magic but without enough

thought for the necessary standards.
My old self (mostly) gone, still

the practical issues of an argument evaded me. Drafting, I had only a thread,

abstract value in the close-reading; present and future (un)equally balanced: I thought I must go forward, never realizing

how difficult the pages would be to disentangle.
I was plagued by an old sense of guilt and fear of failure.

(Now it appears clear that I must theorize my own identity).
My left hand tattooed with blue, I penned

her in-between landscapes,
still unclear of exactly what I was doing,

not aware that the core of my argument was already born as I wrote— not sonnets but body paragraphs.

(Can I say now that they’re similar?)
But reversion of old habits,

Too many contradictory emotions (over sensitive, under definitive)
I was blind to the relative extent

of revision and did not stress over my work, vowed only to illuminate the sacredness. The irony:

Chapter 1 was not a bridge.
I would not ask my advisors for help or admit my intellectual effort

I was heretical, ignoring advice in disguise,
For example, Holly Pickett:

“Haste makes waste.”
I kept to the familiar path,
continually on thin air.
[2]

Eager and curious,
I gave shape to the next chapter quickly,
saw storytelling

as life-blood and life
a tool for positive change.

a candle of understanding
made me pause while reading.
I let H.D.’s waxy prose melt

into my mind’s bowl.
Memoir made me thirst for water

hunger for food,
kin and connection.
“Invent it,” said H.D.

“Learn to write my thought
in your own voice.”

And I remembered:
Beinecke sources. The chapter grew richer
with the sacred material,

making me feel like actual academic.
H.D. became even more like a ghost,

The Gift less of a rune or riddle.
But an A is not granted to everyone.
I admit

that perfection was still a goal.
Talking casually with friends

helped a little,
and yet
I had been doing better work

In the swivel Chair of my locked study,
though I wish the room had an open window.

The cool beneficence of the comments
on Chapter 2, I can say truthfully,
were fair and lit its darkness

So I planned more,
checked out every book
on Trilogy’s Holy Wisdom
for my next project,
Chapter 3, unwritten

but not for long.
Was I still dim? Lost?

Either way,
I went home (far from a star)
for break, began again.

[3]

Home reminded me that perfection
Does not garner love.
I did not know where to go so I worked,

ignored insatiable longing to leave,
annotated sources one by one,
would rather write than talk, sometimes.

In January, I had a sense of direction
And was happy to say
Take care, do not know me, Atlanta.

Chapter 3 was a tree:
It grew then flew from my fingers.
“Is it written,” I said at the end of class.

In any case, it was drafted, though
certainly far from complete:
no assignment is safe with a perfectionist.

Tightest chapter yet, she said,
I am Annie, a great scholar, I thought,
Like a sunken stream, seen in a dream

I ignored how disordered
and knotted my previous writing was.
This process is normal, a predicted pattern.

At the final group meeting,
it was all very gay and there was laughter.

Later that night, the muse sang in my ear;
I finished a draft of my introduction.
Buy I still did not wish to make a scene,

I still did not quite know how to step back.
I definitely did not know Gavaler
would re-name my terms,

Though healed remained unalterably
a part of the picture.
Not only did he recognise my argument,
but he helped me see it even more clearly. I labored in rigorous sessions of concentration,

straightened the structure,
tightened the scope and plan and gave a Complete-Draft to Wheeler.

Then, I addressed minute-details.
I re-translated the poems

behind the hastily built fortresses of my mind,
there all along.
The term ended. It was all so very soon over.

(Microsoft) word became a place of Transfiguration
as snow fell on the analysis,
always improvable,
though now I am kind to it and myself,

and the picture
is distilled in this very binding (hopefully),

a little apart from Morris and older critics.
Though I am young, H.D. spoke and I listened.

Lexington
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