Ghost Words and Invisible Giants: H.D. and Djuna Barnes Under Signs of the Imperative

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the correlations between the natural and supernatural, agency and authority, and meaning and language in the work of the modernist American writers H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Djuna Barnes. Using the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein, and Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, I argue that the different kinds of spectral and otherworldly figures that appear in these works – ghosts, the living dead, divinities, individuals who are also amorphous multiplicities – correlate to the modes of negation of parental imperatives that structure the language-use of their authors. I contrast H.D.'s and Barnes's visions of the relation of language to meaning and the personal to the social using Lacan's delineation of the different modes of psychic negation that enable or disable language use: repression, disavowal, and foreclosure. According to this model, H.D.'s work evidences foreclosure: a mode of thought and language that fails to differentiate words, thoughts, and people from one another. This incapacity endangers the psyche with the hallucinatory return of or haunting by what cannot be symbolized. In contrast, Barnes's work suggests disavowal, and her language renders experience in distorted forms. She repudiates power figures and the unspeakable meanings associated with them, but her work portrays the spectral, surreptitious return of these figures and meanings.

Writing that witnesses or stages a return to a state of non-difference between symbol and symbolized, as Barnes's and H.D.'s work does, calls for different interpretative and methodological strategies than those usual in literary criticism. To read such work primarily as symbolic communication is to lose perspective on the structures of thought and language that it grapples with. A perspective that is rigorous and radically different from the works' own is necessary to produce readings of it that make symbolic "sense," though it is unable to fully account for experiences that are not conceivable. To this end, I describe "disorders," types of thought and language that psychoanalysis implicates in interminable human suffering, without drawing conclusions about the range of experiences that might be concurrent with asymbolic or anti-symbolic thought and writing.

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Presented in gratitude to my supervisor, Luke Carson, who made it both imaginable and necessary for me to be as sincere as I could in academic work, not by telling me to be but just by being himself, and so giving my sincerity a quality of attention that allowed it to persist.

for my mother

Introduction

To argue that H.D.'s and Djuna Barnes's writing displays, respectively, what Jacques Lacan describes as psychotic and perverse mechanisms may appear reactionary, since they have been, among other things, icons for feminist and queer literary criticism. I believe rather that my work is an extension of this criticism, since it examines the kinds of patterns that asymbolic and anti-symbolic language can form in creative writing by women, and how the categories of "literary" and "pathological" break down, at least in some cases, under the psychoanalytic lens. I was brought to psychoanalytic theory because it can engage with Barnes's and H.D.'s work using its "indeterminacy" as a beginning rather than an end point, and also by the sense that things were happening in Barnes's language, in *Ryder* (1928) and *Nightwood* (1936), and H.D.'s language, for instance in later works *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (2007) and in *Helen in Egypt* (1961), that produced, or at least reflected and reinforced, a particular kind of suffering, confusion, and unfulfillment in their lives, and sometimes in reading their work. This unusual language was meant, I sensed, to manage the unbearable confusion and threat to selfhood represented by the figures of authority in these works. Djuna Barnes and H.D. share an apprehension of parent figures and the limits they impose, and of language, as unstable and uncertain, violent, and violating. Their work responds to these untrustworthy and violent limits with aporias and aphasias in its formal elements as well as by figurations of this violence in its content. But their responses could hardly contrast more sharply in certain respects. While for both the parental imperative remains threatening and inassimilable, Barnes's writing suggests an intentional management of this by means

of its aestheticisation and re-iteration, whereas H.D.'s writing after World War II suggests a more radical incomprehension, and less intentional iteration, of the imperative, and an overwhelming wish to end the confusion that it entails, even if the only means to do so is to be destroyed by it.

I contrast H.D.'s and Barnes's visions of the relation of language to meaning, the personal to the social, and the spectral or supernatural to the natural using Lacan's delineation of the different mechanisms of negation of parental imperatives (repression, disavowal, and foreclosure) and its correlative "psychic structures" (neurosis, perversion, psychosis) as my main lens. I use other psychoanalytic theory eclectically, most notably Melanie Klein's concepts of introjection, projection, and splitting, and Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's theory of "cryptophoria." I read H.D.'s work through the lens of theory on psychotic language, and Barnes's using theory on perverse language, unappealing as I know these terms will be to many of my readers, because it allows me to grapple with the questions about this work that seem to me the most interesting. Foremost, what more can it tell us about H.D.s and Barnes's modes of consciousness, and about human consciousness in general as it emerges in the intersections of language, belief, and behaviour? Further, what are its implications for our critical assumptions about what constitutes the modern "literary" text, how best to read it, and how it is distinct from other kinds of texts?

My inquiry into the correlations between the natural and supernatural, agency and authority, and meaning and language in Barnes's and H.D.'s work views their portrayals of agency/authority, meaning/language, and natural/supernatural in light of their familial and romantic histories and their broader social involvements or noninvolvement (for

instance, H.D.'s Occultist practices and psychoanalytic sessions, Barnes's fascination with spectacle and later reclusion). I interpret the different modes of splitting, separateness, and oneness that appear in Barnes's and H.D.'s work as symptoms of their psychic lives. The modes of negation that their work symptomizes by the relation (or lack thereof) between language and meaning implied by its style and content, also reappears in its vision of the broader social world. Their work displays figures and/or embodiments of splitting and supernatural life: ghosts, gaps, and dualities, the living dead, strange gods, individuals who are also dual and/or multiple, and these signal the negations that structure their formal elements and portrayals of social relationships. The spectral and otherworldly appears in these works at the boundaries of thought and language as the meaning that it cannot grasp, and consecutively as the lost familial love-objects of both their authors and characters. The different kinds of absent presences that appear in their narratives mark the divisions and estrangements that structure the language's mode of asymbolic meaning: cryptic, formulaic, or ineffable.

Though I apply the Lacanian triad of neurosis/psychosis/perversity and the modes of "denegation" (*dénégation*) with which he characterizes them to Barnes's and H.D.'s writing, I do not see these as categories with which questions about a person's language use or psychic "structure" can be closed. Nevertheless, they are theories with which much that is remarkable in Barnes's and H.D.'s writing can be accounted for and correlated with biographical material. I am not sure that there are distinct and fixed psychic structures correlative to the different modes of negating "castration": most people's language use straddles and moves between them, it seems to me, over time. *A priori* discursive divisions between literature and raving can only obfuscate clear thought about

how they really differ, if at all, and what they have in common. Their particularities are erased, and critical models, which reproduce themselves indefinitely, determine how they are read. Though it has often been claimed that great writers and other artists are mad or half-mad (especially the modernists) and that this is crucial to their ability, the vocal and written expressions of most people who are considered mad are seen as torturous and meaningless, not worthy of serious attention. The characteristics that make it easy to consider them thus are present in *Sword*, and to a lesser extent in *Helen in Egypt*, but not in *Ryder* or *Nightwood*, although the latter are also considered difficult and indeterminate. Yet all are considered to have literary merit, and to be worthy of serious study, by a reasonably high proportion of people who arbitrate culture.

Though a single consciousness can, I think, adopt many styles of denegation over the course of a life or even a day, certain habits, or strategies, of relating to meaning can dominate a text or a life. I describe some of the ways that this is evidenced in H.D.'s and Barnes's work not to achieve the closure of diagnosis, but hoping to open new ways of reading its styles of indeterminacy: a difficult task when faced with work whose modes of meaning are often so highly idiosyncratic. Though the theories that I use are systematic, my application of them is not meant to cohere into a non-provisional system. I explore the relation of H.D.'s and Barnes's literary language to different strategies of "denegation" because I believe that this methodology might usefully be applied more widely to Modern literature and even to literary criticism, since the latter can sometimes be compromised by excessive complicity with the modes of negation preferred by its authorial subjects. I have used the models of "psychic structure" suggested by Lacan, Klein, and Abraham and Torok very differently in regard to Barnes and to H.D. These

models would be applicable to other texts, with their different ways of resisting interpretation and producing aesthetic effects, in very different ways if at all.

In the case of Barnes's and H.D.'s work, a perspective that is rigorous and radically different from the ones that are offered in the texts seems necessary to produce readings of them that make nuanced symbolic "sense." Lacan's theory, so highly systematized, seems the most useful. However, it is unable to fully account for experiences that are not conceivable. I describe "disorders," types of thought and language that psychoanalysis rightly implicates in interminable human suffering, but try not to implicitly limit the range of experiences that might be concurrent with asymbolic or anti-symbolic thought and writing. This is sometimes difficult when using psychoanalysis, with its privileging of the castrated subject and the symbolic order.

For Lacan, childhood encounters (or lack of encounter) with the limit that the father represents impose distinct structures of subjectivity that are characterized by different ways of using language to negate this limit. According to the Lacanian model, H.D.'s work evidences foreclosure: a mode of thought and language in which the paternal signifier does not establish (as it usually does) the differentiation of words, thoughts, and people from one another. Instead, the paternal signifier is imagined as returning from without in embodied, threatening, and eroticized forms. H.D. seeks integration and completion by encompassing this signifier of difference, invoking an assimilative view of relationships and world history. In the struggle for an organic whole, her hyperbolic formalism seeks to encompass constantly wider interpretive frameworks in response to the destructive effects of repudiations by father figures. She envisions hidden, universal significance that is never completely expressed in words but that is always-already

contained in herself and in her (dis)unions with phallic *héros fatals*. Since her work seeks unlimited referentiality to forestall the collapse of language, the critical search for its meanings through extra-textual references must be unusually wary of free-association's lure. To expect that historical or intertextual approaches will ultimately reveal her works' conceptual coherence is to risk the trap that caught H.D. during this time: the search for her lost meaning by excavating, recording, and speculating on the endless associations along which her mind, her work suggests, is endlessly sliding.

Barnes's work suggests in contrast that indeterminacy for her is a self-conscious defense, rather than an inadvertent torment. Her literary invocation of ambiguity and multivalence, and her insistent rendering of empty space and absence, allows Barnes herself a sense of freedom from a too-pressing language. Her style suggests a psychic structure in which limits, and the symbolic meanings they enable, are present but fragile. Her language simultaneously shores up and transgresses the limits of symbolic communication imposed by parental speech by rendering experience in unclear, distorted forms. She repudiates power figures and the unspeakable meanings associated with them, but her work portrays the spectral return of these figures and unspeakable meanings, language and a world that are constitutively haunted. Since words both are the secret and hide the secret, her characters' attempts to replace their ghosts and confusions with full presence and right interpretation lead only to madness, a state in which language loses its symbolic function altogether and takes bodily possession of the subject.

My first two chapters focus on *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (1952, first published in 2007) and *Helen in Egypt* (1961), works that H.D. saw as culminations of her life history. Both revisit various significant episodes in H.D.'s life but are primarily

concerned with her experience in London during and after the Blitz, at which time she believed that she was receiving spirit-messages that, if interpreted correctly, would save the postwar world from nuclear catastrophe and enable its transition to the next world. These messages were repudiated by the person who, H.D. had believed, was capable of discerning their meaning and relevance: Lord Hugh Dowding, retired Royal Air Force Marshall, hero of the Battle of Britain, fellow-Spiritualist, and father figure. In *The Sword Went Out to Sea* and *Helen in Egypt* H.D.'s alter-egos, chiefly Delia Alton and Helen of Troy, grapple with Dowding's repudiation, trying to make sense out of it, and failing that they try to substitute it itself for the meaning that they cannot find. These heroines' vexed relations to Dowding-based heroes inadvertently symbolize the (dis)connection between words and meanings that H.D. experienced. Their (non)relationships are meant to, or hoped to in the future, bridge this rift, but in the present they do not. Attempts to mend the rift between words and meanings are also evident in the works' constant invocations of new highly but inexplicably meaningful objects, patterns, characters, and scenes, and in their attempts to establish that their protagonists contain all meaning in themselves. *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt* suggest semiotic and emotional collapse, and the ensuing requirement of ever-new terms, wider interpretive frameworks, meaningful sexual (non)relationships, and other substitute structuring principles to maintain a sense that meaning is possible. The presupposition and conclusion that these strategies share and constantly work to reestablish, *Sword* tentatively and *Helen in Egypt* more decisively, is that writing and being are identical in them: that these works and (identically) their protagonists, who are H.D., are both writing and being. These writing-beings, particularly

their recurring transcendental destruction by male sexual violence, constitute their own and everything else's asymbolic, ultimate meaning.

Chapters Three and Four examine the vague, ambiguously referential language, juxtaposed narratives, cryptic imagery, and weird character behavior in *Ryder* (1928) and *Nightwood* (1936). As has been observed, these works undermine the meanings that their narratives seem to offer, creating spaces of uncertainty. Their images and scenes have little obvious causal relation to one another or to the story taken as a whole but symptomatize, I argue, the unspeakable content buried beneath them. The meanings that are both invoked and dispelled by them, but never completely, concern the violations in Barnes's family relationships. Her work uses the language of spectrality to suggest the present absence both of individual lost love objects and of social powers. Ghosts of warped, rapacious, and loved family members, of unspeakable scenes, and of nation and gender haunt its characters as well as its syntax. However, unlike H.D.'s work, *Ryder* and *Nightwood* suggest no alternative to haunted identity and language: in the form of disavowal that dominates them, the exorcism of the ghost is also its invocation.

The repetition, embedding, and resistance to interpretation that characterizes Barnes's work also characterizes fetishism as I construct it. Like the fetish, the images, stories, and character behaviors in Barnes's work present a history of relations that is not meant to be viewed/read but to be missed. Both fetish and Barnesian *tableau* fix and distort this history in signs that are filled with another signification, hiding it in full view. Barnes repudiates, and is haunted by, power figures and clear stories, starting with her own family but extending to her vision of politics and of the human species. Although Foucauldian and Butlerian theoretical approaches have been used to read her work as

opening space for new modes of agency and articulation, I suggest that Barnes does not share Butler's and the later Foucault's interest in rendering an agency distinct from biopower (Foucault), or compelled citation (Butler), because she does not believe this to be possible.

While I am not disputing the argument that Djuna Barnes and H.D. are concerned with feminine agency, the particular ways in which they attempt to establish this agency are more problematic and complex than has been acknowledged. They are also, I believe, more potentially applicable to literary studies as a whole through the broader questions that they re-open about agency, language, and reality. I use psychoanalysis to read fairly coherent "meanings" into works that have often been described as intentionally resisting coherence and closure, but I hope that the psychoanalytic systems I use may be translatable into other systems capable of addressing the temporal, spatial, and differentiating concerns of these works in the various modes in which they appear.

Introduction to H.D.'s *The Sword Went Out to Sea* and *Helen in Egypt*

> When [H.D.] speaks of "*where thought dwells, / and beyond thought and idea, /their begetter, / Dream, Vision,*" these—*thought, idea, dream, vision*—are not concepts or terms of a phenomenology but entities, *dramatis personae* of her universe. "Sword" and "Word" are poetic counterparts of daimonic beings in neoplatonic hierarchies, having their creative necessity here in the plasticity of the immediate reality of the poem rather than in the requirements of a philosophic structure.
>
> -Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, 421.

> My love of the gods, as fairies and beings was alive in me, before I struck the bare cold reality of "facts" or the numeral star-symbol.
>
> -H.D., *Tribute to Freud*, 121-3.

1. The Salvific Integration of Love and War

My work on H.D. will focus on *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (1952, first published in 2007) and *Helen in Egypt* (1961), works that she thought of as culminations and gatherings-in of her life. During this time, her writing suggests, she thought that the important parts of her life had occurred already, and had only to be understood and integrated. She believes that Lord Hugh Dowding, retired Royal Air Force Marshall, hero of the Battle of Britain (a decisive victory for the Allies) and fellow-Spiritualist, was the last and the culmination of her great loves, the transcendentally meaningful love that her life and relationships had been leading up to. This is so even, or especially, after whatever happiness she found in this belief was shattered by his unequivocal rejection in 1946 of the spirit-messages that she communicated to him in letters. *The Sword Went Out to Sea* and *Helen in Egypt* both grapple with this repudiation, trying to determine its meaning, and failing that, try to transform it itself into meaning.

Towards the end of World War II, H.D. felt unsatisfied with writing and introspection as responses to it, and believed her special destiny to involve something more socially active. This destiny, undisclosed by mundane events, came to involve the agenda of the spirits, Z(akenuto) and the RAF pilots, whose messages she believed she was receiving between 1944 and 1946. These messages, which she transmitted to Dowding, are probably close or identical to the ones that *Sword*'s main protagonist and H.D.'s alter-ego, Delia, struggles to convey to Howell. Delia "is" H.D. in her capacity as psychic medium, and *Sword* is probably, as Hogue and Vandivere surmise (xxii), derived in part from notes taken during her lone séances that she destroyed in 1947. Delia/H.D. believes that they concern a historically crucial defense operation involving psychic radio-communication that she and Howell are supposed to work on together. Dowding's response to H.D.'s letters was at first one of reserved interest, but the reservations increasingly outweighed the interest and he eventually, if *Sword* renders it correctly, refused to receive her messages and described them as "frivolous and uninspiring" (*Sword* 37). Her written response in *Sword* to his dismissal of her messages and unequivocal refusal to receive them, after her struggle to enlist his aid, suggests the collapse of language, and the ensuing necessity of ever-new dualisms and terms, of wider interpretive frameworks, to maintain the possibility of meaning. In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. returns to this repudiation and attempts more successfully to imagine a cosmology (of sorts) within which it makes sense, a sense that does not contradict the sense of purpose that her psychoanalytic sessions with Freud, and her extraordinary psychic experiences, had given her.

After her 1933-1934 psychoanalysis with Freud, her writing suggests, H.D. felt personally responsible for humanity's survival of World War II. What was required of her was an act of personal integration, through writing and psychic vision, that would have broader social effects. Her work at this time suggests that there is war because of a general lack of social and psychic integration in the world, but that her personal re-integration in writing (sometimes involving a male counterpart) may stop the war. The significance of her relationships and associations, increasingly abstracted from any social milieu, is sought in her writing through free-association, the method that will uncover new social and psychic terrain. She writes excitedly in *Tribute* that:

> I am on the fringes or in the penumbra of the light of my father's science and my mother's art – the psychology or philosophy of Sigmund Freud…. I must find new words as the Professor found or coined new words to explain certain as yet unrecorded states of mind or Being! (145)

In accordance with this desire to express "new states of being" with Freud's free-associative method, H.D.'s letters and fiction grow free-associative to the point that their meaning often does not coalesce at all. A sacrificial or martyred quality appears along with her new sense of purpose. In 1934 she writes to Bryher, "My whole life, literally, is one pure and perfect crucifixion…I am not, except in certain hours of writing and in certain hours of FORGETTING writing, ever free" (*Analyzing Freud* 498). She is begging Bryher not to nag her about her writing, and this passage has been read by Barbara Guest (218) in terms of her growing demand for autonomy. But it is also, I think, meant quite literally: writing is martyrdom. The integration of self and word that is to be accomplished in her writing is described in increasingly devastating terms and by circular logic. Integration is, her writing suggests, both the cause and the effect of the war. In *Ion* (1937), written with the coming war in mind, offers an explanation for this:

> [Athene] pleas for the great force of the under-mind or unconscious that so often, on the point of blazing upward into the glory of inspirational creative thought, flares, by a sudden law of compensation, down, making for tragedy, disharmony, disruption, disintegration, but in the end, O, in the end, if we have patience to wait, she says, if we have penetration and faith and the desire actually to follow all those hidden subterranean forces, how great is our reward. (254)

Integration of the "conscious" with the "unconscious" is, so often, disintegrative. H.D. must integrate, become conscious of and analyze, her memories in order to stop the war, but the war and the personal suffering associated with it is, paradoxically, *caused* by her integration, and consecutively, the world's. She believes that this suffering and disharmony will surely end if the subterranean forces whose upheaval cause it are "followed" with patience and perseverance. But this end, as critics have noted, is never reached in her writing: everything proffered as a resolution quickly gives way to new problems.

Freud's method of analyzing dreams by looking for condensed, displaced, and transposed signs and symbols, as well as the impending war whose outcome she felt responsible for, provided H.D. with new motivations and strategies for reading quantities of portent into dreams, visions, and events, and these invigorated but also burdened her. Her letters to Bryher during her 1933-4 sessions with Freud are striking in that, for all her excitement about them, they grow gloomier, indeed paranoid, over their course. Though the impending war and general mood of fear undoubtedly contributed to this unease, its main cause is the sessions themselves, especially their free-associative methodology, that slowly eclipses all other modes of meaning for H.D. Her writing increasingly evidences "paralogic," a mode of association in which, writes Norman Cameron, objects are identified with one another based on shared attributes that appear incidental to control groups. These attributes appear meaningful to people suffering from schizophrenia or (I

would add) using the methodology of Freudian dream analysis, or as in H.D.'s case, both. Cameron describes paralogic, or "asyndetic thinking," as "a marked paucity of genuinely causal links…. In the place of well-knit sequences [schizophrenic patients who were asked to finish sentences using the word 'because' invoked] a cluster of more or less related elements." In contrast, "a normally syndetic, or linked-together, logical organization would have automatically eliminated all but one or two…possibilities, and in this way have restricted the solution to something more clean-cut and precise" (Cameron 52-53).[1] Along with this loss of distinction and precision, H.D. sees loss of self, victimization and death, everywhere. She is preoccupied with the cult of Aleister Crowley (whom she had never met or communicated with) and his troubling role in the lives of her former lover, Frances Gregg, and another acquaintance, the writer Mary Butts. The possibility of her own blackmail by Crowley or someone associated with him looms large in her imagination.

Exploration of her "primal scenes" with Freud suggests to her that to be a woman is at an "unconscious" level, to be killed by a man, since for Freud, of course, a proper woman was or desired to be the consort of a man. For H.D., to have and/or to be a child is first to die: "My child is a golden Christ-child off the Xmas tree, all very clear at the age of seven. But child meant primal scene, meant being 'killed' by a man, the father" (*Analyzing* 485). Sex with the father kills, though the offspring is messianic. The "child" is Christ, the mother destroyed: H.D. is both. "Eros and Death," which she describes as "the only subjects of [Freud's] eternal preoccupation" (*Tribute* 103) become from here on in her own recurring themes, and are associated respectively with the mother and the father, whose violent love suggests Freud's conceptual conflation of the two drives. In

Tribute to Freud, H.D., because of the early "loss" (as she sees it) of both of her parents, also contains the male principle, and her love-life is thus built on mixed-together love and violence: "I did LOOSE (sic) both parents at the age of 3 or 4 and built up my whole love-life on that love and terror mixed, and violence as of war etc." (*Analyzing* 507). During her sessions with Freud, at least, she believes this "loss" to be the source of her bisexuality: "it was simply the loss of both parents, and a sort of perfect bi-sexual attitude arises…. I have tried to be the man, or woman, but I have to be both. *But it will work out, papa says and I said, now in writing*" (*Analyzing*, 503, my italics). Through writing, the parents will on some level be regained, the mixture of love and terror on which her love life is founded will stabilize: "So in me, two distinct racial or biological or psychological entities tend to grow nearer or to blend, even, as time heals old breaks in consciousness" (*Tribute* 32).

Whereas in *The Gift* and *Tribute* H.D., taking Freud's theory of bisexuality literally, also contained the male principle and thus did not need anyone's help to integrate herself with it, in the work following her encounter with Dowding this principle is generally found in another, and the forces of "*Eros, Eris*" that are supposed to become integrated seem, if anything, more polarized. The method by which integration is sought seems itself disintegrative. Its lack of success might also be suggested by H.D.'s continuing residency in Küsnacht after World War II – arguably, since it was a peaceful and beautiful place in a war-torn world. Although her later years there were voluntary, and she saw herself more as a colleague than a patient, her doctors continued to treat her as a patient: monitoring her, adjusting her medication, and sometimes restricting her social interactions (Guest 328).[2]

In *Sword*, *Helen*, and other later work, the eternal lover is figured as father and son, and the search for him involves attempts to "integrate" inadequate scientific father figures, mysterious psychic mother figures, Oedipal sons, and unrecognized messianic daughters. These figures represent her attempts to get as close as she can in writing to her memories of, and responses to, her family. She identifies with the daughter's confusion over her maddeningly unforthcoming mother, the father's and the son's sexual aggression towards the mother. She seeks, most of all, to identify with the mother, for to do so would be to understand her silence.[3] These figures are all ultimately a part of H.D., and therefore require psychic re-integration through her writing, memories, and relationships with other people. Her typology of primal and Oedipal fathers and sons and psychic, desirable mother/daughters is marshaled to explain the behavior of the men who mattered to her, especially Dowding, who is identified in *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt* with both son and father, as she is with both mother and daughter.

The fraught family dynamics pictured in H.D.'s work and letters mirrors the unusually strong emotional investment in the responses of authority figures, and extreme reactions to their withholdings of support, that is evident in them. The main concern in her later writing is the difference of others' perspectives from her own, though different perspectives are never clearly imagined. Her mother's dismissiveness, Havelock Ellis's lack of response to *Notes on Thought and Vision*, Freud's belief that her Corfu vision was "a dangerous symptom" (*Tribute* 41), Dowding's repudiation, probably transcribed verbatim in *Sword*, of her spirit-communications as "frivolous and uninspiring," and Erich Heydt's, Dr. Brunner's and/or Walter Schmideburg's skepticism concerning her relationship with Dowding, are events to which her correspondence, memoirs, and

literary work return obsessively.[4] The events themselves are often followed by paranoid, delusional, and disorganized feelings, thoughts, and ideas: Freud's interpretation of her visions as "dangerous," Dowding's repudiation of her spirit-messages, Heydt's disbelief in the universal significance of her encounter with Dowding, and Lionel Durand's (she mistakenly believed) panning of her *Madrigal* in a literary review were all followed by paranoid symptoms.

There was also, in each case, extensive literary production: a written struggle to understand the perceived rejection, a deployment of family triangles (and other patterns), a consideration of different possibilities without a selection of one. These written responses suggest "splitting," "projection," and "incorporation," as I will call them after Melanie Klein, mechanisms that are also suggested by her work's multifarious characters, things, and events, whose causal relations to one another are not evident but who are mysteriously encompassed by or contained in its H.D.-based characters. Her responses to her mother's, Freud's, Dowding's, and Heydt's repudiations comprise whole books, and share the same pattern: why, why, must they be so limited and blind? But if they must, the H.D.-characters will nonetheless go beyond their limits, encompass more knowledge with their vision, their discovery and integration of different parts of themselves – even though this project remains disorienting and incomplete.

Earlier writing establishes the groundwork for *Sword*'s and *Helen*'s particular takes on family dynamics, the conscious mind's re-integration of unconscious memories, and the broader social significance of this. In work before Dowding's ascendancy, like *The Gift* (1944) and *Tribute to Freud* (composed in 1944-6), discovery and integration appear as a solo endeavour that has a sympathetic effect on broader social integration. In

The Gift, war is the result of a broken (by no fault of theirs) promise of peaceful co-existence made by her spiritual predecessors, the Moravians, to "the Indians." There is war because this brotherhood has been sundered and their collective mission derailed: "There was a Promise and there was a Gift, but the Promise it seems, was broken and the Gift it seems, was lost. That is why, now at this minute, there is a roar [the Blitz] outside" (212). However, "a secret powerful community" is destined to "bring the ancient secrets of Europe and the ancient secrets of America into a single union of Power and Spirit, a united brotherhood, a *Unitas Fratrum* of the whole world" (214). This union of the ancient secrets of Europe and America takes place in the person, or "subconscious being" of H.D.:

> I had gone down under the wave and I was still alive, I was breathing…I had gone down, been submerged by the wave of memories and terrors, repressed since the age of ten and long before, but with the terrors, I had found the joys, too…. I was Morning Star, or I was Anna Von Pahlen who had been a sort of Princess in Europe. So Europe and America had at last been reconciled in the very depth of my subconscious being. (*Gift* 219)

The Gift, which ends with a cease-fire, suggests that this reconciliation centered in her own person has a sympathetic effect, healing the divisions between warring nations. The postwar era envisioned unites disparate cultures under the rubric of a shared higher knowledge, which is, finally, the protagonists' self-knowledge. The imagined elect are a diasporic network who know the same truth though they may call it by different names, and this knowledge (which causes the conversion of Native Americans to Moravian Christianity) reconciles Europe and America by making figures who represent them for H.D. into H.D. herself.

Ion, H.D.'s 1937 creative adaptation of Euripides' play, has a similar vision of the sympathetic effect of personal on social integration. It describes Ionian culture as the

product of a fated union of God and mortal, tantamount to the union of "the conscious mind of man" and "unconscious forces of most subtle definition" (254). During its composition, H.D. wrote to Bryher that "My work is creative and reconstructive, war or no war, if I can get across the Greek spirit at its highest I am helping the world, and the future. It is the highest spiritual neutrality" (*Analyzing* 530). *Ion's* main concern is to act as a reminder of the Ionian spirit of beauty and perfection, and to caution humanity to have faith in the "ultimate plan" notwithstanding social strife. Though Ion, founder of a perfect civilization, suffered when he opened the box containing his past and discovered the evidence that reunited him with his mother Kreousa, their reward is Ionian culture itself, "the absolute achievement of physical perfection by the spirit of man" before it "sank into the darkness of late Rome and the Middle Ages" (257). Kreousa, mother of Ion, is an H.D.-figure, the mother, through her art, of the civilization to come, in which art and beings are indistinct:

> [Kreousa] now wishes to be nothing but the mother of Ion, *the mother, if she but knew it, of a new culture, of an aesthetic drive and concentrated spiritual force*, not to be reckoned with, in terms of any then known values; hardly, even today, to be estimated at its true worth…. A scattered handful of these *creatures* or *creations* is enough to mark, for all time, that high-water mark of human achievement, the welding of strength and delicacy, the valiant yet totally unselfconscious withdrawal of the personality of the artist, who traced on marble, for all time…that thing and that thing alone that we mean, when we say, Ionian. (254-5, my italics)

Cultural transformation and perfection here involve the traumatic reunification of a divinely chosen individual with his lost mother. This is equated with the culture's own integration of its "conscious mind" with its "unconscious forces." Integration will give rise to a new culture, in *Ion* a disturbingly perfect one, considering that it was written in the shadow of National Socialism.

Like *Ion*, *Hippolytus Temporizes*, H.D.'s 1927 creative adaptation of Euripides, portrays mother and son figures in painful, muddled, hostile interactions. In the former, Kreousa and Ion's conflict results in their discovery of their relationship, which results in Ion's founding of perfect Ionian culture. However, H.D.'s Hippolytus, obsessed with the goddess Artemis because she reminds him of his dead mother, has worse luck. He sleeps with his stepmother thinking that she is Artemis, commits suicide on discovering his mistake, is resurrected by Apollo at Artemis' behest, and, since he has become insane, is killed off again. These plays, then, portray the successful and unsuccessful unions of sons with mother-figures. One gives rise to a "perfect" civilization, the other to madness and death.

While *Ion* and *The Gift* suggest that the integration of "Europe and America" or "God and mortal" cause, on one hand, the beginning of a perfect civilization and on the other, a cease-fire (at the very least), World War II's reluctance to end, and the onset of the second Blitz, suggested to H.D. that there was more integration to be accomplished. Her increasingly mystifying use of language may have disposed her to see this integration as requiring another person, someone who would know the meaning of her visionary communications. In *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt*, this integration appears paradoxically as the violent (dis)union of the women who represent H.D. with the men who represent Dowding, who see them as mother figures. The violence that H.D. perceived in the war and in Dowding's repudiation, creatively re-visited in *Sword* and in *Helen in Egypt*, becomes her solution to the problem of "integration" that is necessary for the arrival of the next world.

In contrast to the intensity between mothers and fathers, and mothers and sons, the mothers and daughters in H.D.'s fiction have undynamic relationships. H.D.'s mother, when she is fictionally portrayed (in *Tribute to Freud*, *The Gift,* and *HERmione*) is shown withholding everything that Hilda wants: acknowledgement, information, validation, explanation, her very presence. Eugenia Gart in *HERmione* retreats into silences that Hermione can not explain to others or to herself. Helen in *The Gift* answers Hilda's questions but unforthcomingly. Her responses have a style that discloses nothing. Hilda must turn to Mamalie, whose cognition is fading, whose hints and ramblings provide piecemeal information that must, Hilda is sure, all fit together somehow. Characteristically, Hilda tries to contain her mother's repudiation, "my children are not gifted," within a larger framework suggested by psychic insight and by her grandmother's hints, in which it appears as a repression.[5] In *Helen in Egypt* and *Sword,* H.D.'s alter-ego Helen of Troy, like her mother Helen Wolle Doolittle, contains but does not explain "the answer." The violence of the war is directed particularly at this Helen, though it is destructive *en masse*. It seems as though H.D.'s aggression towards her own mother, and towards subsequent repudiators, appears in her writing as male aggression towards literary Helens.

This manoeuvre deploys what Klein calls "splitting" and "projection," mechanisms to disperse the anger felt towards others and the anxiety it generates (*Envy* 5). Writing on *Trilogy* (also written during and after World War II) Robert Duncan draws attention to the role of projection in H.D.'s perception of the war. Duncan argues that the exultancy with which her writing often portrays the violence of war is due to its gratification of her unassimilated rage and longing for vengeance, returning from without

as the war: "The apocalyptic picture of the world that is also the heart under attack is a complex image of correspondences between what is felt as inflicted and what is felt in projection, of wishes for vengeance that are also fears of punishment seen fulfilled in actual events" (54). This rage is a response to perceived attacks and betrayals that are equated with the war, at least as much as to the war itself. H.D. experiences her fury *as* the Second World War, the violence of which is directed specifically at her and her alter-egos, the universal objects of male desire and aggression. In them aggression is absorbed through sexualized attack (the primal scene) and transformed through birth; the world ends and is renewed in an eternal cycle.[6] Though Susan Friedman is right in describing the cycles in H.D.'s work as an adaption of monomythic cycles of sex, death and renewal, there is something rapid, chaotic, overpopulated, unsatisfying and negative in these cycles that set them somewhat apart from the mythic. Friedman has described "the pattern of H.D.'s…life and work" as a "profoundly dialectical" process in which she **"**repeatedly established clearly defined, imagistically rendered polar oppositions so that she could ultimately move towards transcendent synthesis" (*Psyche* 152). However, Friedman's formulation, "ultimately move toward," itself suggests H.D.'s vexed relation to "transcendent synthesis," which her later work figures as a receding will'o-the-wisp of united personal and social meaning, a meaning that her cycle constantly misses.

2. *The Sword Went Out to Sea*'s Mode of Recovery

In her "Preliminary Notes on *The Sword Went Out to Sea*" Jane Augustine describes it as a "recovery document," the writing of which allowed H.D. to retain "the expanded

world view which Spiritualism brought to her and…the sense of giftedness and female empowerment that support her self-identification as a writer" by giving her traumatic interactions with Dowding "a final rational unity" (Augustine 130-1). Though she is right that the writing of *Sword* helped H.D. to stabilize after her breakdown, no final rational unity underlying her traumatic experience becomes apparent in it. Although reasons are proffered, as Augustine discusses, *Sword* ends as it began: with a multiplicity of interpretations and a postponed conclusion, in both senses of the word. The penultimate and final chapters end and begin: "we went on with the play. We went on with the play" (266-7). Cynthia Hogue and Julie Vandivere's 2007 introduction to *Sword* also reproduces this still dominant critical approach to H.D.'s later work: they argue that *Sword* describes a "curative" process that healed H.D. by restoring "the lost strength of the feminine" that balances "a world skewed by the dominance of a warrior ethos" (xxxvii). Write Hogue and Vandivere:

> Although *Sword*'s writing is, finally, less compelling than H.D.'s best works, we suggest that it can take its place as part of a body of women's literature written around World War II the collective concerns of which – the destructiveness of nationalism, the need for a "feminized" vision to be heard in the public sphere, among others – are helping us to reorient and reconfigure modernism. (xvi)

However, *Sword*'s status as a recovery document, both for H.D. and for modernism as we know it, is complicated by its fixation on and eroticisation of this "warrior-ethos." The "[i]mages of invasion, defence, and siege [which] permeate *Sword*" (xlii) comprise, in their repetition, the only "unity" it may have. The "cure" that *Sword* imagines and welcomes involves repetitive, epochal world cataclysm. H.D.'s exultancy in the war, her "love-life" of "love and terror mixed," is not considered in Hogue and Vandivere's reading of *Sword* as a protest that "*war* is mad." Though they are not wrong, their

formulations imply a thoroughgoing rejection of war that *Sword* does not display. While Adalaide Morris argues persuasively that "the ethical work of H.D.'s texts is to put into question the possibility of 'having done'" (13), this "ethical work," in *Sword,* is inadvertent, and undoubtedly entailed much suffering for H.D. To have done is evidently her great longing: "I thought, 'I'm glad it has happened now, this is the third war and now it will soon be over'" (51).

H.D.'s later writing does not document recovery but witnesses the unconscious from a place inside of it, searching unsuccessfully for a way into the conscious mind's mode of functioning – a way to knit the conscious and unconscious.

Like her literary critics, H.D. saw her later writing and her recovery as synonymous, particularly in the cases of *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt*. In 1951 she wrote to Norman Holmes Pearson: "Yes – the Sword is important. But simply again, as a record and a record I could not have done, if I had not persisted, even at Küsnacht, on REMEMBERING. For me, it was so important, my own LEGEND. Then, to get well and re-create it" (Hollenburg 104-5). However, it seems to me that of this story about H.D.'s later writing, that has persisted through the decades, has over-determined critical responses to it. If this protects H.D.'s "reputation" in some old-fashioned sense, it does so by sacrificing engagement with her work. The critical search for H.D.'s meanings through extra-textual references must acknowledge the extreme instability of meaning in the works themselves, or be seduced into the same trap in which they caught H.D. This trap's mechanism is the search for the meaning of H.D.'s writing by excavating, recording, and further speculating on its bottomless troves of associations.

Sword and *Helen* look for their own meaning through free-association and do not find it, because they do not use "language" as a consistent structure within which words take meaning through their differentiation from other words and can thus be used to indicate distinct meanings. Their words do not express meanings, but describe the absence of symbolic differentiation characteristic of unconscious and pre-conscious processes. The object that they unsuccessfully seek to encompass is symbolic language itself, but this remains alien and threatening. Correlatively, the "recovery" that they document is, I will argue, imaginary. Its relationship to recovery in the psychoanalytic sense is one of sabotage.

The question of when H.D.'s work presents itself so limpidly to psychoanalytic descriptions of "psychotic" or "paranoid-schizoid" mechanisms because she knew of them and chose to work with them, and when they are applicable because of their accuracy in describing her mental illness, is impossible to answer with precision, partly because these two alternatives are difficult to wholly distinguish. I read her relation to psychoanalysis as an oscillation: she knew something about it, and it knew (and produced) something about her. *Sword* is not "meant" to render a distorted desire for "castration" in Lacan's sense – but it does so.[7] The psychoanalytic theory available to H.D. may be linked to the knives and crucified worms in *Tribute* and the grieving process in *Trilogy* (as Susan Edmunds suggests), and may have promoted to her, initially, the asyndetic modes of thought and expression that become so pronounced in *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt*. However, in these later works her asyndeticism can no longer be considered intentional without violence to this word's meaning. H.D.'s writing does not intentionally portray the cataclysm of sequential, organized thought as a self-reflexive

rumination about psychotic language, nor was theory about this available to her. While Daniel Paul Schreber's madness, as Eric Santner has shown, gives form (his own body) to the others of German ideology, Santner does not argue that the *Memoirs* do so intentionally because there is no evidence of this. Nor is there evidence that *Sword*'s stereotypy or death-driven logic self-reflexively adopts Anglo-American modernism's, or that *Sword*'s and *Helen*'s structure and content self-reflexively communicate the experience of a disaster of language in conscious response to psychoanalytic theory. Here, H.D.'s agency is in witnessing her disaster of language and perhaps (depending on what we think agency is) in trying to reverse it by becoming language.

Though H.D. scholars like Christine Coffman have rightly attacked the sexism and homophobia inherent in the Freudian conception of psychosis and its tenacious remainder in psychoanalytic theory (147), Coffman has read the construction of "the psychotic lesbian" in critical responses to H.D. simply as a means of marginalizing her work and maintaining patriarchal literary norms.[8] While remarks about madness in H.D.'s work have often been snide and dismissive, the relations between writing, hegemonic discourse, and madness have been examined in thoughtful and exploratory ways in scholarship on writers like Antonin Artaud, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Daniel Paul Schreber, whose struggles with "psychosis" are uncontroversial.[9] The literary language of James Joyce, Jean Rhys, Henry James, Vladimir Nabokov, Djuna Barnes, and Gustave Flaubert, who were not in their lives institutionalized or defined as mad by "experts," has also been scrutinized for symptoms of "abnormal" modes of relation to others. What is interesting in this not the pathologization of writers or creativity, but the potential for a broader, more nuanced

inquiry into the relations of marginalized modes of subjectivity, the discourses that marginalize them, literary movements and works, and perhaps literary criticism.

H.D.'s critics have tended to reproduce the standard tendency to use "madness" as pejorative but unexamined label, a mere negative term which enables the undefined category of "sanity" to be assigned to her. In their introduction to *Sword*, Hogue and Vandivere write that it displays "a mad grief – something that looks like madness but isn't, something that is closer to fury" (i). This argument posits a category of "actual" madness, undefined but inapplicable, for reasons undisclosed, to H.D. It also implies that "actual" mad people are not responding to social conditions, that their madness is not "mad grief" or "fury" but an *a priori* condition. If madness as a concept is rejected in response to its brutality, it should be rejected categorically. While the term and definitions of it subsist, they should be applied or not applied equitably. They might also be usefully re-examined, since they will haunt, and their denial will have to be repeated.

For H.D., the mother is Love, "dream/ vision," the unconscious, while the father, as well as Death, is science (including psychoanalysis), the conscious mind. Their union, as we have seen, is deadly to the mother. H.D.'s association of psychic powers with insanity suggests the discursive pitfalls in the encounter of Occultism and Spiritualism with the "science" of psychoanalysis, since the latter aligns supernatural "vision" with psychotic "hallucination," and spiritual transcendence with either "psychic integration" or madness. In *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt*, the father, "science," attacks, delegitimizes the mother, psychic insight. Yet this attack is necessary to their process of integration. H.D. asserts her "feminine" psychic experiences in the face of the repudiations of "scientific" father figures, but since the only available correspondences to spirit messages and

psychic visions in "scientific" psychoanalytic models are forms of mental illness, such experiences involve anxiety at the outset. They are, as Robin Pappas discusses in "H.D. and Havelock Ellis: Popular Science and the Gendering of *Thought and Vision*," pre-inscribed as mad, "feminine" or "artistic," unobjective, and this may reflect and reinforce certain characteristics of their expression, notably a tendency to overcompensate. Pappas holds that the scientists and pseudo-scientists who studied extraordinary states of consciousness (including those experienced in pregnancy and under the influence of psychedelic drugs) discursively distinguished their "scientific" perspectives on such experiences (even while under the influence of hallucinogens themselves) from the perspectives of women and artists. She extrapolates the discursive manoeuvres by which Havelock Ellis separates the "scientific" from the "artistic" and "feminine" perspectives and privileges the former in his studies of peyote use and pregnancy onto his reception of H.D.'s *Notes on Thoughts and Vision*. *Notes*, she argues, does not construct extraordinary psychic experiences as necessarily pathological, unhealthy, or distinct from rational objectivity, as Ellis's language does, but seeks a perspective in which neither the "scientific" nor the "artistic" perspective is privileged, but in which they can co-exist. I would argue, however, that the perspective in which they might co-exist is presented in emphatically artistic/Occultist, not scientific, discourse that subsumes the latter as surely as Ellis's "scientific" language does the former. It is as if both H.D. and Ellis wish to bridge the two, but are trapped within the discursive model that that they are most committed to, and that these discourses cannot be brought together as equals: one inevitably subsumes the other. H.D.'s later work shares with much of modern Occultism a concern with the integration of science and spirituality, a tendency to subsume religious

difference under its own "scientific-spiritual" rubric, an unconcern with the everyday, a fascination with cryptic diagrams and schemas, and an anticipation of sundering otherworldly interventions. This might be viewed, like H.D.'s later work, as impacted by its "feminine" position in relation to hegemonic and scientific discourses, to which it responds with a desire for "integration," but generally from a very great distance.[10] As the imaginary order seeks to assimilate the symbolic in H.D.'s psychic economy, so her epochal vision after World War II seeks to assimilate difference – religious, cultural, and personal – under the rubric of integration. In *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt* this conceptual scheme is applied to the "difference" represented by Dowding's repudiation.

H.D.'s "feminine" solution to the estrangement of science and enchantment is to contain in herself and later to give birth to a new world order in which the scientific and the psychic are reunited. This rebirth, her later work suggests, will be accomplished through writing. As Jane Augustine notes, H.D. "believes in [language's] substantiality because body (matter), speech, and mind (spirit) are one, not divided; therefore language, like the spirit of God, has the power to create something beyond itself" ("Remarks" 132). In H.D.'s writing, body and language, thing and word, do reunite – but something always remains unintegrated. H.D.'s faith is that the forces of destruction, identified with the male principle and entering into her, will finally, finally, finally engender a new order in which meaning is clearer, an order born, literally in *Sword*, from her ruins and the ruins of the world after the "third war" (*Sword* 51). Elizabeth Willis discusses the influence of the discourses on the Atom bomb that were current at the end of World War II on H.D.'s idea of simultaneous destruction and salvation, and this influence is explicitly present in *Sword* and *Helen*; but this idea takes hold to an unusual extent for H.D. Living through

World War II in London, and witnessing its end by means of a new weapon with an unprecedented and spectacular capacity for sheer, instantaneous obliteration whose power was generated in the same way as the sun's life-giving power obviously had the most profound effects on her and on her later work, but these effects cannot be ascribed entirely to her social context. Horrific as it was, this context affected different people differently. H.D. had always been drawn to raging transcendence, to the sublime in its ideal and romantic senses, and seen it in conjunction with freedom. During this period she internalises the more sinister logic of sublimity that war and bomb offer to an extent that surpasses most forms of trauma.

I will argue that the structure, composition, characters, and imagery of *The Sword Went Out to Sea* and *Helen in Egypt* symptomize what Lacan describes as the "imaginary cataclysm" and the establishment of a "delusional metaphor" that follow a psychotic break. *Sword* predominantly exemplifies the cataclysm phase and *Helen* the formation of a delusional metaphor, but cataclysm and metaphor overlap. These works address the problem of language that arises after the encounter with a person (or thing) that occupies the missing place of the father in the psychotic subject's narcissistic imaginary. Lacan calls this the "One-father," who "need but situate himself in a tertiary position in any relationship that has at its base the imaginary couple a-a′ – that is, ego-object or ideal-reality – involving the subject in the field of eroticized aggression that it induces" (*Écrits* 481). To assume the place of the One-father, which for the psychotic subject was never there, "sets off a cascade of reworkings of the signifier" (the signifier of difference, the Name-of-the-Father that gives language its symbolic function). In *Sword* and *Helen* this cascade appears as multitudinous characters, things, possibilities and events, their causal

relations to one another not evident, but all somehow encompassed by H.D.-based characters. All beings and things in these works, whirled around in the imaginary cataclysm, seek reunification in the "field of eroticized aggression," the passionate male attack on Delia/Helen that is the cause and purpose of all beings, things, and events. This is the delusional metaphor that gives these works "meaning," as their protagonists claim, though this mode of meaning remains unsatisfactory.

"Now it will soon be over": Apocalyptic Redemption in *The Sword Went Out to Sea*

> In the fairy-world, the otherness or alien nearness of the dead and of hidden elements, of illusion and delusion in our daily life, the witchcraft of phantasy and the bewitched obsessions of madness, all the psychological dangers, combined as if they were the heart's wish. The specter that haunts Europe Marx had called the hidden wish of the human spirit in history; the traumatic image Freud had called the repressed wish of the psyche—the primal scene. The underground uprises into the place of what is above-board. Justice demands it. The verse appears, so vivid that we see the surface of things had faded in the sunlight, and what we most feared we might be we must become. The living seem dead and the dead most alive.
>
> -Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*[11]

1. Imaginary Cataclysm, Waking Dream

The Sword Went Out to Sea (first published in 2007) is a spiritual autobiography based on H.D.'s experience in London during and after the Blitz. At this time she believed that she was receiving cryptic messages from dead Royal Air Force pilots that if given their meaning by Lord Hugh Dowding, British war hero, fellow-Spiritualist, and father figure, would aid the transition of this world to the next. In it, H.D.'s alter-ego Delia Alton (identified as *Sword*'s author) interprets the war, her messages, and "Lord Howell's" repudiation by placing them within larger interpretive frameworks which suggest that they have meanings and purposes that are hidden. However, Delia does not discover this hidden meaning in terms of rational cause and effect, but instead finds flickering "patterns" and spectral signs that perpetually "ghost for," or incompletely signify, it. In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. describes signification in dreams as "ghosting":

> The [unidentified] boys in the dream…are ghosts. They are, that is, "ghosting" for another or others; when the ghosts take form as brothers or as uncle-father, it will no doubt be seen that they again are ghosting. Or rather if we pursue the dream content,

> the intermediate ghosts, should they manifest, would be seen to be a step between brothers or uncle-father. We are all haunted houses. (146)

In *Sword* too, ghosts signal something or someone yet to come, but it is not always clear who or what.

Sword was drafted in 1946-7, during and after H.D.'s first stay in Küsnacht Klinik following the 1946 breakdown triggered by Lord Dowding's repudiation of her spirit messages. H.D. continued to revise it until 1952, although she attempted to publish it, unsuccessfully, in 1950. The first book, "Wintersleep," was composed in Küsnacht and Lausanne, the second book, "Summerdream," in Lausanne and Lugano, where she (respectively) wintered and summered. "Wintersleep" is mainly a first-person account of Delia's (H.D.'s) experiences during and after the war. It is concerned with her group and individual séances, her betrayal by Geoffrey, her encounters with Peter Van Eck and Tom Moore, and, most of all, her attempts to associate with Lord Howell, to communicate her spirit messages to him, and to understand why he repudiates them. These encounters have direct autobiographical parallels. Like Delia and Howell, H.D./Delia and Dowding met and exchanged letters concerning H.D.'s spirit-messages, towards which Dowding repeatedly expressed reservations. He may (I think so) have sent a letter, though understandably this does not survive, that said exactly what Howell's does: "No. I can not be expected to receive messages of this sort. They are both frivolous and uninspiring. Of course, it is none of my business, but it would be better if you gave up this work" (37). Parts of this statement, especially the "frivolous and uninspiring," are frequently and exactly repeated throughout *Sword*, suggesting their traumatic charge, and its terse style, that implies more than it says, does not look like H.D.'s. Dowding himself thought that he was receiving messages from these same RAF pilots, the ones who had died under his

command in the Battle of Britain. He had been very fond of them, calling them "my boys" and "my chicks" (*Majic* 196, 206). It is not hard to imagine that these cryptic and (if *Sword* renders them correctly) sometimes affectionate messages from "them," coming from a woman he barely knew, but who seemed to expect a great deal, might have provoked strong words from him. As in Delia's life, too, H.D. and Richard Aldington (Geoffrey) separated over his affair with Dorothy Yorke (Miranda), and H.D. and Peter Rodeck (Peter Van Eck) met on a sea voyage, suddenly to part. "Wintersleep" revisits these scenes, attempting to place them in some kind of order in relation to one another. "Summerdream" begins on the same track, with Delia's thoughts pertaining to Howell's repudiation, but moves into a sequence of other female protagonists, heroines of the histories and legends that succeed one another in each chapter. In each, the heroine has an encounter, or reflects on an encounter, with an enigmatically rejecting, obtuse, difficult, and/or absent man who (like Dowding) is a key player at that historical or legendary moment. "Summerdream" ends with a brief return to London in 1947, where "we," presumably the characters who enact each of these episodes (or this recurring episode in different settings), "went on with the play" (267).

Sword reveals the psychic fragmentation and drive behind Delia's trans-historical, trans-national "interpretive" project and expectation of apocalypse. In it, the psychic splitting that H.D.'s language, characters and objects give shape to is envisioned as ending with the splitting of the atom. Her syncretic apocalypticism, in which destruction is seen as the means to union, appears in *Sword* as an attempt to subjectively integrate the symbolic order, the order of language, with the imaginary order, the unity and boundlessness experienced, sometimes frighteningly, in the absence of language. Lacan's

description of the "imaginary cataclysm" at the onset of psychosis is a blueprint for *Sword*'s context, form, and content. He writes that it is triggered by:

> the question of the subject's access to a signifier as such and…the impossibility of that access…. There follows a process whose first stage we have called imaginary cataclysm…. Then there is the separate deployment and bringing into play of the entire signifying apparatus – dissociation, fragmentation, mobilization of the signifier as speech, ejaculatory speech that is insignificant or too significant, laden with non-meaningfulness, the decomposition of internal discourse, which marks the entire structure of psychosis. After the encounter, the collision, with the inassimilable signifier, it has to be reconstituted, since this father cannot be simply a father. (*Psychoses* 321)

This description applies very well to H.D.'s written response in *Sword* to Dowding's repudiation: the meaning that *Sword* seeks is its language's own symbolic meaning, called into question by the authority figure. In it, H.D.'s cognitive Möbius strip of interpretation "reconstitutes" the "inassimilable signifier," Dowding's dismissal of her letters, as sexualized violence and betrayal, and suggests that this sexual nonrelationship is the solution to the interminable slippage of its words from meanings. But it is unsatisfying, and she hungers for a more final "integration" that must surely follow.

2. Difference, Proliferation, and Sexual Violence

Delia's messages and Howell's "*coup de grâce*" give rise to a dishevelled metanarrative that links the repressed content of the unconscious to the supernatural. Past lives, clairvoyant visions, unknown countries, languages, symbols, myths, Greek drama, English poetry, anagrams, cryptograms, graphs, and maps are invoked as slippery reference points in a textual cataclysm, a disorienting interpretive endeavour that, Delia herself reflects, is either deluded or integral to humanity's survival. *Sword*'s heroines'

relationships with their male counterparts appear as the point of vexed union for disparate social and psychic forces, inadvertently allegorizing *Sword*'s own interpretive collapse. Over and over, male scions of the social order betray and brutally deny Delia and her other incarnations. Their imagined violence is gendered, sexual and lethal, global and, through a contiguous logic, completely personal:

> Hokusai, the most familiar of the Japanese masters, no doubt, by some magic of association, negated Hiroshima. I had felt the scar. The earth was furrowed with the irrational assaults that man had made upon her. She was always mother-earth. I felt that man was actually assaulting woman. I happened to be a woman. (54)

As the world is assaulted, so is H.D. As Dowding is her last love (as she thinks at the time) so the coming war is the last war, the final assault on the world/self before it cracks open. This vision is tinged with eroticism and a vast relief: "Secret tunnels had been mined across Europe. I thought, 'I'm glad it has happened now, this is the third war and now it will soon be over'" (51). As well as suggesting projected and introjected anger, her response suggests a longing for an ending, a limit, a death and rebirth that will end the cycle of projection and introjection. It suggests the return from the outside of "castration," as Jacques Lacan calls the loss of imaginary unity and entry into language as a differential symbolic system that results from the initial encounter with a limit, the "no" of a father-figure. In *Sword*, this limit returns "in the real" as endlessly repeating personal attacks, directed at H.D.-figures and at the earth by men and their wars – but surely to end, at last, in union. *Sword*'s male attacks suggest recurring imaginary entry into the "symbolic order," as Lacan calls the social order of limits, shared, fixed language and differing perspectives. But this entry into the symbolic realm always remains imaginary, never "takes hold" in the actual, or more widely agreed-upon, world. It is always the

violent men, never the H.D.-figures, who are found to be limited. Consequently, *Sword* never starts to make sense.

In his 1955-1956 seminar on the psychoses, Lacan describes Daniel Paul Schreber's use of language in terms of the deferral, by means of an invocation of meanings not evident but presumed to exist, of an absolute unity perceived as threatening. God's presumed knowledge of the meaning of his enigmatic speech and strange behavior (the "diversionary phenomena" that he deploys to torment Schreber) is what maintains God's existence at all. If God (at least in psychosis) is "essentially language," (*Psychoses* 100) one could say that it is the continual production of meaningless language that maintains the possibility, for Schreber, of meaningful language, by maintaining the possible existence of a being other than Schreber, someone who may understand this gobbledygook. Writes Lacan:

> Here, both in the [psychotic] subject's relation to language and in the imaginary world, there is a danger, which he is constantly aware of, that all this fantasmagoria might be reduced to a unity that doesn't annihilate his existence, but God's, which is essentially language…. It is at all times necessary to produce diversionary phenomena so that God is not absorbed back into the central existence of the subject. (*Psychoses* 100)

Without the "rays'" constant, nonsensical speech and multifarious other devices for reducing Schreber's power of attraction for God, there would be no God separate from Schreber, no one who might be capable of knowing the meaning of utterances that are nonsense to Schreber. Without the constant elaboration of speech, thought, and writing (even if meaningful only perhaps to God), speech, writing and thought would cease to exist as such. They would simply be, as they already almost are, simply processes occurring in Schreber's body.

In *Sword*, the work that responds most directly to H.D.'s 1946 breakdown, the male characters based on Lord Dowding are given the role that Schreber gives to God. They are the arbiters of a meaning and a "plan" that Delia and the other autobiographical characters can only apprehend as vague and elusive – though Delia has more hope than Schreber does that everything is ultimately for the best, not the result of God's weakness and bad judgement. However, like Schreber's God, Delia's male consorts are really quite stupid and bungling, interested only in maintaining the dysfunctional present order, not sufficiently aware of reality to manage the world's renewal on their own. Schreber and Delia must tirelessly think the thoughts that will enable them to bring it about eventually.

In *Sword*'s hyperbolic formalism, meaning never stabilizes in words but is imagined perpetually beyond them. Language has spectral life, "ghosting for" the meaning it can never fully express. The unassimilated symbolic order is symptomized in "the real" of unsymbolized, or inadvertently symbolized, meaning. These symptoms include the protagonists' desires for union with their male counterparts (and their counterparts' repudiations of them) their obsessions with patterns, their apocalypticism, and their past lives that swallow up the meaning of the repudiations by placing them in an endless repetitive cycle. The interest of *Sword's* heroines in uniting with their male counterparts suggests a desire not only to defer meaninglessness but also to escape it. The union with the man and the communion of his orderly understanding and her depth-perception represents a return to the safer shores of a stable, but also vital, language. This anticipated stability and renewal of language is identified with the next world that will soon, Delia is sure, replace the nearly defunct present one. Thus, *Thermopylae*, world transition, requires her union with Howell. But in the abeyance of this union, the

possibility of language is maintained by Delia's constantly expanding frame of reference. The meaning of the limit imposed by Howell, within this unlimited frame, becomes unlimited and unlimiting.[12]

However, Howell's repudiation still imposes a limit. It limits Delia's freedom of association by being the thing with which everything must be associated. It thereby substitutes "imaginary castration" for "symbolic castration." For the "symbolic order" where language can express difference it substitutes an imaginary difference, a distant man who is not really distant since they keep getting reborn as one another's consorts, and a world that becomes different, ends and begins again, as an effect of their (non)union. The struggles of *Sword*'s heroine(s) to install the symbolic order fail because in each case the symbolic perspective represented by the man is trumped by the heroine's "expanded" perspective. But the expanded perspective is always *on* this seeming limit. The repudiation, it suggests, happens (and happens and happens throughout eternity) because the heroine's universal significance and deeper understanding triggers male aggression. She is what men have repressed, what their warring, divided world lacks and must regain though violent and sundering measures.[13]

Anticipated apocalypse is thus associated with the hidden meaning that Delia seeks. Given religious form by her Hermeticism, this hidden meaning is remarkable even by Hermetic standards for the persistence with which it remains hidden. After her analysis by Freud, H.D. equates the end of interpretation with death, with the end of spectral life. Freud's own tendency to trope repressed material in spectral terms was not lost on H.D., who recalls Freud telling her that those who finish analysis are "dead… as dead as your father" (*Tribute* 141). Interpretation for her, however, becomes in *Sword*

maddeningly fleeting and ambiguous, a sliding of signification with no anchoring point, "nothing to hold on to" (141). Delia's constantly expanding and dissolving interpretive frameworks suggest a thought disorder in which what cannot be apprehended generates legions of rapidly coalescing and disintegrating ghosts to sabotage the structure of what can be. *Sword* articulates not a "final rational unity," as Augustine has argued, but a constant approach to the "hidden" meaning that it continually posits and that continually retreats from its formulations. *Sword* and other later work, like *Helen in Egypt* (1961), attempt to resolve this withdrawal of meaning. But the "meaning" of the war and of Dowding's rejection to be found in *Sword*, though H.D. believed it to be comprehensible and socially relevant, remains self-referential to the point of incomprehensibility.

Sword's language is always already the language of the unconscious, "ghosting for" its own absent meaning. As in dreams, objects *are* other objects rather than (to borrow Freud's words) the condensed, displaced, or transposed signs of them that most of us find that they are upon waking. Delia's interpretive endeavours witness the unconscious from a place inside of it, but she is barred from the social "conscious," linguistic relationships with actual others based on collective agreements regarding the meanings of words, which can be used to express differing opinions and points of view. Her difficulty in determining the appropriate active responses to supernatural messages is a function of her trouble finding significance that is social, not just personal. Reason, when applied to this purely personal significance, produces knowledge only as an unsignified remainder that makes further interpretation and articulation necessary. Though Robert Duncan rightly argues that "[H.D.'s] genius is fictive and dramatic, not philosophic" (421), in *Sword* the lack of philosophic structure that Duncan describes

becomes a lack of the semiotic structure which normally abstracts sense-data into generalizable significations. *Sword*'s spectres, accordingly, do not communicate hidden socially significant meaning, as Delia hopes, but signal an absence of differentiation between the social world and her own psyche. Since all things merge in Delia's nebula of associations, ever-new thoughts, things, possibilities, characters, and events, are rapidly generated and tossed aside to preserve the sense that there is difference. However, their very proliferation precludes the possibility of stable difference, of structure.

3. Dysfunctional Relationship Patterns

Sword's struggles to establish a meaningful relation between its heroines and heroes signal its drive to integrate the imaginary order and the foreclosed phallus, to re-unite signifier and signified, via the sexual relationship. But though the sexual relationship appears as the point where difference and unity must surely be reconciled, there is no sexual relationship.[14] Actual symbolic otherness, the "no" of the non-compliant Dowding-figure, is trumped by what Lacan calls a "symbolic unreal" (*Seminar I* 117), a fantasized nebula of references associated with the maternal, the divine "plan," and the H.D.-figure. This fantasy replaces Dowding's otherness, his differing perspective, with the universal significance of their encounter, in accordance with Lacan's description of erotomania: "[t]he erotomaniacal delusion is addressed to such a neutralized other that he is inflated to the very dimensions of the world, since the universal interest attached to the adventure is…an essential part of it" (*Psychoses* 43). The supernatural visions and messages apprehended by H.D.'s later protagonists suggest that their consorts'

repudiations are motivated by fear, ignorance, despair, captured by a formula established in their past lives together, repressed memories involving her, or adherence to "the plan." Either "Lord Howell" doubts, *or* he is shrinking from the plan himself, and thus wishes to deny her role in it, *or* he is on track with the plan and must seem to repudiate her role in it as part of an overall strategy, *or* he is triggered because she reminds him of his mother, *or* he is, as a Freudian primordial father figure, stuck on the brutal primal scene – but these latter possibilities are also part of the plan. He never has a perspective capable of calling hers, or the plan, into question:

> I must say that this apparent or real repudiation of Beauvais was part of the plan. I must argue that it was a further test of the quality and strength of Beauvais. If Ladies Guard must meet the war, then Ladies Guard must be tested and tried, and all weakness uncovered. My weakness was my strength. (257)

However, the constant return of the question of Howell's motivation in "Wintersleep" and the boggling procession of past-life betrayals in "Summerdream" suggest that the problem of the other (meaning) subsists on a structural level.

In "Wintersleep," Dowding is chiefly represented by Lord Howell, a person "peculiarly fitted to judge and assess the findings of psychic research workers" which others can only "approach…subjectively" (68). Delia receives coded psychic communications from her dead RAF pilots that she believes he must translate because they are crucial to the impending transition from this era to the next. The pilots "said that I would 'hear' [the code] but that he could understand it. They wanted Lord Howell and myself to work together" (139). This union of her perception and his understanding is, she believes, necessary for *Thermopylae,* the "already told" story of "an outstanding contemporary figure" saving civilization:

> I was looking for the perfect image in time, superimposed on a dramatic personification or a character in a book, out of time, or in the world of imagination, poetry, or drama. When, after hearing Lord Howell lecture…I began to wonder how it was that he and a handful of RAF pilots had saved…civilization, I realized the possibility of an outstanding contemporary figure acting, as it were, or re-living a story already told. I spoke of this story as an actual historical event; I called it *Thermopylae.* (100)

Delia recognizes Howell as the latest incarnation of the heroes of history, poetry and drama who enabled the "turn-over" (174) of civilization in conjunction with her own past incarnations. *Thermopylae*, once again, requires their union. The assault on this vision that Howell's response to Delia's messages entails causes her breakdown: The "slow poison" that his "doubt and repudiation had dripped…into my brain" took effect "after his last letter, dismissing my communications as 'frivolous and uninspiring'.…It was then that I visualized the streets of gibbets. It was then that I walked, eyes wide open, into hell" (95). "Summerdream" goes on to enact a dizzying succession of betrayals of heroines by heroes at what H.D. saw as periods of historical transition. It suggests that each couple maintains their salvific transitional function in spite of, or even because of, their psychic disjunction: "The point was, to get them both together at the turn of the tide – I mean, the turn-about or turn-over of one civilization or one era to another…. All that mattered, was to get them both together. When the message came she would receive it, he would carry it out" (174). However, "Summerdream's" large cast of incarnations, and the ambiguous "meaning" found in each betrayal, implies a dissatisfaction, or unusual kind of satisfaction, in Delia's interpretations. In both books, explanations of the repudiation do not progress so much as co-exist and repeat, as do the repudiations themselves, and Delia's satisfaction in them is by her own description inert:

> I was not…completely satisfied with my explanation of his attitude to myself and the RAF messages, until I saw him as part of that world of poetry. The picture [of Howell

> alone on a ship] satisfied me. But my satisfaction was of something not so much dead, as frozen, final, static, and irrevocable. (155)

Howell's repudiation becomes part of something greater, the "world of poetry," and this makes her "explanation" of it satisfactory in a "frozen, final" way. The explanation's frozen irrevocability appears in "Wintersleep" as repetition and schematization, the constant return to the event of the repudiation and the attempt to schematize it into the "pattern of my life" (104). This "pattern," her conceptualizations suggest, is visual, spatial, but never stable or complete – indeed, it constantly changes. The inexpressibly meaningful visual patterns by which Delia schematizes, or "explains," the repudiation become, in "Summerdream," inexpressibly meaningful behavior patterns, enacted by constantly changing couples who are also the same. This cyclical nonrelationship is the "mystery-play," the drama of the vexed relations of Howell's and Delia's past incarnations at historical and legendary periods that H.D. saw as transitional:

> It was a mystery-play, it would explain everything. Death would appear, in his familiar trappings. Plague, War, and Famine would be his Apocryphal companions…I, myself, might be asked to walk on, in a crowd scene…. There was a stage-clap of thunder. There was a mechanical flight of winged devils…. Then the curtain dropped and there was a brief interlude. We heard the roll of drums, the blare of silver trumpets. At last, I had a place in the vast pageant and a place that was near the altar. (106)

Unlike Katherine Mansfield's Miss Brill, whose role in her imaginary play is annihilated by the cruelty of a young couple, Delia trumps the destructive force of Howell's dismissal by placing it, too, in the play, which it climaxes. *Sword* places each repudiation in the repetitive epochal drama suggested by its protagonists' psychic insights and buttressed by modernity's Occultist cosmologies. In it, the repudiation represents the "meaning," the fastening point, of the mystery-play, though it does so rather unsatisfactorily. It is the only point that it has, however.

Sword's messianic and sacrificial content, flattened affect, and Delia's claims that she was "dead" after Howell's repudiation, suggest the annihilation of personal feeling that occurs in splitting and the drives (which take over when the desiring part of the ego is annihilated). Writes Klein:

> Omnipotent denial of the existence of the bad object and of the painful situation is in the unconscious equal to animation by the destructive impulse. It is, however, not only a situation and an object that are denied and annihilated – it is an object relation which suffers this fate, and therefore a part of the ego, from which the feelings towards the object emanate, is denied and annihilated as well. (*Envy* 7)

Sword's thronging characters and recurring scenario(s) may also be read in terms of the splitting and repetition by which Klein and Lacan characterise the drives. However, Delia's description of the effects of Howell's repudiation suggest stimulation as well as annihilation. Though she claims that "[t]he shock of his volte face had left me, not so much frozen as inanimate and lost. I simply wasn't there, any more" (33), she later adds that "his sudden volte face served to drive in the impressions deeper, to heighten my perception and to act as a sort of flint or whet-stone to sharpen my mind" (126). Delia's apocalyptic vision of world transition both mirrors this stimulating psychic "death" with spectacular social destruction, and suggests that this destruction enables, or adds impetus to, psychic and social "integration." Her desire for union with Howell, for the next world, for certainty regarding the meaning of multifarious signs, and her "integrative" discovery of these "meanings" in herself, suggests an endeavor to mend a shattered ego that in fact perpetuates splitting and the drives. The cure is the poison. The process of "integration," always reaching out to encompass new objects, is itself the cognitive and emotional shattering.

The means by which this final integration is to be accomplished, though suggested by dreams, visions, and spirit-messages, remains unclear. It is aligned both with full meaning and understanding, and with the union of the fated heroes and heroines who represent the "conscious or scientific mind and the unconscious or dream-mind":

> Lord Howell seemed peculiarly fitted to judge and assess the findings of psychic research workers. I had thought myself above the usual type of sensational or hysterical seeker. I still think so. But my valiant…effort to make a bridge between the conscious or scientific mind and the unconscious or dream-mind, met with but scant recognition. (68)

Delia does not think herself the type who would hallucinate spirit-messages, as Howell's words imply. However, his "*coup de grâce*" still prevents her from bridging the scientific and dream minds, since the former is his domain. Their vexed union is like an allegory for the schizophrenic separation of personal/imaginary (the woman) from social/symbolic (the man) significance, and the ensuing breakdown of signification. *Sword* tropes the relation of radical separation between signifier (the sound-image) and signified (the concept) by the man's rejection of the woman and by spectrality.

Sword is far from thematizing the indeterminacy of language – a goal that critics often claim for H.D.'s writing when it becomes too vague to accommodate any other claim of literary intent. The spectral ambiguity of its language does not appear as an intentional literary device, as Helen Sword suggests in her reading of H.D.'s "cryptopoetics." Sword argues that H.D. "deployed cryptopoetic strategies not to reveal some timeless universal truth about death – the code broken, the hieroglyph interpreted – so much as to explore the slippery borderline between death and life and, by extension the slipperiness also of the verbal signifiers we must use to describe whatever is unknown and unknowable" (*Ghostwriting* 118). On the contrary, while H.D.'s verbal signifiers are

indisputably slippery, caught more evidently than most "on the rails of metonymy" (*Écrits* 431), *Sword* is not "about" the indeterminacy of signifiers. It sets itself against their indeterminacy in a fruitless attempt to discover what the spectres "ghost for." Delia's RAF pilots precisely desire straightforward translation, and they want it from Howell: "All [the RAF pilots] wanted was someone who would understand the numbers and letters" (35). *Sword*'s spectres are not "figurative" in the orthodox modernist manner. They do not thematize some uncanny, ungraspable influence in reality, or the maddening insubstantiality of language, except inadvertently and to Delia's torment. They have literal existence and urgent social agendas that can be positively determined, she believes, given the right knowledge and interpretive strategies. While the RAF pilots say that they "speak the same language" as Delia and Howell, they "wanted to establish a means of communication that could be shared by other people" (140). This requires that Howell translate the "infinite varieties of flash and pause, of double-flash, half-pause, and so on. It only needed a translator to put their dots and dashes into words" (150). Delia receives and records a code that awaits the Other to render it into a system of signs.

The Morse Code-like form of these messages recalls H.D.'s vision of communications from a statue, "the Delphic charioteer," in *Notes on Thought and Vision* (written in 1919, first published in 1982):

> If we had the right sort of brains, we would receive a definite message from that figure [the Delphic charioteer], like dots and lines ticked off by one receiving station, received and translated into definite thought by another telegraphic centre…. We want receiving centers for dots and dashes. (26)

These "dots and dashes" become in *Sword* the form of the RAF pilots' communications. As a "receiving centre," Delia appears as one of the "two or three people" that *Notes* envisions who could "destroy the world of dead, murky thought": "Two or three people,

with healthy bodies and the right sort of receiving brains, could turn the whole tide of human thought, could direct lightning flashes of electric power to slash across and destroy the world of dead, murky thought" (27). That these people must have "healthy bodies" suggests H.D.'s earlier note that "Overmind without the balance of the other two [mind and body] is madness" (17). The way that this madness develops is suggested by Delia's strained and uncomprehending mode of receptivity to the spirit-world in *Sword*. It almost seems that her life depends on Howell's decoding of her spirit-messages. The RAF pilots have trouble understanding Howell's unwillingness to listen to them, and their messages, transmitted to Delia but unreceived by Howell, cause a build-up of psychic tension in her, reminiscent of the "pressure of ideas," that Eugen Bleuler describes in sufferers from schizophrenia:[15]

> They [the RAF pilots] stayed as long as I could keep concentrated and didn't give way under the strain …. It was no good my explaining that we had come to a sort of blind-alley…. I felt like a battery…that had to be completed by another battery. Or I felt like a wire, across which a voice was speaking and if the message were not received at the other end, in some way or other, the wire would break. (31)

Delia is filled, excruciatingly, with coded information that can not be "shared by other people" because of Howell's non-cooperation. His repudiation relieves the incomprehensible messages' pressure, in a sense, by replacing them as the object of her interpretive focus. It, too, it incomprehensible: she is perpetually dissatisfied with her explanations of it and constantly discovers new pertinent signs, considering their various possible significances without choosing between them. Her attempt to find the meaning of signs by associating them with other signs results in a branching and re-branching cognitive labyrinth in which signs only suggest other signs. Correlatively, Delia's ghosts and spirits are hopelessly ambiguous creatures, whose communications are vague and

platitudinous, coded, or cryptic, and never determinate, as she would wish. Delia comments wryly on the volumes of spirit-messages collected by the Society of Psychical Research:

> Being in daily peril of imminent destruction by the high-explosives, perhaps I found the letters from the dead, too vague and elusive. At such a time, we needed a surer certainty of heaven. I do not mean the fact of there being a heaven, but the facts of heaven…. But their [the spirits in heaven's] spiritual life seemed to be…without any apparent "traces of direction." (130)

Even when Delia finds "traces of direction," by which she means similarities between words or objects that allow her to unite them paralogically, meaning always remains detached from the signs that "ghost for" it. Delia, unable to eliminate possibilities or associations, speaks from "inside" the social unconscious and according to its dream-logic, a condition that is troped by the spectrality of Delia and Howell themselves: "Lord Howell looked like a ghost. We were ghosts together. We were ghosts together. We were out of the same play" (84). Possibilities, since they cannot be separated, are not really possibilities at all but unclearly meaningful aspects of the same inevitability, "the same play." Ghosts, with their legendary proclivity to return repetitively with unclear agendas and again disappear, signal this simultaneous vagueness and repetition. Ghostliness suggests the incessant dissolution of a world in which others are always projections of oneself, the disjuncture of personal from symbolic meaning of the asocial language of *Sword*.

4. Dysfunctional Spatial and Temporal Patterns: Graphs, Maps, Charts

The meaning that Delia is so certain of remains outside of her unfolding thoughts and memories and requires her to elaborate them. These memories and associations accrue as a spectral palimpsest in her person. Delia's avatars exist simultaneously in her present identity, allowing her to recognize others, like Howell, who are "out of the same play," who have been with her in "past lives" that are not really past but part of an eternal present. The palimpsestic composition of her identity is reflected by this quality in her writing. "Summerdream's" stories do not progress temporally through causes and effects, but lie over one another like transparencies, different layers of an inchoate picture. As Helen Sword writes:

> Paradoxically, in [H.D.'s] wartime writings, she "mend[s] a break in time" not by reinstating but rather by shattering conventional notions of linear temporality, confounding history by collapsing past, present, and future into a single "spectral moment": a temporal unit, in Jacques Derrida's definition, "that no longer belongs to time…that is not docile to time." (*Ghostwriting* 127)

If time, as Lacan argues, can only be measured through the duration of objects, their tendency to exist for a while and then stop existing, then the identity of all objects with one another annihilates time. Or conversely, the absence of time annihilates difference. At any rate, everything is one, and everything happens at once. Delia cannot combat the non-meaning with which Howell threatens her by making it part of a story, since this would require linear time with its causes and effects, beginnings and endings. Instead, she combats this non-meaning with a saturation of associations and instances of time, always personal, within her person. Her frames of reference, having no spatial or temporal structure, are unlimited. Howell's attempt to limit her is trumped by her endless reference points that reveal him as the limited one. The universal relevance of Delia is the "answer" that *Sword* begins to work toward, and that *Helen in Egypt* asserts, with Helen, more

confidently. Not language but rather Delia and Helen are established as universally significant. Their task is accordingly to recognize and catalogue everyone and everything that they contain inside themselves. Seeking meaning in herself, Delia finds expanding, overlapping nebulas of social discourses that share inexhaustibly fertile signifiers: psychoanalysis, religion, history, legend, all endlessly suggestive of one another and of her personal associations. Since everything gains its significance in relation to her and to Howell's repudiation of her, her search for meaning must become the articulation of everything. Delia's attempted articulation of everything suggests what David Rappaport, writing on schizophrenic language, calls "overmeticulousness," in which "the subjective experience [is] that the central idea [here, the "plan"] has not been communicated until all of its facets have been conveyed. Thus many things that usually go without saying will be explicitly communicated" (589).

Sword repeatedly attempts to fix meaning in a language that acts as a dreamlike or spectral explosion of *Logos*, the word as creation. To this end, it generates ever new characters, things, and places that meaning is unattached to except through the "physical and vital realities" (421), as Duncan puts it, of Delia's person. Through Delia's containment of everything within herself, the moment of castration can be "reversed." The tyrannical, murky, dead old order of things that language insists on can be miraculously subverted. For Schreber and Delia, as perhaps for Formalist literary critics in a less animate register, writing that is also being is the means by which the reversal of castration, the elimination of signification and return to pure *Logos*, can be accomplished. However, though *Sword* begins to work toward this imaginary containment of all things in Delia, it primarily traces an "imaginary cataclysm," a natural disaster of cognition in

response to an inassimilable signifier. The establishment of a fairly stable delusional metaphor is far from accomplished, and other ways of organizing things are attempted as well.

Delia, for instance, tries to substitute patterns and objects for symbolism as such. She senses immanent meaning behind language and other signs that "ghost for" it, and tries to apprehend it non-linguistically through graphs, charts, maps, circles and other patterns of various sorts, as well as through material objects. She attempts to organize her impressions according to these visual, non-symbolic systems, which she hopes will tell her something about her mission. But she never succeeds in abstracting meaning from momentary phenomena, just as the dreamer cannot find the "final rational unity" (Augustine 130-1) of her dream until she wakes to the thought-structures of the day. Unassimilated terms proliferate during each attempted schematization. In her preoccupation with the question of the plan and the means to achieve it, "uncertainty of the outcome wins out" although the "certainty of the undertaking, the project, eludes…doubt" (Laplanche 91).[16] This uncertainty is repeatedly dispelled through ever-new characters, narrative threads, associations, images, sexual nonrelationships, and syntheses branching into new dualisms, but it always returns.

Delia's RAF messages, for example, could be transcribed graphically if she knew, as she believes Howell does, the right way to do so. At times she attempts this herself. But the resulting maps, graphs, and charts have no abstract significance. They can be understood as attempts to substitute another system for absent symbolic language.

> [The bee] whispers or drones. He buzzes or hums. Words are not necessary. They [the RAF pilots] could have dictated a graph on a map. Without words and our sometimes clumsy spelling, they could have zzz-ed a detailed line-drawing. I could easily have transcribed the rhythm, the up-and-down, the pause and beat on ruled music paper. But

> they wanted Lord Howell to translate the music – or the weather-chart…. Now, it seems almost too easy. They had only to indicate to me the type of ruled, numbered and lettered paper that they wanted…At first, they would tap out N or S or E or W or Ne or Sw, or variations of these, as I saw them in the compass sun-pattern on the *Ghirlanda* table. These would indicate direction or simply the side of the sheet of map-paper on which the graph began. There would be numbers, latitude and longitude…. They had only to indicate what sort of graph or map-paper they wanted and Howell would find it for them.
>
> "Wave-work", they had said. The hieroglyph or graph of Z or Nenu's own name is [a double zigzag], the wave-symbol. It is W, twice repeated in one graph…. it would be a zzz-zzz way of talking. But it might have been too easy. (140)

This fragment is representative of Delia's interest in graphic representation, her difficulty in representing anything with it, and her belief that Lord Howell would be able to make things clear. It exhibits several characteristics of schizophrenic language, such as overinclusion (the inability to limit the boundaries of a problem), vacillation, and asyndetic or acausal thinking (paralogic). The map, graph, or chart that the RAF pilots might have dictated would not have represented anything in particular, though it might have resembled the hieroglyph of Z's name. But Delia's awareness of the asymbolism of her graphs as unusual, as a problem, is not clear.

Delphi's Painted Lady in "Summerdream" suggests that a transition of her "pictures" from the symbolic to asymbolic realms occurred after her "dismissal" by Pericles:

> I knew the pictures would never leave me…. but it was only after I was (as I then thought) dismissed from the golden house, that I began to see them clearly, that is, to see them as pictures, *things actual, tangible, and eternal. There is that hair-line between imagination and vision* – and that night, on the Acropolis, I crossed it. (175, my italics)

After this "dismissal," Dowding's repudiation, what was once "imagination" becomes "vision" of things that are "actual, tangible, and eternal." Accordingly, identifications in *Sword*, whether between graphics, characters, objects, signs, or attributes, are literal

rather than symbolic. Maps, charts, and patterns are not *of* anything: they are the thing itself. Beings and things *are* other beings and things. Delia literally "is" Artemis, Hippolyta, The Painted Lady, Stella, Ariadne, Day-Star, Blanchefleur, Rose Beauvais, Queen Elizabeth, Helen of Troy. She is their latest incarnation. Lord Howell "is" the incarnation of Pericles, Pylades, Julius Caesar, Normandy, I-command, Prince Lontain, Thomas Moore, Essex, Hippolytus, and Achilles. Past identities, however, are also present, indistinct in Delia's "spectral unit" of simultaneous time. Objects, patterns, and words-as-objects, are called on to "stabilize" Delia by synthesizing these disparate elements of her thought and memory:

> There was nothing to hold on to. I tried to visualize the swallow-graph, the dart and flight, so different from the eagle's.
>
> I kept on wondering about the flight or graph of the eagle or falcon.
>
> "He has a nest somewhere," Ben Masini had said. The nest was the little tripod-table. (141)

The *Ghirlanda* tripod-table, whose pattern Delia describes in great detail, is *Sword*'s foremost example of an object and pattern that substitutes for the symbolic order. Here the extremely violent character of stabilizing "synthesis," for her, can again be noted. The messages that Howell refuses to decode, along with his refusal, have the function, Delia tells us, of arranging her past into patterns which fortuitously resemble those on her *Ghirlanda* table. Delia reflects that "[w]e do not need 'messages' to assure us of eternity. But without the 'messages' the other squares would have remained dispersed, unshaped and unassembled" (110). Though she may be certain that eternity exists, the *Ghirlanda* table's four-square pattern and the memories that it renders allow her to give "eternity" some shape:

> There were four later infatuations or emotional experiences, but until I found the original foundation, they were dispersed and disproportionate. It was only after I had

> left London that the sequence became clear and with it, the experience with Lord Howell. This third square is related to the first square, four-square in all particulars. The last square is more difficult to define, it is the sort of crown or affirmation of the others. (109)

Through the table's pattern, she visually articulates and attempts to resolve the eternal rebranching and revolving of her thoughts. For her, linear cause-and-effect have given way to simultaneity, a cycle of thought that expands on all fronts, like a whirlpool in reverse. She compares it to ripples around a stone thrown in water. The table's "circles on the sea" inadvertently describe her outward-rippling thought-process, while the "sun-star" at the center of the circles is associated with its "stabilizing" quality. To her satisfaction, the sun-star rather viciously captures "unwary and unpredictable motes of memory" like an "eight-legged spider" or a "Venus fly-trap":

> I said that the table was like a stone which sent out circle on concentric circle to the horizon. The sun-star of the four superimposed squares on this little table, seems on the other hand, a sort of mesh or net. The inner stars diminish until they reach a circle of about six inches in diameter, in the centre of the table.
>
> In this innermost circle, there is a conventional, geometric pattern. This flower-pattern has eight petals. It is the living heart of the circle, the eight-legged spider at the center of the web, the Venus fly-trap if you will, pulsing to trap unwary and unpredictable motes of memory. (113)

Unlike the outward-rippling circles, the sun-star-spider pattern gives her a sense of "completion, of finality" (111). Here, in the realm of objects that "materialize" her thought-processes, Delia's speculations become very socially problematic. Delia substitutes the spatial arrangement of the *Ghirlanda* table's pattern for the structure of language. This substitution extends to her association of the table with "science," her father, world destruction, and personal reintegration. Since Delia reflects that "this star-circle [on the table] with its angles and diminishing flat perspective, might decorate the altar of a pyramid-temple in South America, Mexico or Yucatan" (113), its pattern

paralogically suggests the "final outcome" of world annihilation to her. These "angular motives of the gate-ways and fortifications of Yucatan" are "repeated endlessly in the weapons of modern warfare" (127). This association of the table, Yucatan, and "the weapons of modern warfare" suggest that destruction and sacrifice "might by some miracle be justified" (127). The associative identity of these objects, conferred by the sun-star, is taken to reveal a socially significant message:

> England is the inheritor of the tradition of the sea-kings. But all the physical or material horizons have been explored. But other horizons have lately been opened up, by new and terrible weapons of destruction. I have said that the angular motives of the gate-ways and fortifications of Yucatan are repeated endlessly in the weapons of modern warfare. If the motive of slaughter and blood-sacrifice, which I had associated with the pyramid-temples of Yucatan, had or could have any "plan," then the recent unparalleled destruction of the peoples of the world, would by some miracle and only by some miracle, be justified. Then Yucatan, meaning blood-sacrifice, had or might have a "plan" or a "part in plan." (127)

The *Ghirlanda* table is "the legitimate reward of my devotion to the 'work,' the intense, broken sessions when I concentrated so feverishly on the messages from the RAF" (113) because its sun-star pattern tells Delia that sacrificial mass destruction is part of the "plan." This conclusion is interpreted as a "reward." The *Ghirlanda* table "was like, or was the ship" (123), "the Viking ship" of Hal Brith (127). Therefore:

> Perhaps, we may conclude that the Viking Ship was England. England is the inheritor of the tradition of the sea-kings. But all the physical or material horizons have been explored. But other horizons have lately been opened up, by new and terrible weapons of destruction. (127)

It is England, therefore, with its war-nourished enthusiasm for the paranormal and otherworldly, that will presumably "explore" the non-material "horizons" opened up by the annihilation of much or all of human life by atom bombs.

However, the association between the table, Yucatan, and "new and terrible weapons" may be based on more than a visual "motive" that they have in common. The

sun-star also enables the psychic "integration" necessary for world salvation: "The points of the sun or star, directed outward, have in fact, like so many magnets, attracted the various memories, scattered in time and space, and drawn them all together" (120). Thus, the *Ghirlanda* table that Delia substitutes for symbolic language is aligned with both psychic integration, the drawing-in of "various memories scattered in time and space," and with world destruction. The table figures both castration, the entry into the symbolic order that it substitutes for, and the reversal of castration, the containment of this order in Delia herself. This suggests that there is more to "paralogic" than identity based on coincidentally similar attributes. Paralogical identity may at times replace the symbol as a means of communication, revealing the asymbolic forms of foreclosed desire.

Delia sometimes articulates differences as well as identities between things, but these differences are not sufficient to allow one thing to stand for another. Indeed, they are differences that would otherwise not have been in question for most readers: "Campione …is not Persia, it is India" (138). "Lord Howell was not Hal Brith, but William Morris was. And Hal Brith was Eric Ericson…. But Hal Brith did not sponsor the messages, though I said that the table was like, or was the ship" (123). Each distinction is quickly followed by an identification, as if difference might be threatening in itself.

Delia substitutes for the symbolic order an imagined, unstable system in which cause and effect give way to simultaneity, a cognitive big bang of outward-moving "concentric circles" that must encompass everything. Her thoughts entertain as many possibilities as possible, but the circles that she is "driven to circumscribe" yield only

larger circles, more sense-data, which she never abstracts into a coherent system. She claims that these "circles on circles" find a cohesive force in the *Ghirlanda* table:

> The circles on circles…. may not have merged but they must have moved. Later, I said that the circles seemed concentric and the table like the proverbial pebble, thrown on the surface of a pond. But again, there was movement, though this time, from within, as each circle grew larger, spreading from the small centre out, toward the horizon. But the pattern on this table gives me a sense of completion, of finality. My mind may follow any one of the sixteen "traces of direction" in memory or in retrospect, but I myself remain where I am, unconcerned with the future, reconciled with the past. (111)

This unconcern and reconciliation, however, is followed rapidly by new "traces of direction," new paralogical synapses. Ineffable meanings in "Wintersleep" and casts of characters in "Summerdream" slip away, give way to the new, as quickly as they appear. Delia claims that "our pictures sometimes seem to be made up of unrelated segments, yet they spell something. They are the clue to the final answer, they are, among the million paving-stones of the labyrinth, the ones with the little cross marked on them" (215). However, these "clue[s] to the final answer" are the very substance of the branching labyrinth.

In this labyrinth of asymbolic words and patterns, presumed to lead to the final answer, "meaning" oscillates between ambiguous significance and formulaic repetition, the modes of "intuition" and "formula" by which Lacan describes two types of neologism in psychotic language:

> The delusional intuition is a full phenomenon that has an overflowing, inundating character for the subject. It reveals a new perspective to him, one whose stamp of originality, whose characteristic savour, he emphasizes. There, the word…is the soul of the situation. At the opposite pole there is the form that meaning takes when it no longer refers to anything at all. This is the formula that is repeated, reiterated, drummed in with a stereotyped insistence. (*Psychoses* 33)

Intuition and formula become the forms in which signifiers are presented, in which they refer not to signifieds but to the unsignifiable, to "meaning as such" (*Psychoses* 33).

Howell's repudiation is figured as both a repeated scenario, the formula of their past lives, and as an ineffable event whose essence, which gives meaning to other events, cannot be described but only felt. In "Wintersleep," Delia relates the "fourth square" of her *Ghirlanda* table, which "is" Howell, to the scent of lilac. Both cannot be labeled, contained or described, but can "penetrate" the rest of the pattern:

> [T]he scent of the lilac, under the gold-framed mirror, can only be felt, be sensed, be perceived. It is like that with the fourth square of the star-pattern, its dimension penetrates the senses. It can be felt, this fourth of the four squares. It can be apprehended but perhaps it can not be understood…. We can relate or compare this fragrance to others. It evokes emotions and we can accept or dismiss the scenes, the places, the rooms, the people that we associate with this flower. So we can relate scenes and emotions to the fourth square, but it is the very essence of the fourth square that eludes description. But without the "traces of direction" of the other three squares, the fourth would have remained unrealized.…the fourth square or the qualities that I attribute to it can of course, penetrate the others, as the fragrance of lilac fills this room. We do not need a geometric analysis of our life, in order to appreciate or recognize the fragrance of a flower. But the perfume of a flower can be distilled, adulterated and preserved, though no labeled, crystal bottle can ever contain the spirit or the ghost of the flower. (109-110)

Howell's "meaning" for Delia can not be labeled or contained. Likewise "Summerdream's" formulaic repetitions, though seemingly taking a different approach to meaning, nevertheless share the apprehension of it as unsignifiable. While in "Wintersleep" the meaning of Howell's repudiation is ineffable, in "Summerdream" its formulaic repetition takes precedence as, and constitutes, its meaning. The ineffable but penetrating meaningless "patterns" that appear visually in "Wintersleep" are dramatized as meaningless repetitive behavior in "Summerdream." But these formulas have an overburdened quality, as if sinking fast into a sea of non-differentiation:

> I had said that my star-pattern on the table in the *Ghirlanda* drawing-room was like a magic-ring. I had said that I had my traces of direction. This [similarity between her star-pattern and a magic ring] was one of them.
>
> But magic-ring is *Zauberring*. You see what I mean. The word "magic" for us has lost its meaning. But we, he [possibly Norman Holmes Pearson, or Lord Howell]

> and I (German and English speaking) are not only affiliated but are one in the word ring. It was Z who first indicated to me this sort of divination. He began it with *nenufar*, but the dictionary spells it *nenuphar*; in English it is a specialized word, though the French *nenufar* is the name for water-lily. But that was not enough. Z balanced, simplified or coded it, by spelling water-lis. That suggested fleur-de-lis and Z, I think, meant us to understand by water-lis that English-French was indicated. One can perhaps become too deeply involved with this sort of decoding, but I don't think so. Z spelt *nenufar* instead of nenuphar. I looked at the word for a long time. Then I got out Garry's hieroglyphs. There was a little picture of Nenu, the Egyptian sky-god. His name is found in the zodiac. His picture or his name is [a double zigzag] which is the sign of the eleventh house of the Zodiac, Aquarius. And far was all right, too, phar would have spoiled it. So we had ancient Egypt and the present, and far spelt backward, is RAF. (138-9)

Delia's appeal to the reader, "You see what I mean," provokes a careful scrutiny of this passage, a concentrated effort to see what it does mean. If her oneness with Pearson (or perhaps Howell) in the word ring and her multifaceted account of the word *nenufar* is correct, that is, intended by Z, what then? Simply, that this is what *Zauberring* and *nenufar* are associated with for her. How these associations might relate to the social context to which she relates them remains unclear, but their proliferation circumvents the conclusion that they don't. Writes Lacan:

> Beware those who say to you – *You understand*…. this means that she herself isn't very sure of the meaning, and that the latter refers not so much to a system of continuous and reconcilable meaning as to meaning as ineffable, to the meaning of her own reality, to her own personal fragmentation. (*Psychoses* 55)

Just as Dowding-figures in *Sword* associate H.D.-figures with their mothers, H.D.-figures, and she herself, associate him with her father.[17] Lacan writes that the function of the father in the Oedipal phase is "the introduction of an order, a mathematical order, whose structure is different from the natural order" (*Psychoses* 320). An order of some kind is indeed what Delia asks of Howell and later attempts to provide for herself through the *Ghirlanda* table's, and other, patterns:

> We have proved conclusively at last, that two plus two makes four. Not only has each square its four sides but there are four squares to our final pattern. The last square, although I have said it eludes definition by its very essence, yet relates the material to the spiritual, as the fragrance of the lilac recalls old scenes and events. The scenes and events can be described in…detail, though the fragrance of the flower eludes description. (118)

The description of the "old scenes and events" that the indescribable fragrance of lilac recalls can thus, she implies, indicate this fragrance in the "material" register. Likewise, the "fourth square," though it "eludes definition by its very essence," recalls, assembles and penetrates the other three and can thus be indicated through their description. Thus, the "organization" of the first three squares that the fourth square provides (110) turns out to consist in detailed descriptions of the first three squares, or more precisely of things and events that she associates with the love-interests that the squares "are." Endlessly, the organization that things and patterns promise turns out to be more description, more association.

5. Dysfunctional Social Patterns

Like the "provisional-improvised" men and birds that give rise to "compulsive thinking" in Daniel Paul Schreber,[18] characters and things in *Sword* "ghost for" truths that Delia must incessantly unravel, following "traces of direction" which split, often by means of the word "or." Delia's splitting of possibilities with "or" suggests the unlimited frame of reference linked to the problem-solving trouble in sufferers from schizophrenia.[19] She characteristically discards none of these possibilities but maintains them in a simultaneity that suggests not possibility but inevitability, words and ideas heavy with unclear but certain meaning, awaiting someone's understanding. *Sword*,

intended and interpreted as H.D.'s means to recovery from her 1946 breakdown, figures instead a widening gyre of associations, a clanking chain of empty signifiers whose links had begun to harden some time earlier, perhaps in response to Freud's repudiation of her Corfu visions: "But symptom *or* inspiration, the writing continues to write itself *or* be written" (*Tribute* 51, my italics). Whether verbal or visual, the spirit messages fall short of their literal meanings. However, they undoubtedly pertain to Delia and *Thermopylae* in one way or another. Indeed, their very opacity allows the "plan" to which they refer to remain "inaccessible, inert, and stagnant with respect to any dialectic" as Lacan writes of the delusional formation (*Psychoses* 22). Delia's certainty that this uncertain meaning concerns her person in some particular way is characteristic of delusional belief as Lacan describes it:

> The subject admits…that these [hallucinatory] phenomena are of another order than the real. He is well aware that their reality is uncertain…. But…he is certain of something, which is that *what is at issue – ranging from hallucination to interpretation – regards him*…. The very nature of what he is certain of can remain completely ambiguous…but it means something unshakeable for him. (*Psychoses* 75)

As with all things and events, H.D. renders the war, and the visions and nightmares of atom bombs, scaffolds, and underground tunnels for survivors that it suggests to her, meaningful in relation to herself, her physical person, what Robert Duncan calls the "depths and heights of [her] personal reality" (235).[20] For H.D., the Blitz is an attack on *her*, that breaks down, as she sees it, her psychological barriers. Her sense of the salvific function of this attack on herself and the world is perfectly literal in *Sword*. Social destruction correlates to the need that Delia expresses to sort out the proliferating multitude of things, thoughts, possibilities that present themselves to her.

There is, for instance, an imagined necessity to sort out people according to their worthiness to live. Delia imagines a recognizable (to giant St. Bernard/lion hybrids) demarcation between "who was and was not worth saving" (52) from the global annihilation of the "third war." Consecutively, her past incarnation, Julius Caesar's first wife Stella, laments:

> There are too many people. Something has to be done with all these people. And I was younger and I loved you and those roads and charts and maps took you away from me. *Vae Victis*. I thought of the conquered peoples, but there were so many of them and after you left I began to imagine horrible, horrible things, primitive, unutterable – I had mad fantasies…. I have said the house is haunted but I love it…Villa Trevi is full of ghosts but this isn't a matter of the knockings and rappings I heard last winter. I had perhaps foolishly tried to help them in the village…I wanted to die then. If you go, there will be no one to stand between me and the new exodus from the city…I am afraid of all these people. I thought I loved them, but I don't love them. I am afraid of them. (227)

Hogue and Vandivere argue that in this chapter, "Stella seems…to be turning from her own illness to a restored vision of plenitude and peace, to which the vision of Caesar's actual or symbolic journey to King Arthur's blessed isle has opened her" (xlii). However, Stella claims not to be at peace but to be afraid of people. She feels the need that "something…be done with" them. Her claim to happiness would seem to support Hogue and Vandivere's argument, but it is strikingly unpersuasive: "Well, I'll sit down – I'm light-headed, Julius. I don't think I can stand any more of the Trevi [wine]. But, Julius, I'm so happy. You see, last winter was worse than other winters…. It's the Trevi – I'll rest here under the fleeces, while Nina clears the table. I am so happy, Julius" (234).

Here the word "happy" seems to mean "drunk," and suggests the medications administered at Küsnacht, for which Villa Trevi stands. "Happy," at least, means something different than usual, something uneasy. For Stella, this is the fear that "If you

[Julius Caesar] go, there will be no one to stand between me and the new exodus from the city" (227).

In keeping with the dizzying succession of characters and frequent evidence of projection and introjection in *Sword*, "too many people" suggests both "the masses" and the unchecked splitting of H.D.'s inner life into the multitude of characters that *Sword* tosses out. The hordes that frighten Stella and the necessity that Delia imagines in discriminating between those worthy and unworthy to live thus suggests the necessity of sorting, arranging and limiting thoughts, visions, and identities. Howell articulates in thought this need for a limit even to spirit-messages, as Delia, who "loved" her exhausting RAF pilots "very dearly" (121), never would. "There were too many of these messages. There were too many altogether. They had to stop somewhere" (152). Howell the Air Force Marshall is assigned the ruthless, discriminatory qualities stereotypically associated with his role. Delia's feminine receptivity and imaginative fecundity catalyze his aggression.

While Christine Coffman and others have suggested that the projection in H.D.'s work is an aesthetic choice that asserts a feminist and lesbian erotics and aesthetics against patriarchal visions of love and language, *Sword*'s projections do not challenge modernism's stereotypes, but rather suggest their uncritical adoption. Delia's psychic colonisation of "Ben Masini" (Arthur Bhaduri, her medium for a time) is another example. Masini is, like Delia, a "strange, sensitive creature," tormented, she surmises, by his mixed parentage, who "[o]ut of the whirlwind…brought his pictures and his naïve, oriental fantasies" (63). However, Delia cuts off all her relations with Masini because of his coming marriage:

> Masini said "But what will you do and Gareth do if I marry Doris?"
>
> I had answered, "I don't know what Gareth will do, but I won't see you any more." He didn't understand, and I became perhaps over-effusive and motherly.
>
> You see, Masini, we are both so terribly fond of you…. I have loved our work together and I can't mix it up with – with other things." (22)

This statement, in light of Delia's own mix-up between her "work" and her obsession with Lord Howell, appears as what Klein calls "projective identification," the projection of her unacceptable feelings onto another person (Masini) who is then rejected. She subsequently adopts his role as medium, table-tipping in "the best Masini manner" (23). After losing touch with him she speculates on his fate in the identical terms that she uses to describe her own:

> But mal-nutrition and constant fear of the law, in connection with a recrudescence of intolerance that found legal support in the obsolete Witchcraft Act, proved too much. He took the easy way, or perhaps it was the hard way. I don't know, for by this time, I have completely lost touch with him. (63)

This precisely mirrors her own breakdown: "I was terribly afraid. I thought I had broken some law. I thought that I was dammned. I was damned. I didn't eat anything. I remembered our discussions of the Witchcraft Act. I wondered what had become of Ben Masini" (49). Indeed, there is no evidence in *Sword* that Masini had a breakdown, or that his marriage to Doris was a response to the overwhelming pressures of mixed parentage rather than a free choice. The nakedness of the projection and its lack of credit to Delia suggest that its portrayal is unintentional. Here, Delia, a rich white woman, projects her conflicts, fears and desires on an Indian-Englishman who seems to depend on her and Gareth (Bryher, the heiress) for financial support, and who is rejected and introjected when his personal life does not conform to "the picture" as she envisions it. That Delia does not yet know what the "complete picture" is does not imply a radical openness to

possibility. Things that do not regard her, like Masini's engagement, are emphatically "not in the picture."

8. Ever-Shifting Frames of Reference

As we see in H.D.'s letters and in *Tribute to Freud*, Freud read her visions at Corfu as her foreclosed homosexual desire for her mother returning in the guise of hallucinations, a phenomenon that he discusses in "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis" (569-70).[21] "The professor," *Tribute* tells us, "translated the pictures on the wall…as a desire for union with my mother" (44). Freud's vision of psychosis, rework it as H.D. might in terms of psychic gifts, must have contributed to her symptoms and the way that she herself read them. Freud clearly believed that H.D. had not negotiated the Oedipal phase successfully by repressing her primordial bisexuality to become properly, heterosexually "female": "The Professor said I had not made the conventional transference from mother to father, as is usual with a girl at adolescence" (*Tribute* 136). Their sessions leading up to this time involved the exploration of her early triangles or failure to triangulate: "F. says mine is the absolutely FIRST layer, I got stuck in the earliest pre-OE stage, and 'back to the womb' seems to be my only solution. Hence islands, sea, Greek primitives, and so on…. my triangle is mother-brother-self…. diverse looking manifestations fit in somehow" (*Analyzing* 143). The project of Oedipal triangulation apparently continues in passages in *The Gift* and *Tribute*, in which H.D. seems to be diagnosing her own lack of relationship to her "un-get-atable" and "giant-

like" (*Tribute* 38) father, and attempting, not very successfully, a libidinal transference from mother to father. In a 1933 letter to Bryher, she reports that according to Freud,

> there is some block and connecting link missing that he can't get at. I suppose it is the "father" vibration, for we can't, no matter how we idealize the mother-idea, get rid of the father …. I think I have made some funny pure classic transference, and that certain things, the "ball," these doves, represent "father," but do not link up with the actual personal father…. I think the link is the star-stuff, but as S.F. once or twice has given such a snort when I have gone into star-states, it sort of cripples me…I am not, as you know, a sloppy theosophist or horoscope-ist, but you know, I do believe in these things and I think there is a whole other-science of them. And that is where, in a way, S.F. and I part company. I suppose that too, is symbolical of my leaving my own home and its surroundings and the strictly, so-called "scientific." But I think you will agree that star-fish stuff is my real world and that getting that, I am, in a way, being "in love" also with my father, but of course, again a mystical "father-in-heaven." (*Analyzing* 331-2)

Freud suggests that there is a block in regard to her "actual personal father." In her terminology, which probably refers to Robert Ambelain's *La Kabbale Pratique*, the "father vibration" cannot be gotten rid of, but things that "represent father" do not "link up" to the "actual personal father."[22] However, she surmises, getting the "star-fish stuff" that is her "real world" is "being in love also with my father, but…also a mystical father-in-heaven." Though H.D. accepted Freud's suggestion that her interest in astrology manifested her desire for her father the astronomer, her "star-states" seem to replace her "actual personal father" with the "father-in-heaven." Certainly, "star-states," "mother-ideas," and "other-sciences" share a hyphenated fuzzy unboundedness with the "father-in-heaven" that the "actual personal father" with his "cold, scientific detachment" lacks. H.D.'s "other-science" rejects her father's "strictly, so-called" science, and calls on a greater interpretive framework associated with Occultism, hyphenation, and the father-in-heaven. Analogously, her correspondence suggests that her famously renewed sense of purpose after her analysis comes, not from father figure Freud, but from modifications to his analytical method which affirm the truth of her visions and the social relevance of her

work, which was, at the time, a creative "translation" of Euripides' *Ion*.[23] This passage suggests what Lacan calls an "affirmation…on the level of the imaginary" that H.D. provides for herself following Freud's "crippling" response to her "star-states." And this affirmation is precisely what perpetuates her disaster of signification.

Lacan warns against free-associative therapy for analysands with "psychotic structures" because of their unacquaintedness with signification as such, and considers the ensuing misrecognition of the distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary orders as the greatest danger in their analysis:

> [W]hat in the subject calls for recognition on the appropriate level of authentic symbolic exchange…is replaced by a recognition of the imaginary, of fantasy. Thus to authenticate everything of the order of the imaginary in the subject is properly speaking to make analysis the anteroom of madness…. we must attribute the well-known cases of fairly rapid onset of a more or less persistent and sometimes lasting delusion to a certain way of handling the analytic relation, which consists in authenticating the imaginary, in substituting recognition on the imaginary level for recognition on the symbolic level. (*Psychoses* 15)

Freud, primly scientific though he appears in H.D.'s letters and in *Tribute to Freud*, was credulous and expansive towards the supernatural at this time despite his earlier dread of Occultism's threat to the scientific integrity of psychoanalysis ("Dreams and Occultism" 54).[24] He was a member of the English Society for Psychical Research, and in "Dreams and Occultism" urges the reader "to have kindlier thoughts on the objective possibility of thought-transference and at the same time of telepathy as well" (54).[25] In *Totem and Taboo* he describes an affinity between magic and art based on their shared method of associating ideas through similarity and contiguity, and on their common assumption of the "principle of the 'omnipotence of thoughts,'" in which "[r]elations which hold between the ideas of things are assumed to hold equally between the things themselves"

(85). Obsessional neurosis, he notes, shares this assumption with magic and art. As Timothy Materer describes Freud's ideas:

> The artist draws on the primitive feelings found in animism just as the magician draws on them to demonstrate a power over spirits. But there is a second and even closer affinity between magic and art: both work through the association of ideas…. The artist is thus linked with the shaman, and magic with literary technique – just as an Occultist would wish. (*Alchemy* 11-12)[26]

In keeping with his theory that magic and art both assume, in different ways, that the relations that they establish between representations of things extend to the relations between the things themselves, Freud validated H.D.'s visionary experiences by invoking her vocation as a poet, in spite of his repudiation of her Corfu visions. Her visions could be "true" for her as a poet, although he did not seem to think that they might represent literal information about anything in the world outside of H.D. Since Freud was very much a scientist for H.D., his view of art and magic's affinity through shared associative modes and his affirmation of her supernatural experiences lent "scientific" credence to her belief in the superiority of free-association over the rationalism that he himself represented for her. This passage of her letter, and *Tribute to Freud*, demonstrate her characteristic turn to a wider frame of reference or "other-science" unavailable to Freud, a gesture that is repeated in *Sword* when Howell (like Freud, associated with her father and with coldness, detachment, and science) rejects her appeal for "the meaning of the numbers and letters" from the RAF pilots that Delia "could only record."

Both Freud's and Dowding's repudiations give rise in H.D.'s mind and work to interpretive endeavors that trump the father figure's blinkered authority, reverse his attempted castration, but postpone clarity. Nevertheless, H.D.'s all-encompassing visions, though their significance is affirmed in the face of skepticism, are treated in *Tribute to*

Freud and in *Sword* as functions of a potentially dangerous mental state in which the eruptions of the unconscious may be overwhelming to the conscious mind.[27] In *Sword*, Delia doubts that she would have received spirit-communications if in perfect health: "Given ideal conditions, comfort, security, peace of mind would the messages have come at all, or would we ourselves have wanted them?... if I with sincerity and conviction, later continue the 'work,' would my very peace of mind and comparative good health, in a sense, block the communications?" (68). Like Havelock Ellis in his account of the peyote experience, Delia seems to shuttle somewhat between an affirmation of the noetic quality of her insights and an understanding of them as predicated on some degree of unhealthiness. Thus, Delia speculates that Howell's fear of madness caused him to repudiate her visions, just as H.D. speculates that Ellis "may have thought [that *Notes on Thought and Vision*] was a danger signal" (*Tribute* 130). The thoughts that Delia assigns Howell in his role as Coleridge's Ancient Mariner suggest her own vacillation between supernatural and psychoanalytic narratives:

> He saw them die of hunger and thirst. They all died. There were only ghosts left, and two of them, madness and death, threw dice for his soul…the bird swayed, circling the dead mast…. but this was finally, irrevocably impossible…it wasn't *them*, of course…It was a phantom, another ghost. It was not an albatross. (152)

Howell tells himself that Delia, the albatross, was a phantom. However, Delia knows that what appears as spectral may be real, and what appears as madness or "life in death" may be "true": madness can be "authentic" (101). Delia claims that it does not matter anyway whether an (unspecified) dream is a projection or a psychic insight. In either case, it follows "the pattern of [her] life," and is thus significant:

> This desolation, once re-established [by Howell's repudiation] became a waltz, a circling within the orbit of another time-dimension. The orbit of the dance belonged, by association, to the hieratic circling of the Maidens in a Greek play. I was a maiden in a

> Greek play, therefore in line with the source of inspiration of all dance and music…. Whether the dream had or had not the quality of a so-called psychic materialization, or was projected by the submerged content of the subconscious mind, is beside the point. The dream, neatly and deftly, followed the pattern of my life. (104)

Whether her dream is subconscious projection or clairvoyant vision, it has the same significance because of its circling pattern, that places it in line with "the source of inspiration of all dance and music." The rejection of Howell (Tom Moore/ Pylades/ *Prince Lontain*) "establishes" a "desolation" that becomes a dream of circling Greek maidens, "all blessed by the gift of Love." In this dream, the goddesses of Love, War, and the Moon (associated with madness) are all awarded "the apple or the apples…without discrimination" (105) by Paris. The dream tells Delia that "Love had tempered the arrows of madness and the sword-thrust of the victor, and Love had adjusted the quivering balance till finally it stood level and at rest." Love tempers and adjusts the Moon-madness and the War-repudiation, and this is true whether the dream that tells her so is clairvoyant, that is, referring to something outside herself, or whether it is itself a "subconscious projection." If it is projection, it can nevertheless tell her something true about what is outside of herself.

9. H.D.'s "Foreclosures"

The slippage of *Sword*'s words from their concepts is synonymous with Delia's failure to discover the meaning of her interpersonal relationships, to symbolize this meaning in shared language. Language's "central signal of a possible mediation" is introduced in an asymbolic or unintentionally symbolic fashion as the vexed unions of its many heroes and heroines. *Sword*'s proliferating past-life repudiations and apocalyptic

fantasies, and the imaginary relation of these to Dowding's actual repudiation, represent a "mode of mediation" that both substitutes for and figures the symbolic language whose absence is revealed by H.D.'s encounter with the "no" of a father figure. The initial "no" seems never to have been forthcoming from H.D.'s father. In *The Gift*, *Tribute to Freud*, and *HER* the mother-figures are truly formidable, while the father is experienced by the child Hilda as "not altogether negligible" (*Tribute* 50). Though highly respected by others, he seems unequal to the power that he represents. In *The Gift* (as well as in H.D.'s correspondence) much is made of her father's head-wound, a real incident exaggerated to macabre proportions. A family friend's record of his wounding (which Barbara Guest includes) states that Dr. Doolittle had not been hit by a car (as H.D. claimed) but instead had stepped off a bus while it was moving. He was "dazed," his beard "dark with blood," but "luckily he wasn't badly hurt" (Guest 18). H.D., however, describes this incident in dire terms in *The Gift* and in a letter to Havelock Ellis. She tells Ellis that her father's "life was despaired for some time" and ascribes to this event her great need for Ellis, a presumably less vulnerable father figure (*Analyzing* 197). In *The Gift* the incident becomes "concussion of the brain and his collar-bone is broken" (194). In both documents, she returns several times to the fact that her mother did not give her credit for finding her father and washing his face: "Mama did not look at us, she was looking at Papa. She did not say, 'O, children, children, who was it found your father?'" (*Gift* 193). Indeed, Hilda and Helen Doolittle's representatives rarely address each other directly in H.D.'s work. In *The Gift*, Hilda's giftedness, her courage in washing the blood from her wounded father's face, and everything else regarding her remains unacknowledged by Helen.

In *Tribute*, too, it is her unforthcoming mother that Hilda desires, though she tries to desire her father:

> It is *she* who matters for she is laughing, not so much at us as with us and over us and around us…. About *her*, there is no question. The trouble is, she knows so many people and they come and interrupt. And besides that, she likes my brother better. If I stay with my brother, become part almost of my brother, perhaps I can get nearer to *her*…. *If* one could stay near her always, there would be no break in consciousness – but half a loaf is better than no bread and there are things, not altogether negligible, to be said for *him* [her father]." (34)

H.D. seems here, probably at Freud's prompting, to be trying to transfer her desire from her mother to her father. After all, "It is his daughter to whom [her father] later entrusts his paper-knife; he leaves the uncut magazines and periodicals for her" (34). To cut, presumably. This attempted transference seems to require that she revisit her initial "castration," which is also associated with Freud. A picture in her father's study of a doctor slicing a patient's arm is accordingly transposed onto her relationship with Freud:

> The half-naked man on the table [in a picture in her father's study] was dead so it did not hurt him when the doctors sliced his arm with a knife or a pair of scissors. Is the picture called *A Lesson in Anatomy*?
>
> It does not really matter what the picture is called. It is about doctors. There is a doctor seated at the back of the couch on which I am lying. He is a very famous doctor. He is called Sigmund Freud. (34-5)

Dr. Freud, who did not like Lacan see psychosis as an unchangeable personality structure, confronted H.D. with the "necessity" of this libidinal transfer to her father and corresponding "acceptance" of her castration. Told that she must she prefer her father, as Freud thought normal, healthy women did, H.D. tries to talk (or write) her past and present selves into it. But though Dr. Doolittle apparently thought the world of her, claiming that his "one girl is worth all of her brothers" (Guest 14), it is the mother's affirmation that remains at issue.

In *Sword*, Delia's father (or his ghost) "made only one pronouncement, Stop this war" (68), a pronouncement suggesting the unlimited power that the father gives her. This is a power that she does not choose, but can not reject: "But though…I would have exchanged Troy and *Thermopylae* for a basket of apples, I couldn't do it" (54). When the "no" of the father fails to initially enter the subject's psychic economy, writes Lacan, language as a differential, abstract system is never acquired. Subsequent encounters with something like this "no," which may simply take the form of other people's interpretations or judgments of the subject's speech, trigger the onset of psychosis, as Lacan discusses in detail in "On A Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis." Writes Lacan: "For psychosis to be triggered, the Name-of-the-Father – *Verworfen*, foreclosed, that is, never having come to the place of the other – must be summoned to that place in symbolic opposition to the subject" (*Écrits* 481). When psychosis is thus triggered, "the subject moves into another mode of mediation…and substitutes for symbolic mediation a profusion, an imaginary proliferation, into which the central signal of a possible mediation is introduced in a deformed and profoundly asymbolic fashion" (*Psychoses* 87).

In *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt*, Dowding's attempt to suggest a limit to H.D.'s knowledge is "introduced in a[n]... asymbolic fashion" as cataclysmic, erotic, eternally recurring, and productive of a certainty whose object remains mysterious. Delia "would be driven, haunted until I circumscribed the circle, I mean, until I was sure of the circumference" (146). H.D.'s recurring failure to reconcile and integrate the feminine, psychic, and "unconscious" forces that her person represents with the masculine, scientific, "civilized" social order (represented variously in her life by her father, Freud,

Havelock Ellis, Dowding, and others) gives structure "in the real" to the foreclosure of what Lacan calls the "Name-of-the-Father" or the "phallus," the signifier-as-such that is necessary for signification. H.D. seeks to fill the gap of castration that appears in the real with a meaning that can never be articulated in her malfunctioning language, but is always personal. Thus it is Delia's person, not language, that must be meaningful, that must close this gap by containing everything.

10. Flesh, Spirit, Ghosts, Art

Tentatively in *Sword* and more decisively in *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. adapts Freud's argument in *Civilization and its Discontents* that, although civilization is built on repression, slightly less of it would be optimal. Accordingly, she associates the female protagonist with the mother of the male love-object, and portrays the violent repudiations of the war heroes as resulting from their repressed memories of their mothers, which must be integrated into their conscious minds. There is war because male aggression is triggered by the repressed feminine/ maternal principle, identified with the works' protagonists. Civilization, built as it is on repression, must be smashed entirely for the next world to emerge. Correlatively, the blocks in the hero's psyche must be shattered to admit the memory and love of the mother/protagonist. In *Sword*, Delia associates herself with Artemis and Howell with Hippolytus. In *Hippolytus Temporizes* (27-30), H.D.'s English adaptation of Euripides' play, Hippolytus is obsessed with Artemis because he associates her with his mother, Artemis' former maiden. Howell, Delia suggests, is haunted by a mother whom he associates with her. Likewise, before Delia met Howell,

she was "haunted, obsessed" (84) by him, her identity split into Iseult Blanchemain, wife of Geoffrey, and Iseult Blanchefleur, the future partner of Howell:

> I had seen a ghost, a spectre, *chère belle fantôme,* Geoffrey had once called me, and he was right to say I didn't love him. Iseult Blanchemain loved him well enough and I protested. But Geoffrey knew enough to know there was another. He knew there was another, but I didn't know it. He sensed in me the *belle fantôme* but he could not know what I did not know. He shouted, as he called it, Hippolytus and that was a play by a Greek poet, called Euripides. He "shouted" it in Greek and I stood frozen while I listened. I was the statue that the poet prayed to…. I saw Hippolytus. (83)

This association of the *belle fantôme* with Hippolytus suggests that Delia's relationship with Howell is Oedipal. In H.D.'s play (unlike Euripides' surviving version) poor Hippolytus mistakenly sleeps with his step-mother thinking that she is Artemis, realizes his mistake, commits suicide, is resurrected in a state of insanity, and dies again, a fate that Howell seems to want to avoid. Howell, too, is already Achilles, Dowding's incarnation in *Helen in Egypt*: "a wisp of steel – a sword of the Spirit, if you will, and a sword that had worked God's will before, as we all know. *Troy town's down*" (46). Delia is already Helen: "I remember the walls and the pale ghost, called Helen. *Troy town's down* but the beauty they recaptured, is no longer living" (54). *Helen in Egypt*'s Helen and Achilles are explicitly one another's (and their own) mother and father: they engender themselves by having sex (288). Thus, in the overall picture that these works attempt to piece together, the cruelty and wars of men result from repressed desire – or at least, the repudiations of Achilles/Howell/Dowding, and the Trojan War and World War II, result from Oedipal issues in the son and primal-scene-happy tendencies in the father. Family traumas charge these father/husband/sons' responses to H.D.-figures with "*Eros, Eris*." H.D.'s attempted castration by father/sons is repeated, *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt*

wish to establish, throughout history and legend, and in every instance it fails because the father/sons are themselves castrated.

However, though it is true that in some of *Sword*'s versions of reality, Howell's reason malfunctions because Delia is his mother or mother-substitute or daughter, the "expanded world view" (Augustine 130) of *Sword* is far less stable than that of *Helen in Egypt*. *Sword* does not provide, as *Helen* does, even a wildly impossible, but discernable, coherent explanation of its hero's behavior. It replaces cause and effect with a personally meaningful, constantly expanding "pattern" that invokes, but does not adhere to, causes and effects. It does not "rationally unify" her experience so much as negate it, constantly elaborating a delusional system to protect asymbolic language from the non-meaning that threatens it.

This movement of "meaning" from language into the protagonist herself is the goal of H.D.'s later work. Her protagonists, H.D. wishes to establish, contain the significance that they seek. Her approach in later work to reclaiming agency in relation to authority is to place the authority figure, the man who assumes the place of the Other, in a broader context that remains incompletely articulated, but within which the heroine's unlimited, ever-unfolding (self)knowledge reveals the man's perspective and behavior as limited. H.D.'s vision of the turn-over of civilization into the "next world" mirrors this denouement of worldly authority. Just as the difference represented by these men is subsumed by her psychic insights, so rationalistic, male-dominated civilization, aligned with the conscious mind, will re-integrate with the primitive, unconscious, maternal, an integration which will, *Sword* suggests, destroy the present world. For Delia/H.D., as for Freud's Wolf Man, "castration is lived…as a precondition for being cured [though] the

role of the persecutor, here the castrator, is successively filled by different men" (Lemaire 246).

The figure of Helen of Troy, who H.D. identified with her mother and with herself, sounds a messianic note in *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt*. Both suggest that H.D. experienced her anger toward the warlike and utilitarian ethos of modern Europe, and Dowding, its emblem, as *their* aggression toward her. "Troy fell because it had sheltered" (116) her alter-ego Helen, inadvertent catalyst of male violence. However, Helen's "frail ghost bequeathed her priceless inheritance not only to the victor but to the vanquished. The rule of war did not preclude the rule of Beauty." Helen of Troy has in *Sword* the role that H.D. sets for herself in *Ion*: representing "Beauty," which she defines there as the unification of "conscious" and "unconscious," and bequeathing this beauty to the coming civilization:

> For this new culture was content, as no culture had been before, or has since been, frankly with one and but one supreme quality, perfection…. The conscious mind of man had achieved kinship with unconscious forces of most subtle definition…. A scattered handful of these creatures or creations is enough to mark, for all time, that high-water mark of human achievement, the welding of strength and delicacy, the valiant yet totally unselfconscious withdrawal of the personality of the artist, who traced on marble, for all time…that thing and that thing alone that we mean, when we say, Ionian. (254)

The violent reconciliation that Helen catalyzes is, as *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt* suggest, the union of "conscious" and "unconscious," the source of artistic, and consecutively, cultural perfection.

In *Sword*, "Day-Star" says of Athens that there are "few ghosts, few…emanations. That is why I love it. It is all spirit" (198). "Spirit" stands here as in *Ion* for the "integrated" artistic perfection that H.D. believed the Ionians had achieved, and that now, at this turning-point, must be achieved again:

> Today, again at a turning-point in the history of the world, the mind stands, to plead, to condone, to explain, to clarify, to illuminate; and, in the name of our magnificent heritage of that Hellenic past, each one of us is responsible to that abstract reality; silver and unattainable yet always present, that *spirit* again stands holding the balance between the past and the future. What now will we make of it? (255, my italics)

On the other hand, the Roman "Villa Trevi" (Küsnacht) is "haunted," but "would be all right if they didn't interpret everything, in that morbid way they have" (224). "Haunting" is again figured in terms of perpetual interpretation, the necessity of further integration of conscious and unconscious. The absence of ghosts, the "integrated" saturation of pure spirit, pure "aesthetic drive and concentrated spiritual force," expresses itself as a perfect beauty, especially in art, that makes interpretation unnecessary.

This integrated perfection stands for the renewed language for which H.D.'s own writing searches. Her heroines' relations to the world, most explicitly Helen of Troy's, are similar to Schreber's as he describes it in his *Memoirs*. Schreber's feminine "voluptuousness," he writes, attracts God's injuring, castrating "rays," but the skewed world order that results will be healed at the time of Schreber's death "at the latest" (252). Like Schreber's person and the God(s) and "provisional-improvised" beings of *Memoirs*, *Sword*'s female victims, male aggressors, and ghosts express malfunctioning language, suggesting but not articulating a hidden meaning imagined beyond the confines of the crumbling social order. Delia's cognitive "labyrinth" and Schreber's "compulsive thinking" compel their pursuit of this meaning and result in a knowledge of the Cosmic Order in which, for both, "everything that happens is in reference to me" (*Memoirs* 197).

Like Schreber, Delia follows spectral signifiers, "traces of direction" which locate meaning in her person: in her memories, associations, and writing, asymbolic though these are, and in her traumatic participation in the eternally recurring "Sacred Drama."

Agency thus becomes a question not of behavior regarding others, but instead of articulating to herself what is always-already contained in herself. The written revisitation of her past, her imaginary castration, becomes itself a political project. Perhaps *Sword* and *Helen in Egypt*, as "integrated" literary works, are necessary to the coming civilization, if it is to be perfect. At any rate, H.D.'s and Schreber's encounters with imaginary castration, their work implies, will enable the new, integrated world of pure spirit to rise from the ruins of the old.

Delia's task of integration and correlative world salvation, linked to the attainment of certain knowledge, raises the difficult question of how to bring together two clusters of associations. On the one hand, "civilization," the "conscious mind," and the white Anglo male secular intellectual tradition, which I have associated with the linguistic signifier and the symbolic order; on the other, the "primitive," "psychic," "unconscious," supernatural, non-white, non-Anglo, and/or feminine, which stands for the signified and the imaginary order. In *Sword*, the integration of these terms involves the need to put psychic phenomena on a more "scientific" basis, a task to which Delia imagines Howell (with whom she associates the former set of characteristics) and herself (with whom she associates the latter) as uniquely suited. Adalaide Morris writes of H.D.'s determination to integrate "science" into her conceptual framework in terms of a desire to heal the modern breach between science and the mystical or animistic. She describes "science" as one of what she, after Roland Barthes, calls H.D.'s "Mana-Words" – "words that function in a writer's vocabulary that are [as Barthes puts it] 'neither eccentric or central' yet nonetheless impart 'the illusion that by this word one might answer for everything'" (8). Morris distinguishes three approaches with which H.D.

attempted to integrate science into her writing – imitation, supplementation, and assimilation:

> Where supplementation makes science and poetry into adjacent and complementary disciplines, assimilation, H.D.'s third strategy, like imitation, her first, overlaps the two enterprises…. in assimilation, the poet takes up a position as a practitioner who contributes to knowledge in his or her own right. The claim of this strategy is not that poetry is *like* science but that in some fashion it *is* science. (59-60, Morris's italics)

Sword takes this "assimilative" strategy. In it, Delia's psychic experiences and associative process are meant to uncover empirical truth. This truth is "scientific" and should be recognised as such: "If 'We are not ready' to place psychic communication on a scientific, practical basis now, at this very moment, when will we be?" (128). The power of "science" to save the world is contingent on its being applied to psychic phenomena. But "science" is never, here or anywhere in H.D.'s writing, fully united with psychic phenomena, with art, or with the unconscious realms. It always remains the term with which, try as she might, she does not fully identify: "[c]lairvoyants, as a rule, are sensitive but not scientific" (125). In suggesting a systematizing and discriminatory capacity that she does not feel herself to possess, "science" implies the possibility of answering for everything "only when veiled," only while it remains beyond her reach. Delia reflects:

> One was afraid of the end of the world. It was the end of the world, anyway. There must be another world, but where was it? It was there, somewhere. I had never doubted that. But I had made no real emotional connection with it, as my work with Masini had been for the most part, either impersonal or literary. *Lord Howell had stood out for some sort of extension of consciousness. I wanted anyhow to feel things in that way, in a rational way. Perhaps that was where I was wrong.* (34, my italics)

Delia's desire, associated with Howell and with the next world, to feel things "in a rational way" echoes all the protagonists' desires in *Sword* and in *Helen in Egypt* for the

union of themselves and their *héros fatals*, science and psychic research, Egypt and Greece, masculine and feminine, civilized and primitive, conscious and unconscious, in order to achieve the "next world." This desired integration, as well as the violent imagery with which it is imagined, suggests the return "in the real" of the symbolic order, the foreclosed place where the protagonists may be wrong. "Science" and the men that she associates with it represent the possibility of admittance into the symbolic, "scientific" world where beings and objects are differentiated from oneself and from one another, language is shared, and speech and writing may be true or untrue. However, it is the men with their science who turn out to be castrated, while the heroines' frames of reference contain theirs but are not limited by them.

In *Sword*, Howell is imagined to be the privileged interpreter of the meaning of the RAF communications that will enable *Thermopylae*: "They would explain it to Lord Howell. Apparently they couldn't explain it to me, but if Howell would come, they could indicate through me, *a new means of communication*" (30, my italics). What Delia gets instead of "a new means of communication" is Howell's "*coup de grâce,*" his refusal to receive her messages and his pejorative judgment of their value, which is itself perceived in later chapters as somehow crucial for transition to the next world and for personal cure: "my weakness was my strength" (257). Personal disaster causes Delia to anticipate a correlative social disaster:

> It was a passionate devotion to the drama that held me there in London, as well as a curious foretaste of inevitable disaster. But the disaster would come crowned with victory, and the victory would be followed by the solution of some mystery. It was a mystery-play, it would explain everything. (105)

This "foretaste" of disaster "crowned with victory" suggests the hope that recurring imaginary castration will "take hold" in the symbolic order. Delia's obsessive concern

with the causes of Howell's repudiation symptomizes her desire to comprehend another perspective, to enter into symbolic exchange with an other person. "Scientific" verification and gendered bodily violence are thus associated with Howell, who (she believes) could have given her spirit-messages a symbolic function. If his repudiation replaces his imagined discriminatory powers in representing castration, her search for its "meaning," the desire of the other, figures an unrequited desire for access to interpersonal relations in the symbolic, as well as imaginary, register: to integrate the imaginary and symbolic orders into the "Borromean knot" (Lacan, *Feminine* 111-112) of the castrated subject. The significance that Delia searches for is that of language itself, perhaps the significance of the very words that make up *Sword*. However, the meanings that she finds, that swallow the potential difference of the other's perspective, are only imaginary. They are "universal" and unsymbolizable, pointing towards a hidden something more than themselves. This hidden meaning is symbolic meaning as such.

11. Agency, Magic, Madness

The question of the respective roles of agency and compulsion in H.D.'s later writing is irresolvable. Whether people beset by schizophrenia are unable to, or choose not to, think and communicate like other people is still in debate, probably because the answer varies over time and for each individual, and because it poses the unresolved question of what free choice is. An initial, intended movement away from the ways of thinking and acting that the hegemonic order imposes seems not uncommon, and the interpretive strategies furnished by psychoanalysis and Occultism were certainly chosen

by H.D., who defended her Hermeticism spiritedly, as it were, from Freud's atheism. Many "sane" people would do the same. And certainly her free-associative style was a choice at times, perhaps in some sense all of the time. But the absence of an underlying order, a pattern that does not hurtle vertiginously outward in every direction because it cannot exclude anything, is at least at certain points experienced as disastrous, as her constant search in *Sword* for patterns and conclusions and her desire for apocalypse show. Perhaps the broad leeway in Occultism for free-association, and the scientific validation that H.D. believed that this was given by psychoanalysis, contributed to this slow eclipse of sequentiality by free-association in later thought and writing, until in *Sword* she struggles to regain structure, "to feel things…in a rational way." It may be relevant that Occultism appeals to a high proportion of people diagnosed as delusional or schizophrenic, whose religious discourse, whether derived from exoteric or esoteric sources, tends to take an esoteric tone. Though the belief that there is "more out there" than science can explain is more prevalent in North America than the belief that there isn't, people experiencing these conditions often perceive cryptic but personally relevant signs of this "more" in a particularly ongoing, urgent, and/or threatening way. H.D., at the vanguard of Occultism's incorporation of psychoanalysis, testifies to the danger of a too-literal understanding of Occultism's and psychoanalysis's mirroring of internal and external significance. For her, the disappearance of difference is experienced not as mystical union – at least, not in the usual, positive way – but as senseless invasion and chaos.

Robert Duncan writes that H.D.'s poetics bring language into the unfolding moment, create and renew history through their resistance to the impersonality of

conventional language. Her free-associative style is key to this renewal. But during and after her 1946 breakdown, its aesthetic success is curtailed by her difficulty in accessing symbolic meaning. Duncan himself, as he describes it in *The Truth and Life of Myth*, locates meaning in his own poetic play, which refuses linguistic stability but (as he sees it) renews language's vitality, a process that posits an existent, calcified language to be renewed. H.D. too imagines a "dead, old, thousand-times explored old world of overworked emotions and thoughts" (*Notes on Thought and Vision* 24), and after her analytic sessions with Freud, she envisions her destiny in terms reminiscent of Duncan's. But unlike Duncan's, her vision is of a being separate from language, and her task is therefore more serious: "I must find new words as the Professor found or coined new words to explain certain as yet unrecorded states of being!" (*Tribute* 145). These states of being will be there regardless of whether she finds the words to describe them or not. They are potentially beyond the reach of her words. "Yet," she notes, "if I become more 'human' I seem to lose my sense of direction, or my prose style" (149). In *Sword* the "re-creation" of the old world is far from a matter of aesthetic play. Meaning, or being, detaches itself altogether from the signs that "ghost for" it, and language becomes a chain, a labyrinth, rather than a vital force. Apocalypse is imagined as the only means to its renewal. H.D.'s vision of salvific destruction and the "next world," like Schreber's, symptomizes the deterioration of her language's symbolic function and its longed-for re-instatement. As signifiers float free of meaning and accrue palimpsestically in her body, her own demise is seen as redemptive: an ending, a beginning, a real difference finally. Passionately anticipated death and the coming of the next world represent the end of

malfunctioning language, the hoped-for advent of an order in which signifier and signified, man and woman, achieve union at last, in the wondrous sign.

"How phrase or how frame the problem?": *Helen in Egypt*'s Formless Question

The gods' pace moves slow.
do they forget?
no;
blessed be the man
who waits
(nor doubts)
for the end
of the intricate
plan.

....

If you love the gods,
you too,
shall be loved of fate;
But you evil
doubter,
you shall be
desolate.

-H.D., *Ion*

I go round and round the clock-dial of the symbols and find new readings and get caught into a semi-trance state. This state is life to me.

-H.D., "Compassionate Friendship"

1. Helen's Whirling Ghosts

H.D. considered *Helen in Egypt* (written between 1952 and 1955, first published in 1961) "the final epitome of the novel or the novels" that she had written in the war years, although formally it is a poem. H.D. identifies with its protagonist, Helen, in a very literal way. She is, she writes in *Compassionate Friendship*, "alive in the Helen

sequence" (65). Helen, she writes, is her "alter-ego or my double. – and that my mother's name was Helen has no doubt something to do with it. This is myself, Helen out of the body, in another world, the eidolon of the legend" (17). The poem's critical reception has been varied, but generally it is considered the masterpiece of H.D.'s later work, or of all her work.

The poem was begun in Lausanne, where H.D. wintered between 1947 and 1953, and Lugano, where she summered, alone in beautiful hotels with occasional visits from Bryher, Perdita, and Walter Schmideburg. It was completed in Küsnacht, where H.D. returned in 1953 after two serious abdominal surgeries. Though she had considered it complete, it was here revised, and prose introductions were added to each canto, at Norman Holmes Pearson's suggestion.

Barbara Guest and others have observed that the poem re-creates H.D.'s relationships with the men who were important to her, and I think that this is the poem's main concern. Achilles is entirely (or almost) based on Lord Hugh Dowding, and Paris is Erich Heydt, with, as critics have suggested, a little Ezra Pound. Theseus has been seen as principally based on Freud, but I will suggest that Walter Schmideburg, or possibly Küsnacht's Dr. Brunner, was an equally important role model.

Helen in Egypt's first "Book," "Pallinode," places itself in the tradition of Stesichorus of Sicily, in whose *Pallinode*, it tells us, Helen was never in Troy. It is thus aligned with the traditional Greek epic (though Stesichorus does not appear again), of which it has been considered a feminist re-articulation. It begins with Helen in an "Amen-Temple" in Egypt, possibly speaking to Achilles, who definitely appears a few pages later, mysteriously transported from the killing fields of Troy. When Helen

mentions the name of Thetis, Achilles' mother, he recognizes her as Helen of Troy and/or as his mother, and his enraged attempt to throttle her becomes a rape. Though Susan Friedman claims that in this scene Achilles' "assault turns into love" (*Psyche* 257), this love is not evident in the text, either then or later. Though Helen seems to retroactively acquiesce to the rape – at any rate, she wishes to remember it once it is accomplished – the scene and later references to it suggest a traumatic physical invasion rather than a consensual act of love. I call it a rape because it looks like one to me despite Helen's retrospective, traumatized, and ambivalent acquiescence. Helen engenders from it, we are later told, a multiplicity of beings including Helen and Achilles themselves. She is from here on in engaged in a search for answers. Though the questions to which these answers are to be applied are not always clear, they concern her identity and the meaning behind the rape and behind other events in which she may or may not (this is another question) have participated. Exchanges with Achilles and questions and assertions follow, some unclear, some regarding the meaning of his words and behavior. In Book Two, "Leuké," Helen departs for Leuké and Paris, and later for Theseus. But though providing solace and council, her former lovers both attack her relationship with Achilles, provoking her departure from them and her return, in imagination at least, to Egypt and to Achilles, or the "image or eidolon of Achilles" (208). In Book Three, "Eidolon," the eidolons (Ancient Greek for image or ghost, Theosophy's term for the "astral body") of Achilles and Helen appear about to be reconciled, but Helen is called back to Leuké and Paris, who is still intent on repudiating her relationship with Achilles. After this, it is hard to say where she is physically, if indeed she has physical being at all. She revisits previous and

new scenes in memory, and/or in astral body, and appears to be reunited, in this way, with Achilles.

I will draw on immediate biographical context to argue that Helen's questions and answers represent the establishment of a delusional formation that was to somewhat stabilize H.D.'s emotional life in the frozen embrace of eroticized possession and sacrifice. The answer to the question of Dowding's repudiation that *The Sword Went Out to Sea* begins to formulate and *Helen in Egypt* settles on links its violent shattering of Delia/Helen with a mother-father-son "integration" conceived in annihilating but repetitive terms.

Helen's never-ending quest circles the absent presence of Dowding's repudiation which, as we saw in the last chapter, placed H.D.'s entry into language in question. She seeks, unworkably, to both annihilate and assimilate this question by writing the poem, much as Daniel Paul Schreber, the subject of Freud's and Lacan's studies of psychosis, did in writing *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*.[28] The poem, though ambivalently, seeks to establish that writing and being are the same, and that the "meaning" of writing-being, which is also the difference between the writing-being and its "meaning," is Achilles' rape of Helen. *Helen in Egypt* is itself, it wishes to tells us, writing-being. It *is* the indecipherable script which it seeks to interpret. It suggests that all of its events, images, and beings are the progeny of, and consecutively have significance in reference to, the rape. Thus, H.D. calls *Helen in Egypt* "the final and complete solution of the life-long search for the answer – the companion in-time and out-of-time together" (*Friendship* 29). Achilles' rape, "out-of-time" on the astral plane, as I will show, is the beginning, end, and purpose of everything else. Everything else, in-time, is aligned with Helen's other

companions, especially Paris. Whereas H.D.'s prose response to Dowding's repudiation, was a disorganized cognitive landslide in *Sword, Helen in Egypt* begins to fix the beliefs and associations pertaining to this experience into a twister that picks up and whirls everything in its path around a central emptiness. Accordingly Helen's, and the reader's, minds are simply whirled around and dropped by the poem. There is no underlying conceptual structure in which to anchor analysis. Its words do not "gel" (a favourite word of H.D.'s in later life) with concepts, but only with the "eternal moment" (277) of the rape that it depicts.

Whereas in *Sword* words and meanings were still trying, cataclysmically, to come together, in *Helen in Egypt* words are more content with perennially unclear meanings, since they gain a somewhat more adequate imaginary significance in relation to the rape. Thus, the generation of new terms has slowed down somewhat, though questions, answers, characters and events in *Helen in Egypt* still succeed one another in a rapid, disorganized way, as if subject to the will of an incorrigibly enigmatic and inconsistent creator.

While the obscurity of *Helen in Egypt*'s language is partially due to its surreptitious Occultist and Spiritualist references, the main culprit is its cognitive disarray. Outside factors and intentions, unfamiliar, fleeting characters, roles and objects come into the picture and disappear with no apparent causes or effects. The rape is the only cause and effect. Ideas, characters, and objects in the poem, so difficult to distinguish and organize, gain their "meaning," their purpose, their existence from it. Since a real symbolic orderliness, predicated on the idea of difference, is precluded from

Helen in Egypt's cosmology, the rape's cycle of imaginary birth and death replaces symbolic with imaginary difference, Achilles' "imaginary phallus."

2. *Helen in Egypt* as Affirmation of the Feminine?

Early described by Susan Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis as a re-inscription of the lost power of the feminine and by Albert Gelpi as a particularly feminine progress towards mystical union, *Helen in Egypt* has more recently been discussed in terms of its indeterminacy (Robert O'Brien Hokanson) and its ambivalently reactionary political import (Susan Edmunds). Friedman describes the poem as an epic re-telling of the Helen myth from an empowered feminine perspective, in which Helen resists various male versions of herself and the world in the quest for the true feminine identity that Friedman envisions as the poem's central concern. For Gelpi, Helen dismisses the advances of the wrong men to remain true to her ideal, which he describes as the feminine mystical unification of all her selves in death, represented by Achilles. Friedman has noted the influence of Freud's theory of the life and death drives on H.D.'s vision of "*Eros, Eris*" in *Helen in Egypt*, but she sees the poem as a reinscription of *Eros*, which it associates with "the woman's world." (*Psyche* 257) In it, Helen's thought process "clarifies…the values" of this world, the "peace and harmony" (261), that must be restored to blasted masculine civilization. For Friedman, the moment on the beach when Helen's "appeal to Thetis…transforms Achilles' hatred into love" (256) encapsulates the poem's vision of the battle of love and death and the recovery of the past that allows love to triumph. However, this ensuing triumph of love is not in evidence anywhere in the poem. Helen is

"loved of War," says Theseus, but War is still around doing the loving, very badly and distantly, as one would expect. In a similar vein, Gelpi argues that "with that name [Thetis] Helen and Achilles are reconciled as lovers and siblings" (Gelpi, *H.D.*, 129). However, the poem repeatedly makes it clear that the name of Thetis is precisely what instigates Achilles' attack and rape of Helen: "Again, [Helen] thinks of [Thetis] and reminds Achilles of his divine origin, 'O child of Thetis.' This is quite enough. Can you throttle a phantom? He tries. The end is inevitable" (15). *Helen in Egypt* shows us, Friedman writes, that "[a]ll male violence is an incomplete, culturally damaging turn from unaccepted maternal love and power and, by extension, from the life-force of the Great Goddess" (*Psyche* 257). But Helen reflects that without the war, there would have been no rape, and this would have been a bad thing: "They [Helen and Clytemnestra] must forget the war and its consequences – but no, there is this yet, unresolved – without war, there would have been no Achilles, no 'Star in the night'" (76). The "Star in the night," the rape, would not have occurred without the war, and the rape is Helen's "only answer" (86) to her unformed question.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis has noted the relation of repressed love for the mother to the violence in *Helen in Egypt*: "*Helen in Egypt* seriously intends itself as an anti-war text, which uses an examination of the roots of violence in repressed love of the mother to propose an alternative" (*Struggle* 114). The alternative to violence that *Helen in Egypt* proposes is not evident, however. Helen herself describes her rape as the "ultimate experience, *La Mort, L'Amour*" (288) and as "the absolute of negation" and chooses this annihilating absolute over the gentler role of "Dendritis" that Paris offers her, with its "Love without arrows" (140). Helen's question, whether "Zeus decrees that, forever /

Love should be born of War?" (32), implies regretfully that for the time being, Love is indeed. No more could Freud separate the two, as H.D. points out.[29] Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World*, another huge influence on the poem, also insists on the impossibility of this.

As well as being read as life-affirming, femininity-reinscribing, and anti-war, *Helen in Egypt* has been read as communicating a less literal, more literary understanding of Occultism than H.D.'s previous work. Helen Sword has written that "Only when [the RAF messages] became starkly unambiguous, requiring action rather than interpretation, did H.D. reject her wartime spirits and replace them with the metaphorical, purely literary ghosts who haunt the beaches and pages of *Helen in Egypt*" (*Ghostwriting* 131). Rather, these ghosts literally represent H.D. and Dowding's astral selves, meeting on the astral plane, a meeting that has shattering and re-integrating effects on the "terrestrial plane". H.D.'s later writing refers directly to the astral plane, considered in various permutations of Hinduism and Buddhism, including Occultism, to be the place where (most) souls go after the death of the body, and a place where special people, "who are not shadows or shades, / but entities, living a life / unfulfilled in Greece" (*Helen* 89) can visit, in their astral bodies, when living, often when dreaming. It is where, in Dowding's *Many Mansions*, the not-really-dead RAF pilots dwell and attempt to communicate with beings on the "material plane." Instead of signaling metaphor or other intent commonly recognized as literary, these "ghosts" signal H.D.'s literal belief that she journeys to another plane of existence, the plane where the significance of events on the material plane is found.

Robert O'Brien Hokanson has drawn attention to *Helen in Egypt*'s extreme indeterminacy, arguing that "[r]ather than simply offering a rebuttal to the legend of 'hated Helen,' *Helen in Egypt* investigates the dilemma of imposing form on experience and demonstrates the elusiveness of the 'true' story" (331). He sees in H.D.'s style an intentional troubling of "conventional modes of thought and representation," a "critique" of these modes rather than the increasingly inadvertent drift from them that I see. Susan Edmunds has linked Kleinian theory to the poem's "fantasies of maternal violence," which, she writes, "continue to preoccupy H.D. in *Helen in Egypt*" (6). Since Britain, she argues, represents the Kleinian "bad mother" to H.D., the violence to *Helen in Egypt*'s accused but ultimately sympathetic mother-figures suggests H.D.'s ambivalently conservative response to the Egyptian revolution. While this reading is very possible, the evidence suggests that the Egyptian revolution did not loom large in H.D.'s mind during the poem's composition. The poem's primary importance for her, her letters and memoirs show and the poem's content suggests, lay in its responses to her significant relationships with men. If themes are general ideas about life, society, or human nature that reappear throughout a piece of writing, it does not have themes. It does place Helen in a very unusual relation to the world, but not for thematic reasons. It replaces (or tries to) symbolic universality, a pre-condition of any theme, with Helen's universal significance.

If the ego is, as Lacan suggests, the self's fantasy of itself, Dowding's status as H.D.'s "astral double" suggests that H.D., whose ego was tenuous, supplemented her image of herself through a narcissistic fantasy involving Dowding, imagining herself through his eyes even when his negative response to her shattered this image. This ideal self, the object of Dowding's (indeed of everyone's) desiring gaze, is personified in

Helen in Egypt as the fragmented but also miraculously unitary Helen. The poem suggests psychic shattering, projection and incorporation through its subdivided, proliferating, telescoping characters, gods, and otherworldly beings (who are also all mysteriously one, or two), and its redoubling, self-swallowing text.

Formally, the poem is composed mostly of questions, answers, and admonitions that do not have a clear relation to the scenes or action of the poem, or to one another, though relations are implied. Mystifying answers to unclear questions produce new unclearly related questions. The either/or choices that the questions offer are often between things, characters, and possibilities whose significance in the poem is unclear, and whose appearance in it is very brief. Thus, each answer leaves the reader a little more confused as to what exactly is being explained, what Helen "understands," and how this relates to the rest of the poem. So, apparently, is the (unidentified) narrator: "And Helen understands, though we do not know exactly what it is that she understands. To her, 'it is all very simple'" (191).

The vaguely formulated, confusing questions and answers, which occur in a somewhat rising tempo throughout the poem's three sections, concern the identity and difference, and real or ghostly existence of Helen's various selves and of the characters, objects, and settings in the poem. They concern as well the purpose of the God who she believes orchestrates it all. These questions and answers do not "mean" anything in the usual sense: they do not take stable positions within a structure of meaning, because the poem has none. Though Helen's questions appear clear enough in and of themselves, they rarely knit with the poem as a whole or with one another. They blur into one another, reappear even after they have been "answered," are no sooner answered than

another pops up. They seem to fall into the uncertainty that motivates them rather than to formulate it. The poem attempts to resolve the formlessness of its questions by presenting various signifiers (sound-images, words) that it asserts are the same, or that contain and are contained by one another, or that are redoubled through repetition in another context: signifiers that "are" other signifiers replace signifier-signified relations. Other forms of splitting, of text and character, also attempt to re-create the structure of language, where words have concepts attached to them. Helen's own behaviour mimics the poem itself: containing, repeating, and recalling word-images that she briefly identifies with the "answer" to her questions, while trapped in an endless deferral in which meaning is promised anew but never delivered by each new character, object, image, term.

What H.D. would like, one senses, is to find "the direct question that will tell her everything" (47). However, the question cannot be formulated because, as its phrasing suggests, there is nothing outside it. It can only be circumnavigated through a series of inchoate questions. In "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," Lacan describes the usual question that structures the subject as "*Chè Vuoi?*": "What do you want?" This question follows the realization that there is something that the Other lacks. However, for Lacan, want cannot exist in psychosis because the Other lacks nothing, and something must be lacking to generate the question of desire. This lack of lack is implicated in the formlessness of Helen's question. Helen already contains everything, including the phallus of the omnipotent Other, Achilles/God. Desire is envisioned in the poem only with her as its object. Her question cannot take shape, except as the question of the question. Since language is enabled by lack, Helen's question, "how phrase or how frame the problem?" (63) is synonymous to the question

"what is language?" A question cannot be framed, because there is nothing that does *not* concern the question. While *Helen in Egypt*'s delusional formation stabilizes an emotional life derailed by the repudiations of authority-figures, H.D.'s incipient desire to enter language is stymied by her foreclosure of anything outside herself. The poem therefore offers us Helen, though rather tentatively, as the solution to the question of the question.

The exceptions to the disjointed vagueness of Helen's questions and answers are her questions and answers concerning Achilles', Theseus', and Paris' motivations: "the problem of why [Achilles] had, in the first instance, attacked her" (18), and why Paris and Theseus discourage her from remembering Achilles. These precise questions concern actual events: Dowding's repudiation of H.D.'s RAF messages (which I discuss in detail in the previous chapter), and Heydt's, Brunner's, and/or Schmideburg's discouragement of her preoccupation with Dowding and her unsubstantiated beliefs about their relationship. The clear questions and answers begin in "Pallinode," with questions of Helen's culpability in the Trojan War, and quickly refocus on the motivation for Achilles' rape. His general ruthlessness and penchant to sacrifice women with whom Helen identifies to the demands of war is also considered. In "Leuké," Helen finds herself in the company of Paris and later Theseus. The clear questions here concern the motivation of Paris's repudiation of her relationship with Achilles, and she later considers Theseus's motivation for his dismissive attitude towards Achilles, as well as returning to the motivation of Achilles for his raping of Helen and "sacrificing" of women. "Eidolon" contains fewer questions and claims to understanding. It revisits and re-evaluates previous scenes, and the vague answers found in them, suggesting equally unclear

alternatives, and sorts characters and things according to identities and differences that seem to be predicated on contiguity. But it does formulate *Helen in Egypt*'s most decisive and comprehensive explanation for Achilles' rape of Helen: she reminds him of his mother. Indeed, she is his mother.

2. The Rape as "Delusional Metaphor"

As a literary critic and not a practicing psychoanalyst, I do not know how often "delusional metaphors" involve, as this one does, the entry of penises or penis-like things into a subject who conceives and gives birth as a result. I have only published case studies to go by, and in them this scenario is fairly widespread. It is shared with H.D./Helen by Daniel Paul Schreber, author of *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, whose preoccupation with reproduction, genealogy and motherhood, as Deleuze has observed, has not received much critical attention since it does not illustrate psychoanalytic theory as well as do some of his other preoccupations. But for Helen and Schreber, motherhood as well as rape has a crucial role in the delusional metaphor. Their delusions assert not only "imaginary castration" in the form of violent sexual subjugation by a powerful male figure, but the imaginary reversal of castration, the establishment that Helen and Schreber, physically contain the phallus, the ultimate meaning of all things, and that they can therefore engender a meaningful world to replace the present dysfunctional and senseless one.

As critics have observed, the explanations of *Helen in Egypt*'s male authority figures are resisted: Paris is a bitter, Oedipal-complexed Trojan who knows little of the

sea, Achilles is warped by the High Command and likewise reacting to his mother issues, even Theseus is stuck on Greece at the expense of Egypt and unfairly partial to Paris over Achilles. Meaning, the poem suggests, requires broader understanding and it is Helen who has it. Unlike its other questions and answers, *Helen in Egypt*'s various answers to the questions of Helen's consorts' motivations are comprehensible, albeit bogglingly inter-referential and ungoverned by the known laws of time and space. These answers represent the growth of what Lacan calls a "delusional metaphor," a somewhat more stable fantasy within which a nebulous sense of meaning and identity is preserved from the threat of annihilation experienced in the psychotic break.[30] The delusional metaphor stands in for the paternal metaphor, allowing words and meanings to be bound together in a more enduring way. Everything from *Helen in Egypt*'s use of language to its characters' behavior attempts to answer in this way the question of language raised by H.D.'s encounters with Dowding, Heydt, Freud, Brunner and/or Schmideburg. By questioning her version of reality and offering their own in opposition to it, the men on whom Theseus, Paris, and Achilles are based placed themselves in the position of what Lacan calls "the Name of the Father," the place where meaning is determined, in "symbolic opposition" (as he puts it) to H.D. herself. This call to enter the symbolic arena, where language is shared and meaning is open to contestation, is an experience for which, Lacan writes, the psychotic has no precedent. It creates an awareness that there is a place to which she is being called that she can not assume because it does not exist in her world. Thus it leads to psychotic breaks in persons with "psychotic structures," structures where what Lacan calls "castration," or entry into the symbolic order of shared and stable language, has been foreclosed (see my chapter on *Sword*, and Lacan's "On A Question

Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis"). The men whose explanations conflict with her own vision assume a place that, for H.D., was never there. The hole that this opens up fills with a multiplicity of others in narcissistic, sometimes malign, relations to herself. These imaginary beings and things fill in for the symbolic language whose absence suddenly gapes. Notwithstanding their multiplicity, however, the delusional metaphor, the rape, that holds them together is fixed and repetitive. The insistence and repetitiveness with which Achilles' imaginary phallus is invoked marks a distance from the "symbolic phallus" whose latency allows language to work normally.

The non-symbolic modality of the phallus for H.D. correlates to the strangeness of *Helen in Egypt*'s language. This language is at a remove from interpersonal speech and thought, and while it can still create beautiful and heightened atmospheric effects, at times it flies too close to the sun and plunges, surely inadvertently, into bathos. For instance, Achilles' re-dedication to "a new Command," that of Formalhaut, the "royal sacred High Priest of love-rites," (210) suggests, by Formalhaut's encumbered title and rapid appearance and disappearance, not living language but a delusion that chokes it with gratuitous, lifelessly ornate, words and beings. Most of the poem's characters are similarly glorified and fleeting, as if the poem were an Ancient Greek and Egyptian theme party that its guests dress up for but that they leave after putting their heads in the door. Proliferating and telescoping characters, human and divine, suggest what Lacan calls "a proliferation of imaginary modes of being," as the poem's response to the "interpellation to which the subject is unable to respond" (255), the call to the place of the (lacking) subject of language.

The rape, remembered sacrifices of other female characters (who represent Helen), and Helen's disagreements with Paris and Theseus, are obviously modeled on H.D.'s real differences of opinion with men. However, as the poem progresses it becomes less clear, as is typical in delusional formations, what textual or extra-textual stuff the poem's action and Helen's questions refer to.[31] What is clear is that for Helen they are answered in some way by Achilles' rape, based on Dowding's repudiation of her RAF messages. The rape, "the only answer," pins a delusional circuit, "the series or circle of the ever-recurring 'eternal moment'" (277) to its simultaneous beginning and ending, death and birth. It retroactively gives "meaning" to each of H.D.'s "cycles" or "sequences," as she describes the phases in her life as distinguished according to predominant love-interests. The narrator tells us that Helen's "mind can not answer the 'numberless questions' but [her] heart 'encompasses the whole of the undecipherable script,' when it recalls the miracle, 'Achilles' anger' and 'this Star in the night.'" (85). However, paradoxically, the question that Helen most often asks is the reason for Achilles' rape. Her several explanations intermesh somewhat, creating a sort of loop from which the rest of her tangled thoughts and associations spread, and this becomes the "answer" in reference to which everything else takes meaning, but which is itself outside of meaning. *Helen in Egypt* thus answers with circular logic the mystery that *Sword* returned to obsessively and left hanging: how to integrate Dowding's repudiation into "the plan" and maintain the heroine's key role? *Sword* proffers many possible motivations for the Dowding-figures, but does not settle firmly on anything. In *Helen in Egypt* H.D. uses Freudian and Occultist models more decisively to make his repudiation the "Alpha and Omega" (*Majic* 46), the beginning and end, of her cyclical cosmology.

The rape both dramatizes and "answers" the question of H.D.'s entry into language. It both imagines castration, and establishes that Helen contains the phallus, the thing in reference to which everything gains meaning.

But Helen is not perpetually satisfied with this "answer," as her many subsequent questions show. Its shortcomings as a structuring principle for meaning can be observed in the drift of *Helen in Egypt's* characters and text: its multifarious, mysteriously overlapping characters, and unclear expressions, questions, answers, settings and meanings. At times it hazards alliteration and rhythm, patterning, counting, and sorting, and the materiality of imagery, memories and objects, as attempted replacements for a structure of meaning. It also tries to sort things out by identifying characters as identical and different, containing or contained. It recontains its own text in mysterious quotation marks (do the words mean something other than what they say, and if so, what? Or are they spoken by someone else, and if so, who, and what does this someone mean?) The poem's multiple identities, repeated scenarios, enigmatic quotations, and short-lived patterns attempt to answer the question of language but give rise to more failures of signification. The delusion gains its impermeability to the question of entry into language through a non-referential language which requires new characters, objects, and associations to be constantly generated in lieu of meaning. As Delia does in *Sword*, Helen tries to figure out "the answer" by following a trail of slip-sliding signifiers, hoping that the "picture" will retrospectively become clear when all are chain-linked together. However, the many dualisms that she tries to bring together (Egypt and Greece, Egypt and Troy, "personal time" and "eternal time," Eros and Eris, Paris and Achilles, Troy-Helen and Egypt-Helen, the child and the mother, the father and the mother) are no

sooner imaginatively brought together than another distinct term appears. Something remains "unintegrated" with the "complete picture," marking the contours of a hole that opens up in her language. The sexual nonrelationship, though it appears as the completion, the apotheosis of the drive's endless cycle, only keeps the wheel spinning.

The rape's simultaneous fertilization and annihilation replaces the differences between words, between beings, between words and beings, with imaginary difference. Like language but in a more corporeal register, birth, death, and the skin usually mark the limits of identity. In the rape, all of these limits are invoked, and all are traversed. The rape and miraculous birth both represent limits and puncture them. But even this moment of *La Mort, L'Amour*, in which difference is invoked but transcended, has an uncertain remainder. Achilles and Helen "will always be centralized by a moment, 'undecided yet.' Though *La Mort, L'Amour* will merge in the final illumination" (271).

The many causes, effects, and objects associated with the "quilting point" of the rape continue to divide and multiply because their exact causal relations to it are never clear. Thus, the same words refer to many different things; things are or refer to many other things; many explanations are proffered for the same thing; many names and characters are actually the same being in some unclear manner or unclearly related. *Helen in Egypt* does not organize its characters and action according to cause and effect but according to contiguity with a single imaginary cause and effect, the rape of Helen, and ultimately with the enigmatic God who wills it and probably participates in it. As is typical in the writing of sufferers from schizophrenia, it does not settle on a coherent frame of reference.[32] Instead, like Schreber's *Memoirs*, *Helen in Egypt* seeks to resolve the foreclosed symbolic wound through the fecundity of its protagonist. Beings are

"letters" and "writing," and to write is to give birth. Thus Helen/H.D. is the mother of herself and everyone else, of the poem. Still, in the end, the narrator calls on an unidentified other to answer Helen's inchoate questions: "One greater than Helen must answer, though perhaps we do not wholly understand the significance of the message" (303). Helen may be, produce, and understand the writing that is *Helen in Egypt*, but some knowledge pertaining to what it is about, the poem suggests, remains elsewhere.

The idea of events or "pictures" only becoming intelligible once the "ultimate plan" is revealed appears often in H.D.'s later work. It may have been popular in Spiritualist circles during World War Two: Arthur Badhuri and Dowding both admonished H.D. to view her paranormal experiences as containing meanings that would become clear over time. *Majic Ring* shows that her piecing together of different images into one picture was encouraged by Badhuri's mediumistic style. He would give her "pictures" and say that they would form a whole, piece by piece, with patience: "pieces make complete pictures" (81). Writes H.D.:

> On December 10th for instance, here with [Badhuri's séance] table, we had <u>each piece goes with time</u>. And I find that I wrote to Lord Howell on December 11th, "<u>Each piece goes with time</u> seems to indicate the 'plan' as a picture-puzzle with the separate bits scattered about, to be fitted together later in the <u>eternal plan</u>." (170)

Correspondingly, *Helen in Egypt*'s narrator tells us that Helen wishes to read progressively, "picture by picture," the way Achilles reads:

> "picture by picture," Helen would read the star-script, as Achilles had done. Paris will come back, he "will reflect the past" and Helen as she was "before the ultimate Mystery." But Helen in her mind, or "in my crystal" as she calls it, "would see further." She would relate the pictures in time to the pictures in eternity, as she "strove in the precinct, to decipher the Amen-script." (204)

Dowding's and Badhuri's responses to H.D., and Helen's constant admonitions to herself to be patient, to "take her time about it," I take to be responses to H.D.'s extreme

trouble in interpreting her experience at all. This was perhaps not well addressed by Badhuri, who evidently encouraged her in a circular logic by which the ultimate revelation would provide her with the missing frame of reference within which all preceding revelations would become clear. This source of meaning, which she hoped that Dowding would provide, was substituted for by his repudiation, imaginatively reworked into a passionate attack. On this "ultimate," all other meaning is fastened. New elements enter the picture, other love interests and memories suggest the need for expanded organizational models. But this encounter serves for years, more or less, to pin meaning down somewhat.

4. Writing-Beings, Swarms, the Astral Plane

If God, the Other, is as Lacan tells us "essentially language," the question that haunts *Helen in Egypt*, the "agony / the question that has no answer" (276) may be formulated (in my words), as "What is language?" Lacan writes:

> the syndrome of action from without, as naïve as it appears, does underlie the essential dimension of the phenomenon, the psychotic's exteriority in relation to the entire apparatus of language. Hence the question arises whether the psychotic has really entered language. (*Psychoses* 250)

Perhaps in response to this question, H.D. envisions Egypt as the land of living language. The living beings in it, like Helen and the bird that "hooted past," *are* "writing" or "letters":

> but when the bird swooped past,
>
> that first evening,
> I seemed to know the writing,

as if God made the picture
and matched it
with a living hieroglyph; (23)

These beings constitute one of H.D.'s attempts in *Helen in Egypt* to make words *be*, so that there will then be no need for them to *mean*. She can then be, as she claims, "alive in [her] Helen sequence." The narrator, and Helen, need not interpret and explain the events and images that they describe, as Helen often claims: "it is not necessary to read the riddle. The pattern itself is sufficient and it is beautiful." H.D. seeks to render meaning as being by identifying its characters with signifiers (sound-images, "writing"), and its own actual signifiers as signifieds, or concepts, that someone, surely, understands. However, language/God remains external yet invasive, the meaning his "play" provides unsatisfactory. Helen remains outside of signification.

Egypt, world of the signifier, tropes the astral plane, adapted by Theosophy and other branches of Occultism from Indic religions. The probable reason that astral projection is not completely explicit in *Helen in Egypt* is H.D.'s knowledge that her readership was comprised of literati who would be unable to take astral projection seriously, not of Occultists or other believers in astral projection. In Theosophy, "eidolon" (also the title of the poem's third book) means astral double. H.D. evidently used the word in this sense as well as in its ancient Greek senses as "ghost" and "image." Though "astral double" in Theosophy refers to the astral body as opposed to the material body, H.D. expanded the term's meaning and claimed Dowding, as well as Helen, as her astral double – a status bestowed, at least in part, by their identical initials (*Thicket* 39).[33] She also distinguished her corporeal, astral, and celestial selves, as does some

Theosophy, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other related religions. As H.D. writes in *Thorn Thicket*, the memoir following *Compassionate Friendship:*

> There are three phases, "militante (terestre [sic]), souffrante (astrale), triumphante (céleste)." There is "un corps, un double, une âme." This is the circle, in which the Madrigal war I marriage is the corps, the Lord D. contact in War II, the double, and the inspiration, the poetry running through this, before it and after, the âme. (20)

On the astral plane, Helen and Achilles, H.D.'s and Dowding's "eidolons," meet and part in "the second long-playing disk" of H.D.'s "cycle." The first was her marriage to and parting from Richard Aldington, as she writes in *Compassionate Friendship*: "The meeting with the double in War II is super-imposed on the corps, the marriage or love-affair of War I. The âme is the writing as it goes along, as it went along" (20). H.D. and Aldington met on the corporeal plane, H.D. and Dowding's meeting in the astral world is "super-imposed" on this corporeal affair. Describing *Helen in Egypt* in *Compassionate Friendship*, she writes:

> This is myself, Helen out of the body, in another world, the eidolon of the legend. But she is not alone. There, she meets the legendary Achilles, a phantom but a reality. There I, there Helen lives out her war – her wars. There, in the second long-playing disc, is Helen with Achilles on one side, on the other, Helen with Paris. (17)

In Egypt, with Dowding, the "cercle," or "choc en retour" of her delusional formation is completed. As H.D. recalls it:

> We repeat *Madrigal* or *Marriage*, 20 years later, with another war. But this is what Robert Duncan calls the "astral H.D." Lord D. as I have said, was H.D. too and was an "astral H.D.". We met on that plane. There was the choc en retour, as the Cabalists call it, the 1946 coming back. I was very ill. (*Thicket* 17)

In the timeless, looking-glass world of the astral plane, *Helen in Egypt* attempts to resolve the problems that H.D.'s relationship with Dowding posed for her. It envisions the astral plane, Egypt, as the land of the living signifier, the eternal dimension beyond the bar of Lethe, river of repression or forgetfulness, in which writing is being. In "Pallinode,"

which is set there, Helen, who "does not wish to forget," therefore "achieves the difficult task of translating a symbol in time, into timeless time or hieroglyph or ancient Egyptian time" (13). This "symbol in time" is a bird that "hooted past." Helen tells Achilles, about to shoot it, that "the shape of this bird is a letter" and that it is "dedicate to the goddess here":

> the shape of this bird is a letter
>
> they call it the hieroglyph,
> strive not, it is dedicate
> to the goddess here, she is Isis (13-14).

This bird-letter that triggers Achilles is a reference to the *letters* that H.D. sent Dowding and that he repudiated. She calls them, in *Sword*, "*winged word*[s]" (30). These letters contained dots and dashes and words, delivered to H.D. by the RAF pilots in some sort of code that she was convinced that Dowding could interpret, though she could not. These letters, with their coded messages from astral beings, become actual "winged words," or bird-letters, in Egypt, the astral plane. Here, beings such as Helen and the bird-letter *are* what is writing on the "terrestrial plane."

Though it does not appear in its initial description, Helen later claims that a "swarm" had surrounded her during Achilles' attack. She refers to the swarm, among other terms, as a spread of wings, thousand sails, unnumbered host, galaxy, cloud of snow, veil, and Holocaust, as well as with proper names: Euphorion, Eros, the Hawk Horus, and Paris, since "Paris" is "the one name for the thousand lost" (41). The multiplicity of this swarm is emphasized by the large number of terms by which Helen refers to it as well as by the terms themselves, but it is also, she tells us, one. Instantaneously engendered by the rape, the swarm also caused it: "It is "the 'thousand

sails' that brought them together. If [Helen] forgets that, she is lost" (37). This "thousand sails" refers to the RAF pilots whose communications H.D. sought to convey to Dowding. Helen claims that it/they shelter her from the intensity of Achilles' anger:

> it was they, the Holocaust,
> a host, a cloud or a veil
>
> who encircled me, who sheltered me
> when his fingers closed on my throat. (38)
>
> there was never such a spread of wings
> such a play of golden feathers,
> though I did not see them,
> I heard them, as I heard myself say,
> O Thetis, O Sea-Mother (42)

This swarm/child annihilates difference by its claim to simultaneous unity and multiplicity. Though they are singular nouns, "swarm," "host," "cluster" and "galaxy" refer to gatherings of distinct entities or things. They "seem one but are many" (43), and conversely are an "infinite number," but "yet one whole":

> … the Child,
> Aphrodite sent,
>
> Love begotten of War
> and the sea-enchantment together;
> the veil of Cytheraea?
>
> a cloud or a swirl of snow,
> a swarm, an infinite number,
> yet one whole, one cluster of bees,
>
> as a trail or a Galaxy
> of numberless stars,
> that seem one but are many… (43)
>
> it was they, the veil
> that concealed yet revealed,
> that reconciled him to me… (44)

As well as protecting Helen, the "swarm" also aids mysteriously in her attempt to reclaim the dark side of Achilles, who has split into Osiris and Typhon: "As Isis seeks to reclaim Osiris with the help of their Child, the sun-god Horus, so Helen, with the aid of "the unnumbered host" would gain spiritual recognition and ascendancy over "Typhon, the Destroyer" (28). This swarm, then, allows difference to be/come unity, both in itself and for "other" characters. It reconciles Helen (temporarily) to the problem of difference that Achilles' attack represents.

Achilles' rage that the "unnumbered host" are Helen's and not his suggests one of H.D.'s explanations for Dowding's repudiation: he was angry because the RAF pilots chose to communicate with her and not him. In *Helen in Egypt*, he, their father, is jealous of their mother:

> O Child, must you seek your mother
> while your father forever
> attacks her in jealousy?
>
> "I begot them in death, they are mine";
> must death rule life?
> must the lily fade in the dark? (28)

But Achilles' anger fertilizes Helen, and causes her to give birth to the very "swarm" whose preference for her angers him. Helen reflects that:

> with his anger,
> that ember, I became
>
> what his accusation made me,
> Isis, forever with that Child,
> the Hawk Horus. (23)

In another two-directional movement of time, Helen and Achilles also engender themselves, although they are also subtly identified with the swarm/Paris/the Hawk Horus: "The promised Euphorion is not one child but two. It is "the child in Chiron's

cave" and the "frail maiden," stolen by Theseus from Sparta" (288). Achilles, as well as Paris, is Helen's son, and Helen is her own mother and daughter. There is no unidirectional time to make this impossible.

5. Multiplicities that are One

Different words, different identities, are part of a "complete picture" which is never attained, but which is contained in Helen, incarnation, mother, writer and writing:

> She seems to have identified herself with her own daughter, Hermione, with her sister's daughter, Iphigenia, and with Clytemnestra, her twin-sister, "one branch, one root in the dark." Now she seems to equate Orestes, her sister's son, with Achilles. She has said of Achilles, "let me love him, as Thetis his mother." Now of Orestes, "has he found his mother? will he ever find her? can I take her place?" She would re-create the whole of the tragic scene. Helen is the Greek drama. Again, *she herself is the writing*. (91)

Helen identifies with Iphigenia, Clytemnestra, Polynexa, and Hermione, and is, the poem suggests, all of *Helen in Egypt*'s many goddesses, most notably Thetis, Isis, Cytherea/Aphrodite, Artemis, and Persephone. She is also several Helens: Helen of Troy, Helen of Egypt, Dendritis or "Helena of the trees," and Helen of Sparta. Achilles is also Osiris, Typhon, Orestes, Heracles, and Hades/Dis. Paris is also Adonis, Eros, Orestes, Euphorion, the "swarm" or "galaxy," and Horus, as well as being "incarnate Helen-Achilles" (185). Achilles and Theseus, it is also found, are the light and dark aspects of the same being (190), which makes them Castor and Pollux. Though polarized, they "meet finally in 'Helen in Egypt' and 'Helen in Hellas forever'" (190). Helen and Clytemnestra are thus their twin sisters: "half, part of the tale of Troy, half, bound to the Dioscuri, 'twin-sisters of twin-brothers'" (71). Everyone, indeed, is ultimately either Helen or her male counterpart, the son-father-lover-God.

The portentous introductions and rapid disappearances of seemingly powerful, fantastic, and very significant beings, as well as the simultaneously single and multiple identities of the text's characters, suggest splitting and a sort of mental "fast-forward" that saps these beings of their aesthetic power, as if the poem were music played at triple speed. Multiple beings "manifest" in single bodies or in the text itself, and the vast majority of them appear with a bang and disappear with a whimper within a page or two, leaving no trace on the poem's action. The "delusional metaphor" does not organize them into a sequence of cause and effect, but simply sticks to them, like a Möbius strip of flypaper to a swarm of flies or bees. Delia in *Sword* in fact compares her thoughts to "unwary flies" that are "caught," and "collected," to her relief, by a "sun-star" that behaves like a "Venus fly-trap" (113).

Multiplicity, birthed or recollected, is imagined as preserving in *Helen in Egypt*. Helen and the narrator suggest that profusions of beings (who are also one, or two) "temper or moderate" Helen's overwhelming experience with Achilles. In order to "progress in life" (117), Helen must "balance" this experience by recalling and identifying her "other loves" (165) and her family: "It is as if Helen wanted to recall her immediate 'family,' as protection or balance against the overwhelming fact of her Fate or Destiny, her meeting with Achilles" (68). During the meeting itself she was "protected" by a "swarm," of pure multiplicity that she had instantaneously conceived and given birth to. Afterwards, she remembers her "immediate family," and later with Theseus she remembers her other lovers. But since these other beings are not really separate from Helen herself, or from one another, more uncertainty and tension is generated around questions of their identity and difference. The simultaneous unity and multiplicity of

beings unhinges the usual one-to-one relation of words to meanings. The splitting and introjection of *Helen in Egypt*'s characters and the alienation of its words from meanings go hand in hand.

Apropos of the splitting of the ego, writes Melanie Klein, some split-off identities are endowed with positive, some with negative, imaginary qualities. These distinctions are drawn in *Helen in Egypt*, where Helen represents the initiated, reborn, "astral" H.D., the principle of pure Love (or Beauty, in *Sword*), while Clytemnestra represents the earthly, angry, H.D. Betrayed by Agamemnon and slain by her son Orestes, she is a figure for H.D. betrayed, as she saw it, by Aldington and Dowding (with their other women), refuted by Heydt. Iphigenia is also a figure of H.D. betrayed. Achilles facilitates the "sacrifice" of Iphigenia and demands the sacrifice of Polyxena, as well as having his way with "Chryseus, Deidamia, Briseius" (172), and God knows whom else, as Theseus upsettingly points out. Iphigenia was betrayed by Achilles; was Helen?

> Why does Helen recall Iphigenia? Does she identify herself with her sister's child? Does she feel that she, like Iphigenia, was "a pledge to death" and that like Iphigenia, she had been rescued at the last moment? She reminds us that Iphigenia was summoned to Aulis, on the pretext of a marriage to Achilles. (72)

The poem evokes a multitude of betrayals and sacrifices of women by men, one pair following another: "But Achilles ('I tell and re-tell the story') has been an accomplice. He, as well as her own father, would have sacrificed Iphigenia. *Helen returns constantly to this theme of sacrifice*" (84, my italics), populating it with different "players" who are also herself.

7. Words That Are Meaningful in Eternity

Self-quotations with no clear significance are another way that the poem splits and takes its (other) self as its meaning/being. Words that appear in the verses reappear within quotes in the prose sections. These were written later, at Norman Holmes Pearson's suggestion, to "explain" the verses. Generally, the prose simply repeats the verse in declarative form, with parts of it in quotation marks. Instead of explaining the content they surround, the marks suggest that the prose means something else. But what? Words that were once part of a question now have mysterious meanings that are proffered as answers to unclear questions that have somewhere been posed, or as parts of new questions. Someone is being quoted, usually Helen; but her own expressions, with their rapidly appearing, non-consecutive terms, seem to refer to a source that we do not have. We do not know what Helen means, but by quoting her enigmatic expressions the prose suggests that the narrator, or someone, does, or will in the future.

Schreber, he tells us, uses quotation marks to indicate that the expression is one that has been "suggested to me from outside" (54) by voices. For instance:

> I did not invent the expression "forecourts of heaven," but like all other expressions that are in inverted commas in this essay (for instance "fleeting-improvised men," "dream life," etc.), it only repeats the words which the voices that speak to me always applied to the processes concerned. These are expressions *which would never have occurred to me*, which I have never heard from human beings… (49, Schreber's italics).

These constantly repeated expressions are emphatically not his. "The processes concerned" are the bodily transformations to Schreber that accompany the expressions. They are, he eventually discovers, intended by God to torture him into losing his reason, which would enable God to withdraw from him. This plan, however, is pursued intermittently: God is an ambivalent lover, and his withdrawals alternate with approaches, especially as Schreber learns how to withstand the torment of the phrases to

his nerves by simply, as the voices do, repeating them without thinking about them. *Helen in Egypt* contains a similar phenomenon but continues to suggest that the strange phrases that suddenly appear in it without clear reference to anything indicate something more positive than the mind-games of a cruel and ignorant God. God's intentions are not compromised by His own misunderstanding and ambivalence but are part of a benevolent plan that will – that surely must – render the relations between its component parts perfectly clear in the end. Thus, redoubling and repetition replace signification as "meaning" by encapsulating words in shells of quotation marks to await the coming of the Other who knows what they mean. The prose does not clarify what it quotes but stores it. The words are not simply, as with Schreber, intended to drive Helen crazy. Their meaning must await the final answer. In the meantime, it is enough for Helen to inscribe them so that they will remain part of the complete picture to come.

This hoarding of words in anticipation of an interpreter to come is evident when, for instance, Helen asks: "What is this 'simple magic' of a 'ring of no worth, a broken oar' that finds more favour in the eyes of the 'Regent of heaven' than the priceless treasure 'from the uttermost seas?'" (280). The ring and the oar have no obvious referentiality in the poem, nor does the Regent of Heaven. They do not appear elsewhere. Their magic is the subject of a question whose answer, Helen finds, perhaps can not be defined, but nevertheless exists: "Perhaps it can not be defined. It is a 'secret treasure' but Helen implies, as she counts 'the seven and seven slats of the ladder or the bars of light on the wall,' that it could only be judged or assessed if 'God would let me lie here forever'" (282). The actual meaning of the words in quotation marks, Helen finds, could only be determined in the synchronic dimension of eternity. They do not refer to

diachronic meaning. The answer to their "question" could be ascertained only through the quantification of something apparently unrelated: by counting "the seven and seven slats of the ladder or the bars of light on the wall." Words have meanings that cannot be measured by their use in speech and writing, cannot be addressed in time or by other words. Their significance is endless and indefinable.

Schreber also asserts the eternal nature of the answer. It is eternity in which the wound or rent in the Order of the World could be healed: "the Order of the World carries its own remedies for healing the wound that has been inflicted on it: the remedy is *Eternity*" (60). Schreber writes that "the concept of *eternity* is beyond man's grasp. Man cannot really understand that something can exist which has neither beginning nor end, that there can be a cause which cannot itself be traced to a previous cause. And yet eternity is one of God's attributes" (42). However, Schreber hopes to "prove…by means of definite examples" that "divine creation is a creation out of the *void*" (42, my italics). Schreber's examples are definite, though stated in a roundabout way out of a concern not to expose God to blame and ridicule. The example that he immediately offers to prove that "divine creation is a creation out of the *void*" is God's earthly fathering of Jesus by Mary. Though "nobody would maintain that God, as a Being endowed with human sexual organs, had intercourse with the woman from whose womb Jesus Christ came forth" (42), he suggests indirectly but insistently throughout the rest of the *Memoirs* that this is exactly what happened, and that Schreber has now replaced Mary as God's sexual object. He tells us that "A human being who in a certain sense can say *that eternity is in his service*, can afford to ignore all nonsense in the certain knowledge that ultimately a time must come when nonsense exhausts itself and a sensible state of affairs returns"

(237). God's attribute of "eternity" allows him to create things out of a "void"; the "rent" in the Order of the World will be filled by the offspring of Schreber (214), who also has eternity "in his service." Eternity has and will fill the gap that yawns, but is not doing so in the moment. God's creations in this rent, disordered time are the "fleeting-improvised" beings with their nonsensical speech that He conjures up to interfere with Schreber. This state of affairs is contrary to the Order of the World, in which creation takes place through the reproduction of species. Schreber suggests that the offspring that will "issue from [his] lap" (214) will restore "a sensible state of affairs."

Schreber and Helen both suggest that their privileged access to eternity allows them to give birth to a new order. Since it is only in the temporal dimension that a hole opens up in meaning for Schreber and H.D., Schreber's *Memoirs* and *Helen in Egypt* build up systems of causality in which the meanings endowed to words and events by their sequential relations to one another are completely replaced by the repetition of an "eternity," or an "eternal moment" that extends backward and forward, freezing time's movement and the sliding of the signifier. Eternity is the only reference point, the beginning from which everything issues and the ending to which it returns. In eternity, creation/sense simultaneously emerges from and returns into the bodies of Helen and Schreber.

Thus, if critical responses to *Helen in Egypt* have referred sparingly to the poem's actual text, preferring to summarize its meaning as they understand it, this may be because the poem rather literally takes "eternity" to mean anything. The verses run on seemingly endlessly with new associations, and Helen herself asserts that she could only determine "the answer" to a formless question through an act of quantification that would

take forever. In fact, that is exactly what she is doing in *Helen in Egypt*, though the reader may not realize it. The poem has no temporal dimension, "no before and no after," but "only the ever-recurring 'eternal moment,'" the moment of the rape (277). All of its characters, associations, images, things, are laid out in the dimension of eternity, where "the wheel is still" (202). Their meaning awaits the phallic reader, the reader who can enter this dimension.

8. The Wheel of Time

This eternity, however, has a threatening side for Helen. Timelessness, as experienced in the astral rape, is "too great a suspense to endure" (162), and must be "balanced" by movement in time, however illusionary. Thus Helen "must be re-born, that is, her soul must return wholly to her body." Within this body "the memory of breath-taking encounters with those half-seen must balance and compensate for the too intense primary experience" (162). Though the rape is the only moment that exist "in eternity," Helen must depart from and return to it by remembering and forgetting, which creates "[t]ime-in-time (personal time)" (202). This forgetting and remembering promote the departure from and return to the "Absolute" (199), "the 'eternal moment' of [Helen's] constant preoccupation, *La Mort*" (301). Her recollection of other loves and family thus "recall, re-vitalize and re-awaken Helen" (160). The remembrance of others, which alternates with the remembrance of the eternal moment, generates a multitude of associations that moderates the "suspense" of timelessness and oneness.

> She will encompass infinity by intense concentration on the moment. She has finished her cycle in time. But out-of-time or beyond moon-time, are the "widening star-

> circles." But she will not attempt to escape "the moment" by a flight to infinity with "wild wings." She will bring the moment and infinity together "in time, in the crystal, in my thought here." (200)

Helen's wish to "bring the moment and infinity together" in her "thought" suggests a desire to unite this recollected multiplicity with the "one finite moment" that has "no before and no after" (301). However, the multiple terms (time, crystal, thought) proffered for the location of this synthesis, and the use of unclear quotation marks, indicate an uncertainty as to what exactly is being brought together with what, and where.

The annihilation (of Helen), which is also unification (with Achilles) causes the sequence of events that lead up to it: the birth of Helen, Achilles, and Paris, who is also mysteriously the "unnumbered hosts" who fought the Trojan war. The hosts that fought the war are Paris, and the war was caused by Paris's seduction of Helen. It resulted in the death and the transportation of Paris to Leuké, and Helen and Achilles to Egypt, the "astral plane," the timeless dimension where he rapes her and it all begins again. The characters engendered by Achilles and Helen, in Egypt, grow up, fight, copulate, are killed, re-enter Egypt, and are reborn. The rape begins and ends a sequence of events in illusionary time, but is itself outside of time. Characters, places, objects, substances, and words that Helen associates with the rape replace time and sequentiality with multiplicity. They provide a variety of terms that refer not to one another but only to the "ever-recurring eternal moment." Helen's "mind goes on, spinning the infinite thread" (297), but the enigma that fastens it remains the same. Rape/death/birth is the fixed point around which a "Wheel" of signifiers is "still," (202) changing but simultaneous, many but one. The "Wheel of Time…the Zodiac hieroglyph, comes to life with the magnetic intensity of these two" (271), Helen and Achilles. They bring time to life. The prose tells us that

"Time-in-time (personal time)…as well as star-time (the eternal) seem alike incalculable to Helen, without Achilles" (202). Without the "eternal moment," neither "personal time" or "the eternal" can be calculated, since it places them in relation to one another. In Egypt, Helen and Achilles are out of time: "Time values have altered, present is past, past is future. The whole heroic sequence is over, forgotten, re-lived, forgotten again" (57). Meeting where "present is past and past is future," they beget the selves who act in past and future, "personal time," and thus return them all to "eternal time" (202).

This meeting is the central moment of Helen's catalytic action on the world. Achilles' attack on her is both the cause and the effect of the war: "Is it possible that it all happened, the ruin – it would seem not only of Troy, but of the 'Holocaust of the Greeks'…in order that two souls or soul-mates should come together? It almost seems so" (5). The Trojan war gains meaning in reference to Achilles' attack in eternity. Troy was breached and fell "in memory" of Helen's rape by Achilles:

> why did I invoke the mother?
> why was he seized with terror?
>
> for that was Victory
> and Troy-gates broken
> in memory of the Body (7)

War and rape mirror one another endlessly. Troy falls in memory of the rape, but the war also causes, occurs for the sake of, the rape, the integration of the principles of War and Love that are ultimately contained in Helen. The rape of Helen causes the war and is necessary to end the war.

Like the mother in Lacanian theory, Helen is both first cause and final destination: "Achilles seems grudgingly to apologize for his first boorishness, 'I was afraid.' Who indeed would not be, at sudden encounter with the admitted first-cause 'of all-time, of all-

history.' Fate, Death, Reintegration, Resurrection?" (47). The events resulting from this attack point toward a new world, springing from Helen, which is a replay of the past one that ended in her.

Since Egypt is outside of time, Helen can return after the rape to the earlier time of her relationship with Paris. Her experience with Achilles can thus provide its meaning: "In the light of her inheritance as a neophyte or initiate, she would re-assess that first experience" (112). The cycle beginning in Egypt plays itself out in "personal time," on the "material planes" of Leuké, Sparta, Athens, Mount Ida, Chiron's cave, and Troy:

> and War came; Hecuba like Jocasta
> was overthrown (by Paris, by Oedipus,
> the son); O the web is sure
> …
> he of the House of the Enemy,
> Troy's last king (this is no easy thing
> to explain, this subtle genealogy)
>
> is Achilles' son, he is incarnate
> Helen-Achilles; he, my first lover,
> was created by my last;
>
> ….
> how could I know, the fire-brand, the ember,
> the Star would return – but other… (185)

Paris, the "fire-brand," is the return of Achilles, the "ember" (185). Paris is Achilles' son, his slayer, and himself, and Helen is the mother of both. When Helen mentions the name of Thetis, she stands both represents and is (*Helen in Egypt* wishes to establish that these are the same) Achilles' "careless, unspeakable mother" (253), responsible for his death in Troy:

> the invincible armour
> melted him quite away,
> till he knew his mother;

but he challenged her, beat her back,
are you Hecate? are you a witch?
a vulture, a hieroglyph? (261).

Achilles' unflattering questions perhaps recall the "beings of a lower order" (the sorts of beings with whom witches communicate) from whom, Dowding suggested, H.D.'s spirit-messages came.

Achilles' ensuing rape of Helen fixes a point to which to relate events "before" and "after." All these things and events do not partake of the eternal momentary which is all that really exists, but of unreal pasts and futures that they inhabit in great numbers with no fixed organization. They can be taken apart, mixed around, and changed. "Personal things" can be "re-assembled in different order as thoughts and emotions." Before and after the "eternal moment" is the teeming, chaotic multitude of Deleuze and Guattari's delight:

it was Love, it was Death,

but what followed before, what after?
a thousand-thousand days,
as many mysterious nights,

and multiplied to infinity
the million personal things,
things remembered, forgotten,

remembered again, assembled
and re-assembled in different order
as thoughts and emotions, (288-9)

Helen in Egypt's cosmos gain the illusion of sequential time not from organization but from repeated splitting and incorporation, departure from and return to the eternal moment in which all is one in Helen. Helen anticipates, near the poem's end, the arrival once again of the "sacrifice" that occurs near its beginning: "Helen herself

seems almost ready for this sacrifice – at least, for the immolation of herself before this greatest love of Achilles, his dedication to 'his own ship' and the figurehead, 'an idol or eidolon…a mermaid, Thetis upon the prow'" (245). *Helen in Egypt*'s characters including Helen, emanate from and are absorbed, excruciatingly, back into God, just as Schreber and his "provisional-improvised beings" come from and return to a God who, as Samuel Weber writes, "corresponds to meaning" (Weber xxviii). Schreber, too, believed that "the eternal cycle of things" was "the basis of the Order of the World" (53). God's roles as beginning and end point in the endless cosmic cycle, and, consecutively, as soul-murderer, are of equal interest to him:

> This exposition of the "forecourts of Heaven" may give an indication of the eternal cycle of things which is the basis of the Order of the World. In creating something, God in a sense divests Himself of part of Himself or gives different form to part of His nerves. This apparent loss is restored when after hundreds or thousands of years the nerves of departed human beings… return to Him as the "forecourts of Heaven." (53)

The "Order of the World" is creation's cycle of departure, or divestiture, from God, and reunion with God. But God, in the meantime, is supposed to leave these divested nerves alone until the death of the bodies they form, rather than forming nerve-attachments with them, as in Schreber's "unique" case:

> Yet things were so ordered – up to the crisis to be described later – that by and large God left the world which He had created and the organic life upon it (plants, animals, human beings) to their own devices and only provided continuous warmth of the sun to enable them to maintain themselves and reproduce, etc. As a rule God did not interfere directly in the fate of peoples or individuals – I call this the state of affairs in accordance with the Order of the World. It could however occur now and then as an exception, but neither did nor could happen too frequently because to draw close to living mankind was connected with certain dangers even for God Himself…. the nerves of *living* human beings particularly when in a state of high-grade excitation, have such power of attraction for the nerves of God that He would not be able to free Himself from them again, and would thus endanger his own existence. (48)

The forming of "nerve attachments" with live humans is contrary to the Order of the World, for one thing because it endangers God's existence, and for another because humans "should have autonomy over their own thoughts," as Schreber repeatedly maintains: "I also ought to have the right of being master in my own head against the intrusion of strangers. But this is not possible as regards the rays, because I am not in a position to prevent their influence on my nerves; this rests on God's power of miracles" (175). As a result, Schreber is victim to the "tendency innate in the Order of the World, to *unman* a human being who has entered into permanent contact with the rays" (72).

Departures and returns of souls, or "nerves," to God are in Schreber's time, in which the "Order of the World" is awry, very rapid. God, normally at a great distance from Earth, "was forced [by his attraction to Schreber's nerves] to draw nearer the earth again and remain relatively close to it. [Thus,] the earth has once again become the permanent scene of divine miracles" (196). These miracles always pertain to Schreber and are usually accomplished by the miraculous "fleeting-improvised" men, birds, insects temporarily given shape to torment him. These beings have no autonomy at all: "they must reel off the crammed-in phrases without any regard of time and circumstance and irrespective of whether they want to or not" (170). Their function is to annihilate Schreber's autonomy by injuring his body and forcing him to think continuously on the sense, or lack thereof, of their words. Alternately, God may accomplish his "interference" with Schreber by stimulating the nerves of a nearby human being, causing him to begin "talking to [Schreber] or making some other noise" (199). The horror of the divine miracles resulting from God's increased proximity seems to rest in the complete absence

or theft of autonomy that miracles both demonstrate in others and seek to accomplish in Schreber, and which he calls "soul murder."

The Order of the World requires time as well as eternity. Schreber suggests that whereas when the proper interval is maintained, the soul's return to God as "rays" is blissful, when the interval between departures from and returns to God is shortened or eliminated, the result is violent and grotesque. God's proximity results either in the murder of existing souls, or in the contemptible, droning "automatons" that persecute Schreber. Only Schreber's cultivation of the "feminine voluptuousness" that resembles divine bliss can moderate God's and other rays malign intentions toward him: and this is not autonomy, but sacrifice. Schreber transmutes himself into a passive receptacle for "nonsense" so that, meeting no resistance, it may "cancel…itself out" (151-2).[34]

9. The Death Drive and Helen's God

The cyclical consistency of H.D.'s and Schreber's delusional metaphors suggests the "death drive" as described by Lacan, a circuit of departure and return in relation to a lost object which is actually a part of oneself. Lacan cites Freud's description of the fort/da game, a constantly repeated cycle of loss and recovery, as an example of this drive. Whereas for Freud, this game represented a working through of traumatic loss, for Lacan the motive for the repetition becomes the stability and consistency that repetition itself maintains, which replaces the desire to re-enact the loss. In psychosis, however, there is no original lost object: the loss was foreclosed. It returns to Helen and Schreber "in the real," in alien and threatening forms whose cycle of departure and invasive return

is perceived as taking place outside of them. The return of the terrible lover alternates with his abandonment; an intensity approaches and withdraws. Lacan writes that the psychotic, rather than "entering" language, is "inhabited, possessed, by language" (*Psychoses* 250). Helen and Schreber's God, a rapist, takes them over prematurely, takes an agency that they have not had time to freely give. This alternates with a withdrawal that, though moderating for Helen, leaves her both "forsaken" and vulnerable to the attacks of inferior beings. What is suggested by Schreber and Helen is a sense of God's annihilating force, for which they do not feel ready. To return completely to God is to be sacrificed. Even Helen only seems "*almost* ready for this sacrifice – at least, for the immolation of herself" to Achilles' great love. For all Helen and Schreber's emphasis on the importance of surrender to this martyrdom already so imminent, their anticipation of it lacks the rapturous, or at least heightened, affect that can usually been seen in mystical writing.

But the alternatives to martyrdom, Helen's endless ruminations and Schreber's wearisome persecution by talking rays, are not much better. Interfering rays, for Schreber, and unclear questions, for Helen, intervene between themselves and conclusion. Their words seem to circle the intensity of return to God, anticipating but never reaching it. As occurs in masochism, they bring the other into existence through what Lacan describes as the "insertion on one's own body…of the departure and end of the drive" (*Seminar, XI* 183).

If God's existence is, as Lacan tells us, "essentially language" (*Psychoses* 100), perhaps it is the return to symbolic language, with its capacity to harm, to express differences and opinions that wound, that is envisioned as the impossibly threatening

prospect of the return to God. Multiplicity, non-differentiation, and meaningless "rote" speech circumvent this. Even the rote repetitions of Helen's players and Schreber's mechanical birds, while they may be upsetting, at least do not express genuine difference, dislike, or animosity, but simply God's mechanical repetitiveness. Instead of the return to God/language, a shaky stability is derived for Helen from the repetition that Theseus advises, of "always another and another and another" memory, "lest you return to that other/ and flame out, incandescent" (187). This remembering, multiplicity, and repetition "balance[s] and compensate[s] for" (162) the "incandescent" encounter with the question of language, the final "answer" whose absence continually fills with new questions, new memories. And so it goes.

The alternative to this cycle, Helen suggests, is actual death. If motherhood, conception, is the endless remembrance of things that pertain to the cycle of annihilation and rebirth, the alternative is annihilation alone: to forget, to be lost. (17) At one point Helen surmises that "I am not a mother, I am only a daughter."

> and I am only a daughter;
> no, no, I am not a mother,
> let Cypris have Amor,

The daughter's consort is not Amor, but his negative opposite. It appears that her destiny, like childless Persephone's, lies with an "absolute of negation," Hades/Dis:

> So there must be no rivalry with either the earth or the heaven mother. Helen says, "I am only a daughter." She will not compete with Demeter for union with her Absolute or with Leda for this same Zeus. There is another Absolute, that of "the crystal, the center, the ice-star." It is the Absolute of negation, if you will, or of completion, "this immaculate purity," and hence in a sense, of Death. Helen has said, "my heart had been frozen, melted." – So she compares herself to Persephone and recalls Theseus' question, "did you too seek Persephone's drear icy way to Death?" Helen's answer is yes, "I found or was found by Dis." (195)

God is completely annihilating to the daughter who is "not a mother," who can not conceive (of) herself. The Helen who is "only a daughter," with no capacity to remember, give birth, (re)create multiplicity, experiences love with longing as death without birth:

> O flame-tipped, O searing,
> destroying arrow of Eros,
> O bliss of the end,
>
> Lethe, Death and forgetfulness,
> O bliss of the final
> unquestioned nuptial kiss. (183)

Though there is longing, there is icy fear. The "bliss" is identified with "Persephone's drear icy way to death," the dismal "Hyperborean dwellings" where "Achilles waits" (195-6). This suggests that the reason that therapeutic interventions advising H.D. to stop revisiting her memory of Dowding produced resistance and more images of splitting: they were perceived as annihilating. Hence Helen's emphasis on "never [forgetting] Achilles" (170) and their "Star in the night":

> but I would not go yet,
> I must have time to remember
> Dis, Hades, Achilles. (199)

Helen's reminisces are challenged. Before the immanent return to Achilles to which Thetis has summoned her, Helen subsists in "my small room" and ambivalently receives the attentions of Paris. For Paris, modeled on her Küsnacht analyst Erich Heydt, Helen "died, died, died/ when the Walls fell" (131)" and Achilles "never loved [her]" (143). Paris tells Helen there was no meaning in the Trojan War and her encounter with Achilles that was fulfilled on another plane of existence: "She died, he says, that is all there is about it" (131). Erich Heydt's attack on H.D.'s belief in the supernatural significance of her encounter with Dowding is not hard to glean from this.[35] Helen

ascribes it to the rage of the defeated. Heydt, German, is both the defeated Oedipal son, lusting over the mother who belongs to the father, and the defeated German nationalist. Paris/Erich is the son-lover in the Oedipal triangle, jealous of the father-lover:

> they the many, the One [RAF pilots]
>
> were born of myself and Achilles,
> our Son; but there is another,
> single, alone, proud and aloof,
>
> no Greek but a Trojan;
> he hated Achilles; Achilles
> was not his father
>
> nor was I, Hecuba, his mother;
> did he hate Hecuba?
> she exposed him on Ida

Heydt, H.D. is intermittently convinced in *Compassionate Friendship*, is a Nazi spy, controlled by a mysterious being, "Tiresias," "X," "Boss," or "Bally," and possibly working in Küsnacht simply to get at her in some way as part of a secret psychic experiment in the interest of German sabotage.[36] Paris hates the Greeks because they defeated the Trojans in the war. Although Paris kills Achilles on the plains of Troy, he cannot defeat Achilles' significance to Helen. Heydt/Paris and his people are castrated, inadequate to challenge the power of Achilles/Dowding, victorious English war hero, law-making father figure. "What could Paris know of the sea" (304), la mer, la mère, the mother? Only Achilles could know her. Although Helen appreciates Theseus' "power and tenderness," to which she temporarily ascribes the completion of her unknown task (206), it is Achilles' rape to which she consistently returns to anchor meaning. Only Achilles, the "invincible, unchallenged Sire" (5) who had "saved…civilization" (*Sword* 100), "could break his heart / and the world for a *token*, / a memory forgotten" (304, my

italics). Only the victorious, phallic father, not the defeated son, can castrate the world for a token, a sign, an entry into language and into the writing-being. But with their Oedipal and primal complexes, Paris and Achilles can hardly be blamed for being a bit grumpy sometimes. Paris and Achilles can hardly be blamed for being a bit grumpy sometimes. Heydt's and Dowding's refutations of H.D.'s viewpoint can not place it into question.

Paris's advice, though inadequate to come between Helen and Achilles, produces more signs of splitting: the "rent veil," the "attributes of" Aphrodite (145), and Helen's departure for Athens and Theseus:

> [Paris] has asked, "why remember Achilles?" and apparently, Helen has turned on him with the accusation that it is he who has "recalled the past." There is despair and envy in him, "hatred, fear of the Greeks." There is that shadow, that prescience, even now in "this haven, this peace, this return." He is "defeated even upon Leuké." For her, there was "healing…death or awakening…the love of Achilles." The final retort of Paris is, "I say he never loved you." (143)

The advice from Paris and Theseus to "remember other loves"(165), and their unwelcome reminders of Achilles' womanizing, create further identities and questions in Helen. Immediately after Paris' "final retort" of "I say he never loved you," Helen "has taken on the attributes of" Aphrodite: a gesture that angers Paris. She "appears in a rent veil" like Aphrodite's, departs from Paris, and appears before Theseus "baffled and buffeted and very tired" (151). But Theseus, in this capacity presumably based on Küsnacht's Dr. Brunner and/or on Walter Schmideburg, a sometime resident, advises her to "leave [Achilles] with the asphodels." He brings up, inappropriately Helen feels, Achilles' other lovers:

> He seems deliberately to have stepped out of the stream of our and of Helen's consciousness. Why? He has told her that she was safe with him. He reminds her that she "found life here with Paris." His Achilles lingering with Polyxena ("leave him with the asphodels") is not Helen's Achilles "on the desolate beach." (172)

Theseus' counsel, too, produces resistance and images of splitting. His dissonant reminders of Achilles' other loves produces the "voice within" Helen (174) and her return to "Egypt but in a Greek mode" (178). The voice within Helen is the voice of another Helen whose consciousness the preceding Helen does not share: "there is a voice within me, listen, let it speak for me" (174). This new Helen speaks authoritatively to as well as through her host Helen on the subject of other characters' identities with one another:

> if Thetis was Cypris, Cypria,
> (you say) who could not Achilles be?
> in the temple, in the dark,
> in the fragrance of the incense,
> without touch, without word,
> by a thought, Amen begot Amor. (180)

The new Helen is an extreme one, with "passionate devotion and dedication to 'the rage of the sea, the thunder of battle, shouting and the Walls'" (176). She represents the "answer" to the first Helen's question, "does the ember glow in the heart of the snow?" (174). This question, though unclear, suggests that the absolutes of heat and cold are one, or at least containing and contained, united by their extremity. Splitting, meant as protection from extremity, produces the extreme thinking in which wellness and death become one: "is it Death," asks Helen subsequently, "to know / this immaculate purity, / security?" (194). The new Helen tells Theseus that Achilles' other loves did not matter to either of them and immediately remarks on the "beauty of arrows, / each bringing surcease, release (177). This unjealous, death-loving Helen then begins to identify Gods and Goddesses as identical with one another:

> Again, the "voice" seems to speak for Helen…It takes us back to Egypt but this time in a Greek mode. Isis is Cypris (Cytherea) and Isis is Thetis. Amen-Zeus is the father of Isis-Thetis-Aphrodite (Cypris). We cannot altogether understand this evocation, the

> rhythms must speak for themselves and their alliterations, Cypris, Thetis, Nephtys, Isis, Paris. Proteus, the legendary King of Egypt, as we have learned before, takes many shapes. (178)

Notwithstanding what the rhythms and alliterations of her speech may have to say for themselves, Helen of Sparta, who seems to manifest in the previous Helen to protect her from Theseus' arguments, soon bewilders and overwhelms her. After Helen of Sparta's cluster of questions and assertions concerning the identity and difference of the poem's deities, the first Helen cries "stop – O voice prompting my strophies / stop – how could that be?" (180). How could all of these beings be one another? While formal and imagistic renderings of splitting are not a rare occurrence in *Helen in Egypt*, their particular use to defend against challenges to H.D.'s delusional metaphor, and their dizzying repercussions, are evident in Helen's responses to the challenges of Paris and Theseus. Splitting, initially a defence, increases confusion.

10. Telescoping, Gender, and Soul Murder

Although identities (apart from "coming together" in Helen) are divided along the gender line, questions of identity and difference are infinitely subtle and gradiated within each gender category. The way that beings are one another cannot be described, only suggested by phrases like "Amen begot Amor." The poem suggests that Thetis and Aphrodite, and Helen of Sparta, are distinct from the initial Helen, but not very or always. Male gods are likewise not entirely distinct from one another and from Helen's male counterparts, though they seem generally more controlling than goddesses. The omniscient being variously referred to as Amen, Zeus, Proteus, Thoth, Formalhaut (the

Royal Sacred High Priest of Love-rites) and The-Nameless-of-Many-Names arguably controls all the characters in the poem, particularly Achilles. In this capacity, he may also have a darker side as "Calchas," (87) and "the Command," who also control Achilles.

Helen, brooding on Achilles' culpability in female sacrifice, reflects that "as the light of the Star grows clearer / the shadow grows darker" (84). As the rape increasingly illuminates the other events that she recollects, making it clear that they are all part of a pre-determined endless cycle, the fearful aspect of this cycle becomes more and more apparent. Splitting takes the potentially sinister form of telescoping, in which one being is occupied and controlled by another. Achilles, for instance, was "under compulsion, and at the command of the Greek soothsayer, Calchas" (87) when he participated in the attempted sacrifice of Iphigenia. His general cruelty is the result of control by "the Command," and/or "a Spirit-master." This idea of control would have been familiar to H.D. from her séance years: in Spiritualism, "controls" are the spirit(s) that most often possesses the medium, acting as interlocutors with other spirits and directing séances to some extent, and "Z," who H.D. believed was God, was one of these "controls." Again, the immanence of God, or of beings who are not *not* God, is described in terms of coercion or invasion.

Helen's own understanding of Achilles' involuntary behavior comes from a "Message" from the outside, she is fairly certain. She experiences her thought as the whisper of a Presence:

> How does the Message reach me?
> do thoughts fly like the Word
> of the goddess? a whisper –
>
> (my own thought or the thought of another?) (87)

Helen is not sure, but suggests that the voice comes from outside:

> I swerve about to surprise
> this Presence, this Voice,
> but the long arcade is empty;
>
> has Nephthys stepped from her pillar
> or from her frame upon the Wall?
> is it Nemesis? is it Astarte? (88)

The voice tells her that Achilles' life would have been forfeit if he had not co-operated with the plan to sacrifice Iphigenia. (87) This argument, Helen decides, "on the material plane, justifies Achilles and Helen would call him back" (87) – it may not, she suggests, justify "his first boorishness" (47) on the astral plane, the rape, since the astral plane is beyond physical life and death. However, Achilles' subsequent improved behavior also appears as the result of control, by Theseus, Formalhaut, or Amen-Zeus. Achilles is made to crawl by many: even Theseus commands him "to say, Theseus commands me" (208).

Helen's experience of, and speculation about, control by an omniscient other resembles Schreber's fantasies of "soul-murder" by what he calls "nerve-language," the language that feminizes him.[37] Like Helen's, Schreber's feminine identity contains all language and all beings. But they divide him into parts grotesquely, not, as with Helen, rather splendidly. For instance, Schreber writes that certain "fleeting-improvised-men…unloaded into my body a part of their bodies in the form of a foul mass…M. repeatedly placed himself into my arm as a so-called 'large nerve' (a jelly-like mass about the size of a cherry) through which in a certain sense he participated in my thinking and my sensations like the other rays or nerves" (115). Although Helen does not describe anything so nasty, she is not always certain whether her thoughts are her own "or the

thoughts of another," even when she appears to be thinking them. As Lacan discusses, we find in Schreber's writing:

> the notion that the imaginary identity of the other has a profound relation to the possibility of fragmentation and segmentation. That the other is structurally multipliable and divisible…. There is also the telescoping of these images inside one another. On the one hand one finds multiple identities of the one same character, on the other there are these little enigmatic identities…. These identities, which in relation to his own identity have the value of an *instance*…penetrate, inhabit, and divide Schreber himself. (*Psychoses* 98)

Like Schreber's, Helen's imaginary others are inside her, or part of her, and seem to mark time, since multiplicity is associated with the temporal dimension. She contains difference itself by containing identities that both multiply and divide. Indeed, their distinctness seems comprised only in one's ability to "manifest as" (178) another. Telescoping and gender alone demarcate woman from man, container from contained. The distinction of container and contained correlates somewhat to the gender division, since God, the ultimate male, always "manifests as" lesser males, and Helen, the ultimate female, ultimately contains all. The omniscient God, Theseus, and Achilles "meet finally in 'Helen'" (190). Helen/Thetis, the sea-mother, "mer, mère, mere, mater, Maia, Mary, / Star of the Sea, / Mother" (*Tribute to the Angels* 17) is where all boundaries and distinctions melt. But however capacious Helen becomes, the question of identity and difference subsists.[38] Lacan argues that the inevitable identification with the feminine position in psychosis represents not entry into language but language's entry into the organism. Since the gender division is a function of castration, entry into language, the psychotic's foreclosure of this results in attempts to assimilate language in a bodily rather than symbolic register. Helen's and Schreber's passive position in relation to aggressively

sexual male divinities symptomises this bodily register of "castration," physical invasion by language.

Samuel Weber surmises that Schreber's conviction that the human race can be renewed through his transformation into a woman (*Memoirs* 72-73) expresses an attempt to *reverse* this castration "in the real" by making it visible, material, the subject of speech. Writes Weber:

> What Schreber would like to see established is the fact that *he holds God within his body*, that the *Wunde* of castration – which *is* not, and yet which is *not* nothing, insofar as it allows gender difference to articulate itself – has corporeal existence as a *Wunder*. Schreber's text attempts to control this difference, which structures both language and the subject (as a sexual being), by making the difference *visible*, so as to repeat and reverse the moment – the "apparition," as the voices say – when castration was discovered. (il)

Accordingly, Schreber's wounds and "unmanning" are seen by God and talked about by the rays: and this is indeed what draws them to Schreber. Schreber suggests the picture of his penetration by God to the reader. God's occupation of him is physical: in Lacan's terminology, Schreber has the phallus – God's – in his body. His *Memoirs* begins by asserting that "things exist which are true though [humanity] cannot understand them" (41). For instance, though "nobody would maintain that God, as a Being endowed with human sexual organs, had intercourse with the woman from whose womb Jesus Christ came forth" (42), the rest of the work suggests, by the actual changes to Schreber's reproductive organs (so enjoyable to God) and by his sexual encounter with Ariman, that this is precisely what happened to Mary and what is happening now to Schreber. It is the nature of rays to penetrate Schreber, whose nerves attract them so. That God created man "in his image," Schreber discreetly admits, "has to be understood literally, which no human being has so far dared to do" (194).

Like Schreber's "unmanning," Helen's sexual ravishment and "sacrifice" by an out-of-control divine, or divinely possessed, masculine being is potentially globally salvific, an act of divine violence that may replace the disintegrating world order. Her fertility transforms castration into procreation, language into being. Schreber imagines himself as fertilized by a tormenting, lustful God (who also wishes to "forsake" him) so that the "rent" (Memoirs 50) in the "Order of the World" can be healed and the "human race can be renewed" (Memoirs 72). Helen, like Schreber, is temporarily castrated, is "stricken, forsaken" (5) and then raped. Like Schreber she is consort to the phallic Other: Achilles, the "unchallenged Sire," and the omniscient God manifesting in him during the rape. On being entered by the phallus, she reverses castration by giving birth to the "swarm" who are both "One" and "many," and also to herself, Achilles, Paris, and Euphorion, who are all mysteriously one with one another and with the swarm. Helen and Achilles' auto-genesis asserts that identity and difference are the same. There can thus be no separation, no alienation. The separation imposed by the father-figure is replaced by the physical differentiation of organisms, who yet "come together," begin and end, inside of Helen. In Helen, the phallic mother, difference is identity, identity difference.

If multiplicity is preserving, Helen tells us, oneness is annihilating. The splitting of God makes him bearable. His Oneness is:

> what few may acknowledge and live
> what many acknowledge and die
> he is One, yet the many
>
> manifest separately… (78-9)

God's Oneness, like Achilles' rape, is overwhelming, and is tempered by multiplicity both birthed and contemplated. "Without the souls or 'the sails of the thousand ships,'

[Helen's] encounter with Achilles would have 'burnt out in a flash' or burnt her out, like Semele, when Zeus at her request, 'revealed himself'" (45). God's annihilating oneness is shattered into multiplicity, and re-unified in Helen.

The signifier One, Lacan writes, is the signifier of difference. This is what is foreclosed in the psychotic structure, and thus its appearance in interpersonal relationships is perceived as threatening, a "ferocious jouissance" (Ragland 49).[39] This jouissance fertilizes Helen in the form of Achilles and their "eternal moment." Her fecundity, and recollection and patterning of multiplicity, "temper[s] or moderate[s]" the signifier One. One is not one: the "swarm," "galaxy," "cloud" of little entities is nominally singular yet divisible, as is everyone in the poem. Helen's "immediate 'family'" are also herself and one another. But this divisibility of Oneness escalates the slippage between signifier and signified, since there are no more one-to-one correspondences between words and things. The fastening of signifier to signified in the symbolic order, Lacan writes, occurs for the subject with the assumption of singular symbolic identity, a name. The many names the poem offers are not attached to distinct beings, however, but overlap. The splitting, mixing, matching, and telescoping of characters' identities in *Helen* reflects the same process at the level of the sign.

11. The Name of the Mother and the Eternal Theatre

Both Schreber and Helen's experiences of God appear as narcissistic relations with an "Imaginary Other" that allow their egos to come into being. These relations seem more uncanny and dehumanizing than one normally sees. The experience of control by

God is rarely if ever expressed in such literal, mechanically oriented, and affect-less language in non-psychotic religious writing. Lacan writes of the psychotic relation with the Other that "insofar as the relationship remains on the imaginary, dual, and unlimited plane, it doesn't possess the meaning of reciprocal exclusion that is included in specular confrontation, but possesses instead the other function, that of imaginary capture" (*Psychoses* 205).

Surrender to this imaginary capture may be curiously affect-less, but it immortalizes the word that stands for the individual, since this invasive other takes the place of language. Helen's name, both single and inseparable, one and many, subsists on condition of her surrender to God's "decree":

> I have talked with Proteus – or –
>
> another (whoever he be,
> he manifests variously);
> Nameless-of-many-Names he decrees
>
> that *Helena* shall remain
> one name, inseparable
> from the names of the Dioscuri,
>
> who are not two but many,
> as you read the writing, the script,
> the thousand-petaled lily. (104)

Helen's name, however will "remain / one name, inseparable" from these many names, only on condition that "she accepts, without reservation and without question, the decree of the Absolute, the King of Egypt, Proteus or Amen, "the Nameless-of-many-Names" (105). This decree, though presumably the one in the verse above, is now unspecified, and may also (as Albert Gelpi reads it) refer to God's will that "Helena / be joined to Achilles" (102). At any rate, surrender to some imperative is necessary to secure a name.

Helen does not see her identity in the terms of agency, or an ongoing narrative based on her choices. Her story is not really a story, but a play, and not really hers, but God's. It and her identity are perpetually called into being by the Other who is their only cause. God, with inscrutable motives, controls the characters' actions from behind the scenes. Characters do not respond to one another any more than actors in a play would respond to one another's lines with personal reactions. What appears personal in their interactions is in fact "scripted" by God and learned "by rote" by Helen and "the players" whom he "lured" (234). As the narrator asserts, "[i]t is a play, a drama – 'who set the scene? who lured the players?' The players have no choice in the matter of the already-written drama or script. They are supremely aware of the honour that 'all song forever' has conferred upon them." (230). The players must surrender to the action of God's play, rather than framing narratives of their own, and the identities conferred on them thereby are, of course, roles, not "really" them. This is (arguably) a disadvantage of the imaginary phallus as compared to the symbolic one, in whose realm subjects usually identify their "real selves" with their stories, and correlatively, meaning with language.

This all-powerful God's "decree" also involves "a question asked / to which there was no answer" (230). Helen asks:

> was it [antecedent unclear] a question asked
> to which there was no answer?
>
> was it Paris? Was it Apollo?
> was it a game played over and over,
> with numbers or counters?
>
> who set the scene?
> who lured the players from home
> or imprisoned them in the Walls,
>
> to inspire us with endless,

intricate questioning?
why did they fight at all?
…
how will the story end? (230-1)

These questions, whose subject "it" is unspecified but possibly the loss of Troy, pertain to the "decree" that Helen must "accept without question." Helen poses several possible nouns for the unclear "it." It may refer to either proper names (Paris, Apollo) or to a cycle of eternal recurrence, "a game played over and over" like the fort/da game. To have a name, an identity, that is both single and multiple, "one name inseparable / from the names of the Dioscuri / who are not two but many," Helen must fully accept the utter incomprehensibility of God's "decree," the cause of everything. She must accept that there is no sense to be made of the other's demand. The inscrutability of this God, who "is the word," and his fondness for the repetition of the same cosmic drama, mirrors the senselessness of words. The repetition of them in a "play," and in quotation marks, replaces their missing meanings. It is the players', and perhaps the poems' own, surrendering, unquestioning repetition of "the already-written drama or script" (230) that guarantees Helen's name.

Schreber too anticipated (correctly, as it happens) "that great fame will be attached to my name surpassing that of thousands of other people much better mentally endowed." (214) This possibility is mentioned consecutively with the "alternative" one that "by divine fertilization offspring will issue from my lap." (214) Schreber's surrender to "unmanning," "imperiously demanded" by "the Order of the World," guarantees either his motherhood of a new race of men and/or an immortal name, since "nothing could of course be envisaged as a further consequence of unmanning but fertilization by divine rays for the purpose of creating new human beings" (148). Helen, likewise, is fertilized

and has her name immortalized by surrender to an imperious God and presumed acceptance of his enigmatic "decree," though the poem does not tell us that this acceptance actually occurs. Schreber's God, like Helen's, is enamored of repetition. His miraculous "fleeting-improvised" beings do nothing but repeat the same phrases, which they, like *Helen in Egypt*'s characters, have "learnt by rote" (Memoirs 72). They say for instance, "don't forget that all representing is nonsense" (152). The loathing that Schreber frequently expresses for these "predetermined concoctions of thoughts spoken into my head by senseless voices in tiresome, monotonous repetition" (151) exceeds even the bleakness of his references to the "miracles" that destroy his bodily organs. Indeed, that each of these body-destroying "miracles" is accompanied by its own repeated phrase, which act directly on Schreber's nerves, suggests that the bodily changes may be brought about by the phrases themselves. For instance, the diminution of his bodily stature is "always accompanied by the announcement, 'I wonder whether to make you somewhat smaller'" (132). Most of the miracles are more painful, but they are still better than the droning voices. Schreber's cultivation of "feminine voluptuousness," the enjoyment of surrender that mitigates both voices and miracles, is primarily intended to make the rays stop their hated "nonsense."

The exceptions in both texts to the pre-recorded, unspontaneous character of language is in Helen's and Schreber's direct encounters with an aggressively sexual God. Helen, after acknowledging that "the players have no choice in the matter of the already-written drama or script" (230) and that she herself "seems almost to speak by rote," then "breaks off, as it were, from the recorded drama to remind us of the unrecorded…her first meeting with Achilles, 'on the ledge of a desolate beach.'" (234). Likewise, Schreber's

direct encounter with the "posterior" God, Ariman, is "intense, so that anybody not hardened to terrifying miraculous impressions as I was would have been shaken to the core." Although Schreber writes that "*what* was spoken…seemed calculated to instill fright and terror into me," he instead felt "largely…admiration for the magnificent and the sublime" (124-125). The reason for Schreber's admiration is this: "everything that was spoken was *genuine,* not phrases learnt by rote as they later were, but the immediate expression of true feeling" (124). There is in Helen's "unrecorded" and Schreber's "genuine" sexual encounters with God a sincerity and spontaneity that, though violent, is treasured because it is otherwise completely lacking from their experience. Schreber *infers* that the phrases that the rays repeat may mean something to God, but the rays, like *Helen in Egypt*'s players, "reel them off without knowing the sense of the words" (*Memoirs* 166) any more than Schreber does.

Lacan argues that in psychosis a narcissistic relation to an imaginary other who is imagined to "hold the initiative" replaces the relation to the symbolic Other as bearer of meaning:

> At the heart of the psychoses there's a dead end, perplexity concerning the signifier…. I suppose that the subject reacts to the signifier's absence by all the more emphatically affirming another one that as such is essentially enigmatic. I told you that the Other with a big O, qua bearer of the signifier, is excluded. The Other is thereby all the more powerfully affirmed between it and the subject, at the level of the little other, of the imaginary…. This is where all the between-I phenomena that make up what is apparent in the symptomatology of psychosis take place – at the level of the other subject, of the one who holds the initiative in the delusion – in the case of Schreber, Prof. Fleischig or God. (194)

In *Helen in Egypt* we can see this attempt to replace the symbolic "big Other," the Other as structure and locus of meaning, with an imaginary big Other (who, since he is imaginary and not symbolic, is in Lacanian terms actually small). This seemingly big but

actually small other, who has the initiative, directs his enigmatic demand at Helen. Though she may not understand it, or even be able to say what it is exactly that she doesn't understand, there is no doubt that the demand is somehow concerned with her. Her surrender to its imperative guarantees her name, her surface-identity, but (as during the rape) it threatens her deeper identity, the memories through which she re-discovers herself. Likewise, Schreber's surrender to God's sexual enjoyment involves the cessation of his own thinking. He calculates his mental workings to resemble thoughts without actually being thoughts. Rather, the "not thinking of anything thought" (226) mentally repeats the rays' empty words without engaging with them. This prevents God's rays from withdrawing from his body while allowing him to cultivate "feminine voluptuousness," with which actual thought does not mix. His surrender of independent thought, like Helen's, guarantees his immortal name and perhaps his motherhood to a new race.

12. Forgetting/Remembering, Castration/Procreation, Father/Mother

To be "both phantom and reality" (3), like Helen, is to enter Egypt, the astral plane(s), but not to "forget," as the dead souls who dwell there generally do. In much modern Spiritualism and Occultism, as well as the religions they borrowed them from, the astral plane(s) are temporary (that is, not eternal) dwelling places for souls, who usually forget their previous forms. They can also be visited by divine beings, and by spiritually advanced humans, who project their astral bodies there but do not (usually) forget their corporeal ones back in the human realm. H.D. believed in a special category

of humans, whom her writings refer to as "initiates," "neophytes," or "twice-born," who in *Helen in Egypt* visit, or belong in, Egypt. Achilles is mostly absent from Helen because he is at work at building a "light-house" there for these initiates: "others like ourselves, / who are not shadows or shades, / but entities, living a life / unfulfilled in Greece" (89). Just as Dowding wished to reassure England's uninitiated that their loved ones were alive and well in the beyond, so Achilles wishes to take "the wisdom of Amen and Thoth / back to the islands" (90).

Helen, too, is concerned with bringing one plane of existence nearer to the next, but she does this through the cultivation of her memory, which seems to be endangered in Egypt, the place where memory is for most people, who enter only after death, wiped clean. The narrator tells us that "Lethe, as we all know, is the river of forgetfulness, passing from life to death. *But Helen, mysteriously transposed to Egypt, does not want to forget. She is both phantom and reality* (3, my italics). Since Helen remembers, "from the depths of her racial inheritance, she invokes (as the perceptive visitor to Egypt must always do) the symbol or the 'letter' that represents or recalls the protective mother-goddess" (13). The "symbol or the 'letter'" is a trace of what is absent: to read and write involves memory. In psychosis, remembering becomes asymbolic and specific: memory attaches itself to actual words and things, rather than to concepts, since words no longer invoke concepts.

The bird-letter that Helen invokes because she "does not want to forget" (3) is "dedicate" to Isis, the mother-goddess. Memory and text, in the poem's associational realm, is the "mother" as H.D. also suggests in *Notes on Thought and Vision*: "memory is the mother, the begetter of all Drama, idea, music, science or song" (23). Accordingly

Helen, the mother-figure, is "the writing" and is unforgettable: "Who will forget Helen?" the poem asks again and again, as it describes the destruction of Troy (121-124, 127). Who will forget "the admitted first cause of all-time, all-history?" (47). Helen, the signifier/mother, is the object of eternal preoccupation in both senses. She is both the one remembering and the memory.

Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, which in the poem must be crossed to enter Egypt, in Greek myth bars the land of the dead from the land of the living. The river suggests the bar of castration between the conscious mind and unconscious memories. In *Helen in Egypt*, these are not memories *of* the mother but actually *are* themselves the mother. The poem suggests its own auto-signification with its writing-beings, "letter[s] who "recall" the goddess who is mother to them all. Though they can be "recalled" or "invoked," they are not memories but the actual thing remembered. The "letter" is alive in this unconscious realm. *Helen in Egypt* "matche[s]" "the picture" made by God, the thing that is ultimately signified, with its own "living hieroglyphs" (23). To "invoke" the letter in Egypt is, for Helen, to retain identity, to be, like the vulture, a "living hieroglyph." But this invocation of identity does not occur without struggle. Helen, when contemplating the overwhelming "eternal moment" of her rape by Achilles, must "fight for 'her identity, for Helena'": I must fight for Helena / lest the lure of his sea-eyes / endanger my memory" (37). However, it is Achilles' annihilating "anger" that changes Helen from a "letter" to a mother herself, the thing that all letters recall:

> in the dark, I must have looked
> an *inked-in shadow*; but with his anger,
> that ember, I became
>
> what his accusation made me,
> Isis, forever with that Child,

the Hawk Horus. (23, my italics)

Prior to the desire to remember, Helen voices a desire to forget associated with the initial attack. The desire to forget is a response to the throttling, while the desire to remember is a response to its transition into sex:

O Thetis, O sea-mother,
I prayed, as he clutched my throat

with his fingers' remorseless steel,
let me go out, let me forget,
let me be lost …….

O Thetis, O sea-mother, I prayed under his cloak,
let me remember, let me remember,
forever, this Star in the night. (16)

The father's castration, aligned with forgetting, is subverted into an act of procreation, aligned with remembering. This procreation/remembering is what saves Helen at the time of the rape, when she gives birth to the "thousand sails" that "brought them together. If she forgets this, she is lost." In subsequent traumatic recollections, she remembers other loves and family to "temper or balance" the "suspense" (162). If forgetting/castration is the aggressive father, remembering is the mother and castration's reversal, procreation, the unity of the letter and being. Motherhood is envisioned both as corporeal and as literary production. If the father is symbolization, the mother is what is symbolized. In Achilles' attack of Helen, memory and identity, the mother, and repression and difference, the father, unite. But not to Helen's eternal satisfaction: "O God-father," she begs Theseus subsequently, "teach me to remember / teach me not to remember" (185-6). Castration and its reversal together are needed to read/remember, since to remember it is necessary to first not remember.

Achilles himself could be a case study in Lacanian language development theory. After the young Achilles, the father figure, loses his mother Thetis, he constructs a representation of her:

> a sorcery even more potent,
> a wooden doll
> that Thetis' child hid away;
>
> O mysterious treasure,
> O idol, O eidolon,
> with wings folded about her… (291)

Representations associated with the mother are manifold: wooden doll, bird, octopus, flying fish, grasshopper, mermaid, Helen herself. But they do not have a narrative framework within which to take meaning. To Achilles, with his story of loss and recovery, at least some of these representations have symbolic meaning. Things can stand for what he has lost. On the plains of Troy, Achilles literally reads Helen. He interprets her movements on the Walls as signs for Yes/No, and predicts the future by watching her movements and counting her steps: "Achilles looks to Helen as 'a new oracle': if she pauses here or there – yes. If she goes on here or there – no" (53). Helen is the oracle for Achilles that H.D. wished to be for Dowding, the mark of the thing lost and also the thing itself.

In Egypt, Achilles sees Helen as a sign for Thetis, the sea-goddess, la mer/ la mère. Helen is "Thetis-eidolon" (284) and "hieroglyph," the mark of the "meaning" that Achilles reads and remembers. She is "[t]he symbolic veil to which Achilles had enigmatically referred," which "resolves itself into the memory of a woman's scarf, blowing in the winter wind" (55). The memory of Thetis is "the power / that swayed Achilles" (56) during the Trojan war, causing his death and transport to Egypt. It is

because Helen recalls to Achilles a memory of having lost, "the scene of his boyhood and his childhood's secret idol, the first Thetis-eidolon" (284), that she triggers the rape in which Achilles "break[s] his heart / and the world for a *token* / a memory forgotten" (304, my italics). Achilles reads/attacks the writing that is Helen. The father rapes the mother; the law-maker rapes, reads, splits the writing-being down the middle. But why? Why can not my *letters*, my winged words, my children simply be the truth? Why should writing not be being? What is this "language?":

> O Child, must it be forever,
> that your father destroys you,
> that you may find your father?
> …
> O Child, must you seek your mother
> while your father forever
> attacks her in jealousy?
>
> "I begot them in death, they are mine"… (28)

I have the phallus, says Achilles. I raped the writing-being so that writing and being might be alienated, and I might control the meaning of writing. Dowding said, more or less: your messages, ostensibly dictated by the RAF pilots, are frivolous and uninspiring. I am the arbiter of what *my* RAF pilots have to say. But what is symbolized soon breaks out of the deadening encasement of the symbol, in a swarm, a galaxy, a multiplicity whose name is in the singular. Is not every singularity split from everything else, from primordial non-differentiation, only by the name hung on it? But a name cannot make something a singularity, as swarms and galaxies show us.

Helen's search for "the answer," however, hinges on the question of identity, and seems to require Achilles' co-operation:

> But still Helen wants "some simple answer." She feels that Achilles can give it to her. But she delays asking *the direct question that will tell her everything*. When she

> introduces it, it is in a roundabout way. She knows that her name was Helen, in Sparta, in Greece. But she wants to know of that other, "walking upon the ramparts." She does not directly ask Achilles if he recognizes in her the Helen of his first accusation, "I have seen you upon the ramparts." Is this Helen actually that Helen? (47, my italics.)

The question of the question, and the question of identity are placed persistently in close relation to one another. Questions and assertions of identity and language shadow one another throughout the poem. Achilles asks Helen a very similar question to the one she asks him: another question of Helen's identity followed by a question of language:

> How are Helen in Egypt
> and Helen upon the ramparts,
> together yet separate? (63)
>
> how have the paths met?
> how have the circles crossed?
> *how phrase or how frame the problem*? (63, my italics)

13. Circling the Formless Question

Helen's circumnavigation of the formless question, the question of the question of identity, the question of language, proceeds, as I have suggested, by means of unclear questions and answers. Helen suggests that she need not find the answer, that she already understands the answer, and/or that she contains it, but these claims are followed by more unclear questions and answers. Like the poem's narrator, Helen attempts to answer the formless question by invoking and dispelling objects and beings in rapid succession. We can see this process in the poem's treatment of Achilles' initial formless question to Helen: "which was the dream, which was the veil, of Cytherea" (36). The referent(s), the "whiches," of the sentence are unidentified: Achilles may be asking Helen whether it is Troy or Egypt that is illusory, but "which" may not refer to them. "Dream" and "veil"

may refer either to two distinct modes of unreality, dream *or* veil, or to the same one, dream/veil as opposed to something else. Achilles, then, is asking Helen to apply two nouns that designate either one or two unspecified unrealities to either one or two unspecified subjects, possibly Egypt and/or Troy. Perhaps a befuddled Helen wonders in response whether she has ever entered into language. At any rate, Helen does not understand this question: "What does he mean? She does not know. We do not know" (37). What Helen finds significant, however, is that "for the second time, he has spoken her name. That is sufficient" (37). Achilles has posed a formless question, a question whose referents are unclear, but he has said her name, and that is "sufficient" to guarantee her identity, notwithstanding the challenge to her position as a subject of language that his question represents.

Though "the dream" and "the veil" are later associated with Troy and Egypt, "was the dream, Helen upon the ramparts? / was the veil, Helen in Egypt?" (85), the question never becomes clear, though it undoubtedly pertains to Helen in some way. Helen finally responds to it by taking two nouns in the verse section and citing them in the prose section, where they appear to be the answer to the formless question: "Achilles' early question, 'Helena, which was the dream, / which was the veil of Cytheraea?' is answered, and Helen herself has answered it, 'they were one.' They are 'the ships assembled at Aulis,' and – a mermaid…" (238). Here, Helen answers the question of difference and identity that attaches itself to "the dream" and "the veil" by claiming their identity with two more, suddenly appearing and disappearing, objects, one in quotation marks. The formless question is "answered" by the contiguity of these terms. The logic seems to be that one of the ships that sailed to Troy has a mermaid on the prow, the mermaid stands

for/is Egypt, therefore Troy and Egypt are one. Contiguity is identity. Theseus reminds Helen that:

> …we have only guessed
> or half-guessed
> …
> whose was the ensign (painted on the prow)
> of one whose name, even, will be
>
> an eternal enigma (163)

Theseus had advised Helen to remember "small reliques" (164) instead of re-capitulating to "her own apotheosis" with Achilles. But these small reliques themselves are evidence of the apotheosis: they are compared to debris on a beach "after a wreck" (164). Again, multiplicity, meant to guard Helen against the "emotional experience" (162) with Achilles, is also a product of it, and recalls it.

The events in time that inspire her questions, Helen says, can not be abstracted: "there is no other sign or picture / no compromise with the past" (86). Specific memories cannot become the memory of an abstract conceptual system that enables symbolic language and clear questions. Thus Helen wishes to "encompass" the memories themselves in her heart without having to understand what they mean:

> the heart does not wonder?
> the heart does not ask?
> the heart accepts,
>
> encompasses the whole
> of the undecipherable script;
> take, take as you took
>
> Achilles' anger, as you flamed
> to his Star,
> *this is the only answer*; (86, my italics)

This passage suggests the resolution of language into images. The question of Achilles' motivation is answered by a visual memory of his behavior. Helen asserts a kind of formalist reading of her memories: they do not *mean*, but *are*. They are complete in themselves. She wishes, it seems, to resolve the events into a whole, visual "undecipherable script," and to "encompass" this "script." *Helen in Egypt* itself is perhaps the fullest expression of her attempt to do so. In "Pallinode," the bird-letter, a symbol "in-time," perhaps accomplishes this. Though a letter, it is alive, a "shape" that "parallels" the "timeless, hieratic symbols," inanimate marks not subject to birth and death:

> The dream? The veil? Obviously, Helen has walked through time into another dimension. But the timeless, hieratic symbols can be paralleled with symbols in-time. Helen herself had realized this, on her first meeting with Achilles, "the shape of this bird is a letter, they call it the hieroglyph." There are other hieroglyphs, Thetis has reminded her, a grasshopper, a flying fish, an octopus – these are Greek symbols of a Greek sea-goddess – "Helen, come home." (107)

Beings in Egypt appear as parallels "in-time," for "timeless," abstract, symbols. Egypt itself is reduced to a mark, a "'delicate sea-shell'" (114). They are, the text wants to establish, hieroglyphs that "parallel" symbolic language. Helen claims satisfaction with the uninterpretability of visual objects: "Let the temple walls flower with 'the indecipherable Amen-script.' It is not necessary to 'read' the riddle. The pattern itself is sufficient and it is beautiful" (32).

Though for Lacan a "psychotic structure" implies an asymbolic relation to language from the beginning, it seems to me that words once functioned symbolically for H.D. in a way that they no longer do when she is writing these lines. Why else would she protest so often that it is not necessary to understand the "indecipherable Amen-script?" Her awareness of what it is that she can not understand seems, to me, too accurate, and

her longing for understanding too strong, for this understanding never to have existed at all.

Helen understands, she claims, without needing to decipher the signifier. Thus, she can choose the "one finite moment" that has "no before and no after" (301), no dialectical meaning. The meaning that the rape enables, she finds, is the rape, and its salvific function lies in this self-reflexive redoubling where question and answer are one. The event that provoked the formless question is itself the only answer. *Helen in Egypt* likewise is its own meaning, a writing-being, and therefore salvific for H.D. Like Schreber's *Memoirs*, it reverses castration "in the real" by casting itself as the very system of signifiers, and consecutively as the very meaning of the sexual encounter, that is in question. But no sooner does Helen claim contentment with the indecipherable signifier or memory as "the only meaning," than she is beset by another pressing question requiring interpretation, often concerning Achilles or God:

> Achilles, Achilles come back,
> you alone have the answer;
> the dream? the veil?
>
> is it all a story? (88).

Is there nothing but a story, a tale told by an idiot? "The harpers" may describe Helen and Achilles' meeting, over and over, "forever." But will they ever tell Helen its meaning?

> "How have the paths met?" This is indeed the lesser personal mystery. "The harpers will sing forever of how Achilles met Helen among the shades," but perhaps they can not tell us *why* they met, for exactly what reason "the circles crossed." This is part of the Greater Mystery. Helen will not force an answer from the oracle. She will take her time about it. (64)

While she waits patiently for the meaning of the meeting that is so much in question, Helen, like Achilles, "counts the tread of her feet" finding signification perhaps only in

this numerical quantification: "No, I will not challenge / the ancient Mystery / I will count the tread of my feet" (64). Indeed, we can discern in this rhythmic, counted tread, "faster or slower, but never changing the beat, the rhythm," the very meter of *Helen in Egypt* itself, counted painstakingly by H.D.[40] "The rhythms," the narrator tells us, "must speak for themselves, and the alliterations" (178), since the words are not providing a layer of sense. As well as images, the poem offers us rhythm and meter, counted by Helen herself, in place of signification. Helen's efforts at quantification and schematization as alternate structures of meaning, however, create only more associations, sometimes very bizarre ones:

> I place my hand on a pillar
> and run my hand as the blind,
> along the invisible curve
>
> or the line of chick or bee;
> where are we?
> and what is the answer? (46)

This reference to the RAF pilots who Dowding referred to as "my boys" and "my chicks"[41] suggests the desire of Delia in *Sword* to graph their communications into a line, which, she expects, will zigzag. She associates this with bees, since the zigzag "would be a zzz-zzz way of talking" (*Sword* 140). In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen's idea that a pillar is a "line of chick or bee" attempts, like Delia's imagined graph, to resolve something uncomprehended into a pure shape, and attach this to an unclear question: "what is the answer?"

Consistent with the poem's attempted rendering of signification into pure visual image or graphic, Helen herself is the object of everyone's gaze. Endless memories, associations, and identities are encompassed by Helen without being deciphered, and

therefore enter the field of this gaze. H.D. attempts to redress the failure of words to connect to meanings by loading them into Helen, who "brings together" terms with no place in a symbolic structure by making them all relevant to herself. Schreber tells us more directly than Helen that "everything that happens is in reference to me." This is not vanity, he explains. It is simply that "[s]ince God entered into nerve-contact with me exclusively, I became in a way for God the only human being, or simply the human being around whom everything turns, to whom everything that happens must be related, and who therefore, from his own point of view, must also relate all things to himself" (197).

We can see this same belief in H.D.'s work following her analysis with Freud, at the very latest. Subsequent work seeks repeatedly to "reconcile" different principles in herself and her alter-egos, in order to end the social strife (particularly World War II) caused by their non-reconciliation. Whether or not these principles are also identified with another person, such as Dowding, does not change that fact that they must be reconciled not interpersonally, not with that person, but within herself. Helen replaces the question of the Other with something already contained in herself, something that she can give birth to in response to the question of the Other. Though the "Amen-script," the word of God, is "indecipherable," Helen herself "is" it, and therefore "understands" it on an intuitive level, though "we" are not sure what she understands. She "understands" for us by being what the other, whose gaze is trained on her, reads. Lacan writes that "the nucleus of psychosis has to be linked to a relationship between the subject and the signifier in its most formal dimension, in its dimension as a pure signifier" (*Psychoses* 250). Helen is this "pure signifier." Like Schreber's memoirs, *Helen in Egypt* is "a text that does not stand apart from what it describes, but which itself is included in it" (Weber,

xli). In other words, its signifiers do not "stand apart" from what they signify, as signifiers usually do, but try to replace their sense with their thingness as singifiers. This idea of simultaneously material/corporeal and literary production is repeated in H.D.'s later work, in *Hermetic Definition* for instance, in reference to her encounter with another man who was perceived as rejecting her, Lionel Durand.[42]

14. The Body of Helen

Recurrently, Helen asks Achilles to explain to her the link between her identity in Troy (London during World War II) and in Egypt (the astral plane). "What was she then, if she was there, at all, in Troy. His answer is unequivocal and final, 'a fountain of water in that desert…we died of thirst'" (47). Achilles' answer, though it does not seem very "unequivocal," since it is an analogy, does tell us that the Greek armies perished for lack of Helen. She is what men at war die for lack of. Her identity is not part of a symbolic order at all, but universal.

The figure of Helen of Troy heralds a new world order. Helen's power, greater than the "Iron-ring" of "the Command," seduces Achilles away from "the Command" and causes him to die and become a "new mortal" in Egypt. Her universal desirability catalyzes the Trojan war so that a new world can rise from the remains of the old. She is unforgettable and irresistible: Achilles dies because of a glance that they exchange; Paris because he cannot forget her. The capital letters consistently given in *Helen in Egypt* and other later writing to terms like Love, Beauty, and War, and their consistent identification, respectively, with H.D. figures and Dowding figures, suggest a belief that

she and Dowding were divine principles or incarnations. Perhaps they are "Egregores," beings formed, according to Robert Ambelain, from the beliefs, ideals, and rituals of a particular group.[43] War is one of the Egregores that Ambelain mentions, and "Helena," H.D. tells us, is "the name of Love" (95). H.D.'s Occultism-infused adaptation of psychoanalytic "integration" represents the mystical union of the divine mother, father, and son that Ambelain tells us occurs in spiritual initiation. The union of Helen and Achilles (who is also Paris) represents the union of Love and War as proper nouns, and consecutively the union of mother, father, and son. It is by this union that Love and War, Helen and Achilles-Paris, give birth to themselves. The "integration" that produces Beauty and Love is both the cause and the effect of the violence that attacks Beauty and Love. The cosmic cycle catalyzed by Achilles' rape is thus "the only answer" (86) to the question of its cause. Achilles raped Helen so that the world could be re-created, so that Achilles could rape Helen. In H.D.'s *Ion*, the union of Ion and Kreousa give rise to perfect Ionian civilization, which H.D., who gauges a culture's perfection by the beauty of its art, describes as the "greatest aesthetic miracle of all-time" (257). In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen is the "eidolon" of Love, the divine mother who must integrate with War, the father-son, to give birth to another (artistically) perfect civilization, or perhaps a perfect epic poem like *Helen in Egypt*. The poem suggests that the product of Helen's "integrative" rape by Achilles, the "ultimate experience, *La Mort, L'Amour*" (288), is literally the poem itself, the perfectly beautiful offspring of these physical embodiments of "conscious" and "unconscious," or "War" and "Love" or "Beauty." H.D.'s protagonists attract the male violence necessary for renewed, perfect, beautiful civilization which is also perfect artistic production.

Helen's questions of identity mirror the question of the relation of word to meaning in the poem itself. Since this remains in question, the sense of a "real" truth beyond whatever answers she may have come up with subsists. The prose-commentator tells us that because Helen "herself is the writing" she does not need to interpret it: "*Helen herself denies actual intellectual knowledge of the temple-symbols. But she is nearer to them than the instructed scribe; for her, the secret of the stone-writing is repeated in natural or human symbols.* She herself is the writing" (22). Instead of understanding the symbol "intellectually," she *is* it, like God in the gospel of John.[44] She is God's "opposite number" (*Majic* 47).[45]

> Proteus, the legendary King of Egypt, as we have learned before, takes many shapes. Could he "manifest as Achilles?" If so, (the question is not asked but implied), could he manifest as Paris? Then, could the two opposites (the slayer and the slain) merge into one, and that One, the Absolute? This last question is implicit but not formulated in the final phrase or strophe, "Amen begot Amor." (*Helen in Egypt* 178)

H.D. considered Zakenuto, *Majic Ring's* "Master in modern dress," to have already manifested in one of her *héros fatals,* Peter Rodeck (*Majic* 125). Helen, like Delia the "opposite number" of God, is also, like God, the Word and the "first-cause" (*Majic* 46-7). She signifies and apprehends all meaning. Her search for the meaning of other people's behavior is thus a self-referential search. The "clues" in her own memories provide "the only answer." Helen is the "meaning" of *Helen in Egypt*.

Although H.D. probably has the Gospel of John in mind when she asserts that Helen "is the writing," her assertion is not only meant to signal that Helen is God incarnate, though it is meant to do that. Her wish to establish this proceeds from a wish that she perhaps shared with John, to erase the difference, or return to a state of non-difference, between signifying and being. H.D. notes and ruminates over John's claim

that God is the Word: "He is the Word, the word is made up of letters. He is all the intermediate letters and he is the infinite combination of the letters in English and in every language. If he is the Word, he is essentially part of the language" (*Majic* 46). God, perhaps, presents this non-difference. What he says *is*, and this is how creation occurs. In Genesis, for instance, what he says comes to be, and this is how everything is created. So Schreber also notes with interest: "God *wills* that something should be, and by dispatching rays with this will, *what he wills immediately comes into existence*. The Bible expresses this significantly with the words "God said, let there be light, and there *was* light" (184). For Schreber rays, which "must speak as soon as they are in motion" (121), are the words of God. However, Schreber notes that "divine creative power" seems dependent on "drawing nearer to [the] body," celestial or corporeal, "on which creation was to take place" (184). This is also true in *Helen in Egypt*. Hence, perhaps, the necessity that Schreber and Helen take the divine into their flesh. If God is the Word of the original Law, the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, can reverse that Law. The moment of castration can be, as Samuel Weber puts it, "reversed." The order of things that language put into place can be subverted or renewed. For Schreber and H.D., writing that is also being is the means by which the return to Oneness can occur.

H.D. often expressed a concern that the "threads" on the loom of her memories and associations were woven together "too loosely," an image that expresses the disintegration of her thought-processes from clear relevance to one another into enigmatic relevance to herself. Since everything that happens in the outer world is "about" her, the truth about herself and the world is the articulation of everything. Her

difficulty formulating questions and theories results from the limitlessness of the objects that are relevant to her.

Violent destruction that is also synthesis and rebirth remains a constant throughout H.D.'s later writing, though new players step in and others recede or merge into one another. The "next world" becomes less material than it appears in *Sword* or *Trilogy*, more of an alternate dimension, the astral plane, that co-exists with the "material plane." Although subsequent work shows that she is still looking for the ends of her thoughts, *Helen in Egypt* is a triumph in that it loops them with a circular logic that somewhat stabilizes her quest for meaning. The temporal dimension retroactively signified by the birth/death prevents meaning from collapsing in on itself. Death and birth, which signal difference, suggest that difference and time, as well as oneness and eternity, are possible.

H.D.'s failures to install a symbolic order correlate, her writing suggests, to her rejections of other people's interpretations of things relevant to her. In it, the symbolic perspective represented by the male is trumped by her "expanded" imaginary perspective every time; but the frequent return of the question of the other's motivation suggests that the problem of the other is incompletely resolved by these foreclosures. Though the delusional metaphor substitutes the imaginary difference of the rape's birth and death for the difference between signifying and being, Helen's search for the truth still circles the question of what is signified. H.D., like Helen, continues to appeal to others for answers and then to reject or appropriate their offerings, with her characteristic turn to an unclear frame of reference that she is sure they cannot comprehend – but that she also cannot. The question that the encounters with Freud, Dowding and Heydt gave rise to, the

question of language itself, subsists. The "next world," "answer," "ultimate plan," that H.D. longed for so desperately is the symbolic order that she repeatedly forecloses. This longing persists. H.D., like *Helen in Egypt*'s Helen, Kreousa in *Ion*, Delia in *Sword* and *Majic Ring*, and Hilda in *The Gift*, continues to doubt and interpret and crave reassurance that the "ultimate plan" is still operative and that she still has an important place in it.

Introduction to Djuna Barnes's *Ryder* and *Nightwood*

> Before that, it must have been two hours, I had gone down on the floor and hugged my grandmother by her knees, dropping my head down, saying, "Don't let it happen!" and she said, "It had to happen."
>
> - *Nightwood, The Original Version and Related Drafts*

If H.D. after World War II unsuccessfully attempts to find an "outside" to her ghost world through writing, Barnes in contrast imagines no outside. Her endeavor is not to establish the difference that enables symbolic language in the first place, but to maintain it. To describe language's limits and its breakdown in language is, paradoxically, to strengthen these limits, to guard against this breakdown. Barnes accordingly makes the distortions and gaps of language visible as such. Her writing subjects the narratives of power-figures and narrators less to counter-narratives, as critics have claimed, than to a silent gaze that sees spaces of disjuncture in them. For Barnes, correlatively, negation does not necessarily enable an impartial and consistent (however harsh) social order. Her works' holes and fractures figure more precarious spaces, the disavowals of a fluctuating universe in which the only law is that of enjoyment, excremental jive, lustful power. Barnes figures holes, fractures, graves, and empty spaces in both the form and the content of her text to represent uncertainty, ambiguity, non-universality, and thus to limit the power of language and of the parent-figures who generate it.[46] However, these holes and gaps can pour forth excremental speech and obscene or threatening innuendo, can disgorge rotting ideals. In Barnes's work, words are not only what veils the secret: they are the very substance of the secret.

Barnes's writing stages the violations and lack of boundaries in her family relationships, particularly in her relationship with her grandmother, Zadel Barnes Gustafson. The difference between knowing and not knowing that her cryptic style accomplishes acts as both invocation and boundary. For Lacan, fetishism attempts to strengthen the sense of separation from the mother-figure by supplementing the paternal bar with material objects or behaviors that represent it, and Barnes's writing can be understood in this sense as fetishistic. Her style reflects her strategy for coping (not, perhaps, in the best possible way) with a world in which limits were never firmly in place, a world shaped by her sexualized relationship with Zadel, who was her first great love and with whom she shared a bed for fifteen years.

Zadel's letters to the young Djuna are sexually explicit, depicting horniness in response to her letters and an overtly sexual relationship between them (Herring 54-59). No overtly sexual act, beyond playing with her grandmother's breasts, appears directly in Barnes's writing: if they had other "secrets," and they probably did, Barnes writes around them. Bruce Fink ascribes the appearance of the perverse structure almost exclusively in men to the greater and more genitally localized erotic charge that exists between the male child and the mother-figure (173). Barnes's relation to Zadel constitutes an exception: Zadel's letters to Barnes take their erogenous zones as sites of their love (Herring 54-55). Some of Barnes's writing also suggests (and she once told George Barker) that she was raped by her father, Wald Barnes. Opinions vary as to whether this rape was actual or vicarious. Field argues that the father-daughter rape occurred, and is hidden in Barnes's writing behind a more presentable betrayal, her arranged sexual encounter with family friend Percy Faulkner. Writes Field, "[i]t did happen, and the outrage was the shadow-

play behind all her art. Afterwards, Elizabeth divorced Wald" (43). Conversely, Herring suggests that the depictions of father-daughter rape in her writing result from Barnes's sense that her father was a vicarious participant in her violation by Faulkner (268-271). However, he acknowledges the disturbing implications of the Zadel-Djuna correspondence. That Barnes was sexually abused in some sense is generally taken as fact by her critics.

Barnes was quite normal by the standards our celebrated modernist authors. She did not see, hear, and believe things that many other people did not see, hear, and believe, and while she did become quite disorganized in later life and tend to see other people's intentions toward her as malign or controlling, this is not so unusual in itself. She is unusual in that she mastered the art of presenting opaque and hidden personal meaning in her work to an astonishing degree, though this perhaps served her better as an aesthetic strategy than as a therapeutic one. Though Barnes always remains aware of the aesthetic quality of her writing, a layer of it is like H.D.'s texts addressed not to the reader but to herself.

1. Living Pictures

Early critics of Barnes's work portray it as exquisite but not meaningful. Andrew Field comments that "philosophizing was not native to Miss Barnes; some intellectual digestive process converts thought into peculiar and rather charming, but meaningless, stylization" (95). Field sees the "*tableau vivant*" or "artistic unit…sufficient unto itself" (90), rather than meaning, as the Barnes reader's source of satisfaction. He describes

these units as "independent cameos or portraits framed and hung" (32). Louis Kannenstine, too, locates the value of her work in the image itself. In his reading, Barnes's characters' lives are "struggles to become one unqualified whole, either one thing or the other, but they are blocked by the recognition of their duality, their inescapably fractured being" (xv). Kannenstine reads Barnes's resistance to meaning as a function of the central concern of her oeuvre, the binary oppositions created but no longer managed by "Christian dichotomies of body and soul, carnality and spirituality" (xiv). He reads her strategy for managing the ensuing "flux" between "the elusive ends of experience" in her writing's "arrest of…experience" and "capture [of the] image" (xv).

To read Barnes's work with recourse to biography has been seen as counter-productive, given its intentional opacity and its implicit challenge to the "true story." As Daniela Caselli observes, for Barnes "[t]he secret, rather than producing obscurity, preserves clarity of vision, which would be lost once the secret goes public" (196). Because of this need to preserve secrecy in order to preserve clarity of vision, Caselli argues that "Biography and autobiography are…problems rather than solutions in Barnes" (194). Further, Barnes herself hated them: "the complexity found in the published work is not compensated by a clearer, less obscure, less (or more) disturbing dimension which we call 'life'; the idea that there can be a formula to make sense of it is presented in both published texts and letters as ludicrous" (193). Caselli, like Kannenstine and Field, suggests that the image is the privileged Barnesian site of (non)meaning, places where biography and confession are endlessly problematized (29).

Barnes's dislike of biography, however, can be read biographically, though this could, of course, be read as a mishandling of what should be considered impossible to

explain clearly. This does have the advantage of allowing us to move on from reading her resistance to clear meaning as a final, subversive meaning of its own, and leaving it at that. I do not see Barnes's insistent denaturalizing and obscuring of clarity as itself representing a final, irreducible negation of patriarchal language and constructions, as an act that simply replaces clear meaning with ambiguous or withheld meaning and goes home, patriarchy having been undermined. Barnes's style, rather, presents and hides personal things. I read Barnes's writing psychoanalytically, with some recourse to biography, because this allows a reading of her work that takes her intentional opacity and mistrust of clarity as a beginning instead of an end point, and opens the field for further discussion.

Barnes's mode of meaning puts the interpreter into a different position than clear language (or clearly psychotic language) does: less certain, less able to achieve closure – and perhaps this is part of the point. With Barnes I feel less certain about using biographical material, and there is much less published material to use. I am less certain than I am when writing on H.D. that what I am saying is "true." But this too is a function, I think, of Barnes's mode of expression. Barnes imagines a reader whose interpretive flailings and bungling certainties she dances around, whose confusion is a necessary part of the meaning of her writing – for her. I reconsider the biographical and confessional-therapeutic implications of *Ryder* and *Nightwood* in order to problematize non-meaning's transcendently meaningful and subversive status in critical readings of Barnes's work, and to point to an overlooked, and eminently overlookable, mode of meaning in it: disavowed meaning.

The suspended image that Kannenstine sees as Barnes's answer to oscillation between extremes and Caselli sees as confounding clear meaning, I read as describing a perverse fixation that divides Barnes's narratives and characters by eliding something from them that is yet present in them. Lacan traces the split in the subject to the apprehension of the image as such.[47] Unlike the real world, which is always shifting temporally and spatially, the image is immobile and timeless, and therefore perfectly accessible to the gaze. In Barnes's work it demonstrates *a priori* fixity and fragmentation. It both presents and abjects a trace of a "particular" bodily history, since the word "particular," for Barnes, indicates what is not in language, what has not been abstracted into a "general" sign. The particular is signaled in her work by silence, movement, departure, spectrality, ambiguity, gaps, dirt, and excrement. It is what her writing seeks to approach, but what it must always, in approaching, freeze and distance. The approach is always also a departure, the departure an approach. Like a lake in the desert, or like a ghost, the particular always recedes from and follows the word.

Kannenstine's and Field's decisions to "reach not beyond the image" (*Ryder* 3) may have contributed to a critical tendency to overlook (till recently in *Nightwood's* case) the rich and complex multivalence of Barnes's prose. Barnes's allusiveness got her first "book" (*The Book of Repulsive Women*) past American censorship, which failed to notice the references to lesbian sex so obvious to its contemporary readers. *Ryder* and *Nightwood*, too, have frequencies that have eluded the critical radar. Barnes's prose, as her skill developed, comes closer and closer to opacity and silence, seeking to say nothing but remain meaningful.

Lacan writes that "full speech" is more full the more fragmentary, indeterminate, digressive, and seemingly pointless it is: "the more uncertain the text that the subject gives us, the more it is meaningful" (*Seminar, I* 45). It is "in effect…defined by identity with that which it speaks about" (*Écrits* 381). In other words, full speech, the speech of the unconscious, is identical to psychotic speech, but appears in fragmentary, vanishing form in the speech of non-psychotics, where it is often "a tiny scrap, surrounded by an aura of uncertainty" (*Seminar, I* 46). In Barnes's work it appears fleetingly but persistently. It appears in *Ryder*'s and *Nightwood*'s images and *tableaux*, which are elaborate but often unclear, apparently disconnected from the works' narratives – such as they are. *Ryder* represents in its language and *tableaux* endless pairs of things, often with a hole in between, and it is keenly aware of the anatomical terrain that this visual rendering of splitting and aporia suggests: it often invokes this anatomy. These holes, and what issues from them, are indeed its chief examples of "full speech."[48] While the picturesque image is fetishistically frozen, "mythic" in Roland Barthes's sense of the word, it has a hole with a vanishing memory-trail that should not be too eagerly washed away.[49] While Barnes's vague, ambiguously referential images can carry obvious innuendoes, even her "clear" images often have this memory-trail, if read within their frames. Instead of mediating between dualisms, as Kannenstine claims, Barnes's images demonstrate and undo their own dualistic fixity. As in Freudian dream analysis, their forms and their ostensible meanings must be seen as separate, sometimes very incongruent, for the "full speech" hidden in them to emerge.[50]

The repetition and resistance to interpretation that characterize the Barnesian *tableau* also characterize fetishism as psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria

Torok describe it. The fetish, they write, works as a "symbol-cover" for the cryptophore's "fetish-word" (153) by presenting the word in a way that renders its symbolic meaning unclear to others and to some extent to the cryptophore. Thus the fetish both invokes, and hides, some libidinously charged scene. Like the fetish, the image in Barnes's work presents, in a distorted fashion, a history of relations. It fixes and benumbs this history in signs that are filled with another signification, hiding, or burying, it in full view.

Perversion, understood by Jacques Lacan as a subjective "structure," rather than a behavior, is the result of the subject's incomplete entry into the symbolic order, the order where metaphor operates. While the "castrated" subject recognizes his "mother's" or primary caregiver's desire as such, and his inability to completely fulfill it, and so apprehends the lack on which symbolism is predicated, and the psychotic subject never experiences separation from the mother and thus cannot enter the symbolic realm, the child who develops a perverse structure experiences the mother as distinct from itself, but does not experience her as limited by, or wanting, anything outside the mother-child dyad. The mother figure's demand for the child is never checked by a father figure who represents her desire as such. In perverse disavowal the subject simultaneously admits and denies the mother's lack, or "castration." For Freud, this is the mother's lack of a penis; for Lacan, her lack of the phallus, her limited power. The child experiences itself as the mother's phallus, the thing that completes her and that cannot be substituted for by other objects in accordance with symbolic law. To ease the burden of the mother's demand, perverse subjects seek to supplement the paternal function by objectifying or staging it.[51] However, since it is not difficult to see "normal" heterosexual sex as itself a staging of castration, it is difficult to demarcate perverse sexual behavior from whatever

other kinds of sexual behavior may exist. In perversion, limits may be unusually emphatic and central: for instance, in sadomasochism one person imposes highly dramatized "limits" (immobilization, cuts, whip-lash marks, and other visual representatives of castration) on another person, and both identify with the one who is being limited. In fetishism, particular objects and scenarios stand for the mother's desire and its (other) objects. Her unconditional demand for the subject is thereby limited.

2. Crypts and Phantoms, and their Fixed Movements

For Abraham and Torok, fetishism symptomizes "cryptophoria," a language disorder in which key words that represent shameful secrets are walled off in the pre-conscious mind and cause the subject's language and behavior to become cryptic (155-156). Building on the theories of melancholia and incorporation/introjection pioneered by Karl Abraham and Sándor Ferenczi and elaborated by Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein, Abraham and Torok describe the psychic crypt as an imaginary formation through which the love-object whose loss cannot be spoken of is "swallowed and preserved," in a "secret tomb inside the subject" (99). They write, "the objectal correlative of the loss is buried alive…as a full-fledged person, complete with its own topography" (130). The psychic "phantom," on the other hand, consists of fragments of a discourse that invade the subject, transmitted through the silences in the speech of a loved one (118-120). "Cryptophoria," Abraham and Torok's name for the language disorder that "crypts" and "phantoms" entail, is symptomized by speech and behavior in which "fetish-words" representing shameful secrets are taken out of their original context and inserted into another context. Their meanings are thereby disguised as other meanings. The secret is

not repressed, not unconscious, but half-known: the cryptophore knows that the fetishized object, phrase, or practice is not identical to the unspeakable lost object and scene, and yet persists in the "belief" that it is. This entails a correlative effect on his relation to language.

A psychic crypt is constituted by a lost love-object, usually a partner in some form of incest, whose personality the subject adopts alongside his own in order to imaginatively continue the libidinal relationship. In it, write Abraham and Torok, "the objectal correlative of the loss is buried alive…as a full-fledged person, complete with its own topography" (130). The psychic "phantom," on the other hand, consists of fragments of a discourse that invade the subject, transmitted through the silences in the speech of a loved one (118-120). "Cryptophoria," Abraham and Torok's general name for the disorders that they characterize in terms of "crypts" and "phantoms," is symptomized by behaviors in which "fetish-words" representing shameful secrets are taken out of their original context and inserted into another context. Their meanings are thereby disguised as other meanings. For instance, one patient spent his time collecting rock samples and butterflies (which he gassed and mounted) because his mother's lost lover had been betrayed by his grandmother to the Nazis, and sent to a concentration camp, where he was set to work splitting rocks and died in the gas chambers. Through behavior or speech, the cryptophore's behavior presents this unspeakable, shameful knowledge in "innocent" form, but repeatedly, insistently.

Cryptophoria does not inevitably give rise to "fetishistic" sexual practices, if these can be delimited. It gives rise to inexhaustible allusive substitutes for the encrypted content, whether in language, sexual behavior, or other behavior. In one patient, an

encrypted memory of incestuous desire between himself and his mother, when she was washing him in a tub as a boy, returns in the man's frequent references to water and inundation, and in his dreams of floods, rain, and washerwomen (119). Fetish-words that do affect sexuality also give rise to particular word-clusters in the subject. For instance, the word *leche*, Spanish for milk, similar in French to "lick" and in English to "lechery," evocative of the white, milky semen spilled during ejaculation, comes to be the fetish-word of Abraham and Torok's "man of milk" (149-153). Since his encrypted secret is that his sister gave their (*leche*rous) father hand jobs, presumably while on a vacation in Spanish South America, he regales his analyst with free-associative words and fantasies that pertain to milk and milking (goat's milk: *lait* de *chè*vre), as well as traction, pulling. He also (*léche*r, to lick) admits to being an avid performer of cunnilingus (Abraham and Torok see this as fetishistic, which again begs the question of where the distinction lies, or whether there can be one, between fetishistic and non-fetishistic human sexual behavior). In cryptophoria, then, words that recall the fetish-word(s) are spoken or acted out by the cryptophore with the apparent intention to communicate something different than the encrypted meaning associated with the shameful secret. This both invokes the secret and its erotic charge, and keeps it at a distance. Psychic "phantoms" and "crypts" are thus symptomized by statements and behaviors that present them in an indirect fashion, often by making them seem to pertain literally to the subject's more immediate surroundings. For instance, by fetish-words or phrases, presented in another context, or by synonyms, homonyms, homophones, or allosemes that are associated by the cryptophore with the shameful secret. While the words' ostensible meanings appear to be the going concern and its other meanings mere ghosts, the reverse is true in the

cryptophore's psychic economy. The fleeting, ghostly connotation is what remains/returns, while the apparent denotation is incidental.

Abraham and Torok understand fetishism at first glance quite differently than does Lacan, as an oblique way of calling on the lost love-object and the forbidden secret, thus generating the libidinal charge associated with them. However, this account of fetishism is not as different from Lacan's as it first appears, since in Abraham and Torok's theory a psychic tomb is only constructed when "the shameful secret is the love object's doing and when that object also functions for the subject as an ego ideal" (131). I take this to mean that the love object takes the role of both the Lacanian mother whose demand for the subject is never checked, and the father who is supposed to set limits but does not do so believably. The limit is set only in speech, with the implicit or explicit injunction that "this must never be spoken of." Limits exist then, for those with "perverse" or "cryptophoric" structures, only in pretense, never in actual relations of power. But other people, perhaps those with more conventional childhoods, believe in them, and correlatively believe that the cryptophore's speech really means what it pretends to mean. With the help of the (castrated) others' credulity, or with the help of innocent-seeming objects, the "real meaning" of the fetish or the fetish-word can be both represented and covered over. Thus the fetish, or the fetishized, castrated other-object, is imagined as "barring" or supplementing a bar on the demand of the Other. In a similar way, the Lacanian fetish represents both the paternal prohibition and the *jouissance* associated with what is prohibited. Barnes's writing calls both her love and its prohibition into being. It represents an other that is both "impending and inaccessible" (*Nightwood* 2-

3). When represented cryptically, this other is separate enough from herself to enable desire.

Ryder (1928) and *Nightwood* (1936) depict the mechanisms of perverse disavowal in the registers of form, imagery, word choice, and character behavior. Precise and often repulsive, their images startle with a sudden lurid flash that immediately passes away. These frozen, incongruous, quickly disappearing *tableaux* have no obvious causal relation to one another or to the story taken as a whole, but contain images, phrases, and actions that symptomize something outside of what they ostensibly present. *Ryder* and *Nightwood* embed fetishistic fantasy in their very structure and syntax. Rather than suggesting that Barnes herself was bound to it, however, her ability to describe fetishistic mechanisms suggests if anything that her desire was fairly free of them, though freedom, in Barnes's writing, is always haunted.

Freud's and Lacan's discussions of "fetishism" tend to overflow the boundaries that they try to set for the term and gesture towards something common to everyone. Various psychoanalytic theorists see all sexual behavior (Dean, arguably the later Freud) and/or all creative writing (Kristeva, Felman) and/or all ideology (Žižek) as constitutively fetishistic. Since their mechanisms are applied so ubiquitously, perversion and fetishism in the more clinical forms of psychoanalytic theory, to remain meaningful categories, become matters of degree, a "borderline" range that is no longer neurosis but not yet psychosis. Their mechanisms, though ostensibly distinct from both of these, are more likely to overlap with them when discussed in detail in case studies and not simply in the abstract: hence the interminability of discussions of the categories in which Little Hans, the Wolf Man, Dora, and other famous case studies belong. As well as seeing the

perverse subject as somewhere *between* psychotic and neurotic/normal, there have also been suggestions that he or she is *both* psychotic and not psychotic, or at least has multiple personalities (Goldberg), perhaps one or more in each category, as Abraham and Torok's theory might also suggest. Goldberg describes, instead of the usual horizontal split between conscious and unconscious knowledge, "vertical" splits that divide consciousness. (43-5) Though I doubt the authenticity of very elaborate forms of multiple personality disorder in which many fully distinct personalities cohabitate in endlessly fertile dramas, the view of perversion as mingled craziness and not-craziness seems the most useful to me – possibly because I don't believe that these categories are immutable. The permeability of their boundary, it seems to me, allows (and perhaps drives) writers like Barnes to describe craziness, total possession by the other, in words.

Disavowed content, which Barnes's words simultaneously summon and push away, is depicted in *Ryder* and *Nightwood* as simultaneously fixed and moving. In *Nightwood* (working-titled "Bow Down"), genuflexion, bowing or going down, stages the subject's simultaneous expulsion and capture by the other. In going down, not to invisible depths but always before a loved or revered, usually standing other, its characters cite scenes of shame and abandonment. Barnes's writing reports on the movements of objects, their genuflexions, falling and fixity, perambulations and trails, introjections and evacuations, merging, splitting. Indeed, it is less its objects and characters than their movements, so uniformly departing and descending – yet motionless – that carry her work's meaning. Perhaps this is why when one meets *Nightwood*'s Nora, the Barnes-character, "at the opera, at a play, sitting alone and apart," her own eyes "report not so much the object as the movement of the object" (52). In *Ryder*, disavowed

content likewise appears syntactical, incidental, and/or merely passing through. Its ghosts, though in plain view, are "in the picture" permanently but fleetingly, in the act of leaving or falling out of it. They are always-already in the past, or maybe the future, never of present concern. But they are always present in departure.

The mechanism of disavowal is expressed in this unending exodus. Since disavowal knows as well as not-knowing, it requires ongoing spoken and behavioral acts of negation that do not so much erase its object-cause, as pose it fleetingly. The fleetingness of these objects suggests the immediate return to (and re-emergence from) the unconscious that characterizes their disavowed status. Lacan writes: "What is ontic in the function of the unconscious is the split through which that something, whose adventure in our field seems so short, is for a moment brought to the light of day – a moment because the second stage, which is one of closing up, gives this apprehension a vanishing aspect" (*Seminar, XI* 31).

4. Battling Discourses in *Ryder*?

Barnes's mode of expression has been considered as a challenge to clarity, patriarchy, and univocity, and thus as feminist, queer, or anti-ideological. Most recent criticism on *Ryder* has tended to find two types of ideological narratives in it that battle one another, whether homophonic and polyphonic, or patriarchal and feminist, or conservative and libertine. But these divisions are rarely considered closely in relation to Ryder's own divided form. Esther Sanchez-Pardo is an exception: she reads *Ryder*'s form and content as portraying a failure to move from a split, paranoid-schizoid vision of part-

objects to a depressive vision of whole objects. *Ryder*'s form as well as its content, she argues, represent Kleinian paranoid-schizoid mechanisms, which Klein correlates to feminine melancholia and to the death drive.[52] She sees a failure to move from paranoid-schizoid to depressive anxiety in *Ryder*'s "paranoid economy in which objects are not perceived as whole" (339).

However, the problem with the opposition that Sanchez-Pardo finds between whole and part objects in *Ryder* is that this distinction itself is very much at issue. To a certain extent, Pardo's Kleinian dichotomy of whole and part objects can be transposed onto the dichotomy I will draw between particulars and generals. The general, counter-intuitively, would be the part-object, a (misrepresented) fragment of the particular. The particular, were it accessible, would be the whole object, the whole story. However, the particular in Barnes's work is less a whole than it is a hole, a part that is overlooked, an aporia that, when represented, is immediately general. Thus, particular and general cannot be kept apart in writing. Spectrality in *Ryder* and *Nightwood* is associated with the fleeting particular whose elision is necessary to the general, the frozen picture or sign.

Ryder's subversive agenda is therefore oriented towards the deconstruction, not the re-articulation, of "mythology" in the Barthes-inflected sense in which I will be speaking of it. *Ryder*'s narrators and characters suggest alternate modes of agency not chiefly through the liberated sex or counter-hegemonic stories that have drawn critical attention, but through subversions of language's universal symbolic function. *Ryder*'s subverted subversions of discourses of Spiritualism, prophetic vision, and social manners undermine authority less with "countermyths" than with "antimyth." It uses ambiguity, multivalence, framing, bathos, and idiosyncratic or holophrastic language to expose

narrative as myth and thereby suggest what it elides. While its women do revise cultural narratives to "suit themselves" with empowered roles, their stories are myths among others, useful in securing some discursive ground to stand on, but not to eradicate the gaps that perforate this ground and its inhabitants. As Ann Martin argues, Barnes imagines oppression not as two unequal camps (for instance, Patriarchy's repression of the feminine and/or queer) but as a network in which aggressors are simultaneously victims, and in which all language has a hidden agenda.

Ryder is read as opposing parts and wholes, meaning and non-meaning, as well as evaluative oppositions. Sheryl Stevenson has described it as an opposition of "female versions of cultural ideology" to dominant ones, its "outlaw women" undercutting hegemony through "parody and revision of dominant Western texts and myths" (82). Diane Warren reads *Ryder* intertextually as a challenge to homophonic hegemony by feminine polyphony, with its women's multifarious capacities, desires, and stories spilling over the clear social boundaries of patriarchy.[53] She presents the "stiltsman's" remark that "[e]verything is true that is honoured" (20) as the ideological principle behind *Ryder*'s subversions. This is troubling, given *Ryder*'s themes of rape and incest. If something or someone is dishonored, according to this logic, they are false, which would make the lynch mob in "Rape and Repining" (28) *Ryder*'s ethical exemplars. Nor does *Ryder's* polyphony include all its women's voices: Julie and the unnamed rape-victim are silent, apart from Julie's "You, you, you!" (143), meant for her father but uttered through teeth clamped in the flesh of his mistress, as if not even an accusation without content can be addressed to him directly.

As well as aligning feminism with the most thoroughgoing possible relativism and positing this as an unequivocal social good and *Ryder*'s "unifying concept" (Warren), critical discussions of agency in *Ryder* have found distinctly feminine modes of carnivalesque grotesquerie that overturns patriarchal narratives while itself remaining intact. Stevenson, for instance, uses Molly's account of the Biblical Eden story, in which the man "snapped…up" the apple, as an example of Molly's counter-mythology, although it is not included in Molly's creation story but multiply framed as a story (Molly's) of a story (Mary's) of a story (the calf's foot's). Susan Edmunds has noted the inconsistency between critics for whom Wendell represents the forces of oppression (particularly the arguments concerned with establishing his sexual abuse of Julie) and the critics who see him as subversive. She creates instead a more historically specific binary opposition between two different groups of social reformers, conservative and libertine, both of which *Ryder*, she argues, criticizes. For Caselli, Barnes's work has remained marginal in discussions of modernism because it resists all meaning. It rather (as Robin Blyn has also observed) "stages an irreducible tension between failing to disclose and promising; procrastination and repetition; unreadable originality and persistent intertextuality" (34). Barnes's work, Caselli argues, stages its own unnaturalness in order to expose "[t]he erosion of patriarchy and of genre [that] takes place…through linguistic proliferation, mimicry, and indecency" (214). This follows smoothly enough from readings that see in *Ryder* the subversive feminist mimicry of patriarchal conventions. *Ryder*, however, does not imagine any kind of language, even its own, as anti-patriarchal or dependably subversive. It offers no clear distinction between patriarchal and anti-patriarchal stories, language, and perspectives.

Though there is plenty of mimicry, parody, indecency, proliferation, polyphony, ambiguity, and radical relativism, there is nothing much in *Ryder* for all this to undermine. It is as if the gesture of subversion itself conjures the vision, for critics, of the univocal patriarchal power that is being undermined – just as, perhaps, loss conjures the vision of full presence that critics see *Nightwood* as undermining. *Ryder* refuses and mocks all narrative knowledge, counter-myths included. For instance, it mocks women's alternative stories with Kate Careless:

> [Kate] had strange wisdom, because she needed a recompense, for that she went off into trances, seeing men at war, and her will-of-the-wisp sister in a long white gown, – the dead do not supply colours. Right buxom was that sister when she died, folding her hands over a well-turned breast, but she came back maiden, death and the maiden. Who doubts this matter? Who doubts the word and testimony of the common woman? She alone who is too ignorant for beauty alone may see beauty; she who is too vulgar for religion may be vouchsafed the word…. Who doubts the word of the mother who sees that which compensates the condition? Not I! (223)

Kate Careless's stories, like Molly Dance's, are "ignorant," "vulgar," idiosyncratic, and open to doubt, but this does not put them at the cutting edge of *Ryder*'s radical project. *Ryder* does not suggest that we should read Amelia's, Mary's or Molly's stories differently than we do Kate's "strange wisdom." The figure of the "wise fool" is among the conventions that *Ryder* parodies, and is not aligned only with an unequivocally anti-patriarchal perspective: Wendell uses it too. "Education," says he, "makes [the child] a monologuist in the presence of God, instead of a disciple" (130), a claim that ought to place him among Warren's champions of polyphony.

Further, since the battling ideological positions that critics have often described are emblematized by *Ryder*'s characters, *Ryder*'s favored battleground has, in critical writing, been the heterosexual bed, and only its sexually "liberated" females, like Molly Dance, have been able to exemplify female agency. Even Sanchez-Pardo falls into this

trap: "There are four exceptional women in *Ryder* who rebel against the patriarchal imperative and take pleasure in sex" (334).[54] For these readers, *Ryder*'s rebel woman must first have sex with the narcissistic man. Only then can she deflate him with her independent particularities: the disappearance of his wallet, her post-menopausal sterility, or the possibility that she has already conceived by Dan the policeman. The question of agency in women who don't (voluntarily) have sex with men, like Julie and Anne, has not been posed. Sex is *Ryder*'s most spectacular mode of subversion: it gives the man a reflection of himself that can be taken away. But Anne and Julie do have an agency of sorts, if agency is a space of separation from an imperative, possibly but not necessarily a space in which something might emerge. The space of separation from *Ryder*'s narratives that make its sexual encounters subversive can also be created without them. This occurs, for instance, in Julie's dreams and negations, Anne's weird fixation on smut and propriety, and Matthew O'Connor's vague monologues. What emerges is "full speech," not recreations of the social world with different power relations in place.

Barnes's linking of Julie's sexual abuse to *Ryder*'s dualistic and fractured images, stories and language, suggests that her relentless deposition of clear language stems from an early experience of its power to consume and pervert. While *Ryder* may be read as making "universal" claims about language – if it functions similarly in general as it does in incestuous families – its debunking of language may also be read as a response to this particular, incommunicable experience. *Ryder*'s "full speech," perhaps, should not be filled with too general a significance. Its "unnaturalness" lurks beneath the façades of stories that appear natural until "framed."

Nightwood readings have similarly tended to read feminine and queer empowerment into it, mostly this time by way of its silences. Silence, particularly Robin's, is seen as opening or leaving "space for" something beyond the social order. O'Connor's warning, "don't learn anything, for it is always learned on another person's body" (147), suggests the bodily subjection involved in "learning" through language, a subjection inapplicable to the silent Robin. But like Robin's lovers, *Nightwood* critics have often persisted in longings of their own, reading in her silence a place of potential articulation outside of the boundaries of *Nightwood*'s linguistic and social realm. On the contrary, what space there is in *Nightwood* is created and maintained by language. What emerges in silence is the total determination of the subject by the social world. Robin is of all the characters the most "possessed" by language.

While *Ryder*'s form and content describes the mechanisms by which "psychic crypts" and "phantoms" are formed, *Nightwood*'s also describes their effects on characters. In *Ryder*, the cryptophoric structure is less developed than it is in *Nightwood*. *Ryder* repeats a pattern of splitting in two (that are also one) in its imagery, structure, and narrative. This "anasemic" (Abraham and Torok) or "full" (Lacan) expression, whatever its register, mimics the splitting and psychic encryptment attendant on Barnes's early experience of sexuality. *Ryder* charts the growth of crypts by gesturing towards the aporias in its own narratives and the ways that they swallow up or bury the experience of the particular body. *Nightwood* shows us the result of this process: a strange graveyard where words and behaviors act as tombstones that mark what lies buried. The characters encrypted by Nora, *Nightwood*'s Barnes-character, are in *Ryder* still alive as Julie's family. The aporias that will bury them are depicted in *Ryder*'s structure, narrative, and

imagery. Sophia's lies to Julie, and the open secrets of the Ryder family, re-emerge as a full-blown psychic crypt containing her grandmother in *Nightwood's* Nora.

"Which is the holier?": Orifices and Issues in *Ryder*

The world is cracked – and in the breach
My fathers mew.
- *The Antiphon*

1. *Ryder*'s Dualisms, Gaps, and Frames

Ryder (1928) describes, in a wide variety of styles, the lives and times of the Ryder family and those associated with them by blood or sex. Its disjointed chapters rapidly skim the lives of a Ryder great-grandmother and grandmother before settling, wanderingly, into the three-generation household of said grandmother, her son, his wife, his mistress, and their children, a family modeled on Barnes's own. *Ryder*'s fifty chapters can be described as a series of vignettes, monologues, and (a few) poems that loosely or tightly pertain to the Ryder homestead, its environs, lineages, socio-historical context, stories, and characters. Its central characters reappear in most of these. On first publication it was immediately censored, to Barnes's great provocation, by the American Post Office. The expurgated passages, Paul West tells us in his rather dismissive afterword to the 1990 Dalkey edition, had to do with bodily fluids. Much to do with bodily fluids remains. Although to everyone's surprise *Ryder* quickly became a bestseller, it has never had the critical acclaim that it deserves. Earlier criticism has depicted it as practice for *Nightwood*, and while more recent criticism has taken its socially subversive, and sometimes biographical, elements seriously, it has rarely been read as the richly multivalent work that it is.

I will establish that *Ryder*'s form and content persistently gesture towards a gap in language and in the body, and that each character functions in a particular relation to this gap – whether fixated on it, intent on filling it, split or swallowed by it, or simply gesturing towards it. *Ryder*'s characters function as exemplars of different ways of negating the gap and redoubling in language and being that *Ryder* insistently depicts through images of holes and dualities, and doubled formal structures. The variety in their styles suggests different modes of denial, or rather, the denial of denial, which Lacan calls "denegation" (*dénégation*).[55] These different styles of negating negation can and will be given psychoanalytic labels, but my intent is less to draw psychoanalytic profiles of *Ryder*'s characters than it is to introduce the curious ubiquity, variety, and effects of gaps and dualisms in *Ryder*, and establish that they are central to its meaning. Read in this way, *Ryder* is a psychoanalytic *tour de force*. It is not a commentary on the specific political conditions of its time so much as a work concerned with the gap in language and being, the modes by which people negate it, and the effects these negations have on them and others.

The kind of subversion that held Barnes's lasting interest, and that *Ryder* does not undermine even as it offers it up, is a language that gestures insistently at the gap that separates it from materiality. Barnes's signifiers remain perfect, scintillating and evocative, but what they indicate is often murky. The language of *Ryder*'s narrator(s) and of its characters is full of multivalence (signs that seem to simultaneously denote two or more things), ambiguity (unclear images, unclear relations between objects and between events, descriptions and plots, signs and significations), and radical idiosyncrasy (pictures and signs that are disarranged, removed from their usual contexts and placed in alien ones

– or that do not refer to a clear meaning, are unrephrasable). Through *Ryder*'s parody, ambiguous and multivalent language, and framing and juxtaposition of narratives, Barnes attempts, story by story, to "traverse the fantasy" of fetishistic universality that, she implies, clear language insists on. Her devices open spaces in signification within which lie the particular physical realities secreted by general value or "myth."

Ryder suggests gaps in its "natural" world through its structure, imagery, and narrative. These gaps, it further suggests, result from the forced transmutation of the body into language, the "particular" into the "general," the "unnatural" relation into the "natural" one. *Ryder*'s narratives and pictures "eternally arranged" are haunted by the spectre of the cannibalized particular body. This ghost reappears in and moves through *Ryder*'s images of enclosed spaces: its rooms, pairs, pictures, orifices, and other holes and framed spaces, as well as in its structural and narrative gaps. *Ryder* constantly depicts language burrowing into itself, cannibalizing the body (or the particular), transmuting it into picturesque "shit," and filling the spectral space left by the body with this shit.[56] Clear language in *Ryder* makes "that which thou art" into "a sign against thy body" (5). Stories remain excremental even when women re-appropriate them because representation itself entails the digestion of the particular body or thing by the sign. The relations between these signs have a false, imposed clarity that their referents lack. *Ryder* uses unclear language to try to avoid this, and depicts clear language as cannibalistic to expose itself doing it. In *Ryder*, the "whole" is the "hole" filled with someone's narrative (or actual) shit. This is the fate of all holes, all gaps: the particular (full speech) immediately passes into the general (empty speech), or disappear.

Thus, while the particular hole and the general whole could be said to be one more binary opposition in *Ryder*, their difference does not remain stable. It is a matter of perspective, like figure and background in a reversing picture in which you see either a goblet, or two profiles facing one another, depending on which you look at. Whatever the gaze fixes on is real: the rest is ghostly. This constantly reversing opposition between particular and general, the unspoken and spoken, being and haunting, is the horizon within which *Ryde*r's other shaky oppositions, like hegemony and counter-hegemony, emerge and pass away.

The gaps in *Ryder* suggest not repression, not the unknown, but disavowal, the known that is constantly being made un-known, hidden in plain view, obscured by meaningless clarity. *Ryder*'s narratives do not repress anything but pervert what they represent. As "a whole" made up of distorted parts, therefore, *Ryder* "disarranges" itself into something that is not picturesque or mythic, not perverted in the service of a story. Its narrative fragmentation, ambiguous language, and images of gaps and dualities appear as Barnes's attempts to manufacture repression, to create an unconscious where there is only consciousness, a stable Law where there is only the ravening of "hunter, hunting hunter." Redoubled women, part-objects, empty holes, deadly childbirth, and excremental traces toll in *Ryder* like bells with no clear summons. They present buried evidence, not coherently but insistently, circling in form and content the interred remains of Barnes's childhood and love.

The figures of duality surrounding a spectral space that appear and reappear throughout *Ryder* schematize the dualism and aporia inherent in language, the way it straddles (or rydes) spaces of unspeakability. *Ryder* translates these dualisms and holes

into likewise unspeakable anatomical correlatives, and fills them with excrement or, sometimes, babies. In and from *Ryder*'s many gaps issue or linger shit, aligned with sadistic and cynical perverse language, and babies, aligned with what I will call melancholic or hysterically perverse language.[57] The melancholically incorporated other, preserved within the subject by its exclusion from speech, returns in childbirth. The digested (arranged, appropriated) other returns in excretion.

Like the archways that *Ryder*'s "stiltsman" compares to a woman's open legs, "the natural heritage erected to man's achievements" (20), stories within and alongside one another frame one another, giving claims to wholeness the lie. In its structure as well as content, *Ryder* foregrounds the frames by which "the picture" is necessarily constituted, the boundaries through which picturesque language issues. Since each story is both picture and frame (for other stories), there can be no consistent choice of foreground and background, truth and lie. Each story gives way, re-emerging only perhaps at the edges of another one.

Ryder's form, like a body in a perverted fantasy, is thus fragmented, segmented and perforated into parts that seemingly function independently of one another, rendering aporia and dualism at a structural level. Like the pictures that lie inches-thick on Sophia's walls, *Ryder* is a palimpsest, a "conglomerate juxtaposition."[58] Its stories are "nothing erased but much submerged" (13) as a result. The more "true," or "sacred" stories (Abraham, the Nativity, Julie's sexual abuse) lie underneath, lending thickness to but obscured by the sensationalistic and trashy newspaper clippings on top:

> At forty these pictures were an inch deep, at sixty, a good two inches from the wall; the originals were, as she herself was, nothing erased but much submerged…. Even Alex had gone, he, who had for so long held sway, slowly ebbed, and in his stead rose that last tide, clippings from newspapers. For in the end this was her court, - false prophet,

> false general, the pretty girl untimely raped, some woman aptly killed, some captain who claimed discovery of the North Pole, some Jack who had climbed a steeple top; all in a conglomerate juxtaposition, and under all, smiling in forlorn inevitability, Beatrice Cenci, Shakespeare and the Divine Dante. (13-14)

The *Ryder* family mimics the palimpsestic text of Sophia's newspaper "court": "false prophet" (Wendell) and "false general" (Sophia herself), "the pretty girl untimely raped" (Julie), "some woman aptly killed" (Wendell's first infidelity), "some Jack who had climbed a steeple top" (Wendell or Timothy). And like Sophia's clippings, *Ryder*'s characters and chapters obscure or gainsay rather than supporting one other.

In contrast, *Ryder*'s stories-within-stories, stories told by characters, often reflect and reinforce one another. But they do so to serve the agenda of their teller. These stories-within-stories demonstrate the intentions that frame language. *Ryder*'s contiguous and embedded arrangements of stories expose their mutual support or sabotage. They demystify one another's truth-claims for the reader attentive to the discursive effects of their complicity or juxtaposition. The one who swallows them whole, *Ryder* suggests, is swallowed up by them.

2. Images, Things, Negations

The image, not the thing, is what *Ryder* proscribes in Chapter One, "Jesus Mundane," whose narrator mandates fetishism in King James Biblical language, instructing the reader to "[r]each not beyond the image" (3), and to follow convention:

> Go not with fanatics who see beyond thee and thine…. Go thou, then, to lesser men…. Thy rendezvous is not with the Last Station, but with small comforts, like apples in the hand, and small cups quenching, and words that go neither here nor there, but traffic with the outer ear, and gossip at the gates of thy insufficient agony. Reach not beyond

> the image. For these idols and these lambrequins [etc.] are not for thee in the spirit, but for thee only in the outward manifestation; nor are the Beasts for thee. (3)

Speech and knowledge are static, "go[ing] neither here nor there" and spectacular, barred from the "Thing" that, the passage suggests, lurks behind their *tableau*. The split between image and Thing immediately causes a logorrhoic, potentially infinite redoubling, the attempt to fix a sublime "beyond" that keeps dividing from its representation, and retreating: "Neither shalt thou have gossip with martyrs and saints and cherubim…. For some is the image, and for some the Thing, and for others that Thing that even the Thing knows naught of, and for one only the meaning of That beyond That" (4).[59] Because the reader's desire, his "wound" and "need" for the speaker (presumably Jesus) are unknown by him, his behaviour must be determined by his mimicry of other people. His identity and his language are copies of "outward manifestations." He is limited to surface effects: "And speak not of Me, for thou knowest not of what thou speakest…. Nay, thou knowest not the extent of thy wound, nor the matter I have with it, neither knowest thou how far thy soul comes toward me, nor yet how far I lean outward to catch it by the hand" (5). In *Ryder's* universe, identity and speech is mimicry. Its God mandates mimicry, and its text formalizes the mimicry that is mandated, its many and celebrated parodies themselves redoublings, images of "Things." Its characters relate to this state of affairs in various ways.

The voices of *Ryder*'s characters and unidentified narrator(s) deliver a cacophony of stories that serve their speakers' particular interests with naturalized arrangements of signs.[60] These stories proliferate with figures and images of duality surrounding a question or an opening, often associated with an anus or vagina. Like its stories, *Ryder*'s characters are fractured in different ways that accommodate the impositions of

psychoanalysis. Sophia, the grandmother, the Ryder family's sole financial support through her secret begging, and Wendell, son and father, an infantile, promiscuous patriarch intent on fathering children, exemplify perverse disavowal and identification with power. Sophia and Wendell's sadistic language-use attempts to fix social relations with themselves as (quite literally) inside the other, as the thing that splits the other. Sophia, a "cynical" pervert, tells lies that she knows are lies, hoping that others will believe them. Wendell, who fully identifies with the Other, tells lies that he believes are true by virtue of his having told them. He literally "knows not what he does," (159) as Kate remarks to him.[61] Amelia, his martyred, miserably fertile wife, could be described as masochistically or melancholically perverse (the two are synonymous for *Ryder*'s intents and purposes). She criticizes but swallows the lies and social arrangements proffered by Wendell: although she knows very well that he is a fraud, she nevertheless imagines him sublime until the end. Anne, her sister and correspondent, is phobic, perpetually appalled by smut and grotesquerie, her fixation on it identical to that of the fetishist Horace Chubble except in the tenor of her enjoyment. Kate-Careless, Wendell's more contentedly fertile mistress, knows that Wendell is perverse and their relationship "disgusting," (171) but has developed a taste for "the flavour of motherhood" (170). Julie and Timothy are Amelia's older children, and Elisha is Kate's older son. Julie, *Ryder*'s Barnes-character, is silent in an attempt to refuse the splitting between knowing and not-knowing imposed on her by her family and their language-use. This attempt, *Ryder* and *Nightwood* suggest, was not successful. Julie and *Nightwood*'s Barnes-character, Nora, are melancholics or "cryptophores," split and entered by the ghosts of their loved ones. Molly Dance and Lady Terrence Bridesleep, on the contrary, are lovers of Wendell's,

humorous, idiosyncratically perverse women who refuse *Ryder*'s symbolic equivalent of feminine melancholia by refusing to conceive by him. Molly Dance, an exuberantly sloppy counter-mythographer whose stories are meant to "suit" her, is self-reflexively ideological and therefore responsibly so.[62] Timothy, a little psychotic, pours forth proliferating, free-associative lists and dualisms. Dr. O'Connor, deliverer of the Ryder family's children and therefore potentially anti-melancholic, is an exemplar of a perhaps more useful, though ambiguous, self-awareness than that available to the Ryders. He favors palimpsestic imagery, unclear referentiality, wide-ranging parody, double-entendres, and narratives in which what appears to be a story progresses in such an unclear and absurd manner that it opens "storyness" itself to an uncertainty that may be fruitful. O'Connor's language does not pose distinct possibilities, but suggests vacillations in signification itself, words that straddle multiple meanings that are separated by silences. The idiosyncratic narratives, double-entendres, and palimpsestic particulars deployed by O'Connor, some (unnamed) narrators, and sometimes other characters such as Molly Dance gesture persistently towards aporias, as if opening holes in a too-full language. But shallowly buried meanings seem to fill these holes as quickly as they open. Non-meaning is apprehended only as fleeting.

The first exemplar *Ryder* offers of the perverse relation to language that "Jesus Mundane" proscribes is Sophia Grieves Ryder. Though partially undone by her loyalty to Wendell and her grief over her second husband, Sophia is what Žižek calls a "cynical" perverse character: she does not believe her own lies, but hopes that others will. Sophia is the authority of the family because she is willing to deceive everyone and believe no one, including herself. Her very nickname, "the general," suggests both military authority and

the opposite of the "particular." That is, language itself, always split from the particulars of its referrents. Thus, though "where the race in general enters a man's head…there, in the end, you'll find many persons in particular" (45), "the general" Sophia's "lies" cover these particulars. Knowing "the way into the heart of man," (15) which is "an insulting shape" (238) (perhaps split in two) Sophia buries herself there with "the simple magic of the word 'mother'" (12) – the first word spoken in whatever language by most infants, the first break in their hearts.[63]

Sophia's early years suggest the formation of this relation to the Other:

> In that house of thin partitions and sounding existence, she had hatched on every side and, coming forth, noted with approbation the moment when sympathy in the father for the new-born, newly come, took him at four in the morning in dangling nightshirt, to the "Floating Bowl" (or night vase), for as she later wrote to her friend Tollop, of the Gazette, "It did please me to see in my father consternation and its accompaniment." (9)

This "accompaniment," given Barnes's love of wordplay and elliptical presentation of the abject, is constipation. Thus having constipated her father:

> In after life…proved a step in the mastering of her métier. When Sophia came of age and set up house for herself (as her humorous stock would have done before her), she rendered tribute to this memory by making something both rounded and excellent to enshrine it, for she ordered and saw executed, five fine chamber-pots of a lustrous finish with one line upon their bellies' surface (just under the lip, lettered in flourished gold, and garnished with devices in bows and cupids) of the axiom:
>
> "Needs there are many
> Comforts are few
> Do what you will
> 'Tis no more than I do." (11)

Sophia's gaze, then, freezes her father in mid-dump, and she commemorates this vision with a series of inscripted chamber pots. These give her bygone father permission to finish the job, and tell him that, nonetheless, his dump is no greater than hers. The final chamber pot, "dedicated to her own use" (11) and reading "Amen," suggests that the

preceding verse is also addressed to the heavenly father, whose excrement is thereby declared no greater than her own – just as the anal-sadistic infant of Kleinian theory would wish. Sophia's ability to produce shit on par with God's is vouchsafed by the immaculately (or spectrally) conceived Wendell, the product of an "infusion" of Beethoven's ghost, with an "aroma… ripe to the nose of justice" (169).

Klein writes that in the anal-sadistic phase (which for some lasts a lifetime), excrement is seen as a harmful substance and its release as an attack on the parents or parent-substitutes. Retaliatory excremental projectiles from the parents are then feared. If the subject is able to progress beyond this "paranoid-schizoid" apprehension of battling part-objects into an apprehension of the parents as "whole objects," the sadistic urge to destroy their "bad parts" will oscillate with depressive guilt and the anxious desire to make amends. This depressive vision of whole objects is what, in Sanchez-Pardo's reading, *Ryder* demonstrates the failure to achieve. Taking her cue, we can read Sophia's chamber pots as an anal-sadistic challenge to the paternal "symbolic order" (to impose Lacanian on Kleinian theory) which allows us to judge and generalize. Indeed later, we learn that Sophia "was the Law" to her family. She sets herself in the place of power as "the general," "greater than" those who devour her and equal to the father in the manipulative power of her shit. She becomes this Law by being devoured and sublimated into testimony. Her devourers say, "she is greater than we":

> She was the law. She gave herself to be devoured, but in the devouring they must acclaim her, saying "this is the body of Sophia, and she is greater than we." Devour her they did, and said, "This is the body of Sophia, and she is greater than we"; all but Julie, who loved her most. It was Julie who gave this queen her mortal hurt, for that she loved her best. Sophia offering her heart for food, Julie spewed it out on a time, and said, "I taste a lie!" And Sophia hearing, cried in agony, but Julie went apart. (16)

Julie's discovery of Sophia's lies split her apart from her family and from herself. Sophia knows that her lies weigh in against the truth for the hearer regardless of whether they are believed. "Know the truth as she may," she said to herself, "the thing I've seemed will balance the account" (15). And indeed, Julie "held" Sophia's lies in "after life…as the best part of a capacious soul," a formulation that suggests disavowal and the cryptophoric "incorporation" of Sophia's lies in Julie's psychically fragmented "after life." Abraham and Torok describe "incorporation" in terms reminiscent of Julie's unsatisfying consumption and internalization of Sophia's lies: "The Fantasy of incorporation is the first lie, the effect of the first rudimentary form of language. It is also the first instrument of deception. Satisfying need by offering food does not sate the actual and persistently active hunger for introjection. The offer of food only serves to deceive it" (114).[64] This unsatisfying food comes out as shit: "of the banquet doeth the turde tell" (65). But for *Ryder*'s characters there is no "real" food, no experience that broadens and nourishes the ego, as Abraham and Torok imagine that there can be (114).[65] *Ryder* does allude to the existence of a divine excrement that Sophia might challenge with her own, but of this, "Jesus Mundane's" narrator tells us, nothing is known. The loosening and tightening of the human heart, he tells us, is nothing akin to the same action in God's bowels:

> When thy heart loosens to hear the Miracles, and of the dead arisen and the damned that were and are not, and yet are, when thy heart tightens to the direction and the way to Holy Places, that have been found and lost again forever, think not that it is a tithe of the loosening and the tightening that was among the bowels of Him who gave them birth and who gave them death in the selfsame dream. For thou knowest nothing of the mighty rains of Heaven that come down of Him and that return to Him, *that even thou might be included and yet made nothing, for thou wast only one within the way*. (4, my italics.)

God's excrement "includes" the hearer and "yet [makes him] nothing," "only one within the way": another turd in the divine chute. It is such an unknown God that Sophia

(re)incarnates. Her transubstantiation, the offering of her body to her family for food, demonstrates the work of language, the passage of the particular body (hers) to the general "claim," the excremental narrative. Secret-ed and excreted, Sophia's body becomes a smaller scale rendition of the "heavenly rains" in which the subject is "included and yet made nothing." At least, this is Julie's experience of her place in Sophia's stories. Accordingly, the picture on page 11, of Sophia excreting into her chamber pot as Alex arrives on the scene, is identical to the picture on page 90, of the "heavenly rains," in the marks that indicate the sources of the effluence and the effluent itself: one or two rounded part-shapes (representing distended posteriors) from which a deluge of dotted lines issues from a single point, as excrement does and rain does not.

The transmutation of the body into excremental language is acknowledged by *Ryder*'s characters. Man, Amelia tells Kate-Careless, has intercepted the shit that should have gone to earth with floors, and then replaced it with words. "What can prevail now that we put floors and pots beneath [shit]…but only man going head foremost, offering a word. And what is there in a word that is magnificent or of help to the land?" (115). By man's "vision," laments Amelia, the droppings that sustained nature's cycles of consumption and excretion now fall short (114). Unlike Sophia, who commemorates prematurely arrested shit (her father's constipation) in verse, Amelia sees arrested shit as something she must clean: "you can't expect but that we'll have the dunging when [Wendell] has such faulty fancies" (116).

This cleaning of the turds on civilization's platforms is precisely what O'Connor warns against in *Nightwood*. Since excrement is the only remaining testimony to the digested particular, washing it away erases history and alienates, says O'Connor, "the

American" from himself. Amelia's "dunging" (Kate, as usual, is too lazy to participate) corresponds to her melancholically perverse attitude towards Wendell's mythology. Though she knows that he "nests with vermin, [and] beneath the shadow of his wings, corruption breeds" (150), she nevertheless grants him the place of the Law, seeing him as "nature in its other shape" and "a deed that must be committed" (241). Though criticising the "faulty fancies," Amelia cleans the ensuing shit and swallows the shittiness of his other domestic arrangements, imagining him sublime until the end.[66] Her cleaning of his pigeons' shit mirrors her internalization of his lies and her eventual effacement of herself from the family.

Amelia's dream of an "Ox of a Black Beauty" who asks her for "a place in your God, or I go to acquaint him that I am, and he will damn himself in me, for there is need of that also" (99) also suggests the disavowal involved in her deification of Wendell. In the dream, she peeps through the keyhole into a room where she also lies on the bed, dreaming. The walls are lined with pictures of "women going from nowhere to nothing, with snood and long leaning throats and hands held loose for lack of sorrow" and a tapestry of "Friars going from nowhere to nowhere, holily." Split into past and future, one place and another place, this "nowhere to nowhere" and "nowhere to nothing" suggest the placelessness, the constant receding movement into the future, the past, elsewhere, with which Barnes repeatedly portrays disavowed content in *Ryder* and *Nightwood*. These friars and women, though fixed in picture frames, go from "nowhere to nowhere" and "nowhere to nothing" as if the depicted act of going creates a doubled "nowhere," one to come from and one to go to, both outside of the picture. The dream-self of the doubled Amelia denies the ox, telling him he "must labour." This denial

represents her characteristic barring of uncertainty, which returns, as I will show, in her "labour" of childbirth. Instead of giving the ox "a place in [her] God," Amelia "turned and turned about in the chamber, taking things up and laying them down" (99). The effects of Amelia's melancholia also appear in *Ryder*'s stories-within-stories, told by Wendell and Amelia, of redoubled women and death in childbirth. Splitting and redoubling is the natural state of women, Amelia and Wendell suggest, although it generally results in death, since splitting copulation with a man is followed by deadly childbirth.

The chief man to create and fill the gap that narratives make in "woman," Wendell's stories suggest, is Wendell. He is the father whose injunction, thick with innuendo, is to "enjoy!" – and it is he that must be enjoyed. A textbook pervert, he imagines himself as completing his mother Sophia, calling himself the "life" of her "suffering" and "note" of her "instrument" (169). Her own wish to be buried with his cock ring, "the ring of bone given to me by the hand of my second son, Wendell, first intended, and carved with painstaking lust, that the utmost aboriginal satisfaction, due the women of his house, might be rendered" (80), suggests that his perverse position does originate from her desire. A weird intimacy is also suggested by Wendell's description of Sophia's breast as the "preliminary basting" in a series of (otherwise sexual) encounters that "cooked" him (168).

Wendell, The "Father of All Things" (210), divides women from themselves and from one another. He is *Ryder*'s chief mythologist, the father of its fragmented and distortedly re-arranged universe. In his stories, his self-interest is not distinct from the stories' meaning. Wendell believes in the determining power of speech and identifies

fully with his enunciations: “What I would be, that I say I am, and thus, eventually, I become” (165). He assumes the place of the Lacanian big Other to whom all language is addressed: “I sport a changing countenance. I am all things to all men, and all women’s woman” (164). Wendell’s stories, not lies but perversions, signify what Roland Barthes might call “Wendellness.” Nothing is erased, but all is arranged in the service of Wendellness.

Wendell’s story of The Beast Thingumbob, in Chapter Twenty-Seven, is an instance of this arrangement in the service of Wendellness. Here Thingumbob’s love, “The Cheerful,” asks Thingumbob to prove that he loves her by promising to bury her, and describes language as deception: “Tell them [her coming children] thenceforth nothing of me, nor picture me to them in any way…. for I am, and soon shall be as I am not, and they must know no deception” (121). While the Cheerful may be “right,” consonant with Barnes’s own view in denouncing language and the “picture,” the Wendellness signified is that mothers need not be spoken of, since, too lofty for the deceptions of language, they prefer no commemoration. The male need only impregnate and bury the female to prove that he loves her. Wendell, one of whose affairs has already resulted in death in childbirth, becomes the ideal lover by implication.[67]

Unlike Sophia, who impersonates “every-one’s-mother” (176-7) but knows better, Wendell really thinks he can be everyone’s father. Thus, when Lady Terrence provides him with “No Child also,” he is silenced and perforated: “Wendell opened his mouth, but no sound came” (211). Women’s vision “corrupts” them for Wendell, because it threatens his universal status. “There are no good women,” he tells Elisha. They “see too much from the start” and do not “take sides” (his side, of course) as he thinks they ought.

"Confinement would, in fact, only make the matter worse, for alone, they act before God. That is religion" (225-6). Even if a woman were isolated, it would be God, not Wendell, who was her object. Wendell, who believes in Justice, defines woman as the "spectator" of injustice, who watches "one man betraying another" from the audience. Wendell fears that woman, not "tak[ing] sides" (224), preserves the anamorphosis contained in the gaze, the gap where specters haunt his narratives.

Women, Wendell and *Ryder* as a whole suggest, find in the inexplicit, unclear, and inevident the parts of themselves that were left there. Wendell contrasts his own liking for certainty with the likings of women, who, "with some unknown dexterity, take comfort from anything that has no evidence" (203). O'Connor ascribes this to "God in them," and claims that "[i]t accounts… for the peculiar difference in the suicides of man and woman" (203). Whereas women rarely theorize their actions, he suggests, man must have theoretical "platforms" that elevate him to himself. He must identify his corpse with an absolute in order to make of suicide an "absolute" act in philosophical terms. Says O'Connor:

> A man may commit suicide for any number of the same reasons that a woman commits suicide, but he never lets the effect seal the cause, he reasons it out, he leaves notes, he says it was this, or that, or the other, in an endeavor to place himself on an equal footing with God. It is to him death of God and the father…. He goes to his mirror…. he looked into that mirror as a lad, and understood that face. What must it be, when he looks and sees a face he does not understand? Troubled – why? Because he cannot kill himself without including his will in that action. He knows that if he kills himself, he is a slave of that action, so with the soul of a slave he bargains, and makes great argument about a thing that has not only no base for argument but no way but the way including his will. He says to himself, "I must abandon you. How shall I abandon you?" Thus, he makes for himself a pact. "If I kill me, my corpse shall be, in my terms absolute, and by myself, myself made not myself – voilà!" (203)

Here, man identifies his corpse with his own ideal ego, which he wishes to preserve intact even in death. The circular logic by which he clings to autonomy in death by splitting

himself and having one part do away with the other results, says O'Connor, from his knowledge that there is duality: "God and the father" (204). Women, on the other hand, "one and all commit, in that act, their body to death's custom, neither making bargain nor asking for precepts and points of departure, nor platforms for philosophy, because women know that there is God only" (204). "Woman," O'Connor suggests, surrenders wholly in death to something not herself. The difference between woman's "God only" and man's "God and the father" is in reason's "great argument," which allows man to imagine himself in dialectical terms in death as in life: "by myself, made not myself."

Man's split and incontinent God splits man, and preys on man through woman. Woman is what man tries to fill himself by filling: "for man there is nothing that on him preys but God, and He upon him preys night and day, dreaming of greatness, threaded on the human agony, as man sets his game spinning on the helix of a vixen's whim" (206). God tops man through woman. Man, trying to fill her, instead finds himself in the reverse position, "threaded" by God. Like a "shadow-jackal," *Ryder* tells us, "woman" preys on male civilization and the reason that has accomplished it, transforming it when it "enters" her by some peculiar bodily alchemy. Man is thus prompted to ask:

> "What is woman? Wherein comes that of her which we are not? What destroys our reason in her, when we see it enter her as we would, and come forth as she will? What in her, like a shadow jackal, preys upon the mound of our accomplishment, dragging off that of it we thought most rotten with defeat, to make of it a halter and a noose? For man rides the monster civilization, but to woman goes the shoe cast of it, in which is the exact record of the journey. (206)

What is buried by civilization returns via "woman" to hang it. Thus women who keep this "exact record" of civilization's "journey" unman men. Wendell's encounters with the Lady Terrence Bridesleep and Molly Dance can thus deflate his fantasy of universal fatherhood not only with particulars and desires that he can not contain, but also by

bringing the "past" (creation stories, things that they've eaten, shit) into the present. It is God, these passages suggest, who "threads" or feminizes Wendell through his contact with women who defeat his dialectics with their atemporal, aspatial messes. His encounters with them subject him to a present that (unlike the "monster civilization") cannot be straddled and ridden because it includes the past and future.

A "child" (204) himself, Wendell identifies as each child he begets. Like himself, his children shall be "All Things" (210). He re-enacts a fantasy of polymorphous becoming with himself as his own Protean product. By sowing "no seeds of doubt," no gap between sign and referent, he "becomes" what "I say I am." However, his dump of Amelia finally forces him to relinquish the positions of father and child: "I have no children. I have unfathered myself" (239). This auto-unfathering is followed by his first subjection to the gaze of the "creeping things" of the world:

> the creeping things that he had not numbered or known, looked at him from a million eyes, and his eyes were there also…and he spoke not…. And everything and its shape became clear in the dark… and lifted their lids and looked at him; in the air and in the trees and on the earth and under the earth, and regarded him long, and he forbore to hide his face…they lifted their lids and regarded him, and spoke not in their many tongues…. Closing in about him nearer, and swinging out wide and from him far, and came in near and near, and as a wave, closed over him, and he drowned, and arose while he might yet go. (242)

Wendell finally imagines himself from the other's perspective: "his eyes were there also," watching himself. Perhaps for the first time, he sees where he is not. The gaze of the other "came in near and near, and… closed over him." Wendell, *Ryder*'s last picture, both drowns and arises to go. He splits into two, and, ghostly, passes away.[68]

While Wendell's relation to language's duality and gap is perverse, Timothy seems to envision it in an even more literal, embodied way that arguably exceeds perversion and verges on psychosis. His diction and concerns persistently articulate

dualities and gaps, that he tries to fill, it seems, by saying everything.[69] However, his method of pairing and listing things itself illustrates the difference that separates one word from another, the difference that structures language but cannot be put into language. Timothy, "who was God and the Father," is a geyser of lists and dualisms, his compulsive collecting and pairing of words suggesting his alienation from them:

> Quoth Timothy: I hate and I loathe and I love and I mourn thy body and soul. The old and the new, the dying and living, the sign and the symbol, the follies and foibles, thy good and thy bad, thy sick and thy well, thy ups and thy downs, thy riches and wants. Thy thickness and thinness, thy roundness and flatness, thy wet and thy dry. [Etcetera, etcetera]. Exclaiming and saying, quoting and sighing, they stood far asunder and clove to each other. Saying and sighing, exclaiming and talking, over and over, forever a little. (134)

Perhaps because of his need to speak in dualisms, Timothy is keen to place "holiness" between the eyes of others, particularly those of an unnamed whore. He claims that:

> All beasts have the holy look who have their eyes on either side, for they are apart and contrive not together, and the one sees not what is seen by the other, and mix not their roots – the ox and the goat, the lamb and the deer…. And I would,' he added, 'that your own eyes were not so dumbfounded acquainted, for it's a terrible time I'm having setting holiness between them; and there, I fear me, it will meet its death of tight strangulation. (197)

Timothy would split the whore's gaze so that one eye did not see what the other saw – like his own schizoid vision that can see only pairs of things. If her gaze was split he could "set… holiness between" her eyes. For Timothy, "God and the father," "holiness" describes the extreme psychic fragmentation that motivates his compulsive arrangement of things into pairs and lists. Timothy is unhallowed by these eyes between which he is unable to set a gap: the eyes focus together on him.

Molly Dance has a similar effect on Wendell to the whore's on Timothy. Liking "all things, of all kinds, all at once, in the same place" (193), she establishes a space that Wendell is unable to split with himself. He instead finds a multitude of others in it – most

notably God, the father of Molly's last-born, who Wendell had hoped to father. Molly and the whore refuse to provide a discursive or physical space, beyond the sexual encounter, for Wendell and Timothy to fill.

Other of *Ryder*'s characters, rather than being eager to fill the space, neutrally acknowledge it as something that exists in itself. It appears to them as habitat for things that both are and are not. Sophia's mode of possessing Julie, "I had no daughter ever, and she is that daughter," suggests that Julie both does and does not exist. Similarly, Lady Terrence's "You need No Child also, my good man, all fathers have one" (211) suggests Wendell's simultaneous fatherhood and childlessness. Elisha's determination to remain "uncrammed of learning as a gooseberry…. with a saddle as empty as it is possible for nothing to make it" (236) suggests both occupation and non-occupation of the Ryderly "saddle," the place where the gap between the legs is filled. Likewise, O'Connor's "two in front" and "two behind" who all sigh "Holy! Holy! Holy!" (138) suggest a nether space where what is not lingers.

3. Unending Departure: Julie

This nether space is traversed by phantoms "without cease":

> Through the twilight of the capacious room went the cohort of those gone, forgotten and remembered and forgotten again. Trailing regal garments, dust coloured and death worn, and threadbare of the grave – a lamb and a phantom, and the phantom's lamb, and the lamb of the lamb, and foremost, a prince in point-lace, with touching sweet honey-coloured curls, holding in the curve of a cradling velvet arm, the supine form of a girl-child with the blood of the rape flowing in a thin, fine, ever-widening stream, the slotted insertion of her communal dress, petal by petal, falling, the bride's bouquet in her betrayed hands, and passed out through the wall without cease. (159)

These cryptic apparitions are not explained, do not stop or linger in the "capacious room," but pass away continuously as if their very nature is to be constantly leaving but never gone. The operations of disavowal and cryptophoria appear here as synonymous. Both render the known as not-known by imagining it as continuously in the process of leaving. The disavowed, the encrypted, forever departs from scenes that seem to be about something else. *Ryder*'s characters variously fill these holes in its scenes, these open graves or unending departures. They attempt to fill them with words, or with themselves or others, or else they fixate on them, gesture ambiguously toward them, or fall into them.

Julie, the Barnes-character, falls into language's aporias. She denounces family lies but does not replace them with anything, since she doesn't have anything. Therein may lie the truth of Sophia's remark that Julie *is* Wendell but "unhung, and you are slung like a man; it will make the difference" (170). Wendell, denouncing social law, replaces it with the law of his own organ, whereas Julie, not having one, denounces "Wendellness" but replaces it with nothing. Of all the characters in *Ryder*, only Julie makes no claims except indirectly through her dreams. Her dreams are full of falling: "The cat jumped up on the fence, and from there into the bough, and the birds stood away from him and he leapt, and mystery took away the ledges and places of the world utterly, and the cat fell, down falling, surprised, falling surprised forever, and no one to tell it to" (122). Unlike the trajectory of shit (according to Amelia) in patriarchal civilization, the cat's downward movement is never arrested by the platform of "faulty fancies." Like the spectres that "passed through the wall without cease," the cat "falling surprised forever" figures the world's continuous disavowal of Julie's experience, of Julie herself. Julie

herself falls through the cracks of the unspoken in *Ryder*'s stories, having no place in its myth-world.

Nightwood's Nora is also always falling: "There is a gap in 'world pain' through which the singular falls continually and forever; a body falling in observable space, deprived of the privacy of disappearance; as if privacy, moving relentlessly away, by the very sustaining power of its withdrawal kept the body eternally moving downward, but in one place, and perpetually before the eye" (51). This passage visually renders the fall of the incest-victim through the "gap" of what is not included in "world pain," the incommunicable pain of incestuous love and loss that renders its victim "singular" but unprivate, both "known" and elided by every act of speech, both still and falling. Nora, this passage suggests, is prey to a simultaneous visibility and abandonment, and like Julie subject to a constant, vertiginous groundlessness and departure. The "platforms" on which man erects his "faulty fancies" are not for them: their position in relation to the gap in language is to be buried in it.

The stories that Julie reads and hears are about beautiful, dying little girls, and their effects on Julie involve splitting and falling. Barnes implicitly associates the splitting by which Julie identifies with storybook characters with the splitting effects of sexual abuse. Julie, being read to, "is many children, suffering the tortures of the damned, kneeling at the parent knee, in all ages, all times and all bindings, becoming what books make of a child" (106). After being read to of Little Emily's relinquishment of "the needle" and death, Julie is "tor[n] away" from her beloved Sophia by "darkness… while she yet lay upon [Sophia's] breast."[70] The needle is a Barnesian trope for the vagina: "[h]as not Science proved that… the Thread makes no Conquest of the Needle, and the

Needle has not a leaning to the Thread?" (26). Emily's loss of it is linked to her dying, implicitly violated body, whose appearance is followed by Julie's dream of the cat with no foothold in the "ledges and places of the world." The unspeakably violated hole of the child's vagina embodies the aporias of social, or Ryderly, discourse. Rape and incest constitute a hole in "world pain," through which its victims fall "forever… and no one to tell it to."[71] Because Julie and Nora, the Barnes-characters, are constantly falling and vanishing out of their own stories, their "secrets" belong not to them but to the texts in which they appear. Julie and Nora are elided by their own open secrets, *Ryder* and *Nightwood*.

"Julie becomes what she has read" presents the embedding movement of this disavowal. In it, story and dream-imagery simultaneously cover and depict the sexual abuse of Julie. Her dreams, that are given shape by the fact that Wendell is concurrently molesting her, draw on multifarious images of femininity culled from "what she had read." In them, spectrality, fragmentation, and falling figure the disavowal of this abuse. The deluge that precedes Arabella Lynn's interment represents divine excrement, the effusion that disavows injustice, signaling the "shittiness" of the narrator's fetishization of death in childhood: "Ah, what a picture for the beholder!" (108).[72] Arabella's aestheticized death (for doubting in God the Father) saves her, the narrator tells us approvingly, from the "sin [that] might have battened on that edifice, dragging it down into inevitable ruin" (108). Her spectral body haunts her gown, the fetish-object: "see how she kneels in her figure-haunted gown!" (107). Likewise, Julie's violated body haunts the idealizing dreams that cover her violation, and haunts *Ryder*'s stories. After

Arabella Lynn is fragmented and dies, Julie becomes a sixteen year old girl whose image and idyllically sinister surroundings suggest the molestation in distorted form:

> Down she looses her hair as though it were the molten sluices from the gorged parapet melting in the noonday heat, flooding the garden, covering the roses with a web of brightness. A thousand birds sing in ecstasy for all she has yet to learn. Love shall be, never being, and life shall go ahead, a fine queen on a black-rumped mare, forging and breathing like a man; or in the dark of some forgotten close, life, like an idiot girl, smelling of neither puberty, shall finger the hem of her reverses, and count one, while, in the underbrush, and through the hot hedged day, a rabbit fleetly paws the earth, harkening the weather's inconstancy, and the changing of a leaf. (109)

Following this erotic dream, Julie is amidst a group of little girls who are "scourged and blasphemed," become mothers, and fall "this way and that, silent and soft and docile" (109). She then wakes to see Wendell looming over her and Sophia running. She becomes, in Sophia's curious phrase, not her daughter but her "no daughter ever," a formulation that echoes her dream that "Love shall be, never being." Julie, first split and then nonexistent, is subsequently disowned by Wendell via two more negations: "she is none of mine. Did I not hear her deriding me greatly?" Freud's word for perverse negation, *Verleugnen*, literally means "to disown" as well as "to deny." The molestation that she has just (not) experienced exists only insofar as Julie haunts the disavowal of herself.

Ryder does not suggest a perspective from which incest appears as a true secret. It appears as precisely what, in Abraham and Torok's theory, creates a psychic crypt: a half-secret, an aporia in the discourse of a love-object that surrounds the unspeakable half-known "secret" and secretes it into a psychic tomb. Sexualized relations are the *Ryder* family's norm, perhaps because Wendell, who sees himself as "all things to all men, and all women's woman" (164), sees no reason to refrain from having sex with anyone.[73] Even Sophia's injunction to Wendell after his molestation of Julie, "do not

strike her," suggests that the sexual abuse is, to her mind, both permissible and unspeakable, since it is only the threat of physical violence that provokes her protective words. Incest is not known, but it is done. Wendell's unacknowledged molestation is not singular but definitively Ryderly. Julie's experience of incest is excluded from speech as a function of the text's, and the family's, narrative and social style.[74] Her response of silent counter-negation of family and speech leaves her, as her dreams show, no foothold in the world.

4. Open Secrets, Redoubled Women, Stories of Stories

Ryder's mendacious representations cause splitting and aporia in its structure, world and characters. Alienations between what is represented and what is elided appear in its structure, characters, stories, images, and stories-within-stories. These stories-within-stories present us with a series of redoubled characters and double parts, that in all cases are split by some fetishistic ideal or fixed picture. Wendell's story of Arthur's story of Molly and Eva, Amelia's story of Felice and Alix, O'Connor's story or monologue on doctoring and the Judgment Seat, Anne's story of Horace Chubble, and the lynch mob's verbal dismantling of the raped girl, all display a preoccupation with dichotomies and the space in between their two terms.

One of *Ryder*'s most persistent dualisms is "woman." Woman is split by the male gaze on and entry into her body, by the idealized beauty, virtue, motherliness that she must see herself as representing.[75] *Ryder* expresses the fragmented being of women by splitting them in two: two sisters, a pregnant woman, a woman and her vagina or "woman

within woman" (153), a past and future with no present, a mother and child, a wife and mistress. These pairs are sometimes also subdivided.

Wendell's story of Arthur's story of Molly and Eva describes this splitting of women by Patriarchal ideals, here feminine virtue. The town's fixity on the question of which was the "holier" or more "wholesome" creates a hole dividing one woman into two. That Molly and Eva, split by the ideal of virtue, are actually one woman is suggested by the fact that the bad one (Eva) is always seen going to, and the good one (Molly) coming from, church: a feat impossible for two women but simple for a single one whom the confessional has "cleansed" of her sins. The argument that suspends the activities of the town so that "there they were a good full week later, never having changed their position, in kitchens and bedrooms, in garret and cellar, in house and in street, all rucked and rumpled with the heat of the matter, and no solution in sight" (217) concerns the question of which is the "holier," or the more "wholesome." As well as freezing the town in stasis, the argument fixes the separation of Molly/Eva, since it excludes the knowledge that they are not separate. Molly (the good sister) then dies in childbirth, and Eva is found with a baby by the "wise man" sent by the town to confront them. "The thing is reversed," Eva tells him. "Moll has gone to the Lord, and I have come from the Lord, so let them change their rag for another. Moll is dead, and I'm a mother, and be damned to you and the rest" (219). The death of Molly and birth of Eva's (or Molly's) child, a Christ-figure, allegorizes the expulsion of the internalized ego-ideal that split one woman into "good" and "bad" (accordingly, it kills the "good" woman, since good women, Freud tells us, are constitutively split by their superegos). With the death of Molly, Eva (a surly Virgin Mary figure) and her child suggest a whole, a paradigm shift for which the

townspeople must necessarily "change their rag," or replace the fetishistic discourse of "holiness" that splits one woman into two.

However happy this conclusion, it must be remembered that this story is told by "Arthur," a travelling salesman invented by Wendell to account for the additional mother and children in his household to a town delegation at his door. It carries Wendell's signature "mythemes" of idealized death in childbirth and motherhood, and the God-father/lover who unifies the woman's split subjectivity. In Wendell's story to the townspeople, the reason for Arthur's absence – "he is afraid that…the sleeve of his left cuff may be pissed upon" is "perfectly clear," but meaningless. Perhaps for this reason, Wendell's "explanation" has the desired effect of making the man with the cane "beg [Wendell's] pardon a thousand times for putting you at an inconvenience" (220) and clear out. Wendell's story, then, contains both meaningless clarity, or "empty speech," and meaningful unclarity, or "full speech," in the figure of the redoubled woman, the (w)hole(iness), the (dying) mother and child-figures that appear so insistently in *Ryder*.

Amelia's bedtime story also presents women who are fractured and destroyed by internalized ideals. "Felice and Alix," another sister duo, die in childbirth as a result of their hyper-aestheticized femininity. Each comparison of the two establishes Alix as Felice's ideal ego and uncanny double, and exposes her as lacking:

> Felice had little hands, Alix had smaller; Felice had a tiny waist and two breasts as delicate as the first setting of blanc mange. Alix's waist was only a hand's span and her bosom was no greater than two tears set low. Felice had golden hair, Alix's was fine and thin and curling.
>
> Felice had a little skeleton as chipped of angles as a Ming, and as light as ash. Alix's flesh covered her bones as thinly as ice on a tree. Felice's ankles were faultless, Alix's were as weightless as cuttlebone and as fragile. (155)

The dualism of Felice/Alix is accomplished through reflection and contrast, their hyperbolic femininity like a mirror that splits one woman in two by revealing her as lacking. But this ideal is itself an ideal of non-being, the failure to achieve it a failure to disappear. Alix's minuteness and daintiness outdistances Felice's in being closer to nothing at all, the ultimate feminine ideal for Amelia. Their death in childbirth, then, is the achievement of ideal femininity.

Ryder's primary as well as embedded stories figure the divided woman. Amelia and Kate are divided by the fetishistic "ideal" of Wendell: one fat, lazy, coarse, a mistress, and enjoying herself, the other skinny, hard-working, prudish, a wife, and martyred, each torments the other with what she is not to Wendell. Wendell reaps full enjoyment from their situation by putting them in bed together, "only a hate apart," himself the "bodkin" in the middle (172). Indeed, Barnes does her best to split the human referents of *Ryder*'s characters from their representations. As Andrew Field has suggested, Barnes names Amelia, based on her mother Elizabeth Chappell Barnes, after her father's mistress, Marguerite *Amelia* Alvarez de Rocafuerte, who he says is the prototype of Kate-Careless. Likewise, he notes, she names Sophia, based on her grandmother Zadel Barnes Gustafson, after Zadel's replacement, the second wife of Axel Gustafson (*Ryder*'s Alex), *Sophia* Steele Billings (26). Elizabeth and Zadel, reading *Ryder,* are presumably alienated from their representations – who are nonetheless, perhaps, impossible to completely cast out.

Ryder's women's deadly fixation on and internalization of the wound of patriarchal discourse is allegorized by the number one cause of their death: childbirth, "the death that craws within" (77). Deadly childbirth is the outcome of the "splitting"

entry of the fetishized penis, the phallus, into the woman.[76] The child in the mother's womb is a figure of the melancholic woman.[77] Women in *Ryder* who internalize ideals of feminine beauty or saintliness are destroyed by the bodily impossibility of accommodating them: their repressed parts come back out screaming. Wendell's unnamed mistress, Felice, Alix, and Molly of Molly/Eva die in childbirth; the raped girl is expected to; Amelia is certain that she will, and ends up being expelled from the family as a result of it. Wendell, tellingly, considers death in childbirth a woman's most saintly possible circumstance (202).

Not all of the women in *Ryder* internalise the male gaze. Some, like Sophia and Molly Dance, cross it with their own. Molly's self-identification only as her name, "[b]ottom up or head up… it's Molly Dance to the end, and that's more than most people can say" (199) allows her to remain particular, "hard to catch" or to define in general terms.[78] Women can also, like Julie, try to avoid internalizing patriarchal ideology by remaining silent, or, like Anne, by incorporating this ideology only as a bunion: Anne's bunion, "the very weathercock of morals," throbs in empathy with social "impropriety" (112). Since to "have" the phallus (to father, for instance, "the great race of Ryders"), the man must have the (fetishized) woman, the woman can take away his control of meaning by asserting her own vision. She can make him aware – fleetingly – that she sees him as lacking.

Another mode of feminine fragmentation is suggested in "Rape and Repining," the monologue of a parochial English lynch mob who drive an unnamed raped girl to a neighbouring country. In the eyes of the mob, the raped girl's violation divides her from the virginal feminine ideal, and thus makes her "counterfeit" (26), no longer "what she

should be" (21).[79] Since her virginal body emblematized authentic regional identity, her violated one splits it into two alienated parts: "the Annual Rent paid to the Queen…cannot make Tittencote smack of Tittencote, and you gone slipping down to hell" (23). She is hence banished to a "Neighboring Land," where (it is hoped) her body will be rid of "Uncertainty," made "Honest," as a patch for a hole:

> Get from our Country and over the Border and into some Neighboring Land, there to lie, until some Blithering Scabby Potsherd mends a Stewpan with you, or lays you between Hot Iron and Hot Iron, and so melts you down, to make a Cap for his Heel. So shaken loose, so cutpursed that the Uncertainty is out of you, so set you back as Current Coin… that you turn to Honest Flesh. (28)

Since her penetrated vagina splits certainty (the virginal ideal, the phallus) and "Uncertainty" (the sullied flesh, the penis), she must rehabilitated only as a part-object, a fragment of leather or a scrap of iron. She can thereafter be authentic only as a scrap, not as a woman, and only in the future, not in the present. "Certainty" allows no slippage between the female body and the feminine ideal. If perforated, non-identical to the ideal, the body is no longer a woman but a future part-object. Thus, the raped girl's coming child will be always-already disavowed, "set…backward upon the Beast of Time…. and his Father and Mother will say, 'We resemble that hereafter, which was before, and is not.'" The temporal mechanism of disavowal denies the present: what is disavowed seems to exist on either side of the present, the picture, from which it constantly recedes. Like jam in *Through the Looking Glass*, it appears in the future and past of the moment in which it is invoked.

The vagina in *Ryder* represents women's split being. *Ryder* imagines the vagina as a kind of psychic crypt where "full speech" emerges and disappears, eluding articulation by eluding the present. Anne gives it a chthonic status, calling it "woman

within woman" (153). This image suggests the feminine melancholic disavowal of the "bad parts" of the self, the parts that discourse disowned, and their secretion into intrapsychic space.[80] Childbirth accordingly figures the re-emergence of these parts and the destabilization that accompanies it: the indirect, partial, or inexplicit movement towards a fuller meaning that Lacan calls "full speech," and Abraham and Torok "anasemia."[81]

The gender divide in social power, Anne suggests, is linked to the misleading appearance of anatomical difference: "This, now I do think on it, is the matter with the world, that a man's greatness do come right out bang upon us, a woman's is in her flesh and hidden. How can one expect the ways of men to go right when things are so mixed up?" (153). Man's unconscious, one might say, is right out there in the open – it is the very social structure – while woman's is "in her flesh," and its content emerges at her expense. Like the psychic tomb, the vagina "is great at the core and dwindles as you reach her outer jacket, so that you see a monstrous little of a dire plot" – just the odd fleeting ghost.

In *Ryder* femininity and melancholia, or cryptophoria, are not yet as conflated as they are in *Nightwood*.[82] *Ryder*'s women may externalize and thereby domesticate the shitty ideal before it kills them, as its more dirt-friendly women show. While childbirth kills or torments women who are fully identified with ideals, it comes more lightly to women who "make a roadway" for meaning with their own shit, like Eva, Sophia, Molly Dance, Lady Terrance, and Kate-Careless. Sophia has her chamber pots, Molly Dance lives in filth, her kitchen and outhouse wet with human effluents that "stunk and sounded…. There was not a dry plank in the two buildings that one could put foot to"

(193). Liking "all things, of all kinds, all at once, in the same place," Molly has no need for dialectics. She has no concept of good and evil: "what would your good and evil have meant to her, or how could she have understood it?" (193). Lady Terrence's liking for the "rudiments and hidden parts" of animals also suggests this domestication of excrement. She is a gourmand of "malign concoction[s]" and "could remember to a tripe to what she was beholden" (208). What she has "eaten" cannot return to destroy her (as it does in childbirth), since it has never been elided. Kate-Careless is likewise comfortable with excrement and childbirth, a potential emptier of chamber-pots on the heads of fathers of the law (90), a non-cleaner of Wendell's pigeons' shit. Thus, unlike the "other kind of woman," Kate cannot be counted on to clean up for Wendell by removing herself when woken up at night and asked to leave the family. It is the woman of "pale existence," Amelia, who cleans up Wendell's messes, finally including herself, to protect him. Women, *Ryder* suggests, are like ambulatory messes of refuse that trail into the past, into their own bodies. They may either "clean themselves up" by aspiring to an ideal of non-being, like Felice and Alix, or else celebrate themselves by celebrating dirt and excrement.

Like the vagina, the rectal hole marks an absent presence in *Ryder*'s symbolic field, but unlike the feminine reproductive system, aligned with feminine melancholia, the digestive system and particularly excrement are associated with more manipulative modes of perversion. Excremental speech can pervert and tame the particular through its picturesque arrangements of signifiers. Roland Barthes' theory of "mythology" and Abraham and Torok's of "antimetaphor" both describe this function of associating objects contiguously to overlay the (shameful) history of their association with the

"naturalness" of their present one.[83] The "mythic" association fills the historical one, which is "nothing erased but much submerged." This excremental picture is then haunted by traces of its secrets:

> The worde fulsome, and the kiss of friend
> Do glut their livers, their pylorus swell
> For of the banquet doth the turde tell,
> And rown in the belly's dark always
> The secrets of the supper all bewray. (64-65)

The "turde" marks the trail into the disavowed past, but only if read dialogically, within its frame(s), instead of monologically, as an aestheticized "picture forever arranged" on which the mind, stopping "between uncertainties" (*Nightwood* 111) remains fixed. If we read The Cheerful's "choice" to die in childbirth and not be spoken of alongside *Ryder*'s, and history's, treatment of dying mothers, we will see it as imposing its "Wendellness" on them. Similarly, if we take Felice and Alix's beauteous delicacy and death in childbirth into the Victorian context which the story's language suggests, we will note the relation of the social customs and medical practices that reinforced the ideal of feminine delicacy to high rates of death in childbirth at this time, and will wonder at Amelia's investment in her chilling myth of "feminine death-drivenness." It is a matter of contextualizing the mythemes of excremental speech.

As well as cynical, strict, and melancholic perverts, and psychotics, we have Horace Chubble, the fetishist, and Anne de Grier, the phobic. Chubble, described in a letter of Anne's to Amelia, has a fixated relation to duality and its gap. However, for him these formations are predominantly external. "When I die," he tells Anne's employer, "I shall have a beautiful new pair of wings and a cambric nightgown, and with a goose-quill

in my bottom, I'll brush round heaven looking under the angels' garments for *duplicity*" (74, my italics). The shocked Anne observes to Amelia that:

> Those bent on heaven and those bent on hell have got fearfully confused as to direction, so they do stumble into each other, learning things not fitting to their separate goals. Therefore imagine, dear sister, where we will all land in the end – somewhere in mid-air, no doubt, for that we are fit for neither place, and a dreadful sight is that space between two stools, where Mr. Chubble can be heard remarking on goose-quills to my lady… (74)

Duplicity here refers to the bifurcated (?) lower parts of angels. Once again, the genital regions mark the space between what is spoken and what is true. The goose-quill in Chubble's anus suggests (as well as the obvious thing) a pen in an inkwell dedicated to reportage on them. With this reportage he wishes to fill the anatomical space of "duplicity" that he may find. The places in "mid-air" between heaven and hell, and the "space between two stools" (the ones holding Chubble and her Ladyship, one hopes) are likewise aporic no-places between dualisms or "stools." Such spaces, for Anne, are "a dreadful sight" since they appear insufficient to render the individuals dedicated to one of their framing terms (heaven or hell) adequately separate. Anne's fear is warranted, for her wish to distinguish herself and her Lady from Chubble aligns her with him through their shared fixations on external "duplicity" and what lies between its division. As in feminine melancholia, holiness and doubleness are in each case accompanied by fixation. However, here the fixation is on a thing imagined as external to the character. The goose-quill dedicated to recording duplicity, and the "space in mid-air" between heaven and hell, create, Barnes suggests, the very separations that they mark as pre-existing. The fixation on this space, between good and bad, heaven and hell, creates the duality – as *Nightwood* also suggests.

In contrast to *Ryder*'s perverse characters, Matthew O'Connor uses language vaguely and idiosyncratically. Instead of creating divisions around a clear, fixed ideal, he unhinges signs from referents and makes ideals appear strange and potentially obscene – as, indeed, they are in *Ryder*. O'Connor, too, has an image for the gap in meaning. It is probably an anus, but neither it nor what it lies between is clear. "The Soliloquy of Dr. Matthew O'Connor (Family Physician to the Ryders) on the Way to and from the Confessional of Father Lucas," allusively links the Judgment Seat and Judgment to corresponding human bifurcations and gaps. Rather than imagining God as an object of knowledge, it gestures ambiguously and multivalently toward Him:

> [I]t's a devil a bit of peace I'll get, says I, banging my head against the scrofula and the tapeworm and the syphilis and the cancer and the pectoris and the mumps and the gleet and the pox of mankind, I says, and me with my susceptible orbs staring down into and up through the cavities and openings and fissures and entrances of my fellowmen, and following some, and continuing others, and increasing many, and them swelling and opening and contracting and pinching like the tides of the sea, and me a mortal like the sea with my ebb and flow, and my good heart, and my thundering parts and my appetites and my hungers…. Visit me often, [Father Lucas] says, and I'll give you comfort and kind words and a little consolation that shall inch thee on thy way a bit, and bring thee nearer the Celestial Gate, slip by slop, cleansing your soul as you go, that you may not enter altogether dusty and dirty and mucked before the Judgment Seat, with its two in front and its two behind and the four sighing Holy! Holy! Holy! God save the behind, I said, and staggered out into the life and traffic of my days. (137-138)

This passage superimposes God with the human posterior, figuring both God and the anus as an empty space surrounded by doubled parts and lined with excrement. But the image is left vague – the reader can guess at but not ascertain what it is describing. It is not clearly a thing or clearly nothing. O'Connor's "two in front" and "two behind" suggest cloven lower body parts as well as the two cherubim that traditionally attended God's Mercy Seat. His "Holy! Holy! Holy!" suggests the holes situated between these parts as well as the Seat's traditional appellation, "Holy of Holies." O'Connor's punning

links the Judgment Seat with the anus through their common form as a gap between dualisms. However, what "holiness" really signifies remains unfixed, multivalent.

O'Connor stares into human and perhaps divine orifices with his "susceptible orbs" but does not fill them with determinate content. His gesture uses double entendre to unhinge itself from denotation, redoubling the figures of doubleness and holiness. His simultaneously "sacred" (religious) and "profane" (sexual) interest in holiness, though appearing self-contradictory, enables his gesture towards an empty space that remains undefined as something or nothing. His multivalent language allows "both sides" of the possible issue (for instance, sacred and profane "holiness," being and non-being) to coexist, since neither is clear enough to distort the other.

O'Connor's soliloquy also contains an apocalypse story fraught with vague religious imagery. In his imagined church:

> The candles took root and grew and rose toward the ceiling, and bloomed and wilted and died, and the ceiling grew and mounted and bloomed and wilted and died, and came down…. The figures at the altar blurred, crossed, melted into each other; fornication of the mass, parted and bred Death, Death's wailing child in wax, lying in a bowl of wine, mouth open for the gushing breast of grief, pouring forth the Word in an even belt of wrath…. Sorrow burst and the seeds fell and took root, and climbed about the stations of the cross and bore Him down to earth, and climbed on and on and bore Matthew and Nora and [many others] down to earth, and climbed on and bore their children and their children's children down to earth, and the children of them begotten, and were not appeased, and climbed and bore man down utterly, and stretched out and took his works and bore them down also, and there was Nothing, and this, too, they reached for and closed on, trembling terribly and gently… (140)

In this scene, all objects, structures, and Nothing itself are brought "down to earth" by the creeping vines of Sorrow, possibly fertilized by the excremental "Word," which "pour[s] forth in an even belt of wrath." Its jumble of imagery is an extreme example of *Ryder's* characteristic approach to destabilizing meaning. It describes the process by which everything (and Nothing) are brought down to earth, the horizontal on which life erects

itself. “Seeds of sorrow,” little capsules, perhaps, of what is unspoken but not gone, eventually burst, grow, and bear everything and Nothing, the last dualism, down, as ghosts bring *Nightwood*’s characters down. Seeds of sorrow, like psychic crypts, cause characters and objects to go down.[84]

6. The Picture’s Sharp Edge

The question of how to read Barnes’s *tableaux* has often been posed. Precise and often repulsive, they startle with a sudden luridness that unconnected to anything, immediately passes away. Like the Barthesian “myth” that distorts a particular history by naturalizing it, the picture in *Ryder* represents, in a distorted fashion, a half-remembered unspeakable history.[85] Barnes’s writing gives us pictures and stories that show everything that her society usually hid: human anatomy and digestive cycles, excrement, family sexual abuse, lesbian, gay, and straight sex. Yet most of it (some of *Ryder* was excised) bypassed censorial notice, which perhaps surprised Barnes less than it has her readers. Like the Barthesian myth, the Barnesian image is a tableau of contiguous objects that distort and pacify their relations. The secret is arranged in a context that renders it “innocent,” filling this arrangement with some other, more general meaning. The secret is on its way to the picture’s sharp edge, where it vanishes. Perhaps Julie’s dreams simply tell us something about the nature of little girls: that they are so sweet and delicate that they naturally die of guilt for doubting the existence of God. Or perhaps we are merely meant to enjoy their beautifully rendered deaths. That Abraham and Torok’s theories of the psychic crypt and specter share this structure and apply primarily to incest-victims is

surely not coincidental. Like the cryptophore's seemingly innocuous behavior, the Barnesian *tableau* hides the secret in full view.

By writing gaps and frames into *Ryder*'s narratives and images, Barnes imposes limits on the power of its storytellers: father, mother grandmother, society. She exposes the lesions in stories by writing in gaps where there were bland-faced contiguities. But these gaps, divisions in certainty, are always being filled. Though God is left indeterminate by O'Connor, different from Wendell only in that he "does not tremble" in "the balance" (202), elsewhere He resembles Wendell or Sophia. *Ryder*'s God vacillates between O'Connor's and "woman's" singular "God only," and the God of the doubled object, "God and the father," who releases the "mighty rains of Heaven," whose creation is one more excremental narrative. The Other in *Ryder* is both (w)hole and split, like a reversible figure whose central shape resolves into two peripheral shapes, each passing away as the viewer's perspective shifts, in the fixed movement of disavowal.

"A Company Unawares": Phantoms of the Spoken in *Nightwood*

> As I looked upon that head, my memory weighed for the lost body; and because of that missing quantity even heavier hung that head along the ground. So love, when it has gone, taking time with it, leaves a memory of its weight.
>
> -*Nightwood*, 108

1. Haunting or Possession: Ghost Words on the Body

Djuna Barnes wrote *Nightwood* mainly in Greenwich Village and Hayford Hall, England, but she started it in Paris sometime between 1927 and 1931, if we count notes taken during her prolonged break-up with Thelma Wood. *Nightwood*'s five main characters, Felix Volkbein, Matthew O'Connor, Robin Vote, Nora Flood, and Jenny Petherbridge, live and love mostly in Paris, though some wander to Vienna and America near the novel's end. It is well known that Robin is based on Thelma Wood, the love of Barnes's life, Nora on Barnes, O'Connor on Dan Mahoney, her Paris drinking buddy, and Jenny Petherbridge on Henriette Metcalf, who supplanted Barnes as Thelma's woman. Their portraits are far from mimetic, however. Rather, they stage Barnes's personal ghosts. *Nightwood*'s character behavior, suspended images, and word choices cryptically present Barnes's disavowed love of her grandmother and the haunting words that she associates with it. These ghost words, though they appear in surreptitious forms, determine *Nightwood*'s language and narrative, taking over character behavior and thus the action of the novel. As in Freudian dream analysis, and contrary to what most critics have said, words and scenes' forms and their ostensible content must be seen as separate, sometimes very incongruent, for their encrypted meanings to emerge.

We should, says Dr. Matthew O'Connor, doubt "everything seen, done, spoken, precisely because we have a word for it, and not its alchemy" (83). This is particularly true in *Nightwood*, whose images and scenes encrypt other meanings. An image, in *Nightwood*, is "a stop the mind makes between uncertainties" (111). Where the mind was coming from or going before it stopped is uncertain, but the visible image captures it. But the arrested movement necessary for clear visibility imposes a separation in time. The image's connection to the past becomes oblique. The relations that constitute it are frozen, vague in their particulars yet seemingly natural. The image provides an echo of its own lost past in the field of the visible, something with which it seems the viewer can re-unite, though actually it is already dead.

Nightwood's spectral tropes, like "haunted" and "possessed," suggest the ghosts of rapacious and loved family members, of unspeakable scenes, and of nation and gender that are staged by its language and characters. "Haunting" tropes a simultaneous presence and absence that constitutes *Nightwood*'s mode of subjectivity. Not only Nora, but also Robin, Felix, O'Connor, and *Nightwood*'s language itself, are haunted by what psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok call "psychic crypts" and "phantoms," embedded love-objects and words associated with them to which the characters and text constantly, but never clearly, refer. Though Abraham and Torok write that "to stage a word…constitutes an attempt at exorcism, an attempt…to relieve the unconscious by placing the effects of the phantom in the social realm" (176), *Nightwood* offers no better alternative to haunted subjectivity, no exorcism of its ghost words. The words that hide the secret also *are* the secret. Yet, though there is nothing outside of language, there is the possibility of language's undoing and the direct encounter with

what it disavows. Haunted language and subjectivity break down in *Nightwood* as its characters attempt to replace their ghosts and confusions with full presence. This does not dispel the ghosts, but leads to "possession," or total control by them. The compulsive behaviour of *Nightwood*'s characters in the final scenes of the novel occurs consecutively with their attempted abolition of difference and with a dearth of metaphor in the novel's language. At its end, *Nightwood*'s ghost words cease to "haunt" and take over character behavior, appearing as madness.

A psychic phantom may be socially functional if adopted as a conventional behavior (Abraham and Torok 176), and *Nightwood*'s very social fabric appears as a collective staging of phantasmatic love and abandonment. Ghosts of lost loves compel its characters' behavior in relation to phantasmatic institutional power (the nobility, the military, the church, the medical profession), as well as their behavior in relation to subsequent love-objects. The death at *Nightwood*'s outset of Hedvig, the novel's first mother figure and its only "authentic" embodiment of the military and sovereign powers of "Old Europe" (9) represents the withdrawal both of the maternal figure, the primary identification, and of Europe's institutional centers of power, from *Nightwood*'s postwar social fabric to the "impending and inaccessible" (2-3) heights before which its characters are driven down. The lost love that they entomb reappears in the outside world as a person or institution that impels them in pursuit of the "great past" (9) that it embodies and withholds. They descend before this phantasmatic power as if going back in time could be accomplished by giving up a little of the vertical stature recently attained by the human species, but it has always-already turned away. They seek the time when they had not been abandoned, but there is no such time. It is in the curiously immobile descent, the

repetition of the abandonment, that their sense of a time before it subsists. *Nightwood*'s "détraqués," abandoned by the (m)Other and her law, concoct images and titles that deny their "estrangement" (11), while their animality (the circus people), bowing (Felix and Guido), and "going down" (O'Connor, Nora, and Robin) cite it. These ghosts take hold as the novel nears its end. O'Connor finally loses his "power of speech" (Lee 216) and identifies as his dead brother, and Felix unwillingly bows, in "mortal shame" (123), to the imagined Grand Duke of Russia. Robin transforms into a wolf, a symbol in modernity for the grandmother,[86] the "degenerate," [87] and the outlaw, the life that is in a legal sense already dead.[88]

Nightwood's vision of subjectivity as haunting or possession by an institutional, familial, and beloved other makes its political import ambivalent, since the madness and the sanity that it portrays both appear compelled by forces outside the subject. For *Nightwood*'s characters, as for Barnes, the loss of the first love-object, the mother figure, does not enable an impartial and consistent (however harsh) social order in which limited autonomy can be claimed within limits. *Nightwood*'s specters haunt a perverse universe and compel fetishistic behavior. They suggest not repression, not the unconscious, but disavowal, the half-known that is constantly being presented and denied, ejected and embedded, staged within another ostensible meaning. *Nightwood*'s cryptic *tableaux* attempt to create a textual "unconscious" by forbidding knowledge to the reader, and so to shore up personal boundaries in a lawless, ravening universe of "hunter, hunting hunter" (Antiphon 133).

By staging her ghost words in *Nightwood*'s suspended images, innocent-seeming phrases, and bizarre character behaviors, that seem incongruous or incidental to what is

being presented, Barnes defends herself against the phantom possession that she envisions for her characters. *Nightwood* thus functions as a fetish-object in the terms of both Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's theory of "cryptophoria," and Jacques Lacan's discussion of "perversion." The fragmentation, resistance to interpretation, and repetition notable in its *tableaux* and character behavior are characteristic of these modes of expression, which fix meaning in opaque, repetitive patterns. *Nightwood*'s narrative voice and its characters attempt to contain, to harness, the shameful and exciting connotations of particularly significant words by staging their literal meanings. Thus, though I read *Nightwood*'s cryptic words and behaviors figuratively (since I argue that they stand for something else) they are *meant* by *Nightwood*'s characters, or its ghosts, to hold the figurative, or symbolic, dimension from the reader. This invocation and exorcism, the double movement of disavowal, supplements Barnes's sense of separation from the (m)Other that is invoked and exorcised.

The psychic phantom and crypt interfere with the metaphorical function of language, which is perceived as threatening because metaphor invokes the shameful connotations of certain words. Through "antimetaphor," described as "taking literally what was meant figuratively" (132), the cryptophore attempts to strip his fetish-word(s) of "figurativity," as Abraham and Torok call the "simultaneity and interpenetration of presence and absence" that occurs in symbolic language (128). The fetish itself works as a "symbol-cover" for the cryptophore's "fetish-word" (153), the word that is key to the secret, by presenting it in a way that denies its figurative meaning. In this way, it both invokes and hides some libidinously charged scene in which, most often, the cryptophore's desire met with that of a family member.

In cryptophoria, then, words reminiscent of the fetish-word(s) are repeatedly, insistently spoken or acted out by the cryptophore with the apparent intention to communicate something other than the meaning associated with the shameful secret. This both invokes the secret and its erotic charge, and keeps it at a distance. The cryptophore's history is hidden in full view, in signs that are filled with another signification. These fetishized objects or scenes gesture toward the intrapsychically preserved object of the libido: the shameful love and secret, and the word(s) that give it half-life. This is the manner in which Barnes's work presents her history.

Cryptophoria, as I have suggested, does not inevitably give rise to "fetishistic" sexual practices, if these can be delimited, but to inexhaustible allusions to the encrypted content, whether in language, sexual behavior, or other behavior. This orbits the secret, both invoking its erotic charge and keeping it at a distance. Cryptophoric statements and behaviors seem to pertain literally to the subject's immediate concerns, but the reverse is true in the cryptophore's psychic economy: the fleeting connotation remains/returns, while the denotation is incidental. With this cryptic style, *Nightwood* establishes a difference between knowing and not knowing that acts as both invocation and boundary for the "impending and inaccessible" (2-3) mother figure: the ghostly grandmother. The effects of this ghost on Barnes, perhaps especially evident to her during the time of terrible loss and emotional bondage in which she writes *Nightwood*, are contained in and by it.

2. Robin and Nora

Since Robin's "picture forever arranged" (37) deceives the viewer into imagining eternal value, the defense against her, says O'Connor, is an excremental trail between night and day that attaches the "detach[ed]" (89) value to the particular instance, to the body's "nighttime" history; just as, in *Ryder*, the offal that history leaves can be preserved to maintain history's particularity: "of the banquet doth the turde tell" (65). O'Connor councils the melancholic Nora to use dung "to make a roadway for" (84) the past: "The brawl of the Beast leaves a path for the Beast." In both novels, this trail of dirt is imagined to allow the subject's past and "Beast" to come into the present without excessive agony. The trail of dirt left by the past love is a defense against the torment of being "too sharply reminded" (89) of it by its sudden appearance in the outside world. Robin herself is this reminder, come upon, in Nora's case, "heavily, like an engine stalling against your chest" (84). Those, like Nora, who do not make a "roadway" come upon her: "all the things you can't bear and love…all at once" (135).

Nightwood's cryptophoric style attempts to defend against this too-sudden return if the past, with its words and images that, though abjected by the narrative, yet bring the past surreptitiously into the present. This presentation of the past probably made *Nightwood* more an artistic than a therapeutic success for Barnes: its language seems too opaque for the reasonably clear articulations that talk therapy requires. O'Connor's and Nora's talks fail so spectacularly as therapy that they have been read (Martins 111) as a parody of it. *Nightwood* is less hopeful than *Ryder*, with its sloppy happy women, about

the effectiveness of this presentation/abjection of the past. O'Connor, who invokes what is different and particular, and unhinges signifier from signified (as I discuss in my previous chapter) in his attempts to bridge night and day, past and present, subject and object, fails to do so in *Nightwood*. *Nightwood*'s ghosts remain unreconciled, but become ever more present and tormenting. Indeed, the ghosts that constitute subjectivity in *Nightwood* enact a shift from "haunting" to "possession." Its characters' psychic crypts and ghost words begin as absent presences and solidify into fully embodied symptoms that capture their subjectivity. Robin, Nora, Felix, and O'Connor all enact cryptic imperatives throughout the novel, and finally "go down" under them as they lose all sense of difference.

The shift of these ghostly power figures from "haunting" to "possession" is suggested in the death scene of Felix's father, Guido, whose secrets are then embodied in Hedvig. In her life with the secretly Jewish Guido, Hedvig "believed" the false story of his Baronetcy "as a soldier 'believes' a command" (5), that is, not by knowing it to be correct but by acting it out. She responds to his inability to "be one with her" by "moving toward him in recoil" (3) in a double movement of inclusion that cannot include but must alienate him. Though Guido "in life…had done everything to span the impossible gap" that his secret maintained between Hedvig and himself, at his death "her body at that moment became the barrier and Guido died against that wall, troubled and alone" (3). In death, at the end of language, the "impossible gap" of the secret solidifies into a loved object that bars him from itself.

Robin, as critics have noted, suggests the lost past to *Nightwood*'s other characters. However, she evokes it not because she is somehow free from the social

order, as has been argued, but because her foreclosure of her own abandonment by her mother makes her embody the novel's phantasmatic law-giving mother figure for Nora and Felix. Robin's gestures represent to herself both the abandoning maternal figure that she has incorporated and the abandoned life, her child-self, that goes down before it. Thus, readings that find alternatives to *Nightwood*'s social fabric in Robin overlook the ghosts that always-already determine is characters' behaviour, and hers especially. In them, Robin's supposed indeterminacy is conflated with an agency that the novel itself denies her.[89] Consecutively, an alternative to *Nightwood*'s social realm is invoked which, though rarely given specific content, informs Robin's behaviour and makes her silence meaningful.[90] Merril Cole reads Robin as figuring the Lacanian real, an "*extimate*," or "excluded interior" of historicity "that is most intimate to it, even if disavowed."[91] For her, *Nightwood*'s use of analogy and narrative indirection both posits this extimate and refuses its disclosure, and thus "leaves space for something not yet in history, something not yet realized, to emerge" (405). Though what this thing that *Nightwood* "leaves space for" might be, or how it might "emerge," is unclear, it is associated with marginal subjectivity and desire. For Christine Coffman, it is the space of "another symbolic," the realm of the "people that have never been made" where the "angel on all fours" (*Nightwood* 95) belongs, and where Robin would come into her own. (120)[92]

Robin's psychology, the relation of her behaviour to the social world in which she exists, is short-shrifted in these readings. The refusals and intentions that critics ascribe to her elide *Nightwood*'s own descriptions of her as "lost" and "possessed" (48, 113). True, she is not possessed as a partner by her husband or lovers for long, as Susannah Martins points out (126). But the title of the book's last section, "The Possessed" (167), surely

includes her in its referential field. Robin does not resist the desires of *Nightwood*'s characters because she has no "volition for refusal" (43). Never having lost, she *is* lost. Towards its conclusion, *Nightwood* discards analogy, and Robin erases the metaphorical dimension from the novel's description of her as a "beast" (37). Her final prostration, often read in terms of the refusal or subversion of patriarchal determinations, "anti-metaphorically" stages her and Nora's psychic phantoms.

Gary Sherbert, drawing on Abraham and Torok's theory, argues that Nora exorcises the psychic crypt containing her grandmother in mourning Robin. This is possible because Nora substitutes Robin for the grandmother, since the incest-prohibition is conflated in her mind with the prohibition of homosexuality: "Robin is incest too; that is one of her powers" (156).[93] For Sherbert, Nora's discussion of Robin with O'Connor thus indirectly refers to her grandmother and mourns her. *Nightwood* suggests, however, that Nora's association of Robin with her grandmother is due not to their lesbian relationship but to Robin's androgynous image. Further, it suggests that Robin does not allow her lovers to mourn their original losses, but to deny that these losses ever occurred. In *Nightwood*, the term "invert" refers not to Nora or Jenny, who merely, as they say, have sex with women, but only to Robin, who "resembles a boy" (136). As Foucault discusses, modernity was characterized by the ascendance of sexuality and sexual object-choice from a practice to the foundation of identity.[94] Androgyny, imagined as childish under-development, is a characteristic of modern sexology's "cretin," who lacked the power of speech.[95] Robin, the cretinous (silent, childish) "invert," is "the living lie of our centuries," which "our miscalculated longing has created" (136-7), a formulation that suggests the miscalculations and luxurious abhorrences of modern

pseudo-scientific disciplines. She is modern sexology's fetish because she recalls the time before sexual difference, the time before subjectivity. Nora's melancholic claim, "A woman *is yourself, caught* as you *turn* in panic" (143, my italics), evokes this model. Robin, the "invert," represents the disavowal of homosexual love on which Judith Butler suggests heterosexual identity is premised.[96] She thus appears as the lost love object both in particular (Nora's grandmother) and in general (the same-sex parent-figure that every heterosexual, Butler suggests, "never loved" and "never grieved") (*Power* 147). In O'Connor's words:

> What is this love we have for the invert, boy or girl? It was they who were spoken of in every romance we ever read. The girl lost, what is she but the prince found? [...] And the pretty lad who is a girl, what but the prince-princess in point lace – neither one and half the other […] *They go far back in our lost distance where what we never had stands waiting*; it was inevitable that we should come upon them, for our miscalculated longing has created them. They are our answer to what our *grandmothers* were told love was, and what it never came to be; they, the living lie of our centuries. (136-7, my italics)

The love that "our grandmothers" were told of, which "never came to be," is answered from without as the "invert." Robin represents "the sweetest lie of all" (137) to *Nightwood*'s characters because she embodies what is disavowed by this lie, the love that they "never had" (137). Her "'aside' voice of the actor" (38) speaks of what is always peripheral to "the scene" as her lovers present it, the spectral margin in which their cryptophoric relationships are maintained. It is "enchanted with the gift of postponed abandon," the postponement of the love object's abandonment of the subject. Robin attracts Nora and Felix by reinforcing their melancholic disavowal of lost love, not by offering them a means of mourning this loss.

Abraham and Torok write that the process of cryptophoric "incorporation" involves a fantasy that the lost, unnamable object is literally taken into the subject via the

mouth (128-132). To "eat" Robin is to "put our face close to the blood on the lips of our forefathers," to come near the traces of the mother who has been incorporated by cannibal forefathers. Robin has power over the other characters because, says O'Connor, they are unable to "make a roadway" for "the night" (84) that would allow this "eaten death" (37) to return from its crypt to the external world. Robin's presentation as an "eternal wedding," or union, and "the image of a forgotten experience" (37), and her portrayal as a maternal object both edible and voracious, "human hunger pressing its breast to its prey" (37), suggest that she is the mother whom she herself "never lost." Her passive acquiescence to motherhood (45) and her conversion to Catholicism (45) also point to this incorporation:

> Strangely aware of *some lost land in herself*, she took to going out; wandering the countryside… she wandered to thoughts of women, *women that she had come to connect with women.* Strangely enough, these were women in history…. She prayed, and her prayer was monstrous because there was no margin left in it for damnation or forgiveness, for praise or for blame…. She only told of herself in a *preoccupation* that was its own predicament. (47, my italics)

Robin, because of her inability to mourn through language, is "pre-*occupied*" by her mother. This occupation is "its own predicament" because it makes her unable to represent and mourn loss. "She herself is the only 'position'" (146) in an imaginary unity in which the desires of others are indistinguishable from her own and thus irresistible. Her "very lack of identity makes [her] ourselves" (88). Robin, in her thoughts and prayers to the Madonna "had come to connect with women," but she "only told of herself." There is no other in her prayer, thus "no margin left for damnation or forgiveness, for praise or for blame" (47). Robin's cryptophoric lovers, searching in her for the "one sole condition" (112) that they have forfeited, find instead the loss of "figurativity," as Abraham and Torok call symbolic language, and the compulsive citation of ghostly

words and scenes. The loss and desolation that she awakens in others mirrors her own desire to distinguish her subjectivity, to "think…herself alone" (167). To Felix, it seems that "her attention…had already been taken by something not yet in history" (44). This thing not yet in history is Robin herself, Robin's entry into subjectivity through the loss of imaginary unity with her mother. Felix's demand for a child, "*Wo ist das kind?*" (45), echoes Robin's own search for herself. In response, she "conceived herself pregnant" (45) in a strange auto-fertilization, mimicking her mother by conceiving *herself*. She thereby occupies both the position of her lost love-object (mother), and her own lost self (child), her mother's object.

Robin's childlike behavior and adoption of boy's clothing – with Felix, she favored old dresses and skirts (42) – also suggests the melancholic incorporation of her abandoned son, Guido. Though she "didn't want him," after giving birth to him she is "lost," as if she "had done something irreparable" (48). Her response, in the manner of the cryptophore, is to "be secret about him …Why talk?" (49). Instead of talking, she symptomizes his loss by dressing in "boy's clothes" (147) and playing with toys for hours. Her romantic behavior toward and abandonment of Jenny's foster-child Sylvia (115), as well as her aggression towards Guido, whom she almost dashes down to the ground before her (48), and her and Nora's doll, which she does dash to the ground (147), cite her original scene of abandonment, with herself as her mother and Sylvia, Guido and the doll as the young Robin. Her "going down" before Catholic altars to the Madonna (46) also re-stages this abandonment, now with herself as the child and the Madonna as the mother. In these scenes, Robin is interchangeably parent and child, power and outcast, "monstrous" (47) life, betrayer and betrayed.

Sylvia's relation to Robin also mirrors Nora's to her grandmother. Like Nora, falling "in one place" (51), like the poor cow during an air raid who "had gone somewhere very fast…yet was still standing there" (22), Sylvia is pictured as both departing and staying still in response to horror. When Jenny attacks Robin, Sylvia is described as "running away from something grown up…she was sitting still and she was running" (106). Sylvia has "fallen in love" (115) with Robin, who wakes her up throughout the night to ask her to confirm this. But Robin forgets Sylvia, whose response is shame: "'shame went all over her" (116). "Who is Sylvia?" asks O'Connor innocently of Nora, naming the title of a popular song. With Nora, Sylvia, Guido, and the doll, Robin occupies the desired subject positions of abandoning mother and abandoned child. And since Nora has a psychic crypt of her own, Robin can be her mother's mother (Nora's grandmother). Thus, while they are together, Nora and Robin interchangeably appear as one another's encrypted loves and lost selves.

Robin's abandonment of Nora for the predatory and aged "squatter" Jenny Petherbridge thus appears as a response to Nora's psychic crypt. The ravening Jenny, and elderly prostitutes, fascinate both Nora (131) and Robin (144) because they embody Nora's encrypted desire. "Steaming in the vapours of someone else about to die" and living "among her own things like a visitor to a room kept 'exactly as it was when –'" (65-66), Jenny incarnates Nora's crypt – a formation, write Abraham and Torok, that walls off and protects a guilty pleasure to maintain the expectation that it may be resumed (114). Dr. O'Connor commands Nora's "attention for the first time" with his description of the zombie-like "Tuppeny Upright," a whore whose price has been reduced by age to tuppence, who stands while "letting you do it, as silent and indifferent as the dead, as

if…waiting for something that they had been promised when they were little girls" (130-131). Nora's dead grandmother, he implies, is indifferent. It is Nora's desire for the old woman that causes her to go "slowly along in the dark" (130). Nora's claim to O'Connor that "it is only through me, of all my family, that my grandmother dies, over and over" (149) avows her sense of her grandmother as victim, damned by Nora's love and condemnation, while the leering, waistcoated grandmother in her dream (63) testifies to her simultaneous sense of her grandmother as predator.

Since language is ametaphorical for Robin, materiality is the only source of meaning. Hence she looks for herself through reproduction and travel, and hence physical violence from Nora (144) and Jenny (76) renders her docile and prone, whereas pleading does not. However, words determine her behavior. She is, as Jenny says, "in sensuous communion with unclean spirits" (168). When she is alone with Nora, "there entered with Robin a company unaware. Sometimes it rang clear in the songs she sang…songs of the people, debased and haunting" (57). Robin, an "infected carrier of the past" (37), contains an unseen populace. Her first name, evoking the (red)breast, and her last names, "Vote," and "Volkbein" also suggest her motherhood to a ghostly "people."

Nora's psychic crypt, like Robin's, is signaled by the "pre-occupation" in which she is "endlessly embroiled" (53). But unlike Robin, whose "pre-occupation…was its own predicament" (47), Nora's pre-occupation is "without a problem" (53). Nora has, through language, partially entered a social order that excludes the knowledge of her encrypted grandmother: thus her grandmother's "pre-occupation" of her is "*without*," outside of "the world," which is partitioned-off "like a ship in a bottle" (53). The image of Nora "moving downward" through the "gap in 'world pain,'" but "in one place, and

perpetually before the eye" (51) reveals that this visible and immobilized separation of the world from Nora is reflected in her position from its perspective. Nora's work doing "advance publicity for the circus" (18) that, *Nightwood* tells us, has only a public life, emphasizes her lack of a private dimension, her "pre-occupation" by the other. Nora's "grandmother's bedroom" dream describes the intrapsychic correlative of her perpetual motionless fall before the world's eye, representing her psychic crypt as a saturating "lost presence" that is continually in the act of departing, but never moves:

> This chamber that had never been her grandmother's, which was, on the contrary, the absolute opposite of any known room her grandmother had ever moved or lived in, was nevertheless saturated with the lost presence of her grandmother, who seemed to be in the continual process of leaving it. The architecture of dream had rebuilt her everlasting and continuous, flowing away in a long gown of soft folds and chin laces, the pinched gatherings that composed the train taking an upward line over the back and hips in a curve that not only bent age but fear of bent age demands. (63)

Like Nora's dream, the architecture of *Nightwood* rebuilds the grandmother as "everlasting and continuous," but constantly "flowing away," apprehended only in her departure, in Robin's departure. The grandmother subsists most fully for Nora in her loss of Robin. This was occurring even while they lived together, since Robin, whose desire was always "to go and yet to stay" (140), recalls ever-departing presence, the fleeting but recurring connotation, of the psychic crypt. The only way to erase this postponed abandonment is to abolish time and space itself, so that the division of past from future, connotation from denotation, might be impossible. O'Connor describes the bereft lover:

> face down, with that terrible longing of the body that would, in misery, be flat with the floor; lost lower than burial, utterly blotted out and erased so that no stain of her could ache upon the wood, or snatched back to nothing without aim – going backward through the target, taking with her the spot where she made one – (95)

Descending, going down, is going back in time, to a state prior to the losses inflicted by life. Thus the girls in the toilets, going down on their lovers, cry: "I'm an

angel on all fours, with a child's feet behind me, seeking my people who have never been made, going down face foremost" (95). Their descent, described in the most sordid possible terms, seeks to recapture the only time before loss and shame: the time before time. But this pre-time is surrounded on all sides by past, future, and damnation: "God damned you before me, and after me you shall be damned, kneeling and standing away till we vanish!" (95). To go down on the "damned and betraying" loved one is to come as near as possible to the time before the betrayal: "In the acceptance of depravity," says O'Connor, "the sense of the past is most fully captured" (118). The "gap in 'world pain,'" the irreducibly particular, unspeakable pain of incestuous love and loss, thus holds "the singular" in suspended departure.

Robin, who wants "a way to leave and not to go" (140), circumvents time and separation in *Nightwood*'s double logic. Her going and staying captures her lovers in a passing that is never past: "[a]s an amputated hand cannot be disowned because it is experiencing a futurity, of which the victim is its forebear, so Robin was an amputation that Nora could not renounce" (59). Nora is victim to Robin's "amputation" in a time before it took place, while Robin experiences separation from her mother-substitute, Nora, as something that has yet to happen. Though Nora accuses Robin of "forgetting" her, Robin cannot forget since she cannot first remember: loss is always a futurity for her.

Since Robin can neither feel nor be absolved of guilt, she looks for subjectivity through her "secret" betrayals of Nora, her mother-substitute, and Nora's suffering and forgiveness. Robin's "privacy" consists in her life away from Nora because it requires Nora's experience of a separation between herself and Robin: she does not otherwise experience herself as separate from others. Her cryptophoria in "making [Nora] the

Madonna" (146) is suggested by O'Connor's remark to Nora that "Night people do not bury their dead, but on the neck of you, their beloved and waking, sling the creature, husked of its gestures" (89). Though Robin's failure to enact the first separation (which, as Butler speculates, is a ritual of guilt and acquittal) bars her attempt to become human by "thinking herself alone" (167), Robin's substitution of Nora for the law and Nora's inability to renounce her brings her partly into the human fold.[97] Nora's suffering and forgiveness is Robin's salvation and, inseparably, her damnation: Nora is both "the Madonna" (146) and "a devil" who "make[s] everything dirty" (143). "Only you," Robin tells Nora, "mustn't be gay or happy, not like that, it's not for you, only for everyone else in the world" (155).

On seeing a whore dozing in her room next to an altar to the Madonna, Nora realizes that she was "a fixed dismay" to Robin: "the space between the human and the holy head" (157). The Madonna, Nora suggests, does not absolve the whore but divides her: their relation creates guilt, but it is the Madonna who is "indecent" (157) by being "fixed" and "eternal." The whore, arms akimbo "as if half of her slept, and half of her suffered" is incompletely interpellated by the Madonna, the suffering half of her perhaps knowing that she is guilty, the sleeping half yet believing that she is innocent. In Nora's "grandmother's bedroom" dream, her grandmother's "life out of her life" appears as something "being done to Robin, Robin disfigured and eternalized by the hieroglyphics of sleep and pain" (63). The subjectivity that Robin gains through Nora, this dream suggests, is inscribed by the phantom grandmother. Thus, Nora's break with Robin, which awakens her from her "nightmare" (145) also "befoul[s]" her: "No rot had touched her until then, and there before my eyes I saw her corrupt all at once and withering

because I had struck her sleep away" (145). Robin loses her "innocen[ce]," (146) her experience of loss as a futurity, and suddenly resembles something old, rotten, and re-encountered, "something once beautiful found in a river" (142). On seeing Robin ametaphorically embody her grandmother, Nora "went mad and [has] been mad ever since" (145). She appeals first to Robin (142) and then to O'Connor to speak: "Matthew, for God's sake, say something, you're awful enough to say it, say something!" (145).

In the Kleinian tradition, Abraham and Torok maintain that it is crucial to child development that, after withdrawing the breast, the mother teach the child language so that it may begin "mourning" its loss: "the mother's constancy is the guarantor of the meaning of words" (128). *Nightwood*'s characters' appeals to O'Connor to "say something" are accompanied by appeals to God, as if God's function is, or should be, to instate language. But does "she" (150)? Nora appeals to God to overcome the muteness of the dreams, the "hieroglyphics of sleep and pain" (63) that "disfigured" and "eternalized" Robin and herself: "[w]hat was that dream saying, for God's sake, what was that dream?" To this, O'Connor indirectly articulates Robin's unspoken desire, a desire that he shares: "Mother of God! It's my mother without argument I want" (149). The loss of and desire for the mother, he implies, must be spoken before the dream can symbolize anything. But Nora denies her separateness from Robin, and thus implicitly denies O'Connor's power to re-instate figurative language by naming her desire. Foreshadowing the end of individuation and figurativity in *Nightwood,* she tells O'Connor that if she and Robin had slept in the whore's bed, they would have "moulted our parts, as *figures* in the waxworks are moulted down to their story, so we would have broken down to our love" (158). However, instead of coming together like melting wax

figures, or even like regular human lovers, they finally reunite only in mutual prostration before the lost love objects that they represent to one another.

3. Going Down: the Wolf

At the novel's close, the takeover of Felix, O'Connor, Nora, and Robin by ghost words is described in terms of their descent and genuflexion, figurative in O'Connor's case but otherwise literal. Though O'Connor attempts to preserve symbolic language and the possibility of difference, Nora's insistence on non-difference seems to break his hold on it, and to allow the novel's slide into ametaphorical language use and "possessed" character behavior: Nora and Robin's going down before one another, Felix's helpless bowing, and O'Connor's insistence on his identity with his dead brother in "Go Down, Matthew." Though scenes of prostration have appeared earlier, the characters' behavior now appears less voluntary and even less appropriate to social context. It suggests their compulsion by social forces as well as by personal love objects.

In loving Robin, Nora is confronted by Robin's "anonymity" (55), the "great passionate in*difference*" or non-differentiation, that she "treat[s] her lovers to" (139). Nora in the end insists on it: "[s]he is myself" (127). Nora's love, that "deposit of the heart, analogous in all degrees to the 'findings' in a tomb" (56) has, O'Connor suggests, the same cryptic structure of exclusive inclusion that separates the "city" from the "pauper."[98] Aptly, *Nightwood*'s phrasing makes it impossible to conclude whether it is Nora and Robin, or the "spirits" of love and anonymity, that are "'haunted' of" (55) one another. While haunting one another, Nora and Robin present to each other the missing

"half of the story that both forgot" (138). Once they are separated, Nora seeks to reunite with Robin by becoming her: tracing her steps, sleeping with her lovers, "haunt[ing] the cafés where Robin had lived her night-life" (156). Robin, who searches for herself, "began to haunt the [train] terminals" (167), recommences her visits to Madonnas in chapels, and searches the faces of wild animals for recourse to a life free of the desires of others (168-9). Ironically, Robin's search is itself determined by the desire of the other: by discourses of degeneracy and primitivism, by Nora's encrypted grandmother, and by the phantom-word "wolf" associated with these. Because of Nora's insistence on their unity, and Robin's inability to achieve individuality, they end as O'Connor predicts, "locked together, like the poor beasts that get their antlers mixed and are found dead that way" (100). Nora and Robin's last scene takes place before an altar to the Madonna, the "impending and inaccessible" mother before whom Robin descends, while Nora goes down before the grandmother-wolf who "possesses" Robin.

In Abraham and Torok's work, in European folktale, and in *Nightwood* itself, the wolf is an uncanny figure for both the "unhomely" sexual predator and the "homely" grandmother.[99] Nora's thought on seeing Dr. O'Connor in a nightgown, that "children… like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed" (79), is interpreted by Susanna Martins as a recasting of the Freudian primal scene in which the horizontal position of the wolf feminizes it. Martins argues that "the prostrate wolf is associated with the passive female object of desire – the mother, in the primal scene" (Martins 120). The story of Red Riding Hood itself, however, as well as the strong presence of the grandmother in *Nightwood*, suggest the wolf as grandmother. That this thought occurs to Nora upon seeing O'Connor in drag, lying "beside himself" (80), implies to Martins that "the wolf and Red Riding

Hood are the same person" (120). In Nora's subjective economy, then, the grandmother and Nora are "the same person." Further, Nora's thought is "only the sensation of a thought" (79). Nora does not fully articulate it, even in thought, because "wolf," as something that children like to have in bed with Red Riding Hood, is a "fetish word," a key to the psychic crypt containing her grandmother.

Except for Nora's "sensation of a thought," the text circles the grandmother-wolf in its many references to dogs, unspecified "beasts," prostrate women, and "bitches." However, the wolf was a popular trope in modernity. It could stand for mental illness, as with Freud's famous study of the Wolf Man,[100] and consecutively for the degeneracy attributed to homosexuality.[101] It also troped predatory humans (Red Riding Hood), man in the "state of nature" (Thomas Hobbes) and *homo sacer* (as Agamben discusses). Sacred life, writes Agamben, has been symbolized by the werewolf by political writers throughout history because "the transformation into a werewolf corresponds perfectly to the state of exception…. What had to remain in the collective unconscious as a monstrous hybrid of human and animal [is] at its origin the figure of the man who has been banned from the city, [in] a zone of indistinction between the human and the animal" (106). Thus, Agamben argues, the figure of the banned werewolf who dwells within the city, in proximity to the sovereign, tropes the truth that "[s]overeign violence is… founded not on a pact but on the exclusive inclusion of bare life in the state" (107).

Barnes was something of a Hobbesian, as Hank O'Neal discusses in his memoir. Its title, "*Life is painful, nasty, and short…in my case it has only been painful and nasty,*" comes from a remark in which Barnes applies Hobbes's famous description of life in the "state of nature" to herself. Hobbes's oft-quoted statement that all human relations are

market relations was also advocated by Barnes, writes O'Neal: "She told me hundreds of times that the only reason anyone does anything is for money" (174). The Hobbesian "state of nature" is represented as parental lawlessness by the Hobbs family in *The Antiphon* (1958). The Barnes-figure's father, the rapacious Titus Hobbs, is dead, and "his beasts, the girls" (128) are gone, but her brothers are clearly upholding family tradition in attempting to "stand her on four feet" (176), and her mother, Augusta Hobbs, finally murders her with a large curfew bell (222), seemingly for resisting her brothers' advances. In *The Antiphon* as in *Nightwood*, Hobbes's "*homo hominis lupus*," the state in which "man is a wolf to men," tropes family and sexual abuse.

Given also the lengthy discussions of the significance of "Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed" in critical readings of *Nightwood*, and Barnes's remarks about Thelma Wood's "wolf's blood" (Herring 157) it is surprising that Robin's final going down has not yet been read as lycanthropy. This reading is consistent with Abraham and Torok's theory of the phantom, by the logic of which Robin's wolfishness appears as a symptom of Nora's psychic crypt. At her reunion with Nora, Robin's "escape" into an alternate mode of being, presumed free of the desires of others, is in fact the phantom of Nora's crypt and a testimony to its content: the grandmother. When Robin goes down on all fours with Nora's dog, she is attempting to neutralize Nora's "shameful secret" by "demetaphorizing" the fetish-word, "wolf," associated with it.

In an English folk tradition that is still alive, the touching of wood neutralizes the power of language to invoke what has been left out or denied by a statement (Simpson and Roud, 365). That Nora's body strikes "the wood" at the same moment that Robin "began to go down" (169), staging the grandmother-wolf, suggests the final nullification

of the figurative power of language. Nora's desire for the grandmother emerges "antimetaphorically" in Robin. Her "transformation" into a wolf symptomizes the grandmother and the social outlaw (*wargus*): both the law that governs Nora's desire and the human abandoned by the law. Consecutively, Robin stages the social specter of homosexual "subhumanity" and the ravening power of which it is both representative and victim. Her prostration suggests sadomasochistic theatre's presentation of the relation of power to outlaw or "sacred life," as Agamben describes it: "we find the symmetry of *homo sacer* and sovereign in the complicity that ties the masochist to the sadist, the victim to the executioner" (135). In *Nightwood* as in sadomasochistic theatre, this social relation appears in a context in which it is not "in the picture."

4. Felix and O'Connor

Like Robin and Nora, Felix and O'Connor symptomatize abandoning maternal figures in their strange words, behaviors and descents. Felix wants to reunite with the past in his love for Robin, its image. To Felix, Robin seems to bring together his "broken fate" by uniting "an image and its reflection," (38) the representation of his great past that he labors to construct, and what is, he imagines, represented. He is drawn to Robin, he tells O'Connor, by her "undefinable disorder, a sort of 'odour of memory'" that gave her the "quality of one sole condition" (112) shared by his aunt's story of his family: the "condition" of never having lost that Robin suggests to her lovers. He describes this as "a fluid sort of possession…. what then appeared to me to be security, and which was, in reality, the most formless loss" (112-13). That Robin's "loss" is "formless," that her

"possession" is "fluid," that her "memory" is only an "odour" suggests that this loss is unformulated in language. Felix ascribes his love for Robin to his fabricated past: "[m]y family is preserved because I have it only from the memory of one single woman, my aunt; therefore it is single, clear, and unalterable.… Through this I have a sense of immortality. Our basic idea of eternity is a condition that *cannot vary*" (112).

Felix, whose people embodied "sacred life" throughout European history, believes that the "great past" he has lost is the splendor of a noble family. Robin, whose "fluid sort of possession" is actually a "formless loss" that "cannot vary," represents the real loss that he does not know, but that subsists for him in the gaps, or "formless loss[es]," in his aunt's narrative.

Though Felix does not know these losses, he symptomatizes them. In his mother Hedvig, who gives birth to him on a bed with a "valance stamped with the bifurcated wings of the House of Hapsburg" (1), the novel represents the "Old Europe" (9) of Felix's obsession (especially Austria, Germany, and the military) as a maternal figure. Towards the powers that she embodies, Felix, like his father Guido, does homage, "going down as before a great heat" (2-3). Their spasmodic "genuflexion that the hunted body makes from muscular contraction" (2) suggests the trans-generational phantom of anti-Semitism, the genuflexions of hunted bodies compulsively repeated in the hunter's absent presence. "Thrust[ing] him from her and dy[ing]" (1), Hedvig presents Felix's abandonment by "Old Europe." His choices of Robin and of Frau Mann evoke her disavowed loss: "[a]gain in the ambit of his father's futile attempts to encompass the rhythm of his wife's stride" (44-45), Felix iterates modernity's anti-Semitic discourses on the feminine Jew's futile mimicry of the manly Aryan.[102] He also makes strange remarks:

confronting Robin's indifference to his stories of the "great past" in which their marriage has "included" her, he adds "I am deceiving you!" (45), and wonders what he means. Most tellingly, he stages the "racial memories" of persecution encrypted in his aunt's narrative of his past. These memories, "binding…about" Felix's father, Guido Sr., were testified to only by his clutching of a yellow and black handkerchief "that cried aloud of the ordinance of 1468, […] demanding that, with a rope about its neck, Guido's race should run in the Corso for the amusement of the Christian populace" (2). Not dispelled by their articulation by the handkerchief, these phantoms cause Felix to "Bow Down" (1) in re-citations of the dehumanization of his people by European Christians. His final "abandoned" bow of a "madman" towards the imagined Grand Duke Alexander of Russia (122-3) suggests his "possession" by these unknown memories. Felix, "his head making a complete half-swing, as an animal will turn its head away from a human, as if in mortal shame" (123), compulsively cites this bestial history.

However, Felix's last moments with the young Guido, "the shadow of his anxiety" (120), suggest a functional, if still compelled, re-iteration. "Carrying a pocket full of medicines, and a little flask of oil for the chapping hands of his son" (122), he invokes the stereotype of the Jewish peddler, equipped with medicines and concerned with the vicissitudes of corporeality. His "Come, […] you are cold" (123), recalls the "cold yet hysterical abandon" with which "the Christian populace" applauded the torture of Jews (2). But Guido, though "cold," is not "abandoned." Felix, rubbing oil into his son's hands, cites a "Jewishness" that, though stereotypical, suggests his productive reappropriation of the past.

O'Connor, though he most represents language and difference throughout the novel (Lee 217), fares worse in the end.[103] Like Barnes herself, O'Connor attempts to use language to shore up identity while gesturing at its inadequacy. His stories, he claims, are "lies," motivated by his friends' appeals to him to "say something, Doctor, for the love of God" (135). However, his friends' incapacities to mourn seems to destroy his own. Nora, who "believed in the word" (51), insists to him that Robin "is myself" (127), as if words could conquer difference. It is this insistence that brings O'Connor to "confused and unhappy silence" (158), and the final conclusion that all his speech was "for nothing" (165). As Judith Lee points out, he slowly loses the ability to use figurative language throughout the second half of *Nightwood*. By the novel's end he evidences a psychic crypt containing his brother, whom he had "seen," he says, "as if my memory of him were himself" (152). Drunk in a bar after his escape from Nora, O'Connor insists:

> Is not a brother his brother also, the one blood cut up in lengths, one called Michael and the other Matthew? Except that people get befuddled seeing them walk in different directions. Who's to say that I'm not my brother's wife's husband and that her children were not fathered in my lap? Is it not to his honour that he strikes me as myself? (160)

If it was his mother that O'Connor "want[ed]" and his brother whom she loved, and came to O'Connor to talk of "as if my memory of him were himself," then his object-choice of men, identification as a woman, and claims of identity with his brother suggests an early triangulation and "shameful secret."[104] His once taboo, now acknowledged, desire for his mother was first incorporated as gender. A psychic crypt was then formed containing his brother, who had replaced the mother as O'Connor's object once his female gender was accomplished.[105] Nora's thought on seeing O'Connor in a nightgown that "he dresses to lie beside himself" (80) suggests this double possession. Brimming with feminine accessories, the room "was also muscular, a cross between a *chambre à*

coucher and a boxer's training camp," and contained an abdominal brace which "gave the impression that the feminine finery had suffered venery" (79). The room represents O'Connor's layered identity: the feminine surface which yet, "giving back evidence" of the brother occupying it, is "mauled as the last agony" (80).

O'Connor's description of wombs as the prisons of convicts damned to death (97), his wish that we could be born in the grave and crawl into the (to him) more appealing uterus to die (99), and his cryptic "I began to wail for all the little beasts in their mothers" (105) all raise the question of his motivation for the performance of illegal abortions at a convent (114). His interventions change the womb from a place of life to a place of death, suggesting the desire to eliminate his unborn brother *in utero*, and so to be one with his mother. Since he incorporates his mother, this is also a desire to remove his encrypted brother from his psyche and so become "entirely" a woman, "with a womb as big as a king's kettle," instead of having "a face on me like an old child's bottom" (91).

Nora's other thought on seeing O'Connor in a nightgown – "what nation…what ghost…has not worn it?" – suggests, like Robin's occupation by "the people," a female figure who contains and delimits spectral political life. An early draft of *Nightwood* shares this vision: in one of O'Connor's excised stories of serving in World War I, a sergeant about to handcuff him "gave up the ghost" and instead took his hand to lead him to prison. O'Connor then felt that he "had a mother…I had always wanted one *all to myself*!" (*Nightwood Drafts* 278). His impending incarceration reminds O'Connor of his mother: "in our mother's wombs we are close prisoners all" (97). For him, the crypt-like structure of the womb contains and excludes the child as a prison both contains in and excludes the outlaw within "the people."

Tellingly, O'Connor's work of abortion reformulates the relation between law and outlaw by giving the mother the power to "take life or let live" (Agamben 87) in relation to the fetus. O'Connor, who wishes to exorcise his brother and so to have his mother "all to [him]self," works at the vanguard of modern advances in technology and the disciplines which increasingly expose life to death. Yet, given the usually shattering and lethal effects of childbearing in Barnes's work, O'Connor's cryptophoric profession in *Nightwood* suggests a defense by the subject against the other that invades it, a power to destroy rather than to be destroyed. But this choice is only possible when the other is corporeal, the forebear rather than the futurity of its own amputation. That O'Connor's job stages his encrypted desires suggests also that it may be a predetermined "choice," another repetition of the moment when unity with the beloved, first apprehended as lost, seemed almost attainable.

5. To Exorcise the Other

In her fiction, Barnes's great loves drive her down, without empathy for her, in obedience to senseless ideals. Excised from *Nightwood*'s final version is a fragment rendering Barnes's rape at seventeen by (probably) 52 year old Percy Faulkner (see Field 43, 49-53). The Barnes-character, then Catherine, "had gone down on the floor and hugged my grandmother by her knees, dropping my head down, saying, 'Don't let it happen!' and she said, 'It had to happen'" (*Nightwood Drafts* 299-300). Here, as Abraham and Torok put it, "the shameful secret is the love object's doing and…that object also functions for the subject as an ego ideal" (131). Also cut was the narrative of

Barnes's betrayal by and prostration before her second great love, Ernst Hanfstengl, to whom she was engaged from 1914 to 1916. He broke off their engagement because she wasn't German and went on to become the chief minister of the foreign press for the Nazi party from 1932 to 1937. "Catherine" describes their final, violent sex scene:

> And he took me by the wrist and began turning my wrist…. I began to go down with the pain in my arm. And he said 'Down, and say that there is nothing that I do not understand about you!' And I said 'You understand nothing, now I know you understand nothing!' And I kept saying 'Nothing!' (*Nightwood Drafts* 303).

Though scenes of sexual humiliation with obvious correlations in her own life were cut, the genuflexions of *Nightwood*'s characters iterate the physical and psychic prostrations that haunted Barnes. Almost entirely absent from *Nightwood*'s portrayal of Robin is the control-freakishness of her prototype, Thelma Wood, who seemingly demanded sexual freedom for herself and Barnes's virtual house arrest (Field 157). *Nightwood* alludes to Robin's possessiveness once:

> all the time she was watching me to see that no one called, that the bell did not ring, that I got no mail, nor anyone hallooing in the court, though she knew that none of these things could happen. My life was hers…. And one time, at about three in the morning when she came in, she was angry because for once I had not been there all the time, waiting. (147)

However this passage, unconnected to anything else in Robin's characterization or the novel's action, is quickly buried by the many suggestions that Nora was the possessive one: and it is this story that critical readings have adopted. Scenes of Nora victimized by anyone but herself are cut because Nora is too obviously Barnes. *Nightwood*'s other characters, however, enact these scenes of abjection and abandonment for her.

Barnes cut herself off, as much as she could, from everyone for the last forty years of her life, living in near-total isolation in a Greenwich Village flat. Her desire to

separate herself from the world appears like a refrain in the last chapters of her biographies. Hank O'Neal, one of the last contacts left for her to push away, writes:

> The mystery she had so consciously cultivated for so many years ruled out [the possibility of help from admiring fans]. Even if there had been no such mystery her pride would have prevented any outside assistance.... pride, independence, solitude, and anger at a world she neither understood nor wished to be a part of were all that kept her going at the end of her life. She stated this eloquently time and time again. (15)

O'Neal himself was banished when his organization of her financial affairs was perceived as too controlling. He records that Barnes "kept repeating, 'You had control over me and I can't stand it!'" (191). What he describes rather dryly as Barnes's cultivation of "mystery" appears as the result of a childhood where parental demand preyed on psychic differentiation, entailing behaviour and speech that encrypted the truth of her experience.

For each of these characters, as for Barnes, the ghost must be exorcised – but it is in each attempted exorcism that the ghost subsists. It is named, called into being, but never directly, and it never melts in the clear light of day. It moves and flickers in the night. It departs to come near, beneath the skin. The meanings that are both invoked and dispelled by *Nightwood*'s characters, words, and scenes concern the physical transgressions of Barnes's parent-figures, especially Zadel. *Nightwood*'s characters and language testify to a childhood in which psychic differentiation was re-cast as cryptophoria, and subjectivity thus constituted by "haunting." Barnes, whose sexuality in childhood was determined by Wald's and Zadel's practice of "free love," came to perceive others as simultaneously abandoning and controlling her – just as *Nightwood*'s ghosts do its characters. Contrary to most critical accounts, what agency may appear in *Nightwood* is not a refusal of biopower or compelled citation associated with Robin, but instead a "haunted" volition that may be pre-determined but that retains a sense of

difference.[106] Written while the slow loss of Thelma recalled Zadel's love and betrayal in all its horror, *Nightwood* defends Barnes from her beloved ghost with cryptic words that both invoke and dispel it, supplementing her sense of its difference from herself.

Conclusion

Djuna Barnes's and H.D.'s particular experiences of the relationship of the subject to the social, I have argued, produce in them particular modes of thought and language and, consecutively, particular kinds of suffering. These kinds of suffering and language may be seen as exemplary of the kinds of split subjectivity that appear in modernity's and postmodernity's literature and religious and critical writings. Thus, though I describe language "disorders," namely, types of language that psychoanalysis implicates in human suffering, I hope to broaden cultural frameworks of intelligibility for the experiences that are concurrent with asymbolic or anti-symbolic thought and writing through my examination of the discursive moves that distinguish "pathologies" from the psychic processes that are always operative when we think, speak, or write.

H.D.'s and Barnes's critics have seen their writing as contributing to queer, feminine, and anti-patriarchal modernism both in its content and style. In many readings (in H.D.'s case those of Friedman, Chisholm, DuPlessis, Gelpi, Hogue and Vandivere; in Barnes's, Kannenstine, Caselli, Coffman, Warren, Smith, and Martins), H.D. and Barnes respond to patriarchy not only at the level of literary content, by depicting its destructiveness and suggesting other modes of sociality, but also by way of cryptic, enigmatic styles which resist any transparency of meaning and any possibility of certainty, both of which come to be seen as ethically problematic in modernity. Writers on H.D. have tended to either enter into her own frame(s) of reference quite uncritically, that is to see her work as doing what she sees it as doing, or else to take distant and dismissive views of it (for instance, see Lawrence Rainey). These polarized critical

responses seem to dramatize the embattlement of masculine and feminine principles, and the need for their "integration," with which H.D. herself was so concerned. Barnes's critics have also read her texts' apparent non-meaning, or replacement of meaning with the image, as expressing her opposition to "the masculine principle," however they envision it, of her times. I see too great a critical reliance on the reproduction of these (in H.D.'s terms), polarized "masculine" and "feminine" principles, whatever particulars are associated with them (patriarchy, univocity, violence, oppression, Christian dogmatism, as opposed to subversion, queerness, nurture, polyphony, freedom, religious syncretism, et cetera), in the discussion of H.D.'s and Barnes's work.

To read H.D.'s later work as symptomatizing her trouble using symbolic language after World War II, and to read Barnes's work as displaying fetishistic mechanisms, is not to dismiss it or them. However, this writing demands another way of reading. The critical reproduction of polarized "masculine" and "feminine" principles, whatever particulars are associated with the former (hyper-rationalism, war, death) cannot take us far in reading it. The use of this binary in critical readings of H.D.'s and Barnes's work appears to me as a response, in part, to its symbolic disorder, and to the concomitant necessity that *something else besides it* be invoked. Patriarchy in whatever guise, be it war and male violence (see especially Friedman, Hogue and Vandivere) repression and sterile reason (Chisholm), clear language and univocity (Gelpi, Warren, Kloepfer, Caselli), Christianity (Kannenstine), heteronormativity (Friedman, Coffman, Marcus, Martins), or, as almost always, some composite of these, is opposed to these texts so that they can appear to take conceptual and social meaning in distinction from this other thing. This move echoes H.D.'s literary invocations of a masculine principle that opposes

the feminine one her heroines embody, and her attempt to locate meaning in their nonrelationship. Since words are not taking meaning from a differentiated system of concepts, imagined sexual difference and (dis)union are taken by H.D., and H.D.'s and Barnes's critics, as productive of a meaning that remains anticipated and unclear.

My dissertation expands on these previous readings by considering H.D.'s and Barnes's writing as also symptomatizing their psychic lives. My alignment of the family and relationship dynamics that appear in their biographies in conjunction with their language use, and social and cosmological visions, allows me to interpret much in their writing that was considered intentionally uninterpretable in terms of psychic processes. It also provides a practical way of bridging the discursive distinctions between the pathological subject and the modernist text, and the categories of "madness," "literature," and "spirituality" that are at issue in these texts and in the criticism surrounding them. These categories continue to be at issue today: perhaps, as my dissertation suggests, because our divisions between legitimate and illegitimate texts, and concomitant ways of interpreting them, run as deep as language and the kinds of faith and meaning that it enables. The application of psychoanalytic methodology in literary criticism today to a variety of texts and social institutions enables my shift of emphasis from diagnosis to a more detailed examination of the correlation between thought structures, perceptions, and beliefs, and a more nuanced understanding of the ways that these affect human experience. It also enables a questioning of how *a priori* beliefs influence the ways that texts are received within the same interpretive communities: creative work by canonized authors is assumed in English departments to have important messages worthy of interpretive ingenuity, whereas texts in case studies on psychotic writing are assumed to

have value only in exemplifying a category, even when (as I suggest in my study of some of H.D.'s later work) the differences between them may not be inherent. Other methodologies might be more conducive to good readings of some texts that we classify as literary, and might have new things to tell us even about the ones that richly reward the high expectations that most "literary studies" methodologies bring to them. Certain ways of being unhappy, such as melancholy, alienation, and anxiety, are flagged as characteristically modern, and these have already been correlated with the fragmentation, indeterminacy, and incompleteness by which we have characterized its aesthetic forms: for instance in Walter Benjamin's *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* and *The Writer on Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, and Georg Lukacs' *Aesthetics and Politics*, Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Form*, Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun*; Esther Sanchez-Pardo's *Cultures of the Death Drive*, Jonathan Flatley's *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, Jean-Michel Rabaté's *The Ghosts of Modernity*, and Shoshanna Felman's *Writing and Madness*. But just how this might be working, and how it might be related to the writer's particular vision of her or his relation to the social world, has rarely been explored in detail in Anglophone literary studies.

Further, such a methodology could be applied to the relationship between the institutions that produce particular kinds of texts – for instance, religious or academic institutions – and the individuals in them. For instance, the texts of a religious organization are read by the people in them with a certain amount of faith – or at least a desire for the faith – that they contain the answers to the eternal questions that trouble human beings. On the other hand, texts in most English department classes are read in the

belief that they have something important but indirect to tell us about the socio-historical circumstances within which they were produced. These beliefs and the ways of talking and thinking that they entail could be characterized in Lacan's terminology as respectively neurotic (in some cases psychotic) and perverse. However, my methodology would enable me to read these texts in relation to the institutional structures that underpin them, and biographical evidence from their participants, to evaluate the functionality of their approaches within the framework of the subjective experiences of meaningfulness and suffering.

It seems to me that writing that records or enacts the return to a state of non-difference between symbol and symbolized calls for different interpretative strategies, and that to read it primarily as symbolic communication is to lose perspective on the structures of thought and language that it grapples with. Psychoanalysis furnishes methods to avoid this trap, but imposes its own ideological baggage: for instance, the privileging of the symbolic order and the castrated subject, and the assumption that people are indeed separate and that to think and act as if it were otherwise is crazy. Certainly, it can cause problems. If we use the concept of madness as it stands, it is fair to apply it to H.D. But to try to imagine the truth as the reunification of words and their referents is an ancient idea that surfaces in various religious texts, Eastern and Western, as well as in literary theory. "Reversing castration" not only has a palpable appeal to many non-psychotics, but has a crucial place in the lineage of "Western thought," which depends on its latency. Much literary criticism finds the closure of meaning in this very gesture towards some experience outside of language, albeit vicarious and receding from the words with which we approach it.

It might be most useful for criticism that addresses H.D.'s and Barnes's work, or other monadic texts, to enter into the author's own frame of reference as much as it can while also retaining radically different one(s), that are not mere negative, unexamined terms, like "patriarchy" or "madness," but systems that can be applied provisionally in order to create a dyad where none existed. This might allow a dialogue that more closely examines the questions and the states of consciousness that these texts grapple with, instead of reproducing them. More attention to asymbolic modes of meaning as such in literary works, and in texts in general, would open a discussion of what is at issue in them.

Notes

[1] See E. von Domarus, "The Specific Laws of Logic in Schizophrenia." *Language and Thought in Schizophrenia*. Writes von Domarus, "whereas the logician accepts identity only upon the basis of identical subjects, the paralogician accepts identity based on identical predicates" (111).

[2] Guest notes that "Bryher had been asked to limit her visits by Dr. Heydt, who decided that H.D.'s equilibrium was upset" (328).

[3] H.D. avowedly fixated on her mother and her mother's name, and believed that this fixation indicated "the direction of [her] soul's journey." In *Majic Ring* she writes, "But even the truth of a child's "fixation" on a mother and a mother's name, on Helen, on Hellas, on the Hellenes (on, if you will, Helios) is only a sign-post, is only an indication of the direction of the soul's journey, which journey was already pre-determined before the child Delia was born" (99).

[4] *Tribute*'s response to Ellis resembles her later response to Dowding: "I thought he would be so interested. But he appeared unsympathetic, or else he did not understand or else he may have thought it was a danger signal" (130). Later again, "It had really been a great shock to me as I had visualized Dr. Ellis, during the time of writing my notes on thought and vision, as a saint as well as a savant" (148). The strength of her reaction can also be seen in her letters to Bryher, which show delight in the betrayal of Ellis's urination fetish to Freud and in Freud's dismissal of his work as "immature." However, she continues to solicit Ellis's affection and approval in their personal correspondence.

[5] *The Flowering of the Rod* also places the repudiation and denial of H.D.-based character into a larger context in which it shown as misguided, and/or cowardly, and/or triggered by haunting memories. Published in 1946, shortly after Dowding's repudiation, it stages it with yet another cast of characters: he as Kaspar and Simon and she as Mary Magdalene. Their meeting in the end as gift-bearers in a manger-scene suggests that Christ and "the new Paradise" may be the product of their union. Kaspar/Simon's behaviour, as Susan Edmunds points out, is cast as repression of unconscious knowledge. Writes Edmunds, "[j]ust as Freud suggests that his patients' acts of 'negation' or disavowal are attempts to deny their own unconscious thoughts…Simon's denial that he knows Mary (like his subsequent attempts to 'eject' her from his house) suggests that he does in fact know her, even that she is wrapped up in his self-knowledge'" (*Line* 79). Though Edmunds reads in H.D.'s later work a knowledge of and borrowing from Kleinian theory, there are times when her argument suggests not so much H.D.'s intentional use of Kleinian theory as its simple applicability to her language.

[6] This is not introjection in Abraham and Torok's sense, a positive process by which new objects become integrated with the ego's existing models. Klein's usage, in which the introjected objects may remain separate within the ego, and which is closer to Abraham

and Torok's "incorporation," more accurately renders the mechanisms to be found in *Helen in Egypt*.

[7] Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality Vol.1* that psychoanalytic discourses *produced* the desire and subjectivity that they purported to free, or at least analyze (77-131).

[8] For Coffman, H.D.'s free-association and projection was an "effort to define a modernist poetics of the visionary that is inflected through female same-sex desire" (146) and a challenge to "the phallogocentric terms of the symbolic order that produces [the unrepresentability of the homosexual-maternal]" (152).

[9] The "symbolic oppositions" to the "name of the father" that triggered their breakdowns have been read in a variety of scenarios comparable to the repudiations that H.D. suffered, from Schreber's failed political candidacy, childlessness, and later appointment as *Senatspräsident* (Lacan, Statner, Weber) to Hölderlin's failure to impress Schiller with the originality of his writing and his mother with the legitimacy of his poetic vocation (Laplanche 80-1, 91-2).

[10] "Occultism" is an umbrella term for a wide range of beliefs, practices and texts that do not all share these characteristics. However, many Occultists, including Robert Ambelain (who influenced H.D. immensely) share several or all of them.

[11] Robert Duncan, 73. My title is from H.D. [Delia Alton], *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, 51. "I thought, 'I'm glad it has happened now, this is the third war and now it will soon be over.'"

[12] See *After Lacan: Clinical Practice and the Subject of the Unconscious*. In it, Cantin explains the disorganized character of delusional psychosis thus: "It is as if the elaboration of the delusion were not subjected to or governed by the laws of language, but rather by the underlying fantasy that the delusion serves to support – the fantasy, that is, of the omnipotence of the Other to which the delusion responds and which the delusion works to maintain, though all the while trying to escape from it…. *one could almost say that delusion treats the real by attempting to subjugate the symbolic to the imaginary*" (95, my italics).

[13] H.D.'s religious and political views appear here as apocalyptic and assimilative, not heterogeneous and pacifist, as they have been described for instance in Augustine's introduction to *The Gift* by H.D. and in Friedman's *Psyche Reborn*, 207-296.

[14] For a further discussion on the non-conjunction between the drives and the sexual relationship, See Lacan, *The Seminar, XX: On Feminine Sexuality*, especially 111-112.

[15] See Eugen Bleuler, "The Basic Symptoms of Schizophrenia," in *Organization and Pathology of Thought,* ed. David Rapaport, 613-615. "Pressure of words" would be more accurate, since it is not ideas but words that Bleuler's patients describe.

[16] Laplanche writes that in Hölderlin's later essays, "[t]he thinking proves to be extremely difficult to sort out…it often clings to formal points of emphasis, like mathematical formulas the terms of which are subsequently subjected to circular permutations in which the meaning sometimes vanishes in favour of false symmetries" (88).

[17] Guest, 261. Writes H.D.: "[t]o recall my father is to recall the cold, blazing intelligence of my 'last attachment' of the war years in London."

[18] The subject of Freud's only extended investigation of psychosis, *The Schreber Case,* Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* is arguably the most influential source text in the study of psychosis. It is Lacan's primary reference in replacing Freud's theory of cast-away homosexual desire with foreclosed castration as the condition of psychotic potential.

[19] See *Language and Thought in Schizophrenia* 44, 59, 120-121.

[20] Writes Duncan, "H.D.'s apocalyptic vision in the *War Trilogy*…provides an historical perspective in which the experience of London under attack in the Second World War becomes meaningful in relation to depths and heights of personal reality, depths she had come to know in her psychoanalysis with Freud and then in new terms with the study of Occult and hermetic lore, heights she had known in aesthetic and erotic ideals as early as her first work" (H.D. Book 235).

[21] Freud suggests in "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis" that the ego in psychosis, instead of siding with external reality at the expense of the id, sides with the id at the expense of foreclosed ("*Verworfen*") external reality. This entails a reconstruction of reality which hallucination often abets.

[22] In *La Kabbale Pratique*, Ambelain writes that the "vibrations" of sounds cause the "ideas" linked to them to appear (34). These "ideas," which resemble Jungian archetypes but have their own "life," include "mother-ideas" (see *Analyzing Freud* 331, *Kabbale* 132).

[23] Writes Sword, "H.D. manages in her 'tribute' both to celebrate the famous psychoanalyst's memory and to skewer his most deeply held beliefs, portraying him as a 'beloved light-house keeper' who 'shut the door on transcendental speculations' but whose denial of the afterlife would in time be proven to be wrong…. She concludes her memoir by associating her self with Goethe's Mignon, leading her symbolic father and protector…over terrifying 'chasms or gulfs' to the promised land far beyond the grave, 'the land where the orange-tree blossoms'" (*Ghostwriting* 109-111).

[24] See Jung's testimony, quoted by Colin McCabe, in his Introduction to Freud's *The Schreber Case*. Jung records that Freud told him in 1910, "'My dear Jung promise me you will never abandon the theory of sexuality. That is the most essential thing. You see we must make a dogma of it, an unshakeable bulwark'…Somewhat astonished, I asked him: 'A bulwark, against what?' Whereupon he answered, 'Against the black muddy tide,' here he hesitated for a moment, then added, 'of Occultism'" (x).

[25] See also Timothy Materer, *Alchemy* 9-10.

[26] As Materer explains, in sympathetic magic "the destruction of a carven shape of a person will stand for the destruction of that very person [similarity], or the anointing of a knife will alleviate the pain of a wound made by the knife [contiguity]. In this association of ideas, Freud identifies two principles – similarity (as in the carving) and contiguity (as in the weapon); in literary art, the principles would be termed metaphor and metonymy. "Believers in animism use magic to gain control over the spirits, thereby imposing their will on the world and even triumphing over death. Freud compares such magic to art because our civilization credits the 'omnipotence of thought' only in 'the field of art…. People speak with justice of the 'magic of art' and compare artists to magicians" (*Alchemy* 12).

[27] See H.D., *Tribute:* "For my head…is already warning me that this is an unusual dimension, an unusual way to think, that my brain or mind may not be equal to the occasion…Here is this hieroglyph of the unconscious or subconscious of the Professor's discovery and life-study, the hieroglyph actually in operation before our very eyes. But it is no easy matter to sustain this mood, this 'symptom' or this inspiration" (47).

[28] In his introduction to *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* by Daniel Paul Schreber, Samuel Weber writes: "Schreber's most significant fantasies concern the body on one hand, and language on the other; that body and language stand in the closest possible relation to each other…*we are dealing with a text which does not stand apart from what it describes, but which itself is included in it*" (xli, my italics). My chapter title is taken from *Helen in Egypt* 63, hereafter cited in the text.

[29] Writes H.D., "Eros and Death; those two were the chief subjects – in fact, the only subjects – of the Professor's eternal preoccupation" (*Tribute* 103). *Helen in Egypt's* theme of the union of "*La Mort, L'Amour*" or "*Eros, Eris*" suggests Freud's conceptual merging of the life and death drives, into a single aggressive drive in his later work.

[30] Writes Lacan, "It is the lack of the Name-of-the-Father in that place which, by the hole that it opens up in the signified, sets off a cascade of reworkings of the signifier from which the growing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, until the level is reached where signifier and signified stabilize in a *delusional metaphor*" (*Écrits* 481).

[31] See Robert W. White's discussion of the early stages of paranoid schizophrenic illness. Writes White, "[i]n the early stages of the [paranoid schizophrenic] illness it is generally

possible to see a connection between the patient's misinterpretations of reality and his personal wishes, needs, and fears. As time goes on, however, the delusions tend to spread out in a disorganized fashion. Magical forces and mystical powers come into the picture, and strange influencing machines are supposed to exist which the patient may draw in great detail" (547).

[32] Angyal, for instance, ascribes an inability to deploy consistent frames of reference to sufferers from schizophrenia: "the schizophrenic is from the beginning greatly handicapped in apprehending, creating, and manipulating clearly separated fields which are prerequisites for any system formation…. I mean by the term 'system' the logical formation of the type of structure or integration or organization which exists in wholes" (121).

[33] Writes H.D., "Is this the Consecration du Cercle? (sic)…. Does the Circle dictate the material as well as the spiritual aspects of life? There is Heydt-Heydt…but this is balanced by the H.D.-H.D. of the War II contact, and by the earlier, almost perfected formula of the War I Madrigal. The H.D. of D.H. Lawrence almost does the trick, D.H. – H.D., but not quite" (*Compassionate* 39).

[34] As Weber describes Schreber's logic, "the cosmological system worked out by Schreber's 'compulsive thinking' sets him up as the object of God's gaze and the vanishing point into which pour the effects of the wounded cosmic order" (il).

[35] In *Compassionate Friendship* H.D. writes that Heydt "had scant sympathy with my War II story of the RAF and communications as for lord Howell. I felt his attitude was un-professional and destructive, especially as he had urged me to tell him about the War II novels, the first of which, *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, was a reconstruction of my contact with Lord Howell, through and because of the messages we had received, as narrated in the *Majic Ring*. Though much of the material is re-worked in The Sword, I had actually put aside The Ring, after I finished the first rough copy, winter 1944, and never saw it again until Bryher brought it to me from London, last winter, 1954…. Anyhow, we are back in late summer, 1953, when Erich went off, leaving a question un-answered and a possible compassionate friendship un-resolved.

This break in time, in continuity was more than compensated for, by my beginning the new Helen sequence, Leuké. I didn't much care then, what he did, thought, or was. He had acted as a dynamic liberator or inspiration for my Greek epic" (79).

[36] Writes H.D.,"I think the story [*The Mystery*, which she leant to Heydt] was read by Tiresias – what can I call him? – and that the note that Erich wrote about it was dictated by him…. I think I have gained, rather than lost, in visualizing Heydt as almost 'controlled' by this 'Boss' or 'Bally'…. Heydt would not have had time to find these references and books, even if he had had the intelligence to build up for me, this series of associations – if we can 'build' associations and I think we can" (*Compassionate* 113-4). She adds that "Zurich was always notorious for its spy-ring, its counter-espionage and

espionage circles. If the pseudo-Boss is the head of a spy-ring and Erich one of his chief minions, then what? Do they think I can be of use to them?" (115).

[37] As Weber points out, Schreber describes his emasculation in terms of possession by a language that acts on him from without. Writes Weber: "Because of its very structure, nerve language is anything but an expression of 'genuine feeling': it is much less an expression than an impression, something remembered, not the expression of something inward but the emergence in the interior of something outwards, something 'learned by rote'…. as a nerve the subject does not speak, it is spoken. Although Schreber does not say this in so many words, he writes it; or, perhaps more precisely, it writes him" (xxxvii).

[38] Thetis, both sea-goddess and (Achilles') mother, who manifests in Helen, brings maternity and non-differentiation together in a single name. In H.D.'s associative network, the sea is the mother, the "word bitterer still, *mar*,/ sea, brine, breaker, seducer,/ giver of life, giver of tears…. mer, mère, mere, mater, Maia, Mary, / Star of the Sea, / Mother" (*Tribute to the Angels*, 17).

[39] In psychosis, writes Ragland, "the signifier One (the phallic signifier or S_1) for difference has not been inscribed, thus carving lack into the narcissistic ideal image. While lack sends most beings in search of another person to complement them, the psychotic seeks a literal image of him or herself in others, not a supplement to a lack. When the psychotic subject is threatened by another person's distance (difference), he treats that other as a persecutor, like the superego Lacan described as an agent of ferocious jouissance" (49).

[40] Lacan writes that "[t]o be interested in structure is to be unable to neglect the signifier. In structural analysis, as in the analysis of the relationship between signifier and signified, we discover relations between groups founded on sets that, whether open or closed, essentially comprise reciprocal references" (*Psychoses* 184).

[41] See Tryphonopoulos' endnotes to *Majic Ring*, 196 and 206.

[42] See, for instance, *Hermetic Definition* 49-50. Here, in H.D.'s poetic response to Durand's death, "Star of the Day," she identifies as Durand's mother and describes her writing to him as her conception and delivery of him. This process is "controlled" by Isis: "génerateur, générant, / never to be gainsaid, / who ordered, ordained or controlled this / and compelled my stylus, pen or pencil / as I wrote, *I walk into you*." Durand's death is equated with her maternal delivery of him through writing.

[43] *Thorn Thicket* and *Compassionate Friendship* also make it clear what a vital context Theosophy and Robert Ambelain's *The Practical Kabbalah*, in which the mother-father-son triangle and the necessity for their integration also appears (*Kabbalah* 33) is to *Helen in Egypt*. The mother-father-son triangle also appears in *Sword*, where Delia associates Howell with her father and son, herself with Artemis and Howell with Hippolytus. (83) In

Hyppolytus Temporizes, H.D.'s creative 1927 adaptation of Euripides' play, Hippolytus substitutes Artemis for his mother as the object of his insistent and disastrous Oedipal complex. In *Helen in Egypt*, Küsnacht analyst Erich Heydt shares the position of son (and father) with Dowding/Howell.

[44] In *Majic Ring*, H.D. writes that "if [Zakenuto] (46) [or God (34) or Amen (48)] is the Word, he is essentially part of language" (46). The Word that was God, she reflects, said, 'I bring not peace but a sword'" (34). Helen, too, is essentially part of language, *Helen in Egypt* tells us, and Helen is "loved of War" (178); H.D. describes herself in *Thorn Thicket* as married to war.

[45] In *Majic Ring*, H.D. writes: "I was [Amen's] opposite – well, his opposite number for just that single flash in time. A picture was projected, we were in the picture, I did not see the picture, I was in the picture, the *tableau*, if you will, the cinema 'still'" (47).

[46] *Ryder* does not undercut Sophia's power by exposing her desire as successfully as it does with Wendell; and it is the grandmother, not the father, whose presence most haunts the pages of *Nightwood*. We are told that Sophia lies to her family, but *Ryder* provides little in the way of examples. She hides her begging, her "Do not strike her" covers Wendell's abuse, and the stories she reads to Julie fetishize dying little girls, but Sophia's own desire is unclear.

[47] The image, writes Lacan, "reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind" (*Seminar, XI* 99).

[48] Lacan, like Barnes, compares the emergence and disappearance of full speech to the "pulsation" of the vagina: "We find here [in the register of indestructible desire that escapes from time] the rhythmic structure of the pulsation of the slit…. The appearance/disappearance [of unconscious content] takes place between two points, the initial and the terminal of this logical time – between the instant of seeing, when something of the intuition itself is always elided, not to say lost, and that elusive moment when the apprehension of the unconscious is not, in fact, concluded, when it is always a question of an "absorption" fraught with false trails" (*Seminar, XI* 32).

[49] Barthes describes "mythologies" as systems of signs whose significations naturalize someone else's manipulative social agenda to the viewer/reader. Myths are contiguous: "The elements of the form …are related as to place and proximity: the mode of presence of the form is spatial. The concept, on the contrary, appears in a global fashion, it is a kind of nebula, the condensation, more or less hazy, of a certain knowledge. Its elements are linked by associative relations" (126).

[50] Barthes writes that "if I clearly distinguish the meaning and the form, and consequently the distortion that one imposes on the other, I undo the signification of the myth" (128).

[51] See Fink, 170-193. The pervert and the psychotic, writes Fink, engage in an attempt to supplement/provide the paternal function that brings the symbolic Other into existence – the pervert by staging or enacting the enunciation of the law, the psychotic by fomenting a delusional metaphor.

[52] For Klein, melancholia/orality is associated with the feminine subject-position and sadism/anality with the masculine one. Melancholia is characterized by a predominance of introjection over projection, to a point where "external reality is abolished." Sadism, conversely, seeks to abolish internal reality.

[53] Warren reads "alternative creation narratives which challenge the inherent sinfulness of femininity established by the conventional Eden narrative" (50). She uses the term "creation narrative" to denote a variety of stories that, except for Molly's, do not resemble re-tellings of Genesis, as the reader might have been led to expect by her phrasing.

[54] For some reason, Sanchez-Pardo's list does not include Laura Twelvetree and Kate-Careless, who are both portrayed as enjoying sex but not otherwise much rebelling against the patriarchal imperative.

[55] See Lacan's discussion of "denegation" in his "Introduction and reply to Jean Hyppolite's presentation of Freud's Verneinung," *The Seminar, I* 52-62. Lacan uses the term to denote the different ways (repression, disavowal, foreclosure) that the subject's speech denies, or "denegates" (since meaning is predicated on negation) meaning. The style of "denegation" can be neurotic ("I don't mean to say that my father was an ass"), psychotic ("God is a huge ass that covers me in shit') or perverse ("I know my father isn't really a huge ass, but still…").

[56] Sanchez-Pardo has come to a similar conclusion, writing that "*Ryder* questions the sacrificial logic that grounds language and the social upon the death of the mother, upon what Luce Irigary calls 'originary matricide'" (316). For Sanchez-Pardo "in *Ryder* the symbolic equation that literally appears as the death drive compulsively reappears under the guise of reproductive anxiety, in the disruption and destabilation of forms that mimics the laboring female body and the irresolution of the work of mourning, emerging in the pervasive cadence of melancholia" (341).

[57] See Žižek, *For They Know*, 245. Žižek here describes three modes of perverse disavowal, "which could be called 'normal,' 'manipulative,' [or cynical], and 'fetishistic' *stricto sensu*." These modes are respectively exemplified in *Ryder* by Amelia, Sophia, and Wendell. "Normal" disavowal and "melancholia" will be aligned in my usage, since in both (in *Ryder*) what is known and not-known is preserved in the subject as other. "Cryptophoria" partakes of both, but with a specificity of detail that my chapter on *Nightwood* will be more concerned with describing, since it is a more established phenomenon there.

[58] Warren describes Sophia's palimpsestic pictures as a "reinscription of the domestic space as cultural pantheon [which] parallels Sophia's reworking of traditional femininity [and] develops the novel's polyphony, by including a remarkable range of figures whom she admires" (55). Warren's analysis notes only the culturally valued figures, and does not mention the newspaper clippings.

[59] Blyn comes to a similar conclusion in her reading of *Nightwood*, writing that its "aesthetic of indeterminacy [is] arrived at through the competing claims of spiel and tableau…. the hyperbolic and contradictory art of verbal spiel repeatedly points its audience to a visual tableau that refuses to confirm its claims" (512). Blyn notes the relation between "freakishness" and incorporation in *Nightwood*: "as the characters aggrandize themselves, they create the theatrical sets of their own freak tableau, and their will to Aestheticism becomes the measure of their freakishness… as protection against the threat of incorporation, competing explanations of Robin vie with one another in *Nightwood*… contradicting each other and casting one another into doubt" (513).

[60] Though critical responses have suggested that *Ryder* has one narrator, and that this is the adult Julie, its diversity of narrative voices, personalities and agendas suggests that they may not issue from a single fictional entity. *Ryder* itself does not suggest that its narrator is Julie.

[61] As Kate tells Wendell, "you know not what you do, and leave it to me to find out and my father to guard" (159).

[62] As Barthes discusses, myths are not always necessarily bad. The agenda in the service of which the myth is employed must be a measure of its ethical status: a mytheme in service of a progressive/subversive agenda is ethically different from one that naturalizes political oppression (146-148).

[63] Sophia's maiden name, Grieves, as Sanchez-Pardo has observed (315), suggests *grief* and *graves*, the death and burial of the maternal body as the founding gesture of patriarchy.

[64] Barnes also uses the term "after life" for Sophia's own life after her loss of Alex, who betrayed her with a "wench" (84) to her sorrow: "In after life, Sophia looked upon [her will, stipulating that she be buried with Alex] with amazement" (80).

[65] This positive assimilation of experience is what Abraham and Torok call "introjection." In contrast to Klein's (and my) use of the term, they use it to describe a process of ego-expansion and maturation.

[66] Warren reads Amelia's creation myth credulously. For instance, from Amelia's remark that "I never had much education…so the jungle was never scratched off my heart" (115), Warren concludes that "Amelia's lack of formal education has in this instance become a virtue, as it allows her to comprehend a world not dominated by the 'faulty

fancies' of Wendell's consciously ordered thought"(*Consuming* 67). Amelia, even though she is engaged in cleaning the excrement of Wendell's pigeons, is for Warren defying him with her story of the primeval life-web, and thus presenting "a significant challenge to bourgeois morality." This argument may call to mind Anne's observation that "there's no wit in woman's thinking one thing and doing another" (73).

[67] A more accurate version of reality, as Sanchez-Pardo has discussed (311-316), is that Wendell's myth of sufficiency exploits Sophia, who begs, and Amelia and Kate, who bear children in conditions of drudgery.

[68] This "itself that is behind" a picture, writes Lacan, is the gaze of the other which renders the subject himself split, a picture as well as a being. Lacan in *The Seminar, XI* describes the gaze as "the *object a* in the visual field" (105). As such, it "serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus…insofar as it is lacking" (103).

[69] Though I have associated the need to say everything with psychotic writing in my H.D. chapters, André links it to perversion because of the pervert's need to fulfill the lack in the Other, both as other person and as language itself: "[l]anguage can say everything apart from non-language. It is precisely against these limits that the pervert protests, by upholding in many instances, be it only in the peculiar relationship entertained with the fantasy, the challenge of saying everything" (119).

[70] Little Emily, too, relinquishes her sexuality and dies in aesthetic splendor: "'and here,' said Emily, 'take the needle from me, it is too heavy!' and she closed her sweet violet eyes and breathed no more' – And the darkness pulled at the lamp and at Julie and tore her away from her beloved [Sophia] while yet she lay upon her breast" (122).

[71] Ponsot and Dalton have discussed the implicit sexual abuse of Julie in *Ryder*. See "Escaping from Eden," and "A Reader's *Ryder*."

[72] As well as, perhaps, a figure for Wendell's ejaculation, as it has been read by Dalton (170). There is an indistinction between semen and excrement in *Ryder*.

[73] Suggestions of incestuous sexual relations in the Ryder family abound. For instance, Elisha and Wendell seem to get quite close in bed while talking of "woman": "In the dark Elisha wet his lips, and said softly, tell me, what is a woman?" (224). On falling asleep after having defined woman, Wendell, "his red hair spread like a girl's upon the pillow," and Elisha, whose mouth is now open, appear to be groping one another in their sleep, while "dreaming things they never thought of" (226). In "Amelia and Kate Taken to Bed" Timothy may molest Julie, (as argued by Ponsot) who cries "'Wendell! Wendell!' as she lay on her bed of playful maternity, aged ten, holding to her breast the rag doll thrown from the door to the immediate left by the strong arm of Timothy, who was God and the Father" (95). Wendell observes of his own first sexual encounter that "Every man…has been initiated into these matters either by a kitchen slut or an elder aunt, who remains a

maiden for all of that" (167). Mere copulation, he implies, is not enough to remove the aunt's status as "maiden" without the company of a spoken acknowledgement.

[74] Levi-Strauss argues in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (8) that incest may be the source of language. Its unspeakablility may found the need for the binary oppositions which structure language.

[75] Žižek describes feminine melancholia as the "fascination towards the wound" of the male gaze (*Ticklish* 248-9).

[76] Sanchez-Pardo also links feminine sexuality to melancholia since both, in Kleinian theory, are the products of excessive orality and introjection of the superego (73-93).

[77] Just as the melancholic "saintly" mother cannot give birth without dying, the child "cannot cast out" (12) the mother, as Sophia knows to her advantage.

[78] Sanchez-Pardo interprets this passage in terms of Molly's resistance to "the splitting imposed by the law (into libertine, whore, thief, bad mother)." In constituting herself as "Molly Dance to the end," she writes, Molly "resists disintegration and remains whole" (334). Where Sanchez-Pardo reads Molly's refusal to be split, I read her insistence on her particularity.

[79] The rape victim's fracturing is further suggested by the multiple gazes of animals that, the lynch mob suggests, are trained on her: "To the Oblong Eye of the deer, is not your Condition lengthened? By the Owl, is there not purchased a Dreadful Rotundity? To the Shallow Eye of the Fish, you are but a little staled, but to the Bossy Eye of the Ox, you may ride as High and Damned as Jezebel!" (*Ryder* 25).

[80] Klein reverses Freud's theory that women have laxer superegos than men, and maintains that the reverse is true. Writes Sanchez-Pardo, "for Klein, anatomical differences – such as the absence of a penis or the receptive function of female genitals – stress the importance of oral impulses and introjective tendencies in the girl, resulting in the 'introjection of her super-ego [being] more extensive than the boys…. The processes of introjection and projection are also stronger in women, and this is of vital importance for the development of their egos'" (83).

[81] Abraham and Torok describe "anasemia" as "the founding silence of any act of signification" (84). It "designates the status of concepts which, though deliberately disruptive of a unifying, conscious self, outline the ultimate unconscious sense or source of the disruption" (77). Thus, anasemia advances "toward this nonpresence in us, the place from which all meaning ultimately springs" (85). This place toward which it advances is "the realm of 'transphenomenology' or 'symbols'" (77).

[82] In *Nightwood*, as I will show, feminine redoubling is reflected in lesbian sexuality, figured as an uncanny external redoubling of an internal "crypt."

[83] Barthes cites the example of a French-African soldier saluting the French flag on the cover of a French magazine to exemplify how "mythology" seeks to eclipse the shameful history of French imperialism in Africa by naturalizing French nationalism in French-Africans (116-122). Abraham and Torok cite coprophagy as an example of "antimetaphor." The eating of shit attempts to abolish the metaphorical associations of shit with the shameful secret by pretending that it is an appetizing substance (132-133).

[84]Like Lacan, Barnes links both sexual reproduction and consciousness to "dehiscence," a botanical term which designates the bursting of seed-pods. With an allusiveness not unlike Barnes's, Lacan writes that there is "a vital dehiscence constitutive of man" which "render[s] foreign" the "original organic chaos" that the child experiences before acquiring language, and enables "the Heraclitean notion of Discord…to shine once more" (*Écrits* 94).

[85] Freud's suggestion in "Fetishism" that the fetish-object may be chosen for its proximity, in a repressed memory, to the parents' genitals (for instance, high heeled shoes may be chosen for their proximity to the mother's genitals in the first, traumatic encounter) must be modified when the trauma is remembered: the fetish-object could not stand for something repressed but could distort something remembered.

[86] Torok states that "the 'wolf' is chosen [in fairytales] precisely for its implicit reference to the grandmother" (181).

[87] The ending of the popular modern novel *Vandover and the Brute*, argues Dana Seitler, could be a model for the ending of *Nightwood*, with the sexually indiscriminate Vandover on all fours barking "Wolf-wolf!" (556).

[88] Agamben describes "*homo sacer*" as a category of life that is contained in the political order but has no legal status in it (82), and reads the ancient, cross-cultural figure of the wolf-man as a trope for *homo sacer* (104-111).

[89] For Victoria Smith, Robin represents the past that history elides. She is "a metonym for history and memory […] both a psychic and a textual device, the epitome of explanation by (necessary) indirection, described almost entirely through analogies" (199).

[90] Susannah Martins and Jane Marcus see Robin as a crusader for the queering of the sexual subject, a destabilizer of identity categories. For Martins, Robin "consciously becomes the 'cultural' ideal of 'natural,' 'bestial,' 'prediscursive' Woman," (123) to trouble this ideal. Marcus reads "The agency of [Robin's] desire and its refusal to be fixed by the desire of lesbian lovers or husband, contained in motherhood, or controlled by T.S. Eliot's or other critics' reading of her as doomed, damned, or pathologically placed as a medical case study [as] a textual triumph" (237).

[91] Although Merril Cole suggests that Robin's last name, "Vote," ironizes her lack of volition (406), she maintains that Robin is "the novel's sovereign power" (408-409). Her argument accounts for Robin's effects on others but conflates her psychology with what she represents to them: Robin "figures" *jouissance* because she "does not fear" (395) it. For Cole, *Nightwood* thus "celebrates… alterity's escape" (392) in Robin.

[92] Christine Coffman writes that *Nightwood*'s "present symbolic" projects onto Robin an image of its own "seeming 'past,'" the presymbolic, in order to "misrecognise its internal movement of decay" (119-120). However, by reversing the symbolic's terms of "beast turning human" to "human turning beast," Robin "opens a space for its displacement" (135). Thus, though for Coffman, Robin is psychotic because of her "refusal to accept the foundational condemnation through which the Western symbolic would install guilt," the novel suggests that "she might, within another symbolic, be otherwise" (120).

[93] Writes Gary Sherbert, "Robin's entombment consciously repeats Nora's unconscious entombment of her grandmother and therefore offers a means of healing Nora's psychic wound" (129).

[94] By the end of the nineteenth century, writes Foucault, "The… medical category of homosexuality was constituted… less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself. Homosexuality… was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (43).

[95] See Sander Gilman, *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, 193.

[96] Gender, Butler speculates, may be a repetitive behavior resulting from melancholic inward "turns" from the lost same-sex other. Writes Butler, "we might understand both 'masculinity' and 'femininity' as formed and consolidated through identifications which are in part composed of disavowed grief" (*Power* 139).

[97] Butler, *Power*, 115-116. Guilt and acquittal first "interpellate" the subject in Butler's reading of Althusserian "ideological interpellation." Here, language produces the subject as the means through which he or she is both "presumed guilty" and acquitted: "the very possibility of subject formation depends on a passionate pursuit of a recognition which…is inseparable from a condemnation" (113).

[98] See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Žižek describes political "disavowal" as the mechanism by which the internal antagonisms of a political body are projected onto a sub-category within it, the inclusive exclusion of which constitutes the political body proper by allowing it to misrecognize itself as an organic whole (except for the corrupting presence of the Jews, homosexuals, and so on). *Nightwood* suggests a similar vision of political disavowal: "[a]ll that we have loved becomes the 'forbidden' when we have not understood it all, as the pauper is the rudiment of the city, knowing

something of the city, which the city, for its own destiny, wants to forget" (156). What the pauper and Robin "know" is "the terrible night" (89), the night that renders life "wild and anonymous" (81). See also Agamben's discussion of the "sovereign exception" in *Homo Sacer*, 37-38.

[99] For a discussion of the wolf as a trope in folklore and modern literature for the social predator, see Ann Martin, *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed: Modernism's Fairy Tales*.

[100] Freud's study of the Wolf-Man, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," is taken up by Abraham and Torok in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: a Cryptonymy*. However, here the significance of the wolf proceeds from the Wolf Man's multilingualism: "wolf" homophonically resembles the Russian "fly" (zipper); so it is not relevant to my study of Barnes's cryptonymy.

[101] See Cole 405; Coffman 135; and Seitler 554. Writes Seitler, "becoming animal represents a sexual subjectivity…that takes place…between the flaps of the nature-culture, sex-gender binary, and through a series of spaces in which the characters of *Nightwood* gather and meet in nocturnal, degenerate, and wretched festivity" (554).

[102] See Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender*.

[103] O'Connor's "power of speech," writes Judith Lee, "is associated with the experience of separation and difference" (217).

[104] Butler suggests that queer identity may not lack gender melancholy, but involve "an effort to disavow a constitutive relationship to heterosexuality" (*Power* 148).

[105] Though the novel's narrative voice refers to O'Connor in the masculine and Barnes scholars still do so, in today's terminology O'Connor is a heterosexual woman.

[106] For formative discussions of the theories of "biopower" and "compelled citation," see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. I*, and Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."*

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