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“do the mysteries untangle / but to re-weave?”:

The Egyptian Hieroglyph as Quixotic Ideogram

in H.D.’s Helen in Egypt

by

Alison Halsall, B.A. Hons., Carleton

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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acceptance of the thesis,

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Thesis Supervisor

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Abstract

This thesis will examine H.D.'s long poem, Helen in Egypt, a recreation of the Helen of Troy myth. By revising this popular legend that emphasizes Helen's fatal beauty which provoked the Trojan War, H.D. attempts to resurrect the mother goddess and to affirm matriarchal power. The structure of this long poem is influenced by Ezra Pound's notion of the ideogram which hints at a recurring theme in a simple word or an entire section, a theme which is deciphered through intuition rather than logic. In H.D.'s poem, the enigmatic hieroglyphs Helen encounters in Egypt are similar to Poundian ideograms in that they take the form of a simple memory, an event, or even an entire character, and allude to recurring themes of memory, oppositional states of love and war, and masculine and feminine principles. The recreation of Helen *of* Troy as Helen *in* Egypt occurs as these arcane signs and abstract notions are gradually decoded.

This thesis will examine H.D.'s interest in and revision of popular Greek, Roman and Egyptian myths to correspond with her proto-feminist perspective. It will describe the importance of memory and the antagonism between love and strife in the first book, the "Pallinode". H.D.'s use of the mother goddess figure in Helen in Egypt, as well as the influences of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theories on her works will help to clarify the second and third books, "Leuké" and "Eidolon", in this long poem.

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Introduction

I. Introductory Remarks

The American modernist poet, Hilda Doolittle, received enthusiastic recognition as an Imagist poet whose talents were first recognized by Ezra Pound. H.D.'s Imagist poems are restricted to the beginning of her literary career. The rest of her works, also characterized by vivid images and an attention to detail, explore different narrative and lyrical structures although they have received less scrutiny than her early poems. To define H.D. purely as an Imagist poet is thus to misconstrue her literary efforts. Throughout her career, she experimented with the Greek dramatic, lyrical, and mythological traditions, often donning a "Greek mask" (Retallack 72) through which she could articulate universal emotions and insecurities. During the First and Second World Wars, many artists -- such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and William Carlos Williams -- returned to myth or to heroic figures in order to reestablish a sense of stability and hope to counteract the disorder that characterized the opening decades of the twentieth century. In H.D.'s war epic, Trilogy (1942-44), for example, "old values" (5) have been destroyed during the confusion of war, and artists are encouraged to return to myth to resurrect the great heroes and inspirational events which will once again instill hope. H.D.'s revision of accepted legends proves highly innovative in both Trilogy and Helen in Egypt (1951-54) because she deviates from convention and focuses not on heroic male figures, but on women whose place in antiquity has been diminished by androcentric and patriarchal values. Through such revision,

H.D. constantly reinterprets accepted stories in order to unveil the political and gender ideologies which drive them. Although she was never affiliated with any suffragist movements, H.D. adopted what can be described as a proto-feminist perspective through her transformation of patriarchal myths in order to affirm matriarchal power and to resurrect the goddess archetype. Just as the goddess in Helen in Egypt attempts to discover a new identity which is separate from the negative one Greek culture had imposed upon Helen of Troy, so H.D. tries to “unravel the tangle / that no man can ever un-knot” (Helen 309), namely the jumble of ideologies that frames our interpretation of myth.

Helen in Egypt, H.D.’s retelling of the Helen of Troy myth, was written between 1951 and 1954, and published in 1961, the year of her death. Previously, in Trilogy, the poet transformed Mary Magdalene from seductress to spiritual guide; now she depicts Helen as a sympathetic figure deserving compassion. The patriarchal myth, which portrayed Helen as the cause of both the Trojan War and the ensuing loss of life, is revised in order to free her from this collective blame. H.D. had long been reading Ezra Pound’s Cantos which were gradually being published from the close of the Second World War. She believed that her long poem about Helen formed a feminine version of the Cantos which avoided Pound’s androcentrism, Fascism and hero-worship, and focused instead on the worship of the goddess, and the condemnation of the heroic and Fascistic beliefs (Ostriker “Women”, 490). In Helen in Egypt, Pound’s notion of the ideogram metamorphoses into H.D.’s Egyptian hieroglyph, an enigmatic symbol which comes to represent the entire poem. “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?” (Helen 48), Helen asks early in the poem, indicating the confusion she feels towards these icons. The hieroglyphs

alter from being thoroughly incomprehensible, to becoming images which, as they are revealed, permit a process of self-discovery.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the use of the hieroglyph in the structure of the poem as an abstract sign that Helen must decode in order to arrive at enlightenment. This paper will demonstrate that the complex organization of Helen in Egypt grows from the central idea of a hidden truth which can only be understood as the ideograms or hieroglyphs are revealed. An examination of the importance that H.D. places on myth as a repository for universal paradigms and emotions, as well as her revision of accepted legends is necessary before I consider the themes as well as the hieroglyphic structure of the "Pallinode", the first section of the poem. Finally, a study of H.D.'s fascination with the mother and goddess archetypes, as well as her sessions with Sigmund Freud, will help to elucidate the second and third sections of H.D.'s long poem as hieroglyphs of self-realization.

* * *

II. The Egyptian Hieroglyph as Ideogram

In Philadelphia in 1902, H.D. met Ezra Pound, the innovative and very young poet to whom she later became engaged and who influenced her development as an Imagist poet. Although the engagement was soon broken and Pound, contemptuous of its supposed ineffectuality, left the Imagist group, H.D. remained an admirer of his work despite his support of Fascism and his eventual incarceration for treason in St. Elizabeth's hospital. One element of

Pound's poetics which H.D. greatly admired was his creation of the ideogram, an idea that stemmed originally from Ernest Fenollosa's manifesto, "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," in which he affirms that Chinese characters form a truly poetic language because they convey both verbal indices and visual images. Ezra Pound met Mary Fenollosa in 1912, and agreed to edit the sixteen notebooks in which her husband recorded his interest in the characters. "My subject is poetry, not language, yet the roots of poetry are in language" (Fenollosa in Allen 13), Fenollosa had written in 1900, establishing from the outset of the essay his desire for a poetry infused with energy. Chinese written characters, he suggests, are a perfect example of a dynamic and dramatic poetry because these pictorial symbols rely principally on verbs. Fenollosa argues that verbs form the fundamental language of poetry since they naturally embody an energetic quality, and that active verbs are linked to nature because nature itself is constantly in process (17). Since Chinese characters represent the vital forces of nature in pictorial form, they are vivid and imbued with energy. He finds this attempt to capture the vitality of natural processes to be a refreshing change from the Western tendency not only to ornament poetry with flimsy, insincere and abstract images, but also to resort to the overuse of copula verbs and the passive voice, verb forms which weaken the sense of immediacy. Fenollosa provides an example of the active voice typical of Chinese structure with the statement, "Man sees horse," to demonstrate how Chinese characters preserve the transitive, and therefore immediate, quality of the experience (19). He celebrates metaphor because of its ability to equate human feelings with natural processes (26). For example, he notes how the written character meaning "to speak" in Chinese depicts a flame coming out of a mouth -- a pictorial image which combines both human activity and a vital energy.

Ezra Pound's notion of the ideogram emphasizes this sense of process and energy that Fenollosa observed in both nature and in language. In 1912, Pound compared words to hollow cones which were charged with an electrical force. He believed that the placement of the words or images, or the cones for that matter, was crucial in order to guarantee that they interacted with each other and augmented the poetic force of the overall work. Pound described this phenomenon as follows:

"Thus three or four words in exact juxtaposition are capable of radiating this energy at a very high potentiality; mind you, the juxtaposition of their vertices must be exact and the angles or 'signs' of discharge must augment and not neutralize each other. This particular energy which fills the cones is the power of tradition, of centuries of race consciousness, of agreement, of association; and the control of it is the 'Technique of Content' which nothing short of genius understands". (quoted in Kenner 160)

The impact of the Vorticist movement on Pound can be heard in his insistence that the image be filled with energy in order to be truly animated. His concept of the ideogram is a method of writing which owes much to Fenollosa's observations that Chinese written characters depict specific patterns in nature and suggest rather than assert meanings. The juxtaposition of verbal fragments and visual images is central to Pound's methodology in the Cantos, and the role of the reader is to organize these fragments into a coherent whole. Ideograms placed sequentially reflect vital forces, and when they interact with one another, similar to cinematic frames in a montage, they create a composite picture. Pound does not simply try to convey ideas in a linear and logical fashion in his Cantos, but also attempts to generate feelings through images, "the intellectual and

emotional complex” (Pound in Allen, 37), as he earlier defined them. In his Cantos, the impressions that he develops are more than just static visual images; they are moving images, dynamic concepts which are formulated in separate and often contrasting cantos, and the overall feeling is what unites them. Their meanings are intended to be deciphered intuitively and associatively, rather than logically. By eschewing logical arrangement (which tricks the reader into believing that he / she fully grasps the author’s intentions), Pound achieves a kind of polyvalency, in which there can be no single, unitary meaning. Since this technique views art as part of a continual process rather than as a finished product (Cordell 252), the critics’ interpretations of Pound’s Cantos constantly changed during their long period of production, and have since continued to change.

Helen in Egypt utilizes hieroglyphs and ideograms which are even more enigmatic than those found in Pound’s Cantos. They gradually become intelligible to both the reader and the central character of the goddess, Helen, as she proceeds on her quest for self-discovery. Each hieroglyph is a cryptic symbol or sign that can signify an action or event, a repressed memory, an entire character, or an abstract idea within the context of this surreal poem. While Fenollosa’s Chinese written characters emphasize man’s relationship to nature through the metaphorical process, the hieroglyphs in H.D.’s long poem intensify the hidden psychological forces which determine our fate. H.D.’s hieroglyphs not only designate a sense of pattern, but also suggest a larger, more momentous message behind the initial meaning. H.D., by drawing on Pound’s method, encourages the interpretation of multiple meanings, and avoids static or fixed central ideas. The entire poem is a combination of hieroglyphs juxtaposed with one another to create a dynamic intensity. The interaction between these images develops the experience of process

which drives the poem because the reader, like Helen, is constantly attempting to understand a myriad of concepts both separately and in relation to one another.

This emphasis on hieroglyphs, whether they are visual or purely metaphorical, is also linked to H.D.'s experiments with Imagist poetics because of the importance she places on visual modes of thought to capture the essence of an experience (Friedman Psyche, 55). Richard Gray describes the photographic quality which is developed in H.D.'s long poem:

Images are, in H.D.'s own words, 'superimposed on one another like a stack of photographic negatives': one image or perception leads into another and the reader's imagination is actively engaged, making the connections, discovering the point of intersection. Instead of a story, in which events occur in time, or a process of logical argument, there is a juxtaposing or overlaying of different images and impressions; and their inter-action, the energy that passes between them, constitutes the 'argument' of the poem. (60)

Similar to Pound's paratactical method, the hieroglyph is an organic form whose meaning arrives intuitively and thus avoids the stultifying predictability of contemporary rationalism and logic. H.D. slowly transforms the Image into the psychological hieroglyph, "the visual script 'that concealed yet revealed' the enigma of the buried self" (Friedman Psyche, 61). Specific themes -- such as the resurrection of the goddess as well as the differences between masculine and feminine principles -- are portrayed in each book, in each section and in many of the individual cantos of H.D.'s poem. The poem progresses past a series of enigmatic images which portray the different steps in her quest, and the memories that Helen must decipher before arriving at a new sense of identity. The endless interconnections between past, present and future, as well as between

different mythological figures represent the new “reality” in which H.D. effects a reconciliation of binary opposites, rescues the figure of Helen from patriarchal condemnation, and in turn releases much of the tension which has been developed through these juxtapositions.

The hieroglyph in Helen in Egypt can also refer to the notion of the “*hieroglyph of the unconscious*” (Tribute 93) that Sigmund Freud encouraged H.D. (who considered herself to be in training as Freud’s analysand) to penetrate. To both Freud and H.D., the dream was a manifestation of unconscious thought in hieroglyphic form (Friedman Psyche, 53), a conundrum which could be decoded by using Freud’s method of “free association” (21) which examined the interrelationships between different dreams and symbols to penetrate their cryptic meanings. This long poem reads as a form of self-analysis in which Helen slowly develops the skills which allow her to interpret the signs correctly as well as to understand the mystery of her own identity. Specific hieroglyphs reappear throughout the text in the recurring images of the hare, the vulture, and the bee, and in particular memories that the characters share. Since they gradually become more clear, this indicates that the characters in the poem are progressing on their individual quests. These hieroglyphs, according to Rose Lucas, “like the hieroglyphics of the buried mind, conceal even as they reveal, give concrete form and therefore understanding to what was hitherto inaccessible” (54). The role of the characters, the reader, and ultimately the poet is to uncover the different layers of language and meaning. Since Helen’s quest is for the interpretation of these icons, she constantly attempts to translate images, symbols and events from her past into a language she can understand and which will facilitate her own self-discovery. The omniscient narrator in Helen in Egypt, for example, informs the reader that Helen is starting to translate something that is concerned with time (what is identified in the text as human life) and timeless

time (what the reader learns to define as immortality). "*Helen achieves the difficult task of translating a symbol in time, into timeless-time or hieroglyph or ancient Egyptian time*" (Helen 13). This process of translation is continuous, however, and takes place even in the final section of the poem. Because of her ability to interpret these glyphs, Helen becomes a guide to whom the great Achilles must listen in order to understand and be reawakened to the life principle that his mother, Thetis, had once revealed to him. As well, since Helen has long been castigated as an adulteress by the Greeks, and left voiceless in traditional versions of myths, H.D. pointedly describes her as the only figure capable of translating these enigmatic symbols. Helen reveals:

"there is mystery in this place,
I am instructed, I know the script,
the shape of this bird is a letter,

they call it the hieroglyph;
strive not, it is dedicate [sic]
to the goddess here, she is Isis". (13-4)

Because of the poem's similarity to psychoanalysis, H.D. does not provide a definite sense of closure at the conclusion of Helen in Egypt, but instead leaves it open-ended to prolong the process of self-discovery indefinitely.

Helen herself is an hieroglyph, a site of open meaning, within H.D.'s long poem. Greek, Roman and Egyptian versions of the Helen myth are merged so that this figure becomes a free signifier that H.D. can manipulate to destroy the negative image of Helen as the cause of the Trojan War. Helen in Egypt is constructed so as to allow Helen to understand who and what the hieroglyph, "Helen", connotes; the question that recurs continually throughout the text on the part of many of the characters, and especially of Helen, is "who am I?" (16). The poem unveils as a series of memories through which Helen must reconcile her respective identities as Helen

Dendritis (the Helen who eloped from Sparta with Paris), Helen of Troy, and Helen in Egypt. It is significant that the meaning of the hieroglyph which the reader tries to discover becomes emblematic of the enigma of Helen's own identity. Before meeting Achilles in Egypt, for example, she is depicted as the scribe who can decode the glyphs; but after their traumatic encounter on the beach, she becomes the object which must be studied, a "living hieroglyph" (24). At this point in the poem, Helen herself is an hieroglyph which she is desperately trying to decode. While living in Egypt, she constructs a reassuring identity for herself; but Achilles' arrival disrupts her secure world when he asks distressing questions that shatter her peaceful state by recalling her past actions. "I was happier alone, / why did I call him to me? / must I forever look back" (38), she asks in dismay. Helen comes to wonder whether the myth of Helen of Troy as temptress might not be true, and whether she was in fact the cause of Achilles' death on the ramparts of Troy. The stable identity she once held in Egypt is called into question by the great hero's arrival, leaving her with an identity which becomes increasingly enigmatic. The hieroglyph brings a sense of Egyptian mystery to H.D.'s depiction of Greek life. Such an emphasis on the Egyptian mysteries is also directly linked with H.D.'s implied feminization of Greek culture; for example, the figure of Achilles who typifies the Greeks is slowly transformed from arrogant warrior to romantic lover.

Chapter I

I. "all myth, the one reality / dwells here": H.D.'s Greek Mask

Although H.D.'s recreation of the Helen myth appears to be representative of the growing tendency towards "revisionist myth-making" on the part of women writers during the twentieth century,¹ its roots can be found in classical Greek poetry. Richmond Lattimore traces the story about the phantom of Helen which was sent to Troy in place of the real goddess to Hesiod's lost works; the idea that Helen remained in Egypt during the war he attributes to Herodotus (Greene 483-4). A later Greek lyric poet, Stesichorus, wrote poems in the sixth century B.C. which dealt with such legendary subjects as the adventures of Heracles, events surrounding the Trojan War, and one fragment that suggested Helen was never in Troy (West xvi). According to Sir Paul Harvey, legend relates that when Stesichorus accused Helen of being the cause for Troy's devastation, he was struck blind by the Dioscuri, a blindness that was finally lifted once he wrote a "Palinode" in which he retracted his denunciation of Helen (406). The suggestion that the goddess did not travel to Troy can be found in one of the few pieces which remain of Stesichorus's writing -- "This tale they tell's not true: / you did not sail in those benched ships / or come to the towers of Troy" (89) -- a segment H.D. almost surely read. Furthermore, Euripides, in his play Helen (written in 412 B.C.), develops the story that Herodotus expounded upon, but portrays Helen as being spirited away from Troy by the gods, and brought to Egypt where she waited patiently for Menelaus to rescue her. Euripides completely deviates from accepted

versions of the myth in order to reclaim Helen's reputation, and portrays her as constantly attempting to "keep [her] body uncontaminated by disgrace" (415) from the approaches of Theoclymenus, the king of Egypt. H.D. translated several of Euripides' choruses and plays, Ion in particular, because the Greek tragedian offered an unconventional approach to classical myths and to Greek cultural politics (Duplessis Career, 18), and because he represented women in a sympathetic way. In Notes on Thought and Vision, H.D. writes that "Euripides is a white rose, lyric, feminine, a spirit" (32). In choosing to translate certain Euripidean plays, H.D. focuses on those with a male-centered, militaristic code which ignores peace in favor of war, and destruction is camouflaged beneath the concept of honor (Dodd 45). By drawing on different sources to construct her recreation of the mythical Helen, H.D. demonstrates that the goddess is not a simple figure but rather a composite of the legends which have been conceived about her. Robert Duncan suggests that "Helen is entirely a creature of story, having her life in all that has been told of her" (Bertholf 46).

Through the translations of these classical plays as well as several of her poems about mythological figures (such as "Cassandra", "Circe", and "Eurydice"), H.D. underscores not only the similarities between war and violence in classical times and the modern era, but also the oppression, betrayal and sacrifice that women have long experienced.² H.D.'s short poem, "Helen", directly addresses the myth of the beautiful woman whom the Greeks blamed for the Trojan War. In the poem, H.D. depicts Helen as submitting passively to the hatred that is directed at her, and emphasizes her "still eyes", her "white face" and "white hands"; the fact that her face is "wan and white" shows how this overwhelming anger has weakened her. Since H.D.'s poem contains no specific reference to her infidelity with Paris, the Greek hatred and revulsion are

portrayed as unfounded. "All Greece reviles / the wan face when she smiles, / hating it deeper still / when it grows wan and white, / remembering past enchantments / and past ills" (Collected Poems 155). Helen is never allowed to respond to the accusations, but is instead barraged mercilessly by the vehement condemnation. All of Greek culture castigates this woman, and this hatred seems to turn her to stone. Only as a statue, then, does Helen become less threatening because now she is the objectified form of the evil temptress that this culture condemns. The poet announces that Greek culture "could love indeed the maid, / only if she were laid, / white ash amid funereal cypresses" (155).

Although Euripides certainly reverses the traditional Helen myth, he does reinforce particular gender binary oppositions by casting Helen as the faithful wife of Menelaus who waits patiently for him to arrive, and who mutilates herself in order to convince Theoclymenus that her husband died during his return voyage to Greece. The domestic role that Euripides designed for her can be considered a ploy to counter the idea of her rebellious nature which manifested itself in her supposed elopement with Paris. Furthermore, Helen curses her beauty, the one characteristic for which she is universally recognized, cuts her hair and gouges her cheeks with her nails for the horrible war that her phantom caused in Troy (Euripides 458). H.D. was thankful that poets and dramatists, such as Stesichorus and Euripides, had written lyrics or plays which supported her interpretation of the legend; in a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson on 30 September 1952, she wrote, "It is fascinating however, that there are these stories that so perfectly fit my legend" (Hollenberg Between, 129). Although Euripides revised the myth of Helen the temptress by portraying her as the chaste wife of Menelaus, H.D.'s dramatic monologue deviates completely from his interpretation and instead attempts to create a "realistic" figure by recounting the poem

from her perspective. Though it has been argued that Helen is placed in a passive position which is reminiscent of the condition in which many women have been depicted in literature (Duplessis Career, 109), Helen finds herself able to choose what to do, and the form of self-analysis is an approach H.D. herself promoted as an effective method to probe the unconscious. Moreover, the figures of Helen and Achilles in H.D.'s long poem are similar to Helen and Menelaus in Euripides' play in that these Homeric characters who once represented the respective oppositions of love and war are newly contextualized, and finally joined in a harmonious whole. The prose passage which prefaces the first book in the "Pallinode" reveals the origins of this recreated Helen myth in Stesichorus and Euripides, and explains that this poem is "*a defence, explanation or apology*" (Helen 1) to women for the transformation of Helen into a scapegoat against whom the patriarchy can direct its anger. It also suggests that H.D.'s poem will revise this negative version of Helen. This way, according to Susan Friedman, H.D. "bases her defense of Helen on a redefinition of innocence that squarely confronts the patriarchal mythos by which women were either chaste wife or illicit lover. H.D.'s 'pallinode' is a 'song against' the male-dominated system of values that victimized Helen as *both* wife and lover" (Psyche 255).

Since H.D.'s poem progresses in a stream of consciousness fashion in which both the temporal and spatial flows are continually disrupted, it further reflects the modernist experiments with different narrative and lyrical forms that can be seen in Joyce's epic, Ulysses, and Pound's Cantos. Helen in Egypt does not develop in a linear but rather in a circular fashion, starting in the middle of the story and simultaneously introducing past and future experiences into the narrative, in order to accentuate the links which can be made between antithetical poles of thought so that they seem not so oppositional in quality but part of a universal whole which Helen, and H.D.

herself, aspire to attain. In Tribute to Freud, H.D. describes the interconnections that both she and Freud established between bygone, current and impending states, in order to develop a kind of metahistory in which events inevitably repeat themselves over time. “It was not that [Freud] conjured up the past and invoked the future. It was a present that was in the past or a past that was in the future” (9). Rather than situating an action in a specific, and thus mutable time, H.D. wants to evoke a “time-less moment” (Helen ix), an eternal and universal instant which applies to ancient Greece as well as to twentieth-century reality. Due to this radical departure from a narrative which relies heavily on a temporal and spatial flow, H.D. questions accepted details about the human world, and develops a feeling of the transcendental, cosmic life which she looked for in her work with dreams and spiritualism (Quinn 133).³

The poem also takes place between differing sets of extremes: between the known and the unknown, the “real” and the transcendental, the finite and infinite, and the temporal and eternal. These oppositions create a temporary frame for the poem, one that is gradually deconstructed, however, as it progresses. These oppositional notions (such as the masculine and feminine principles) as well as the world-views (the death and life instincts) which are polarized so explicitly at the beginning of the poem are finally reconciled at the end to achieve the synthesis between extremes that Helen and H.D. longed to accomplish. As her life unfolds in a circular fashion, Helen realizes that she must understand the specific parts of her life before she can arrive at a sense of a whole, before she can harmonize her personal memories with the cosmic “Wheel” (Helen 210). In order to facilitate Helen’s development, the poet grants the goddess divine powers which allow her to see all sides of the stories, myths, memories at once. This way, Helen not only recalls events before and during the Trojan War, but she also has access to memories that

Achilles has had as a child and as a young warrior. This ability to “see” all aspects of reality allows her to gradually understand the connections between opposites. This indeterminate landscape on which unfolds the story as well as the poem’s strange temporal ellipses can easily frustrate a reader. While Vincent Quinn acknowledges the poem’s strengths, he argues that it communicates only a feeling of unreality because of its concern for mundane levels of consciousness. Moreover, he finds that the poem as a whole “seems arbitrary and insubstantial” (145); to him, H.D. mistakes “metaphors of desire with mystical revelations” (145). Quinn also asserts that the characters fail to display any true emotion towards each other and are, therefore, mere puppets manipulated by the poet.

The structure of H.D.’s poem, Helen in Egypt, consists of lyrical passages which are preceded by sections of prose intended to clarify the themes that the lyrical sections are developing. These prose passages were added after the poetic sections for Helen in Egypt had been written, as can be seen in a letter from Norman Holmes Pearson to H.D. on 21 August 1954. Pearson writes:

You wrote several times that you thought some sort of foreword of explanation, rather of setting in myth and time, might be helpful; and what you wrote me was helpful, especially for the first reading of the trilogy. Wouldn’t it be a good idea now, therefore, if you were to work over a page or two of prose, which I could use to precede the whole? (Hollenberg Between, 160)

This “page or two of prose” blossomed into excerpts that take up almost as much space in the narrative as the lyrics themselves. H.D.’s long poem is separated into three parts (a structure similar to her earlier Trilogy) and each part represents a progression of Helen’s quest for self-

discovery. The "Pallinode", written at Lugano during the summer of 1952, is separated into seven books, and attempts to prove that Helen was not present in Troy during the war, but was instead in Egypt. The "Pallinode" is developed through paratactical associations: the contrasting memories Helen and Achilles have of both Egypt and Troy, as well as the masculine and feminine principles these two represent. This section endeavors to resurrect Helen's identity from the condemnation it has long received, and to illustrate the dramatic tension which occurs in the psyche between remembering and forgetting that is invaluable in Helen's quest for self-awareness.

"Leuké", written at the Küssnacht Klinik, a sanatorium in Switzerland where H.D. was hospitalized in 1953, is also separated into seven books. This section depicts Helen's departure from Egypt at the request of Thetis, a sea goddess who is Achilles' mother. Helen finds herself on the island of Leuké where she has supposedly married Achilles and produced a son, Euphorion. On this metaphysical "isle blanche", Helen recalls suppressed memories, and resurrects figures from her past -- Theseus, Paris and Achilles -- to sort out the many versions of her identity. "Eidolon" was written in Lugano in 1954, and is divided into six parts. In this section, Helen returns to Egypt, and slowly absorbs the contrasting details she has learned about her life. "Eidolon" is marked by Helen's reconciliation with Achilles, as well as by her affirmation of the mother principle that will bring a sense of rebirth into the new life which she and Achilles will share. Although it is tempting to consider the prose fragments as motivated by a specific epistemological viewpoint and therefore unreliable, H.D. never encourages the reader to interpret them as anything but sections which provide contextual details to the often enigmatic lyrics which clarify the personal motivations of certain characters.⁴ Regardless of the poem's sections which seem to be organized in a logical format, the friction between the prose and lyric passages, as well

as the elusive ideas introduced, constantly unsettle the reader.

H.D.'s long poem, Helen in Egypt, exemplifies her interest in Greek tradition and myths, an attraction which stems from her days at Bryn Mawr College and the First World War when Richard Aldington, Ezra Pound and she worked on a series of translations and adaptations of Greek classics. H.D.'s inspiration to translate these classics was influenced by Ezra Pound's transcriptions of Old and Middle English, Greek, Latin, Provençal, Chinese and Japanese works. Her own versions of choruses and plays by Euripides were quite successful because, like Pound, she attempted to capture the spirit of the original piece rather than mechanically translating works; in fact, T.S. Eliot praised her 1916 translations of the choruses from Iphigenia in Aulis over those of Gilbert Murray because she was not a slave to the traditional Greek form (Swann 8). Furthermore, H.D.'s poetry about such classical women figures as Circe, Calypso, Thetis, Helen, and Cassandra, as well as poems which were based on fragments from Sappho, indicate her interest in classical subjects, and were no doubt inspired by her trip to Greece with her companion / lover Bryher (a nickname for Winifred Ellerman) in 1920.

In her translations and adaptations of these ancient myths, she tried to imbue them with a vital energy and to celebrate the richness of legend as a method of warding off the despair engendered by two World Wars. Her use of mythological allusion in her prose and poetry emphasizes the links which she draws between modernity and the ancient past, and suggests that the violence which characterizes the beginning of the twentieth century is similar to that in classical times. In Helen in Egypt, for example, Helen's constant references to the various literal and figurative sacrifices which have taken place in her family, and also to the Fascistic "death-cult" of the Command, are a reminder of the violence that has long been directed at women. It

seems likely that H.D. turned to the past in order to give order to the present, and although antiquity was characterized by similar problems, it was still more comforting than the chaos of contemporary society, and especially the violence of the wars that H.D. experienced firsthand while living in London. H.D. considered myth a “repository of sacred revelation” (Hollenberg Between, 120), and in her prose and poetry explored answers to fundamental questions about the workings of the universe, “about women and men, life and death, love and hate, destruction and renewal, war and peace, time and eternity” (Friedman Psyche, 9). Moreover, Rachel Blau Duplessis calls attention to the revisions H.D. makes to Greek myth as being especially significant because she transforms classics which were traditionally barred to women and to men of lower caste, and were once an indication of cultural authority (Career 17). Although the traditionalist Douglas Bush objects to the alterations that H.D. makes to the classical Greek world, and marks her as an escapist poet who is unfaithful to the Greek tradition,⁵ H.D.’s ancient Greece is far more significant when examined in a modern-day context as a mirror of contemporary society, and well-adapted to counter literary as well as cultural traditions that were once so constraining to those who did not find themselves among the elite.

As a woman poet, H.D.’s revision of mythology is especially significant because of the ways in which she deviates from or develops standard, canonical stories or myths. In Helen in Egypt, H.D. uses the different myths of Helen -- the legend of the young Helen who was abducted by Theseus, of Helen on the walls of Troy, and of Helen in Egypt -- to show first how the goddess has been constructed as evil, and then to destabilize and rewrite the entire myth that surrounds Helen by allowing the narrative to unfold principally from her point of view. Much as the figures of Venus, Eve and Lillith are commemorated in Trilogy, Helen is transformed from the

heartless, Eve-like temptress whose “face launched a thousand ships” to a woman who is searching desperately for an identity and attempting to nullify the collective anger which has long been directed at her. Furthermore, by suggesting that it was a phantom of Helen who was present in Troy, H.D. implies the futility of the Greco-Trojan War, since both sides were fighting for an illusory cause. In this revision of the Helen myth, H.D. focuses on Helen’s character rather than on her beauty, and transforms her from a figure who is recognized as the cause of the Trojan War to a symbol which is totally unrelated to it. In a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson in which H.D. describes a film about Helen which she has recently watched, she reveals her desire to transcend the representation of the goddess as an object of erotic beauty: “I felt quite ill -- [she says of a film]. They always make H[elen] of T[roy] a cutie -- is it the male conception? she was a Spartan, a goddess, etc. Well -- I suppose mere-man cannot swallow that” (Duplessis Career, 146n).

H.D.’s image of the palimpsest operates in Helen in Egypt, as it did previously in Trilogy, to show the different layers of myth and symbol which underlie the recreated myth of Helen in Egypt. The palimpsest, to H.D., signifies “the parchment in which one piece of writing has been scraped away to allow the recording of a new one, [and] is a literary embodiment of layering. One ‘story,’ one text, is superimposed upon another, and if the erasure has been imperfect, some writing from the first may still be visible” (Dodd 46). The superimposition of manifold details operates in this long poem because the different legends and emblems are paratactically associated in order to explain how analogous myths influence each other in the creation of the central figure of Helen. Any poet, however, in rewriting an accepted myth presents it from a different and undoubtedly ideological perspective. Rose Lucas argues that all revisions are subjective because while the poet restates myths from the past, he / she also adds personal variations:

As the crucial image of the palimpsest suggests, the task of the poet as scribe is thus paradoxical; she reveals or recovers what had previously been inscribed and perhaps obscured on the tablet of the cultural text, and also adds her *own* text or mythic story, thereby also re-covering certain aspects of the (writing of the) past.

(47)

H.D.'s decision to narrate the story from Helen's point of view is significant as are the many additions to the Euripidean and Homeric myths -- such as the encounter on the beach between Helen and Achilles, and the meeting between the older Theseus and the mature Helen -- because they take liberties with the old frames of reference in order to create a completely unique account. The different stories and myths upon which H.D. draws emphasize the multiple interpretations, and thus help to undermine the notion of the existence of a central, canonical text.

H.D.'s revision of classical myths, however, can be very disorienting to some critics. Thomas Swann, for instance, in his early study of the influences on H.D.'s work, is annoyed by her representation of women: he notes that fourteen out of twenty-seven heroines in H.D.'s shorter poems mistrust men, eight are willful women who are scornful of men, three are passive heroines whose purity is threatened, and three are fallen women who long to be embraced into nature so that their "contamination" will be eradicated (37). Moreover, Swann discerns a significant absence of faithful lovers and adoring wives in H.D.'s poetry, and suggests that this "implies a lack of identification with their respective situations and perhaps a lack of sympathy for the virtues they exemplify" (77). Thomas Swann's strange conclusions demonstrate the discomfort that such revisions to popular myths can engender, and explain the decision to which he comes about the poet's inability to understand "true" love because of a supposed lack of

understanding for it. As well, when he wonders about H.D.'s motivation in portraying women this way, Swann quickly concludes that H.D. is "denying to men normal satisfaction in love" (58) through her passive heroines who are, he resolves, truly frigid in love and can never fulfill the desires of men.

In rewriting the myth of Helen of Troy, H.D. engages in "revisionist myth-making", a term that was first introduced by Alicia Suskin Ostriker in her article, "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking", to describe the alterations that twentieth-century women writers have made to cultural myths. In Helen of Egypt, H.D. shows that classical times were extremely oppressive to women through the numerous references she makes to the sacrifices of daughters which were intended to appease the immortal gods. Helen of Troy is the mask behind which H.D. expresses her own preoccupations about such male-female power struggles while avoiding the confessional "I" which would betray to the reader a distinctly subjective viewpoint (George in Sobejano-Moran 63). Ostriker argues that revisionist myth-making is a technique used by women writers to redefine women and culture as a whole ("Thieves" 11). While using this technique, "the poet simultaneously deconstructs a prior 'myth' or 'story' and constructs a new one which includes, instead of excluding, herself" (12); and in so doing presents a new version which is undeniably as subjective as the original source. In her long poem, H.D. transforms Helen, "one of the female figures left voiceless and ascribed a one-sided, incomplete meaning by culture" (Duplessis Writing, 77), into a powerful figure with the ability to understand the arcane hieroglyphs, and to dismiss the notion that romantic passion was the cause of the Trojan War. Helen's beauty is never a focus in the poem: instead, the only allusions to her physical appearance are through such synecdoches as her "purple sandals" (Helen 6) and "veil"

(58) which are used to typify her. What is constructed then in the poem is a strong sense of feminine power, and Helen becomes a representative of the feminine principle which brings rebirth.

In revisionist myth-making, the male perspective is abandoned and a new voice which articulates a collective female experience is inserted, one which celebrates matriarchal power, and describes the oppression women have suffered in such a domineering culture (Ostriker "Thieves", 14). Finally, in these adaptations, the authors problematize traditionally accepted social, political and philosophical values -- such as the role of women in society and politics, as well as the association of the spirit with the male principle, and earth with female nature -- and argue that modern events, behaviors and ideologies are influenced by those in the past (28). Alicia Ostriker does not suggest that the recreated myth replaces the old, but rather that, when juxtaposed with the previous, it underscores the specific ideological bias which influenced the original.⁶ Often this new perspective arises by allowing a previously marginalized character to narrate the myth; as Rachel Blau Duplessis writes, "Giving the muted female character her own story postulates that alternative observations and possibly radically different interpretations of central choices and acts can be read from a well-known myth. This shift of narrative paradigm can create a critique of the assumptions and values implied in the hegemonic story" (*Career* 26). Furthermore, by revising these myths, twentieth-century women poets, such as Adrienne Rich, Margaret Atwood and H.D., often resurrect the archetype of the goddess in order to revivify matriarchal power, and reverse the traditional gender stereotypes that associated powerful women with seductresses and portrayed truly "virtuous" women as passive waifs. In *Helen in Egypt*, as in *Trilogy*, H.D. celebrates Isis, the goddess of fertility, and Susan Edmunds suggests that Helen in the long poem,

and H.D. herself, attempt through this figure to commemorate the familial peace of ancient Egyptian culture that is embodied in the myth of Isis (473). What is interesting about this revision of the Helen of Troy myth is that H.D. allows a figure who has been left voiceless to articulate her confusion about her multiple identities, as well as her dismay at being condemned by society, a choice on the part of the poet which is specifically intended to give agency to this previously oppressed character.

Much of H.D.'s poetry and prose can be read as hieroglyphic, that is, as autobiography that is concealed under a delicate veil of fiction. Many critics, such as Barbara Guest, Rachel Duplessis, and Susan Friedman, examine H.D.'s literary works as romans à clef, seeking to discover the real figures in her personal life which motivated the specific characters. Susan Friedman argues that the figure of Achilles in Helen in Egypt is based on Lord Hugh Dowding, the Air Marshal of the Battle of Britain, a man with whom H.D. assisted as a medium while he held communications with lost RAF pilots (Psyche 173-4). Dowding was a central figure in her personal life who encouraged her to embrace spiritualism and the occult. H.D.'s attempt to understand her encounters with Dowding, his eventual rejection of her because their spiritualist tendencies were too similar, and her subsequent feeling of betrayal, may be reflected in Helen's first encounter and violent struggle with Achilles on the beach in Egypt (187). As well, in Helen in Egypt, Achilles represents the masculine threat to women and ultimately to H.D. herself because he incarnates "that aspect of the masculine which cast her off and cast her down" (Gelpi in Middlebrook 78).

Friedman also suggests that the figure of Paris was modeled on Erich Heydt, the doctor and analyst associated with the school of existential psychoanalysis in Zurich whom H.D. met at

the Ksnacht Klinik in 1953 (Psyche 21). The frustration that H.D. felt because of the professional and personal relationships that she held with Heydt is reflected in the difficulty that Helen experiences in ascertaining her feelings for the young Paris. Albert Gelpi also sees elements of Ezra Pound in the figure of Paris and notes that Paris' name for Helen, "Helena of the Trees", recalls Pound's poem, "A Tree", which he included in his "Hilda Book" (in *Middlebrook* 76). As noted, Pound was an early suitor with whom H.D. fell in love, and she was devastated when the relationship ended. The spectre of Ezra Pound would often surface in works as diverse as Bid Me to Live and Helen in Egypt. Susan Friedman argues that the character of Theseus in the long poem is a portrait of Sigmund Freud (Psyche 20), H.D.'s own analyst during the 1930s, a notion which might seem anachronistic until the reader realizes that both Freud and Theseus represent the guiding forces, versions of a "protector spirit" (24), who assist both H.D. and Helen to discover ideas about themselves, and to come to some form of self-realization. While this kind of critical analysis may be questioned, it is difficult to dismiss wholeheartedly because H.D. encouraged this method of interpretation.

Rachel Duplessis points out that H.D.'s relationships with such men as Richard Aldington, Ezra Pound and D.H. Lawrence, took the form of "romantic thralldom", a form of all-consuming, possessive and destructive love. In response, Duplessis argues, H.D. criticizes heterosexuality and the marriage plot in her literary works, and promotes lesbian love relationships which are modeled on her own relationships with Bryher and Frances Gregg (Writing 66-7).⁷ In the liaison between Helen and Achilles, however, H.D. resolves the male / female tension that she experienced firsthand in her own relationships with these men who acknowledged her artistic talents, but who were at times more taken with her formidable beauty. In Helen in Egypt, the

liaisons with male figures are transformed so that they are no longer split along conventional gender lines (establishing woman as passive and man as aggressive), and provide instead a wholesome balance of masculine and feminine principles. This way, Achilles at the end of the poem has been converted from Homer's violent warrior to the ideal male lover who is coming to terms with his inner self and with Helen as an individual. Furthermore, in H.D.'s prose and poetry, especially in Trilogy, feminine relationships, between mothers, sisters and daughters, are idealized and characterized by love and harmony, rather than by violence and power struggles as between the sexes. Not only is the focus on romantic thralldom dismissed in Helen in Egypt through the gradual emphasis on the brother-lover as well as mother-child relationships that Helen has with Achilles, but these different partnerships in which conventional structures are elided finally permit the complete transformation of Achilles into the Absolute Lover with whom Helen achieves perfect union.

Chapter II

I. Memory, Sacrifice and Reaffirmation in the "Pallinode"

The section entitled "Pallinode" presents a series of images introduced randomly which question the traditional myth of Helen of Troy, and suggests an alternative method for understanding not only the figure of Helen, but also the notion of myth itself. Throughout the seven sections in this book, H.D. presents the reader with individual lyrics which explore the concept of time and "*timeless-time*" (Helen 13). They also examine the differences between the masculine and feminine principles, between Eros and Eris. These lyrics further analyze the similarities between Helen and her twin sister, Clytaemnestra, in that both are presented as enemies of the masculine "death-cult" (103). The "Pallinode" is comprised of a complex series of images in which ideas, memories and past events are juxtaposed, hinted at but never fully explained, and their dynamic interaction alludes only vaguely to the larger picture which underlies their association. The prevalence of the hieroglyph in this first section reinforces the enigma surrounding the mysterious icons in the poem as well as the strange, otherworldly circumstances in which Helen finds herself. The "Pallinode" is an argument in which Helen and H.D. reveal their belief that the world is structured along two opposing world-views, a regenerative female principle and a dangerous male element that is founded on violence and death. Helen occupies a symbiotic role in the context of the poem: not only is she the "writer" of the myth, and the "reader" who is forced to decode the hieroglyphs, but she is also the main character around whom

the action unfolds. In H.D.'s poem, subject-object differences are reversed, and Helen becomes the subject of a new myth rather than the old object of desire (Duplessis Career, 109).

In this strange state in which Helen and the reader find themselves, dream processes are sanctioned over the rational patterns of civilization in order to depart from Homer's factual account of the Trojan War and to celebrate the realm of the unconscious which H.D. valorizes in her personal life and in her literary works. At the beginning of the long poem, we are dropped *in media res* into an "Amen-temple" (Helen 1) in Egypt whose walls are covered by as yet unintelligible hieroglyphs; and like Helen, we are disoriented and confused as to why we have been transported here. This magical state in which Helen finds herself is a kind of life-in-death -- she describes her "everlasting" (4) or seemingly-eternal journey to Egypt as if she had been conducted down the river of Lethe on a "caravel" (27)⁸ by a helmsman reminiscent of Charon, the ferryman who conducted the dead across the river Styx to Hades. All that Helen remembers of her passage to Egypt is her being

drawn near, drawn far,
the helmsman's bitter oath
to see the goal receding

in the night; everlasting, everlasting
nothingness and lethargy of waiting. (3-4)

Although the omniscient narrator reminds the reader that water from Lethe was drunk by souls who were preparing to be reincarnated so that they would forget their memories from their past life, he / she emphasizes that Helen, in this death-like state, does not want to forget her past, and to leave unresolved the disastrous events which have characterized her life. This determination to remember, then, preserves Helen's link with life, and makes of her a figure who is paradoxically

real and ghost-like: “*But Helen, mysteriously transposed to Egypt, does not want to forget. She is both phantom and reality*” (3), the narrator informs the reader. H.D. overturns this belief that death brings oblivion by announcing that the “potion”, namely the water of Lethe, does not guarantee forgetfulness but rather memory: “The potion is not poison, / it is not Lethe and forgetfulness / but everlasting memory” (3). This limbo-like state is located between the states of life and death; one of Helen’s principal goals is to retain contact with the living until all of her memories from the past can resurface, and to have faith that the meanings of the haunting hieroglyphs will finally be revealed by the gods.

In Egypt, then, the visual as well as verbal hieroglyphs which mystify the goddess are the first memories and previous accusations that she recalls in this state of “enchantment” (7). In this realm, Helen finally finds peace from the hatred that entire cultures have directed towards her, a hatred that the reader realizes is misdirected because Helen was never in Troy. The “old enchantment holds, / here there is peace / for Helena, Helen hated of all Greece” (2). During the scene between Achilles and Helen in which the great hero finally realizes her identity, the questions that the hero puts to her about the nature of their existence are questions that they both seek to answer, and which will be deciphered once they have access to their repressed memories:

“what sort of enchantment is this?
 what art will you wield with a fagot?
 are you Hecate? are you a witch?

a vulture, a hieroglyph,
 the sign or the name of a goddess?
 what sort of goddess is this?

where are we? who are you?
 where is this desolate coast?
 who am I? am I a ghost?” (16)

Unlike Homer's epic which focuses primarily on the actual events of the Trojan War, H.D.'s poem is narrated largely through personal memory and is concerned with the nebulous realm of the unconscious in which past recollections are constantly reappearing. Helen must discover the significance of her memories before she can forge a new identity for herself; these recollections thus operate in a similar fashion to the dream visions in Dante's La Vita Nuova through which Dante comes to a more sophisticated state of self-awareness (Fritz 150). Helen in Egypt, then, is a poem about accessing forgotten memories, in a way that is quite similar to psychoanalysis, in order to reconstruct the past and conceive a future identity which is free from the execrations patriarchal cultures have long directed at Helen.

Since the narrator informs the reader that Helen's "*concern is with the past, with the anathema or curse*" (Helen 5), the first section of H.D.'s long poem presents a mosaic of memories Helen must recall to fully comprehend the collective anger that has condemned her. The poem traces her gradual reawakening to memory and culminates in her ability to evoke beautiful and painful recollections that both she and Achilles share. Her memories unveil as enigmatic hieroglyphs which she organizes in montage format, juxtaposing one with another, and which call into question past, present and future time constructs. Throughout the "Pallinode", Helen sees "*pictures*" (69) before her, images that suggest other icons or specific events which she has seen or experienced. She seems to observe, for example, an image of the caravel which brought Achilles and her to Egypt (69); another image portrays the lovers respectively as a serpent and a vulture, antithetical symbols of evil and of the Great Mother (Hollenberg Poetics, 186); this typifies them as two opposing factions forever in conflict. "[T]he serpent, reared to attack, / is Achilles' spring in the dark; / so the Goddess with vulture-helmet / is myself

defenceless" (Helen 69). These images emphasize the polarization of the masculine and feminine principles which exists at the beginning of H.D.'s long poem. The sense of spiritual and personal rebirth which surfaces at the end of the poem is only permitted through the recollection of events that have occurred in the distant and more recent past, and the conviction that the gods will bring her to a state of enlightenment. Even events which have taken place since Helen's arrival in Egypt -- such as her encounter with Achilles on the beach and the ensuing violence -- are mediated through memory because this allows Helen to fully consider their significance. "I have all-time to remember" (11), she announces, satisfied that the process of remembering will be gradual and will not destroy her (as Semele was annihilated when Zeus revealed himself to her).

One of Helen's first memories is of the curses which were leveled against her for bringing about the fall of Troy. "*O Helen, Helen, Daemon that thou art, / we will be done forever / with this charm, this evil philtre, / this curse of Aphrodite*" (4). The injustice of these curses becomes all too apparent when Helen realizes that she has become the scapegoat for an entire culture's anger, and that she has been powerless to prevent herself from becoming so. When Tyndareus, the husband of Leda, overlooks Aphrodite when sacrificing to the gods, the goddess of love professes that she will make his daughters (Clytaemnestra, Timandra, and Helen) notorious for their adulterous acts (Graves 2, 269). Aphrodite helps Paris charm the beautiful Helen, who gives herself in love and then elopes from Sparta with him, an action which indirectly causes the Trojan War. Helen is cursed not only by her bewitching yet fatal beauty, but also by an Olympian goddess who chooses to take her revenge out on her. To the Greeks, then, Helen typifies the curse of love which has paradoxically brought so much bloodshed.

Helen's reaction to Achilles' savage treatment of her on the beach in Egypt is conveyed

through memory, not only because the episode is so distressing, but also because it allows Helen to meditate uninterrupted on its importance as a particular manifestation of the collective anger which nonetheless ends in peace. Her almost ritualistic cant, “*let him forget, / Amen, All-father, / let him forget*” (12) recalls an earlier plea which she remembers making to Achilles that he should forget the negative memory of Helen of Troy. When he remembers Helen the temptress -- the “mist / or a fountain of water / in that desert; we died of thirst” (50) as he describes her -- he no longer listens to her explanations and instead begins to strangle her. One of Helen’s last conscious thoughts is her prayer to Thetis that this Helen be forgotten, and that the new myth being formed with Achilles in Egypt will constitute the new collective memory that they will soon share. “[L]et me go out, let me forget, / let me be lost... / O Thetis, O sea-mother, I prayed under his cloak, / let me remember, let me remember, / forever, this Star in the night” (17). Critics, such as Donna Krolík Hollenberg, see this as Helen’s “masochistic submission to male power” (*Poetics* 184) because the goddess seems to submit passively to Achilles’ aggression; but H.D. portrays this capitulation as necessary to access the higher power of Eros.

Throughout the book, the goddess continually remembers this night when Achilles assaulted her; and, as the narrator informs the reader, from this “*We may surmise that this ‘attack’ meant more to her than the approaches of her husband, Menelaus, or the seduction of her lover, Paris*” (*Helen* 41). This memory is pivotal in the structure of the poem because it brings Helen and Achilles together in a violent act which ends with Helen lying quietly in Achilles’ arms, a development that signifies the reconciliation of Eros with Eris which in turn becomes one of the poem’s central images. Achilles, however, with the distressing memories that he retains of Helen as a seductress, threatens to engulf the identity she has begun forging for herself in Egypt.

"I must fight for Helena" (39), she announces, resolved to counter this negative identity with a more positive one which designates her as a representative of love rather than of strife. Helen intuits that she must understand all aspects of her supposed actions on the ramparts in Troy (even though she does not believe she was ever there) in order to understand every facet of her own identity. Book four in the "Pallinode" is thus narrated from Achilles' point of view, and describes his observations of Helen, the look which passed between them that lost him the Command (his eventual infatuation with her), and his subsequent arrival in Egypt.

Through memory, Helen and H.D. examine the goddess' family "*as protection or balance against the overwhelming fact of her Fate or Destiny*" (71), namely Helen's encounter with Achilles. It also delineates several similarities which exist between the female members of her family in order to focus on the maternal principles long ignored by the masculine "death-cult" (103). Helen recalls her Greek identity because it is one aspect of her psychological make-up with which she must come to terms before she can understand the entire picture: "*She again recalls the Greek scene. For it is through her Greek identity that she understands. She has accepted what she does not understand, "this ancient Child, Egypt."* But she would gradually, it would seem, bring Egypt and Greece together" (83). She draws a direct parallel between herself and Clytaemnestra, her twin sister, and between her sister's daughter, Iphigenia, and her own daughter, Hermione, because they are all women who were either condemned for their transgressions against masculine values based on conflict, or were sacrificed to this world of violence. In an attempt to assuage her own feeling of victimization, Helen associates herself with Clytaemnestra who was also wedded to a warrior whose principles were drastically different from her own. "*It is as if Helen were re-living her own story and visualizing her own fate in terms of*

that of her twin-sister" (77), the narrator announces. This way, Helen suggests that Agamemnon and Menelaus, as well as Achilles and Odysseus, are similar in that they are dedicated to the war faction, the "iron-ring" (87), and share principles which are grounded in violence and death. "[Y]et her Lord resembled Achilles," Helen realizes, "when they reach a certain degree, / they are one, alike utterly" (103).

H.D.'s "Pallinode" condemns the supremacy of the patriarchal ethos, represented specifically by Agamemnon and Achilles, by which women were recognized either as chaste wives, booty, or as objects to be sacrificed to the gods. The profound difference between the male and female worlds is underscored because violence is linked to the male world, a violence which remains profoundly incomprehensible to women. "[W]hat did we know of any / of our Lords' activities? / we lived alone and apart" (87), declares Helen, reinforcing the separate spheres in which each sex finds itself. Helen remembers the wedding of her sister, Clytaemnestra, in an attempt to recapture a sense of a woman-centered world that is based on Eros and harmony, a world that is exceedingly vulnerable to the male violence of soldiers such as Agamemnon and Achilles.

She was a bride, my sister,
with a bride's innocence,
she was a lover of flowers

and she wound in her hair,
the same simple weeds
that Iphigenia wore;

she stepped forward,
they stood together
as one, before the altar;

O Word of the Goddess,

O Harmony and Grace,
it was a moment

of infinite beauty,
but a war-Lord
blighted that peace. (77)

The image of the family discloses one of the principle oppositions in H.D.'s long poem, namely that between Eros and Eris, love and war. To develop this idea of a peaceful, feminine world, Helen compares Clytaemnestra and Iphigenia to "one swan and one cygnet / [which] were stronger than all the host, / assembled upon the slopes / and the hills of Aulis" (79). Helen and H.D. portray the maternal power as greater than that of the "death-cult" (103) of the Command, stronger even than the host of war.

In order to condemn the masculine world-view which relies so heavily on domination and violence, Helen and ultimately H.D. return continually to the theme of sacrifice. At the beginning of the poem, Helen pities Clytaemnestra since, in her mind, her sister's murder of her husband, Agamemnon, was justified because she sought revenge for the attempted sacrifice of her own daughter. There exists at the heart of this image of the goddess' family a fundamental contradiction: while Helen, and ultimately H.D., work to establish an integral opposition between masculine and feminine principles, in so doing, they rationalize an act of violence which was committed by Clytaemnestra, one of the principal representatives of this supposedly peaceful world. Helen narrates a "Pallinode" not only to present the traditional myth from a completely different perspective, but also to defend her sister's determination to avenge the act of violence which was directed at her own kin, a decision which motivated her son, Orestes, to behead her in turn.⁹ Helen seems to remember Clytaemnestra's feeling of betrayal and her inability to forget

“the lure, the deception, the lie” (76) Agamemnon told her when he promised to arrange for Iphigenia and Achilles to be married, when he really intended to sacrifice their daughter to counter Calchas’ prophecies that the Greek fleet would be unable to set sail for Troy (Graves 2, 291). It is all too clear to these women that Iphigenia’s betrothal to Achilles was not marital, but was instead “a pledge to Death, / to War and the armies of Greece” (Helen 76), the faction which was hostile to all feminine principles. Helen initially sympathizes with her sister because Clytaemnestra too took a lover when Agamemnon was away at war, and killed her husband when he returned with his concubine, Cassandra, and attempted to sacrifice their daughter. “I would change my place for hers, / wherever she is, O Father, / why should Helen be given / peace through eternity, / and Clytaemnestra doomed, / and slain by her son, Orestes?” (71-2), Helen asks. H.D.’s revision of a popular myth betrays itself as infinitely subjective once it attempts to condone an act of violence committed by a woman. It soon changes tactics by using the figure of the sea goddess to explain that any violent methods to bring about change are contemptible.

At the end of the poem, the sea goddess, Thetis, divulges that Helen and her twin sister have not received similar fates because Clytaemnestra resorted to the same violent methods as those used by the “death-cult” (103), and that because of this, her murder was no more justifiable than the atrocities spurred by the death instinct. According to Susan Friedman, “For H.D., who abhorred war, this change [from the destructive male ideology to the life-affirming principles of love] had to come through peaceful means, through the intangible net of the life force and the transforming power of love if the cycle of violence was ever to stop” (“Creating” 180). Thetis explains to Helen that Clytaemnestra’s methods were wrong, that “if a woman fights, / she must fight by stealth, / with invisible gear; / no sword, no dagger, no spear / in a woman’s hands / can

make wrong, right” (Helen 101). This statement reflects an ambiguous feeling about women’s role because H.D. can at once be relegating women to a traditionally passive and submissive role, as Linda Wagner suggests (527), or encouraging them to adopt more peaceful methods of resistance, tactics which attempt to bring about positive change.

In a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson, dated 23 September 1952, H.D. describes the antagonism she fosters in Helen in Egypt between Eros and Eris: “It is the ‘phantasmagora’ or unreality of war as against the reality of the eternal and of Love” (Hollenberg Between, 127), a conflict which H.D. attempts to reconcile in her poem by giving greater power to love.¹⁰ According to her revision of the Homeric account of events surrounding the Trojan War, Helen and Achilles fall in love on the battlefield of Troy, die, and experience strife after death; nonetheless, a love blossoms between them in Egypt which leads to a rebirth at the end of the poem. While in Homer’s epic Achilles is slain by one of Apollo’s arrows, H.D. suggests that it is “Love’s arrow” (Helen 9) which was specifically intended to puncture his supposed immortality and his dedication to the “death-cult” in order to make him vulnerable to human emotion. This difference between masculine and feminine principles is initially expressed through the opposition H.D. establishes between what she depicts as rational and emotional knowledge, knowledge which is either dependent on fact or intuition. The conflicting world-views of such principal characters as Achilles and Helen are initially juxtaposed when they observe a vulture flying over the Egyptian beach. Helen interprets the “carrion creature” (13) differently from Achilles; she focuses on the rejuvenating rather than the predatory aspect of the bird. She relies on a knowledge which is “*intuitive*” (13) and firmly grounded in “*emotional*” (13) responses in comparison to Achilles’ “*intellectual*” (13) understanding which is based on a masculine ideology

that rationalizes acts of violence. *"For from the depth of her racial inheritance, she invokes... the symbol or the 'letter' that represents or recalls the protective mother-goddess. This is no death-symbol but a life-symbol, it is Isis or her Greek counterpart, Thetis, the mother of Achilles"* (13). Helen, because of her belief in the rejuvenating powers of the goddess, interprets the vulture as a symbol "of woman as the Great Mother" (Hollenberg Poetics, 186) since Isis, as the Egyptian vulture, swallowed the pieces of her husband-brother Osiris and resurrected him in her body. Achilles, however, understands the vulture as a rapacious bird which eats the dead, presumably the dead that are left strewn on the battlefield. Because of Achilles' easy dismissal of the positive symbolism of the vulture, Helen realizes that the patriarchy encourages men to devalue the importance of the mother figure, and to deny Eros and the feminine principles (187).

The goddess does not understand the symbols and hieroglyphs which surround her in an *"intellectual"* (Helen 23) fashion which relies on strict definitions, but rather in an experiential way which allows her to intuit what these *"natural or human symbols"* (23) mean. Simple icons as well as actual figures which surround her become symbolic of a force greater than herself which, once interpreted, can further her own self-knowledge. Farther on in the "Pallinode", H.D. addresses this mind / heart split which decrees that although Helen does not yet logically understand the deeper significance of the glyphs (namely the interconnection the gods want her to discover between Eros and Eris) her emotional state allows her to accept it and to have faith that she will receive further instruction:

I wander alone and entranced,
yet I wonder and ask
numberless questions;

the heart does not wonder?

the heart does not ask?
the heart accepts,

encompasses the whole
of the undecipherable script. (88-9)

The repeated references to the heart underscore the “emotional” approach Helen takes to interpret the hieroglyphs which surround and motivate her, a tactic which allows her to gain a more visceral than rational understanding. Again, however, H.D., although clearly taking a proto-feminist stance in the poem, falls back on the conservative mind / body split by which women and men have traditionally been defined. What surfaces through this association of men with rational and women with emotional responses is a faith both Helen and H.D. place in the unknown and the mysterious, a faith that the higher powers will finally bring them to enlightenment.

Not only does H.D. use the hieroglyphs as icons which suggest a greater meaning, but she also correlates entire characters so that they embody a particular world-view. Achilles, for instance, is linked to a destructive authoritarian “death-cult” that H.D. equates with evil and death, an ideology which is similar to that of the Fascistic governments before and during the Second World War (Friedman Psyche, 259). Susan Friedman also suggests that H.D.’s attack on the masculine cult is a criticism of Ezra Pound’s espousal of Fascism in Italy and his celebration of the patriarchal, Confucian ideology (“Creating” 173). In Helen in Egypt, Achilles, the “*indisputable dictator*” (Helen 53), for example, strives for “*world-leadership*” (53) and is surrounded by a “*select body-guard*” (53), the Command who attempt to achieve dominance over the Trojans through methods of brutality similar to those used by the Third Reich. H.D. associates a “*threat of autocracy*” (15) with Achilles, leader of the Myrmidons, a terrifying troop of soldiers. “We were an iron-ring / whom Death made stronger” (57), the great hero reveals,

underscoring the troop's link with violence and death. H.D. also suggests that Odysseus and Achilles devised a plan for world domination once Troy was successfully defeated; she intimates that if their plan were effective, Achilles would receive Helen and assume complete leadership. "Helen will be your share / of the spoils of war; / ... / you shall control the world" (54), Odysseus says. The punishment for Achilles' authoritarianism, however, is his mortality. Helen reveals that the all-controlling God wants to destroy the influence that the "death-cult" has had on Achilles: "it was God's plan / to melt the icy fortress of the soul, / and free the man" (10). Through the example of the mighty Achilles, then, H.D. condemns the Greek, Trojan, and eastern European patriarchies which were based on war and aggression. As well, H.D. warns that because matriarchal principles were ignored, Helen has become the scapegoat for the fall of Troy -- an hieroglyph no one attempts to decipher because this would make it difficult to condemn her. The narrator clarifies this:

*through eternity, she will be blamed for this and she feels it coming. She will
blacken her face like the prophetic femme noire of antiquity. But it does not work.
Achilles is here to impeach her. Why? We must blame someone. Hecate -- a witch
-- a vulture, and finally, as if he had run out of common invective, he taunts her --
a hieroglyph. (15)*

The opposition H.D. develops between these two contradictory world-views culminates in the contrast that Helen draws between the "unreality of war" (31) for which Achilles still longs even in the state of "enchantment" in which they find themselves, a world of violence in which feminine values are completely absent. Helen asks in disbelief,

does he dare remember

the unreality of war,
in this enchanted place?

his fortress and his tower
and his throne
were built for man, alone;

no echo or soft whisper
in those halls,
no iridescent sheen,

no iris-flower,
no sweep of strings,
no answering laughter,

but the trumpet's call. (31-2)

This section specifically contrasts the harsh world of war founded on destruction with the harmonious world governed by maternal principles which the patriarchate has long discounted. Moreover, Helen links the anger and aggression which Achilles directed towards her in his attempt to strangle her, to the light of the funeral pyre which marked the cataclysmic end of the Greco-Trojan War. "It is the burning ember / that I remember, / heart of the fire, / consuming the Greek heroes; / it is the funeral pyre" (21). It is clear to Helen that Achilles' wrath and the death of the Greek and Trojan soldiers are the result of anger and the violence of a war-faction which can only end in a conflagration of destruction and death.

"[M]ust death rule life?" (29), Helen asks herself, a question she seeks to answer over the course of the poem. Helen plays a specific role in reawakening Achilles to the power of Eros which he had dismissed after dedicating himself to the "death-cult". As Achilles is in the process of strangling her, Helen does not struggle, but instead prays that he will reconcile himself to her spiritual reality. She specifically calls on Thetis, "the repressed feminine principle within him"

(Ostriker "Thieves", 20), to guide him to her and to a recollection of his feminine attributes. This process of reawakening these rejuvenating qualities begins in Troy when, stopping to reattach his greave, he inadvertently exchanges a glance with Helen, a scene which is one of H.D.'s many fictional additions to Homer's story. Robert Graves clarifies these events in his study, The Greek Myths: Achilles first lay with Helen in a dream before his death, a dream which was arranged by his mother, Thetis (2, 317). This vision brought him so much pleasure that he asked Helen to reveal herself to him on the walls of Troy; when she did, he immediately fell in love (317). As a result of this glimpse that he catches of the goddess, Achilles immediately becomes indifferent to the power the "death-cult" has held over him, and his downfall is inevitable:

I stooped to fasten a greave
that was loose at the ankle,

when she turned; I stood
indifferent to the rasp of metal,
and her eyes met mine;

you say, I could not see her eyes
across the field of battle,
I could not see their light

shimmering as light on the changeable sea?
all things would change but never
the glance she exchanged with me. (Helen 56)

Immediately afterwards, the great hero is mortally wounded by an arrow which becomes symbolic of the power of women to penetrate the "iron-casement" of violence which surrounds the hero (Ostriker "Thieves", 21). Achilles' distraction, occasioned by Helen's beauty, underscores the power of her love-dart and sexual charm to undo the monolithic force of the Command. The Achilles' heel is a paradoxical symbol within the context of H.D.'s poem: while it is the great hero's fatal weakness, it also represents the necessarily human imperfection through

which his extreme masculinity can be penetrated by the healing power of Eros. His vulnerability, which stems from the glance he happened to exchange with Helen, leads first to death and finally to love, and emphasizes how these two forces are less polarized than they were at the beginning of the poem. “[N]o Grecian or other king / may contest or disobey” (Helen 54) the “death-cult”, Achilles realizes, but he does so by betraying more interest in Helen than in the battle, and is immediately ejected. Although Achilles at first cannot understand how he could have given up the absolute rule of the Command, he finally realizes the enormity of the chain of violence and terror in which he had participated, a world-view which has been passed down “from father to son” (63). This authoritarian control is contrasted with the power of the great goddess which encompasses aspects of Helen, Aphrodite, Thetis and Isis: “it was not the Command that betrayed, / it was Another; / She is stronger than God, they say, / She is stronger than Fate” (63). Achilles at once blames the goddess for the Trojan loss of Troy, and inadvertently acknowledges her power. The figure of Achilles is very significant within the context of H.D.’s poem: the poet first presents him as a hyperbolic madman at war, and then refines him in order to deviate from the Homeric source, finally restoring him to the happier role of a balanced character.

By the end of the “Pallinode” Helen abandons her quest, so confused is she by the enigmatic hieroglyphs, and by the figures she has met. She attempts to separate herself from Achilles, and to retreat into her own world in which the feminine values of peace, love and harmony rule. While she wants to interpret the hieroglyphs further in order to facilitate her own self-discovery, Helen realizes that she must remain on an “*intermediate dimension or plane*” (47) of incomprehension in order to gradually recall the memories from her past. She is also frustrated because Achilles refuses to forget the battle and the violence which Helen wants desperately to

disregard; she longs for the time when she was alone and in control of what she was forced to remember, and what she wanted to forget. "I was happier alone, / why did I call him to me? / must I forever look back?" (38), she asks herself. It is impossible to disregard Achilles, however, because she determines that the gods "*conditioned*" (7) the Trojan War so that she and the Lord of the Myrmidons could be united. In this state of puzzlement, however, Helen does not want to know the history of Achilles, the incriminating events from his past; she simply wants to accept him without questioning. "Amen-Zeus, let me not ask, / but claim him and know the Sun, / hidden behind the sun of our visible day" (35), she pleads. To justify Achilles' violent acts and the sacrifices he ordered, Helen invents a recollection, a "*race-memory*" (90) as the narrator calls it, which suggests that the great hero would have been killed by his own Myrmidons had he not demanded the sacrifice of Iphigenia (90). At the end of the "Pallinode" Thetis appears and reveals that all of Helen's questions will be answered gradually, and only if she unconditionally accepts and trusts in the direction of the gods to guide her to enlightenment. "[S]eek not to know / too much" (109), she warns Helen. Thetis promises that Helen's rebirth in the myth that she will develop with Achilles has already been predicted, and she must wait patiently for it to take place. At this point of indecision in the poem, the metaphorical phoenix is resurrected to suggest the rebirth of the goddess which will overpower the cult of death. With the rebirth of the phoenix comes a new state of understanding: "Phoenix / has vanquished / that ancient enemy, Sphinx" (98), Thetis announces, finally summoning Helen to the island of Leuké where she will be able to further her quest for self-discovery.

Chapter III

I. The Goddess

From her early Imagist poems, such as “Demeter” and “Eurydice”, to her later war trilogy and finally to her long poem, Helen in Egypt, H.D. displays an interest in the mother figure and the goddess archetype. H.D. proposes that the life-affirming power of women can bring regeneration to counter the destruction produced by the war. She read the works of Jane Harrison and Havelock Ellis, who were influenced by J.J. Bachofen’s notion that human society was originally matriarchal, a theory which was almost unanimously discredited by historians at the beginning of the twentieth century. Johann Bachofen, an historian who published during the late 1850s and early 1860s, argued that the matriarchal and patriarchal social and governmental frameworks were fundamentally different in their methods of control: while the matriarchy promoted peace, he asserted, the patriarchy used tyrannical methods of control (Friedman Psyche, 266). Bachofen’s evidence was taken exclusively from legend since he believed that myths were valid historiographic tools to be analyzed. He defended his use of mythology as actual evidence on which to construct his theory by claiming that it is a form of collective memory, “a manifestation of primordial thinking, an immediate historical revelation, and consequently a highly reliable historical source” (Bachofen 73).

Bachofen based his investigation of the matriarchal organization on the Lycian people, and the existence of such a social organization in India, Egypt, Athens, Lemnos and Lesbos. He

pointed out, for example, that Egypt was a matriarchal society because the cult of the mother, specifically of Isis, predominated over the cult of Osiris (89). He characterized a matriarchal society as one which considered the mother as the principal participant in family, society, and government, and where names, properties and cultural codes were passed down from mothers to daughters. He explained the presence of such goddesses as Demeter, the Earth Mother and the Cosmic Egg in cultural history as indicators of the existence of such a society. Through his examination of legend, Bachofen ascertained that the maternal principle was the universal element which governed this matriarchal society (80) that countered violence with peace, and hate with love (86). He also noted such characteristics as the preference for the passive female principle over the active male principle (77), for the sister and daughter over the brother and son (78), for the moon over the sun, and for the earth over the sea (77). Although his theory makes some salient points about the important rites for certain fertility goddesses, such as the corn and earth deities in several societies, it underscores its own limitations by relying heavily on legend as concrete proof, and also reinforces conventional stereotypes about women's behavior that feminists in the twentieth century, such as Luce Irigaray, Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, have since attempted to transcend.

The historian and anthropologist Jane Harrison was also influenced by Bachofen's theories, and her examination of different mythological traditions in turn inspired H.D.'s interest in the goddess archetype as well as in the opposition between the masculine and feminine principles. Like Bachofen, Harrison emphasized the existence in classical times of both matriarchal and patriarchal structures: while the patriarchal system was concerned with heroic actions, she observed, and the actions of the individual (concepts which are then associated with

the Command in H.D.'s poem), the matriarchal structure was interested in the principles of fostering life, and of the group as a collective unit (Mythology 63). These regenerative attributes are demonstrated by the figures of Thetis, Isis and Demeter in H.D.'s Helen in Egypt. In Mythology and Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, Harrison noted that in traditional mythology the Mother-Goddess was imagined as embodying a direct link with the earth -- the Earth-Mother and every nymph were associated with the mother of all living creatures (Prolegomena 264). Moreover, she detected that the mother figure was given different titles in diverse cultures: this archetype was known as the Mountain-Mother figure, the Great Mother, the Lady of Wild Things, and these attributes can be found in various representations of Artemis, Cybele, and Demeter, the goddess of the fertile earth. Harrison observed that the earth and corn-goddesses represented the same figure, but in the respective forms of mother and maiden, as embodied in the deities of Demeter and Kore. While the former was related to the upper air and the earth, the latter was associated with the underworld (275). Harrison's thorough study of the different goddesses, and their link with rejuvenating and organic principles greatly influenced H.D.'s poetry and prose.

In her long poem, H.D. repeatedly condenses three separate goddesses from distinct mythological traditions into one all-powerful figure, whose abilities are sufficiently enhanced to reconcile the differences between such traditions and to defeat the "death-cult". The first trinity H.D. develops incorporates Thetis, a Greek sea goddess; Isis, the principal Egyptian goddess of fertility; and Cypris, an eponym of Aphrodite. "*We have seen that Thetis, like Proteus, takes many forms*" (Helen 285), the narrator reveals, underlining the transformative quality H.D.'s goddess must possess to bring about change and a rebirth at the end of the poem. In the Thetis-

Isis-Cypris triad, H.D. not only combines characteristics from separate mythological traditions, but also creates a great goddess with powers over love, fertility and rebirth. The second triad she devises includes Ashtoreth, Ishtar and Astarte. Ashtoreth and Astarte are synonymous with the Phoenician goddess of fertility and sexual love (Zimmerman 33), versions also of the Greek Aphrodite. They are Phrygian manifestations of Ishtar, the Assyrian and Babylonian goddess of love, sex, fertility and war (140). Again, then, H.D. unifies analogous deities from different religious traditions in order to abolish the distinctions among them. The final and most powerful trinity is that which connects Demeter, Persephone and Isis; the great goddess who emerges at the end of Helen in Egypt thus becomes a figure with power over life, death, and resurrection. Helen subsumes each of these trinities within herself, and is thus transformed from the constantly denigrated temptress into a formidable and beautiful deity with multifarious powers. It is interesting to note that H.D. ascribes only positive characteristics to her goddesses. In traditional myths, many of these deities are violent and ruthless, qualities which H.D. ignores in both Trilogy and Helen in Egypt. While H.D. portrays Persephone as the benevolent queen of the underworld, for example, accepted legends associate her with bloodshed and destruction (Graves 1, 93). H.D., however, chooses to overlook these menacing qualities in order to solidify the binary oppositions which she creates between violent masculine deities and peace-loving goddesses.

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II. H.D. and Sigmund Freud

H.D.'s interest in the archetypal mother figure stems not only from her scholarly reading, but also from her psychoanalytical sessions with Sigmund Freud between 1933 and 1934. The founder of psychoanalysis believed that H.D. was plagued by a mother fixation because as a child she had felt neglected by her mother. Freud felt, too, that her trip to Greece in the early 1920s was an attempt to get back in touch with her mother (Friedman Psyche, 131), and he argued that Bryher, H.D.'s boon companion and lover, was a replacement for her mother (132). H.D. readily acknowledged several times during these sessions that she used the goddesses Helen and Demeter to design her own ideal mother figure. Before her mother, significantly named Helen, could become emblematic of female power and regeneration, however, H.D. had to dismiss her mother's denial of her own talents at music and painting after becoming a mother and a wife. H.D., deserted by Richard Aldington in 1919 and forced to raise a child on her own, avoided tropes of a "wife" in her poetry and prose. She also turned to her female lover, Bryher, for comfort during her numerous mental breakdowns which followed her turbulent relationships with male partners.

In her writing H.D. eventually created a woman's world which was associated with the regenerative power of love over which presided such deities as Isis, Helen, Aphrodite, Astarte, Demeter, Ishtar, Artemis, and Thetis (258). H.D. asserted that the mother figure held a vital place in the unconscious of an individual and the collective unconscious of humanity itself because it was she who was the first nourisher and life-giver; she believed that her role as a poet, then, was to recall the goddess from a marginalized to a central position in cultural history (144). In an

unpublished manuscript version of her autobiographical memoir, The Gift, H.D. describes her conviction that the goddess is the personification of the feminine principle as well as her theory, inspired by Bachofen and Harrison, that a matriarchal society preceded the current patriarchal structure:

Mary, Maia, Miriam, Mut, Madre, Mere, Mother, pray for us... Under every shrine to Zeus, to Jupiter, to Zeus-pater or Theus-ater or God-the-father... there is an earlier altar. There is, beneath the carved superstructure of every temple to God-the-father, the dark cave or grotto or inner hall or cellar to Mary, Mere, mut, mutter, pray for us. (Deshazer in King 161)

The belief H.D. expresses in this example is a manifestation of her proto-feminist beliefs. In her personal life as well as in her literary works, the figure of Helen embodies characteristics of the goddess and of H.D.'s mother, née Helen Wolle, and represents the spirit of the mother that H.D. worshiped. Helen becomes a personification of the rebirth of the female psyche that H.D. emphasizes could reconstruct and reunify war-torn Europe through the power of Eros. In much of her later works, and most particularly in Helen in Egypt, H.D. seeks to resurrect this goddess, to celebrate the power of the matriarchy, and to deconstruct the two patriarchal myths about women, namely of woman as Madonna and as Magdalene, in order to recast goddesses who were once devalued into inspirational figures.

The influences that Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytical theories had on H.D. and her literary works are very striking, and can be seen not only in Trilogy and Tribute to Freud, but in Helen in Egypt as well. H.D. was one of Freud's analysands between 1933 and 1934, a crucial period in her artistic and personal life because it was marked by the unrest between the two World

Wars when her “war phobia”, as she called it, was at its peak. For both Freud and H.D., ancient myth, religion and art provided clues to the unconscious desires which lay buried in the psyche of each individual (Friedman Psyche, 80). Myths, they believed, were a repository for collective archetypes, and gave insight into ancient events which influenced the behavior of different people at different times. “To recapture the past of the individual, the analyst could turn to these records of time in the traditions and mythologies throughout the world. Freud brought the ‘past back into the present’ by insisting that mythology was useful to the modern seeker of self-knowledge” (80). This turning to the past in order to understand events in the present was a tactic H.D. constantly demonstrated since she ceaselessly recalled and analyzed events from the past in order to study their effects on her life, or had such literary characters as Helen and Achilles inspect their motivations to understand their own behavior. Tribute to Freud is an extremely candid account of H.D.’s experiences during analysis with Freud, her “blameless physician” as she dubbed him. Many of the ideas which surface in this journal -- such as the notions of time, self-analysis, and the opposition between Eros and Eris -- recur as motivating principles for her revision of the Helen myth.

Like the synthesis of contemporary and eternal time, of time and “*timeless-time*” (Helen 13), that H.D. describes in Helen in Egypt, she and Freud evoked an infinite moment, a state in which past, present and future were melded into one in order to underscore the influence that past events or actions can have on both current and impending time periods. “It was not that he conjured up the past and invoked the future. It was a present that was in the past or a past that was in the future” (9), H.D. wrote in Tribute to Freud. Just as the passages with Theseus in “Leuké” unfold as would psychoanalytic sessions, in this memoir H.D. describes the process of

collection and analysis of events, ideas and memories in the mind of the analysand in order to discover their interconnections. "Thoughts were things, to be collected, collated, analyzed, shelved, or resolved. Fragmentary ideas, apparently unrelated, were often found to be part of a special layer or stratum of thought and memory, therefore to belong together" (14). Moreover, the opposition between the principles of love and death in H.D.'s poem stems from the contrasting principles of *eros* and *thanatos*, civilization's desire to unify ideas and the naturally-aggressive instinct of man which seeks to destroy the connections between ideas and things, which Freud outlined in Civilization and Its Discontents.¹¹ Lastly, Freud's use of water "as a dream symbol for birth" (Friedman Psyche, 23) became a symbol H.D. used in Trilogy as well as in Helen in Egypt to symbolize spiritual renewal. Thetis, as the goddess of the sea, is instrumental in awakening Helen and Achilles to a greater self-knowledge and to the rejuvenating power of Eros.

Although H.D. venerated the ideas of Freud, she realized that his perspective was universalizing and androcentric. "[T]he Professor was not always right" (18), she announced in Tribute to Freud, a statement which triumphantly marks her resistance to some of his more conservative ideas. H.D. was acutely aware that Freud displayed generalizing tendencies in his work: his psychoanalytical theories were applied to every culture and every time period, attempting to transcend the rigid constructs of time and space, but nonetheless choosing not to examine the inherent differences between cultures, archetypes and conflicting modes of thought. H.D.'s and Freud's personal perspectives were fundamentally different: while Freud was a rationalist who preferred to examine logical reasons and physical truths, H.D. believed in focusing on emotions and on the internal workings of the mind as a repository for self-knowledge.

Although Freud believed that dreams were important, he argued that they were illusory, whereas H.D. maintained the “reality” of dreams, and was interested in discovering the significance which they hid. Susan Friedman addresses the incongruous ideologies between analyst and analysand: “From Freud’s perspective as scientist, H.D.’s artistic formulation of spiritual realism is based in fantasy and the need for wish fulfillment. From her perspective as artist, Freud’s empirical reality reduces spirit to the tangible fact of destruction and thus embodies a form of nihilism” (Psyche 108). More importantly, however, Freud condoned a nineteenth-century “ideal of womanhood” (32) which depicted woman as an angelic being, a “darling”, and an adoring wife who belongs in her domestic sphere. Such a conservative notion was difficult for a liberally-minded woman living in the twentieth century to accept, and prompted H.D. to create a new embodiment of the goddess, a powerful woman with regenerative powers, in order to overturn and problematize Freud’s beliefs.

Chapter IV

I. “like a Psyche / with half-dried wings”: Helen’s Reconstruction of her Greek Identity

The passage entitled “Leuké”, in Helen in Egypt, could be considered an “hieroglyph of the unconscious”. On this “*isle blanche*” (Helen 113), the meanings of the enigmatic symbols, events and memories which make up the poem, and also the answers to the many questions Helen has raised, are disclosed. At the beginning of this section, the narrator justifies the transportation of Helen to Leuké by reminding the reader that it was on this island that Helen and Achilles married and produced Euphorion, the child who became the symbol of their successful union (113). An historical source for this specific myth has not been located, but some Greek colonies apparently worshiped an immortal sea god, Achilles, who was supposedly living on the island of Leuce which lay opposite the mouth of the Danube (Harvey 113; Graves 2, 317). In this central section which addresses the importance of accessing past memories in order to arrive at a state of self-awareness, Helen progresses from the “*ecstatic or semi-trance state*” (Helen 113) she had experienced in Egypt to one of memory, and attempts to understand the greater meaning behind her encounters with Paris and Theseus. This results in her final rejection of her identity as Helena Dendritis and the forging of a new one with Achilles. It is significant that during Paris’ dramatic monologue Helen does not speak: she is silent because she is presented with a version of the past which she now rejects since it is associated with her negative identity as Helen of Troy. During Theseus’ monologue, however, she interjects to explain the decisions to which she has come with

the help of Theseus as her guide.

“Leuké” is the section in H.D.’s long poem which most resembles the process of psychoanalysis. Here, memories long suppressed are recalled, and either dismissed or retained depending on their importance; this choice is arbitrarily made by the poet to advance the plot. While “*Achilles waits*” (119) in the state of “timeless-time” in Egypt, Helen is inserted back in time, into a dimension where she has access to specific memories, and where she must seek the connection between Eros and Eris, the forces of love and discord personified in Homer’s *Iliad*. Additionally, on Leuké Helen realizes that although she and Paris have been blamed for the sack of Troy, it was really “*the fault of Thetis*” (115) who, marrying a mortal, failed to invite Eris to the wedding-feast -- an error which led to the Judgment of Paris and finally to the Trojan War (115). What takes place on the island of Leuké, this secure “Egg” (195) into which Helen retreats to discover all facets of her psychological make-up, is the “[*reconstruction*]” (116) of her Greek identity. In order to transcend the collective curse, she must reconcile her identity as wife and mother in Sparta, mistress in Rhodes, temptress in Troy, with the new one she has formed in Egypt. As well, with her Egyptian, Greek and Trojan identities, she must combine those of Helen in life, Helen in death, and Helen as Isis, Thetis, and Persephone. “Helen’s quest becomes the search to reconcile the seemingly contradictory selves of daughter, wife, mother, lover and person alone” (Friedman “Creating”, 181). The goddess’ statement, “I am not nor mean to be / the Daemon they made of me” (*Helen* 113), introduces this section which will describe the reconciliation and the final refutation of this negative identity that patriarchal cultures have long ascribed to her. Her confusion about these separate identities is resolved through her conversations with Theseus who, similar to Thetis in the “Pallinode”, becomes a guide on her

quest.

On Leuké, memories and descriptions are combined into a central image which delineates Helen's "first rebellion" (113) with Paris. This new stance allows the goddess to come to terms with her youthful infatuation with her young Trojan lover, and her final decision to leave him. In a flashback, then, Helen finds herself transported back to the delightful days in Sparta when she and Paris were in the first throes of love:

but I would only remember
how I woke to familiar fragrance,
late roses, bruised apples;

reality opened before me,
I had come back;
I retraced the thorny path

but the thorns of rancour and hatred
were gone — Troy? Greece?
they were one and I was one,

I was laughing with Paris;
so we cheated the past,
I had escaped — Achilles. (120)

Helen momentarily takes pleasure in her recollection of the past which she shared with Paris, pleasure that turns to pain when she worries that Thetis will be angry with her for forgetting her devotion to Achilles. "Thetis, lure-of-the-sea; / will she champion? / will she reject me?" (121), Helen asks anxiously. Her distress disappears, however, when she discovers that it was Paris who permitted her reunion with Achilles in death, and thus freed her from a life which was controlled by criticism and hatred. While Eros "let fly the dart" (117) that killed Achilles, Helen learns, Paris was the "*agent, medium or intermediary*" (116) of Eros who helped to bring the hero and herself together. "[S]o it was his arrow that had given me Achilles -- / it was his arrow that set me free"

(121). Helen suggests here that young love prepares one for a mature relationship.

On this “*isle blanche*”, Helen encounters Paris who not only reveals the events which were orchestrated by the gods to bring the goddess and the Lord of the Myrmidons together, but also his impression of “*vibrant, violent Helen*” (Helen 129), a conception of herself with which Helen must come to terms. We learn that when Paris was eventually recalled to Troy as Prince, second only to Hector, the Judgment of Paris ensued. Having chosen Aphrodite over Hera and Athene, Paris is rewarded with Helen. Paris absconds with Helen, which causes the Greco-Trojan War. During the war, Paris is shot in the shoulder by one of Philoctetes’ poisoned arrows. Near death, he crawls home to Mount Ida and to the fountain-nymph Oenone, the mistress he had deserted when he returned to Troy. Although Oenone has a balm that could heal his wounds, she refuses to relieve her lover’s pain because he will not forget Helen. “[W]ho will forget Helen? / not Paris, feverish, with the wild eyes / of Oenone watching his death” (126). The inclusion of the figure of Oenone in Helen in Egypt demonstrates once again H.D.’s tendency to encourage the reader to sympathize with a woman who has been cruelly discarded by her male lover. On Ida, Aphrodite appears to Paris in a dream while he writhes in agony; she promises to recall him to life only if he forgets Helen (140). Paris, of course, refuses, dies and after death, awaits Helen’s resurrection on the island of Leuké: “I wait for a miracle as simple, / as inevitable as this” (135), he reveals. Still infatuated with Helen, Paris encourages her to remember the erotic passion they once shared in Rhodes. He senses, however, that she has developed a new bond with Achilles when he remembers how Helen’s seductive veil once captivated the hero on the battlefield. Paris then attempts to convince Helen that Achilles never truly loved her:

yet your scarf flew,

a visible sign,
to enchant him,
to draw him nearer;

whoever could break this spell,
would enter into a circle
of new enchantment;

he was father, brother,
he was deserted husband,
he was never your lover. (144)

Paris thus endeavors to force Helen to renew her identity as Helena Dendritis, as “Helena of the trees” (146), in order to prevent her from being charmed by the memory of Achilles back in Egypt. He cannot understand why she wants to return to the great hero, and deny the pleasure that she experienced with himself in the past. Sensing from her silence that she is growing distant, and in a desperate attempt to convince her to remain with him, Paris pleads with her to “be” Helena Dendritis, to assume the identity that he wants her to recall: “can you forget the pact? / why would you recall another? / O Helena, tangled in thought, / be Rhodes’ Helena, *Dendritis*, / why remember Achilles?” (147). Helen, however, having remembered her past with Paris, discovers that she does not want to relive it, and silently passes from his anguished presence. “I can not go on, on, on / telling the story / of the Fall of Troy” (159), she later tells Theseus. Her statement conclusively marks her transition from the traumatic past spent with Paris, to the new myth she is shaping with Achilles in Egypt.

In this section of H.D.’s long poem, the understanding to which Helen gradually comes is articulated once she accepts guidance from Theseus, the great Athenian hero who according to popular legend kidnapped her from Sparta when she was a child. Theseus assumes the paradoxical roles of hero, keeper, father, and “lover” (153), as H.D. describes him, positions

which complicate his insertion in the poem. Theseus, it seems, fell in love with the twelve-year-old Helen while he kept her hidden in the village of Aphidnae (Graves 1, 363); this fondness is reawakened by her sudden appearance on Leuké. He quickly surmounts his desire for Helen, and instead becomes interested in the realizations possible on this island where personal memories and emotions are readily accessible. This “*isle blanche*” (Helen 113), compared at times to an “Egg” (195) and an “egg-shell” (205), is a physical and metaphorical embodiment of a psychological state in which transformation and renewal can gradually take place. “[A]ll myth, the one reality / dwells here” (157), Theseus announces excitedly, subtly expressing a desire to explain all aspects of the legends which surround Helen as well as himself.

Early in the Leuké section, Theseus forgets his role as lover, and assumes that of a father - a role reminiscent of Freud's in relation to H.D. In so doing, he comforts Helen by the fire, helps her to recall key events and to forget the painful maledictions from the past. As her protector-spirit, he offers to guide Helen on her quest: “belovèd Child, we are together, / weary of War, / only the Quest remains” (164). In order to inspire her to face her terrors, Theseus tells her about his own adventures aboard the Argo, and specifically about his quest to kill the Minotaur which became, as he explains to her, the manifestation of his “*own primeval terror*” (174) which he has had to surmount. Theseus reassures Helen that she is slowly coming to an awareness of her new identity, and encourages her to evoke the as yet unidentified memory which is the seemingly insurmountable obstacle which she must overcome. In a statement reminiscent of section thirty-eight in “Tribute to the Angels” which describes the rebirth of Our Lady, Theseus says:

my butterfly,

my Psyche, disappear into the web,
the shell, re-integrate,
nor fear to recall

the shock of the iron-Ram,
the break in the Wall,
the flaming Towers,

shouting and desecration
of the altars; you are safe here;
remember if you wish to remember,

or forget. (177-8)

Like Freud with H.D., Theseus encourages the goddess to arrive at self-realization and healing by retrieving and reconciling memories which have long been suppressed.

Although Theseus serves as the guide who enables Helen to progress on her quest for self-discovery, Helen slowly perceives that he is not approaching her story from an impartial viewpoint, but instead from a perspective which sympathizes largely with the Trojan rather than the Greek cause. In an attempt to weaken Helen's loyalty to Achilles, Theseus encourages her to forget the Lord of the Myrmidons, and describes the literal and figurative sacrifices of Polyxena, Chryseis, Deidamia, and Briseis to Achilles.¹² Perhaps jealous that the great hero is Helen's paramour, or perhaps merely worried that Helen should be associating with a member of the "death-cult", Theseus encourages her to abandon Achilles, fearing that she will be annihilated, that she will "flame out, incandescent" (194) through her contact with him. Much as H.D. was taken aback when confronted by some of Freud's generalizing theories as well as by his conservative attitude toward women, Helen is shocked by Theseus' biases which he inadvertently betrays to her. And just as H.D. directly contradicted Freud's ideas in her own literary works, Helen finally separates herself from Theseus, her guide, and listens to the "*heroic*" (183) and

“*lyric*” (185) voices, manifestations of the masculine and feminine principles, which speak within her. Responding to this heroic voice, Helen resists Theseus’ attempts to break her bond with Achilles and dismisses those acts of violence specific to his past: “the loves of Achilles? / do I care? I am past caring / and he was past caring / when he found me” (183), she exclaims. Moreover, the lyrical voice reacts to the former voice, not with a similar challenge, but instead with a song which blurs the distinction between love and death, and shows that Helen has come to a greater state of self-knowledge. This lyrical voice also underlines the reconciliation of opposites towards which Helen has been progressing, and allows the association of analogous deities from different mythological traditions, such as the combination of Isis, Aphrodite, Thetis and Helen. Helen urges both herself and the reader to “say the words over and over” (186), so that through word association we can start to understand how love and war are correlatives.¹³ In the statement, “War, Ares, Achilles, Amor” (186), Helen progresses from one extreme to the other, and so links members of the “*war-faction*” (19) with the antithetical principle of Eros. With the help of Theseus, Helen realizes that out of war springs rebirth, love and atonement. Although the figures of Eros and Eris were personified in The Iliad and were instrumental in orchestrating the outcome of the Trojan War, H.D. portrays them as abstract, metaphorical notions on which hinges the development of the poem’s argument. The poet slowly suggests that they are not oppositional abstractions, but that the concept of war defines the principle of love, and vice versa.

“Leuké” further describes the friction between the masculine and feminine principles. The central conflict Helen resolves is that between Achilles and Paris, the principal representatives of Eris and Eros, and between the relationships she has with them. When Helen realizes she is “*older in perception and understanding than her former lover [Paris]*” (161), she concludes that

the Trojan prince was only the love of her youth, and that Achilles is the beloved of her maturity. Such a distinction, however, inevitably polarizes them again, and she finds herself wondering “how [to] reconcile / the magnetic, steel-clad Achilles / with the flowering pomegranate?” (188). The goddess joins Eros and Eris, Paris and Achilles, slayer and slain, by arguing that Paris is the son, Euphorion, who was produced by Achilles and her on the white island. The root “euphoria” underscores the joy and the mystical realization to which Helen and Achilles have come on Leuké. Troy’s last king, the reader learns, “is Achilles’ son, he is incarnate / Helen-Achilles; he, my first lover, / was created by my last” (192). From Helen and Achilles, the figures who represent the principles of life and death, springs Paris, or Euphorion-Eros, the child who epitomizes the rebirth of love in the poem. Helen reveals, for instance, that Paris was the child “engendered under the cloak” (192) in Egypt when Achilles’ stranglehold was abruptly transformed into a lover’s embrace when Helen prayed to Thetis for protection. This conversion of a former lover into a son is difficult for her to comprehend fully, and Helen looks to Theseus for reassurance because he is her spiritual guide. “[T]his is no easy thing / to understand, O god-father; / draw close, draw closer, / take my hands in your hands, / teach me to remember, / teach me not to remember” (193), she confesses to him, and also to the reader, in an attempt to explain this strange correspondence and reconciliation that she draws between her early and later lovers. “I see it, suddenly I see it all” (198), Helen announces triumphantly, indicating the epiphanic realization which finally allows her to decode the mysterious hieroglyphs which surround her.

The identity she is forming in Egypt with Achilles, Helen decides, is the one she wishes to accept. She thus joins her Greek and Egyptian identities into a greater subjectivity, and paradoxically becomes “the rose deflowered, / the rose re-born; / Helen in Egypt, / Helen at

home, / Helen in Hellas forever" (197). The image of the rose, of course, suggests Helen's rebirth and final separation from the condemnation and hatred which have been directed at her for so long. She finds a new identity with the "*Absolute of negation*" (203), namely Achilles in Egypt, who is the Absolute Lover for whom she has been searching. Helen reveals, "I found or was found by Dis" (203), or Hades, the Greek god of the underworld, who is associated with Achilles. She reveals to Theseus her determination to accept Achilles, her Dark Absolute, and to reject Paris because with her new hero she is developing a fuller sense of identity.

[N]o god-father,
Paris will never find me;
I reflect, I re-act, I re-live;

true, he renewed my youth,
but now, only the memory of the molten ember
of the Dark Absolute claims me

who have met Death,
who have found Dis,
who embraced Hades. (204)

Helen's acceptance of her new identity which is linked with death and with Achilles-Dis is depicted as her final rite of passage in which she experiences an epiphany as the old self dies and a new self is born. Her identity as Helen of Troy is finally abrogated in favor of that which she is developing in Egypt. The "Leuké" section ends with Helen's prayer that Achilles too will arrive at similar conclusions so that they can create a new life, or myth, together.

Chapter V

I. "Eidolon": The Hieroglyph Speaks

"Eidolon", the final book of Helen in Egypt, resolves the riddles which have been introduced throughout the poem. The eidolon becomes an hieroglyph which speaks and finally reveals the poem's enigmatic meanings. While Thomas Carlyle first used this term in 1828 to designate "an insubstantial image, spectre, phantom" (Oxford 838), H.D. changes it somewhat to refer to a physical representation of a character, such as Thetis and Achilles, who finally brings about renewal. The images H.D. develops in this section explain the three unresolved questions in particular. These are: the triad which links Achilles and Paris with Helen; the memories Helen recalls about Troy in order to deduce why the war transpired; and Achilles' recollections of his childhood, and of his love for his mother -- memories that Helen accesses to understand the great hero's dedication to the "death-cult".

At the beginning of the "Eidolon" section the narrator reminds the reader that it was an image or eidolon of Thetis which originally called Helen out of Egypt so that she could recall her Greek identity with Theseus. Also revealed in this particular episode is an eidolon of Achilles which beckons Helen back to Egypt so that the great hero and the goddess can ultimately be united (Helen 217). The Lord of the Myrmidons asks Helen to return not only because Theseus has commanded him to do so, but also because, as he tells Helen, Theseus "revealed all your secrets" (220), namely, her vacillating between Paris and Achilles, and her faithful promise to

“*endure* [all]” (220) with the latter. In this “*waking-dream or day-dream*” (231) in which Helen again finds herself, she once more condemns her former lover, Paris, for attempting to retrieve an “old story” (232), for selfishly trying to constrain her with the myths which identify her as the cause of the war. She asks him:

yet what have you accomplished,

O, Paris, beautiful enchanter?
you would re-live an old story,
Oedipus and his slain father,

you would re-create Troy
with Helen, not Hecuba for mother;
did I ever stand on the ramparts?

did you ever let fly the dart?
I only remember the shells, whiter than bone,
on the ledge of a desolate beach.... (233)

Finally, having transcended the memory of Helen of Troy, the goddess dismisses this old myth in favor of the new legend she is creating with Achilles in Egypt.

In this “*waking-dream*” (231), then, Helen recalls the dreams and memories which have remained suppressed until now, recollections (such as the day when she abandoned Hermione, and the experiences of her phantom in Troy) which enable her to confront her own feelings of guilt and to understand the gods’ intentions when they orchestrated the Trojan War. She thinks back to Sparta when her daughter looked up at her “with wide eyes in a white face, / at a stranger -- and stared at her mother” (237). Helen finally recollects her unhappiness with Menelaus, and the alienation which she felt as a result of her desire for a Trojan soldier. She is shocked by this memory because she realizes that her elopement was driven solely by selfishness. Moreover, Helen seems to access the experiences that her phantom endured in the war, realizing, as the

narrator points out, that the events were predestined, that “*The players have no choice in the matter of the already-written drama or script*” (239). “I am called back to the Walls / to find the answer” (241), Helen reveals, and recalls several of the incidents her phantom had experienced on the ramparts of Troy, by the wharf, and in Priam’s castle. Through the recollection of these events, she comprehends that the gods provoked the war so that she and Achilles could be united, and the principles of Eros and Eris reconciled. Like psychoanalytical recall, once these suppressed memories have been acknowledged, their importance slowly fades, and those which replace them involve Achilles and her in Egypt. “[W]as it seven years, was it a day? / I can not remember... / I only remember the shells, / whiter than bone, / on the ledge of a desolate beach” (244), Helen repeats, comforted by her recollection of the “enchanted” realm where she and Achilles are joined.

H.D.’s revision of the myth of Helen of Troy culminates in the final revelation which addresses Achilles’ reawakening to the feminine principles Thetis, his mother, had once taught him. This Achilles differs radically from the one in The Iliad and even the figure in H.D.’s “Pallinode”, because the proud man who was controlled by a passion for violence and death has become vulnerable and now turns to Helen for help in ascertaining the paradoxical instincts of *eros* and *thanatos* in himself. Together, Achilles and Helen evoke memories which have been suppressed since he went to war and dedicated himself to the “death-cult”, recollections about his love for his mother which have become the “one secret” (289) he concealed beneath his identity as a great warrior. Helen realizes that Achilles’ love for Thetis is greater than his affection for anyone else, and that his reunion with her is the event that he most desires. The reader observes Achilles’ deep devotion and adoration of his mother when Helen states:

there is one image,

and slaves and princesses
and the town itself are nothing
beside a picture, an image, an idol

or eidolon, not much more than a doll. (252-3)

Achilles first creates an eidolon of Thetis when she leaves him, a mere child, with his mentor, the Centaur Chiron, to be trained as a warrior. The doll the young boy makes of his mother comforts him and comes to symbolize his erotic desire for her and for any other beautiful woman. Linda Wagner argues that the eidolon of Thetis is another image of woman who is controlled by masculine power, a static muse-like figure who inspires courage in the great hero (531-2). This statement is problematic, however, because this is only one of the many forms the sea goddess takes, and although it might be construed as passive, H.D. endows Thetis with an undeniable power throughout the rest of the poem.

Achilles' obsession with eidolons is continued throughout his life, stemming from the little statue he kept hidden in the tree by Chiron's cave to the immense figurehead which adorns his ship, grandly typifying the power, beauty and love which he associates with the sea goddess, and subsequently with any woman who might become his lover and / or wife. H.D.'s portrayal of Achilles as a boy infatuated with his mother presents an alternate image to that of the Greek warrior. It argues that if Achilles once demonstrated a capacity for Eros in regard to his mother, Thetis, it remains a potential to which Helen can reawaken him. Homer's version of the war describes Achilles sulking in his tent during the first battles because of a quarrel with Agamemnon over Chryseis and Briseis. H.D. supplants this tale with the suggestion that he was really on the beach caressing the figurehead of his ship. An omniscient voice outlines Achilles' fondness for

this eidolon which fronts his ship, a description which becomes sensual, and thus reinforces the erotic desire that he feels for his mother or for “woman” in general:

so he went to the prow
of his love, his beloved,

feeling her flanks,
tearing loose weed from her stern,
brushing sand from her beams,

not speaking, but praying. (Helen 257)

H.D. departs from Homer’s version again by implying that Achilles’ prayer is neither for strength in battle nor for the soul of his friend, Patroclus, but instead for the war to end so that he can return to his mother or his lover and not have to comfort himself with a mere eidolon (259).

Achilles’ pivotal recollection centers around this filial and erotic love with which he must come to terms before he can develop a new bond with Helen.

Through flashbacks, then, H.D. clarifies many events which have previously mystified the reader. In battle, Achilles had temporarily forgotten this love for Thetis and committed himself to the war-faction. “[H]e had followed the lure of war, / and there was never a braver, / a better among the heroes, / but he stared and stared / through the smoke and the glowing embers, / and wondered why he forgot” (297). Helen, in her attempt to reconcile the principles of love and death in the hero, fathoms that once Achilles had forgotten his mother and “the laws and the arts of peace” (296) his choice of violence over harmony was assured. This way, as Donna Krolik Hollenberg notes, “H.D. graphically depicts the legacy of the Oedipus complex as it reflects patriarchal socialization. Anticipating contemporary revisionist psychologists, she shows that to repress one’s connection with the mother, to define masculine as not feminine, is to produce a

rigid, defensive, ultimately inadequate criterion of the strength of the self" (*Poetics*, 201). When Achilles "awakes" to the fact that he has been killed in battle and transported mysteriously to Egypt, he is greatly distressed with Thetis for neglecting to dip him entirely (forgetting his heel) in the river Styx to make him completely invulnerable. He calls her his "careless, unspeakable mother" (*Helen* 262) because the recognition shatters his belief in his own invulnerability. Moreover, in Egypt he is tormented by his mortal state, and also by the figure of Helen who appears on the beach with "eyes [which] slant in the old way" (263), and who bears a painful resemblance to someone he cannot recollect. The anger which manifests itself when he attempts to strangle Helen stems less from his disappointment at not being immortal, than from his frustration at recognizing his lost love for his mother and the feminine principles she had taught him before he was enticed away from Eros by the glory of war or *thanatos*. "[A]nd was this his anger, / that something forgotten or lost, / ... / was taken from him, / and he only remembered it, / remembered and wanted it back, / when it was gone?" (292-3), she asks. Helen assumes the role of an analyst and endeavors to help Achilles remember this passion that is more powerful than the "death-cult" of the Command (Kloepfer 170). Through the recollection of these memories, Achilles is reawakened to the feminine principles; and by means of this discovery, he becomes the "New Mortal" (*Helen* 273) with whom Helen will form a new relationship.

Throughout *Helen in Egypt*, H.D. constantly utilizes triadic structures to suggest the interconnections between different figures and symbols, and even between distinct mythological traditions. In order to underscore her connection with the principles of love, life and rebirth, Helen is equated at times with Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of Love; Thetis, the sea goddess; and with Isis, the Egyptian goddess of fertility. As well, the great hero, Achilles, is associated

with the Egyptian deity Osiris to underscore his role as ruler of the dead in Egypt (27), and with Typhon to emphasize his brutality and violence in war (27). To indicate the transformative symbolism of dying from one life in order to be born into a new, Proteus tells Achilles that Helen and he are linked to the Greek and Roman gods of the underworld: "Helen is Persephone, / Achilles is Dis, / (the Greek Isis-Osiris)" (218). Through rebirth as a combined deity Helen and Achilles thus become all-powerful because within them the principles of life and death, female and male, are conjoined. Bound to Achilles Helen achieves parity with Thetis, the mother goddess, as well as with the hero himself, a triadic connection which resolves the strict binary oppositions between men and women because each character comes to typify a synthesis of masculine and feminine principles. The struggles for power which originally characterized her life in Sparta and Troy change with Helen's choice of Achilles over Paris; once Paris is abandoned, Achilles assumes the formidable position of brother-husband-equal (Gelpi in Middlebrook 88) to the beautiful goddess.

To effect this transformation and to reconcile the differences between these two antagonistic male figures, Helen first identifies Paris with the Egyptian son of Osiris, the hawk-headed Horus conceived by Isis to avenge his father's murder, who now reconstitutes the dismembered body of Achilles-Osiris (Edmunds "Writing", 486). Helen also compares Paris to the Greek Eros so that he embodies the love force Helen and Achilles have engendered. This way, Helen, Achilles, and Paris are joined in a triad which unifies them through the forces of life and love, and resolves their strife (Eris). H.D. further develops the connection between the goddess and the great hero, and the respective gods of the underworld by adding Paris to this triad: H.D. links Helen with Persephone, Achilles with Pluto (the Greek god of the underworld

who was also originally considered a god of fertility), and Paris with Dionysus, all epitomizing either the death or the life instincts. “[W]ith Helen-Persephone, / with Pluto-Achilles; / but there was another, / incompatible in life, / yet in myth, completing the circle, / the triangle, the broken arc, / Dionysus-Paris” (Helen 224).

The Greek deity, Dionysus, was the god of wine and revelry, and was usually followed by a group of Satyrs and Maenads who were united in a bacchanalian frenzy (Harvey 147). He was also depicted as a god of vegetation who died and came to life again as a god of wine, and who inspired music and poetry (147). Graves also notes that Dionysus, who had his origins in the Near East, was portrayed as a rather effeminate deity, and that his extravagant lifestyle was opposed by Pentheus’ and Perseus’ conservative beliefs (1, 109). The effeminate manner of this god when linked to Paris reinforces the somewhat dandified qualities which Homer depicted in his young Trojan warrior. Since the Greeks identified Dionysus with the Egyptian Osiris, Paris as Dionysus again epitomizes the reconciliation, the combination of the instincts of *eros* and *thanatos*. The eidolon of Paris attempts to convince Helen that Achilles should be feared because of his association with the “death-cult”, and because Achilles’ ghost demanded the sacrifice of Paris’ own sister, Polyxena. Nonetheless, Paris is willing to accept Achilles as his father in this new triad so long as Helen assumes the position of Hecuba, Paris’ mother. He states:

if Achilles is my father
in this new spirit-order,
I will accept the Hero

if you are my mother,
for I, I was left by Hecuba,
like Oedipus to die;

Jocasta, Oedipus? Hecuba, Paris?

this is the old story,
no new Euphorion. (Helen 226).

The double role of mother and wife which Jocasta fulfilled for Oedipus is one that Paris wants Helen to provide for him -- a liaison which again emphasizes the transgressive erotic emotions expressed throughout the poem, and which arise when relationships are based on "romantic thralldom".

H.D.'s correlation of the three gods, Zeus, Ammon and God, in the respective Greek, Egyptian and Judeo-Christian religions at the beginning of Helen in Egypt collapses the differences among separate religious traditions, and continues throughout the poem, often serving to reconcile completely different gender characteristics. Symbols, such as the lyre, the sword or even entire characters, are constructed and then re-worked to underscore the notion of a protean metamorphosis which is one of the poem's central themes. Susan Friedman notes that H.D. commonly presents polar opposites, and the development of a synthesized whole which grants entry to a transcendent plane of peace and unity, incorporating in a single notion both its thesis and antithesis (Psyche 152). As the narrator observes in "Eidolon", "*Perhaps it is the very force of opposition that creates the dynamic intensity*" (Helen 234). Through this integration of polarized ideas binary opposites which have been manipulated by patriarchal cultures, such as woman as seductress and as angel, are fully countered. While H.D.'s "Pallinode" initially develops the opposition between the masculine and feminine principles, between Eris and Eros, these antithetical notions which underlie existence are elided in "Eidolon" to demonstrate how aspects of each can ideally be found in every concept. When Helen "remembers" how in Troy her phantom attempted to throw herself off a ship to escape the constant condemnation, but did not

have the courage or the strength of will to follow through with it (276-7), Helen realizes that the phantom was preserved by the gods because they intended to use her to awaken Achilles to the interconnection between love, death and war. *"No, Helen can not escape from Troy through physical death. Now she is glad of her return, she is "happy to see the dawn." She was saved for this, La Mort, L'Amour"* (278), the narrator clarifies, resorting to a worn cliché.

Through this reconciliation of two seemingly contradictory principles, the authoritarianism of the war-faction, and the condemnation of Helen as the cause of the war, are finally overpowered by love and rebirth. The goddess manages once and for all to destroy the patriarchal tendency to define her as a temptress and Achilles as a war lord when she recalls "thoughts too deep to remember, / that break through the legend, / the fame of Achilles, / the beauty of Helen, / like fire / through the broken pictures / on a marble-floor" (268-9). This way, as Rachel Duplessis shows, Helen's own role becomes paradoxical: while she realizes that her phantom was one of the causes for the war, Helen herself was also the cure for it (Career 113). Once Eros and Eris are reconciled in Helen's union with Achilles, Eros-Euphorion is the result, *"the ultimate experience"* (Helen 299), a "child" in whom masculine and feminine elements are finally blended to form the androgynous figure who epitomizes H.D.'s extraordinary synthesis of strict male and female binary oppositions. Interestingly, Euphorion was also an epic poet from the Alexandrian school (Harvey 170), a coincidence H.D. would surely have realized and used to suggest that the reunion of these two figures ultimately produces an artist.

The conclusion of "Eidolon" and also of H.D.'s trilogy rejoices in the supremacy of the mother and goddess, thus uniting the images which have been constantly created about these formidable figures. The closing lyrics depart from Helen's specific story by examining the

abstract symbols which have been interconnected throughout the poem, and which conclusively emphasize the principles of multiplicity and circularity which have characterized the poem. Helen and Achilles once more find themselves on the Egyptian beach, but the reader now understands the significance of the events before and after their encounter. Helen and Achilles, like the reader, have arrived at a new state of comprehension through the recollection of their suppressed memories. Rather than closing with Helen's words, the narrator explains to the reader that "*One greater than Helen must answer*" (*Helen* 314) -- an omniscient figure who displays a more universal wealth of knowledge than the goddess. In a coda, this voice finally elucidates the meanings of the enigmatic symbols and events before and after the encounter in Egypt, the forces of *eros* and *thanatos*, and the finite and infinite time constructs in which the characters have found themselves. This "finite moment" (314) which is the final reunion of Helen and Achilles, love and war, embodies the constant preoccupation with the interconnection of death and love which constitutes the enigma Helen has been trying to resolve:

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

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

reveals the innermost
key or the clue to the rest
of the mystery. (314)

This section which is presumably spoken by the protean king, "*Nameless-of-many-Names*" (221), reveals the answers to the secret correspondence between gender principles that Helen (and H.D.) have gradually been deciphering.

It is the final coda, the eidolon of words, which sums up Helen's decision to reject her former lover, Paris, but not the Paris who is the embodiment of Eros-Euphorion and Dionysus. Since the Trojans were not regarded as a sea-going people equal to the Greeks, Helen criticizes Paris' arrogance when he pretends to know something about the sea and calls upon Thetis as a guide. "*But what could Paris know of the sea*" (315), Helen asks in disgust, revealing an aversion that she has come to feel for her lover who never attempted to believe in the preeminence of the goddess. Paris-the-lover is rejected, and Helen is left to ponder eternally the significance of the sea, and the role of the sea goddess, Thetis, in the development of her new self-awareness. The sea, "*its ripple that spells a charm / on the sand*" (315), becomes the new force which Helen will study indefinitely to further her own quest for self-discovery. The final stanza of the coda celebrates Thetis, and refers once again to the image Achilles forgot when he went off to war, and which in turn brings the reader back to the beginning of the poem when the goddess and the hero were recalling their memories in Troy. Since there is never a sense that the poem has arrived at a definite conclusion, we recognize that the cycle of analysis is perpetual and that Helen's journey is prolonged into eternity. Unlike Paris who pretends to know something about Thetis, Achilles is the figure in the poem who possesses the strongest link with the sea goddess and the rejuvenating power of the sea. "[O]nly Achilles could break his heart / and the world for a token, / a memory forgotten" (315), the omniscient narrator concludes. H.D.'s long poem, which was finished in 1954, closes with this celebration of feminine reckoning, an exaltation which in effect marks the culmination of H.D.'s entire literary and personal quest for the rejuvenating powers of the goddess.

Conclusion

The meanings of H.D.'s complex poem, Helen in Egypt, as well as the enigmatic hieroglyphs which surround Helen in the Egyptian "Amen-temple" (11), are gradually if somewhat painstakingly unveiled. The interpretation of this text is difficult because it does not invite the reader in, or make any of the notions or correspondences overly easy to understand. Like Trilogy with its emphasis on hermeticism, H.D.'s Helen in Egypt seems to be hermetically sealed and the analysis of its arcane concepts is open only to a persistent acolyte. The modernist poet's lengthy revision of the Helen of Troy legend reflects many of the ideas H.D. pondered throughout her life. Myths, for instance, are portrayed as vessels for collective history. The mother and goddess figures are presented as embodying a feminine principle which has been forgotten, and this neglect has engendered much of the destruction over the centuries. Moreover, several of Sigmund Freud's notions are alluded to in order to effect the self-discovery to which many of the figures in the poem come.

Sections of the poem, as well as the entire poem itself, are hieroglyphic and similar to ideograms, in the Poundian sense of the term, which develop particular oppositions H.D. wants to reconcile in an attempt to arrive at a synthesis of behavior, emotion and thought in the fragmented twentieth century. The focus on the Greek lineage of Helen in Egypt becomes a mask H.D. dons to explore her beloved Greek traditions and to articulate both ancient and modern anxieties. Like Joyce who equates Stephen with the Athenian craftsman Daedalus, H.D. reinvents Helen of Troy by associating her with formidable deities. Unlike Joyce who examines Stephen Daedalus'

struggles with Catholicism, however, H.D. recreates the figure of Helen to understand the cultural and political contexts which directly affect the representation of this mythical woman. The poem progresses as an analysis primarily of Helen's personal identities (identities which H.D. emphasizes have been controlled by patriarchal culture) and finally culminates in Helen's self-awareness. The goddess recalls suppressed memories and reconciles antithetical notions which conclude, as the narrator describes, with "Helen's epiphany in Egypt" (115), as well as with H.D.'s own celebration of the goddess' ability to counter the patriarchal and androcentric notions which have dominated western culture.

In her short and longer poems, from the beginning to the end of her literary career, H.D. uses the Greek past and its rich mythology to critique conditions which continue in the present, whether to examine the notions of love and rebirth, masculine and feminine ideals, or to denounce the psychological effects of war and patriarchy in both ancient and modern times. Much as she transformed Mary Magdalene, Venus and Lilith in Trilogy, so through the figure of Helen of Egypt, H.D. presents an "alternative vision" (Ostriker "Women", 491) not only of the Trojan War, but also of the marginalized woman long blamed for its inception. Subject-object differences are resolved, and Helen *in* Egypt escapes the calumny associated with Helen *of* Troy by becoming the subject of the rejuvenating new myth which she is forging with Achilles in Egypt. H.D.'s poetry and prose, with its characteristic word play, vivid images, and its questioning of accepted ideologies, thus addresses universal concerns with war, with the life of the psyche, and with oppression, whether it is political, racial, or gender-based.

Endnotes

1. Ostriker observes that such women writers who employ revisionist myth-making include Sylvia Plath in "Lady Lazarus" as well as in "Medusa", Kate Ellis in "Matrilineal Descent", Margaret Atwood in her "Circe/Mud Poems", and Rachel Duplessis in her poem "Medusa".

2. In "Cassandra", the goddess of prophecy expresses her melancholy at having these powers of prediction because everyone fears her and she spends most of her life alone. While "Circe" describes Circe's frustration at being abandoned by Odysseus, Eurydice addresses the anger that she feels because Orpheus' look behind him doomed her to death.

3. The term "spiritual realism" is first used by H.D. in Trilogy to designate the dialectical relationship that she depicts in many of her literary works between a spiritual state and "reality". In Trilogy H.D. notes how the healing potential of artists during the First and Second World Wars has been denigrated. She believes that artists must bring a sense of spirituality to war-torn Europe in order to restore hope. The term "spiritual realism" thus designates the two levels on which H.D.'s prose and poetry develop, levels which seek to imbue the horrific realities of war with a sense of faith.

4. Robert O'Brien Hokanson points out that there is a marked difference between H.D.'s prose and lyrical passages in terms of tone and the facts that each passage presents (338). Whereas the prose passages attempt to introduce information in an objective manner, the poetry is infinitely subjective because it deals directly with the emotional revelations of the characters and the poet. Hokanson argues that the objective perspective the prose passages attempt to provide fails ultimately because they are clearly aspiring to control how the elements of the story are interpreted. While he does raise some interesting issues about narrative agency in the poem, I cannot agree with him when he argues that H.D. attempts to undermine the reliability of the prose passages and their emphasis on fact and truth.

5. Douglas Bush wrote, "The Greece she dwells in has no real connection with the Greece of historic actuality. Most of her poetry has the air of an exquisitely chiseled reproduction of something, though it is a reproduction of something that never existed. H.D. is a poet of escape. Her refuge is a dream-world of ideal beauty which she calls Greece; her self-conscious, even agonized, pursuit of elusive beauty is quite un-Greek. The fact is that the hard bright shell of H.D.'s poetry partly conceals a soft romantic nostalgia which, however altered and feminized, is that of the Victorian Hellenists" (quoted in Quinn 33).

6. Sherri Williams, in her article "Translating Helen: H.D.'s Helen in Egypt", questions the validity of revisionist myth-making because she suggests that the notion of revision implies that the original text was somehow inaccurate. She argues that the version that is created to correct the older version can perform the same exclusionary function that the canon performed (109). She prefers to state that H.D. provides an alternative version of history that can exist in conjunction with other historical narratives, such as Homer's framework, that are present. While Williams makes a point about the exclusionary capability that such revisionist myth-making might breed, I

do think that she is being overly argumentative in this respect because Ostriker in her theory never once implies that women writers were replacing an old text with a “better” one, but were instead re-telling a canonical story from a completely different perspective.

7. For an examination of H.D.’s “sexually transgressive poetic” (Laity xi) which was influenced by her admiration for the poetics of desire as displayed by the Pre-Raphaelites and the Decadents, see Cassandra Laity’s book, H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle.

8. The caravel is also the vessel of the sun-god, Osiris, and his death-ship. Since “[t]he caravel epitomizes a mythology of the soul’s journey and its palingenesis” (Fritz 160), Helen’s death-barge paradoxically contains the power of resurrection, already linking the antithetical notions of death and life.

9. Orestes attempted to kill Helen because she too had been an adulteress, but Helen was rapt away in a cloud and brought to Olympus. She became one of the immortals, and, like her twin brothers, the Dioscuri, the guardian of sailors in distress (Graves 2, 65-66). The different outcomes of the two sisters, Helen and Clytaemnestra, are especially significant within the context of H.D.’s poem: while the wife of Agamemnon resorted to violence and was destroyed because of it, Helen’s adulteries were orchestrated by the gods to engender the synthesis between love and war.

10. This confrontation between the principles of Love and Death stems from Greek mythology, and refers to the marriage feast of Thetis and Peleus to which Eris (the goddess of strife) arrived uninvited to cause turmoil among the goddesses. She threw the Apple of Discord among them which said, “Let the fair one take it”, and since Hera, Athene and Aphrodite all claimed it, Paris was asked to choose among them. Hera promised him glory, Athene success in war, and Aphrodite the most beautiful woman alive. Paris selected Aphrodite who in turn helped him to carry Helen off (Harvey 306). This in turn occasioned the elopement of Paris and Helen, an event that culminated in the Trojan War.

11. In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud outlines the opposition between *eros* and *thanatos*: “In all that follows I take up the standpoint that the inclination to aggression is an innate, independent, instinctual disposition in man, and... it constitutes the most powerful obstacle to culture... [C]ulture [is a] process... in the service of Eros, which aims at binding together single human individuals, then families, then tribes, races, nations, into one great unity, that of mankind... The natural instinct of aggressiveness in man, the hostility of each one against all... opposes this programme of civilization. This instinct of aggression is the derivative and main representative of the death instinct we have found alongside of Eros, sharing his rule over the earth. And now, it seems to me, the meaning of the evolution of culture is no longer a riddle to us. It must present to us the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instincts of life and the instincts of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species” (Freud 102-3).

12. In this instance, H.D. demonstrates how each of these women was “sacrificed in one way or another” (Helen 180) to Achilles. Deidamia was seduced by Achilles while he was disguised in the

Scyrian court (82-3). Chryseis was captured by Achilles and awarded to Agamemnon. A plague was sent by Apollo to avenge her capture, and she was returned to her father. Briseis was abducted by the Greeks and given to Achilles. When Agamemnon demanded that Achilles relinquish his mistress, the quarrel between the two soldiers ensued (Zimmerman 61). After Troy fell, the ghost of Achilles claimed Polyxena, and she was sacrificed on his tomb (Harvey 4).

13. H.D.'s use of puns and word associations stems from her interest in the Kabbala. Robert Ambelain's book, La Kabbale pratique [sic], profoundly influenced her examination and reorganization of letters in words to discover the secret messages that were hidden within them. For a more comprehensive study of H.D.'s interest in esoteric religions, see Susan Friedman's section, entitled "H.D. and Religious Tradition" in Psyche Reborn.

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