

H.D. AND THE SHORE: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the significance of littoral imagery in the poetry and prose of the American modernist H.D. (1886-1961), and asserts the shore and its ecology as a central, unexplored aspect of her work. Over the course of H.D.'s career, the shore is used to explore palimpsests of landscape, ecology, identity and myth over European and U.S. shorelines, reflecting on our own cultural understanding of the shore and modern conceptualisations of these mutable and now extremely vulnerable landscapes.

An ecocritical approach is used to situate H.D.'s poetic shores within the coastal places she knew and visited during her life, highlighting her close engagement with specific littoral places, flora and fauna. It also considers H.D.'s investment in littoral ecology and wildlife, namely jellyfish, molluscs, sea-birds, migratory flocks and coastal flora. As well as documenting H.D.'s naturalistic observation of particular shores, this thesis also explores the interaction of mythology and nature in H.D.'s work, and examines the shore's symbolic significance to H.D. within a larger network of cultural associations with the shore.

The thesis also suggests further opportunity in considering how modernist writers engaged with ecology, animals and landscapes, and explores how this legacy reflects our own contemporary environmental concerns.

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A NOTE ON PRIMARY TEXTS

ABBREVIATIONS: References to H.D.'s works are given parenthetically in the body of the thesis, not as footnotes. The texts, and editions used, are indicated by the abbreviations listed below.

- CP* *Collected Poems 1912–1944*, ed. by Louis L. Martz (New York: New Directions, 1986).
- NTV* *Notes on Thought and Vision* [1919], ed. by Albert Gelpi (San Francisco, CA.: City Lights Books, 1982).
- PIT* *Paint it Today* [1921], (New York: New York University Press, 1992).
- AS* *Asphodel* [1921–22], ed. by Robert Spoo (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 1992).
- P* *Palimpsest* [1926], (Carbondale, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968) (original text published 1926).
- HER* *HERmione* [1927], (New York: New Directions, 1981).
- KK* *Kora and Ka* [1930], (New York: New Directions, 1996) (original text published in 1930).
- N* *Nights* [1935], (New York: New Directions, 1986) (original text published in 1935).
- BMTL* *Bid Me to Live* [1939], (New York: Grove Press, 1960).
- WDNF* *'The Walls Do Not Fall'* [1944], *Trilogy* (Cheadle: Carcanet Press, 1973) (original work published in 1946).
- TG* *The Gift* [1942–45], ed. by Jane Augustine (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1998).
- TA* *'Tribute to the Angels'* [1945], *Trilogy* (Cheadle: Carcanet Press, 1973).
- FR* *'The Flowering of the Rod'* [1946], *Trilogy* (Cheadle: Carcanet Press, 1973).
- SWS* *The Sword Went Out to Sea* [1946–47] ed. by Cynthia Hogue and Julia Vandivere (Gainesville, FL.: University Press of Florida, 2007).
- TF* *Tribute to Freud* [1933–48], (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1970).
- ET* *End to Torment: A Memoir to Ezra Pound* [1958] (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1995).
- Helen* *Helen in Egypt* [1961] (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

PARENTHESES: As many of the texts by H.D. used in this thesis are unpublished or published posthumously, round parentheses are used throughout to denote an original publication date, e.g. (1925) and square brackets for composition date, e.g. [1919].

ELLIPSES: Ellipses appear frequently in some of H.D.'s work, namely *HERmione* and *Helen in Egypt*. Throughout the thesis, therefore, ellipses given in square brackets [...] are my addition, indicating unquoted text, and ellipses given without the parentheses ... are H.D.'s own, appearing as a part of the original text.

INTRODUCTION

In the 2011 edition of the online H.D. newsletter, published to mark the 125th anniversary of H.D.'s birth and the 50th anniversary of her death, editors asked for responses to readers' first encounter with the American poet. H.D. scholar Donna K. Hollenberg contributed her first reading of H.D.'s final work *Helen in Egypt* (1961), writing that 'I had no idea what the poem "meant", and nothing coherent to say about it; I only knew that I loved reading it aloud, preferably by the ocean'.¹ Oceanic shores, both real and imagined, recur throughout H.D.'s work; it is no wonder that Hollenberg's impulse is to pair H.D. with the shore, specifically with experiencing the shore, in this way.

H.D., born Hilda Doolittle in Pennsylvania 1886, played an active role in modernism in the first half of the twentieth century, publishing poetry and prose from 1916 to her death in 1961. The shore appears as a setting, a symbol and a system of imagery throughout H.D.'s work, from her first collection of poetry in 1916, through her interwar writing and her output during the Second World War, to her final poetry published shortly before her death. The aim of this thesis is to explore the relationship between H.D. and the littoral, surveying its presence across H.D.'s body of poetry, prose and Life Writing, and investigating its significance as a poetic image, an environmental habitat and a personal and cultural signifier.

During her childhood in Pennsylvania, H.D. often holidayed on the coast. Her 1939 memoir *The Gift* details childhood visits to Point Pleasant in New Jersey, her autobiographical notes mention time spent at Port Jefferson, Long Island, and her letters mention holidays with childhood friends at Baily Island in Casco Bay, Maine, and at Watch Hill, New Jersey. These accounts

¹ Donna K. Hollenberg, 'H.D. at First', *H.D.'s Web: An E-Newsletter*, 7 (2011), 5–6: 5.

describe the shore as a place of freedom, describing carefree days, nude swimming, sailing and night-time canoeing.² A unifying feature of the shore in H.D.'s work is that the shore is a site of various freedoms: from the social conventions of inland society, from binary definitions, from stifling home lives.

H.D. spent her working life in London after emigrating to Europe in 1911, where her career began as a central figure in the Imagist movement, and lived there until her death in 1961. However, despite this urban living, the shore as a wild and isolated space resounds through her work, reflecting both the real littoral geographies she visited and their cultural and personal associations she brought back to London. H.D.'s first collection of poetry, *Sea Garden*, was published in 1916 and features a shore very similar to the northeastern American coastlines she knew in her youth, but also reflects her growing interest in Hellenism and involvement in the Imagist movement.

By the end of the First World War, H.D. had established herself in the modernist circles of London, editing *The Egoist* from 1916–17 and marrying the poet, and her collaborator, Richard Aldington in 1913. After Aldington was enlisted in the First World War and returned from France, however, their marriage quickly disintegrated: in this time, H.D. and Aldington stayed in Devon and Cornwall, before H.D. travelled to the Isles of Scilly with her new partner Bryher. Again, these places can be traced in H.D.'s writing from this period, when they become metaphors for H.D.'s rediscovery of herself in the aftermath of the war and her separation from Aldington, and in her new relationship with Bryher.

² Margaret Pratt (née Snively) to H.D., 2 March 1953, Box 11 of the *H.D. Papers*, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

In the years after the war, H.D. and Bryher travelled extensively through Greece, Italy, Asia Minor and the United States, visiting numerous shores and archipelagic geographies. Greek shores and islands are a central landscape in H.D.'s poetry of the period, collected in *Hymen* (published 1921) and *Heliodora* (published 1923), which rework female characters and narratives in classical mythology, and often foreground places H.D. visited, such as Piraeus and Eleusis.³ In 1920, H.D., Bryher, H.D.'s daughter Perdita and mother Helen stayed in the Carmel Highlands near Monterey, California, describing the coastal landscape as 'the very edge of the world': as I will argue, this conception of the shore as an edge landscape, divergent from inland living, becomes an important part of H.D.'s portrayal of various classical women.⁴

Beginning in 1921 and continuing into the 1930s, H.D. began writing novels with a heavy autobiographical slant, exploring her adolescence and early life in the literary circles of London. These novels trace H.D.'s growing self-awareness with an emphasis on the interior lives of their female protagonists, but all feature littoral settings that shape and elucidate the characters' inner lives. American coasts, Greece and Cornwall all feature as formative sites for self-actualisation, but they also stage various inner conflicts and resolutions for H.D.'s queer identity and rejection of heteronormative roles.

In 1933, H.D. travelled to Vienna to be analysed by Freud, after a referral by Bryher's own therapist. H.D. discussed her anxiety over the rise of Hitler and the onset of a new world war as well as her sexual identity, which she defined as bisexuality after their sessions. When the Second World War came about, H.D. was too old to contribute officially to the war effort, and set to work writing an epic poem that took her the duration of the war to complete. *Trilogy* imagines a world rebuilt after war, restarting after the arrival of a female second messiah. The

³ Autobiographical notes, Box 47 of the *H.D. Papers*.

⁴ H.D. to Alida Monro, 1920, Box 3 of the *H.D. Papers*.

shore appears in new guises here, its cycles becoming representative of the poem's cycle toward newness. In H.D.'s later work, beginning during the Second World War, the shore lacks the specific geography it has in earlier work. H.D. is no longer writing about her American youth or the British shores she knew after the First World War, but instead turns to the shore's rich cultural symbolism as a place of tidal cycles and an ancient site of evolutionary beginnings.

This symbolic shore continues into H.D.'s last published poetry *Helen in Egypt*, completed in 1958 and published in 1961. Here, the littoral object of the spiral-shell comes to represent cyclical time, and the shore is a site of memory, harking back to H.D.'s childhood associations with the East Coast American shore. H.D. was a British citizen for most of her writing life, gaining British citizenship through her marriage to Richard Aldington, but she repatriated as an American citizen in 1958, despite not planning to return to her home country. Her citizenship appears to be a symbolic gesture, suggesting an attachment to the memory of her American youth rather than a present desire. The shore links Helen's memory to her identity in the poem, the shell returning her to the beginning of her story.

H.D.'s presentation of the shore, across her work, is prismatic, and often hard to pin down. It shifts between various metaphorical and ecological guises, and is built both onto the real coastal places H.D. knew in her life and as a personal, symbolic landscape encoding a marginal and fluid self. This multiplicity is at the centre of my reading, aiming to understand how the shore influences our lives as both a physical space and a cultural presence. This presents an intervention to the field of H.D. scholarship, suggesting that H.D. is far more interested in physical place and ecology than is currently thought, but also asks us to consider the role of mythology and poetic symbolism in our understanding of particular ecologies, and to open the field of modernism beyond the urban and interior.

I. H.D. and the Shore: A Critical History

Despite the shore appearing in the majority of H.D.'s writing, it is yet to be studied in the field of H.D. scholarship. This thesis centres the shore in reading her work, and thus poses a dual intervention, arguing not only that the shore is a much more important site and poetic image to H.D. than is currently thought, but suggesting that current research on H.D.'s portrayal of landscape can tell us important things about our relationship with nature and landscape. H.D. shows a real desire to transcribe the littoral landscapes she knew in her life, showing a careful observation of littoral wildlife and a vivid understanding of the shore's ecological and cultural life.

H.D. was largely overlooked by literary scholars until the 1970s, when a rediscovery of her work by feminist scholars placed her in the midst of a flurry of scholarship over her feminist, revisionist classicism and queer poetics. Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis studied H.D.'s poetry primarily as an exploration of selfhood, finding self-actualisation in the rejection and subversion of patriarchal and heteronormative values, and this research has paved the way for numerous studies of H.D.'s depiction of sexual politics in her work.⁵ Eileen Gregory's

⁵ Susan Stanford Friedman's 1975 essay 'Who Buried H.D.?' sparked an interest in feminist studies in H.D.'s life and work that came after academic silence following her death in 1961. As Friedman comments, at that time 'outside of a few poets like Denise Levertov, who wrote 'An Appreciation' of H.D., Robert Duncan, and the aficionados who circulated a pirated edition of *Hermetic Definition*, few people read her poetry' (803). For Friedman, H.D. represented a marginalised voice that had been misunderstood by previous (male) critics due to a 'male oriented bias' (811) which favoured her male modernist counterparts because 'she was a woman, she wrote about women, and all the ever-questioning, artistic, intellectual heroes of her epic poetry and novels were women' (803). Friedman's argument for a re-emergence of H.D. criticism in order to better understand a female-voiced Modernism ignited new interest in her work, particularly in biographical study. Rachel Blau DuPlessis' 1986 study into the biographical obstacles of H.D.'s career also focuses on her restrictions as a female writer, again using Friedman's image of the captured Scops owl from 'Sagesse' to illustrate her frustration at the limitations placed on her. Friedman's first book on H.D., *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* was the first reading of her work to combine a heavily biographical narrative with a scholastic criticism, and focussed on H.D.'s

work extended this question of a queer, feminist poetics into H.D.'s Hellenism, arguing for her classical revisionism to be read through queer feminism.⁶

This emphasis on queer, feminist selfhood in her work has meant that H.D.'s interest in nature and landscape has been somewhat overlooked, with her writing of landscape and wildlife framed only as metaphors and symbols in her quest for self-knowledge. However, H.D. was interested in the physical, material experience of landscape as well as its potential for building personal and cultural symbolisms: often the two are layered closely over each other. As early as 1916, John Gould Fletcher pointed out the similarity of H.D.'s coasts to the East Coast of the United States, commenting about one of her first poems, 'Hermes of the Ways': 'the scenery and the feeling are not Greek. In fact, as someone has pointed out, the whole poem might have been called "The coast of New Jersey"'.⁷ Fletcher goes on to point out that this close evocation of a real landscape is tempered by the poem's mythological subject of Hermes, but that this provides an 'eternal quality' to the described landscape. H.D.'s husband, Richard Aldington, recognised this pattern between wild nature and cultural mythology later in her career, and in a 1957 letter discussing her newly issued *Selected Poems*, wrote:

I was interested to see in the blurb that the writer [Pearson] stresses the importance of your experiences on the N[ew]. England sea coast. Now, that was a point I made in my Columbia Extension lecture on you and DHL [D. H. Lawrence] in 1939. I said I thought that though the Greek influence is clear and the quality of the poems attains something Hellenic, the essence of the poetry is American and above all New England. I should have suspected this, but I felt it very strongly because by then I had spent two summers on that fierce New England coast. There are two "American" schools, in my opinion. The "urban" to which Ezra and Eliot belong, and the "out-door" which includes Whitman, Thoreau, Melville and yourself.⁸

post-Imagist work. [Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Who Buried H. D.? A Poet, Her Critics, and Her Place in "The Literary Tradition"', *College English*, 36(7) (1975), 801–814; Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *The Career of That Struggle* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1986); Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1987).]

⁶ Eileen Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷ John Gould Fletcher, 'Three Imagist Poets', *The Little Review*, 3 (1916), 32–41: 34.

⁸ Richard Aldington to H.D., 18 June 1957, *Richard Aldington and H.D.: Their Lives in Letters*, ed. by Caroline Zilboorg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 385.

Not only does this description underline the importance of American landscapes to H.D., but it places H.D. in the traditions of American nature-writing, away from the urban and self-conscious work of the modernist tradition. As I will discuss later in this section, it is limiting to associate modernism solely with the 'urban', but it is still remarkable that Aldington would re-define H.D. in this way. Aldington's point is underscored by H.D.'s close friend and literary executor Norman Holmes Pearson in a 1969 interview, in which he carefully positioned H.D. as being as interested in American nature as she was in Hellenism: 'she often told me that her nature imagery, for example, was never really Greek but came from her childhood reminiscences of Watch Hill and the coasts of Rhode Island and Maine, which she used to visit with her friends as a child'.⁹

Yet despite these sources, H.D. has only begun to be read through ecocriticism in recent years. Annette Debo, in her 2012 book *The American H.D.*, posited an ecocritical reading of H.D.'s work focussing on the influence of the American landscape on H.D.'s construction of her identity. Debo traces the appearances of the north-eastern landscape of the United States throughout H.D.'s work, building a picture of a poet whose innate national identity is wholly built on an experience of American nature. Such research suggests that natural landscapes and geographical narratives play a larger role in H.D.'s work than the lack of prior academic scholarship on the subject would suggest. Debo focuses on the significance of American places to H.D.'s vision, believing that her 'American past haunted her' after her move to Britain and that H.D. therefore 'reflected back upon her childhood to formulate the relationship between her adult identity and that American childhood'.¹⁰ Indeed, H.D. repatriated to the United States at age seventy-two although she died while still in Europe, and for Debo, this desire to return to the country of her

⁹ L.S. Dembo, 'Norman Holmes Pearson on H.D.: An Interview', *Contemporary Literature*, 10(4) (1969), 435–446: 437.

¹⁰ Annette Debo, *The American H.D.* (Iowa City, IA.: University of Iowa Press, 2012), p. 128.

birth 'relies on a belief in the formative power of place'.¹¹ Debo argues that restricting H.D.'s work to a Hellenic or metaphorical sphere is a 'disservice' to H.D.'s close observations of the American landscape and the potential for ecocritical readings her work possesses. This thesis builds on Debo's work by focussing in particular on shoreline landscapes, both narrowing Debo's American scope into a single habitat landscape and expanding it into the British and Greek landscapes H.D. also grew attached to. Where Debo focuses very much on the physical and material evocations of place in H.D.'s work, this project also considers the cultural and imaginative associations H.D. builds into her landscape, that 'eternal quality' Fletcher describes. This project argues that H.D.'s mythology is in deliberate dialogue with her portrayal of real geography and ecology, explicitly exploring humans' physical and cultural experiences of landscape.

While Debo's work represents the only self-labelled 'ecocritical study' of H.D.'s work in book form, a number of journal articles have addressed the potential for H.D.'s work to be read ecocritically. In 2014, Cynthia Hogue wrote an eco-poetic reading of H.D.'s later novel *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, written during the Second World War, arguing that the novel displays environmental awareness and presents a gynocentric vision of a replenished natural world. Harriet Tarlo's study of the classical pastoral in H.D.'s work is also important to the framing of this thesis, as it balances H.D.'s portrayal of classical myth with her close observation and naturalist portrayal of Greek landscapes. In her 2012 article "'An Insurmountable Chasm?": Revisiting, Reimagining and Re-writing Classical Pastoral Through the Modernist Poetry of H.D.', Tarlo traces the presence of classical Pastoral tropes in H.D.'s early poems, and through them emphasises H.D.'s attention to ecological detail and interconnection. Tarlo's definition of environmental landscape poets require that 'materiality, particularity, and locality are key to writing', and uses H.D.'s detailed field notes from a trip to Greece in 1932 as evidence of a

¹¹ Ibid.

material emphasis in her classical poems.¹² The presence of nymphs and nature-spirits in H.D.'s work for Tarlo not only indicates an interest in the myths of Greece, but anticipates a modern approach to environmental ethics, asking us to recognise that 'we are also an element in the symbiotic processes and species of the world'.¹³ Tarlo argues that the presence of nature spirits in H.D.'s work do not detract from the texts' portrayal of real geography, and in fact allow H.D. to present a blurring of the boundaries between human and non-human in which the relationship of the poet to nature becomes reciprocal, and therefore environmentalist. In the spirit of this work by Tarlo, I similarly want to present the mythologies and cultural associations bound up in H.D.'s shores as part of an environmental exercise towards understanding the shore. H.D.'s shores demonstrate a close evocation of specific ecology and geography, but also express that human experience of landscape is inevitably a combination of nature and culture: by recognising cultural associations and personal symbolisms in the shore, both H.D. and us, as readers, may envisage a holistic and reciprocal relationship to this environment, which has urgent value now that shorelines are especially vulnerable to contemporary climate change.

II. Littoral Modernism

Studying H.D.'s shores welcomes H.D. into a new area of modernist study, where landscape and environment are treated as significant preoccupations of literary modernism, and modernism, in turn, as an important venue of literary ecocriticism.

In "'The Locus of Compossibility": Virginia Woolf, Modernism, and Place', Carol H. Cantrell suggests that at first glance, modernism 'would seem to be hostile territory for a student of literature and the natural environment', because its aesthetics have 'taught us to privilege the

¹² Harriet Tarlo, 'An Insurmountable Chasm?': Re-visiting, Re-imagining and Re-writing Classical Pastoral through the Modernist Poetry of H.D.', *Classical Receptions Journal*, 4(2) (2012), 235–260: 240.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 239.

formal and the abstract over the referential', while its primary figures 'are famously expatriates, wanderers, exiles [...] rather than [rooted] in local and national traditions'.¹⁴ Yet Cantrell goes on to argue that these features of modernism are precisely what makes it an illuminating place to study relationships between the human and the non-human. Cantrell argues that modernists were reflecting on a changed understanding of nature in the early twentieth century and that 'it seemed not only possible but necessary to create or invent new ways of seeing, new ways of registering the perceptual shock of change, new ways of being readers and viewers, and to respond with new urgency to questions about the consequences of human creativity'.¹⁵ Cantrell's article examines Woolf's portrayal of the relationship between consciousness and the physical world, but her approach has wider implications for ecocritical analysis of modernist texts, demonstrating their inherent slant towards finding new ways of communicating, expressing and reading as we learn how to read texts anew as responses to the landscape and to environmental degradation.

The characteristics of modernist literature—formal hesitations and discontinuities, self-referential symbolisms, challenges to accepted conventions and conditions—allow for new understandings in the relationship between literature and the environment. Matthew Griffiths similarly argues in *The New Poetics of Climate Change* that modernism's 'oppositional quality' is valuable as a resource that breaks open our language and culture with a view to alteration and renewal. He writes:

With the transgression of traditional boundaries of scale, self and perspective, Modernist writers attempt to find ways to elucidate resultant connections and tensions,

¹⁴ Carol H. Cantrell, "'The Locus of Compossibility': Virginia Woolf, Modernism, and Place", *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*, ed. by Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic (Athens, GA., University of Georgia Press: 2003), pp. 33–48, p. 33.

¹⁵ Cantrell, p. 34.

and their techniques can be correspondingly useful in establishing the relationship between human agency and climate change¹⁶

In *The New Poetics of Climate Change*, Griffiths offers readings of Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts* and David Jones' *The Anathemata* as respectively implicit and explicit explorations of the Anthropocene, and reads T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* as a model for conceptualising a mode of climate change poetics that is exactly modernist in its style and purpose. For Griffiths, each modernist poet presents the breaking down of 'realistic' representations of nature and thus opens the modernist landscape to ecocritical readings.

Kelly Sultzbach similarly reads the work of E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and W.H. Auden as pioneering examples of creative environmental thought in the twentieth century, arguing that considering the perspective of the non-human world was an essential part of their artistic practice. For Sultzbach, not only were Forster, Woolf and Auden literary writers, they were also philosophers, cultural critics and to a certain extent scientists, therefore inviting ecocritical study of their work that examines the ways in which they use the environment to critique cultural assumptions about scientific hierarchies, political power and traditional forms of knowledge.¹⁷ Her book examines animal studies, pastoral and eco-phenomenology in the work of each writer, building to a conclusion 'showing how modernist literature revises environment-as-object to acknowledge environment-as-being'.¹⁸ Other canonical figures have also received 'green' readings: Jeffrey McCarthy's 2015 book *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900 to 1930* considers the ecocritical potential of D.H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Mary Butts and Ford Madox Ford, modelling the ways in which prominent modernist figures can be analysed alongside emerging voices in our explorations of modernist literary environmentalism.

¹⁶ Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 37.

¹⁷ Kelly Sultzbach, *Ecocriticism in the Modernist Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁸ Sultzbach, p. 13.

This study joins H.D. to this growing group of modernist writers undergoing new interpretations with an eye towards human-nature relationships, but also offers new insights into subcategories of the field, where the sea and shore play an important role. As a response to the growing study of green modernism, a number of subcategorized fields of study are being defined, transforming the notion of a singular green modernism into the plural green *modernisms*, a grouping of multiple critical dialogues attuned to the nuances of modernist engagement with the natural world. Alexandra Harris's *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper*, reminds us that beyond the first decade of High Modernism, modernists were looking to the countryside for inspiration and 'drawn to the crowded, the detailed, old-fashioned and whimsical, gathering souvenirs from an old country that may not survive the fighting'.¹⁹ Modern artists' representations of country life, such as Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts* and the work of Lorine Niedecker and David Jones, inform a desire to reclaim a sensitivity to heritage and local place. Rural modernism has illuminated the engagement with the natural world by writers outside of the urban centres, and giving new precedence to wild and rural spaces.

H.D. presents a particularly interesting response to the focus of rural modernism, being a writer interested in rural (littoral) spaces and yet only a visitor to them. H.D.'s preoccupation with shoreline spaces both foregrounds a rural space in her work and yet sets her apart from rural modernism's focus on heritage, agriculture and local place. H.D. straddles the urban and the rural in her writing, obsessing over the shore as a traveller and visitor rather than as a resident. Cantrell's argument that modernism's exponents are 'expatriates, wanderers, exiles' is particularly relevant to H.D., who expatriated from the U.S. at the start of her career and

¹⁹ Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), p. 33.

remained in London for its majority. Yet H.D.'s 'exile' status is precisely what makes her layered, palimpsestic interest in the shore so compelling. H.D.'s work presents an opportunity to understand the shore beyond the local and material, considering the interplay of its imaginary and mythical dimensions.

Rural spaces have also been observed as important landscapes in the work of queer modernists in particular, again highlighting the ecocritical potential of H.D.'s own engagement with littoral rural space as a bisexual writer. Although Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson's *Queer Ecologies* takes contemporary American literature as its primary focus, they refer to E.M. Forster's *Maurice* to remind us that 'rural spaces in particular have served, in a wide range of literatures, as places of freedom for male homoerotic encounters', underscoring what is at stake in expanding our definitions of both 'natural' places and 'natural' sexualities.²⁰ However, the green space may not have been as equally liberating for modernist lesbians, whom Paul Peppis suggests were not as well represented in science or literature as male homosexuals.²¹ Sultzbach develops this point by suggesting that Woolf's prose is more likely to use techniques of aligning sexuality with an embodied appreciation of nature's ability to create alternative moments of ecstasy and passion, and whilst she does not link this to the oceanic spaces that populate her work, other scholars have labelled the changeability of the tide and the inherent fluidity of the sea as an alternative model to this notion of a queer rural space. As I will argue with H.D.'s work, the shore functions in a similar way, finding rural space where the social pressures and gaze of the city is absent. The shore presents a point where elemental binaries merge, manifesting H.D.'s lifelong rejection of gendered binaries and conventions.

²⁰ Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 23.

²¹ Paul Peppis, *Sciences of Modernism: Ethnography, Sexology, and Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 138.

Oceanic modernism has recently emerged as a way of moving beyond modernism's terrestrial focus, alongside the development in the environmental humanities more generally to define the blue humanities, or study of the ocean, as its own discipline distinct to terrestrial environmental study. Woolf has been a prominent subject in emerging studies of oceanic modernism, her coastal and open-sea settings considered against biographic geography and her novels' characteristically fluid features of non-linearity and multiple focalization. These studies cover the material geographic sources of Woolf's engagement with the sea, tracing her settings to her childhood experiences in St. Ives, Cornwall, as well as Woolf's engagement with long-held Western mythologies and knowledge about the sea.²²

Woolf is a central figure in John Brannigan's book *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890–1970*, which models the littoral focus and environmental approach of this thesis.²³ Brannigan's study responds to Pete Hay's 2006 assertion in *Island Studies Journal* that literary perspectives of the archipelago 'exhibit an understandable tendency to see the reality of islands as of less interest and import than the "virtual" status of the island as metaphor'.²⁴

Brannigan realigns the mythic and metaphorical back to the material by studying the archipelagic coastlines used by modernism's seminal figures: James Joyce, W.B. Yeats and Virginia Woolf. The 'greening' of modernism exhorted by Brannigan presents a particular challenge in the apparent contradiction in bringing spatial, material and geographical awareness to texts which are so governed by a modernist aesthetic of abstraction and allusion. However, in

²² See Laura Winkiel, 'A Queer Ecology of the Sea: Reading Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*', *Feminist Modernist Studies* 2(2) (2019), 141–163; Nicole Rizzuto, 'Maritime Modernism: The Aqueous Form of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*' *Modernist Cultures*, 11(2) (2016), 268–292; David Bradshaw, 'The Purest Ecstasy: Virginia Woolf and the Sea', *Modernism on Sea*, 100–115.

²³ Such work has, in recent years, begun to emerge from a literary perspective, with texts such as John Kerrigan's *Archipelagic English* (2008) and Philip Schwyzer and Simon Meador's *Archipelagic Identities* (2004), but Brannigan's is the first to take a materialist approach to the archipelago in modernist literature specifically.

²⁴ John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890–1970* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 26; discussing Pete Hay, 'A Phenomenology of Islands', *Island Studies Journal*, 1(1) 2006, 19–42.

doing so he offers new ways of reading modernist literature environmentally, by drawing out their specific localities alongside the ways in which the archipelagic is deployed in metaphor and symbol.

The sea and shore as both material space and symbolic place are intermeshed throughout Brannigan's readings of modernist texts. In Brannigan's reading, Joyce uses tides and shifting sands as figures for Stephen's emotions in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but also relies on and evokes the material tides and shifting sands in the transformation of the bird-girl. Brannigan argues that a materialist reading of Stephen's walk along the sands of Sandymount Strand, and, in *Ulysses*, of Leopold Bloom's consumption of the shore as a spectacle and entertainment, allows us to consider the function of the bay in the modern city. *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* show Joyce concerned with shoreline as 'social constructions of a territorial imagination', which are also 'material sites of resistance to myths of territorial insularity'.²⁵ In this combination of material and metaphorical analysis, Brannigan understands the forces of influence shaping Joyce's view of the shore: a place felt and experienced by the body, a physical, living ecology and a place of personal and communal symbolism in memory, national identity and social culture.

Brannigan furthers his analysis of the material/metaphorical dualism of the archipelago in his analysis of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. In the 1927 novel, Woolf sets her characters on Skye, an island she did not visit until more than ten years after she published the novel, and which David Bradshaw has identified as a thinly veiled representation of St. Ives in Cornwall rather than Skye itself. This literal distance, alongside Woolf's notorious textual slippages and mythologies, present to Brannigan an obstacle to the identification of the precise space, and suspend Woolf's seascape between material and metaphorical analyses. Woolf's 'strange geography', as

²⁵ Brannigan, p. 15.

Brannigan terms it, thus presents a new form of representation through an alternate image system which mixes both art and science in the creation of literary space.²⁶

H.D.'s own littoral geographies, as I will argue, follow a similar dualism between material and metaphorical guises. While Brannigan's book ultimately focusses on national identity and specifically the Irish Sea separating Ireland and Britain, his approach to balancing both the material and the metaphorical is central to my approach to H.D.'s shores. Her landscapes at once mimic the American and British shorelines H.D. knew, the classical shores she imagined in myth and a personal symbolism against binaries and stasis. When these facets are considered together, we are given a vision of the shore as both a real and imagined space, asking important questions about our relationship to littoral ecologies. Considering the physical/metaphysical dichotomy of Woolf's shores also raises interesting questions about the relationship of landscape to literary form. In Woolf's novel *The Waves*, chapters of the central narrative, spoken in first-person by multiple characters, are sectioned by interludes detailing a coastal scene from sunrise to sunset. The image of the shore—its waning light, amphibious wildlife and changeable conditions—provides a model for the novel's own fluid approach to perspective and voice. Similarly, there is scope to consider the ways in which H.D.'s poetic form uses the physical landscape of the shore to define her poetics.

H.D.'s shores furthermore offer an extension to the geography of modernism, suggesting the importance of the Isles of Scilly, Devon and Cornwall to her work and to other writers who visited there, such as Richard Aldington, D.H. Lawrence and John Cournos. The essay collection *Modernism on Sea*, edited by Alexandra Harris and Lara Feigel, recognises British coasts as an alternative geography for modernism, remarking in its opening introduction:

²⁶ Ibid, p. 16.

Modernism is usually seen as the most urban and frenetic of artistic movements. A typical journey through high modernism would start in the cafes and arcades of Paris, whirl along the banks of the Liffey and stop the traffic in Bloomsbury before blasting into a Berlin nightclub. But a discerning artistic pilgrim would do well to pause on the cliffs and promenades of the English coast. *Modernism on Sea* puts the case for a new geography of avant-gardism, acknowledging that the most intriguing cultural hubs of modern times include Swanage, Margate, Morecambe and Hythe.²⁷

Modernism on Sea offers new emphasis on the British coast for modernist writers contemporary to H.D., such as Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, the Sitwells and T.S. Eliot, as well as in the work of a number of artists, architectures and social histories.²⁸ H.D. does not feature in its pages, but the collection demonstrates that the shore is a feature across modernism, widening the potential of a field of littoral modernism, where this thesis and study of H.D. may be located. As the quoted passage illustrates, this scholarship maps a specific geography to littoral modernism in Swanage, Margate, Morecambe and Hythe, and H.D. extends this list, finding important inspiration in the landscapes of Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly which she transcribes into her work.

Harris and Feigel's survey of the modernist British shore offers some reasons why modernist writers were so drawn to the shore, and these mostly centre on the social culture of the seaside:

The devoted observer of modern life would certainly find plenty to interest him on the esplanade: sunbathing, crowd-mingling, sexual license, surreal juxtapositions, the modernist architecture of the lido; or, in more metaphorical terms, the experience of being on the edge, caught between the vast sea and the small human pleasures of the shore.²⁹

What is striking about H.D.'s shores is that they rarely engage with these public pursuits: H.D. is drawn to coastal wilderness or, at the very least, isolated speakers in her work. Also unlike the

²⁷ Alexandra Harris and Lara Feigel (eds.), 'Introduction' to *Modernism on Sea* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 1.

²⁸ David Bradshaw, Ben Morgan, and Deborah Parsons write on these authors respectively in *Modernism on Sea*. T.S. Eliot and his writing on Margate in *The Waste Land*, feature in the collection's introduction, p. 1.

²⁹ Harris and Feigel, *Modernism on Sea*, p. 3.

writers presented in the collection, H.D. also shows an extremely close eye for the flora and fauna of the shores she knew and depicted: H.D. explores the physical and metaphorical life of the shore beyond the human. However, while H.D. visited and wrote about real littoral geographies, she avoids describing them too realistically. Shores closely resemble the Atlantic coasts H.D. knew but are rarely named directly; the unfamiliarity of coastal wildlife is also emphasised, with spiralling shells and uncanny flowers. As soon as a scene begins to take shape in her writing, it is immediately undercut with the presence of an ancient deity, or a transformation into imaginative vision. The shore's metaphorical value of being on an 'edge' is a central one for H.D., as the shore represents, across her writing, the clashing and merging of binary elements, a mutable site of fluidity and escape.

III. More than Marginal: The Coastal H.D.

H.D.'s attachment to the American Atlantic shore is well-documented; Debo's research maps the landscape's influence on H.D.'s life and identity, and H.D.'s letters also reveal her attachment. In a letter written towards the end of her life, H.D. told a friend 'I always loved that New England coast', and in a letter to her childhood friend Mary Herr, H.D. names Maine 'a place of mine'.³⁰ In order to understand H.D.'s shore, it is important to not only identify the specific littoral landscapes she depicts, but to also understand the patterns of cultural and personal associations with the littoral that permeate her work.

³⁰ H.D. to Isabel Potts Landis, 24 June 1946; H.D. to Mary Herr, 1944, Box 18 of the *H.D. Papers*.

In *The Edge of the Sea* (1955), Rachel Carson's evocative and closely-observed portrait of Atlantic coastal life, Carson observes the shore as a landscape that is indefinable and in a constant state of change:

today a little more land may belong to the sea, tomorrow a little less. Always the edge of the sea remains an elusive and indefinite boundary.³¹

For Carson, the shore itself introduces a 'marginal world' that manifests an idea of being in-between and of eluding objective definitions. She describes it as having a 'dual nature' that changes according to the tide and never settles on the land or sea as its home environment. The shore inhabits an in-between space that is and is not land, is and is not sea; as a landscape and as imagery it is imbued with a sense of liminality and mutability. As a habitable space, the shore legitimises a human experience that is similarly marginal. It is perhaps easy to see why H.D., herself a bisexual and female poet in a male-dominated and heteronormative literary culture, may be drawn to some such marginal space, especially one where marginality is defined by being both one thing and another and also neither.

H.D.'s creative identity is famously slippery. As a writer, she wrote under a slew of pen-names: Edith Gray, J. Beran, Rhoda Peter, Helga Dart, Helga Dorn, John Helforth, D.A. Hill. Even 'H.D.' is elusive enough to obscure identity in its refusal to affirm gender, nationality or family name. H.D. herself transcends social norms and boundaries, particularly around gender and sexuality, often using this ability to move from one identity to the next and rebuild particular mythologies and cultural tropes from her unfixed position. Her work is often shaped around binaries—masculine/feminine, ancient/modern, human/nonhuman, self/other, conscious/subconscious—and works both to blur such boundaries and to find meaning in the space between them. The

³¹ Rachel Carson, *The Edge of the Sea* (1955), collected in *The Sea* (Bristol: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), p. 399.

shore becomes a pertinent image to a poet so invested in the notion of how oppositions overlap and interface, as it manifests physically this fluid and mutable meeting point.

H.D.'s interests outside of her writing—psychoanalysis, mysticism, astrology—suggest a life-long search for self-knowledge. As Louis L. Martz writes in his introduction to her *Collected Poems*, 'to live constantly at the junction [...] to inhabit constantly the borderline—this was to be the life that lay ahead of H.D., as person and as poet'.³² There are clear connections between H.D.'s own identity and sense of self and the liminality afforded by the shoreline image. These straightforward parallels between a marginal H.D., evading binary gender and sexual definition, and a mutable and liminal shore, shifting its attachment to either sea or land, reveal the shore as a pertinent vehicle for H.D. to encode and understand the self.

However, more interesting and productive conversations around H.D.'s shores occur when we consider their more complex modes of meaning. H.D. engages with the liminality of the shore, but she also is invested in its reality, its ecology, its fauna, its flora and the ways in which it actively shapes identity. Marginal as it may be, it is also a place of exchange, of national demarcation, and deeply rooted in human history. As Nicholas Allen, Nick Groom and Jos Smith write in the introduction to *Coastal Works*, their study of the coast and its role in our cultural imaginary, the shore is 'where relationships and tensions between geography and culture are felt intensely and are played out dynamically', dramatizing moments of cultural exchange and its impact on identity.³³

Work in the environmental humanities has opened up the subfield of the Blue Humanities as a response to the terrestrial focus of environmental thought. By considering the ecological,

³² Louis L. Martz, 'Introduction' to H.D.'s *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984), p. xiv.

³³ Nicholas Allen, Nick Groom and Jos Smith (eds.), 'Introduction', *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 1–20, p. 5.

historical and cultural lives of the sea as its own field, we examine what is often treated as a periphery space as an unexplored but significant site of human activity. Scholarship on the cultural and mythical lives of the shore has particular prescience when studying H.D.'s work. Islands have what Adam Nicolson has called 'edge potency', an aesthetic appeal grounded in the sense of distant horizons opening imaginative opportunities.³⁴ Certainly, H.D. is drawn to dramatic separations between land and water. Her descriptions of the shore are often visceral and grounded in tangible sensation; the smell of salt, the crashing waves and salt spray, the harshness of sand being flung by the wind, all serve to convey a meeting of land and sea as a confrontation between two opposing elements. 'The edge of any landscape [...] quickens an observer's expectations', writes Barry Lopez, and H.D. presents the edge of land and water with imaginative vigour, attuned to its drama and movement.³⁵

Whilst there is an appeal to the shore's sense of an 'edge', that edge is also intangible. The shore is impossible to delineate, the boundary between water and land constantly moving. For H.D., the shore is not only fluid in its existence between two binaries, but in its distinctively expansive and ever-shifting nature. In her work, the shore takes on metaphysical significance as an 'elsewhere' or alternative space to reality, coming to represent memory, infinite time and perpetual cycles of destruction and rebirth.

The attraction of a shoreline 'edge' is, however, somewhat limiting. In the afterword to *Coastal Works*, John R. Gillis remarks that 'edges are as much the product of art and literature as they are their subjects. We like to think of edges as a product of nature, when, in fact, nature abhors sharp edges and lines of any kind'.³⁶ Whilst the shore is seemingly made up of linear edges

³⁴ Adam Nicolson, 'The Islands', *Geographical Review*, 97(2) (2007), 153–164: 156.

³⁵ Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in Northern Landscapes* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 123.

³⁶ John R. Gillis, 'Afterword: Beyond the Blue Horizon' in *Coastal Works*, pp. 261–268, p. 261.

between sea/horizon and land/water, it is also considered by coastal scholars to exist as a complex interplay of various factors: species, ecologies and geographical features. In considering littoral sites as ecotones in literature, we place emphasis on the shore as a complex and unique environment that elucidates the ways in which two opposing environments interact and survive alongside each other. An ecotone places importance on the 'in-between', as an ecotone 'often has a biological density far greater than that of the areas on either side of it: both the intensity of its life and death cycle and the diversity of its species are greater, with some particularly hardy "frontier" species even coming to thrive in its environment'.³⁷ Whilst H.D. scholarship often points out the invested binaries of her work—masculine and feminine, heterosexual and queer—studying her use of the shore to encode such pairings gives a more complex account of connection, interplay and merging in her work. H.D.'s shore anticipates this description of the shore from Gillis in *Coastal Works*: 'more like a seam than an edge, a connection rather than a separation'.³⁸ H.D. uses the liminality of the shore to deconstruct binaries, using the mutable meeting point of land and water to observe the arbitrariness of their separation, but there is also a sense of connection, a more complex interplay of opposites.

Littoral wildlife also plays an important part in H.D.'s shores, as H.D. writes about coastal wildflowers, jellyfish, bivalve and gastropod molluscs, coral and sea birds as both ecological beings and creative symbols. H.D. is drawn to overlooked creatures in particular, and those with strange ways of being in and sensing the world: her coastal wildflowers are drawn in comparison to their domestic counterparts, emphasising their alien familiarity; the fluid bodies of jellyfish are imagined as existing beyond the comprehension of the human senses; and coral challenge human assumptions of individualist being. There is a sense throughout H.D.'s work that the shore becomes a kind of elsewhere space beyond human convention, populated by unfamiliar

³⁷ Allen, Groom and Smith, *Coastal Works*, p. 5.

³⁸ Gillis, *Coastal Works*, p. 262.

and alien creatures. Stacey Alaimo writes that the alien quality of the sea and its wildlife challenges us to think beyond the human:

The pervasive trope of the oceans as alien may alienate humans from the seas, but it may also suggest that sea life hovers at the very limits of what terrestrial humans can comprehend. The recognition of these limits, as a suspension of humanist presumptions, may be an epistemological–ethical moment that debars us from humanist privilege.³⁹

H.D. is a writer constantly trying to reach beyond conventional boundaries: the alien quality of the sea compared to the land allows the shore to function as a boundary between familiar and unfamiliar ground, its inhabitants similarly caught between being known and being alien. The shore therefore becomes a useful site for conceiving of fluid, alternative identities, such as queer identities or identities that reject conventional femininity, and for myth, which similarly relies on a tension between normal and abnormal. Alaimo's discussion of 'humanist privilege' here is also an interesting point of investigation for H.D., who similarly uses littoral animal bodies to explore forms of unconscious thought in her early work and to imagine a literal dissolution of human superiority over the non-human in her later work, where she redefines herself as a 'biological entity'.

Astrida Neimanis's work in the blue humanities has refined the significance of the marine and the littoral for marginalised bodies, recognising it as an important landscape in queer studies, post-colonialism and ecofeminism. While her seminal posthumanist work *Bodies of Water* focuses its attention on bodies of water, the open sea and water as an element, her argument around the fluidity inherent in marine landscapes has significant implications for H.D.'s use of the littoral. She writes:

³⁹ Stacy Alaimo, 'States of Suspension: Trans-corporeality at Sea', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 19(3) (2012), 476–493: 477.

For us humans, the flow and flush of waters sustain our own bodies, but also connect them to other bodies, to other worlds beyond our human selves. Indeed, bodies of water undo the idea that bodies are necessarily or only human.⁴⁰

For Neimanis, water is an inherently radical element: ‘watery embodiment’ presents a challenge to humanist understandings of corporeality: namely discrete individualism, anthropocentrism, and phallogocentrism.⁴¹ Similarly, for H.D., the fluid exchange of water and land at the shore allows for the formation of queer self-actualisation, and for recognition of the symbiotic relationship between the human and non-human. Hester Blum argues that analyses of marine spaces in literature should go further than metaphor and figurative language into ‘what is literal in the face of the sea’s abyss of representation’.⁴² In my own study, the most productive discussions of H.D.’s work occur at an intersection of this ‘literal’ representation and figurative interpretation, echoing Brannigan’s endeavour in bringing the reality of coasts, island and shore to an equal level with littoral metaphors and symbolisms. H.D.’s depiction of the shore not only develops our understanding of her writing, but asks questions about what it means for a landscape to exist in the poet’s mind as both a real and an imaginary place. In *The Edge of the Sea*, Carson considers how we come to understand the shore from a human perspective:

To understand the shore, it is not enough to catalogue its life. Understanding comes only when, standing on a beach, we can sense the long rhythms of earth and sea that sculptured its land forms and produced the rock and sand of which it is composed; when we can sense with the eye and ear of the mind the surge of life beating always at its shore.⁴³

Here, Carson describes an approach to the shore landscape that goes beyond scientific observation into a recognition of our instinctive associations with the shore, the way we relate to it through our senses, and how this is all part of the shore’s ecology. H.D. is often keenly aware of the interconnected life of the shore, but also considers it as a site of mythology, interrogating

⁴⁰ Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 2.

⁴¹ Neimanis, p. 3.

⁴² Hester Blum, ‘The Prospect of Oceanic Studies’, *PMLA*, 125(3) (2010), 670–677: 670.

⁴³ Carson, ‘Preface’ to *The Edge of the Sea*, p. 395.

the dialectical relationship between nature and culture. Studying H.D.'s shore offers a unique case study in how scientific observation and imaginative vision can co-exist in poetry, and how they come from the same drive to understand and record the physical world.

IV. H.D. the Eco-Poet?

Studying H.D.'s work provides a compelling addition to Brannigan's model of 'greening modernism' and our approach to filling the space between the material and the metaphorical. H.D.'s response to the shore changes over the course of her career, and the nature of its development gives insights into the intersection of material and metaphorical. *Sea Garden*, H.D.'s first poetry collection from 1916, contains detailed and observant portraits of coastal wildflowers and depicts the coast as an intersection of various biomes. Usually read for its Imagist credentials and explorations of gender and queer identity, it also provides persuasive evidence of the influence of H.D.'s grandfather, who was an authority on freshwater algae, in its observant depiction of coastal life. The landscape of *Sea Garden* is, as Debo has shown, pervaded by the East Coast landscapes H.D. knew as a child and young woman. Yet the collection also uncovers voices and nature nymphs inherent in its coastal wilderness, seamlessly moving between the scientific and the imaginary. This chapter also considers H.D.'s littoral poetics, the ways in which her poems transcribe the materiality of the shore into their sounds, rhythms and poetic techniques.

After this collection, H.D.'s landscapes develop into symbolic abstractions that Pete Hay places as an antithesis to the material. Her collections *Hymen* (1921) and *Heliadora* (1924) use the littoral landscapes and mythologies of the classical world to revise female-centred myths; H.D.'s novels between 1921 and 1940 investigate the shore as a landscape shaping and reflecting the interior lives of their protagonists. H.D.'s Second World War poem *Trilogy* and novel *The Sword*

Went Out to Sea imagine the building of a new, rebuilt earth of which the shore plays a transformative part, and H.D.'s final work *Helen in Egypt* repositions the shore in the metaphorical, as the ideal symbol of liminality. H.D.'s work is a unique study in coastal writing as it explores both the uses and motivations of writing about the physical shore as well as the shore in metaphor, and the transitions and transformations between the two.

Although H.D.'s landscapes move between the material and the symbolic, studying a poet whose work responds so continuously and variously to nature—not just its landscapes, flora and fauna, seasons, weather and climates but also its myths, cultural currencies and encoded poetic tropes—surely enhances our understanding of literary landscapes rather than diminishes it. Greg Garrard, in his introductory survey of the various definitions and uses of ecocriticism, writes that ‘the challenge for ecocritics is to keep one eye on the ways in which “nature” itself is always in some ways culturally constructed, and the other on the fact that nature really exists, both the object and, albeit distantly, the origin of our discourse’.⁴⁴ Garrard’s implication is that a cultural construction of nature is an obstacle in viewing what is true and material in a landscape, and that the two are separate endeavours; Lawrence Buell calls this tension between culturally fashioned nature and ‘real’ nature ‘a myth of mutual constructionism’.⁴⁵ Reading H.D.’s shores with an eye to both ‘real’ nature and ‘cultural’ nature challenges this approach, presenting the shore across her body of work (and often in a single piece of work) as both linked explicitly to the influences and projections of human culture and a living ecology in its own right. Her work suggests that nature-based mythologies do not live at a slant to nature, but with it. Her poetic eye is kept connected to the minutiae of nature through imagined human mythologies as these encapsulate the myriad unknowns of nature, and remind us of its importance. H.D.’s shoreline landscapes provide a blur in the distinctions between elements, habitats and ecological

⁴⁴ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 10.

⁴⁵ Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the United States and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 2001), p. 6.

relationships to obscure too our understanding of the human. H.D. uses the image of the shore to ask complex questions about what it means to be human, how we interact with the physical world and how it shapes us.

The issue with discussing literary landscapes alongside their cultural meanings is that we inevitably, to borrow Bill McKibben's phrase, rob nature of its independence.⁴⁶ H.D. is a poet whose visual vocabulary uses flowers, trees, seas and insects to explore and dissect notions of identity, voice, place and history; her palimpsestic writing layers the natural with the cultural seamlessly and presents them as being in a symbiotic state. H.D. does, however, reject the usual human interferences of nature-writing (pantheism, dominion, pathetic fallacy) to focus on exact parallels and organic points of connection between the human world and the natural. She reasserts the voices of marginalised littoral nature as she explores her own marginalised state, which leaves her already on the outside of human society. Robert Kern has suggested that an element of 'reading against the grain' has become a necessary part of the ecocritical project, and that ecocriticism becomes 'more interesting and useful [...] when it aims to recover the environmental character or orientation of works whose conscious or foregrounded interests lie elsewhere'.⁴⁷ Kathleen R. Wallace and Karla Armbruster also support the extension of ecocriticism beyond texts which deal explicitly with nature. They argue that 'a viable ecocriticism must continue to challenge dualistic thinking by exploring the role of nature in texts more concerned with human cultures', particularly texts that 'revolve around these less obviously "natural" landscapes and human attempts to record, order, and ultimately understand their own relationship to those environments'.⁴⁸ This study therefore examines H.D.'s shores as

⁴⁶ Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Viking, 1990), p. 54.

⁴⁷ Robert Kern, 'Ecocriticism What Is It Good For?', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 7(1) (2000), 9–32: 18, 11.

⁴⁸ Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (eds.), 'Introduction', *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), p. 4.

a site where culture and nature confront one another, and find between them, as Carson did at the shore, 'an elusive and indefinite boundary'.

V. Summary of Chapters

This thesis is structured chronologically, with some overlap in time between H.D.'s poetry collections and her novels. The first chapter looks at H.D.'s first poetry collection, *Sea Garden*, composed between 1912 and 1915 and published in 1916. *Sea Garden* demonstrates the layering of landscape and meaning that appears across H.D.'s writing; the life of the shore is delicately and vividly observed and yet encodes a number of named and unnamed deities into the landscape. This chapter initially explores the portrayal of the shore in *Sea Garden*, the cultural associations with the shore it expresses and its portrayal of human relationships to the shore. It also considers H.D.'s littoral poetics, the ways in which form in her poetry attempts to transcribe geological features and tidal movements of the shore. The title of the collection being *Sea Garden* suggests that every poem is in some way reaching towards an embodiment of the landscape. Writing is something that puts landscape into form, but the coast offers a particular challenge here: one cannot write on or with water, so any attempt to express the littoral in writing can only be mimetic. I argue that H.D.'s rhythms and repetitions are used to evoke the rhythms of the tide, her use of chiasmus and compound nouns giving a sense of constant reflection and inversion that mimics the ever-changing interfacing of water and land. The chapter then looks closely at H.D.'s poems about coastal wildflowers, exploring their depiction as both scientific subjects and Imagist poetic symbols. I consider the influence of H.D.'s botanist grandfather and astronomer father on her poems in *Sea Garden*, specifically on the collection's dialectic between nature and culture, and on the collection's evocation of East Coast American shores. Lastly, I consider the collection's use of coastal mythology as a way to express vivid human experience of the shore, balanced between physical observation and imaginative

response and recognising the limitations of human sensory experience. This chapter serves to underpin the thesis by establishing the multiplicity of H.D.'s shore, layering real geography and naturalist observation with personal symbolism and cultural association.

Chapter Two examines H.D.'s writing after the First World War. H.D. spent much of this time on the coasts of southwest Britain, visiting friends and holidaying with Richard Aldington in Devon and Cornwall, and after the breakdown of her marriage to Aldington she travelled to the Isles of Scilly with her future life partner, Bryher. The chapter considers the use of littoral imagery in her unpublished essay, *Notes on Thought and Vision*, particularly its central conceit of 'jellyfish consciousness' and the influence of the littoral geography of the Isles of Scilly, where the essay was composed. I argue that the bodily composition of the jellyfish specifically models a consciousness beyond the human senses, which H.D. uses in her conception of a creative unconscious. This chapter also considers the revisionist female myths of the poetry collections *Hymen* (1921) and *Heliadora* (1924), arguing that the ecology and geography of the Greek archipelago is central to H.D.'s classicism, and that the shore provides a liminality crucial to H.D.'s reworking of classical narratives. This part of the chapter also considers the appearance of riverbanks as a land/water boundary playing a similar role to the sea shore, and specifically becoming a site where heteromantic narratives are rerouted.

The third chapter explores H.D.'s *Madrigal* cycle, a grouping of autobiographical novels written between 1921 and 1939. Many of these novels were unpublished, which along with their autobiographical content suggests that they are an intensely personal project. Their shoreline settings reveal the real coastal geographies H.D. was attached to as well as their personal symbolism: the coasts of Greece, Britain, New Jersey, and Maine are evoked with detail and complexity in relation to the novels' female protagonists. *Paint it Today* (1921), the first novel written but second in the chronology of the novels' narrative cycle, follows a young American woman in the literary circles of London. Here, British coasts prompt a feeling of homesickness

for the expatriate protagonist Midget, and Greek coasts allow for bodily autonomy and queer desire.

HERmione, written in 1927, sets its narrative before that of *Paint it Today*, following the adolescence of a young girl, Hermione, in Pennsylvania before her emigration to Europe to follow her literary ambitions. *HERmione* reveals H.D.'s personal associations to the shores of Point Pleasant, New Jersey, which she idolises as a place of complete freedom, a place where she can imagine a complete regeneration of her identity. Rivers also appear in the novel, as they do in *Hymen* and *Heliadora*, as a site where heteronormative narratives and expectations may be rerouted. *Bid Me to Live*, written much later in 1939, returns to H.D.'s life after the First World War when she was living on the Cornish coast. This novel follows themes of self-actualisation and female identity like the other novels, but also portrays the shore with the concerns of H.D.'s later work, exploring the shore as a site of geological history and cyclical time.

The fourth chapter examines H.D.'s epic poem written in the Second World War, *Trilogy* (1942–45), examining the littoral as a site for post-war renewal. The poem concerns itself with post-war regeneration, imagining the coming of a second messiah, an Eve/Venus/Mary hybrid, who allows for a deconstruction of Western patriarchy and heralds a new, gynocentric earth. The cycles of the tide become inherently important to this new Eve and her Eden: the figure is born at the site of the shore, and has as her symbol a spiral seashell. The spiral-shell is a recurring symbol of H.D.'s later work, manifesting a sense of non-linear time, time that is constantly layered and repeated. In *Trilogy*, the shell is used to take humankind back to a pre-historic beginning, but also reconnects humans with their place in an ecological web. The fluidity of the shore allows for a redistribution of power away from the patriarchal, but also shifts human superiority over the non-human: it is a place of evolutionary beginning, and of humankind's peaceful future.

The final chapter studies H.D.'s final creative work, the verse novel *Helen in Egypt* (1961). This text retells the story of Helen of Troy from Helen's own perspective, using Euripides's play *Helen* (first produced in 412 BC) and Stesichorus's *Pallinode* (written between 640 and 555 BC) as sources. The sources pardon Helen from her 'blame' in the Trojan War by asserting that she was in Egypt and that only her phantom was seen at Troy. H.D. uses this 'phantom' status to challenge and reform Helen's legacy in Western patriarchal narrative. Helen's self-actualisation is dependent on her remembering events at Troy while she is in Egypt, and these memories centre on various littoral spaces: collecting objects from a beach, watching a sea-bird from a boat, visiting the white island Leuké. The shore's mutability as a boundary allows Helen to exist as both woman and phantom, and gives her narrative the necessary fluidity to be constantly changing and evading constrictive definition. The spiral seashell is also a central image in the poem, representing Helen's fluid state and layering of memory but also becoming the structural basis of the text itself. As H.D.'s final work, the poem achieves resolution through instability, concluding with no real 'ending' and on the contradiction of a memory being re-forgotten. The shore is a necessary metaphor for such liminality, and becomes the means through which H.D. is able to most vividly express a fluid, definition-evading self.

CHAPTER ONE: THE LIFE OF THE SHORE IN *SEA GARDEN* (1916)

In an attempt to capture the crystalline qualities of her verse, Harold Monroe in 1915 said of H.D.'s early Imagist poems: 'they are as fragile as sea-shells. If I came too near them I should be afraid of crushing them into the sand with my clumsy feet'.¹ Monroe inadvertently captures here the way the shore spaces of *Sea Garden* are distilled into every word, the shore's physical qualities profoundly shaping her poems. Yet the poetry of *Sea Garden*, first published as a collection in 1916, has not yet been studied specifically as an evocation of the littoral. This chapter explores the overarching presence of the shore in *Sea Garden*, and underpins the thesis as a whole by illustrating H.D.'s investment in the ecological, geographical and cultural properties of the shore.

In 1912, a young Hilda Doolittle met with Ezra Pound in the tea rooms of the British Museum, a year after moving to Europe. In this infamous meeting, Pound read three of H.D.'s first poems, 'Hermes of the Ways', 'Acon' and 'Orchard', and underneath them signed 'H.D. Imagiste', initiating the young poet into the modernist literary scene. H.D. became a model disciple for Pound's new movement of Imagism, publishing her work in *Poetry* and *The Egoist*, whilst also working with Richard Aldington on the *Poets' Translation Series*, pamphlets of translations from Greek and Latin texts. In 1916, she replaced Aldington as editor of *The Egoist*, and her first poetry collection *Sea Garden* was published.

Sea Garden showcases H.D.'s Imagism alongside her early forays in classical scholarship: the collection portrays natural spaces inhabited and shaped by classical nymphs, statues and deities with a language of Imagist directness and efficiency. The landscape of *Sea Garden* portrays gardens, woodlands and orchards found inland from a wild and secluded coast. The structure of the collection itself even physicalizes a path across and around a shore; poems about coastal wildflowers, for instance, are scattered through the collection as flowers would grow haphazardly across the land,

¹ Harold Monroe, 'The Imagists Discussed', *The Egoist* 2(5) (1915), 77–80: 79.

and the collection ends with an arrival at a city. There are poems forming botanical portraits of coastal wildflowers ('Sea Rose', 'Sea Lily', 'Sea Poppies', 'Sea Violet' and 'Sea Iris'), and recounting the journeys inland of various shore-dwelling people ('The Helmsman' and 'The Shrine'), connecting the shore's past and involvement in human history and migration with its ecological life and evolution. In poems such as 'The Gift', the shore is depicted as a wild and secluded space representing total freedom; elsewhere it is a site where ancient mythology collides with history (in the cliff-carved sculpture of 'The Contest' and the shoreline wandering of Hermes in 'Hermes of the Ways') and where ancient deities reside ('Sea Gods', 'The Wind Sleepers').

There are few studies of *Sea Garden* that examine the collection's landscape: Eileen Gregory considers the influence of Sappho on H.D.'s early work, and uses the physical qualities of *Sea Garden*'s littoral landscape as a major point of comparison.² Annette Debo, in her ecocritical studies of American identity in H.D.'s landscapes, reads the seashore of *Sea Garden* as New England imagery based on places H.D. personally knew. She argues that 'the splendour of your ragged coast' (l. 87) in 'The Shrine' and the 'gulls and sea-birds that cry discords' (ll. 25-26) in 'The Wind Sleepers' recall Casco Bay in southern Maine, near Portland, and that its steep cliffs and rocky coasts evoke the southern side of Casco Bay, Cape Elizabeth.³ Debo points out that the wildflowers of *Sea Garden* are all native to New England, and that their value is not only in their resilience against the elements but in their specific locality to H.D.⁴ Debo demonstrates the physical knowledge H.D. had of the shore in relation to an ingrained sense of American identity that runs throughout H.D.'s work. Susan Stanford

² Eileen Gregory, 'Rose Cut in Rock: Sappho and H.D.'s *Sea Garden*', *Contemporary Literature*, 27(4) (1986), 525–552: 544.

³ Annette Debo, *The American H.D.* (Iowa City, IA.: University of Iowa, 2012), p. 137.

⁴ Annette Debo, 'H.D.'s American Landscape: The Power and Permanence of Place', *South Atlantic Review*, 69(3–4) (2004), 1–22: 10, 9.

Freidman argues similarly, emphasising the governing influence of American transcendentalism and pioneers as central to the *Sea Garden* landscape.⁵

Diana Collecott, in her analysis of the 'H.D. scrapbook' held in the Beinecke, analyses how three coastlines of Greece, Cornwall and California are literally superimposed over photographs of H.D., Bryher and images of classical antiquity.⁶ While the scrapbook was made for H.D. by Kenneth MacPherson in the late 1920s, it is striking that MacPherson's layering technique reflects the landscapes of H.D.'s poetry, where classical myth and personal symbolism are set against both Mediterranean and Atlantic littoral landscapes. The scrapbooks enact a physical expression of H.D.'s preoccupation with the coastline landscape, namely the tension between the shore's ecological existence and its cultural associations, metaphors, and myths. They also beg the question of precisely what kind of shore H.D. wished to write: American, Greek or imaginary? This chapter argues that H.D.'s purpose in transposing various littoral geographies is to explore a multivalent mythology of the shore, one that moves between specific interactions with particular features (New England wildflower species, Ancient Greek nature spirits) whilst working to understand the shore itself as a material landscape and cultural myth. As John Gillis writes in his study of littoral history, *The Human Shore*, 'Not only do we live on coasts but we think with them. They are a part of our mythical as well as our physical geography'.⁷ H.D. offers a case study into the shore's cultural and metaphorical potency, exploring the ways in which our cultural associations with the shore—its wildness, its mutability, its implication of voyage and adventure—shape our understanding of its living ecology.

⁵ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Exile in the American Grain: H.D.'s Diaspora', *Women's Writing in Exile*, ed. by Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 87–109.

⁶ Diana Collecott, 'Images at the Crossroads', *Signets: Reading H.D.*, ed. by Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 155–181.

⁷ John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 1.

This chapter will initially explore H.D.'s understanding of how humans interact with the shore; as settlers, as fishermen, as voyagers. I argue that the relationship between H.D.'s ecological shore and cultural shore is a reciprocal one, allowing the poet to enter into complex conversations about how humans interact with the world around them through both material presence and symbolic, imaginative response. I will then consider H.D.'s personal attachment to the shore: as a wilderness space that functions antithetically to conventional human society, and as a liminal space where new definitions and poetic values are created. The following section will examine the influences of H.D.'s scientist father and grandfather, and how her depiction of the shore attempts to smooth the division between science and art. This section will also consider the reciprocal relationship between Imagism and a scientific mode of poetry, arguing that H.D.'s depiction of the shore is not coincidentally Imagist, but that Imagism is used purposefully to find a mode of poetics that most effectively communicates human experience of the natural world. A final section will consider the role of mythology in the littoral world of *Sea Garden*, arguing that H.D.'s portrayal of named and unnamed deities and spirits in the littoral landscape presents organic moments of connection between the human world and the natural by accepting human sensory experience as inherently limited. Mythological figures that are at once human and non-human come to represent the unknown in nature, and allow the poet to transcend the limitations of human sensory experience.

I. Borderline Living: H.D. and the Shore

The title of *Sea Garden* both specifies and merges the physical qualities of sea and garden, and exploits their associational meanings: the garden being domesticated and knowable, the sea wild and mysterious. This section considers this duality of landscape, examining first H.D.'s portrayal of the sea and shore, and secondly the setting of gardens in the collection, specifically how such gardens give way to littoral wildernesses. *Sea Garden* is a landscape of contradictions, foremost between water and land, but also between real-world and mythical, precise and abstract, small and

large, ripe and unripe, torn and whole, named and unknown. H.D.'s feeling towards the shore in the collection moves between fondness and danger, nostalgia and fear, familiarity and strangeness. As the title of the collection, on one level, suggests a meeting point between two opposing natural spaces, it also introduces the notion of in-between, of the unfamiliar spaces between binaries that begin to deconstruct them. William Carlos Williams notes a quality of both earthiness and otherworldliness to H.D. in his autobiography, where he describes her in terms both ethereal and of nature; 'when I was with her', he wrote, 'my feet always seemed to be sticking to the ground while she would be walking on the tips of the grass stems'.⁸ Through a conflation of Greek landscapes and American, H.D. creates an 'elsewhere' space that functions as a separation from reality and an exploration of a shoreline space that typifies being neither one thing (land) nor the other (sea).

Susan Stanford Friedman, in her exploration of H.D.'s influence by American wildernesses, describes the landscape of *Sea Garden* as being 'never anchored in human geography'.⁹ Friedman alludes here to the collection's imaginative strangeness and allusions to nature mythologies and deities, which construct a refusal to stay in and describe one particular (American) place, but this description does not acknowledge the ways in which H.D. is engaging with the specific forms of flora, fauna, and landscape of the American East Coast, and in doing so also misses the ways in which H.D.'s imaginative visions aim to convey a real sense of connection with littoral nature. H.D. anchors the land of *Sea Garden* in an understanding of how humans use landscape to understand a place; constructing myths, reaching for historical narratives, learning to name and identify particular features and plants. She aims to do what Rachel Carson proposes fifty years later in *The Edge of the Sea*, not just to understand the shore physically but to 're-enter it mentally and imaginatively'.¹⁰ There is a life-long interest in the locality and particularity of the shore in *Sea Garden*, but also a

⁸ William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1971), p. 12.

⁹ Friedman, 'Exile in the American Grain', p. 98.

¹⁰ Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (1951), collected in *The Sea* (Bristol: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), p. 19.

desire to explore its significance as a cultural image: its familiarity and its unknowability are set at odds throughout to explore its cultural legacy and possibility.

The physical landscape of *Sea Garden* is instantly striking: the collection's first three poems present, respectively, an in-depth portrait of a single flower growing on the coast, a narrative of human shoreline settlers who are driven inland by its harsh conditions, and an encounter with a being or deity residing in the sea itself. In these three poems, 'Sea Rose', 'The Helmsman' and 'The Shrine', H.D. sets out her vision of the shore in *Sea Garden*, which celebrates the evocative and imaginative power of a seashore vista with an observation of its smallest components and human presence.

'Sea Rose' presents a coastal wildflower that is 'marred' and 'meagre' (ll. 2–3), and 'caught in a drift' (l. 8). The coastal rose functions as an introduction to the harsh coastal landscape overarching the collection. The rose is a passive object in a chain of active verbs: flung, lifted, driven (*CP* ll. 10, 11, 13). The flower is stunted and hardened by the harshness of the coastal wind and sand, existing somewhere in-between the conventional poetic image of the domestic rose and the 'spice-rose' of the poet's imagination (*CP* l. 14). The opening of *Sea Garden* therefore immediately presents us with a flower adapted to life on the shore, permeated with the shore's duality of land and water, both a true species and an imagined myth.

The next two poems in the collection, 'The Helmsman' and 'The Shrine', further explore littoral living, but turn their attention to human communities and their attempts to live with and on the shore. John R. Gillis, in his study of the human shore, makes this distinction between settlements living with and on the shore with reference to his own life living between Maine and the Bay Area: 'I have come to appreciate the difference between living *on* coasts and living *with* them, and have learned to make a sharp distinction between people located on coasts and coastal people whose

historical relationships with the coastal environment goes beyond mere residence'.¹¹ In the first of these two poems about shore-dwellers, 'The Helmsman', H.D. follows a narrative of a human community with an instinctive draw to the coast, but who live in conflict with the shore itself, migrating inland from its harsh conditions. The speaker appears to be the helmsman referred to in the title, but also forms a communal perspective of 'we'. The voice recalls a community moving inland for agriculture 'pastur[ing]' their 'flock' in places 'cut off from the wind / and the salt track of the marsh' (CP II. 4–6). Their new land is specifically a pastoral one, with 'oak and scrub-oak tangles', 'hyssop and bramble', 'acorn-cups', 'thickets' (CP II. 12, 13, 18, 21). These human settlers have forgotten the 'tang' of the sea (CP I. 9), the 'sweat of a torn branch' of driftwood (l.34) suggesting that their movement from the shore inland shapes their identity as much as the new landscape itself. Their new land seems far removed from the violence of the littoral elements: it is neat, orderly, tame, both in the imagined landscape it conjures and in its lulling repetition, 'field to field', 'wood to wood', 'hill to hill' (CP II. 27–29).

The connection between the human settlers and the landscape, both littoral and pastoral, is emphasised. These human settlers are portrayed as part of their landscape, literally moulded and changed by it: 'we caught flower and new bramble-fruit / in our hair', 'we laughed / as each branch whipped back', 'we tore our feet in half buried rocks' (CP II. 14–17). But they are sea-beings too, 'dipp[ing] our ankles' (CP I. 22) in the leaves and earth of the inland fields as though they were water. Images of driftwood and sea are human and corporeal in their 'sweat' and 'tang'. The form of the poem is striking. In the following stanzas, there is no immediate anaphora but a limited semantic field beginning each line:

We forgot—we worshipped,
we parted green from green,
we sought further thickets,
we dipped our ankles
through leaf-mould and earth,

¹¹ Gillis, *The Human Shore*, p. 2.

and wood and wood-bank enchanted us—

and the feel of the clefts in the bark,
and the slope between tree and tree—
and a slender path strung field to field
and wood to wood
and hill to hill
and the forest after it. (CP II. 19–30)

The limited stem of ‘and’, ‘we’ or ‘through’ emphasises the variety of line lengths employed in the poem, allowing the form as a whole to imitate and series of rock-shelves, or waves on the water’s surface. The final stanza of the poem sees the settlers return to the sea and express an intuitive and mutual pull between themselves and the water, and this too questions the way H.D.’s poetics are reaching towards a formal expression of littoral patterns and movements:

But now, our boat climbs—hesitates—drops
climbs—hesitates—crawls back—
climbs—hesitates—
O be swift—
we have always known you wanted us. (CP II. 35–39)

In the final stanza, the use of m-dash follows the halting movement of the boat, and brings the poem from the realm of memory (as the passengers remember their inland lives) into the immediacy of the physical present. As with the previous quotation, the gradually reducing line-lengths trace the pattern of a wave, as do the circular repetitions of ‘climbs, hesitates’. The use of m-dash also gives a sense of connection, of one voice meeting another, marking out the boat’s arrival at the shore.

The ‘we’ of the poem recalls John Gillis’s description of coastal peoples in his study of the human history of the shore: ‘there was once a time when coasts were home to a significant part of humanity, when, like any home, they were the locus of a sense of belonging, the center of a world

rather than a periphery'.¹² The m-dash here sets up a drumming sense of rhythm, a reminder of the shore's primitive draw.

Sea Garden's 'The Shrine' similarly examines humankind's relationship with coasts through seafaring. The wild beauty of the coast beckons ships and settlers as a symbol of homecoming, but is also a place of violence, shipwrecks and hidden danger. The poem asks, 'Are your rocks shelter for ships?', imagining the shore as 'a safe crescent' where the tide pulls the boats gently to port and welcomes 'trading ships' (CP II. 1–4). The reality of the shore is that it is 'great, fierce, evil' (CP I. 8) bringing ships to perish. The lights promised as a city or lighthouse are mere 'dank shoals', with 'slate and pebble and wet shells / and seaweed fastened to the rocks' (CP II. 12–14). H.D.'s poem speaks to various histories of the shore, where it was once a site for trading, and regarded initially as a visual blight for its extreme edges. The danger of the shore, and the sailors' instinctive fear, recalls Paul Carter's description of human reaction the shore over history, with the shore being continuously perceived as: 'obstinately discontinuous, abysmal, anti-rational, impossible to fix'.¹³

Tales of littoral danger are passed between sailors:

Many warned of this,
men said:
there are wrecks on the fore-beach,
wind will beat your ship,
there is no shelter in that headland;
it is useless waste, that edge,
that front of rock—
sea-gulls clang beyond the breakers,
none venture to that spot. (CP II. 65–71)

As in 'the Helmsman', internal assonance, sibilance and half-rhyme build to a tidal, wave-like rhythm: 'many', 'men'; 'wrecks', 'wind'; 'beach', 'beat'; 'useless', 'shelter', 'waste'; 'beyond',

¹² Gillis, *The Human Shore*, pp. 3–4.

¹³ Paul Carter, *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design* (Honolulu, HI.: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), p. 74.

'breakers', 'spot', 'rock'. The effect is subtle, attuning our ears to presence of an aural sea and irregular but ever-present tidal rhythm, building the movement of the sea and the sight of the shore into the very structure of the poem.

The description of the shore by these sailors as 'useless waste' is also striking, and is repeated elsewhere in the poem by 'landsmen'. The shore is also termed a 'land-blight' (CP I. 9). Such descriptors stand out in a poem that, elsewhere, details the shore's biodiversity: the seagulls flying over the water, the shoals with their colonies of weeds and shells, and later in the poem the cliffs covered with coastal lilies. Even the sea itself is described with emphasis on its vivid colours, 'rollers shot with blue / cut under deeper blue' (CP II. 38–39). The human idea of uselessness and waste is a projection by these sailors and landsmen, who like the helmsman's people do not seem to understand the coast despite an instinctive draw to it. As Gillis writes of contemporary humans, our relationship to the shore 'is that of the stranger' and that 'after millennia of coastal existence, [humankind] has forgotten how to live *with* coasts and oceans'.¹⁴ The sailors remind each other of peers who had sought 'a headland / shaded with ledge of cliff / from the wind-blast' (CP II. 18–20), which belies a lack of practical knowledge of the shore, a misguided and exploitative expectation that the landscape will provide for the human, and will shape itself around human needs, which is far removed from the coast's reality as an ecological space.

There is reference in the poem to distinctions between coastal people: those who live on the sea (the sailors), those who live on the shore (landsmen), and those who live with the shore (fisher-folk). While the sailors and landsmen share the same stories about the shore—that it is 'useless', dangerous, violent—and harbour unrealistic expectations of the shore capitulating to human visitors, the fisher-folk are depicted as a separate community. The sailors 'dared deeper than the fisher-folk' (CP I. 54), a reference to their own perceived heroism as sea-voyagers, but the fishermen

¹⁴ Gillis, *The Human Shore*, p. 4.

do not contribute to the negative stories of the shore as the landmen and other sailors do in the poem. The silence of the fishermen in the poem gives a sense that they, who deal with the everyday life of the shore, are not as vulnerable to harsh littoral conditions and perhaps have learnt how to live with the shore, staying close to the cliffs and not moving as far out as the sailors.

Cutting through the human settlers' attempts to survive on the shore in both poems is a sense that connections are forged with the landscape through anthropocentric means, namely spirituality and mythology. In 'The Helmsman', it is not defined exactly who or what the inland settlers 'worshipped'; rather it is accepted to be a general sense of the land and their life within it. They are similarly 'enchanted' by the fields and woods, particularly 'wood-banks' and particular shapes within the grass, suggestive of specific mythologies (*CP* I. 24). The title of 'The Shrine' immediately places the poem in a religious context, though again the object of worship is vague, defined only as 'spirit between the headlands / and the further rocks' (*CP* II. 77–78). As the sailors recount stories of others perishing and driving their boats into the rocks, they 'thread throat on throat of freesia / for your shelf' (*CP* II. 45–46), offerings to this littoral spirit that blur flower and body. The sailors, despite their fear and misgivings, 'hail this shore' (*CP* I. 75) and sing to this littoral deity as their boat appears to arrive safely. The tide 'slackens', and the wind 'beats out', and the sailors pay homage to the enshrined deity of the poem:

your eyes have pardoned our faults,
your hands have touched us;
you have leaned forward a little
and the waves can never thrust us back
from the splendor of your ragged coast. (*CP* II. 83–87)

As the sailors catch a glimpse of the coastal shrine, the shore turns from hostile to beckoning as it 'leans forward' towards them and allows for safe passage.

The shoreline deity is imagined in corporeal detail with eyes and hands but also with religious benevolence; it not only allows the sailors to safely arrive at port but pardons them. The notion of

'pardoning' brings subtle nuances to the depiction of the shore here. The poem does not reveal what is being pardoned; it partly suggests hubris as the sailors 'dared deeper' despite the warnings of other people, or perhaps transgressive journeys, the sailors voyaging to where they should not be or with invasive or colonial intent. The act of finding the shore is described as an act of evil—'It was evil—evil /when they found you' (CP II. 15–16)—again suggesting a moral ambiguity around the discovery of the shore, so often a demarcation of national boundary. The final couplet suggests a shift in the sailors' mindset from seeing the shore as a dangerous and hostile place to seeing it as a place of instinctual connection, one inspiring spiritual awe. The sailors' worshipping in song and offerings become confused between the 'spirit' and the landscape itself, as both inspire the same sense of power and fear. Whilst the sailors recognise the destructive beauty of the landscape—the 'wind blast', the 'cut and wreck' of the waves and rocks—their final connection to it seems flimsy, couched in a mythology that relies on the random processes of nature and dependent on their own feelings of acceptance. H.D.'s depiction of the shore in this poem relies on the sailors misunderstanding the shore's physical and ecological life, being 'strangers' to it, and not knowing how to live and travel *with* the shore. The sailors thus layer the natural and mythological; when they are finally given passage through the rough seas, it seems to be both a random act of nature and a result of their offerings. The sailors feel 'pardoned' and note a physical change in the environment as the wind lets up and the tide calms; as readers, we are not told if this is the work of a deity or a coincidence of nature.

Gillis emphasises the long history of the sacred shore, describing its significance as a spiritual site in Judeo-Christian tradition and numerous Western and Pacific indigenous cultures.¹⁵ As I have outlined in my introduction and will discuss later in more depth, H.D.'s shore is encoded with a number of nature spirits and deities from classical Greek tradition, but, as in 'The Shrine', also explored as a place where the separation between physical and spiritual is blurred. As Gillis points out:

¹⁵ Gillis, *The Human Shore*, pp. 29–30.

It seems that places where land and water mix have long been a symbolic resource and stimulus to cultural development. There were not only myriad spirits and deities to be encountered but also access to other worlds, where dead ancestors resided. The transformative powers of water, reflected still in the modern rites of baptism, were universally recognised. Shores were often the site of rites of passage.¹⁶

The 'transformative powers of water' form one aspect of the shore's sacramental qualities; the shore's liminality as a not-sea, not-land threshold forms another. The fluidity of water and the mutability of the line of the shore lend themselves to cultural understandings of ideas that are intangible and abstract: life, death, rebirth. The shore is, also, a site where relatives leave for war or are killed at sea, and where the dead are returned by the tides. The awe the sailors feel for the shore in 'The Shrine' is consciously paralleled by awe and fear for a powerful deity, and also a sense of imminent death.

A number of poems in *Sea Garden* illustrate these spiritual connotations of the shore through human eyes. In 'The Cliff Temple', the temple is indistinguishable from its surrounding littoral environment:

Great, bright portal,
shelf of rock,
rocks fitted in long ledges,
rocks fitted to dark, to silver granite,
to lighter rock –
clean cut, white against white. (CP II. 1–6)

As in 'The Shrine' where building, deity and landscape are interchangeable, H.D. presents the shore itself to be a spiritual place, hiding ambiguous deities. A particular unidentified god is addressed in the second half of the poem:

Have you heard, O god seated on the cliff,
how far toward the ledges of your house,
how far I had to walk? (CP II. 56–58)

The poem details a pilgrimage made to this particular part of the shore, emphasising its physical difficulty; not just 'how far' it was but how the speaker 'lurched forward', 'stumbled in the ground-

¹⁶ Ibid.

myrtle', and caught their breath (CP II. 53–55). It is not just the distance that marks out the difficult path but the physical features of the littoral landscape: the uneven ground, the hilly inclines, the wild and encroaching vegetation. The shore is not simply a spiritual space but a space that requires a rite of passage, a proof of resilience.

The 'god seated on the cliff' exerts a powerful and compelling influence over the worshipper, whose lists of questions form obsessive and pleading temple prayers. The self-destruction of the individual is needed to find union with this nature god as the speaker must hurl, drop, leap from the cliff's height into the sea:

Shall I hurl myself from here,
shall I leap and be nearer you?
Shall I drop, beloved, beloved,
ankle against ankle? (CP II. 45–48)

Ultimately, the speaker's quest to reach the god of the cliffs is futile, the god's presence being 'still further on another cliff' (CP I. 63). There is a hint of Sappho's leap in these lines, as explicated by Eileen Gregory in her exploration of Sapphic models in *Sea Garden*, but there is also a strikingly close observation of the littoral landscape.¹⁷ The rocks below are 'silver granite', the speaker notes the absence of mountain- and cliff-dwelling goats and sheep, and flying past are 'sea-hawks' and 'gulls'. (CP II. 4, 7–8, 14–15). The speaker notes that the crashing waves cannot be heard from the height of the cliffs, and observes a small, white-flowered tree growing from a fissure in the rock below. Such detail provides a grounding physicality to the speaker's narrative of anguish and self-destruction, and to their reaching for something intangible and constantly moving.

Alicia Ostriker notes that 'young poets classically cut their teeth on pastoral poetry', and that H.D., in *Sea Garden*, is 'defining ideal self through ideal landscape'.¹⁸ Whilst her shores engage with a sense

¹⁷ Gregory, 'Rose Cut in Rock', 547.

¹⁸ Alicia Ostriker, *Writing like a Woman: Poets on Poetry* (Ann Arbor, MI.: University of Michigan Press, 1983), p. 11.

of human migration to and from the shore, the shore also has personal resonance for H.D., becoming a means through which her sense of self is defined and tested. William Carlos Williams recounts a young H.D. almost being drowned off Point Pleasant in New Jersey:

Hilda had come down just before my arrival and, getting into her bathing clothes, had gone to the shore after the others. They all saw it. There had been a storm and the breakers were heavy, pounding in with overpowering force. But Hilda was entranced. I suppose she wasn't used to the ocean anyhow and didn't realise what she was about. For without thought or caution she went to meet the waves, walked right into them. I suppose she could swim, I don't know, but in she went and the first wave knocked her flat, the second rolled her into the undertow, and if Bob Lamberton hadn't been powerful and there, it might have been worse. They dragged her out unconscious, resuscitated her, and had just taken her up to the house.¹⁹

This early experience reveals H.D. drawn to the power and danger of the sea, specifically as it overwhelms the land and land-dwellers. Yet despite H.D.'s fascination with a powerful and dangerous nature, this near-drowning also reveals a lack of knowledge of the landscape, and a naivety at her place within it. H.D. is, from this passage, searching for some kind of organic connection with the landscape, and is reminded of her alienation from it.

Harriet Monroe speculated on H.D.'s debt to her pioneer ancestors, to whom she attributed the wildness and vitality of H.D.'s work: 'the pioneers took a shut-in race out of doors, exposed it to nature's harsh activities, and thus restored a certain lost fibre to its very blood and bones'.²⁰ The human settlers of the shore landscape, as in 'The Helmsman' and 'The Shrine', recognise the shore as an untameable wilderness space yet also feel a profound connection to the landscape. In *Sea Garden*, H.D. invokes the pioneer spirit as she searches the shore for an identity and self-fulfilment found within landscape. The wildness of the littoral landscape in *Sea Garden* is self-actualising, and provides H.D. with a space to construct and test the self. The title of *Sea Garden* invokes two contradictory habitats in the wild, unknowable sea and the familiar, tamed garden, and this

¹⁹Williams, *Imaginations*, pp. 69-70.

²⁰Harriet Monroe, 'H.D.', *Poetry*, 26(5) (1925), 268-275: 269.

dichotomy comes to represent the contradictory forces of identity, particularly of gender. 'Sea Rose' presents a comparison between a wild, littoral rose and its domestic counterpart, testing a conventional, heteronormative romantic image against the complexities of female desire and identity. H.D. contrasts the domestic rose, traditionally a symbol of heterosexual romance, with the sea rose, a wildflower growing on the shore. H.D. celebrates the resilience of the sea rose and its survival against the elements; after being 'flung' and 'caught' by the driving coastal winds and sea spray the flower is 'lifted' in the sand (*CP II*. 10, 8, 11). This flower actively resists its usual associations, is 'meagre', 'harsh', 'stunted' (*CP II*. 3, 1, 9), and produces a sensory effect the domestic rose cannot:

Can the spice-rose
drip such acrid fragrance
hardened in a leaf? (*CP II*. 14-16)

The comparison between the wild and domestic flowers models a tension between a conventional, domestic femininity and a transgressive or alternative form of female sexuality. The austere eroticism of the wild rose presents a direct challenge to the soft, virginal romanticism of the domestic rose. In 'Sea Rose', this binary between domestic and wild enacts a reversal of value, endowing the torn, wild rose with the beauty and poetic legitimacy reserved usually for the domestic rose: the 'can' of the passage above suggests that the acrid fragrance is a kind of accomplishment and a distinctive kind of experience to savour, rather than being, as we might expect, a fault. 'Sea Rose', in opening *Sea Garden*, also typifies H.D.'s littoral poetics throughout the collection and her later work, using patterns of half rhymes and, later, chiasmus, to attempt to transcribe the littoral into poetic form. In 'Sea Rose', enjambment mimics the movement of the tide, as do repetitive sounds and half-rhymes throughout the poem, 'harsh', 'marred', 'sparse'; 'stint', 'stem, 'stunted'; 'drift' crisp', 'drive', 'drip, 'acid':

Rose, harsh rose,
marred and with stint of petals,
meagre flower, thin,
sparse of leaf,

more precious
than a wet rose
single on a stem—
you are caught in the drift.

Stunted, with small leaf,
you are flung on the sand,
you are lifted
in the crisp sand
that drives in the wind.

Can the spice-rose
drip such acrid fragrance
hardened in a leaf? (ll. 1–17)

These patterns of internal half-rhymes and assonance across short, monosyllabic lines focus the poem's attention to the minutiae of the flower's presence, and offer the same circular, returning structure as 'The Helmsman' and 'The Shrine', enacting the surrounding habitat of the flower and its symbiotic relationship to the shore.

The form of the flower poems is distinctive when set against the collection's more narrative-driven poems like 'Sea Gods', 'The Shrine', 'The Helmsman'. Line lengths are short and of a consistent, similar length, contrasting to the formal irregularity and fluidity of the other poems. The effect is to form a singular portrait of the flower, a botanical study in verse. In 'Sea Lily', internal alliteration and assonance is again returned to, patterning the verse with waves of sound:

Reed,
slashed and torn
but doubly rich—
such great heads as yours
drift upon temple-steps,
but you are shattered
in the wind.

Myrtle-bark
is flecked from you,
scales are dashed
from your stem,
sand cuts your petal,
furrows it with hard edge,

like flint
on a bright stone.

Yet though the whole wind
slash at your bark,
you are lifted up,
aye—though it hiss
to cover you with froth. (CP II. 1–20)

The stanzas describing the harshness of the shore share similar hard consonants in ‘flecked’, ‘dashed’ ‘slashed’, ‘cuts’, but the stanza describing the lily’s survival is characterised by vowel sounds, even leading to the unexpected inflection of the speaker, ‘aye’ blending into ‘lifted’, ‘hiss’, ‘froth’. Again within the soundscape of the poem we are given a sense of two kinds of movement: one hard and sharp, one fluid and soft. The blending of the two gives the sense of two elements merging, but also illustrates the unexpected nature of littoral strength: the danger of the sea and depths, the relative safety of the land, the point at which the two meet being both a site of destruction and of new forms of life.

Elsewhere in *Sea Garden*, poems set in gardens draw similar comparisons between domestic and wild forms of nature. In these poems, the coastal wilderness of *Sea Garden* makes space for female insurgency against the expectations of conventional gender roles and symbols. In ‘Sheltered Garden’, the speaker expresses a desire for wilderness away from the stifling domesticity of the garden. The poem promotes a renewal of the concept of beauty so that traditional forms, beauty ‘without strength’ that ‘chokes out life’ (CP I. 43), may be forgotten. The speaker has ‘had enough’ (CP I. 1) of the ‘border on border of scented pinks’ (CP I. 17) that make up the idyllic, manicured garden she feels trapped in, and yearns for its destruction into wilderness, a ‘terrible wind-tortured place’ (CP II. 59–60). Images of the garden’s fragile, pretty flowers and ripe, fertile fruit offer an open parallel to a portrait of ideal femininity. Though the poem’s speaker is protected, ‘sheltered’ from danger in this garden, she is suffocated. The poem opens with a gasp for breath and the speaker projects her feelings of frustration and boredom onto the orchard’s coddled fruit, reasoning that ‘all

your coaxing will only make / a bitter fruit' (*CP II*. 26–27). The speaker calls for a destruction of the 'garden' characteristics of the place in favour of wilderness:

I want wind to break,
Scatter these pink-stalks,
Snap off their spiced heads,
Fling them about with dead leaves
[...]
Leave half-trees, torn, twisted
But showing the fight was valiant. (*CP II*. 44–56)

The notion of the 'valiant' fight of the landscape implies that the natural space already has strength, but this strength is simply unveiled when the garden is able to reverse its domestication.

This escape into wilderness is linked directly to the sea in 'The Gift'. This poem traces a rejection of conventionally feminine images, including that of a flowering garden: 'slight fingers' that twirl flowers in the street (*CP I*. 15), a pearl necklace (*CP I*. 23), a garden full of myrtle, myrrh-hyacinth, and violets (*CP II*. 37–46), a house that is 'over painted, over-lovely' (*CP I*. 48). As with 'Sheltered Garden', there is a need for an isolated elsewhere of rocky, infertile land, and 'The Gift' matches this with the sensory captivation of the shore:

another life holds what this lacks,
a sea, unmoving, quiet—
not forcing our strength
to rise to it, beat on beat—
a stretch of sand,
no garden beyond, strangling
with its myrrh lilies—
a hill, not set with black violets
but stones, stones, bare rocks (*CP II*. 78–89)

The poem ends with a rejection of the pearl jewellery, both a symbol of cultured femininity and a cultivated product of the sea. As the poem moves from the domestic garden and house to the sea and its adjacent barren land, the speaker offers a metaphorical escape from the confines of gender expectations. H.D. projects this gendered alienation onto the physical landscape of a wild borderline in order to make it an external reality. The movement from the garden to this sea in 'The Gift'

suggests a rejection of male-defined femaleness (the preened garden) and a celebration of female-defined femaleness (a coastal wilderness).

In her essay on American identity and H.D.'s emigration to Europe from the United States, Susan Stanford Friedman argues that marginality was key to H.D.'s modernity, both in her separation from the land of her birth and the marginal impositions of her personal life.²¹ For H.D., it was 'where she wasn't, not where she was, that mattered'.²² In *Sea Garden*, the shore is firmly an 'elsewhere' space, where wildflowers are depicted in parallel to their domestic counterparts so that they are conceived as a 'something else', where the shore is unknown, unmapped territory to the sailors of 'The Shrine' and a challenged border territory to 'The Helmsman'. The shore welcomes marginal characters—voyaging sailors, displaced communities, even the Sapphic yearning of the speaker of 'The Cliff Face'—by nature of its physical qualities, of being not-sea and not-garden.

The shore, as a place that evades definitions of land and sea in being both and neither, becomes a place where restrictive definitions may be dissolved. H.D. herself in 1929 wrote that 'I fear the being caught in any one set formula or set of circumstances', and the shore of *Sea Garden* asserts itself as a site where conventional definitions may be blurred, allowing for an escape from such 'set formula'.²³ The speaker's encounters with the landscape throw up various binaries that must somehow be resolved: land and sea, domestic and wild, precise and abstract, small and vast. Through the destruction or merging of these opposites, as seen in the flower poems where the seemingly opposite qualities of beauty and toughness become inseparable from each other, H.D. is able to form new definitions that undermine conventional thought. Testing and breaking the space between binaries establishes a process whereby opposing definitions are challenged and renewed:

²¹ Friedman, 'Exile in the American Grain', p. 93.

²² Ibid, p. 94.

²³ Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, ed. by Michael Boughn and Victor Coleman (Oakland, CA.: University of California Press, 2011), p. 295.

for H.D., working in a male-dominated modernism and Imagism and learning how to express her queer identity, the need to move outside and between set dualisms of gender and desire made the shore a vital way of expressing fluid modes of being. H.D. reforms the 'pioneer spirit' in her dogged search for the new, the unmapped, the unsettled that extends into language and poetic convention.

II. The Wildflower Poems: Imagist Science and Coastal Details

Five poems of *Sea Garden* present species of coastal wildflower: 'Sea Rose', 'Sea Lily', 'Sea Poppies', 'Sea Violet' and 'Sea Iris'. These coastal flowers are celebrated for their resilience and fragility in the face of the harsh landscape, as H.D. details their colours, shapes and living habits. These poems reveal an investment in the physical properties of landscape down to the smallest detail, and in their rich description are the most akin to traditional nature-writing of the poems of *Sea Garden*. The poems therefore demonstrate a mode of scientific observation that H.D. employs in her poetry, but they are also the most Imagist poems of the collection as well as the most naturalist. In this section, I will explore H.D.'s scientific influences, and how these influences shape her depiction of the shore and specific coastal wildflowers. These wildflower poems are also often cited as clear examples of Imagism; I will therefore study the intersections between a scientific mode of observation and an Imagist mode of expression. I argue that H.D.'s studies of littoral wildflowers are intended to create a mode of poetics that transgresses the separation between science and art in order to express the life of a living thing most vividly, in a way that encompasses both its material and metaphorical life.

Like the 'Sea Rose', the flowers have petals broken 'like a shell', are 'thin twigs' ('Sea Iris', *CP* II. 4, 7), 'slashed and torn' ('Sea Lily', *CP* I. 2) and 'stunted' ('Sea Rose', *CP* I. 5). Yet they are 'doubly rich' ('Sea Lily', *CP* I. 3) for their survival; their strength drags colour from the sand ('Sea Iris', *CP* II. 16–17), their petals are 'fire upon leaf' ('Sea Poppies', *CP* I. 14) and they are stars edged with frost ('Sea Violet', *CP* I. 17). With these wildflower portraits H.D. actively removes the flower image from any romantic or

pastoral association to examine its natural forms; the poems set out each flower with Imagist exactitude but also suggest a celebration of wild nature that begins at the shore. The flowers are individually named and examined as their own distinctive species, and the sea lily refers to a common marine crinoid found on the American East Coast. The ‘doubly rich’ creature owns its duality; it takes the shape of a lily, as its name suggests, but H.D.’s poem alludes to this ‘flower’ not being all it seems (*CP I. 3*). The sea lily has ‘scales’, and at the end of the poem is subsumed by the water, suggesting that it lives on a shallow tidal seabed as opposed to the shore itself (*CP II. 10, 19–20*).

Throughout the flower poems are references to their lives in metaphor and cultural trope: the sea lilies have counterparts that ‘drift upon temple steps’ (l. 5), the sea rose its domestic ‘wet rose / single on a stem’ (l. 7), sea poppies are compared to poppies grown in meadows (ll. 15–17) and ‘greater blue violets / flutter on the hill’ (l. 9) behind the sea violets. H.D. asks of the sea violets, ‘who would change for these / one root of the white sort?’ (ll. 11–12), a pattern running

throughout the wildflower poems where the poet finds the littoral versions more poetically valuable.

The pattern is suggestive of not just a search for new meaning and beauty but a desire for realism, for an observation of a flower as an ecological being in its natural habitat.

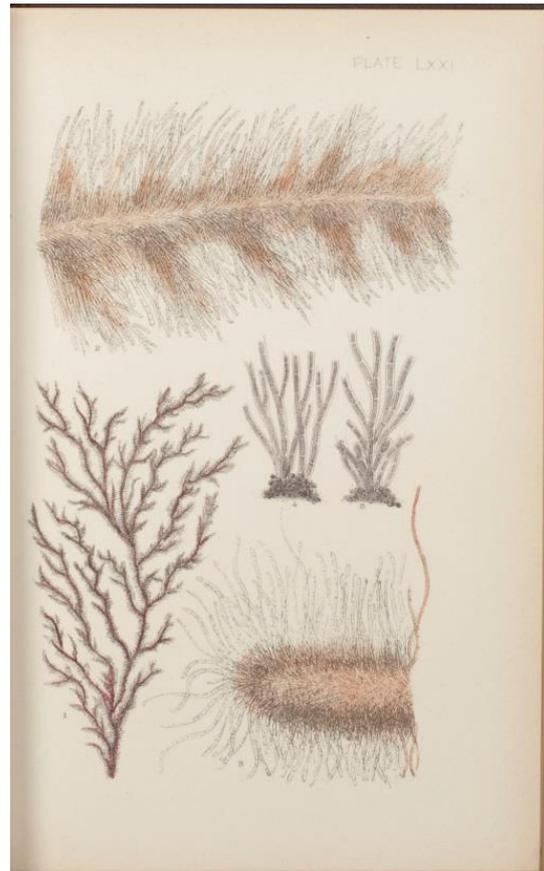


Fig. 1
 An illustration of specimens in *Freshwater Algae of the United States* by Francis Wolle (Bethlehem, PA.: The Comenius Press, 1887), Plate LXXI.

The links between H.D.'s work and the work of her scientist father and grandfather have been studied in depth, noting traces of scientific modes of observation and interpretation in her work.²⁴

Adalaide Morris sees H.D. 'reproduce' her grandfather's 'delicate language, his transfixed, interrogating gaze, and his push for taxonomic precision'.²⁵ Charlotte Mandel, in her study of the influence of lens-vision in the work of H.D., encompassing film cameras, photographic cameras and, crucially, microscopes, writes:

Hilda Doolittle was born at the full of the Victorian-style quest for scientific knowledge by personal diligent observation, collection, notation and classification. Her grandfather was an authority on freshwater algae, her father a noted astronomer. To the child, these were awesome men who discovered living bodies in pondwater's green scum or kept long night watch to glean secrets of the heavens.²⁶

H.D.'s grandfather, Rev. Francis Wolle, became an expert in micro-botany at the age of sixty-four, and by the time of his death twelve years later, had become a recognised international authority on freshwater algae, salt- and freshwater desmids and diatoms, and had identified thousands of species. His books, *Desmids of the United States* (1884), *Fresh-water Algae of the United States* (1887) and *Diatomaceae of North America* (1890) contain a total of 5700 figures reproduced from the author's drawings, which increased by 300 more in revised editions. As well as producing detailed drawings of each species, Wolle was also responsible for naming them, and did so by using Greek and Latin words that corresponded to a particular feature of the organism.²⁷

²⁴ In addition to Morris and Mandel, Annette Debo also writes extensively on the subject in her article 'H.D.'s American Landscape: The Power and Permanence of Place' (2004) and her later monograph *The American H.D.* (2012).

²⁵ Adalaide Morris, 'Science and the Mythopoeic Mind: The Case of H.D.', *Chaos and Order*, ed. by N. Katherine Hayles (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago, 1991), pp. 195–220, p. 199.

²⁶ Charlotte Mandel, 'Magical Lenses: Poet's Vision Beyond the Naked Eye', *H.D. Woman and Poet*, ed. by Michael King (Orono, ME.: National Poetry Foundation, 1986), pp. 300–317, p. 301.

²⁷ This process of naming is outlined in Charlotte Mandel's essay, p. 302.

In *Sea Garden*, we can trace H.D.'s influence from her grandfather in her scientific eye for the habitat of the shore. As already discussed, 'The Shrine' is about the littoral experiences of the sailors, but also depicts a rich biodiversity stretching from flora, to shellfish, to birds. In 'Sea Gods', H.D. describes not only the violets that populate the shore grass but their myriad of subspecies, creating new names for them using distinctions of colour, shape, and habitat. There are 'wood-violets, stream-violets, / violets from a wet marsh', 'blue violets', 'yellow violets', violets 'like red ash', 'bird-foot violets', 'hyacinth-violets', violets whiter than the surf, and violets which thrive in numerous different environments: violets from the hills, from the earth, from cracks between rocks, from moss, cliffs, and rivers (*CP* II. 22–23, 27, 28, 32, 33). Similarly there are many identification names for different grasses throughout the collection: wood grass, coarse grass, shore grass, common grass.²⁸ H.D. describes

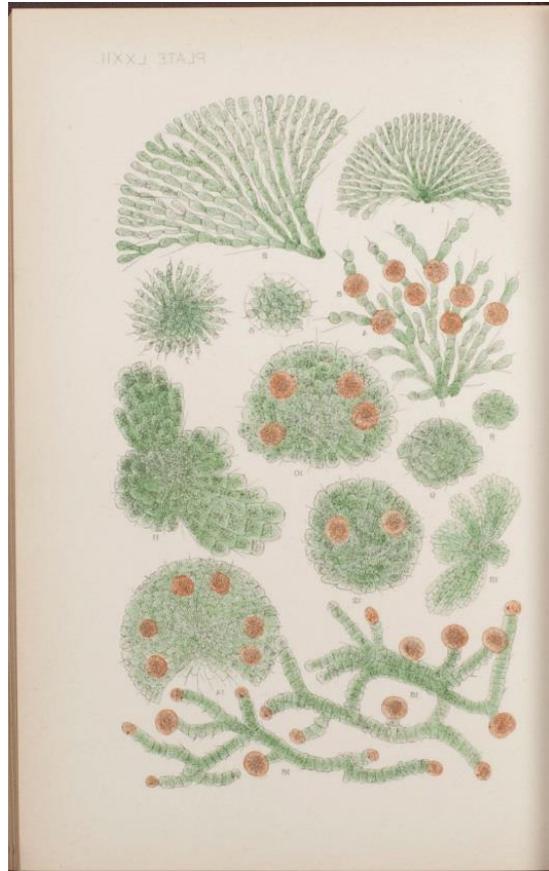


Fig. 2
Another illustration of specimens, this time evoking a rich sense of colour and texture, from Francis Wolle's *Freshwater Algae of the United States* (1887), Plate LXXII.

her littoral environment with curiosity and eye for detail, but also echoes her grandfather's own descriptions of waterline algae. These place similar emphasis on subtleties of colour: 'green, then pink grading off into all the shades of purple, and finally olive, from golden green and bright tawny

²⁸ The *Helmsman* has 'wood-grass' (l. 10), 'coarse grass' and 'shorter grass' (ll. 36–37), 'The Pursuit' describes 'flowering grass' (l. 16), 'Acon' and 'Sheltered Garden' have respective 'burnt grass' (l. 28) and 'dead grass' (l. 39), 'Hermes of the Ways' has 'sea-grass' and 'shore-grass' (l. 53–54), and 'common grass' appears in 'The Gift' (l. 74).

to black; indeed, there are few if any colours from the most gorgeous to the dullest, but to be found among the Algae'.²⁹

The wildflower poems furthermore reveal a preoccupation with the conditions in which each flower survives. H.D. is drawn to the embattled survival of these species on the shore as much as she is to their symbolic lives. The wildflowers are, throughout the collection, compared to the hand-grown and domesticated flowers and fruits of the orchard and garden, which are stifled and stunted in their over-cultivated worlds. As H.D. asks of the sea poppies, 'what meadow yields / so fragrant a leaf / as your bright leaf?' (CP II. 15–17) In some instances H.D. seems to actively draw on knowledge passed to her through her grandfather's work. In his introduction to *Diatomaceae of North America* (1890), Wolle describes how these microscopic plants attach themselves to 'stones, wood or other adjacent objects to prevent [...] being swept away by currents and waves'.³⁰ Throughout H.D.'s flower poems, there are references to this natural activity: the violet is 'grasp[ing]' the 'edge of the sand-hill' (CP II. 14–15), the roots of the iris are 'tangled' (CP II. 2) with the sand, and the stalk of the poppy 'has caught root / among wet pebbles' and shells (CP II. 8–9). Wolle's influence on H.D. is apparent not just in the realism of the shore landscape she depicts, but also in the language with which she depicts it.

Wolle's illustrations (see Fig.1 and Fig.2 as examples) in *India Ink* which accompany his research mimic H.D.'s flower poems by displaying the organism as a sole being whilst also hinting at its natural environment; each specimen is drawn on the page separate from its landscape, yet is also surrounded by its relative species.³¹ They also suggest a symbiotic relationship between science and art; the detail and style of Wolle's individual drawings make them clearly illustrations as opposed to

²⁹ Rev. Francis Wolle, *Desmids of the United States* (Bethlehem, PA.: Moravian Publication Office, 1884), p. xii.

³⁰ Rev. Francis Wolle, *Diatomaceae of North America* (Bethlehem, PA.: The Comenius Press, 1890), p. ix.

³¹ Both images courtesy of Harvard University via the Hathi Turst Mobile Digital Library <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044106416472&view=2up&seq=7>> (accessed 11/07/2019).

diagrams, and they are ordered on each page according to colour and shape as well as by family or genus.

H.D.'s cousin, also named Francis Wolle, recounts their grandfather teaching him how to rub a piece of pond algae onto a piece of paper and to 'place it under a microscope', at which point 'you will find it to consist of tiny plants of a great variety of shapes and colors. These are the cryptograms'.³² The mystery of these 'cryptograms' is what makes them so captivating to both her grandfather as a scientist and to the Wolle/Doolittle children, and it is striking that the word used here is *cryptograms*, as in puzzles, as opposed to *cryptogams*, the scientific term for sporing plants such as algae and lichen. The plants beneath the microscope become more than scientific specimens, but signifiers, puzzles to be deciphered. In her childhood memoir *The Gift*, written during the Second World War, H.D. describes their grandfather sharing his research with his grandchildren with mystery and childhood curiosity:

When Papalie lifted us, one by one in turn, to kneel on the chair by his worktable, we saw that it was true what he said, we saw that where there is nothing, there is something. We saw that an empty drop of water spread out like branches, bright green or vermilion, in shape like a branch of a Christmas tree or in shape like a squashed peony or in shape like a lot of little green-glass beads, strung on a thick stem. (*TG* 42)

The details that emerge from H.D.'s observation of the plants under the microscope is telling. Shape and colour are important identity markers, as they become in the wildflowers poems. As Mandel points out, in 'Sea Violet' there is even the sense of looking at the flower through a microscopic lens: 'the object shimmers though motionless within the frame'.³³ The child H.D. makes sense of the microscopic plant forms by relating them to her own life; a string of beads, a Christmas tree, a flower from her garden. H.D.'s wildflower poems not only use their domestic or poetic counterparts as a point of comparison, but as an active point of reference, a way of understanding the unique life of littoral plants. It is a distinctly poetic way of understanding the physical world, to compare objects to

³² Francis Wolle, *A Moravian Heritage* (Boulder, CO.: Empire Reproduction & Printing Company, 1972), p. 21.

³³ Mandel, 'Magical Lenses: Poet's Vision Beyond the Naked Eye', p. 308.

other objects in order to reach a kind of understanding, while also deferring and widening the comparison to multiple objects.

H.D.'s father Charles Doolittle, an astronomer at the University of Pennsylvania, seems to have instilled in his daughter a fascination with the signs and myths imposed by humans onto their environments. H.D. parallels the image of her grandfather hunched over at his desk studying details invisible to the naked eye to her father pointing his telescope skywards, studying the larger unknowns of the universe. She recognises that while her grandfather studies something measurable and nameable with his tiny plants, the answers to her father's research are unattainable:

Papa went out to look at the stars at night. He measured them or measured something, we didn't quite know what. We could see what Papalie was doing with his microscope on his study-table. But when Papa took us to his little domed house [...] and we asked to look into his telescope, he said that we would see nothing; you could not see what he was looking at or for. (TG 39)

H.D. greatly admired her father; as Bryher writes in her own letters, 'not a day went by that she [H.D.] did not mention "my father, the astronomer"'.³⁴ Barbara Guest, in her biography of H.D., also details how H.D.'s father 'took her with him to the scientific and philosophical societies to which he belonged'.³⁵ H.D.'s experience of science growing up was caught between the two experiences of her male relatives; the natural world being at once quantifiable, nameable, discoverable, but also governed by and containing things that were mysterious, unseen, unknown. The notion of nature containing 'cryptograms' appears through the littoral landscape of *Sea Garden* as mythological figures and images collide with the material world. As Mandel writes, H.D.'s desire was less to observe outward scientific fact but 'to reverse and internalise the scrutiny. In her art she becomes herself receiver and refractor of images/signs to be inscribed into words'.³⁶ H.D. does not wish simply to transcribe the appearance of a littoral landscape and flowers, but to fully explore their

³⁴ Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (London: Collins, 1984), p. 14.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 20.

³⁶ Mandel, 'Magical Lenses: Poet's Vision Beyond the Naked Eye', p. 309.

abstract and mythological significances, to decipher their 'cryptograms' of both scientific and literary meaning.

H.D.'s balance of materiality and metaphor has another influence: Imagism. The wildflower poems' identification of specific species in the shore environment can be interpreted in two ways: as an interest in scientific observation of the realities of coastal ecology, and as remnants of H.D.'s involvement in the Imagist movement. The wildflower poems use concentrated imagery to draw singular portraits of their subjects, much like a botanical illustration, but the poems also suggest symbiosis between the image of the flower and its living existence in nature. Each flower is characterised by a strong central colour—white and blue for sea violet, amber and gold for sea poppies, blue and green for sea iris—as well as their textures, wind-torn shapes and acrid, earthy scents. The voice of 'Sea Iris' asks the flower 'do your roots drag up colour from the sand?' (*CP* II. 16–17), implying that the flower's aesthetic and, by extension, H.D.'s poem, both come from the coastal soil. For H.D. in these poems, creativity and the shore are intertwined.

Part of the doctrine of Imagism, as set out by Ezra Pound, is that 'the natural object is always the adequate symbol'.³⁷ In 'Garden', H.D. explores the difficulty in capturing the natural object in her poetry, implying that a natural object that can withstand poetic dissection must itself be hardy and resilient, like her coastal wildflowers. In the first section of 'Garden', to capture the image of the domestic garden rose is an act of violence:

I could scrape the colour
from the petals
like split dye from a rock.

If I could break you
I could break a tree. (*CP* II. 4–8)

³⁷ Ezra Pound, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', *Poetry*, 1(6) (1913), 200–206: 201.

The poem presents a problematic and destructive relationship between nature and nature poet through this central verb of 'breaking', but the word also has connotations of 'breaking' a code represented by or held in a flower. Yet there is also a hesitance to the poem, a repetition of 'if' that questions whether the rose can truly be 'broken' or not. In this light, the flower poems may not just be studies of particular species, but an exact exercise in detailing a flower in order to understand it, to extract its 'meaning' or code. The flowers' position on the mutable boundary between land and sea couches their identities in a state of flux, at once material and metaphorical.

The influence of Pound's two rules of the 1913 Imagist credo, 'direct treatment of the "thing"' and 'no word that does not contribute to the presentation', is evidenced in the wildflower poems, which all take a single image (that of a single flower) and are economical in their monosyllabic, short descriptions.³⁸ The opening of 'Sea Iris' describes the flower and its surroundings dually:

Weed, moss-weed,
root tangled in sand,
sea-iris, brittle flower,
one petal like a shell
is broken,
and you print a shadow
like a thin twig. (*CP* II. 1–7)

The iris's environment is hinted at in the way H.D. combines the metaphorical and the material: the 'shell' petal is both metaphorical and the flower's material surround, the roots tangled in the sand both enchant the poet in their messiness and ensures the iris's survival, and the shadow emphasises the flower's fragility. The verb 'print' suggests a particular kind of flat, even, smooth surface, hinting at the quality of the sand or formation of rock around the plant. Shape, printing and brittleness define this singular Imagist image but also evoke the littoral environment with specificity. In the second half of the poem nature and culture literally collide, as fishermen hunting for murex drench

³⁸ Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect', *Pavannes and Divisions* (New York: Knopf, 1918), p.95.

the flowers in water. The iris's roots pull colour and form from the sand, but the flower is also 'painted' blue, coloured by both its natural life and the eye of the observer-poet. The images have almost a hallucinatory specificity as they evoke both the colours and textures of the image and the littoral landscape itself.

The precision, impersonality and brevity of the Imagist exercise forms a scientific mode of language for H.D., but one that also recognises the natural object as an image, a cultural artefact as well as an ecological one. Imagism's movement away from the sentimentality of French Symbolism furthermore encourages a complex consideration of nature images, moving them away from conventional poetic association (such as the romantic rose) and into something tangible and direct. H.D.'s deconstruction of the flowers into abstract shapes and forms parallel an almost scientific dissection of their physical forms; Imagism thus allows H.D. to draw her flowers with both the objective eye of a scientist and the creative vision of a poet.

The overlay between science and art preoccupied a young H.D., who considered herself 'in-between' the two. In her later memoir *Tribute to Freud* [1933–48], written as H.D. was being analysed by Freud, H.D. believes herself torn between the various members of her family, describing a competition between 'my father's telescope, my grandfather's microscope' in which she draws herself as being literally caught and doomed between them: 'if I let go [...] I fear to be dissolved utterly' (*TF* 112).³⁹ Transgressing the separation between telescope and microscope would mean creating a mode of nature poetics that thrived on two things: searching for hidden meanings in the physical world and using cultural myths and concepts to understand them (as an astronomer), and meticulously observing their details (as a botanist or naturalist). H.D. both models and defies this scientific lineage, using forms of naturalist observation and detail in her poetry whilst also exploring natural forms as poetic, cultural symbols. H.D.'s relationship with these scientists was not so

³⁹ H.D., *Tribute to Freud*, (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1985) (original work published in 1956), p. 116.

straightforward, and later in *Tribute to Freud* she recognises a necessary balance between science and art, one that brings in the vocation of her music-teacher mother:

I am on the fringes or in the penumbra of the light of my father's science and my mother's art... the house in some indescribable way depends upon the father-mother. At the point of integration or regeneration, there is no conflict over rival loyalties. (TF 145)

This point of 'integration' which intrinsically leads to 'regeneration' is central to both H.D.'s crossing of the science/art divide and her conception of the shore. *Sea Garden*, as her first collection, would have to be the first experiment in this integration of science and art, or recognising nature as a series of cryptograms as well as ecologies. The shore also offered a personal kind of integration and regeneration; a resolution between the oppositional influences of H.D.'s family, and of other personal influences such as her sexuality, gender and the pressures of Imagism. The 'cryptograms' offered by the natural world not only allowed for an investigation into the 'meanings' and forms of the natural world, but also offered a sequence of images through which H.D. could define her own self. The elation of *Sea Garden's* anti-society, anti-convention, anti-human shore is defined by Alicia Ostriker, who writes 'the wild natural settings enable the poet to imagine an existence unconfined by the genteel feminine proprieties that governed her Philadelphia girlhood. She can defy her astronomer-father's rationality and her mother's middle-class conventionality'.⁴⁰ The shore specifically offered a world of fluidity and indefinable boundaries, where amphibious creatures and fluid natural setting could be defined by their very evasion of objective definition.

In *Sea Garden* there is a clear understanding of the universe as both an environmental reality and a system of potential signs and symbols; H.D.'s role as a poet seems to be to read her environment according to the latter, and her father and grandfather as scientists to consider the former. The influence of her scientist family members appears in *Sea Garden* in H.D.'s close observation of littoral flora species and understanding of the shore as a boundary habitat between water and land

⁴⁰ Alicia Ostriker, 'The Poet as Heroine: Learning to Read H.D.', *The American Poetry Review*, 12(2) (1983), 29–38: 30.

that produces unique wildlife and survival habits. H.D. is also, however, aware of the need to deny these familial influences in her poetry; in her writing, the flowers are not only scientific specimens but images, cultural specimens that live in a cultural ecology of associations and symbolisms. In her 1921 semi-autobiographical novel *Paint it Today*, H.D. reveals her writing to be an attempt to 'combine' the qualities of scientific observation with imaginative vision:

She, Midget, did not wish to be an eastern flower painter. She did not wish to be an exact and overprécieuse western, a scientific describer of detail of vein and leaf of flowers, dead or living, nor did she wish to press flowers and fern fronds and threads of pink and purple seaweed between the pages of her book. Yet she wanted to combine all these qualities in her writing and to add still another quality to these three. She wished to embody, as this other quality, the fragrance of the flowers. (*PIT* 17)

H.D.'s poetry aims to embody the true living forms of the coastal wildflowers. Here, scientific study is a form of destruction as plants are pressed into the pages of books, but it also leads to a detailed and sensory knowledge of their forms, the 'fronds' and 'threads' and 'vein' and 'leaf', the colours of seaweed and fern. The exacting, realistic art of the 'eastern flower painter' is similarly rejected unless it can be combined with the unnamed 'extra quality' H.D. wishes to embody. This extra quality seems to be wholly poetic, the 'fragrance' of the flowers, the sensory experience of being in nature and a dissolution of the boundary between human and non-human. Imagism offers H.D. a reach across this divide, a way of writing with precision and detail that aims to capture and distil the essence of experience and pay homage to the natural object. There is a desire to understand the mystery and power of the shore landscape in *Sea Garden* which is not far removed from a scientific drive for understanding, but H.D. extends this search for knowledge into what is unknown, unseen, unexplained by science. H.D.'s search for meaning in the myriad wildflowers and tiny creatures of the shore reveals a curiosity for the beings and forces unnamed and invisible to the naked eye, and extends into the mythology of the shore.

III. Beyond the Earth-bound Senses: The Shore's Mythology

Rachel Carson, in her 1937 article 'Undersea', asks her readers:

Who has known the ocean? Neither you nor I, with our earth-bound senses, know the foam and surge of the tide that beats over the crab hiding under the seaweed of his tide-pool home.⁴¹

Carson imagines the sea as a place of alien rituals and codes, all unintelligible to the human eye. This sense of the unknown, of our 'earth-bound' senses being insufficient in truly knowing the oceanic shore, is something H.D. understands with her systems of 'cryptograms' and breaking codes. H.D.'s portrayal of mythological figures and deities embedded in the littoral landscape asks us to consider more deeply how exactly we understand a landscape. Is scientific observation enough? The implication of Carson's 'earth-bound senses' is that there are things we miss in a landscape when we consider only its human sensory dimension. As H.D. suggests with 'The Shrine' and 'The Helmsman', our moments of connection with the landscape happen through human narratives that go beyond the physical and into the metaphysical. H.D.'s inclusion of classical mythology in her littoral *Sea Garden* compromises a purely naturalist stance, but also allow for a route out of human experience, into the myriad unknowns of a natural space. With a voice that is neither entirely human, nor entirely non-human, we can enter into new understandings of the landscape. Among H.D.'s childhood friends were Margaret Snively and Matilda Wells, whose families lived near the Doolittles. H.D. would spend several weeks each summer with Matilda at Baily Island in Casco Bay, Maine, and with Margaret every summer at the Snively cottage at Watch Hill, New Jersey.⁴² H.D. celebrates her summer visits in her 1926 novel *Palimpsest*:

Somewhere behind them the moon had fallen down perpendicular, slipped off the flat stretch of sand where hillocks marked drift and sand hill, where following sand hill and sand crest and hollow of sand trough, it seemed eventually one must surely reach the sea, the rim of a New Jersey seacoast; where inland, cut apart from the inwash of sea, were fresh pools, where dragon-flies opened iridescent petal of frail wing, where hovering dragon-fly perched on the ivory, out-rayed petal of New Jersey lotus [...] A Graeco-Egyptian was wandering across New Jersey marshes in search of those famous (even in Egypt) ivory-pointed, saffron-scented lily lotuses. (*P* 217–218)

⁴¹ Rachel Carson, 'Undersea', *Atlantic Monthly*, 78 (1937), 55–67: 55.

⁴² Guest, *Herself Defined*, p. 17.

The littoral landscape is described here with striking depth and detail. The drifts, sandhills, sand troughs and sand crests evoke the physical contours of the shore alongside its various parts. It is geographically specific—New Jersey—and describes exactly the meeting of land and water ‘where inland cut apart from the inwash of sea’ and its point of contact in the fresh pools and rockpools. Contrasting with this material emphasis on the landscape, however, is the introduction of the ‘Graeco-Egyptian’, which layers the landscape with classical forms. H.D. describes the figure’s search for a native New Jersey wildflower, the ‘lily lotus’, which is both famous in this imagined classical world and evocative of a classical flower itself.

The physical landscape, and H.D.’s close observation of it, triggers an imaginative response based in classical mythology, a response that does not remove us from naturalist observation but asks us to look closely at a particular feature and its significance throughout history. Flowers and light, colour and sea-water, remain vivid within the Greek lyric spirit in H.D.’s work. H.D. demonstrates an illustrative eye for the Greek landscape from her early work in *Sea Garden*. ‘Acon’ maps the ‘steep slopes’ to the Erymanthus river, and catalogues its native species of flora; spray of dittany, cyperum, myrrh, calathes, Illyrian iris, hyacinth, poppies. *Sea Garden*’s ‘The Contest’ similarly describes a figure carved into a coastal cliff, where narcissus, citron flowers, white-ash, rock-cistrus and cypress grow around and over the sculpture. H.D.’s classical figures and nature spirits are consistently couched in a rich, detailed sense of natural landscape. H.D.’s later classical writing would emphasise the importance of the physical landscape in her own studies of Hellenism. When she wrote her commentaries on Euripides in 1920, she wrote:

Parse the sun in heaven, distinguish between the taste of mountain air on different levels, feel with your bare foot a rock covered with sea-weed, one covered with sand, one washed and marbled by the tide. You cannot learn Greek, only, with a dictionary. You can learn it with your hands and your feet and especially with your lungs.⁴³

⁴³ H.D., *Notes on Euripides, Pausanias [sic] and Greek Lyric Poets*, TS c. 1920, *H.D. Papers*. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

H.D.'s evocations of a littoral landscape in *Sea Garden*, expressing the material experience of being at the shore while infusing the rhythms of the tide and the movement of the land/water boundary into her poetics, enacts a preoccupation with the material conditions of place that is crucial to her classicism. There is a sense that the presence of classical nature spirits, and the poet's communing with them, enact a ritual connection to the littoral landscape, but often these voices are nameless and anonymous, shrouding their mythic origins.

This distance between ritual and myth in *Sea Garden's* classicism is notable, and performs the act of myth-making in the landscape. It is useful to turn to H.D.'s influence by the classical anthropologist Jane Ellen Harrison here, though some of her writing on myth and ritual is postdate to *Sea Garden*. H.D. never refers to Harrison directly, and did not possess any of Harrison's books, but she might well have read the articles praising her work in the *New Freewoman* and the *Egoist* in 1913, and did read many of Gilbert Murray's studies of Greek religion, in which he summarised many of Harrison's theories.⁴⁴

Harrison's 1903 book *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* attests to the matriarchal nature of local rituals in Greece, undermining the assumption that patriarchal family structures in Homeric Olympus were representative of Greek culture as a whole, and writes particularly of the vision of mother goddess as wild earth. *Sea Garden's* isolated, hostile shores serve as a model for H.D.'s rejection of heteronormative gender roles in a way that similarly rejects patriarchal models, and looks to nature and natural objects to build new forms of ritual. H.D.'s unnamed spirits, in communication with the poet, are framed as rituals without a known myth, and so allow for new engagements with the landscape, and with classical mythology, to be formed.

⁴⁴ Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism*, p. 111.

In the 'Introduction' to *Prolegomena*, Harrison separates myth and ritual into distinct aspects of Greek religion:

Greek religion, as set forth in popular handbooks and even in more ambitious treatises, is an affair mainly of mythology, and moreover of mythology as seen through the medium of literature. In England, so far as I am aware, no serious attempt has been made to examine Greek ritual. Yet the facts of ritual are more easy definitely to ascertain, more permanent, and at least equally significant. What a people does in relation to its gods must always be one clue, and perhaps the safest, to what it thinks. The first preliminary to any scientific understanding of Greek religion is a minute examination of its ritual.⁴⁵

Through ritual, myth becomes enacted; what is 'done' performs the way myth is 'thought'. Eileen Gregory has given a vivid account of the ways in which *Sea Garden's* classicism seems to be closely modelled on Harrison's theories in *Prolegomena*, namely on the book's proposition of Olympian culture's hidden chthonic roots, which establish a dimension of Greek worship orientated towards unnamed daimonic presences, and unknown spirits. Gregory points out the similarity between H.D.'s 'Wind-sleepers' and the wind daimons described in *Prolegomena*, and that poems such as 'Pursuit' and 'Orchard' recount poetic interactions with unseen, unnamed deities and spirits.⁴⁶ The collections estranging light, as seen in the poems 'Mid-day', 'Evening' and 'Night', have the 'hallucinatory quality of ghostly visions'.⁴⁷ The notion of 'scientific understanding' also runs through *Sea Garden*, as H.D. reframes and challenges botanical portraits of coastal flowers against a landscape's unknown, unseen properties.

In a later text, *Mythology*, Harrison writes of the tension between ritual and myth in a way that feels prescient to *Sea Garden*, though it appeared much later. Harrison writes:

While man is carrying out his ritual, practising his rites of expulsion or impulsion, he is also thinking or imagining.
[...]

⁴⁵ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.A5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 112.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 113.

Man is essentially image-maker.⁴⁸

Harrison concludes in finding the potency of Greek Gods for writers in their 'blend of the real and the unreal', the human and the animal.⁴⁹ For studying H.D. as a writer consciously interested in the imaginary and real lives of landscapes, a distance between myth and ritual in *Sea Garden* means that her nature spirits are able to be taken out of the classical context, as modes by which the human is able to communicate with non-human forms. New 'rituals', with their mythical context obscured, can be read anew with an eye to the image conjured, which amounts to an image and experience of being at the edge of the shore.

H.D.'s poem 'Oread', written in 1917 though not published in *Sea Garden*, which layers classical forms with a distinctly East Coast American shore. It is quoted below in its entirety:

Whirl up, sea—
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir. (CP)

'Oread' observes speaker and environment unite as land is subsumed by sea, but while its voice (implied by its title) is distinctly classical, its landscape evokes East Coast shorelines. The pines and firs evoke the characteristic evergreens of East Coast forests, the green implies seawater thick with seaweed, and the crashing waves and rocks link the poem distinctively to the features Debo attributes to the shorescapes of Maine and Portland. The poem's title, 'Oread', refers to a mountain nymph, and its pattern of pine trees within this context links to its tree counterpart, dryad. The dryad is a motif in H.D.'s autobiographical novel *HERmione*, which traces H.D.'s youth in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and refers to the nickname Ezra Pound gave to her before she moved

⁴⁸Jane Ellen Harrison, *Mythology* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1924), p. xxiii.

⁴⁹Ibid, p. 144.

to London in 1911. The poem is grounded in H.D.'s experiences of East Coast littoral landscapes as a young woman, but is layered with a classical figure who speaks as the landscape itself.

The poem's Vorticist movement draws us into its hurling, whirling eye: the exact point of contact between land and water, and specifically the dissolution of both upon meeting. The pine trees of land become mirrored in the shape of the waves, but also themselves become liquid, able to 'splash' and 'whirl' and form pools; the pine tree also becomes indistinguishable from a fir tree. The speaker, who we assume is an oread invoking the sea, is a mythological figure but also becomes the land itself, speaking of the rocks as 'ours' and the sea-covered trees as 'us'. As the poem describes the material movement of the sea crashing against a coastal edge, the shore becomes a mythological place as well as a physical one. The voice of 'Oread' is revealed as something commanding the sea into action; the ambiguity of sea and land invites the projection of metaphor. H.D.'s concerns with transgressing the binaries of gender become prevalent here. Helen Sword's questioning of *Sea Garden* comes to mind in the fluidity displayed in 'Oread'; 'do we posit a fluid "female" sea and a rigid "male" land? A passive "female" shore and an active "male" sea?'⁵⁰ Sword's questioning has a deliberate tone of irony; in 'Oread' and *Sea Garden*, the clashing and merging of two seemingly binary elements reveal the nature of such definitive systems to be inherently non-existent, or in the very least arbitrary, and posits a new space that liberates separate definitions from their various confines.

However we read 'Oread', or label the oppositions meeting in the form of land and sea, the poem explores the site of the shore as a meeting point of both literal and figurative binaries. As a poem that is ambiguous in its larger meaning, it presents us with the imaginative potential of the shore, its liminality as a boundary space giving way to new imaginative possibilities. It also presents an

⁵⁰ Helen Sword, *Engendering Inspiration: Visionary Strategies in Rilke, Lawrence, and H.D.* (Ann Arbor, MI.: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 124.

intervention in H.D.'s classicism, revealing a stronger tie to the material life of the littoral landscape than previously thought. The poem strikingly removes any kind of human voice; in implying the speaker to be an oread, our access to the landscape is shaped by something that is both human not human, constructed by the human to represent something separate and unknown to the human world. The oread is tied to and shaped by the littoral landscape of the poem, and invites us to locate our own narratives and mythologies within the littoral setting. Like H.D.'s classicism in *Sea Garden*, it serves as a connection point to the natural world rather than an obstacle to it. The poet converses with the landscape through the idea of nature deities and nymphs, leading to a deeper understanding and appreciation of its material conditions.

H.D. patterns the landscape of *Sea Garden* with Greek allusions, possibly influenced by her 1912 visit to the Italian Mediterranean island of Capri.⁵¹ It is in later poetry that H.D.'s classical allusions and narratives gain depth and specificity; the hellenism of *Sea Garden* is constructed more through subtle reference to myrrh, laurel, temples, and nymphs than through named deities or specific myths. As Adalaide Morris writes, 'each charged landscape enshrines a deity', and her words 'charged' and 'enshrined' accurately describe the littoral mythologies of *Sea Garden*.⁵² Where H.D.'s later classical work is explicitly referenced, naming and following the narratives of figures such as Thetis, Circe, Leda and Helen, in *Sea Garden* nature spirits and nymph figures unfold anonymously from the landscape as though they are a natural part of it, emerging as the depiction of the physical landscape progresses. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the littoral becomes an integral part of H.D.'s classicism as she turns her attention to the retelling of the narratives of classical women; the shore as an unmappable, fluid space becomes a site of narrative fluidity where conventional power is redistributed.

⁵¹ Guest, *Herself Defined*, p. 53.

⁵² Adalaide Morris, 'The Concept of Projection: H.D.'s Visionary Powers', *Contemporary Literature*, 25(4) (1984), 411–436: 415.

The deities are often ambiguous and unnamed: the 'wind sleepers', for instance, the 'sea gods' or, in 'Huntress', an Artemis-like figure but unnamed. These spirits do not appear in manifest forms but leave signs: a crushed hyacinth, a footprint in the sand, a rockface forming the outline of a human figure. H.D. depicts her shore landscape as a hybrid between classical and North American landscapes: the natural and mythical are in constant dialogue. The woodlands of *Sea Garden* are patterned with both the footsteps of dryads and the smells and textures of trees and fruit, nereids join coastal wildflowers in the shore's 'wet caves' ('Acon', *CP* I. 17), the river Erymanthus runs through the gardens and land, and the mysterious spirits of 'Sea Gods' and 'Wind Sleepers' gather at the shore.

H.D. locates deities and poetic meaning in the landscape around her, depicting some of them with a religious fervour that explores and deconstructs the creation of myth and the projection of human meaning onto nature. The speaker of 'Orchard' is overwhelmed by the spiritual meaning found in the natural cycles of a pear tree— 'I saw the first pear / as it fell [...] and I fell prostrate / crying' (*CP* II. 1-8)—and brings the orchard an offering of nuts, berries, and fruit. H.D. locates divinity and meaning in both the natural cycles of the landscape and the imposition of spirits, nymphs and deities. The shore of *Sea Garden* is thus densely layered in its meaning: both American and Aegean, mythical and real, otherworldly and familiar.

One of the few named deities in the collection is Hermes, who, in 'Hermes of the Ways' presides over the very point of the shore where land meets sea, 'where sea-grass tangles with / shore-grass' (*CP* II. 54–55). This site is described in close detail:

The hard sand breaks,
and the grains of it
are clear as wine.

Far off over the leagues of it,
the wind,
playing on the wide shore,

piles little ridges,
and the great waves
break over it. (CP II. 1–9)

This littoral landscape is described with the closely observed natural detail that is seen throughout *Sea Garden*. From the minute detailing of the sand's appearance and texture to the expansive 'leagues' of dunes and beach, to the pattern of ridges made in the sand by the wind and saltwater, H.D. shows a meticulous eye for the interrelating components of the shore. From this portrait of the shore, we are met with the mythological figure of Hermes, 'him of the triple path-ways' (CP I. 13), a figure who is 'Dubious, / facing three ways' (CP II. 16–17). The three ways are elemental: sea-wind, sand dunes and sea-orchard, though the sea itself is curiously left out. Hermes waits for 'wayfarers' to welcome to the land, echoing *Sea Garden's* earlier poem 'The Shrine', where the sailors arrive to an unforgiving coast and are given passage by a coastal spirit. This shore, however, is completely isolated. The description of the 'sea-orchard' is barren: apples are 'hard, / too small, / too late ripened' after the sunlight was obscured by 'sea mist', and the boughs of the trees are 'twisted' (CP II. 42, 44). The shadows of the trees are 'not the shadow of the mast head / nor of the torn sails' (CP II. 47–48); Hermes waits for wayfarers who do not appear. Yet the poem asserts that the speaker themselves is on the shore; they physically feel the rush of the wind, seemingly spontaneously interjecting 'Heu, / it whips round my ankles!' (CP II. 28–29). The poem actively blurs the lines between physical, mythological, human, non-human by presenting a subjective view of the landscape that is real and otherworldly, populated and isolated.

'Hermes of the Ways' again showcases H.D.'s littoral poetics, where the shore is embodied by form and language. Visually, the poem's balancing between short, monosyllabic lines and long, reaching lines plays on the movement of waves, with fluid stanza-long sentences broken by enjambment and comma. H.D.'s shore in this poem is dream-like, a vision where the invisible forces of a landscape

slowly reveal themselves. H.D. plays with sound in the poem, mixing identical letters with different pronunciations to enhance this sense of the transformative littoral site:

he whom the sea-orchard
shelters from the west,
from the east
weathers sea-wind;
fronts the great dunes. (ll. 19–23)

The 'ea' of 'sea' and 'east' plays against its equivalent in 'weather' and 'great', which combine with repetitive 'w' sounds to create a chiasmic reflection of assonant sounds. Chiasmus in the poem appears over certain stanzas:

The boughs of the trees
are twisted
by many bafflings;
twisted are
the small-leaf boughs. (ll. 41–45)

Chiasmus here embodies the position of Hermes as 'him/ of the triple path-ways' and, by extension, the layered elements of air, water and land over which he presides. As Diana Collecott explains in her account of H.D.'s use of chiasmus, the origin of *chiasmus* is in the Greek verb meaning 'to place crosswise' or 'mark with a cross'.⁵³ H.D.'s use of chiasmus in the above stanza 'The boughs of the trees / are twisted [...] twisted are / the small-leaved boughs' play into a poem patterned with crossing, tangling, merging: the sand 'breaks' like a wave (l.1), the wind turns solid as it 'piles little ridges' (l. 7), the shadows of the 'twisted' trees blends with the shadow of a masthead and sails (ll. 47-48) and Hermes inhabits the point where 'sea-grass tangles / with shore-grass' (ll.53-54).

Collecott has traced the ways in which H.D.'s use of hyphenated compounds, such as 'wind-tortured' or 'many-foamed', were modelled on her Greek sources and were a means to Imagist compression.

⁵³ Diana Collecott, *H.D. and Sapphic Modernism, 1910–1950*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 261.

As Collecott argues, H.D.'s lexis is always edge-to-edge: grass-tip, shadow-print, helmet-ridge, tool-edge. This works to map her liminal topography: sea-orchard and sand-shelf; stream-bank and wood-path; hill-crest, hill-shadow; forest-ledge and field-edge; snow-peaks, mountain pool.⁵⁴ This language of compound nouns, considered in light of H.D.'s littoral preoccupations, seems to be an active decision in forming new classical expressions and retellings, something picked up by Virginia Woolf in her own classical scholarship. In her 1925 essay 'On Not Knowing Greek', Woolf protests her exclusion from classical scholarly circles represented by the Cambridge Apostles. The essay is seemingly about breaking into patriarchal culture, but Woolf also criticises patriarchal classical culture for its complacency about meaning and value, and like H.D. yearns to understand the physical conditions of Greece, the 'thick wet mists' and 'stone and earth'.⁵⁵ Woolf criticises the notion of 'knowing' a Greek culture which truly cannot be known, and argues that true understanding lies in the acceptance of the unknown parts of the Greek world.

Collecott compares this argument to the sapphistry of *A Room of One's Own*, where shadowy "half-said words" characterise a tentative speech 'when women are alone'.⁵⁶ H.D.'s use of chiasmus, and the reflection, inversion and repetition inherent in it, seems to be doing something similar, searching for new ways of expression in the in-between, the 'crosswise', in order to foreground female poetics. When we foreground the shoreline setting of *Sea Garden*, 'Hermes of the Ways' traces a link between H.D.'s use of chiasmus to the way in which chiasmus embodies the circular motions of the tide and the fluid boundary between water and land.

H.D.'s classicism here not only answers the human with the mythological, but suggests that the landscape is in dialogue with itself. As in 'Oread', the landscape is full of voices, not just that of the

⁵⁴ Collecott, *H.D. and Sapphic Modernism*, p. 259.

⁵⁵ Virginia Woolf, 'On Not Knowing Greek', *The Common Reader*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie (London: Vintage Classics, 2003), pp. 23–38, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945)(original text published 1928), p. 84.

named figure but of the natural features themselves. As the 'wind rushes / over the dunes', 'the coarse, salt-encrusted grass *answers*' (CP II. 25–27, my italics), suggesting a form of communication between the various landscape features that is grounded in the physical, in the movement of grass to the wind, and the collection of salt from the sea. The presence of the unknown, unseen force of Hermes elucidates a landscape where other unknowns are present. The trees are not only shaped by the harsh littoral conditions but 'by many bafflings' (CP I. 43). The speaker tells us specifically that the sea cannot be 'known', but an imaginative portion of the landscape can:

But more than the many-foamed ways
of the sea,
I know him
of the triple path-ways,
Hermes,
who awaits. (CP II. 10–15)

Such language echoes the narrative of the sailors in 'The Shrine', where the landscape is understood through the construction of a mythological figure rather than direct, ecological knowledge. The mythological figure of Hermes is knowable, the sea relatively unknowable. In a poem that spends so much time describing the physical shore in great detail, the mythological figure of Hermes manifests what is liminal and unknown about a particular landscape, what cannot be seen by human eyes. Hermes, as a figure of communication, makes the unknowable recognisable as a figurative, communicative being, acting as a point of connection between the human and non-human. For H.D., who grew up with her grandfather's microscope and father's telescope, instruments that help us see parts of the world that our eyes cannot, there is an acute awareness of the imaginative possibilities in a landscape where so much is unknown, unseen, unnamed.

A.D. Moody perceives the spirits of H.D.'s early poetry as pantheistic, the divine embodied in natural forces.⁵⁷ H.D.'s material world is certainly charged with unknown forces, some named and some unnamed, all reaching for an esoteric, mystic experience of the material, but there is also a physical dimension to H.D.'s landscapes which complicates her writing and makes any pantheism hard to discern. H.D. was well-read in classical anthropology, as seen in her engagement with the work of Harrison and Murray, and her personal library contained texts that demonstrated the close links between ritual and natural objects. She owned an inscribed copy of L. R. Farnell's *Cults of the Greek States*, in which Farnell identifies 'Hyakinthos' as a hero derived from a god of vegetation, like the Cretan Narcissus, and tells how his cult was celebrated each spring with flowers and mourning songs. He also points out that in Greece such flowers were not only strewn on the graves of men and heroes, but were worn as symbols of the earth-mother, signifying natural cycles of death and birth. Farnell's writing reveals a landscape charged with ritual potential, and through this, human connections to the natural world are forged. Farnell describes Homeric pantheism as inherently bound up in natural features and objects:

The sacred place of worship might be a natural cave, or a 'temenos', a fenced clearing in a grove, containing [...] a tree trunk or holy pillar or heap of stones, whence gradually an artificially altar might be evolved.⁵⁸

In *Sea Garden*, named mythological figures like Oread and Hermes are balanced with unnamed, unidentified voices inherent in nature, such as the wind-sleepers or the sea gods. H.D. transcribes these voices in a way that does not tie them to a specific mythological system, treating them instead as parts of the landscape that may have been used in ritual, or that lie open to alternative ritual use.

Eileen Gregory has traced H.D.'s debt to Sir James Frazer, whose *The Golden Bough*, owned and read by H.D., seems to frame this approach to pagan myth. The publication of the third edition of *The*

⁵⁷ A. D. Moody, 'H.D., Imagiste: An Elemental Mind', *Agenda*, 25(3-4) (1987/88), 77-96: 83.

⁵⁸ L.R. Farnell, *Outline-History of Greek Religion* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1921), p. 31.

Golden Bough caused great excitement in modernist intellectual circles between 1911 and 1915. In an unpublished 1920 essay, H.D. mentions Frazer with admiration in the context of classical scholarship, as an editor of Pausanias.⁵⁹ Gregory argues that in terms of myth and religion, *The Golden Bough* is important to H.D. for the same general reasons that it is important to modernists like T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, namely 'the figure of the dying god and the idea of cyclic recurrence of the enactment of death and rebirth'.⁶⁰ But I would argue there are also models here for H.D.'s nature spirits. Frazer traces a long history tree spirits and tree-worship in Europe, rituals that crossed national borders and may be found in anthropological histories from West Africa to Greece, Italy, Eastern Europe and in the rituals of Celts and Druids. Frazer writes, 'to the savage the world in general is animate, and trees and plants are no exception to the rule. He thinks that they have souls like his own, and he treats them accordingly'.⁶¹ H.D.'s nature spirits, animating the 'inanimate' seascape of *Sea Garden*, reference this notion of ancient ritual attached to unknown or forgotten myth, creating new ways to relate to and understand the physical world, and revealing its mythic potential.

As Eileen Gregory has written, the voices inherent in the rocks, grasses, winds and sands of *Sea Garden* actively blur the distinction between the human and non-human, asking 'for our participation in a moment in which wildness dissolves the boundaries between human and non-human'.⁶² A figure from classical mythology is both specifically non-human in that it lives at a slant to and beyond the human world, and human, a construct of human experience and culture typically encountered in human form. H.D.'s mythology is often seen as a complication in any landscape-

⁵⁹ H.D., *Notes on Euripides, Pausanias [sic] and Greek Lyric Poets*, TS c. 1920, *H.D. Papers*. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

⁶⁰ Eileen Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 109.

⁶¹ Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: a Study in Comparative Religion* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), p. 111.

⁶² Gregory, 'Rose Cut in Rock', p. 543.

centred reading of her work as it is seen as centring the human; however, it is more accurate to say that it complicates the human presence of *Sea Garden* by blurring the real and unreal.

In 'The Wind Sleepers', the shore functions as an elemental site where water, land and air meet, inhabited by beings that are both human and non-human. The 'wind sleepers' sense the littoral, physical landscape tangibly—'we are stung by the hurled sand / and the broken shells' (*CP* II. 4–5)—but they are also elemental, a part of the wind. These beings take on the appearance of the littoral, 'whiter / than the crust / left by the tide' (*CP* II. 1–3), and speak of undergoing a transition:

we no longer
sleep in the wind—
we awoke and fled
through the city gate (*CP* II. 6–9)

The wind sleepers command recognition from the human world through an entry into human culture. They demand 'tear us an altar' (*CP* I. 11), 'Chant in a wail / that never halts' (*CP* II. 17–18), 'pace a circle and pay tribute / with a song' (*CP* II. 19–20); this acknowledgement is more important to the poem than defining whether these voices are natural, human or elemental. The sleepers' identity is tied to the littoral landscape as they are stung by the sand and shells and ask for the altar to be pulled from the 'cliff-boulders' (*CP* I. 12), but also look to validate their identity through ritualistic practises like tribute, song and propitiation (*CP* I. 16). The final stanza of the poem asks for 'words' to be meted out 'when the roar of a dropped wave / breaks' (*CP*. 21–22), suggesting that the act of writing a poem is itself an act of worship; however the 'words' are then confused as the sounds of 'sea-hawks' and 'gulls' and 'sea-birds' (*CP* II. 24–26). The anonymous voices of the wind sleepers blur the lines between the human and non-human by portraying them as a symbiotic relationship. The littoral landscape is recognised and understood through ritual, cultural practice and the words of the poem derived from the sounds and species of the landscape itself.

'Sea Gods' is another poem to present a littoral landscape charged with unembodied voices, but depicts directly the relationship between sailors and these conjured deities. The sailors invoke the 'sea gods' and describes a change in the littoral landscape after they have given floral tributes. The narrative is similar to that of 'The Shrine'; sailors recount tales of the shore's danger as they sail to meet it, bringing tributes of flowers in order to gain favour and safe passage. In 'Sea Gods', the deity is initially seen as weak and disjointed from the shore:

They say you are twisted by the sea,
you are cut apart
by wave-break upon wave-break,
that you are misshapen by the sharp rocks,
broken by the rasp and after-rasp. (CP II. 11–15)

The sailors' bring tributes in the form of 'great masses' of violets, from woods, cliffs, streams, marshes, hills; violets that are white, blue, red, yellow, purple; single violets, clumps of violets, violets with earth at the roots (CP II. 20–37). A long section of the poem details these flowers, revealing the speaker's knowledge of the landscape and its myriad species of the same flower. This knowledge of the landscape brings safe passage and even seems to dissolve the trappings of the human: 'you will answer our taut hearts, / you will break the lie of men's thoughts' (CP II. 59–60). Where the sailors of 'The Shrine' searched for pardoning at the shore, these seek an escape from the thoughts and emotions of human identity. These humans live in communication with nature: 'when you hurl high—high—/ we will answer with a shout' (CP II. 55–56). The sailors connect the relief of the littoral landscape with their own ability to catalogue the details of the landscape and to bring that knowledge to the shore, proving themselves to these 'sea gods' and being rewarded with 'shelter' (CP I. 61).

The shore itself is also renewed through its contact with these humans. Rather than being twisted, broken, misshapen, the gods are reimagined as a sea-inhabiting force:

You will trail across the rocks
and wash them with your salt,

you will curl between sand—hills—

you will thunder along the cliff—

break—retreat—get fresh strength—

gather and pour weight upon the beach. (CP II. 42–47)

The refrain of 'you will' suggests more knowledge of the shore than the sailors of 'The Shrine', who describe the shore as useless and wasteful. The description of the sea is deliberately god-like with its thundering strength and control over the landscape; here, the recognition of the shore as a varied habitat but also a site of human ritual leads to a renewal of both human and natural life.

H.D. examines the complexities of our human relationship to the shore through recognising the ways in which we ascribe mythologies and imaginative narratives to parts of nature which are unknowable, overpowering or beyond our control. In her preface to *The Edge of the Sea*, Rachel Carson writes:

To understand the life of the shore, it is not enough to pick up an empty shell and say 'This is a murex', or 'That is an angel wing'. True understanding demands intuitive comprehension of the whole life of the creature that once inhabited this empty shell: how it survived amid surf and storms, what were its enemies, how it found food and produced its kind, what were its relations to the particular sea world in which it lived.⁶³

H.D.'s depiction of the shore in *Sea Garden* is multi-faceted, an attempt to fully encompass the multiple lives of and on the shore. As the poet observes a single wildflower, the landscape is transformed into a site of human migration, self-actualisation and littoral ecology. H.D. goes beyond mere observation of the shore in order to achieve true understanding, tapping into an instinctive knowledge of the ways in which humans live on and with the shores, the ways in which we mythologise it.

Sea Garden's active and crashing sea waves are not only an homage to the Atlantic breakers of H.D.'s childhood, but serve as metaphors for the energy of two opposing elements set against one another,

⁶³ Rachel Carson, 'Preface' to *The Edge of the Sea*, p. 395.

challenged and ultimately renewed. Its patterns of shore imagery locate freedom in the point at which clashing elements merge, creating new spaces where new composite definitions may be formed.

CHAPTER TWO: WHERE THE SLOW RIVER MEETS THE TIDE: LITTORAL FLUIDITY IN *NOTES ON THOUGHT AND VISION* [1919], *HYMEN* (1921) AND *HELIODORA* (1924)

At the start of 1916, when *Sea Garden* had been accepted for publication, H.D. and her then husband, Richard Aldington, travelled to Devon. During February 1916, they rented the Old School House at Martinhoe, before moving in March to the nearby Woodland Cottage in the parish of Parracombe, where their friend John Cournos joined them. H.D. was, by her own account, happy at the ‘wild and pagan’ Woodland, describing its surroundings in great detail in a letter to Marianne Moore in 1916: ‘thatched cottage with a brook backed by a wooded hill with a small mountain in front and the sea, with cliffs covered with gorge, is half a mile down the valley’.¹ This nearby shoreline, brooks and river, cliffs, gorges and sea, was an integral part of their daily routine there; in a letter to F.S. Flint in May she wrote, ‘every day we go to Heddons [*sic*] Mouth about 1.30, bathe, scamper about on the rocks, build a drift-wood fire & have tea’.²

It was the first of many travels to southwest England in this period of H.D.’s life. Aldington enlisted whilst they stayed at Woodland Cottage, after which H.D. moved to Corfe in Dorset to be nearer to his training grounds.³ Two years later, in 1918, she returned south to the Penwith peninsula in Cornwall, and after that, in 1919, travelled to the Scilly Isles with Bryher.⁴ In her accounts of these places she describes what Julie Sampson calls a ‘doomsday atmosphere’ after the war, where H.D., her husband, and their visitors partook in ‘hedonistic activities’ like sunbathing and swimming naked. These visits to the southwest coast in the years after *Sea Garden* were where a number of

¹ H.D. to Marianne Moore, 15 April 1916. Box 1 of the *H.D. Papers*. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

² H.D. to F. S. Flint, May 25 1916, in ‘Selected Letters from H. D. to F. S. Flint: A Commentary on the Imagist Period’, ed. by Cyrena N. Pondrom, *Contemporary Literature*, 10(4) (1969), 557–586: 574.

³ Julie Sampson, ‘Sea-Thyme in the Southwest: H.D.’s Se/a/cret Garden’, *H.D.’s Web: An E-Newsletter*, 7 (2011), 8–32. According to Sampson’s research, H.D. wrote the *Hymen* poems ‘Fragment Thirty-Six’, ‘The Islands’, and the uncollected poems ‘Eurydice’, ‘Amaranth’, ‘Eros’, and ‘Envy’ while in Dorset.

⁴ Here, again according to Sampson, H.D. wrote the *Hymen* poems ‘Thetis’, ‘Sea Heroe’s’, and ‘She Rebukes Hippolyta’.

her texts of that time were written, translated, or edited, including *Notes on Thought and Vision* (written in 1919 and published posthumously in 1982), an essay musing on creativity and the mind, and two poetry collections, *Hymen* (1921) and *Heliodora* (1924). These travels around the southern coast of Britain stimulated a creative fervour in H.D. In a letter to John Cournos, she mused on her constant writing in this period: 'you know I am living a curious imaginative life now. Everything burns me and everything seems to become significant'.⁵ The geography of the Scilly Isles was similarly formative for Bryher's own writing, as she took the name of one of the islands as a personal pseudonym when she published her first novel.⁶ The presence of the shore seeps into the texts written around this period, becoming a central image and tool of H.D.'s creative work.

As *Sea Garden* layers H.D.'s early memories of the American East Coast with an imagined classical coastline, so the geographies of British and Mediterranean coasts shaped H.D.'s work of this period. *Notes on Thought and Vision* describes specifically the littoral landscape of the Scilly Isles; when H.D. revisits her time in Scilly with Freud years later, writing about it in *Tribute to Freud*, her memory of the landscape is tied inextricably with her writing practice and thoughts about creativity and the mind. In *Hymen*, many of the poems seem to conjure the wild littoral scenery of Heddon's Mouth, which features a great gorge. Other poems detail the danger and death lurking at the shore; one wonders if being on the Devon coast conjured in H.D. the familiar fear of drowning off the coast of New Jersey.⁷ Caroline Zilboorg has remarked how both 'Heliodora' and 'Nossis' in *Heliodora* merge H.D.'s beloved Greek landscape with that of the Devon scenery in which the poet was staying.⁸

⁵ Quoted in Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (London: Collins, 1984), p. 80. Guest's book does not give an exact reference for the letter, but it seems to have been written before 1926.

⁶ Guest writes: 'Bryher had first visited the Scillies with Doris Banfield, her schoolgirl friend who came from Cornwall, and they separated her from a family who had taken her off to Greece or Egypt. The Scillies were her youthful Arcadia, from whence came the name that initiated her entrance into a world of her making; naturally she wanted to share the islands with H.D.' *Herself Defined*, p. 118.

⁷ William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations* (New York: New Directions, 1971) p. 69–70. Williams's account of this is quoted in the previous chapter, p. 37.

⁸ Caroline Zilboorg, "'Soul of my Soul": A Contextual Reading of H.D.'s "Heliodora"', *Sagetrieb*, 10(3) (1991), 121–138: 123.

However, there is no definitive account of these numerous littoral geographies nor a pattern for exactly where H.D. wrote each of these texts. We know from *Tribute to Freud* that *Notes on Thought and Vision* was written specifically on the Isles of Scilly in 1919, but her poetry is far more elusive in its geography. Some critical speculation suggests that Devon was the backdrop of her translations, particularly of Euripides' *Ion* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, fragments from Sappho and Book One of *The Odyssey*, as well as the poems 'Heliadora' and 'Nossis' from *Heliadora* and an early draft of an essay on Meleager, entitled 'Garland'.⁹ When she moved to Dorset after Aldington's enlistment, she worked on a number of poems from *Hymen*: 'Fragment Thirty-Six', 'The Islands', 'Amaranth', 'Eros' and 'Envy'.¹⁰ In Cornwall, H.D. wrote a mixture of poems that would be published years apart in *Hymen* and *Heliadora*—'Leda', 'Lethe' and 'Song'—as well as the long sequence 'Hymen'.

Whilst her writing does not specifically cite or model these locations, there is a sense of fluidity and liminality central to these texts that is expressed through littoral imagery. Little has been made of the connection between H.D.'s writing in this period and her vacationing on English shores; Julie Sampson has drawn a series of connections between them but the shore as an image itself is absent from H.D. scholarship. Yet the shore appears in numerous guises throughout these texts, as a setting, as a measure of beauty, as a spiritual place, as a creative place and as a place that transcends specific geography. It appears that where the familiar landscapes of the American coast were a model for *Sea Garden*, the southwest English landscape had a more subtle effect on H.D. It is known that this period was marked by tragedy for the young poet, but also escape, from the literary modernist circles of London and its patriarchal influences, and from an unhappy marriage. H.D. also embarked on her first significant lesbian relationship (with Frances Gregg) after the breakdown of

⁹ Ibid, pp. 123, 124, 130.

¹⁰ Sampson, 'Sea-Thyme in the Southwest', p. 12.

her marriage to Richard Aldington, a feeling of flux and change in her life which may have felt mirrored in the mutable shorelines she was surrounded by.

H.D.'s poetry of this period focusses on H.D.'s interest in classical translation and forms, and particularly on revisionist portrayals of classical narrative that foreground female and queer experience. Littoral boundaries between sea and shore and river and bank are used to complicate heteronormative narratives and allow for a fluidity of identity and setting that offer H.D.'s classical women an escape from the confines of their patriarchal myths and legacies. These texts mark a significant change in H.D.'s poetry, specifically her move away from the world of Poundian Imagism. As well as seeking refuge from wartime London, the Aldingtons' move to the southern shore was also eluding the male modernist/Imagist writers' circle of the city. The evocative and richly detailed Hellenic tributes H.D. wrote in this period seem to reject the terse observations of the Imagist approach, the clear single image refracting into a complex network of cultural narratives, textual legacies and feminist revisionism. As H.D. uses these collections to question the objectivity of how classical myths are told and re-told, focussing particularly on marginalised female narratives and identities, H.D. is also exploring and building her own poetic identity away from modernist literary circles, literally moving away from London to the liminal, freeing space of the shore. This in itself feels, in part, like a queer and feminist exercise: the most intimate of the early poems, as Angela DiPace Fritz points out, deal with difficulties of being a woman poet.¹¹ H.D.'s collaborations with Aldington were often strained; Donna K. Hollenberg argues that her use of narratives from male Greek poets are a means 'to dramatize the narcissism of the male artist'.¹² Susan Stanford Friedman explores the insecurity H.D. felt as a woman writer in a world of male artists, citing letters in which

¹¹ Angela DiPace Fritz, *Thought and Vision: A Critical Reading of H.D.'s Poetry* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), p. 46.

¹² Donna K. Hollenberg, *H.D.: The Poetics of Childbirth and Creativity* (Boston, MA.: Northeastern University Press, 1991), p. 88.

H.D. describes herself as being a 'back-number' and haunted by dreams of literary men.¹³ A letter from Aldington in January 1919 criticises a number of poems from *Hymen* with an arguably patronising emphasis on her spelling errors and lack of 'maturity', writing 'Remember: H.D. cannot afford to be anything less than perfection'.¹⁴

Littoral spaces are an integral part of the texts of this period in examining, deconstructing and rebuilding various selves and identities. As H.D. expands and defines her creative practice beyond Imagism and the male, heteronormative world of London modernism by moving to the British coast, she also uses coastal images to typify the freedom of her rewritten classical women and to expand a conscious self beyond the physical world into a collective unconscious. Whilst H.D. is known for her classical revisionism and scholarship, and the poetry of this period some of her most well-known, the participation of the shore in this exercise has heretofore been unexplored; this chapter foregrounds the liminality and fluidity of the shore as a crucial aspect of H.D.'s writing in this period.

This chapter will first examine H.D.'s essay *Notes on Thought and Vision*, completed on the Isles of Scilly in 1919 and published posthumously in 1982. This essay explores H.D.'s creative vision and her understanding of the human mind, particularly the subconscious and its relation to art and poetry-writing. *Notes on Thought and Vision* is a difficult text, seemingly rooted in analysis that is both Freudian and reaching to undermine Freudian poetics; it describes an experience of subconscious thought that H.D. terms 'over-mind', a 'jellyfish experience' and a collective creative vision that spans history and artistic period. The 'over-mind' becomes important to H.D. as an image of fluid identity, crossing the limitations of gender and physical body and allowing for a collective sense of artistic vision. While it is portrayed as a movement into unconscious thought much like the subconscious, it is distinctive in its movement, moving 'over' and outwards from the self as well as

¹³ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 37.

¹⁴ Richard Aldington to H.D., 31 January 1919, Box 1 of the *H.D. Papers*.

into and 'under' conscious thought. Its roots in the geography of the Scilly Isles are revealed as H.D. uses littoral and marine imagery to understand and relate the fluid over-mind state. Fluidity of identity in *Notes on Thought and Vision* is linked to the retelling of particular narratives, namely to the retelling of classical and Judeo-Christian narratives, which reveal the over-mind to be a collective, connective consciousness across history. This access to the over-mind grants H.D. a personal ability to re-write the stories of Christ, Meleager, Lo-fu, Da Vinci and others, and allows her to reimagine her own female identity as a particular kind of creative practice, 'womb-vision'. The over-mind finds connections between the female body and a revision of narrative and identity that directly anticipates the revisionist female myths of *Hymen* and *Heliodora*; both texts use the shore as a model of fluidity and liminality that can be used to realign and reimagine identity, patriarchal narrative and legacy.

The poems of *Hymen* and *Heliodora* focus more specifically on classical narratives than *Sea Garden*; where *Sea Garden*'s mythologies were nameless and mysterious forces, in these later collections H.D. engages directly with particular characters and stories. *Hymen* is modelled around various retellings of classical narratives, specifically feminist revisions that centre female voice and experience. The singular voice of a female mythological figure is determinedly represented by the poems' single-name titles: 'Thetis', 'Evadne', 'Hymen', 'Demeter', 'Simaetha', 'Circe', 'Leda', 'Phaedra'. In *Hymen*, these poems are interspersed with responses to other classical texts, such as love poem fragments modelled after Sappho ('Fragment 36') and an opening scene of Greek drama ('Hymen'), and with poems based in classical geography, 'The Islands', 'At Baia', 'Egypt'. *Heliodora* similarly emphasises its classical modelling, but announces a more scholarly approach in the opening 'Author's Note', where H.D. points out epigrams and texts she has translated and incorporated into her work from Plato, Meleager, Euripides and Sappho.

The littoral in these collections form an integral part of the reinvention of these classical women. Coastal shores and riverbanks become an intersection of competing narratives as well as intersection of land and water, and the coastal site becomes a space of narrative possibility in enabling female characters to negotiate alternative identities. The shore is used by marginalised female characters such as Thetis and Circe as a site of freedom and self-actualisation, achieved through a knowledge of littoral flora and fauna and a realignment of Homeric narrative. Susan Gubar's assertion that *Hymen* functions as a 'sombre meditation on the predatory nature of heterosexuality' is also linked to the littoral, with littoral settings often providing a backdrop to predatory hetero-romantic mythologies (such between Leda and the swan, or Evadne and Apollo) in order to question and realign structures of power.¹⁵

In *Hymen* and *Heliadora*, H.D. introduces the classical world as an archipelagic geography, mapping out the specific littoral places and names of classical Greece, but also uses the littoral to explore the interior landscapes of her classical women. This duality of a littoral landscape that is both physical and symbolic creates a fluidity around her characters that slowly reinvents their narratives and identities. The chapter will then consider the littoral as a means by which H.D. engages with her classical sources—namely Homer, Ovid, Sappho and Meleager—and that the littoral, or more specifically a close attention paid to her layering of physical and symbolic landscapes, forms an important part of H.D.'s revisionist intervention on classical scholarship. Finally, the chapter will use two portrayals of the sea nymph Thetis, one from *Hymen* and one from *Heliadora*, to explore the littoral as a symbol and site of fluidity that enables classical women to rewrite their own myths. This further extends H.D.'s littoral imagery from the seashore to the riverbank, which becomes an important image in her prose, specifically in *HERmione*, as will be discussed in Chapter Three. Riverbanks possess many of the same qualities as the seashore, being a tidal and mutable boundary

¹⁵ Susan Gubar, 'Sapphistries', *Signs*, 10(1) (1984), 43–62: 55.

between land and water, but they also offer a specific route out of heteronormative patterns where H.D.'s shores celebrate female self-actualisation in isolation.

I. The Isles of Scilly and the Jellyfish Mind: *Notes on Thought and Vision* [1919]

The period of H.D.'s life between Devon and Scilly was marked by tragedy. Richard Aldington was enlisted in 1916 and sent to the Western Front to fight. The war left Aldington traumatised and their marriage broke down on his return, an experience H.D. would later record in her 1939 novel *Bid Me to Live*. In 1915, H.D. lost a daughter through miscarriage, and in 1918 her brother Gilbert was killed whilst fighting in France. H.D.'s father died a year later whilst H.D. was pregnant with a second daughter. A bout of influenza during this pregnancy threatened both her life and the life of her unborn child, but H.D. was cared for and ultimately saved by her partner, Bryher, who took mother and daughter to the Scilly Isles in 1919 for recuperation. In her own words, H.D. was left 'weakened by this continual strain', but the arrival of Bryher signalled a change in fortune.¹⁶ Not only did Bryher, an extremely wealthy heiress, provide H.D. with a stable source of funding for her art, but she was also instrumental in H.D.'s profoundly influential travels to Greece, America and Switzerland in the coming years.

It was on the Isles of Scilly that H.D. began to reflect on her own writing practice, exploring the relationship between consciousness, identity, spirituality and creativity through a series of ecstatic experiences, culminating in a collection of notes about various aspects of writing and existence. *Notes on Thought and Vision*, written in 1919 and published posthumously in 1982, is difficult to define. Robin Pappas calls it a 'prose poem essay', a polemic meditation on creativity with the

¹⁶ H.D. to Amy Lowell, February 1916, *Richard Aldington and H.D.: Their Lives in Letters*, ed. by Caroline Zilboorg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 16.

abstract imagery of a poem.¹⁷ Christina Walter terms it 'a pastiche of experiential record, aphorism, legend, and manifesto'; H.D. herself called it 'psychological data' intended for her sexologist friend Havelock Ellis.¹⁸ Its non-linear narrative, intangible imagery, the musing nature of its argument and its obscure biblical and classical references traverse traditional genres. The destruction of boundaries and definitions is the crux of the essay, as H.D. muses on the dichotomy between body and mind, conscious and subconscious, physical and metaphysical. Albert Gelpi reads the stylistic liminality of *Notes* to be both representative of her personal life and the key to her new artistic projects:

H.D. found herself, in every respect, in extremis on unknown boundaries and strange thresholds. At this crosspoint she was peculiarly and vulnerably liminal: subject to influences and manifestations which consciousness usually ignores or represses.¹⁹

Notes on Thought and Vision centres on a discussion of what H.D. calls her 'jellyfish experience', a feeling of complete submersion in an alternative form of mind-state that occurred during her time on the Scilly Isles. She reveals her personal associations with certain images, many of which are sea creatures examined in a littoral context; a jellyfish that dwells on land, crabs and seagulls, shells, oysters and pearls. This chapter challenges Gelpi's notion of H.D. being 'vulnerably liminal', or 'subject' to particular influences rather than deciding on them. *Sea Garden* demonstrated a productive liminality, a space for a marginalised voice, and in *Notes* we see again the promise offered by the coast in manifesting a fluidity and isolation of identity. The shoreline's liminality allowed H.D. to enter into an unconscious state defined by flux and conceived in littoral and marine imagery, which profoundly shaped her poetry.

¹⁷ Robin Pappas, 'H.D. and Havelock Ellis: Popular Science and the Gendering of Thought and Vision', *Women's Studies*, 23(2) (2009), 151–182: 158.

¹⁸ Christina Walter, 'From Image to Screen: H.D. and the Visual Origins of Modernist Impersonality', *Textual Practice*, 22(2) (2008), 291–313: 294.

¹⁹ Albert Gelpi, 'Introduction' to H.D., *Notes on Thought and Vision* (San Francisco, CA.: City Lights Books, 1982), pp. 7–8.

Like *Sea Garden*, *Notes on Thought and Vision* is shaped around the merging and dissolution of split dualisms: mind and body, physical and metaphysical, emotion and reason, female and male, mortal and divine, classical and Christian. It focusses on a mental state H.D. terms 'over-mind', where the distinction between mind and body are dissolved, and she is able to enter into a sense of 'abnormal consciousness' (NTV 19). This new form of consciousness is a crucial creative state, she tells us: 'the realisation of this over-conscious world is the concern of the artist' (NTV 40). Perhaps understandably for a text that H.D. never intended to publish, the essay is evasive in its meaning and switches confusingly between multiple narratives, following the work and artistic circles of Leonardo Da Vinci, the Eleusinian mysteries, a description of *The Charioteer at Delphi*, Galileans at Delphi, the life of the Ming poet Lo-Fu and H.D.'s own thoughts and recollections. The inter-textual nature of the text seems to suggest that this 'over-mind' state is one common to numerous creatives throughout history, and that this collection of thoughts and note-taking reveals H.D.'s own thoughts on creativity.

For this study, then, it is pertinent that H.D. couches this understanding of 'over-mind' in largely littoral and marine imagery, particularly in such imagery that matches the fluidity of mental state crucial to over-mind. She terms her first encounter with the over-mind state her 'jellyfish experience', and later appropriates the jellyfish as her own personal poetic symbol, writing that 'the world of vision has been symbolised in all ages by various priestly cults in all countries by the serpent. In my personal language or vision, I call this serpent a jellyfish' (NTV 40). The initial jellyfish experience took place off Land's End, where H.D. describes the entry into over-mind rather like a land-dwelling body crossing a littoral threshold into the water:

That over-mind seems like a cap, like water, transparent, fluid yet with definite body, contained in a definite space. It is like a closed sea-plant, jellyfish, or anemone. Into that over-mind, thoughts pass and are visible like fish swimming under clear water. (NTV 18–19)

The jellyfish image is important to this conception of the creative over-mind state, as H.D. continues: 'long feelers reached down and through the body, [and] these stood in the same relation to the

nervous system as the over-mind to the brain or intellect' (NTV 19). This clearly conceptualises over-mind as some kind of release from the limits not just of human consciousness but of the human body, human sensibilities, which forces H.D. to experience the world in a non-human way. Stacy Alaimo's essay 'Jellyfish Science, Jellyfish Aesthetics: Posthuman Reconfigurations of the Sensible', traces the development of human knowledge about jellyfish with our understanding of the senses. Alaimo follows aestheticised images of jellyfish in popular culture, and considers the ramifications of seeing the appearance of particular animals as 'living art'.²⁰ Her essay also challenges anthropocentric understandings of human/animal relationships by positing jellyfish as creatures that exist at the limits of our visual and sensory perception, and asks if an environmentalism specific to such aquatic creatures is needed. Alaimo's studying of the corporeality of jellyfish sheds light on H.D.'s use of the jellyfish as a symbol in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, as the jellyfish's almost-invisible and almost-fluid body becomes emblematic of a new form of thought and being that, like Alaimo's jellyfish, hovers imperceptibly beyond our usual sensory experience.

Applying her study to *Notes on Thought and Vision* suggests that H.D. uses the physical characteristics of the jellyfish body within her metaphor for the blurring of distinction between physical sensibilities and unconscious visions. Whilst the jellyfish dwells in the sea itself, we observe it commonly in littoral environments, encountering them whilst swimming off a beach or when they are washed up onto the sand. H.D. does not state the connection between her Scilly visions and her terming them the 'jellyfish experience', but one might suppose the name was born from musing on the fluid physicality of the jellyfish whilst in its littoral environment, perhaps prompted by the sighting of a jellyfish body on the sand or in the shallows of coastal waters. As Alaimo notes in her essay, Stephen Haddock of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute writes that the end of the nineteenth century experienced a 'golden age' of research on jellyfish and other gelatinous

²⁰ Stacy Alaimo, 'Jellyfish Science, Jellyfish Aesthetics: Posthuman Reconfigurations of the Sensible', *Thinking with Water*, ed. by Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod and Astrida Neimanis (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), pp.139–164, p. 151.

zooplankton; H.D.'s references in *Notes* not just to jellyfish but to 'diving bells' and metaphorical deep underwater dives chime with her generation's growing interest in diving and marine research.²¹ The sight of the jellyfish is strange as it blurs so seamlessly into its water environment, hovering at and inhabiting 'the limits of human visual perception'; jellyfish embody the fluidity and mystery of the subconscious and as such 'set the terms for the encounter' by forcing us to reconsider the limits to our own sense-based perception.²² The 'long feelers' of consciousness that H.D. uses to characterise the feeling of over-mind are set by the jellyfish itself, whose nervous system is alien to our own.

In her conception of the creative over-mind, H.D. is inspired by and capitalises on the unknowability of the ocean and the alien appearance of the jellyfish, which, without the usual body or five senses of mammals, experiences its world in a radically different way to us. H.D.'s over-mind 'jellyfish experience' both engages with the physical body of the jellyfish and uses these qualities to reflect on her own consciousness. It also appears that it could encourage H.D. into new modes of radical thinking. To quote Alaimo again:

Humans, as terrestrial creatures whose somewhat water [*sic*] bodies are distinct from airy atmospheres, expect objects and creatures to be recognizably bounded and assuredly stable. Jellyfish, being watery, exist at the edge of "the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable", barely distinct from the seas around them [...] Jellies somehow live *as* the very element that surrounds them.²³

It is significant that the jellyfish image, adopted as H.D.'s personal poetic symbol, encapsulates a notion of seeing beyond what is conventionally objective and 'seen'. Her poetic vision into unconventional narratives and narratorial legacies allows her to rewrite accepted myths and unsettle the boundaries of traditional, phallogocentric classicism, which follows a parallel study of the invisible, hidden and unseen. The jellyfish's ability to be both visible and invisible models H.D.'s

²¹ Ibid, p. 139; Stephen Haddock 'A Golden Age of Gelata: Past and Future Research on Planktonic Ctenophores and Cnidarians', *Hydrobiologia*, 530(1-3) (2004), 549-556: 551.

²² Alaimo, 'Jellyfish Science, Jellyfish Aesthetics', p. 155.

²³ Ibid, p. 153.

classical women who are both visible as part of a myth, yet also invisible and unheard. And, like the jellies living 'as the very element that surrounds them', the women often achieve this fluidity of identity at the site of the shore, where their experiences are shaped and changed by the winds and seawater.

H.D.'s imagery of the shoreline and of nature in *Notes* is a fertile one: oysters, pearls, acorns, and grains parallel a form of creativity H.D. calls 'womb vision', which she equates with over-mind (*NTV* 52–53). She asserts that there is 'vision [...] of two kinds – vision of the womb and vision of the brain' (*NTV* 20). The jelly-fish of consciousness, in her words, moves its locus from the head to the body, and shifts consciousness to the body itself with the feelers 'floating up towards the brain' (*NTV* 20–21). H.D. argues through this image of the mobile bodily jellyfish that 'the brain and the womb are both centres of consciousness, equally important', so that the womb and the brain are both attentive strands of consciousness connected to the over-mind. Marrying notions of 'male' intellect and 'female' emotion and defending the latter against its perceived inferiority, H.D. asks:

Are these jelly-fish states of consciousness interchangeable? Should we be able to think with the womb and feel with the brain? (*NTV* 20)

H.D.'s jellyfish image turns the littoral site inward, using a shore landscape as a space for female expression. The jellyfish inhabits the human body in a manner that evokes the notion of an underwater bodily space, evoking the image of a womb in pregnancy. The jellyfish experience is linked directly to H.D.'s experiences of motherhood: 'for me it was before the birth of my child that the jellyfish consciousness seemed to come definitely into the field or realm of the intellect of the brain' (*NTV* 20). The fluid physicality of the jellyfish, and its inspiration to consider ways of thinking and seeing beyond the knowable feed directly into H.D. portrayal of classical women, who shift their narratives within the littoral site.

In *Notes on Thought and Vision*, there is therefore a direct engagement with the physical environment of Scilly, as the text considers the sensations of diving, the lives of littoral creatures, and invests in the liminality of the shore as a space for alternative realities. When H.D. recounts the significance of the jellyfish experience later in life in *Tribute to Freud*, the description focuses on the distinctive littoral geography of the Scilly Isles. In the following passage, a description of the Isles of Scilly's Mediterranean flora and numerous bird populations is paralleled with the geography of the inner mind:

There were great birds; they perched there in 'retreat', at certain seasons, both from the tropic zones and from the Arctic. It was here this time I had my 'jelly-fish' experience [...] There were palm trees, coral plants, mesambeanthum, opened like water-lilies the length of the grey walls; the sort of fibrous under-water leaf and these open sea-flowers gave one the impression of being submerged. (*TF* 130)

The description of Scilly here uses the language of over-mind to describe sensory experience underwater, submerged. The flora is also itself ambiguous: mesambeanthum is 'like' a water-lily, the 'fibrous under-water leaf' grows above ground, the flora gives the impression of being underwater or aquatic when it is terrestrial. This littoral sense of the aquatic and the terrestrial meeting and merging shows a clear link between H.D.'s psychic experiences and the coastal landscape she occupied at the time, suggesting that her treatise on creativity was inspired and shaped by the littoral landscape itself. The notion of the coastal birds being in 'retreat' is also telling, paralleling the birds' migration to Scilly with her own retreat to the island from the tumult of the previous years.

In *Tribute to Freud*, the Scilly coast becomes a transitional state between normal consciousness and over-mind, and the cyclical nature of littoral ecology becomes representative of the connective nature of over-mind. In this passage, the over-mind is imagined as a collective consciousness, linked through various life cycles:

Are we psychic coral-polyps? Do we build one upon another? Did I (sub-aqueous) in the Scilly Isles, put out a feeler? Did I die in my polyp manifestation and will I leave a polyp skeleton of coral to blend with this entire myriad-minded coral chaplet or entire coral island? My psychic experiences were sub-aqueous (*TF* 133).

H.D. describes her psychological experience in strikingly physical terms; she and the experience are 'sub-aqueous' and her consciousness becomes a polyp skeleton of coral. H.D.'s images are striking in their ecological overtones, depicting the human mind as somehow being able to work collectively and to enter into the natural world. H.D.'s conception of the over-mind attempts to understand creativity as a transparent network; access to the over-mind grants access into communality, not only between human experiences but also between human and natural.

The jellyfish image central to the conceptual understanding of over-mind in *Notes on Thought and Vision* can also be framed as an image of fluid, collective consciousness similar to this image of coral colonies. Some species of jellyfish, Portuguese Man O'War being the most well-known example, are siphonophores, a colonial organism made up of individual zooids or polyps, rather than a single multicellular organism. The knowledge of such colony organisms in the jellyfish family would have been well established by the time H.D. was writing *Notes on Thought and Vision*, appearing in popular print forms as early as 1901.²⁴

If H.D. understood the jellyfish as a form that could be both a singular organism and a collection of organisms, then her jellyfish image uses the hydrozoan body to typify an experience of over-mind

²⁴ The *Chambers Encyclopaedia* in 1901 describes hydrozoan as 'free or fixed, simple or colonial' (39). Jellyfish as collective species even appear in popular science books by 1929, such as *The Science of Life* by H. G. Wells, Julian Huxley and George Wells. A section on 'Polyps, jellyfish, Sea-anemones, Corals' in the first of three volumes of *The Science of Life: A Summary of Contemporary Knowledge about Life and its Possibilities* gives an overview of Siphonophores, where 'colony-formation is carried to an extreme degree', alongside a detailed description of the Portuguese Man O'War body (152). For this Siphonophore, they write, each unit of polyp or fixed medusa has a specialized duty as a 'feeder', 'soldier' or 'sexual cell' whilst also contributing to the 'formidable tentacles' of the entire creature (152). Volume Two of *The Science of Life* similarly recognises coral as 'colonial' and 'compound' creatures, outlining hydrozoan species as a plant and animal living in an obligatory partnership, usually a polyp (the animal) and an alga swarming in the tissues of the polyp (the plant) (580). Again, this recognition of colonial polyps is balanced against a sense of strength in the collective. They write, 'no account of the world's habitats would be complete without some mention of corals and their work. The formation of whole islands for the habitation of man by the unceasing industry of the tiny polyps [...] has always fascinated the human imagination' (580). [*Chambers Encyclopaedia* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1901); Julian Huxley and G P. Wells, *The Science of Life: A Summary of Contemporary Knowledge about Life and its Possibilities* (London: The Amalgamated Press Ltd, 1929–1930), Volume One and Two.]

that moves between singular and collective consciousness. The image of a collective jellyfish body also has ecological overtones as the coral image, polyps building up over each other, does, situating the human as a piece of an ecological system. *Notes on Thought and Vision* represents an investigation into the nature of the external world and a person's place or function within it; its ecological concerns and detailed descriptions of the shore suggest that H.D. is interested in the detailed workings of the shore and how littoral creatures experience their world. When H.D. describes *Notes on Thought and Vision* as 'psychological data', she is linking the endeavours of natural observation to an emotional or creative response to a form of scientific vision, continuing her work in *Sea Garden* to find meaning in both the material and metaphorical shore.

II. What are the Islands to me? Littoral Mythology in *Hymen* (1921) and *Heliadora* (1924)

In 1911-12, T.E Hulme announced a classical revival in literature that was opposed to previous romantic ideas of poetry, thought and belief. Though Hulme died in the war, this new classicism became a pervasive dimension of early twentieth-century modernism. Ezra Pound was one of Hulme's chief advocates and built on his thoughts to define Imagism and Vorticism between 1912 and 1915. Influenced by Hulme and Pound, T.S. Eliot declared in 1916 that 'the beginning of the twentieth century has witnessed a return to the ideals of classicism'.²⁵ Pound and Eliot both advocated a virile Hellenism, 'straight as the Greeks', the model for which was to be found in Aeschylus.²⁶

Although H.D. began her career as the poster-girl of Imagism, exemplifying the technical virtues of Hulme's classicism, Pound criticised her aesthetic principles by 1917, writing in a letter that she had

²⁵ This remark was made in Eliot's *Syllabus of a Course of Six Lectures on Modern French Literature* (Oxford 1916), republished in Ronald Schuchard, 'T.S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916-1919', *Review of English Studies* 25 (1974), 163-173: 165.

²⁶ Diana Collecott, *H.D. and Sapphic Modernism, 1910-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 113.

‘spoiled’ her ‘few but perfect’ verse with ‘loose dilutations [sic] and repetitions’.²⁷ T. S. Eliot reproached H. D., her husband Richard Aldington and Gilbert Murray for preferring what he thought as feminine, decadent fin de siècle sentimentalism, and for placing Euripides above Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*: ‘But H.D. and the other poets of the “Poets’ Translation Series” have so far done no more than pick up some of the more romantic crumbs of Greek literature; none of them has yet shown himself competent to attack the *Agamemnon*’.²⁸ By the time *Hymen* was published, both Pound and Eliot had dismissed H.D.’s Hellenic preoccupation; Pound called it ‘Alexandrine Greek bunk’ and H.D. a ‘refined, charming, and utterly narrow-minded she-bard’, while Eliot described it as ‘fatiguingly monotonous and lacking in the element of surprise’, with a Hellenism that ‘lack[ed] ‘vitality’ and was plagued by ‘neurotic carnality’.²⁹

Yet scholars of H.D. have paid tribute to her knowledgeable and intertextual engagement with the classics. As Eileen Gregory writes, though H.D. sat ‘in oblique and marginal territory’ within this emerging trend of modernist classicists, she had a ‘habitual awe for scholarly paternal authorities, for their intelligence, their breadth of learning, their impersonality’, and that while H.D. was herself an autodidact, teaching herself to translate Euripides with the help of English and French versions of the text, she ‘took her scholars very seriously’.³⁰ As I have discussed with reference to *Sea Garden*, H.D. was well-versed in the famous classical anthropologists of the time, but she also protested against the assumptions of a patrilineal strain of modern classicism, which relied on a rejection of the ‘feminine’ qualities of romanticism and decadence. Embracing instead the ‘complexity of

²⁷ Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson in 1917, *Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespeare: Their Letters, 1909–1914*, ed. Omar Pound and A. Walton Litz (London, Faber: 1985), p. 114.

²⁸ T.S. Eliot, *Euripides and Professor Murray* (1920), *Selected Essays, 1917–1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 50.

²⁹ Pound’s letter to William Carlos Williams, 11 September 1920, *Letters*, p. 157; Eliot’s letter to Aldington concerning H.D.’s second volume of poems, 17 November 1921, *The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Vol. 1 1898–1922*, ed. by Valerie Eliot (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), p. 488.

³⁰ Eileen Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 22, 66.

matrilineal transmission', as Gregory argues, H.D. cast herself as 'a liminal figure, serving a domain of inexpressible, ancient knowledge otherwise lost'.³¹

H.D. began learning ancient Greek while studying at Bryn Mawr, though dropped out before she could graduate. At a time when the presence of women in academic classical circles was growing, she is part of a pattern of modernist women on the peripheries of classical scholarship. The masculine nature of certain Hellenic texts was for a long time further emphasised by the inaccessibility of the language to women, who were excluded from institutions of learning that distributed classical Greek knowledge, such as, public schools or Oxford and Cambridge. This was beginning to change at the start of the twentieth century, with Harrison being one of the first female students to study Greek at Cambridge in the 1874 and to teach there in 1898, and her influence reaching a wide audience through Murray's writing and articles in the *New Freewoman* and the *Egoist*. As H.D.'s scholarship would be dismissed by Pound and Eliot, so did Harrison find scorn in the page of the *Egoist* for similar reasons: 'female' enthusiasm, lack of intellectual rigour, 'Specialised Unintelligence' and 'brain-fuddle'.³² Like Virginia Woolf with her two Greek tutors in Clara Pater and Janet Case, H. D. learned a view of classical anthropology that challenged and undermined accepted scholarly narratives through the intermediary of dissident female voices.

H.D.'s interest in Euripides began at Bryn Mawr and modelled her interest in moving her classical scholarship away from the patriarchal centre to the peripheral identities. H. D. had been a great admirer of Gilbert Murray's pre-war translations of the Greek dramatist's plays, in particular *The Trojan Women*, a pacifist play written in 415 BC during the Peloponnesian War. As Charlotte Ribeyrol has written with reference to H.D.'s interest in pacifism, Euripides's account of war in *The Trojan Women* blurs the boundaries between man and woman, freeman and slave, Greek and barbarian

³¹ Gregory, p. 125.

³² Carter Huntly, 'The House that Set-backs Built' [review of *Art and Ritual* by Jane Ellen Harrison, *Egoist* I (16 March 1914), 114–116: 114–115.

and thus dismantles the Athenian hegemony.³³ H. D.'s translations of four plays by Euripides (*Rhesus*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Ion* and *Hippolytus*) between 1915 and 1919 focus on certain key passages rather than entire texts, and were almost exclusively passages from female choruses. By selecting such excerpts, H. D. reclaimed the classical text as a female-dominated space, the position of the chorus as commentator placing emphasis on the writing and telling of female experience. H. D. also chose to include fragments from Sappho in her own poetry. The lyric poems by Sappho indeed formed a feminine literary model for H. D. and Virginia Woolf, who set the Muse of Lesbos apart from the rest of the Hellenic canon highlighting her atypical voice, 'her own Greek tongue'.³⁴

As H.D. re-writes in her poetry the voices and stories of women confined by their patriarchal legacies, the shore again becomes a site of movement, realignment and reinvention. In reading *Hymen* and *Heliadora*, poems written between 1916 and 1923 around H.D.'s formative experiences on the Isles of Scilly, there are clear links between H.D.'s meditations on art and transcendental selfhood in *Notes on Thought and Vision* and H.D.'s revision of classical narratives. *Notes on Thought and Vision* specifies a pattern of 'sub-aqueous' experiences, whereby movements in ascent and descent between land and water become the entry point into new formulations of identity. In her poetry of this period, H.D. draws her female figures around the shore in a way that follows these movements descending from and ascending up to a shore, and moving towards and away from it. The contradiction at the heart of *Notes on Thought and Vision*, that a movement 'down' into the subconscious is also a movement 'over' into a transcendental self, is mirrored in the movements of Thetis specifically, where the distinction between ascent and descent is blurred.

³³ Charlotte Ribeyrol, 'Feminine Hellenism and Pacifism: Jane Ellen Harrison, Virginia Woolf and H. D.', *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 4(1) (2011), 21–30.

³⁴ Virginia Woolf, 'On Not Knowing Greek', *The Common Reader*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie (London: Vintage Classics), pp. 23–38, p. 28.

H.D.'s search for a transcendental self through the psychogeographies of *Notes on Thought and Vision* models a search in her poetry for new narratives that transcend old ones, and a pattern in her female classical figures to search out identities that transcend old forms and legacies. The shore becomes a site where identities are made fluid in order for them to shift and be rebuilt. The link between the littoral geography of the Scilly isles and H.D.'s access to over-mind also becomes significant in this poetry, as H.D.'s classicism takes inspiration from a sensory experience of a classical/Aegean landscape. *Notes on Thought and Vision* ends on H.D.'s own imagined image of Christ as a figure who transcends history and objective identity through a dissolution into the littoral landscape; H.D.'s poetry of this period also foregrounds a fluidity of movement and travels over the geography of the littoral shore as a way into self-actualisation and a liberation from confining patriarchal narrative. The shores of England are significant despite the fact that they are not specifically modelled or used in the poems, as they bring H.D. to an understanding of the self based on fluidity and liminality at the shore, as reflected in *Notes on Thought and Vision*.

By *Hymen's* publication in 1921, H.D. had produced a number of translations of Greek text, including fragments of *The Odyssey* and Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Hippolytus*, all of which contain narratives centred on the shore as a place of homecoming, ritual sacrifice and human settlement. The notion of translation of classical narrative was in itself an important part of H.D.'s artistic vision; Eileen Gregory, in her essay on the relationship between H.D.'s classical translations and own writing, remarks that 'the idea and practice of translation is central to H.D.'s writing and self-conception throughout her career'.³⁵ For her work in *Hymen*, where female classical figures are re-written within and re-routed from their original narratives, this emphasis on translation begets a fluidity in meaning and authorship which H.D. uses to the advantage of her revisionist myths. As *Notes on Thought and Vision* relied on littoral imagery to relate a fluid consciousness, littoral

³⁵ Eileen Gregory, 'H.D. and Translation', *The Cambridge Companion to H.D.* ed. by Nephie J. Christodoulides and Polina Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 143–157, p. 143.

imagery is used in *Hymen's* classical myths to translate female mythological figures into fluid, liberated identities.

H.D. furthermore revisits the same or related myths across the two collections, translating and re-translating her own versions of each narrative. She writes a poem about the sea nymph Thetis in both, both identically titled 'Thetis'; provides numerous reworkings of fragments from Sappho across the two texts; and produces a number of poems about characters and scenes in *The Odyssey*, writing about bands of voyaging male crews, Circe, Penelope and Helen across both. She maps out the archipelagic geography of ancient Greece across the collections, naming Ion, Rhodes, Paphos, Sparta, Eleusis, Piraeus, among others, as sites where her revisionist myths take place. Crucially, these revisited myths and locations engage with littoral landscapes: islands, beaches, sea caves, movements from land to water and riverbanks.

This section will examine *Hymen* and *Heliadora* together as they were close in their composition and overlap in both their construction and content. Together they establish the littoral as a key site in H.D.'s classicism. The littoral becomes significant in these collections in three ways. Firstly, as a geography that is both specific and liminal, in which named and real places are also symbolic of inner, emotional lives. Secondly, as a way of engaging with classical writers and asserting a new form of classical writing. H.D. references Homer through a number of poems that feature characters from *The Odyssey*, produces 'fragment' poems that cite Sappho, and models her revisionist myths on ideas she finds in the work of Meleager. Thirdly, mythic narratives that use specifically littoral places or beings—the sea nymph Thetis, Leda and the swan, Evadne and Apollo on the river Eros—emphasise fluidity in the identities of their female protagonists.

i. Symbolic Geographies

Over the two collections, there are a small grouping of poems that trace classical geography—‘At Ithaca’, ‘Toward the Piraeus’, ‘At Eleusis’, ‘At Baia’, ‘The Islands’, ‘Lethe’, ‘Egypt (After E.A. Poe)’—and a number of poems that use named places a specific backdrop in the poem, namely Sappho’s Lesbos in a number of Sapphic fragments, along with Eros, Paros, Rhodes and Ionia. The poems of *Hymen* do not name specific littoral places to the same extent *Heliodora* does, instead using the names of classical women as titles and mapping many of their narratives onto shores and river margins. This may point to the influence of H.D.’s travels to Greece and Asia Minor in 1920 and 1921 between the publication of *Hymen* and *Heliodora*, however these classical backdrops are not explored or portrayed in geographic detail, instead they are used to situate the inner lives of particular classical figures. In the poems that explore specifically littoral, named places—‘Lethe’, ‘At Ithaca’, ‘Toward the Piraeus’—the significance of place falls not on the location itself but the role its landscape features play in shaping the experience of the poem’s protagonist.

‘The Islands’ is a poem that explores the physical geography of the Greek archipelago, but frames it within the development of nations and the feelings of the individual speaker. *Notes on Thought and Vision* introduces the image of a jellyfish as a representative of dyadic collective/singular identities, and *Hymen’s* vision of the island geography of the classical world similarly utilises this dichotomy of singular islands and populations with a larger collective archipelago:

What are the islands to me,
what is Greece
what is Rhodes, Samos, Chios,
what is Paros facing west,
what is Crete?

[...]

What is Euboa
with its island violets,
what is Euboa, spread with grass,
set with swift shoals,

what is Crete?

What are the islands to me,
what is Greece? (CP II. 1–5, 18–24)

These lines open and close the first section of H.D.'s poem 'The Islands', which appears in her 1921 poetry collection *Hymen* and was originally written in 1916 or 1917. The poem explores the archipelagic geography of classical Greece and human/poetic responses to it, asking 'what can love of land give to me?' Hellenic geography is characterised in this poem by various sea-adjacent positions; above she mentions the island violets and swift shoals of nearby land, and elsewhere in the poem storm-waves, ships at sea, ships 'whose hulks / lay on the wet sand' (CP II. 53-54), a 'white necklace' of sand (CP II. 13, 35).

'The Islands' reveals H.D. to have knowledge of the various roles the shore plays in the classical world. As in *Sea Garden*, H.D. is aware of the numerous human settlements on the islands, and how these form unique habitats and peoples: a list of Rhodes, Chios, Paros, Samos, Crete, Samothrace, Imbros (to name a few) are inhabited by the 'gentler Attic folk', the 'bright Tyrians', the 'tall Greeks' (CP II. 28, 47, 57). The Tyrians arriving in 'black ships, / weighted with rich stuffs' (CP II. 49–50) and the Greeks in 'white ships' and 'ships whose hulks / lay on the wet sand, / scarlet with great beaks' hint at the various littoral cultures and peoples among the islands (CP II. 52, 53–55). The migration and invading of these people is also envisioned as the shore itself. Wars between Sparta, Athens and Thebes are described as 'salt, rising to wreak terror / and fall back' (CP II. 42–44), echoing the movement of both warships on water and of waves meeting an island coast. The classical shore is here a place where national politics and identities play out, and also represents a boundary for homecoming and voyaging.

The poem's refrain is iambic—'what are the islands to me'—but the meter is undercut and dissolved beneath the poem's urgent questioning. The m-dash reappears from *Sea Garden*, giving the effect of multiple voices interrupting one another as various nations and island inhabitants speak:

What is Greece—
Sparta, rising like a rock,
Thebes, Athens,
what is Corinth? (CP II. 14–17)

[...]

What can love of land give to me
that you have not—
what do the tall Spartans know,
and gentler Attic folk?

What has Sparta and her women
more than this?

What are the islands to me
if you are lost— (CP II. 25–32)

The poem's repetitive questions circle back on themselves, asking multiple times in different stanzas about Naxos, Crete, Sparta, Paros, Milos and Imbros. The repetition is met with the assonance and sibilance that has characterised H.D.'s littoral poetics elsewhere: 'rising like a rock' (l. 15), 'set with grass, / set with swift shoals' (ll. 20-21). The effect, as always, is oceanic, structured as tidal movements and spoken with the sounds of oncoming waves. However, while the classical landscape of these collections is named, it is also mostly shaped by an interior human response. 'The Islands' traces Aegean island geography alongside the refrain 'what has love of land given to me?', framing the landscape within the individual romantic struggles of the speaker: 'what are the islands to me / if you are lost' (CP II. 88–89). As the speaker searches for a new kind of meaning in the classical world, the refrain 'what has love of land given me?' takes on new significance in the face of conquering nations and shifting militaristic geographies. They find an answer in the pull of the shore:

But beauty is set apart,
beauty is cast by the sea,

a barren rock,
beauty is set about
with wrecks of ships,
upon our coasts, death keeps
the shallows—death waits
clutching toward us
from the deeps.

Beauty is set apart;
the winds that slash its beach,
swirl the coarse sand
upward toward the rocks. (CP II. 60–72)

The poem presents a destructive beauty, one rooted in a visceral experience of the shore and its proximity to violence. But the shore is here also a fluid place, a place 'set apart' from anywhere else, where the boundaries between elements are constantly shifting: the sand is 'swirled' water-like up to the rocks by the wind, the shallows hide unknown dangers. As 'Sea Heroes' presents the crashing danger of the sea as the realm of male shipmen and voyagers, the shore becomes a place for 'the wreck of ships', signalling a classical geography where men are removed. The beauty offered by the shore is further 'barren', a further removal of reproductive sensuality from the landscape. H.D.'s unconventional war-time translations of Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* and *Hippolytus* engaged with texts where women such as Iphigeneia were portrayed sympathetically as victims of the wars and sacrifices of men. The shipwrecks of the shore signal a space where patriarchal narratives of war and voyaging are in some way destroyed in favour of such female narratives.

Lisa Simon has written of H.D.'s interest in the material culture of Ancient Greece through H.D.'s engagement with J.W. Mackail's *The Greek Anthology*, which has great implications for H.D.'s writing of 'The Islands' in particular.³⁶ The *Anthology* models an attention given to the material conditions of Ancient Greece, which for H.D. meant attention given to its physical landscape, and also casts light

³⁶ Lisa Simon, 'The Anthropologic Eye: H.D.'s Call for a New Poetics', *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 10(2) (2010), 14–34.

on H.D.'s depictions of sea-faring in *Hymen*. Mackail's anthology, which became H.D.'s 'bible' in her formative years, was first compiled by the poet Meleager of Gadara in the 6th century BC, as a collection of around two-thousand works by himself and forty-six predecessors, which he called an anthologia, or garland of poetry.³⁷ Mackail edited the collection down to five-hundred lyrics in the early 1900s.

For Simon, central to H.D.'s classicism is the *Anthology's* focus on 'common lives' and 'simple human relations', anthropological details that pull focus away from patrilineal classical literary scholarship, which focussed rather on epic narratives of war and conflict.³⁸ Similarly, Eileen Gregory has traced the ways that H.D.'s resistance to the mainstream Classical tradition can be best understood in the context of her high regard for *The Greek Anthology*, which allowed H.D. to see the past anew.

Gregory writes of the epigrams' influential 'strangeness, strange gods, customs, creatures; their ordinariness, littleness, unloveliness'.³⁹ While many Imagists were influenced by the *Anthology*, this focus on the small and ordinary was not popular with H.D.'s contemporaries. In 1913, Pound wrote scathingly of H.D.: 'The Dryad with no sense of modernity has writ a poem to Tycho the god of little things'.⁴⁰

Yet for H.D., this chance to view the peripheries of Greek society formed the bedrock of her classicism, and many of the poems of *Hymen* are written by anonymous voices, marginalised female figures and nameless citizens like sailors. If we examine H.D.'s interest in the anthology in light of the shore, we can see the ways in which Greek littoral culture was a central part of her classicism. Much of the poetry in the *Anthology* portrays what Mackail called 'sea sorrow', a sense of impending danger and known death around cliffs, shoals and rocky beaches, where worshippers petition gods

³⁷ Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism*, p. 169.

³⁸ Simon, p. 15; J.W. Mackail, *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1911), p. 41.

³⁹ Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism*, p. 171.

⁴⁰ Pound, *Letters*, p. 238. The epigram titled 'Tycho' appears in Mackail's edition.

of the sea for safe passage and where war victims flee to safer horizons.⁴¹ Many of the *Anthology's* fleeting lyrics, Mackail explains, were gathered from the wayside graves inscribed in seawalls, 'by harbours and headlands [...] [from] the graves of drowned men'.⁴²

The *Anthology* epigrams call out anonymously from the dead, delivering warnings for seafarers and messages of good fortune along the coasts:

Well be with you, O mariners, both at sea and on land; but know that you pass by the grave of a shipwrecked man.

I am a tomb of one shipwrecked

Mariner, ask not whose tomb I am here, but thine own fortune be a kinder sea.⁴³

Some epigrams hint at the presence of longer narratives, of stories untold and lost as land meets water:

What stranger, O shipwrecked man? Leontichus found me here a corpse on the shore, and heaped this tomb over me, with tears for his own calamitous life: for neither is he at peace, but flits like a gull over the sea.

Tell his father Meno that he lies by the Icarian rocks, having given up his ghost at sea.⁴⁴

Others map out vividly the geography of classical Greece, its culture of seafaring:

We are Eretrians of Euboea by blood, but we lie near Susa, alas! How far from our own land.

Tell Nicagoras that the wind from Strymon at the setting of the Kids lost him his only son.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Mackail, p. 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, epigrams XVII, p. 70; XVIII, p. 71; XX p. 71.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, epigrams XXII and XXVI, p. 71.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, epigrams XI, p. 70; XXVII, p. 71.

The epigrams recount, as Mackail observes, a 'long roll of the burdens of dead cities—Troy, Delos, Mycenae, Argos, Corinth, Sparta'.⁴⁶ H.D.'s 'The Islands' similarly understands Greek culture as a seafaring one, where geographical and national identities mixed over the porous boundaries of archipelagic shores. This link between 'The Islands' and the epigrams also grounds H.D. classicism in the material experience of the shore, the 'sea sorrow' of the rocks, carved gravestones and feelings of dread when approaching the coast. H.D.'s interest in the physical landscape of Greece, as discussed in Chapter One and later here, can be traced back to the *Anthology's* expressions of ordinary life, and a culture shaped by the physical circumstances of the shore.

Following the landscape patterns of *Sea Garden*, the poem then moves to a garden shaped and toughened by the coastal climate, further constructing a notion of alternative beauty and meaning that rejects conventional and heteronormative feminine forms. Lilies, hyacinth, and narcissus have been 'beaten' by the wind, 'wilted' by the salt, and salt has 'crept under the leaves' (*CP* II. 76-84). 'In my garden', the speaker tells us, 'even the wind-flowers lie flat, / broken by the wind at last' (*CP* II. 85-87). This destructiveness seeps into what we presume is an inland garden, where coastal winds and salt spray have wilted and broken its flowers. The shore denotes a kind of destruction, but also, through the image of the garden, a space for regrowth and regeneration. The 'beauty' of the shore is also here emphasised as a meeting of opposites: of deep and shallow, of earth and air, of land and sea. The exact nature of the shore as a place that is marginal—neither land nor sea—but also harsh, changeable and a place of connection is precisely what H.D. finds meaningful.

The geography of 'The Islands' is turned into a meditation on littoral beauty, emphasising the classical archipelago as a backdrop to the speaker's interior life, and as a site of creativity for the poet. Elsewhere in *Hymen* and *Heliodora*, H.D. returns to the specific geography of classical Greece,

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 70.

but does not invest in the detailed descriptions. 'At Baia', in *Hymen*, is addressed entirely to an unrequited lover, with no mention or evocation of setting, and in *Heliodora* 'At Eleusis' details an offering made at an altar to Dionysus, and 'Toward the Piraeus' catalogues the fury of its female subject, without much elaboration on its connection to the title's geography. Poems set at sea and told through the perspective of a voyaging crew imply a departure point and destination, but 'The Lookout' does not name them, and 'Sea Heroes' lists the places passed through but dwells on the blank and anonymous space of the open sea.

In 1937, when looking back on her writing to explain the sources of her poetic images to Pearson, H.D. wrote the following description, which suggests that her poems of this period are Mediterranean in subject but not in landscape, and the island setting functions as a place where a self is built and altered:

It is nostalgia for lost land. I call it Hellas. I might, psychologically just as well, have listed the Casco Bay islands off the coast of Maine but I called my islands Rhodes, Samos, and Cos. They are symbols. And, symbolically, the first island of memory was dredged away or lost, like a miniature Atlantis. It was a thickly wooded island in the Lehigh River and believe it or not, was actually named Calypso's island.⁴⁷

This description of 'lost land' emphasises the reclamation of space, of renaming a land physically but also 'symbolically' and 'psychologically'. The geography of the classical world is here linked to H.D.'s own construction of selfhood through her memories of the American east coast, where it becomes a system of 'symbols'. Such layers of meaning leave an image of the classical archipelago as something decidedly fluid, moving between retellings of myth and retellings of the self, both geographically specific and evasive. The littoral landscapes of *Hymen* and *Heliodora* are liminal as spaces of the mutable shoreline boundary, but also as part of a layered presentation of Greece itself as something real and mythical, mapped and symbolic.

⁴⁷H.D. to Norman Holmes Pearson, 1937, *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*, ed. by Donna K. Hollenberg (Iowa City, IA.: University of Iowa Press, 1997), p. 9.

ii. H.D.'s Revisionist Classicism

H.D.'s translation of Book One of *The Odyssey* was begun around the same time as *Hymen's* composition, and ends on Athene's flight from the Gods in council as she visits Telemachus in Ithaca. This section appears only part of the way though Homer's original text of Book One, suggesting that H.D. is especially invested in this demonstration of Athene's power as she travels over sea and earth.⁴⁸ The moment is furthermore written in italics, away from the long verse sections of the main narrative, to signify it as decisive stop in the narrative and a framing moment:

*She spoke
and about her feet
clasped bright sandals,
gold-wrought, imperishable,
which lift her above sea,
across the land stretch,
wind-like,
like the wind-breath. (CP II. 176–183)*

This deliberate realignment of where Book One ends places Athene's dominion over land and sea at the centre of the narrative of *The Odyssey*, connecting Athene's power over Odysseus's homecoming to a littoral, land-and-sea state. Odysseus is suspended in the liminal land/sea boundaries of the text, travelling from island to island until he is able to return home; H.D. places the littoral in a central part of Odysseus's narrative. H.D. is aware of the classical shore as a symbol of both homecoming and voyaging, and of its usual relevance to male heroes and their heroic adventuring. 'Circe', a poem from *Hymen*, retells the journey of Odysseus from the perspective of the eponymous sea-witch, and emphasises Circe's experience of the shore and the visiting sailors. In this poem, the sea actively works to rewrite her narrative; Circe's skill is 'sea magic' and the presence of the 'changed beasts' around her both isolate her from the human world and become a projection of a frenetic inner state. Left alone on her island, Circe reflects on the mystery of the sea and an absent

⁴⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Walter Shewring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 3.

person who has left the island to go to sea, possibly Odysseus. The figure's escape into the water disables her powers completely: 'you / adrift on the great sea, / how shall I call you back?' (CP II. 5–7). As the shore for Odysseus manifests a sense of *nostos*, his separation from home, the shore of Circe's island becomes its own form of alienation and loss. Circe's environment is one of edges; she calls men 'from the sharp edges of the earth' and the 'rock-fringes' of the beach (CP II. 17, 53). Circe's island kingdom is one inhabited by panthers, black leopards, hounds and 'god-like beasts', who become an element of the island, drowning out the 'sea roar' with the sound of their 'barks / and bellowing and snarls' (ll. 33–34). The rest of the landscape becomes a vortex around Circe; the sea is 'stars', the sand is 'swirling', the tamarisk trees are made of rock, the wind is an intangible 'resonance' (CP II. 55–59).

'At Ithaca', a poem from H.D.'s next collection *Heliadora*, similarly emphasises the shore as a place of distance, and of women resigned to an edge after the departure of Odysseus. Odysseus's outward voyaging on the sea becomes mirrored in Penelope's inner life as a wife left behind on the shore:

Over and back,
the long waves crawl
and track the sand with foam;
night darkens and the sea
takes on that desperate tone
of dark that wives put on
when all their love is done. (CP II. 1–7)

Whilst these narratives are not particularly emancipatory in terms of their reliance on pining, hetero-romantic portrayals of Circe and Penelope, they do signal collections that revisit the classical shore as a site for marginalised female figures, and that capitalise on the shore as a place of edge, liminality, and identities undergoing flux. The dedication of *Hymen*, to Bryher and H.D.'s daughter Perdita, reflects the gynocentrism of the collection by highlighting the absence of men. Male voices are rarely heard in the collection, with the exception of Hippolytus (son of an Amazon and a devotee

of the virgin goddess Artemis, who praises female beauty) and the boys who sing of the bride in 'Hymen'.

The only poem to focus on male classical figures are the 'Sea Heroes', an unnamed plurality that take the conventional role of voyagers and speak in litanies of nations, sea gods and maritime vocabulary, literally setting men far out at sea and women on the shore. H.D. returns to this dynamic at greater length in her last long poem *Helen in Egypt*, discussed in chapter five. For these men, the sea and shore is confrontational, a place to be conquered:

Crash on crash of the sea,
straining to wreck men, sea-boards, continents,
raging against the world,
furious,
stay at last, for against your fury
and your mad fight,
the line of heroes stands, god-like. (CP II. 1–6)

[...]

Of all nations, of all cities,
of all continents (CP II. 27–28)

Similarly in 'The Lookout', the male crew describe their experience of the passing littoral and marine landscapes in terms of their sea-faring, speaking of 'timber and oak and plank', the 'sail and the sail ropes' which 'are beautiful things and great' (CP II. 63-65). Voyaging becomes the frame through which the lookout interprets their surroundings, describing repeatedly the 'god-like' quest that shapes their journey. The crew are described as waiting for the shore: 'there is nothing to do but wait / till we reach a shoal or some rocks' (CP II. 90–91). The drudgery of the journey is emphasised, the longing for some kind of physical evidence of the passing landscape:

I'd change my place
for the worst seat
in the cramped bench,
for an oar, for an hour's toil,
for sweat and the solid floor.

I'd change my place
as I sit with eyes half-closed,
if only I could just see the ring
cut by the boat,
if only I could just see the water,
the crest and the broken crest,
the bit of weed that rises on the crest (CP II. 95–106)

As the shore represents a kind of homecoming for Odysseus and the archetypal classical male voyager, for H.D.'s women it also becomes a return to the self.

The references to narratives from *The Odyssey* and similar marine voyaging construct a littoral symbolism rooted in homecoming, exploration and a freedom of movement, and frame it for classical women around interior journeys of the self. In 'Phaedra', Phaedra is granted a kind of homecoming through a remembrance of the shores of Crete:

Think of the world you knew;
as the tide crept, the land
burned with a lizard-blue
where the dark sea met the sand (CP II. 6–9)

The shore offers an escape at the liminal boundary of 'where the dark sea met the sand', an unfixed point that both encapsulates the intangibility of Phaedra's memory and her movement outside of old confinements. H.D. uses the shore to revise and reinterpret myths which have typically, to quote Donna K. Hollenberg, 'minimized female pain' and 'curtailed female potential'.⁴⁹ Narratives featuring rape are often revisited and written at littoral boundaries to define female characters outside of an assault, as in 'Leda' and 'Thetis'; inner lives and experiences are developed in isolation in the new narratives of 'Circe' and Penelope in 'At Ithaca'.

Heliadora contains a number of poems titled as numbered fragments, alluding to Sappho. 'Fragment Forty' quotes Sappho directly in an opening epigraph—'Love... bitter-sweet'—and describes the

⁴⁹ Hollenberg, 'The Poetics of Childbirth and Creativity', p. 89.

emotional frailty and vulnerability of a lover through the littoral image of a 'shell, ivory or crust of pearl', and figures the lover as someone 'deserted, / [...] outcast' (CP II. 59, 64–65). Sappho's island landscape is hinted at through the poem's title and epigraph quoting Sappho, but is not specified; the littoral is symbolic of an inner state, rewriting Sappho's fragments to form a new fragmented self. 'Fragment Forty-one' appears with the epigraph '...thou flittest to Andromeda', translated from Sappho's 'Fragment 52'.⁵⁰ H.D.'s poem explores this unrequited love, and uses a littoral landscape to emphasise the emotional distance between the speaker and her 'lady of all beauty', describing 'hot rocks' and glancing 'out toward the sea / watching the purple ships' (CP II. 66, 51, 54–55). Once again, Sappho's island is not specified but alluded to as part of an interior, emotional landscape. H.D.'s essay about Sappho, *The Wise Sappho*, was originally titled *The Island: Fragments of Sappho*, constructing a link between the two poets and the image of a littoral archipelago. H.D. describes the 'words of Sappho' as 'perfect rock-shelves' and 'an island with innumerable, tiny, irregular bays' (NTV 58). As H.D.'s rewriting of Homeric narratives situates the archipelago as a place of homecoming and voyaging, her modelling of the littoral scenes of Sappho constructs a language and imagery of classical female experience.

By the publication of *Heliadora*, H.D. shows a confidence in her classical sources. The 'Author's Note' to *Heliadora* ensures that H.D.'s knowledge of and experience in classical scholarship is read at the forefront of her poetry:

The poem *Lais* has in italics a translation of the Plato epigram in the Greek Anthology. *Heliadora* has in italics the two Meleager epigrams from the Anthology. In *Nossis* is the translation of the opening lines of the Garland of Meleager and the poem of Nossis herself in the Greek Anthology. The four Sappho fragments are re-worked freely. The *Ion* is a translation of the latter part of the long chorus of the *Ion* of Euripides. (CP)

⁵⁰ Sappho, 'Fragment 52': 'After all this // Atthis, you hate / even the thought // of me. You dart / off to Andromeda', *Sappho: A New Translation*, trans. Mary Barnard (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1958).

This engagement with classical writers is a governing spirit of the collection, but the 'Author's Note' also implies a confidence in poetic voice and creative authority. The collection's title, *Heliadora*, evokes the writer Heliodorus of Athens (writing around 150 BC), and the collection's poem 'Heliadora' follows a dialogue between an unnamed male poet and unnamed female poet, told from the perspective of the female, as the two strive for a 'name' for a known female figure in their poetry. H.D. admits that the male poet brings 'phrases' which are 'just and good, / but not as good as mine' (CP II. 7–8), but eventually the male poet's description of the girl's mouth as 'a lily kissed' becomes the final written poem (CP I. 127). 'Heliadora' enacts H.D.'s collaboration with classical poets and explores the gendered politics of such expression: the male poet's words, though really H.D.'s words, become the decided description of the girl despite being 'not as good'. The discussion of a 'girl's kiss' also parallels the collection's voicing of queer identities and poetics, where the queer female poet discusses romantic poetry with and against the heterosexual desires of the male. In the opening statement of *Heliadora's* classical allusions and models, there is an emphasis on queer classical writers, the bisexual Meleager and Sappho, and on female poets being freed from patriarchal romantic convention. As well as paying homage to the female poets Sappho and Nossis, H.D.'s modelling of Meleager also emphasises non-patriarchal, non-heteronormative narratives. Meleager, a Hellenistic poet and anthologist (140–70 BC), was a figure who honoured women poets, including Sappho, Nossis, Moero, Anyte, and thus represents a marked difference from the type of male modernist artist—such as Aldington, Pound, Lawrence—who threatened H.D.'s sense of herself as an artist.

Following the 'Author's Note' is a poem about a shrine on a littoral site. The shrine's deity is an unnamed figure, though the collection as a whole is dedicated to Bryher and H.D.'s daughter, Perdita. The author's note and this poem links the littoral site to H.D.'s exploration of classical myth and classical poetics, suggesting that H.D.'s classicism is predicated on the physical qualities of the shore. The poem opens:

Wash of cold river
in a glacial land,
Ionian water,
chill, snow-ribbed sand,
drift of rare flowers,
clear, with delicate shell-
like leaf enclosing
frozen lily-leaf,
camellia texture,
colder than a rose; (CP II. 1–10)

The strange coldness of this river landscape, reading 'glacial' as both a geographical history and part of a chain of cold and 'frozen' imagery, preserves the flowers of H.D.'s *Sea Garden* poetry and their associations with new forms of femininity and queer identities. In the second half of the poem, the shrine appears, though the poem's use of second person emphasises a connection between the poet and someone else:

intimate thoughts and kind
reach out to share
the treasure of my mind,
intimate hands and dear
drawn garden-ward and sea-ward
all the sheer rapture
that I would take
to mould a clear
and frigid statue;

rare, of pure texture,
beautiful space and line,
marble to grace
your inaccessible shrine. (CP II. 15–27)

The statue made by the poet in honour of a shared consciousness draws them between land and sea (garden-ward and sea-ward); the littoral image of the river inflects an image of merging between the speaker and shrine-owner. What is 'inaccessible' is accessed through the creation of a statue. If the collection is to be read as an ongoing conversation between classical voices, particularly queer and female voices, and H.D., the fluidity of the littoral site reflects this dialogue, which aims for simultaneous homage, personal expression, and revision.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis has argued that H.D.'s largely self-taught classicism was in some way an undermining of a field and literary canon that was largely male and patriarchal in its legacy and gaze.⁵¹ H.D.'s review of Edwin Marion Cox's edition of Sappho (1925) uses the physical landscape of a Greek archipelago to illustrate her own understanding of the classics:

Mr. Cox is by far my superior in scholarship but has he seen the slopes of a Greek island, thyme and wild anemone, wild dwarf iris matching in size the stalks of the low-growing hyacinth, with hyacinth itself whipped over and across with boughs of flowering oranges?⁵²

When H.D. visited Greece in the 1920s and 1930s, she kept a 'Hellenic Cruise' notebook and wrote out long lists of plants. One page, dated 1932, catalogues plants seen on the trip and, for some, their relationship to one another:

daisies
single flat red-earth poppies
thyme
wheat
lilac
freesia [*sic*]
calla-lily
crow-foot, pulse, bean and pear flowers
judas-tree, coral branch
softened, stirred,
[...]—blue myrtle
pear blossom—
small almonds, leafed,
[...]
orange blossoms
white feather-blossom
against eucalyptus⁵³

This detailed, colourful list evokes a material experience of place; whilst this list is written after the publication of *Hymen*, this interest in the floral details of Mediterranean landscape is seen

⁵¹ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in *The Career of that Struggle* (1986) writes: 'To enter the classics is to confront the issue of cultural authority, for knowledge of Greek and Latin, formerly barred to women and certain males, was the sigil of knowledge and authority, the main portal of the liberal humanist hegemony', (17).

⁵² H.D., 'The Poems of Sappho' [review of Edwin Cox (ed. and trans.), *The Poems of Sappho*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1925.] *Saturday Review of Literature* (14 March 1925), 596.

⁵³ H.D., 'Hellenic Cruise' notebook, Box 47 of the *H.D. Papers*.

throughout H.D.'s classical poetry. *Hymen*, where H.D. grapples with specific classical narratives and translations, catalogues numerous species of flowers and trees, noting in the background of her female classical narratives the flowers of narcissus, acanthus, myrtle, crocuses, and fir, pine and ash trees, to name only a few.⁵⁴ This detailed observation of the Greek landscape shapes H.D.'s own retelling of female myths by situating her own classical scholarship as something distinctive to its old and usual forms. Edwin Cox's lack of knowledge of and experience with the flora and fauna of a Greek island creates an opportunity for H.D. to posit her own interpretations and translations of Greek narratives. In the uncollected poem 'Eurydice', Eurydice tells Orpheus: 'For your arrogance / for your ruthlessness / I have lost the earth' (*CP* II. 83–85). H.D.'s gynocentric myths regain autonomy through regaining this earth. H.D.'s classical landscapes, that at once reclaim space for her classical women and become interior, emotional spaces, find the 'lost earth' that was taken from Eurydice and inhabit it fully.

The poem 'White World' opens with a statement of possession over land, 'The whole white world is ours' (*CP* I. 1), and progresses to a rich and detailed description of the land itself. The littoral landscape is 'dark islands in a sea /of grey-green olive or wild white-olive' (*CP* II. 5–6) which are cut with cypresses, valleys filled with citron and the purple flower of the laurel tree. In the final stanza, it seems that the power and possession of the landscape is in fact an understanding and kinship of the land:

joined is each to each
in happiness complete
with bush and flower:
ours is the wind-breath
at the hot noon hour,

⁵⁴ A selection of the flora mentioned in *Hymen*: 'Demeter' features osier, black crocus, narcissus, acanthus ivy and pine trees; 'Simathea' features laurel blossom, privet, sloes and red vervain weed; 'Cuckoo' describes lilies, parsley, violets and cedar trees; 'Phaedra' has poppies, fir trees and pine cones; 'Evadne' features yellow crocus and violets; 'Circe' features cedar, ash trees and tamarisk; 'Song' describes the branches of an Illyrian apple tree; 'She Contrasts with Herself Hippolyta' features oak trees, wild mountain-poplar, moss and laurel; 'She Rebukes Hippolyta' describes a cistus-bush; 'At Baia' features orchids.

ours is the bee's soft belly
and the blush of the rose-petal,
lifted, of the flower. (CP II. 18–25)

Such voices hark back to H.D.'s unnamed nature spirits in *Sea Garden*, but also accompany her revisions of female myth that align female power and freedom with a knowledge of and connection to the littoral landscape. It is not coincidence that the women H.D. depicts are somehow isolated or marginalised: Thetis at the bottom of the sea, Circe on her island, Penelope at the shore. H.D. recalled that, during her post-war travels with Bryher, 'We were always two women alone [...] but we were not alone' (TF 50). The landscape of 'White World' challenges this invisibility by depicting an island landscape in natural union; in which collectively owned elements—'ours'—become part of that collective ownership, 'joined is each to each / in happiness complete', the strength of union emphasised by the rhythm and near-rhyme. Sarah Graham argues that 'White World' promises a central vision to Hymen of a space where heteronormative convention is rejected, drawing on Harriet Tarlo's observations that 'white' becomes a code for same-sex desire across *Hymen*.⁵⁵ Graham furthermore points out that the 'bee' image in the passage above references H.D.'s use of bees throughout the collection as a symbol of male conquest, and that this particular bee, that becomes 'ours' with its feminine 'soft belly' in the pink rose flowers, is emblematic of a previously patriarchal space where female and queer voices are heard and given room. Such natural spaces that are 'conquerable', represent a world where the blending and merging of elements prevents these mythological women from dissolving into invisibility.

This precise and appreciative attention given to the details of the landscape, one that becomes a place of self-actualisation and revision through this close observation, is mirrored in H.D.'s own understanding of writing a classical, littoral landscape. H.D.'s use of the shore is crucial to her de-

⁵⁵ Sarah Graham, 'Hymen and Trilogy', *The Cambridge Companion to H.D.*, pp. 113–126, p. 117. Graham is paraphrasing Harriet Tarlo, "'Ah, could they know": The Place of the Erotic in H.D.'s *Hymen*', *Gamma*, 4 (1996), 89–106: 96.

and re-construction of gynocentric classical myth, but her interest in these shores are also part of a larger intervention in classical scholarship, that examines queer identities and interrogates heteronormative romantic narratives. The littoral descriptions of 'The Islands' layer a knowledge of the Greek archipelagic geography with scenery of a harsh Cornish coastline, but H.D.'s understanding of the classical shore does extend to the specific littoral features of classical Greece, and she recognises this as a way of opening up new possibilities for her classical voice.

iii. Mythology, Fluidity and Identity

H.D.'s classicism in *Hymen* and *Heliodora* therefore takes the littoral as a space of fluidity and revision. The construction of an archipelagic landscape that is both liminal and specific, a named geography and also the interior landscape of self, allows for an engagement with existing, canonical classical narratives that can be evasive, in order to refocus old texts from new perspectives. The merging of boundaries exemplifies female experience outside of heteronormative control. The authority of sensory experience, which H.D. sees as lacking in Cox's scholarship, is central to this revisionism, as female mythological figures reclaim and re-enter littoral spaces through their physical experience of them. If these spaces are seen as models of a complex interior landscape, this furthermore puts them in touch with a transcendental self.

H.D. revisits the myth of the sea nymph Thetis across *Hymen* and *Heliodora*, producing two poems titled 'Thetis'.⁵⁶ *Hymen's* 'Thetis' follows on from H.D.'s comments about Cox by portraying a Thetis with an instinctive knowledge of the sensory dimensions of her littoral environment. The poem takes Ovid's Thetis as a source and allows Thetis to reclaim a littoral space and move outside of Ovid's narrative, which culminates in her rape by Peleus. The littoral site is important as a fluid space, where Thetis constructs a fluid identity that facilitates the revision of Ovid's myth. H.D. revisits the

⁵⁶ For clarity, the 'Thetis' of *Hymen* will be referred to as 'Thetis' (1) and that of *Heliodora* as 'Thetis' (2).

Thetis myth in *Heliadora* with 'Thetis', referred to in this section as 'Thetis' (2), which also takes its source from Ovid. Where Thetis escapes Peleus in the *Hymen* version, here Thetis has lived with Peleus under the sea, and Thetis moves from water to land as she searches for her son, Achilles. This poem follows Thetis as she escapes and moves to the site of a river meeting the sea, paralleling the use of river margins in 'Evadne' and 'Leda' to rewrite mythic heteromantic relationships. The implication of this second Thetis myth is that the undersea world, though possessing its own kind of fluidity as deep, dark water, is insufficient in facilitating Thetis's freedom; it is precisely the mutable boundary between water and land, the clashing and merging of two binaries, that is significant. In 'Lethe' the river is emphasised as a site of complete fluidity, where the track of the water evades all outside sources.

'Thetis' (1) reimagines the sea-nymph through her littoral landscape. There is no mention in the poem of adjacent male figures, of Thetis being the mother of Achilles, the wife of Peleus, or of the central role she plays with Zeus in *The Iliad*; Thetis is described through her sealine environment and her inner life. There is a quiet intimacy between Thetis and the poet established through the poem's striking use of second-person, hinting at the active process of Thetis's re-writing through her journey along a littoral path. The poem begins with a moment of transition, as Thetis steps from 'the paved parapet' into the ecological richness of the shallow seabed:

you will step carefully
from amber stones to onyx
flecked with violet,
mingled with light,
half showing the sea-grass
and sea-sand underneath,
reflecting your white feet
and the gay strap crimson
as lily-buds of Arion,
and the gold that binds your feet. (CP II. 2–11)

Whilst the language is not scientific or botanic, it does possess an extremely keen eye for flora, geology, texture and light. The stones of the shallow sea floor are described in close detail, with

brown pebbles appearing amber in the sunlit water and the black onyx shining purple in the light. The water reveals the sands and grasses of the sea floor, and at this meeting point of land and water Thetis's body is also dissolved. Her feet are reflected and refracted in the water's surface, and the crimson of her sandals is compared to the red flowers of Arion. The words used to describe this littoral scene are indicative of a setting where things blend into each other: mingled, flecked, reflecting, half-showing. Thetis's affinity with not just the shore landscape generally but the precise nature of its various species, considering them both singularly and collectively, allows her to navigate her world freely.

Thetis observes and therefore understands her littoral surroundings. As her feet feel the weeds and flowers change species and colour as she walks, her movements are guided by the contours of the landscape:

You will pause
where the coral-lily roots
thread amber about
gold grain and pebble of wrought
crystal or purple rock;
green water dark
with the blue from the pools beneath;
and between the bands of water,
each day your feet will tread,
climbing from purple to blue,
from blue to sea-red,
step upon step,
laid crosswise,
uneven, sloping gradually,
then steep and high
to the sun-light overhead. (CP II. 30–45)

Again, the space of the poem is drawn around words and phrases that imply a crossing, merging or disruption of binaries: step upon step, uneven, sloping, between, beneath, laid crosswise. Colours, shapes and textures are repeated so as to merge into one another and become circular. What is particularly striking about this passage is its movement from 'the dark pools underneath' into 'the

sunlight overhead', an ascent to the light which implies an ascent to the shore rather than a further journey over land. Thetis's movement here, where 'tread' utilises a dual meaning as both stepping and treading water, forms a fluid passage through 'bands of water' that are purple, blue, 'sea-red' in colour, 'sloping gradually' until she breaks the water's 'steep and high' surface. The landscape becomes disorientating; whilst it forms a path upwards to sunlight, there are also 'pools' of water beneath her, and no signal as to the change in location from the first stanza which clearly travels over land. Thetis is a fluid being, blended into a littoral environment, and this makes her impossible to track and contain.

H.D.'s use of chiasmic reflection and inversion emerges in 'Thetis (1)' on close reading: the fleeting half-rhymes of 'parapet' and 'violet', 'crimson' and 'Arion', give the sense of something half-seen, half-heard. The poem's form models the oceanic in its long, end-stopped sentences, which pattern like waves breaking on a shore:

Green water dark
With the blue from the pools beneath;
And between the bands of water,
Each day your feet will tread,
Climbing from purple to blue,
From blue to sea-red,
Step upon step,
Laid crosswise,
Uneven, sloping gradually,
Then steep and high
To the sun-light overhead (CP II. 35–41)

The iambic meter of lines 37 and 38 are interrupted and subsumed by the lines that follow; the lines gradually shorten and then begin to reach out again. As in *Sea Garden*, half rhymes are patterned irregularly through the stanza and give a sense of movement, inversion and reflecting like the moving surface of the sea, 'step' and 'steep', 'tread' and 'sea-red', 'high' and 'light', 'green' and 'between', as does alliteration, 'beneath', 'between', 'blue', 'bands'. 'A' and 'e' sounds characterise

the first part of the stanza, while Thetis is underwater (ll. 35-41) before turning to 'i' and 'o' assonances when she emerges into the sunlight, embodying the journey in sound.

This ascent to the shore is mirrored later in the poem with a descent to the depths of the sea, a refuge for Thetis that, like the wilderness of 'Sheltered Garden' in *Sea Garden*, provides an escape from the confining, oppressive elements of feminine beauty:

Should the sun press
too heavy a crown,
should dawn cast
over-much loveliness,
should you tire as you laugh,
running from wave to wave-crest,
gathering the sea-flower to your breast,
you may dive down
to the uttermost sea depth,
where no great fish venture
nor small fish glitter and dart,
only the anemones and flower
of the wild sea-thyme
cover the silent walls
of an old sea-city at rest (CP ll. 46-60)

'Sun', 'dawn' and 'loveliness' become cloying, difficult; Thetis ventures to the bottom of the sea where even fish will not go. The sea-city that greets her is restful and silent, inhabited only by the unseeing and immovable bodies of sea anemone and sea-thyme. It is an unexpected moment of stasis in a poem of movement and fluidity, as though Thetis finds a point of still contentment within her fluid intangibility. This section of the poem seems influenced by H.D.'s thoughts in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, mimicking H.D.'s own journey into the watery depths of the subconscious; a fluidity that brings certainty and understanding. The underwater 'sea-city' furthermore hints at a construction of coral, mirroring the fluidity of H.D.'s conception of over-mind as coral polyps built up over one another. The dualities of the mental state in *Notes on Thought and Vision* also seems to anticipate the strange mutability of Thetis's movements, ascent/descent and fluidity/stasis.

Eileen Gregory identifies the poem with a section in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which locates Thetis's descent as an escape before the violent rape of Thetis by Peleus.⁵⁷ *Hymen* contains a number of dialogic responses to classical narratives that detail a woman's rape—Thetis, Evadne—where H.D. places new emphasis on the women's interiority directly before the assault, removing the act from their narratives. In Ovid's account of Thetis, there is a shoreline cave where Thetis sleeps:

There is a bay in Haemonia [...] where there would be a harbour, if the water were deeper: but the waves just cover the surface of the sand. It has a firm shore, free from seaweed, where the sand retains no footprints, and yet does not clog one's steps. A grove of myrtles grows close by, thick with variegated berries, and in its midst there is a cave [...] Thetis used to come there, unclad, seated on a bridled dolphin, and there Peleus found her.⁵⁸

Thetis's domain is littoral, the narrator emphasising the land's shallow water and soft sand. When Peleus first visits Thetis, his advances are rejected by her, at which he 'wound both his arms around her neck, and prepared to use force'.⁵⁹ Thetis escapes by shapeshifting, eventually scaring him away as a female tiger. Peleus performs ritual sacrifices on the shore to invoke the gods of the sea; Proteus emerges from the water and advises Peleus to bind Thetis as she sleeps, and to hold fast as she shape-shifts in order to escape. As he does so, Thetis reveals herself and Peleus 'embrace[s] her, obtain[s] his desire, and fill[s] her with child'.⁶⁰ The narrative moves to continue the narrative of Peleus, 'happy in his wife and happy in his son', and his life in Trachis. Thetis's fluidity in the space of the shore facilitates freedom; when this fluidity is limited and compromised, she is raped and silenced by Peleus. H.D. therefore presents the littoral world of Thetis as specifically safeguarding this fluidity; the use of the future tense—'You will step', 'You will pass', 'You will pause', 'your feet will tread'—keeps Thetis poised in the moment that precedes her rape and allows her to evade a state of present stasis. Thetis's fluidity in moving across, below and over the shore furthermore implies an escape from her fate; her eventual descent to the stillness of the sea-city removing her from the site of her violent assault. The bridled dolphin that transports Thetis to the shore is

⁵⁷ Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism*, p. 117.

⁵⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin, 1955), p. 252.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

transformed by H.D. into a creature constrained by beautiful artifice, a 'jewelled halter /and harness and bit' (CP II. 27-28), but the power and fluidity of the dolphin are emphasised, its movement as it 'sways' beneath her and the way the sun and seawater blend into its body and 'glitters' from its back.

Sarah Graham argues that the littoral world of Thetis is suffused with organic, feminine shapes and elements, such as the 'curved [...] moon crescent', the 'pool', 'wave-crest' and 'sea-flower', offering a validity to the sensual female self outside a heterosexual context. This provides Thetis with a natural escape from the predatory heteronormative ending of Ovid's narrative, but also allows for a reclamation of the shoreline space that betrays Thetis. As Eileen Gregory writes, the poem revels in sensuality and 'explicit eroticism' evoked by images of heat and the use of rich colour.⁶¹ Thetis's knowledge of the details and contours of her shore revel in the physical sensations of light, water, the texture of the shore underfoot and the sight of floral colours. Thetis reclaims her voice and narrative in the poem by reclaiming space; throughout *Hymen* and *Heliodora*, there is a sense of female mythological figures revising their own narratives through reclaiming and rewriting the spaces they navigate. This reverses the male-centred narratives of voyaging and conquering which H.D. uses to reference *The Odyssey*, by returning her classical women to spaces otherwise appropriated or possessed by male characters. Leda and Evadne return to the riverbanks of their own stories in order to redirect their encounters with Apollo and Zeus, and Thetis reclaims her shore, later moving to a riverbank in *Heliodora*.

In her second reworking of the Thetis myth, Thetis is initially presented in underwater stasis. The poem opens 'He had asked for immortal life', centring the narrative and desire of Peleus, and describes the various wishes Thetis granted him: 'freedom under the sea', 'love under the sea' and

⁶¹ Eileen Gregory, 'H.D.'s Heterodoxy: The Lyric as a Site of Resistance', *H.D.'s Poetry: "the meanings that words hide"*, ed. by Marina Camboni (New York: AMS Press, 2003), pp. 21–33, p. 25.

the 'beauty of fifty nereids'. The following description of Peleus's underwater surroundings in 'Thetis' (2) echoes the detail and attention given to the littoral environment in H.D.'s earlier Thetis poem:

freedom under the sea,
drip and welter of weeds,
the drift of the fringing grass,
the gift of the never-withering moss,
and the flowering reed (CP II. 6-10)

The underwater landscape feels passive with the 'drip and welter' of its flora, their 'drifting' and 'fringing'. The landscape even feels artificial, forming a parallel to the cloying, feminine garden of *Sea Garden's* 'Sheltered Garden'; the moss is 'never-withering', the reed is in bloom. Whilst the 'beauty' and 'grace infinite' of this landscape seems typical for lyric beauty, we know from H.D.'s meditations on beauty in *Sea Garden* that wilderness is far more prized. Thetis uses her powers in shape-shifting to escape in ascent, from the depths of the sea to the shore:

so I crept, at last,
a crescent, a curve of a wave,
(a man would have thought,
had he watched for his nets
on the beach)
a dolphin, a glistening fish,
that burnt and caught for its light,
the lift of the undercrest
of the lifting tide,
a fish with silver for breast
with no light but the light
of the sea it reflects (CP II. 19-30)

Thetis's shapeshifting allows her escape in two ways: in becoming an inextricable part of the shoreline environment, and in evading the male gaze. Both of these are emphasised as Thetis breaches the surface of the water; the dolphin is merged with the undercrest of a wave, and the fish is glistening with light reflected off the water, specifically 'no light' but this one. The 'burnt' light of the fish, which becomes 'the light / of the sea' reflected in itself, is a striking image that brings to mind phosphorescence, the kind of bioluminescence seen in rotting fish carcasses and plankton.

Thetis is here the waves, the dolphin, and the fish, conflating the landscape into a single identity. The sea itself is also merged with the figural Thetis as it is described as a 'bright tress of hair', with the 'blue of the painted stuff /it wore for dress' (CP II. 36–38). The sea nymph is indistinct from the landscape of the shore, and this allows her a kind of invisibility in the eyes of passing men, namely fishermen who wait for fish on the shore. H.D. writes that Thetis would look like a wave to a man watching 'for his nets on the beach', and later repeats this: 'Little would he have guessed, / (had such a one / watched by his nets,)' (CP II. 31–33) and again 'no man would have known' (CP I. 39).

Thetis is located in the marginal, the 'between' and 'beneath':

Beneath the sea,
Between the lift of crest and crest,
Had tried it on
And found it not
Quite fair enough
To fill the night
Of my blue folds of bluest dress
With moon for light,
I cast the beads aside and leapt (CP II. 81–89)

Partial rhyme and alliteration emphasises this 'almost' state: 'on', 'night' 'not'; 'night' 'light', 'leapt'; 'blue', 'bluest', 'dress'; 'found', 'fair', 'fill', 'folds'. When Thetis reaches the shore, the form becomes looser, more fluid, the lines growing in length and the rhymes becoming subtler:

Achilles' sandal on the beach,
Could one mistake?
Perhaps a lover or a nymph,
Lost from the tangled fern and brake,
That lines the upper shelf of land,
Perhaps a goddess or a nymph
Might so mistake
Achilles' footprint for the trace
Of a bright god alert to track
The panther where he slinks for thirst
Across the sand; (CP II.100–110)

The repetition of certain phrases and words—'mistake', 'perhaps', 'Achilles's sandal', Achilles's footprint'—embody the littoral in their circularity. There is a clear, Imagistically brief sense of geology and topography in the 'upper shelf' and 'tangled fern and brake', and sounds and rhythms

of the shore appear in repeated sounds: mistake, brake, trace, track. Snatches of iambic meter return and disappear under verse libre, tracking the movements of a wave.

Notes on Thought and Vision emphasises the significance of deities appearing to mortals in the guise of natural objects or animals, encoding the landscape with spiritual possibility. In 'Thetis' (2), Thetis describes the shore as a place inhabited by goddesses and nymphs. Traces of such figures are found in its physical changes: a broken stem of reed (*CP* I. 114), a seashell 'turned to the light' (*CP* I. 115). Thetis arrives on the shore and begins to string littoral objects together into a necklace. She strings 'pearl and agate and pearl' while she sings a song searching for her lost son, Achilles, threading the necklace 'to mark the beat and the stress / of the lilt of my song' (*CP* II. 42–43). This meditative image once again links the littoral as both a physical and an interior landscape, elucidating a kind of self-actualisation as we are reminded of Thetis's original identity as a sea-witch and the mother of Achilles in her song. After threading the necklace, Thetis rises and finds a footprint in the sand belonging to Achilles: 'I saw the mark / of feet, a rare foot-fall: // Achilles' sandal on the beach' (*CP* II.98–100). The movement emphasises Thetis's fluidity through the littoral landscape, and the power of her spell in conjuring the presence of Achilles; the littoral is also marked as Thetis's space as she finds her son on the beach through spells made with drift debris, and in the physical properties of sand to hold the shape of a footprint.

Thetis considers that another person would stoop to kiss the footprint, but that she herself would not, remembering her own central importance in the narrative of Achilles. The final stanza of the poem begins with a statement of her identity as Thetis, Achilles' mother and herself, and relates this feeling of self-actualisation to being at multiple littoral points:

Not I, the mother, Thetis self,
I stretched and lay, a river's slim
dark length,
a rivulet where it leaves the wood,
and meets the sea,

I lay along the burning sand,
a river's blue. (CP ll. 121–127)

There are a number of boundary points where Thetis is able to exist freely: the bank of a river's length, a rivulet where it leaves the wood, the mouth of the river where it meets the sea, even the stretch of land where Thetis lies is merged with the water, 'the burning sand, / a river's blue'. Thetis dissolves within this prismatic 'shore', which offers a Homeric sense of homecoming in finding her son, but also a self-actualisation in fluidity. The significance of Thetis moving to a place of littoral boundary to find freedom rather than staying at the bottom of the ocean is significant; whilst both could be argued to be 'fluid' images, the ocean in its mysterious depths and liquid state and the shore as a liminal, unmappable place, the shore is the only one to offer an identity that intersects multiple states.

The river and riverbank offers other female mythological characters an escape from the confines of heteromantic narratives, particularly in *Hymen*. The multiple boundaries present in Thetis's river at the end of 'Thetis' (2), after she has escaped her life with Peleus, suggest that the littoral river image becomes a route out of the binaries of gender and heteronormativity by allowing for identities between and around such boundaries. Whereas the seashore appears to be more pertinent for asserting the actualisation of a female self in isolation, the riverbank becomes a challenge to the binaries and power relationships inherent in hetero-romantic myths. Riverbanks return in this guise to H.D.'s prose, as examined in the next chapter, particularly in *HERmione*.

Sarah Graham has argued that *Hymen* not only expresses ambivalence about heterosexuality but also offers a 'direct critique' of it.⁶² Several of the poems feature women made unhappy by romantic love for men, which is repeatedly associated with pain. Circe pines for an absent and unattainable lover, and women like Simaetha and Calypso (in 'Cuckoo') also lose their lovers. Graham furthermore

⁶² Graham, 'Hymen and *Trilogy*', p. 116.

points out that heterosexual desire is revealed as dangerous in poems that express sexual rivalry between women, namely the linked trio 'Phaedra', 'She Contrasts with Herself Hippolyta' and 'She Rebukes Hippolyta'.⁶³

'Evadne', recounting the water nymph and her relationship with Apollo, emphasises Evadne as an active entity in her own story, as opposed to a passive love interest.⁶⁴ The repeated phrase 'I, Evadne' resounds through the text to reclaim the experience as her own, along with phrases that highlight the significance of boundaries and their crossing: 'across', 'between' and 'over and over'. The space between male and female is depicted in metaphor as the frontier between the river Eros and its bank, and Evadne herself is both a water nymph and part of the land:

my hair is made of crisp violets
or hyacinth which the wind combs back
across some rock shelf (CP II. 4–6)

Evadne's governance over both land and water typifies an erotic autonomy; in H.D.'s re-telling, she both initiates her relationship with Apollo and controls its representation. In the final stanza, H.D. further challenges established notions of sexuality. Evadne's hands 'keep the gold they took / as they wandered over and over / that great arm-full of yellow flowers' (CP II. 18–20), reversing traditional virginity narratives with Evadne 'taking' something from Apollo. As the boundary between Evadne and Apollo themselves becomes blurred, H.D. dismantles typical power structures found in the performance of sexuality. The lovers are imagined as a single, riverside landscape, the 'hyacinth' of Evadne's hair echoing Apollo's 'crisp' and 'crocus' like mane. As the freshwater cress of Eros grows within reach of the river, Apollo's 'great-armful of yellow flowers' (CP I. 20) becomes paralleled with Evadne's aquatic state, framing the pair in equilibrium and allowing Evadne to claim sexual

⁶³ Ibid, p. 116.

⁶⁴ Pindar, 'Olympian Ode 6', *The Odes*, trans. C. M. Bowra (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 123: 'She [Neaera] wedded, story tells / Kronos' son, Poseidon, / And bore the violet-haired girl, Evadna. / She hid her maiden travail in her dress, / And in the month of birth she sent servants / And told them to give the child to Eilatidas' keeping – / he ruled at Phaisana / Over the men of Arkadia, / And had Alpheos for home ; / There Apollo cared for her, and first / She touched the delights of Aphrodita' (ll. 29–36).

dominance. Evadne's liquid identity as a water nymph allows for fluidity in her encounter with Apollo the land-dweller.

H.D. also uses the image of the riverbank to re-examine classical myth in 'Leda', where the narrative is transformed into a suggestion of transgressive sexuality and female eroticism. Following the story of Leda being seduced by Zeus in the form of a swan, H.D. presents a liminal freshwater boundary as the poem's refrain, 'where the slow river meets the tide', and this becomes the point at which the central action is cyclically veiled and unveiled. The figure of Leda is only mentioned in the title; the poem rather describes the swan and its freshwater surroundings. The swan appears at the poem's refrain of the meeting of river and tide; the swan's 'coral feet' evoking the sea and its 'soft breast' the riverside flowers. The description of the swan is striking; using shifting colours of the red swan's 'red wings' deepening to a 'darker beak' and 'purple down', colours which later engage with the 'dying heat of sun and mist', 'lily with dark breast' and 'warm quivering' of the swan itself. The surreal appearance of the swan plays into a pattern of colour throughout *Hymen* that is linked to female alienation and sexuality. A red spray of blood in 'Hymen' signifies the wedding ceremony; Simathea spins a yarn of purple wool as she waits for the return of her lover; Phaedra has visions of the 'burnt', 'red' sand of Crete. The swan inhabits the marginal space where 'the slow river meets the tide', and Leda's absence in the poem adds to this sense of marginality, of new narratives being created through new configurations of character.

The swan is also strikingly described in both masculine and feminine terms. The poem's third-person narrative identifies the swan as 'he' and 'his', but also gives the bird a gentleness and softness that is conventionally feminine; a 'soft breast' 'caressed' by the dusk light, wings that are 'fluttering', delicate 'coral' feet. The initial description of the swan as a dark, red creature is further undercut by the swan's calm and fragile movements: lifting, drifting, floating, fluttering, quivering. The final

stanza of the poem hints at Leda's seduction, but ultimately displaces it by seemingly also describing the swan exiting the water onto the riverbank:

Ah, kingly kiss

[...]

where the low sedge is thick,
the gold day-lily
outspreads and rests
beneath soft fluttering
of red swan wings
and the warm quivering
of the red swan's breast. (CP II. 24, 28–34)

There is a distinct erotic undertone to this ending, with the 'kingly kiss' and the spreading lily beneath the quivering breast of the swan, but such eroticism is hinted at rather than fully visible. The connection between invisibility and transgressive sexuality would be a poignant one to H.D., who felt similarly invisible with Bryher when they were seen as 'two women alone' despite having one another as romantic partners. The littoral space of the river is fluid between the boundaries of freshwater and salt, water and bank, masculine and feminine, and this gives way to an eroticism outlying heteronormative performance.

As with other portrayals of the littoral across *Hymen* and *Heliodora*, the littoral image is one of complete fluidity, and like the ending of 'Thetis' (2), the setting presents us with multiple littoral boundaries, not just the riverbank but the fully liquid distinction between the river and the sea, the freshwater and the saltwater tide. This merging of multiple binaries parallels other poems across the collections, particularly in narratives rerouting sexual assault; Evadne escapes the binaries of gender with Apollo on the riverbank, and Thetis escapes Peleus before and after her assault on the seashore.

Helen Sword, in her study of modernist portrayals of the Leda myth, rightly notes that our modern readings of the poem may find it strangely benign, as it ‘contains no hint of either the suffering or the violence that marks most other modernist accounts of the myth’.⁶⁵ H.D.’s Leda is not only, as Sword points out, ‘wholly lacking in the passion and anguish that characterise so many of H.D.’s other heroines’, but is not given a voice in the poem at all, appearing only in the title and perhaps, ambiguously, as the lily at the end of the poem.⁶⁶ This ambiguity is perhaps reflective of Leda’s classical sources, none of which portray explicitly or even euphemistically a rape; the modernist trend of portraying Leda’s myth as violent assault appear after H.D.’s poem, in W.B. Yeats’s retelling in 1925 and D.H. Lawrence’s version in 1929.⁶⁷ Sword is right to point out the strange neutrality of Leda’s narrative in a collection that hones in on the victimisation of classical women by men, but the poem seems to be more intent on the expression of an androgynous, transgressive sexuality than on heteronormative relations, and in the context of the collection this seems a deliberate decision. The swan of ‘Leda’ is depicted specifically as an androgynous being, merging masculine and feminine identities and existing specifically on the mutable boundary between river and sea, river and riverbank, even between human and non-human. This uncanny blurring of defining categories removes Leda’s narrative from heteronormative patterns and depicts an eroticism grounded in fluidity and ambiguity, and in movement outside of accepted romantic equations. Against the collections’ other portrayals of women suffering in heteronormative roles, the fluidity of the riverbank becomes an escape where the binaries of gender are dissolved.

⁶⁵ Helen Sword, ‘Leda and the Modernists’, *PMLA*, 107(2) (1992), 305–318, 313.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ In the opening of Euripides’ *Helen* (412 BCE), Helen recounts the story of Leda and the Swan, detailing her past for the audience. She says: ‘my father was Tyndareus: though / they tell a story about how Zeus took on himself / the shape of a flying swan, with an eagle in pursuit, / and came on wings to Leda my mother, and so won / the act of love by treachery. It may be so’ (p. 14, ll.17–21). Here the word ‘treachery’ suggests the deceitful nature of Zeus’s love and his disguise, but does not specifically infer physical or sexual violence. Similarly, Leda also appears in book six of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Ovid writes briefly of Leda appearing in Arachne’s tapestry depicting the crimes of the gods, saying, ‘Arachne wove [...] Leda, reclining under a swan’s wing’ (p. 137, ll. 145, 153). Again, the nature of the crime is ambiguous and perhaps pertaining to romantic treachery and deceit over rape. [Euripides, *The Bacchae and Other Plays*, trans. Philip Vellacott (Middlesex: Penguin, 1954); Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin, 1955)].

In a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson, H.D. associates ‘the “lost” world of the classics’ with both the ‘desire to escape’ and the ‘desire to create’.⁶⁸ H.D.’s use of the liminal littoral sites of seashore and riverbank allows for this dual escape: to escape the confinements of existing narratives and conventions through the fluidity of the land/water barrier while using this escape as a creative act to find new internal and external geographies. *Notes on Thought and Vision* introduced H.D. to a form of poetics beyond the Imagist poetry she had previously written, as she explored her own mind and creativity. Her surroundings of the coastal southwest England made links between the fluidity of this new way of thinking and the fluidity of the littoral site, which resound into a pair of collections that take the littoral as a form of renewal and fluid ways of being.

In the following chapter, we see how H.D. engages specifically with her Cornish and Devonshire surroundings in her novel *Bid Me to Live*, which she began in early drafts during these stays on the southwest coast and completed in 1939. The novel *HERmione*, completed in 1929, also offers insights into H.D.’s personal associations with the shore of the American east coast she grew up with. Both reveal the formative influence of the shore through their autobiographical models.

⁶⁸ H.D. to Norman Holmes Pearson, 1937, letter titled ‘A Note on Poetry’ and reprinted in *Agenda*, 25(3–4) (1988), 71–76: 73.

CHAPTER THREE: 'PUSHING ON THROUGH TRANSPARENCIES': THE SHORE AND SELFHOOD IN THE
MADRIGAL CYCLE [1921–1939]

Beginning in 1921, H.D. experimented with novels, not publishing a collection of original poetry for over a decade between *Heliodora* in 1924 and *Red Roses for Bronze* in 1936. Her prose was typical of high, formalist modernism, with its emphasis on stream-of-consciousness interior monologues, a deconstructed sense of narrative and a blurring of the conventions of speech and form. Many of the novels were grouped loosely into sequences by H.D. as she wrote them. The first of these, *Magna Graeca*, consists of *Palimpsest* (1926) and *Hedylus* (1928). The *Magna Graeca* cycle followed H.D.'s interest in classical poetry, using its ancient setting to explore the poetic vocation and classical women in a patriarchal literary culture. The *Madrigal* cycle consists of *Paint It Today* [1921], *Asphodel* [1922], *HERmione* [1927] and *Bid Me to Live* [1939], and is largely autobiographical, dealing with the development of the female artist and the conflict between heterosexual and lesbian desire.

A letter from Richard Aldington in July 1918 bemoans H.D.'s foray away from poetry into prose. He writes, 'But how are you going on now? Prose? No! You have so precise, so wonderful an instrument – why abandon it to fashion another perhaps less perfect?'¹ What prose offered H.D. over poetry was a chance to develop extended, introspective narratives modelled on her own life, featuring female, often queer, protagonists closely modelled on herself. The novels were unpublished in H.D.'s lifetime, save *Bid Me to Live* which was published in 1960, a year before her death. As such, they are intensely personal, chronicling H.D.'s poetic vocation and navigation of identity through a conflation of allegory, autobiography and a high modernist aesthetic. Susan Stanford Friedman argues that H.D.'s movement from poetry to prose is due to a burgeoning modernist obsession with 'history',

¹ Richard Aldington to H.D., 4 July 1918, *Richard Aldington and H.D.: Their Lives in Letters*, ed. by Caroline Zilboorg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 78.

which for H.D. meant a delving into the 'self-in-history'.² Writing about her early life seemed to H.D. to be the only way to 'work through the wood' of her turbulent life in the 1910s, as she wrote to John Cournos, to get past the 'tangle of bushes and bracken out to a clearing, where I can see again'.³ As Friedman argues, this need for H.D. to write about her personal self was difficult in her then preferred mode of verse: 'the transcendental "H.D.", disembodied poet of a timeless space, could not clear these tangles'.⁴ The ambiguous and distant moniker of 'H.D. Imagiste' that had so successfully been attached to her poetry was not intimate or narrative enough to delve into her own life. The novels seem to be a way of playing with and exploring identity beyond the confines of 'H.D.', as she assumes a number of artist non-de-plumes while writing. *Paint it Today* is signed Helga Dart, and *Bid Me to Live* was signed Delia Alton in the 1939 draft, a condensed and displaced version of her given name, Hilda Doolittle, and her married name, Hilda Aldington. H.D. wrote under many names in her life, but rarely did so with poetry; the various identities appearing on novel manuscripts coupled with their autobiographical context suggest strongly that the novels were a means of exploring the formation and transformation of the self.

H.D.'s novels feature a cast of characters who form thinly-veiled references to H.D.'s family, friends and literary circles, and many detail the coming-of-age and literary ambitions of a young, queer American woman. *Hermione* (1927) and *Paint it Today* (1921) portray H.D.'s early years as a writer: in the former, her adolescence in Pennsylvania as she broke her engagement to Ezra Pound and embarked on her first same-sex relationship with Frances Gregg, before moving to Europe to pursue her literary ambitions; and in the latter H.D.'s life in London's literary circles, grappling with her dual

² Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Return of the Repressed in H.D.'s Madrigal Cycle', *Signets: Reading H.D.*, ed. by Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 233–254, p. 233.

³ H.D. to John Cournos, 9 July 1918, Box 17 of the *H.D. Papers*, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

⁴ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Exile in the American Grain: H.D.'s Diaspora', *Women's Writing in Exile*, ed. by Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 87–109, p. 101.

American/British identity and the end of her relationship with Gregg. *Asphodel* details the height of H.D.'s literary fame around *Sea Garden*, and *Bid Me to Live* details the period in H.D.'s life after the publication of *Sea Garden*, the First World War, and the breakdown of her marriage to Richard Aldington.⁵ The novels are all, as Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis write, 'a quest for identity which centres on the interrelated questions of vocation, marriage, and sexuality', and each of the protagonists (usually a model for H.D. herself) undergoes struggles in their sexuality, literary careers, and a mistrust of the prevailing gender system.⁶ The writing across these novels is distinctive in their stream-of-consciousness prose style, with the phenomenological experience of the female protagonist at the centre. With the autobiographical content being so clear-cut, one is given a sense of H.D.'s own vivid inner life and struggle with her identity as a female bisexual writer in the male-dominated world of literary modernism and a heteronormative society with clear expectations for women.

Given the posthumous publications of many of these novels, Friedman and DuPlessis rightly ask if it is possible or necessary to consider if H.D.'s prose texts are "'finished", "polished", or even "good"', and whether H.D. wanted or even tried to publish them.⁷ H.D. wrote on her manuscript copy of *Asphodel*, 'Early edition of MADRIGAL, DESTROY', and there is no evidence that H.D. tried to publish *Paint it Today* or *HERmione*, though she wrote a number of drafts of each.⁸ The novels' purpose is therefore mysterious, particularly complicated by their layered, meta-textual nature, chronicling the life of the writer H.D. under a number of pseudonyms that refer to H.D.'s birth name, pen name and married name, with a cast of characters very clearly referring to, yet not explicitly stated as, people from H.D.'s own life. Such speculation over H.D.'s publication difficulties or motivations yields no

⁵ *Asphodel* (1922) completes the biographical narrative of *Paint it Today* and *HERmione*, chronicling H.D.'s life in the urban literary circles of London.

⁶ Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'I had two loves separate': The Sexualities of H.D.'s *HER*', in *Signets: Reading H.D.*, pp. 205–267, p. 209.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 206.

⁸ H.D., *Asphodel*, unpublished typescript, Box 20 of the *H.D. Papers*, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

concrete answers, but does imply that the novels in some way form a personal exploration of H.D.'s self and life. Literary narratives often reveal articulations of the unconscious, and this is especially true for H.D., who appears to use novel-writing as a way of achieving personal, introspective self-knowledge, with a secondary function as a form of artistic creation.

HERmione, retelling H.D.'s adolescence, details the forest rivers of Pennsylvania and coastlines of New Jersey as backdrops to the protagonist Hermione's family life and problematic engagement to George Lowndes, and suggests that Hermione's formative experiences of the world are shaped by her experiences of the landscape. In *HERmione*, the land infiltrates the house, spreading wildness throughout, and moulding Hermione's character and development as a writer. Hermione tells us 'people are in trees, trees are in people' (*HER* 5), suggesting H.D.'s understanding of the relationship between human and non-human as symbiotic. H.D. later sees landscape as not only formative but transformative: *Bid Me to Live* depicts its protagonist rebuilding her sense of self on an isolated Cornish coastline, aligning its exploration of personal history to the visible evolutionary history of the land. In these novels, the shore is an element of nature that seems to be something outside of the social, an opportunity to move out of sight of the land on which society is located, created and governed, and where the body is fixed. John Gillis writes of the shore as a central part of cultural identity: 'all cultures have their temporal and spatial edges. Without them, they would be at a loss to locate themselves'.⁹ In *HERmione* and *Bid Me to Live*, the shore becomes an 'edge' that defines and challenges the protagonists' sense of self, unsettling their pre-drawn boundaries of identity and pushing them into new forms of self-actualisation. The presence in the novels of real shores that H.D. knew and visited—in Maine, New Jersey and Cornwall—suggests that her writing of the shore is part of a challenge to somehow locate a self within a known, specific littoral geography. H.D.'s lifelong struggles with her national identity, culminating in her American repatriation after living in

⁹ John R. Gillis, 'Afterword: Beyond the Blue Horizon' in *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge*, ed. by Nicholas Allen, Nick Groom and Jos Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 261–268, p. 265.

Europe for her adult life, are linked concretely to this exploration and expression of the psychogeography of the shore.

H.D.'s investment in environmental determinism has been explored by Annette Debo, who highlights the importance in H.D.'s work of an American national identity rooted in the landscape. However, the role of littoral landscapes (coastlines and riverbanks) in the *Madrigal* cycle, namely as central motifs in the chronological beginning and end of the cycle in *HERmione* and *Bid Me Live*, remains unexplored. This chapter argues that the littoral functions as a site of formation and transformation that H.D. portrays as a central aspect of her personal and literary identity, and that if the novels are read as intense psychological studies of H.D., the littoral site of *Bid Me to Live* functions as a way of resolving the concerns and insecurities present in *HERmione*. This chapter begins with a discussion of the first novel written for the cycle, *Paint it Today*, which establishes the role of the shore in these novels as a site of self-actualisation. Whilst the novel does not deal extensively or centrally with the shore, it does establish its protagonist as being shaped by her physical environment, and select passages that feature the shore establish H.D.'s investment in the littoral landscape specifically.

I. Expatriatism and the Atlantic Shore in *Paint it Today* (1921)

Paint it Today's narrator, Midget DeFreddie, forges a concept of human identity rooted in the landscape: 'language and tradition do not make a people, but the heat that presses on them, the cold that baffles them, the alternating lengths of night and day' (*PIT* 20). This statement of environmental determinism from a character modelled on H.D. herself underscores the importance of landscape in H.D.'s work, particularly as sites of self-actualisation, and as explorations of humans as active participants in ecological spaces. There is also a striking emphasis on the notion of physical experience in the assertion, where climatic conditions such as heat and light are centred and landscape is therefore felt through the body rather than through the visual experience of particular

features. H.D.'s landscapes in her prose hold specific geographies as North European or East-coast American landscapes, but as important as this notion of place is the interaction of elements and the blurring of specific geographies through immediate bodily experience.

Throughout *Paint it Today*, nature and local ecology are depicted as an inherent part of identity. Midget, the novel's female protagonist, starts life as a strange creature whose connection to the landscape is emphasised:

a bird or intermediate, of a lost reptile race, clawing its way into pear and wisteria tangle, to cling, to be lost, to defy worlds from there, to crack the sky with an ugly, screwed-up little face, screwed up into the blaze of ozone, spring air, air forged, whetted of ice on wind.
(PIT 4)

As in many of H.D.'s poems, there is a strong feeling of contradiction, of being both and neither, of being in-between. Midget is bird, reptile, and human, both isolated and part of her surroundings. She is both native—in the pear, the bird, the wisteria—as well as an intruder or extinct species, a lost species of reptile. H.D. goes on to describe Midget's 'portrait', in reference to the novel's title, as being located 'on the trail of the Pennsylvania foot-hills', holding 'bunches of the wax-pink mountain laurel', a 'knot of precious wild arbutus', and a 'wandlike bough of dogwood' (PIT 5).

Annette Debo, in her study of H.D.'s American identity and attachment to American landscapes, notes that these plants are indigenous to the Pennsylvania landscape, but such descriptions suggest more than an observational kinship with her American surroundings.¹⁰ H.D.'s implication is that Midget is actively shaped by her American environment; that there are traces of her there, and that her 'portrait', her identity, is built through climate, through her engagement with the landscape (wildflower-picking) and through how it made her feel (we assume—like herself). H.D. appears to be writing here in a particular American tradition, with links back to early writers such as Hector St John

¹⁰ 'H.D.'s American Landscape: The Power and Permanence of Place', *South Atlantic Review*, 69(3–4) (2004), 1–22: 17.

de Crèvecoeur, where the American landscape and the American self are coextensive, the former generative of the latter. The American farmer of Crèvecoeur's letters writes: 'If [your words] be not elegant, they will smell of the woods, and be a little wild', and 'This is the only line [of thought] I am able to follow: the line which nature has herself traced for me'.¹¹ These echoes of a specifically American tradition of naturalism continue into *HERmione*, where Pennsylvania is described a 'tribe' that holds onto natural objects as 'relics' (*HER* 7), and depicts Hermione's mother as literally attached to the landscape: 'if Eugenia Gart pulled up her mossgrown fibres, Pennsylvania itself would ache like a jaw' (*HER* 9). For Midget, the American landscape forms her identity and her subsequent responses to the European landscape of her adult life. Like H.D., Midget moves from America to Europe in order to pursue her artistic ambitions, and her feelings of alienation from her home country are described in terms of littoral distance, of coastal landscapes remembered and felt but not seen. Here, the wind is 'not wind', and Midget yearns for the 'power of that wilderness' she had left behind, and even the sun is a 'flameless, low-swinging, mid-European substitute' (*PIT* 15).

The shoreline boundary typifies a feeling of national longing: later, H.D. writes of her own experiences as an American in London in *Tribute to Freud*, where the sea becomes symbolic of the distance between her American and her European self, and the shore its boundary: 'there were two countries, [...] separated by a wide gap in consciousness and a very wide stretch of sea' (*TF* 32). The space between America and Europe became a contested space in H.D.'s poetic circles. Friedman, in her study of H.D.'s American pioneer identity, calls expatriatism 'the founding desire of American modernism', with the emigration to Europe by Pound, H.D., and Eliot as 'a self-imposed exile from the parochial and provincial for the cosmopolitan and international'.¹² For William Carlos Williams, who grew up with Pound and H.D. in Pennsylvania, such literary expatriatism was a Euro-centric bias

¹¹ Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1962) (original work published in 1782), pp. 10, 20.

¹² Friedman, 'Exile in the American Grain', p. 88.

against things American.¹³ Whether this is fair or not, the opposition seems clear between the expatriatism of Pound and the nationalism of Williams, which makes the literary mind of *Paint it Today's* Midget all the more intriguing for its veneration of both the American landscape and traditions of Crevecoeur and her desire to join the literary, Poundian circles of Europe. The 'wide stretch of sea' is both a geographic alienation and an artistic one, and one that Midget finds manifested and solved at the site of the shore, a symbol not just of a national edge but of the possibility of crossing it.

Midget reveals a particular fondness for the memory of the American East Coast landscape, and feels a particular kind of alienation when her surroundings do not match it:

The wind against an old hulk on the sands below Etaples, was not yet wind, not wind that is when contrasted with that rush of swords that cut the sand stretches into snow and ice patterns and blared through the Maine pines and tore in mid-summer, tornado-wise, walnut and tough oak branches from the walnut and great oak trees. [...] Was that how they felt it? Yes, these Europeans could not know. (*PIT* 14)

Midget's nostalgia comes from physical place and memory felt. This memory of the elemental landscape forms her identity, placing the 'Europeans' around her into a separate category to herself, the American. The sand and coastal wind evoke bodily memory, highlighting the influence of the environment on her own particular sense of identity. Midget's belief that people are shaped by the temporal and seasonal conditions of the landscape is paralleled in her own response to how the Maine landscape *felt*—the harsh wind, the freezing winter and oppressive summers—rather than how it looked or its named location. Her attachment to the Maine landscape is not rooted in cultural geography but in the climatic conditions she is accustomed to, revealing the affective nature of identity that H.D. links to environmental determinism.

¹³ Ibid, p. 89.

Midget's sense of alienation and distance is heightened by the coastal light of Etaples at sunset, and is again conceived through sensory 'feeling':

The sunset gave them a smothered, lifeless feeling; the sun was not a sun, yet these people trailing up from the sands were people, as the same trailing herd, dark colored, grouped in shapeless knots on the dazzling Atlantic shore, were hardly to be identified, signalled out from one another as separate human beings. (*PIT* 15)

The people around her become dull and shapeless against the water; even the sun reflects Midget's feelings of unbelonging by becoming 'not a sun'. The people are both collective and singular, 'the same trailing herd' and yet 'signalling' out from one another as separate human beings. On the coast of Etaples, the separation of the Atlantic coast under literary modernism becomes blurred as the mass of American expatriates and Europeans become one shapeless mass, defined by themselves as individuals rather than nationalities. This produces a shift in the mind of Midget, where her American memories become 'burned' by the 'blaze on the New Jersey sands', and the Europeans around them a 'reality' (*PIT* 16). This transformation of an alienated self into one that accepts the new European geography is triggered by the sight of blurring and blending on the shore.

The changing light in this passage produces a shift in emotional response as the water becomes 'dazzling', and the sunlight itself unrecognisable. The architect Anna Ryan focusses on the effect of light on human behaviour on the coast in her 2016 book *Where Land Meets Sea: Coastal Explorations of Landscape, Representation and Spatial Experience*, which explores the coastal site as a place where spatial experience is heightened. For Ryan, light on the coast has a 'particular character' due to its 'changing dynamics':

the collapsing movements of the shore-break disperses light outwards quickly, while the ribbing of the sand captures little pockets of water that act as a series of reflectors as the tide turns seawards. [...] The wet ground of the beach and the coastal light work together to draw the body into its surroundings; reflective shadow and reactive sand become one. Coastal light is a presence that wraps the individual.¹⁴

¹⁴ Anna Ryan, *Where Land Meets Sea: Coastal Explorations of Landscape, Representation and Spatial Experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 16.

The result, Ryan argues, is an emotional and imaginative state that effectively dramatises and heightens all the other action that occurs. Ryan's work has no straight connection to H.D.'s own writing, but the focus on coastal light and its illusive properties is striking, and suggests that the physical properties of place are actively shaping the characters' identities and responses in H.D.'s novels, and that the littoral, particularly its interactions of light, water and land, is paid particular attention.

In the words of Friedman, 'being expatriate was a spatial metaphor, a geographic manifestation of a more fundamental exile from convention', and 'to feel fully at home, to be harmoniously integrated into the communities of family and nation, whether America or England, was to be domesticated and tamed'.¹⁵ As a woman, the concept of 'home' was already fraught with obligation, the domestic expectations for Midget incompatible with her creative drive. The gap in consciousness that H.D. associates with the Atlantic in *Tribute to Freud* is an attempt to separate notions of 'home' and 'belonging' from the gendered and autonomy-restricting associations of those terms. H.D. herself repatriated to the United States after a lifetime spent living in Europe, suggesting that the alienation of identity felt by Midget was also felt by H.D. In a letter to her childhood friend Mary Herr, H.D. names Maine 'a place of mine,' emphasizing the significant role it continued to play for her.¹⁶

In the final two chapters of *Paint it Today*, 'Retrospect' and 'Visible World', Midget comes to an understanding of her sexual identity through a Greek coastline. Where the coast of Maine was formative to the young writer, this particular Greek shore becomes transformative, offering new formations of identity to Midget. As the poetry collections discussed in Chapter Two used the setting of a Greek island to complicate heteronormative narratives and retell same-sex relationships, this

¹⁵ Friedman, 'Exile in the American Grain', p. 92.

¹⁶ H.D. to Mary Herr, 1944. Box 18 of the *H.D. Papers*.

section of *Paint it Today* presents a wild coastal landscape where the sexual and romantic relations between two women is centred. This littoral landscape is similar to the one remembered by Midget in Maine: Midget explores a forest along the coast with her lover, Althea, after they have travelled there by canoe and left the vessel at the shore. Althea and Midget are actively engaging in a struggle against the elements as they run through the trees, their bodies strong, young and 'chaste' like the 'sacred virgins of Artemis' (*PIT* 84), immediately establishing a romantic encounter that, as Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis point out, is opposed to the heterosexually defined eroticism associated with Aphrodite.¹⁷

The implied sexual innocence of the women hints toward euphemistic irony, but also gives such same-sex contact the invisibility so desired by H.D.'s classical queer women in *Heliodora* and *Hymen*, where the 'transgressive' sexuality of 'Leda' and the queer identities of 'White World' are couched in similar euphemism and evasion. Their athleticism and strength seem to perform gender outside of the conventions of the feminine, moving through the forests like Artemis's hunters. The description of the women's struggle against the elements is defined by a dynamism and vitality that, converse to their asserted chastity, seems to urge a kind of eroticised reading:

Midget was indeed alive and Althea, her companion, was alive. Their young bodies were worn out with the tussle, the valiant tussle and valiant defeat of the pursuing elements. They were proud and young and alive. (*PIT* 84)

The women's young and proud bodies are both erotic and explicitly chaste, both acknowledging their queer encounter whilst gifting a kind of necessary invisibility to the eyes of others. This passage is also strikingly reminiscent of H.D.'s near-drowning in New Jersey as a young woman, recounted in Chapter One. In H.D.'s case, the encounter led to a lifelong fascination with the physical power of the seashore, and its nature to test the resilience of its inhabitants. Midget finds this elemental Greek landscape to be a similar test of character: Cassandra Laity asks if Midget finds her true

¹⁷ Friedman and DuPlessis, 'I had two loves separate': The Sexualities of H.D.'s *HER*', pp. 205–206.

'origin' in this 'regenerate landscape', that so privileges the body and protects same-sex encounters.¹⁸ She points out that the islands may be modelled on the idyllic islands of Greece and Corfu where H.D. vacationed with Bryher in the 1920s, or even where she stayed with Bryher on the Isles of Scilly. In any case, the shore is here presented as a site where identity is formed, through Midget's remembered experiences of Maine, and transformed, as Midget comes to terms with her homosexual desires. When Midget arrives in Europe at the beginning of the novel with her lover, Josepha, she realises that they were not only 'separated from the great mass of the people of the nations of the world', but 'separated from the separated too' (*PIT* 20). Midget's conception of her queer identity utilises the littoral separations between countries to imagine an existence that is doubly separated from conventional life.

II. The Formative Shore: *HERmione* (1927)

The shore in *Paint it Today* brings up pertinent questions for how the shore functions in later texts. The shore is often framed in *HERmione* and *Bid Me to Live* as a similar escape from heteronormative convention: in *HERmione* as an escape from the same domestic life of Hermione's mother, whose creativity is stifled by her role as wife and mother, and in *Bid Me to Live* as a site where Julia embraces her literary ambitions and escapes what she terms the 'tightrope' of being a 'modern women', obliged to a life where freedom is tempered by domestic responsibility. *HERmione* similarly uses a nostalgia for the American East Coast landscape H.D. knew to explore how identities are formed within certain environments. *Bid Me to Live* focusses on the history of human relationships with the shore as the protagonist, Julia Ashton, rebuilds an identity in the aftermath of marital breakdown.

¹⁸ Cassandra Laity, 'H.D.'s Romantic Landscapes: The Sexual Politics of the Garden', *Signets: Reading H.D.*, pp. 110-125, p. 112.

In *HERmione*, the adolescent protagonist Hermione Gart searches for self-actualisation between the stifling home-life of her town and family, a potential marriage and move to Europe with a suitor, George Lowndes (a figure based on Ezra Pound) and the domestic expectations placed on her as a young woman. It is also, as many have pointed out, thoroughly autobiographical, covering H.D.'s engagement to Pound, formative romantic and sexual encounters with another woman (the character Fayne Rabb, based on Frances Gregg) and emigration to Europe in 1911. The novel's stream-of-consciousness narrative form places immediate experience and identity as overarching narratorial concerns. L.S. Dembo writes that if a single motif runs through *HERmione* it is the struggle for 'incarnation', 'objectification', 'reification', 'any process by which unformed is formed or unnamed named'.¹⁹ H.D. introduces Hermione as being stuck between exact expressions, heading both to and from the definite: her development is 'forced along slippery lines of exact definition; marked supernorm, marked subnorm' (*HER* 3). Hermione's in-between, dual nature originates in alienation and isolation, much like Midget and Josepha on their separate island: 'she was not of the world, she was not in the world, unhappily she was not out of the world' (*HER* 8). Hermione knows that she belongs elsewhere: she is 'an importunate over-grown, unincarnated entity that had no place here' (*HER* 10), and she finds solace for this rootlessness at the mutable boundary of the shore.

Hermione longs to travel to Point Pleasant, a beach in New Jersey, daydreaming obsessively about it throughout the novel. She contrasts the physical nature of the shore to the physical nature of her home's surrounding forest:

she wanted to get to Point Pleasant [...] She wanted to climb through walls of no visible dimension. Tree walls were visible, were to be extended to known reaches of universe. Trees, no matter how elusive, in the end, walled one in. (*HER* 7–8)

¹⁹ L.S. Dembo, 'H.D. Imagiste and Her Octopus Intelligence', *H.D.: Woman and Poet*, ed. by Michael King (Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1986), pp. 209–226, p. 211.

The littoral space provides Hermione with an acceptance of her rootless, in-between identity as one 'not of the world, not out of the world'. The shore becomes a fluid boundary, a 'wall of no visible dimension' that offers freedom in comparison to the trees, which are definable and tangible. The 'transparencies' of the 'shore wall' stand in contrast to the wild 'cones of concentric colour' and 'translucent... celluloid tree stuff' of the dense forests around her home (*HER* 7). The trees link Hermione to her mother, and particularly her mother's confinement in the domestic sphere, the family home with its 'too clear, too perfect' lawn and 'suffocating' rooms (*HER* 83). Hermione describes her mother as a 'wood-goddess on a wood path' (*HER* 67), but recognises this as something limiting, 'walling in' her mother. She notes that while her father spends evenings working in his study under a concentrated 'cone of light' (*HER* 79), her mother sits in the darkness knitting. George Lowndes, her suitor, calls Hermione 'his dryad', the same pet-name for H.D. used by Pound, again linking trees to the reiteration of heteronormative gender roles.

Hermione Gart's identity is linked specifically to water. After asking 'she was not Gart, she was not Hermione, she was not anymore Her Gart, what was she?' (*HER* 4), she picks up a copy of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and falls into near-trance punctuated by ellipsis:

I am out of this book [...] water lying filled with weeds and lily-pads... lilies of all kinds... became even more fluid, was being taken up and up, element (out of chemistry) become vapour (*HER* 32).

With this epiphany she associates the water with clarity, with the boundary between 'elements' dissolving, and becoming 'vapour'. The boundary of the shore encapsulates this feeling of fluidity as a mutable barrier between water, air and land, but the value of this as a physical quality is balanced by an awareness of the personal myths Hermione creates around the shore. Hermione finds self-actualisation in the connection she makes between water, the dissolution of elements and her own name, but the reader never sees Hermione reach Point Pleasant in the novel. Despite being grounded in specific, named geography, the peace and freedom this shore offers is in its status as an imaginary 'elsewhere' that exists in Hermione's daydreaming. To Hermione, her Point Pleasant

aspirations are not only meant to be read in the mind's eye, but also encompass simply a sense of 'anywhere but here', anywhere and anything that is not associated with her home and her frustrations. H.D. similarly describes Point Pleasant in her memoir *The Gift*, where a childhood friend first describes Point Pleasant as an aspirational dream-land. The beach is accessed through the idea of imaginative possibility:

he hadn't been to Point Pleasant, but that is what it was like, there was lots of sand and shells and you could walk for miles along the ocean and there was a place where you could buy balloons he thought, but he was sure we could get peanuts, he said. (*TG* 200)

H.D.'s childhood holidays to the coasts of New Jersey and Maine feature in her letters. H.D. wrote to a friend much later in life, 'I always loved that New England coast', reminiscing about her childhood holidays spent roaming these shorelines.²⁰ H.D. also went to the Snively cottage in Watch Hill, New Jersey, with her friend Margaret Snively.²¹ In her correspondence with H.D. in the 1950s, Margaret fondly reminisces about those summers:

Do you remember at Watch Hill when we used to paddle out in the canoe into the setting sun and return into the full moon? Also the time when you, Matilda, and I went in bathing up the creek with nothing on and just after we had dressed a boat-load of youths came round the bend? Also the time that we got stuck up the creek because it was too rough for us to return and a boy rescued us in his sailboat [...]? Those were care-free days, weren't they— again another existence!²²

H.D.'s personal associations with the shore can be traced through Hermione's focus on Point Pleasant and Midget's aforementioned longing for the Maine landscape. In such memories, the shore is a place of freedom separate from family life: carefree, uninhibited and defined by the physical properties of water and changing light.

²⁰ H.D. to Isabel Potts Landis, 24 June 1946, Box 18 of the *H.D. Papers*.

²¹ Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (London: Collins, 1984), pp. 17–18.

²² Margaret Pratt (née Snively) to H.D., 2 March 1953, Box 11 of the *H.D. Papers*.

The specific shore of New Jersey layers H.D.'s memories with Hermione's desires, and Hermione's emphasis on the shore as a transparent or vaporous boundary has wider implications for the psychogeography of the shore. Shores have what Adam Nicolson has called 'edge potency', stimulating the imagination: as the line of the horizons moves and blurs on the shore, concepts of distance and boundary feel opened up.²³ This blurring of boundaries, of a warped notion of distance, seems vitally important to the young Hermione, and, by extension, the young H.D. Hermione recognises that her home and the forests of her home are as much a part of her identity as the liberating shorescape she craves: 'She wanted to see through reaches of shore-wall, push on through transparencies. She wanted to get away, yet to be merged eventually with the thing she so loathed' (*HER* 7). The freedom that Hermione craves lies not only with the shore itself, but with the merging of water and land and the symbolic synthesis of the disparate elements that resound through her world. The sea and the forest must merge in order for Hermione to reach a point of self-actualisation:

she was both moss-grown, imbedded and at the same time staring with her inner vision on forever-tumbled breakers. If she went away, her spirit would break; if she stayed, she would be suffocated. (*HER* 9)

In a choice between forest and breaking waves, she can choose neither: her only option is to somehow merge them together. The merging of land and water represents a solving of disparate elements in Hermione's world. The aspiration to reach Point Pleasant is towards a place where her issues of divided identity may be solved. Hermione is torn between her mother and father, her artistic career and a life with George Lowndes as his wife, a heterosexual and homosexual love, and each of these dual responsibilities manifests in her as a double personality, and with each division comes the solution as a physical or metaphorical union of earth and water.

²³ Adam Nicolson, 'The Islands', *Geographical Review*, 97(2) (2007), 153–164: 156.

In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. describes her own life in terms of doubles or 'twos' (TF 32), and throughout her prose her characters are haunted by doubles of themselves, manifestations of characters stuck between socially accepted definitions. In *Paint it Today*, the character Midget is doubled with an alien reptile-bird creature, and, outside of the *Madrigal* cycle, in her 1935 novella *Nights* the character Natalia is depicted as crawling into her shell like a hermit crab before emerging as Neith (N 60).²⁴ In another novella, *Kora and Ka*, written in 1930 and published in 1934, the eponymous pair refers to the protagonist, Helforth, and a being, Ka, that usurps his mind and body. The notion of a "Ka", originating in Egyptian mythology where it refers to a double born alongside every person, is here used to typify a deeply divided self and express the 'broken duality' (KK 28) of Helforth's being.²⁵ In the mythology, the Ka becomes a kind of literalised soul that survives the death of its host. In *Kora and Ka*, most significantly, this double is described in marine terms:

I let red flares eat out my mind, red Verey light shall burn up Ka who is a jelly fish, who is a microbe [...] Who gave me this broken duality? Who gave me this curse of intimate perception? I curse Ka. (KK 28)

As in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, the jellyfish image is used to typify a consciousness that is seen and not seen, physical and yet blurred into its surroundings.

Hermione is followed by a double named Her; repetitions of the phrase 'I am HER' suggest an understanding of the self that is somehow dislocated and projected from Hermione's actual physicality or presence. This double endlessly questions Hermione's identity whilst also offering her the truest form of selfhood: 'her' becomes the self-reflexive name through which Hermione names and knows her inner self. As H.D. renames herself in order to delve into her personal history away from H.D. Imagiste, Hermione uses 'HER' as a way to define herself away from the name given to her by others. Hermione's most portentous moments of self-belief come as she repeats the mantra 'I am HER' or 'I am HER exactly' as she unifies herself with an extended self. The name becomes associated

²⁴ H.D., *Nights* (New York: New Directions, repr. 1986).

²⁵ H.D., *Kora and Ka* (New York: New Directions, repr. 1996).

with a dislocated self, but also a self remade through its fluidity, through its ability to both reach outwards and turn inwards. With Hermione being repeatedly characterised on the one hand by George and her family as ‘fey with the wilderness’ and a tree spirit, and on the other as having an ‘octopus quality’ or ‘octopus intelligence’ by Fayne Rabb, it is no wonder that Hermione’s own sense of self moves between the arboreal and the marine.

H.D. needed to be an outsider to write, as she told Marianne Moore: ‘I am beginning to feel as if the world approved of me—and I can’t write unless I am an outcast’.²⁶ While Hermione searches for a place to belong, she also searches for a place to be alone. Hermione’s search for self is characterised by a desire for isolation, a break from these imposed definitions set by family and society in the deserted shorescape. The beach at Point Pleasant is contrasted with the water running through the forest surrounding her home to emphasise her desire to be alone in nature:

A river and white streams held nothing... nothing... she wanted sand under bare heels, a dog, her own, some kind of Nordic Wolfhound; a dog that would race ahead of her while breakers drew up, drew back; she wanted a dog, nothing else, no one else. She wanted to be alone on some stretch of sand with dunes rising at the back and, behind sand dunes, stretches of fibrous marsh grass, Indian paintbrush and the flat, coloured water lilies. (*HER* 6)

Hermione’s image of the shore is a comfort to her, a chance for escape and a way in which the battling elements of her psyche may be calmed. ‘If she could have gone to Point Pleasant, listened to the shore’, she tells us, ‘everything would come right’ (*HER* 54). And yet she does not, or cannot, go to the shore; rather, she brings the shore to herself in a series of episodes which solve the rigidity of her boundaries of self-definition through the fluidity of littoral land/water boundaries. The littoral blurring of water and land is brought into land environments throughout the novel: the family home is flooded with water during a storm, destroying the imbalance between science and art presented by Hermione’s parents, and the Pennsylvania forests become water-logged as Hermione takes a walk with her suitor, George Lowndes.

²⁶ H.D. to Marianne Moore, 17 January 1921, Box 11 of the *H.D. Papers*.

Hermione describes herself as being caught between her parents, 'broken like a nut between two rocks, granite and granite' (*HER* 111). Freidman and DuPlessis write that Hermione's parents represent 'the binary opposites within which she must define a destiny: male-female, power-powerlessness, science-art, god-goddess'.²⁷ Hermione is stuck between her emotionally-led mother on one hand and her scientist father on the other, much as H.D. felt stuck between her own parents. As discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, H.D. inherited an artistic interest that combined poetic image with scientific observation, but her parents' binary also revealed the societal expectations for gender that limited her mother's ambitions and celebrated her father's. Similarly, Hermione is stuck between her mother, Eugenia Gart, a housewife, and her father, a professor of astronomy.

Hermione reconciles the struggle between her mother's and father's worlds during a storm, in which the family home is drenched in water, and Hermione imaginatively describes the event as taking place at sea:

Thunder reverberated across wet lawns, shook the middle forest, prolonged itself like some beast growling under deep-sea water, shook the water above their heads, broke through it and let down more water through a funnel. [...] Tropic water receded ever so slightly, they were as it lifted up from underwater to a higher layer of water. (*HER* 87)

In the aftermath of the storm, Eugenia and Hermione are united. They are 'flung now into profound intimacy like shipwrecked mariners after the heavy sweep of waves had numbed them past consciousness of former quarrels' (*HER* 88). The morning falls around them through the 'shore-washed' windows of the house, through which the garden is transformed into 'shoreweed flung up from dense mid-waters' (*HER* 88) and a pattern of 'fins of tropic shore-fish, seen through tidewave of tidal waters' (*HER* 89). Eugenia recounts Hermione's traumatic birth and Hermione realises, 'words of Eugenia had more power than textbooks, than Geometry, than all of Carl Gart and brilliant "Bertie Gart" as they called him'. (*HER* 89) H.D. finishes the chapter by referring to Eugenia as Demeter, a

²⁷ Friedman and DuPlessis, "'I had two loves separate": The Sexualities of H.D.'s *HER*', p. 210.

woman with both the tenderness of 'such a dear nurse' and the strength to 'drive the raging storm back' (*HER* 90). When Carl Gart enters as Proteus, a figure symbolic of the changeability of the shore, he announces that his experiment in the basement of the house has been destroyed. The shore-storm washing over the house cleanses Hermione of the tension between her parent's worlds by rendering their definitions as fragile and futile. Her father, the celebrated scientist, emerges in failure and her mother in storm-defying strength, disarming the traditional gender norms subscribed to by both, and leaving Hermione free to find her own self-definition between them.

Hermione's gender and sexual identity is tested again through the figure of George Lowndes, a poet based on Ezra Pound who offers Hermione marriage and travel to Europe as Pound once did for H.D. It is clear that Hermione finds the idea of life in a frustrating and stifling marriage hard to bear: she feels betrayed by her brother's marriage to Minnie, a conventional, overly-critical woman who she must call 'sister' when the sister she would choose would 'run, would leap, would be concealed under autumn sumac or lie shaken with hail and wind, lost on some Lacedaemonian foot-hill' (*HER* 11). George Lowndes reminds Hermione of the strict gender codes enforced in childhood: 'she wanted George as a child wants a doll, whose other dolls are broken. She wanted George as a little girl wants to put her hair up and wear long skirts' (*HER* 63). George displays his misunderstanding of Hermione through his nickname for her, dryad, when Hermione clearly rejects arboreal spaces for littoral ones. Hermione's hands reach for George like those of a 'drowned girl', and, like the storm that enveloped the family home, the movement of water across land signals the climax of their strained relationship.

Many of the conversations between George and Hermione take place in the forest near to Hermione's home. As they walk, the forest is described by George as a traditionally romantic, pastoral landscape: he calls it the 'forest primeval' and the 'Forest of Arden'. As well as the Shakespearean allusion, the description of the 'forest primeval' is a clear reference to Henry

Longfellow's narrative poem *Evangeline*, following the titular character and her search for a lost love, the first lines of which George recites to Hermione as they walk (*HER* 66). The forest is situated in a lyric, romantic tradition framed by the gaze and experience of the heterosexual male, George. Cassandra Laity frames H.D.'s inclusions of such landscapes as a rejection of Romanticism and a queering of physical, wild space. Laity argues that H.D.'s earlier poetry, especially *Sea Garden*, associates the garden with suffocating and all-consuming 'male desire', whereas the openness of the Aegean landscape is related to the liberating aspect of female-female relationships.²⁸ Hermione's rejection of the Pennsylvania forests in favour of New Jersey coastlines is a rejection of the closed and traditional Pennsylvanian society that condoned only heterosexual relationships, and for H.D. a rejection of male-defined romanticism in favour of her own, fluidly-defined modernity. For H.D., 'breaking out' as evidenced by her decision to stay in Europe, literally and metaphorically led to an exploration of new landscapes, new identities of the post-Imagist H.D. and new modes of artistic expression.

In Chapter Seven of *HERmione*, the forest landscape is removed from the gaze of George and transformed into Hermione's experience of it, which situates the forest 'deep underwater' (*HER* 65). As Hermione runs from a playfully pursuing George, water creeps both physically and figuratively through the land:

Heat seeped up, swept down, swirled about them with the green of branches that was torrid tropic water. Green torrid tropic water where no snow fell, where no hint of cold running streams from high mountains swept down, was swept into and under branches that made curious circle and half-circle and whole circle... concentric circle of trees above her head (how can anyone ever draw trees?) half circle of a (she saw) beech branch arching earthward. Tree on tree on tree. TREE. I am the Tree of Life. Tree. I am a tree planted by the rivers of water I am... I am... HER exactly.

Her caught Her to herself, swirled dramatically on flat heels and was off down the trickle of earth-colour that was the path cutting earth-colour through green pellucid water. (*HER* 70)

²⁸ Laity, 'H.D.'s Romantic Landscapes: The Sexual Politics of the Garden', p. 112.

If George catches her, Hermione thinks, he 'might yet be something' (*HER* 70). The rapid ebb and flow of H.D.'s syntax merges the colour of the leaves with the water, a blur of Hermione's running—this water is then described as 'shore-water' and therefore dislocated from the forest landscape. Once again, the shore metaphor is used to emphasise the discord between Hermione and the people around her. George is 'severing shore from shore, was man on dry land, no proper deep-shore monster' (*HER* 72), and Hermione is left as a kind of shore anemone 'putting out premature feelers'. As the forest is subsumed in water, it rejects the conventional nature image of the Forest of Arden and becomes alien, a manifestation of Hermione's inner state which is a turbulent clash of elements. Hermione's transformation into a 'tree planted by rivers of water' is reminiscent of Daphne's metamorphosis into a laurel tree to escape the enamoured Apollo, but Hermione's tree is mobile, planted in moving rivers so as not to stay frozen in George's 'forest primeval'. She retains the part of her identity bound up in the Pennsylvania forest whilst leaving his version behind.

The stifling presence of George in the novel is often read as a criticism of Pound and his attempts to control or influence H.D.'s creative output. Friedman and DuPlessis consider the moniker of 'H.D. Imagiste' to have 'forged a cage of poetic and critical expectation that did not allow her to develop'.²⁹ L. S. Dembo interprets *HERmione* as an analogy for H.D.'s struggle to find an Imagist voice that was not limited to the formal characteristics listed by Flint and Pound, but would explore a broader and deeper range of experience.³⁰ Hermione yearns for the shore at Point Pleasant as an answer to her artistic vocation as H.D. yearned for the images of *Shore Garden*, seeking out 'the whole elemental scene that appears in H.D.'s poems as archaic Greece, with its mystery-divinities and Stoical ideals'.³¹ Hermione longs for the 'transparency' of the water and waves, the 'fibrous marsh grass' and rolling sand dunes for its isolation and clarity but also as the site of her initial Imagist aesthetic, that moved away from Pound's imposed identity of 'H.D. Imagiste' in favour of

²⁹ Friedman and DuPlessis, "'I had two loves separate": The Sexualities of H.D.'s *HER*', p. 205.

³⁰ Dembo, 'H.D. *Imagiste* and Her Octopus Intelligence', 211.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 214.

H.D. the poet. The isolation of the shore not only allows Hermione to transcend boundaries but also allows space for the formation of an artistic voice.

Fayne Rabb, portrayed in the novel as Hermione's true romantic interest, is constantly linked back to the shore. She instinctively understands Hermione as a creature straddling air, water and land, likening her to a sea-bird and other littoral creatures: 'Hermione is a gull's name. Were you an albatross, Hermione?' (*HER* 154). She admires Hermione's 'octopus intelligence', echoing H.D.'s understanding of the self through the gelatinous, underwater jellyfish in *Notes on Thought and Vision*. Hermione falls in love with Fayne when she is playing the role of Pygmalion in an amateur production and is attracted by her sexual ambiguity. Hermione 'saw Pygmalion, saw a stretch of shore coast, saw a boy in a tunic who was Fayne Rabb, who was Pygmalion' (*HER* 138). Fayne's androgyny is emphasised here, her layering of different gender identities, and of different creaturely transformations by Hermione, mimicking Hermione's own struggles with being 'in-between'. The image of an androgynous Fayne collaged over the shore, a place where land and sea boundaries are erased into a single fluidity, draws Fayne as a figure safe in the liberating space of the shoreline, where societal dictates for gendered appearance and behaviour cannot reach her. As Hermione leaves for Europe at the end of the novel, both women inhabit liminal spaces where they are both present and absent in each other's lives:

We are and we aren't together... we go on and we don't go on together... there is fear and disaster but Fayne and Hermione don't go on together. I see a lane and the shore. The shore sweeps up and washes the steps of a shore wall. [...] There is a wash forward, wash backward, there is a wash of amber-specked weeds beneath the water. I don't know where this is. I can see you are and you aren't here. You are here and you aren't here. (*HER* 145)

The ebb and flow of H.D.'s syntax emphasises the mutability of the shore, and the border of land and shore is used to place the character of Hermione between objective definitions: 'you are and you aren't here'. To return to Laity's work on H.D.'s romantic gardens, there is a clear distinction between the kind of love offered Hermione by George Lowndes—lyric, arboreal, stifling—and that of Fayne—couched in the liminal possibilities and fluidities of the shore. While Laity rightly points out

that lesbian relationships are set against heterosexuality by means of specific landscape and garden imagery, there is also an attachment specifically to the shore as a place where H.D.'s queer identity finds release. Point Pleasant's sense of discovery and self-actualisation, the destruction of gendered roles through the clash of water and land in the 'forest primeval' and the family home, and the shore's mutable qualities outlined in the passage above suggest that the shore encapsulates something specific about H.D.'s sexual identity. There are clear connections to be made between H.D.'s reading of Sappho and the shore, as has been investigated by Eileen Gregory, but the physical qualities of the Atlantic shore itself seem to play a role. The eye to detail displayed in *Paint it Today's* descriptions of the Maine and Greek coastlines focus on the distorting effects of light and the harsh climate on bodily experience, and the mutable quality of the shore linked to Fayne Rabb construct a web of meaning around fluid, marginal identities finding freedom in fluid, marginal landscapes.

Claire Buck in *H.D. and Freud: Bisexuality and a Feminine Discourse*, argues that H.D.'s writing can be read as 'premised on the structural use she makes of bisexuality', where her work questions the nature of subjectivity through its emphasis on sexual and gender fluidity.³² H.D. sought to come to terms with her own bisexuality when she spent two periods in analysis with Freud in 1933 and 1934. In their 1981 essay 'Woman is Perfect: H.D.'s Debate With Freud', Friedman and DuPlessis quote from a letter H.D. wrote to Bryher on the subject of bisexuality in 1934:

I have gone terribly deep with Papa [Freud]. He says "you have two things to hide, one that you were a girl, the other that you were a boy." It appears that I am that all-but extinct phenomena [*sic*], the perfect bi. Well, this is terribly exciting, but for the moment, PLEASE do not speak of my own MSS., for it seems the conflict consists partly that what I write commits me—to one sex, or the other, I no longer HIDE.³³

As this quotation illustrates, H.D. is excited to recognise her own duality both in herself and in her writing. Her self is divided, moving between positions, something that links her queer self to the

³² Claire Buck, *H.D. and Freud: Bisexuality and a Feminine Discourse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), pp. 11, 12.

³³ Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Susan Stanford Friedman, "'Woman Is Perfect': H.D.'s Debate with Freud", *Feminist Studies*, 7(3) (1981), 417–430: 425.

physical mutability of the shore. It is also interesting in this passage that H.D. suggests that language, to her, feels insufficient at defining her sexuality, even treacherous: her manuscripts 'commit' her to one sex or another, forcing her to 'hide'. H.D.'s bisexuality is furthermore linked here to the sexological notion of bisexuality as a gender identity rather than a sexual one. In *Asphodel*, which continues the narrative of Hermione, Fayne Rabb and George Lowndes, Hermione similarly defines her sexual and romantic relationships with fluidity in gender, telling Fayne:

Men and women will say I love you Hermione, but will anyone ever say I love you Fayne as I say it? [...] I don't want to be (as they say crudely) a boy. Nor do I want to be a girl. (AS 53)

H.D.'s lifelong partner, Bryher, similarly defined her own gender as fluid. Bryher did not think of herself as having a 'lesbian problem', as had been termed by Havelock Ellis: she was a boy to herself, and cautioned H.D. never to refer to her as 'she'.³⁴ Beyond the shore's Sapphic associations, its physical manifestations of fluidity and being in-between objective definition seem to have a personal resonance to H.D. and her own construction of her sexual identity. Her letter above suggests that language let her down in stating specifically how it felt to move freely between binary sexualities and genders. The shore's link to Hermione's relationship with Fayne—the littoral creatures, the wash 'forward and backward' of the waves—links the free movement of the shore to Hermione's acceptance of her identity and rejection of the heteronormative world of Pennsylvania.

Returning to Friedman's work on H.D.'s expatriatism, Friedman identifies the emigration from America made by many modernist poets to be a kind of spatial metaphor, a 'geographic manifestation of a more fundamental exile from convention'.³⁵ For H.D., the shore becomes a specific site of escape, a freedom of mind and spirit: freedom from the pressure to conform, to perform the 'correct' gender, to do the conventional and respectable. Hermione uses Point Pleasant as a way out of her conventional home life and domestic future; the expatriatism of Midget and

³⁴ Guest, *Herself Defined*, p. 122.

³⁵ Friedman, 'Exile in the American Grain', p. 92.

Josepha meant separation from convention, realised on the coastlines of Etaples and Greece. By the time H.D. comes to write *Bid Me to Live* around a decade later, such anxieties were eased, but the shore image is still used as a central part of the protagonist's identity. H.D. instead reflects on the transformative nature of the shore, its cyclical shifting becoming part of a character's own changing identity, and its layers of history and memory.

III. Layers of History and Littoral Selfhood: *Bid Me To Live* [1939]

Outside of these novels that H.D. wrote but never tried to publish, H.D. also published two novels in the late 1920s: *Hedylus* (1928), a novel about a Greek boy, and *Palimpsest* (1926), a work of three stories about three different women in three different historical eras that, as Friedman points out, contribute different elements of the same one life that is very similar to H.D.'s own.³⁶ H.D. continued writing novels throughout the 1930s, producing the novellas *Kora and Ka* (1930) and *Nights* (1935), and attempting to get the novel *Pilate's Wife* published in 1934 before it was rejected by multiple publishers. She also began to take an interest in cinema, contributing to the intellectual film magazine *Close Up*, which was set up by Bryher and the Scottish writer Kenneth Macpherson, and establishing the small independent film group POOL or Pool Group with the pair.

The fourth chapter of the *Madrigal* cycle, examining H.D.'s life after her initial literary success, chronicled in *Asphodel*, is *Bid Me to Live*. Friedman attributes the finalisation of H.D.'s divorce from Richard Aldington in 1939 as an influence on the writing of *Bid Me to Live*, providing H.D. with a feeling of creative freedom.³⁷ The novel certainly follows the autobiographical pattern of the rest of the *Asphodel* cycle, suggesting perhaps that the final divorce prompted a reflection on the key events of the marital breakdown twenty years earlier. The novel follows the interior life of Julia

³⁶ Friedman and DuPlessis, "I had two loves separate": The Sexualities of H.D.'s *HER*', p. 205.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 206.

Ashton following the breakdown of her marriage and the trauma of stillbirth, both major events in H.D.'s life after the publication of *Sea Garden*. The events of the novel are similarly set in the aftermath of the First World War. As I have outlined in the previous chapter, H.D. spent this period on the southwest coast of England, staying with Aldington in Devon and, after their separation, Cornwall. *Bid Me to Live* forms a detailed interior portrait of its protagonist, Julia, but also closely observes the Cornish landscape H.D. knew and its layers of myth, geography and memory, 'grave, Celtic-Druidic Cornwall' as H.D. recalls from her letters at the time.³⁸

In *Bid Me to Live*, the shore becomes a site of restoration for a broken self, rather than a place for the initial forming of it. In this novel, Julia Ashton (another of H.D.'s autobiographical heroines) moves to a cottage on the Cornish coast following the breakdown of her marriage to Rafe, a representative of H.D.'s real-life husband Richard Aldington, and the trauma of the First World War. Like many of H.D.'s protagonists, Julia seeks to order her inner chaos through a passage to the shore; Julia arrives in Cornwall after the news of her husband's affair with Arabella Yorke, mirroring H.D.'s stay on the Isle of Scilly following the breakdown of her own marriage to Aldington, similarly triggered by Aldington's infidelity. Joseph Milica notes the importance of storm imagery in H.D.'s novels, writing on *Bid Me to Live* that whereas in other novels the 'storm' is psychological, *Bid Me to Live* is set within the storm itself.³⁹ Julia's turbulent inner state is not characterised by her daydreams or memories, as it is in *HERmione* or *Paint it Today*, but moves outward into the harsh landscape of the shore.

Hermione's yearning to be alone at Point Pleasant is fulfilled in Julia's retreat in Cornwall, where she spends winter in a cottage on the shore. The writing itself is still impressionistic but less frenetic than in earlier novels, something that Joseph Milica attributes to H.D. mimicking the patterns and

³⁸ Guest, *Herself Defined*, p. 94.

³⁹ Joseph Milica, 'Bid Me to Live: Within the Storm', *H.D. Woman and Poet*, ed. by Michael King (Orono, ME.: National Poetry Foundation, 1986), pp. 279–300, p. 282.

movements of a landscape: 'not exactly "flow", but [...] not stasis either – it might be compared to the irregular movement of ice floes breaking up a river, or falling leaves – there is a ghostly sense of movement and motionlessness in space'.⁴⁰ In a passage characteristic of this style, Julia is depicted as conjoined to the coast around her:

the startling expanse of shore-line that had stunned her into sudden reality was so clear, so vibrant that it had for a moment struck her as, not so much a dream, but part of the series she had called magic lantern slides, when her memory... had suddenly apprehended... the separate cypress-reed or ledge of island within her... So this.

The jagged line of cliff, the minute indentations, the blue water that moved far below, soundless from the height, were part of her (*BMTL* 145)

The ellipses that in *HERmione* so often led to repetition and confusion here give an impression of measured thought. Julia is nourished by her shorescape surroundings, 'fed actually by the mist that filled her body' (*BMTL* 147). The littoral provides the same strength and security promised to Hermione by Point Pleasant: 'the whole world was given her in consciousness' (*BMTL* 147); 'she hugged her old coat tight, hugging herself tight, rejoicing in herself, butterfly in cocoon' (*BMTL* 151). Tracing the physicality of the landscape leads to a kind of new consciousness, a 'sudden reality' for Julia. Here, she finds a littoral plant and in doing so discovers a new kind of 'vision':

[There] was another unfamiliar leaf, like a seed-pod, growing under water. It stuck parasitic white roots into the almost earthless cracks of the stones, a leaf of another age, growing under water. She drew out one of the stalks from the wall, then another.

She sat down on a rock. She unknotted her handkerchief and laid the stalk with the bulbous under-water leaves beside the leaves of the curled parsley-like plant. She re-knotted the handkerchief and placed it in her coat pocket. [...] She was seer, see-r. She was at home in this land of subtle psychic reverberations, as she was at home in a book. (*BMTL* 145–146)

This act of finding and preserving botanical specimens harks back to *Sea Garden* and its naturalist observation, as well as the influence of H.D.'s grandfather, who himself would have collected and identified plants in this way. Again, in the same manner as *Sea Garden*, this scientific exercise of

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 292.

finding and naming littoral specimens leads Julia (and H.D.) to an artistic goal: to become a 'seer' of the 'subtle psychic reverberations' of landscape and place.

At the start of the novel, when Julia still lives in London with her husband Rafe, she hears an echo of an unknown memory that leads her to the shore. Her husband speaks to her, but she 'would find herself listening, as one listening far, far off, to echo of an echo; echo in a shell', and this mysterious seashell echo would be 'the reason for her escape, emancipation, inspiration' (*BMTL* 15). This echoing shell image resounds through H.D.'s later body of work, as discussed in the following chapters on *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*. It becomes a signifier of alternative forms of consciousness, particularly connections to historical past and the subconscious. Julia's transformation on the shore is emphasised as a mental shift, in small moments where she refigures herself as an underwater being, echoing H.D.'s own movements between land and sea, conscious and unconscious in *Notes on Thought and Vision*. As Julia muses on the plants she has collected along the floor, she describes the beach as 'another world' where the plants were endowed with 'special mystery', which puts her state of mind 'in a temple. Under the sea. Like that sunken temple where it was reputed bells still sounded, not far beyond the cliff-head' (*BMTL* 149).

The 'escape, emancipation, inspiration' offered by this echoing shell is vitally important to Julia, who begins the novel in the domestic space of a flat in Hampstead (where H.D. herself lived), struggling with the challenges of being a woman, and a woman writer. A visit from her journalist friend, Mrs. Carter, who believes 'in women doing what they like', leads Julia to muse:

In 1913, the "modern woman" had no special place on the map, and to be "modern" in Mrs Carter's sense, after 1914, required some very specific handling. "I believe in intelligent women having experience" was then a very, very thin line to toe, a very, very frail wire to do a tight-rope act on. (*BMTL* 97)

Julia's diagnosis of the pressurised balancing act required of modernist women is mirrored in her own treatment of Mrs. Carter, described with only her married name and 'well-dressed' appearance

as well as her journalist career and feminist beliefs. The 'frail wire' of modern womanhood is described as a 'biological catch', a sexual identity compromised by societal expectation and judgement: 'you dried up and were an old maid, danger. You let her rip and had operations in Paris (poor Bella), danger' (*BMTL* 136). The 'one loophole', and escape, for Julia is to 'be an artist' and blur the lines between gender as 'man-woman', or 'woman-man' (*BMTL* 136). The notion of identifying the 'modern woman' with 'no special place on the map' is also pertinent to the shore, which is itself unmappable and intangible as a boundary of demarcated place. Whilst Julia's meaning is here metaphorical, it is telling that her description of an alienated 'modern woman' is linked to the shore in its description, and that Julia's self-actualisation as modern woman takes place at a littoral site.

The shore as an emancipatory space for female writers in such a restrictive social system is explored by Gemma Goodman, whose essay on Daphne Du Maurier's Cornish novels offers striking comparisons to *Bid Me to Live*, which is contemporary to such work.⁴¹ Goodman argues that the Cornish coast enables freedom from social expectations of femininity that are policed in London but can be evaded in Cornwall (178), citing Nina Auerbach's comments that, in the 1930s and 1940s, wearing trousers was acceptable in Cornwall when it would have been 'provocative' in London.⁴² The physical landscape of the Cornish shore encourages such rejection of social norm: 'the rural location, comprising expanses of space and a more sparse concentration of population, provides the opportunity to hide, or to be less noticed'.⁴³ Julia's pursuit of her artistic ambitions and feelings of liberation in Cornwall necessitates a similar form of hiding from the gendered expectations she leaves behind.

⁴¹ Gemma Goodman, 'Women at Sea: Locating and Escaping Gender on the Cornish Coast in Daphne Du Maurier's *The Loving Spirit* and *Frenchman's Creek*', *Sea Narratives: Cultural Responses to the Sea, 1600–Present*, ed. by Charlotte Mathieson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 171–194, p. 178.

⁴² Nina Auerbach, *Daphne du Maurier: Haunted Heiress* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 38. Cited by Goodman on p. 178.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 38.

Goodman cites Cornwall's peripheral location and its physical distance from the seat of London as a source of feeling of 'otherness', making Cornwall a space where social norms can be subverted. Cornwall's linguistic and cultural otherness reinforces a sense of distance from conventional society, and makes Cornwall's otherness unique.⁴⁴ Cornwall's otherness from England is a pervasive theme of modernity, as writes Rob Shields, who identifies 'the liminal status of the seaside vis-à-vis the more closely governed realms of the nation'.⁴⁵ In *Bid Me to Live*, Julia has a similar feeling about Cornwall: 'It was not England', she tells us (*BMTL* 145). As I have noted, this liminal quality to the shore is linked to its physical properties: as a margin between land and sea it is constantly shifting, moving with high and low tide, populated by flora and fauna that can weather such changes. For Shields, it also exists outside of normal social structures, 'unterritorialised' because it is 'unincorporated into the system of controlled, civilised spaces'.⁴⁶ As Point Pleasant stirred in Hermione a deep desire for escape from the restrictions of everyday life and the offer of an image of individual freedom, Cornwall's peripheral location in Britain becomes Julia's escape from the confines of the 'modern woman'.

However, as Goodman points out, the freedom in otherness that Cornwall offers Du Maurier's heroines is constantly tempered, the women's escape from their socially inscribed gender roles often made temporary or unstable. Goodman notes that despite Cornwall's feeling of otherness, it also has an encroaching Englishness, and being simultaneously Cornish and English destabilises the space into both escape and entrapment; the women are never truly able to leave gendered convention behind. In *Bid Me to Live*, Julia faces a similar dichotomy, encountering a sense of freedom in the Cornish landscape whilst also succumbing to gender roles. She sends the coastal

⁴⁴ Goodman, 'Women at Sea', p. 178.

⁴⁵ Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge 1991), p. 74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 84.

plants she finds to Rico for identification, for instance, and the act hints at the notion of male authority:

She drew out one of the stalks from the wall, then another. "This will just about fit into an envelope," she thought, thinking she would get Rico to name these for her. (*BMTL* 144)

The phrase 'to name these *for her*' seems strangely domineering, a marked contrast to simply identifying the plant. Even Julia's comment that Cornwall was 'not England' is parroted from something Rico has told her. For Julia, the 'tightrope' between artistic vocation and gendered duty is a complex thing to shrug off, and her independence limited by Cornwall's proximity to her life in London. Unlike Hermione's Point Pleasant and Midget's Greece, there is neither the imaginative dimension nor geographical distance to completely sever her from her gendered duties.

However, despite this back-and-forth between escape and confinement, Julia does achieve a kind of self-actualisation and an artistic vocation, but this necessitates a breakdown in the specificity of Cornwall's geography. Julia discovers the layers of multiple histories and imaginative possibilities the land offers her, bringing her away from Cornwall by deparicularising it and shaping her experience of the coast through the body. Like Hermione, Julia is most at home in the simplicity of the elemental, and particularly water and earth, but the coast is also a 'land of subtle psychic reverberations' and 'a book' (*BMTL* 146). For Julia, it is no longer the blank canvas onto which Hermione projected her emotional state, but appears to have a life of its own, of which she is only a tiny part. Julia is translating Greek passages when she notices parallels between her reading materials and her current surroundings:

The stones, the sun setting, rising, the ruin of the tin mine shaft, the trunk of solid ivy, all these would have words to describe them exactly... The Greek words went with the texture of the stones here. (*BMTL* 162)

In the same way that H.D.'s landscapes are often a layering of classical history and contemporary geography, the Cornish landscape is depicted as a palimpsest of history, industry, and memory

where Julia finds self-actualisation. A passage on Julia's response to shore-mist obscures the landscape until it feels almost alien:

Now she was glad the whole bright rock-landscape was clouded, with this cold, healing mist, as if someone had breathed a cold, healing breath; the very Holy Spirit had breathed on this. She was enclosed in crystal. (*BMTL* 145)

Julia's presence is fossilised in the 'crystal' iciness of bitter temperatures, which follow her into her shore-side cottage. The landscape here is mystical but also corporeal; the mist is the breath of 'someone', a mortal body, and the Holy Spirit, as well as being a natural element.

The landscape is rendered alien and new to Julia, who does not know the names of any of the birds and plants she sees, calling them 'un-named but racially remembered flora' (*BMTL* 149). She is however, able to recognise and name the various marks of human history and industry along the Cornish coast, such as a druid circle of stones, which remind Julia of Merlin, Tintagel and Lyonesse, as well as Stonehenge, a Phoenician donkey-trail and an abandoned tin mine. There are also Egyptian connections, such as a path that winds in the shape of an Ancient Egyptian hieroglyph (*BMTL* 146), and the sparrows that are migrating towards modern Egypt (*BMTL* 165). Whereas Hermione's beach and Midget's coast are concerned only with either the present or the recent past, Julia's acts as a portal to bygone civilisations, and serves as a reminder of how humans (and animals) have used the landscape as a resource, a site of worship and an artistic inspiration.

All features of the surrounding landscape, Julia realises, are 'vast in their implications, symbolic like a temple wall-painting' yet 'sketched as minutely as a pattern on a leaf' (*BMTL* 147). These observations de-particularise Cornwall and project Julia's surroundings across geography, culture and history, building the landscape into the system of 'cryptograms' H.D. first experimented with in *Sea Garden*. The quest for meaning in the visual symbols of our world and its narratives is something H.D. returns to in her later work, particularly *Trilogy* and *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, where H.D.

questions our use of nature images in a collective quest for meaning. Julia recognises the landscape as something shaped, appreciated, and exploited by humans:

The path she had just left, that twisted with apparent meaningless curves, was a hieroglyph. It spelt something. Laid flat, unrolled, it would be a huge screen in a temple in Egypt. The path and the line of the cliff would be hieratic writing. She felt that every casual stone was laid here, there, for a reason. Phoenicians, Rico had written, made this track, and in making this track, they had trod into the soil more than the countless imprints of ancient sandals or thonged leather shoes. (*BMTL* 146–147)

The erosion of rock and soil from human feet is layered with the effects of human building and human civilisation, and this realisation of the human history of the shore brings Julia together with her environment so 'she seemed to be fed actually by the mist that filled her body' (*BMTL* 147).

Cornwall, whilst it provides Julia with the quiet and stimulation that she craves, is not simple escape, a running away. For all of H.D.'s heroines, retreat has been an escape from the human, a movement toward a non-human trance, but Julia's Cornwall is alive with the presence of centuries of human life. There is power emanating from its rugged beauty, but also from the myths built into it. Julia describes the shore as an 'inhuman element, a divine element. It did not play vile tricks, it did not shatter windows, it did not break nerves. Rather, it sustained the being of man' (*BMTL* 159). The harsh climate of the shore that characterises so much of H.D.'s poetry is proven to be an inextricable, but overlooked, part of the human world.

Hermione, Midget and Julia Ashton 'are capable of completing themselves by a psychic and spiritual identification with the elemental world' in the same way that H.D. turned towards the natural world for fulfilment in her writing.⁴⁷ H.D.'s novels explore the ways humans live out their environments; they are formed by them, project their hopes, fears and emotional states onto them and ultimately are resolved by the images and meaning they can derive from them. H.D. posits the littoral

⁴⁷ Dembo, 'H.D. *Imagiste* and Her Octopus Intelligence', p. 225.

landscape as a driving force in the formation of the self: specifically her self, and landscapes she had visited. The coast is a site where individual and collective re-awakenings are drawn from the connectivity and fluidity between body, mind and surroundings. In a passage of *HERmione* where Hermione discusses her burgeoning literary vocation, Hermione asserts her portrayal of landscape as a layering of mythopoesis with science:

A lady will be set back in the sky. It will be no longer Arcturus and Vega but stray star-spume, star sprinkling from a wild river, it will be myth; mythopoetic mind (mine) will disprove science and biological-mathematical definition (*HER 76*)

Science invoked in this passage in order to be disproven as a primary way of relating to the physical environment; the scientific names of stars are replaced with incidental myth than nonetheless evokes the natural object. Through this assertion of myth and of individual responses to the environment, H.D. (speaking as Hermione) is able to assert her creative self most fully, identifying her own mythopoetic mind as the driving force of this new way of seeing.

The novels furthermore hint at an understanding of the world as a symbiotic relationship between human and nature, with culture playing an increasingly important role in the ecology between humans and their natural environment. This idea becomes central to H.D.'s Second World War work, discussed in the following chapter, where she observes the destruction released on the earth by war, and finds hope for the regeneration of human civilisation in the natural cycles of the tidal shore.

CHAPTER FOUR: 'A SPELL IN EVERY SEASHELL': TRILOGY'S ECOLOGICAL VISIONS (1942–46)

After writing *Bid Me to Live* in 1939, H.D. wrote a number of texts while living through the Second World War in London. She spent the whole of the war in London in an apartment on Lowndes Square, which she shared with Bryher. Her daughter, Perdita, lived across the street. All able-bodied Londoners, male or female, were put to work during the war, and British Intelligence employed both Bryher and Perdita in some capacity because of their language facility.¹ H.D., however, was in her early fifties by the start of the war, and was categorised as too old to work for the war effort. H.D. turned towards her writing as a way of contributing in recording civilian life and the enduring possibilities of post-war renewal.

H.D.'s *Trilogy* comprises three poems originally published as a series of single volumes, 'The Walls Do Not Fall' (1944), 'Tribute to the Angels' (1945) and 'The Flowering of the Rod' (1946), each presenting part of a cycle towards a renewed, post-war earth. This cycle of regeneration works not only to rebuild humanity after the destruction of the Second World War, but interrogates systems of power and dominion that lead to war, envisioning a peaceful and egalitarian future. 'The Walls Do Not Fall', the first poem of H.D.'s *Trilogy* sequence, opens the collection with a dedication:

for Karnak 1923
*from London 1942 (WDNF [1])*²

The opening dedication of *Trilogy*, to Karnak in 1923 and London 1942, links present and past and sets up *Trilogy's* overlapping of historical periods, cultures and systems of meaning. The final date positions the poem and poet in the midst of war experience, specifically as civilian in Blitz-time London. As the first date suggests, this memoir of war not only concerns itself with immediate wartime experience, but examines human history and cycles of civilisation in order to interrogate

¹ Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and her World*, (London: Collins, 1984), p. 256.

² All references to *Trilogy* give the poem title and numbered section of the poem in parentheses.

the process of war and the function of the poet in times of such crisis. The date recalls a visit to the remains of the city of Thebes that H.D. made with her mother and her partner Bryher (to whom *Trilogy* is also dedicated), and suggests to the reader a physical comparison between the ancient ruins and bombed-out buildings of the Blitz, as well as paralleling the rise and fall of ancient civilisations with the destruction of H.D.'s contemporary culture and society in war. As Sarah Graham writes, 'the epigraph neatly conveys that her poetry has both personal and global concerns'.³ *Trilogy* takes its war-time subject as a basis to explore, question and renew tropes of human culture, using the destruction of war as an opportunity to create new myths and values. Judaeo-Christian imagery is mixed with Ancient Egyptian, Greek and other Pagan belief systems as H.D. argues for the importance of poetry in wartime, and advocates a renewed post-war world in which old values are shed in favour of a female spiritual leader, whose arrival begets a restarting of historical time and human civilisation.

Annette Kreis-Schinck's comment that 'the poem shuns easy access' is certainly true.⁴ The poem's non-linear format structures itself around the streams of consciousness of the poetic voice as it repeats imagery of nature, visions of various Gods and metaphors of alchemical processes to offer immortality through writing, and charts the journey of Kaspar the Mage to bring Myrrh to the arrival of a female messiah through small, every-day moments of his life. The poem moves between an urge to communicate truthfully a civilian experience of war that is, as Claire Buck suggests, 'scrupulously concerned with accuracy and fidelity to the experience', and a will to obscure objective meaning through the poem's detached voice and conglomeration of opposing religions, cultures and

³ Sarah Graham, "'We have a secret. We are alive": H.D.'s *Trilogy* as a Response to War', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 44(2) (2002), 161–210: 210.

⁴ Annette Kreis-Schinck, *We are Voyagers, Discoverers: H.D.'s Trilogy and Modern Religious Verse* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1990), p. 71.

symbols.⁵ This enigmatic and palimpsestic style allows space for the construction of new myths and ways of using language.

The coming of the 'new Eve' at the end of 'The Flowering of the Rod', the final poem of *Trilogy*, is the climax of H.D.'s efforts to form female-voiced myth in a new world where gender hierarchies are abolished and nature flourishes beneath the 'flowering' of the rod, symbolic of both an alternative to the rood of Christ's crucifixion, and of the Caduceus of Hermes, inventor of 'script, letters, palette' (*WDNF* [10]). Susan Acheson agrees that *Trilogy* 'explores the idea of the female as culturally undefined, as other, ambivalent, detached'; Michael Hardin similarly proposes that the poem is 'an extensive look into the spaces and margins to which the female has been relegated in a masculine language, tradition and mythology'.⁶ Susan Edmunds confirms that, in sum, 'current readings of *Trilogy* [...] testify to H.D.'s feminism and pacifism, her gendered aversion to the violence of war'.⁷ Recent work in *Trilogy* scholarship acknowledges the poem's investment in the destruction of a physical world, namely Elizabeth Anderson's study into the poem's material mysticism, but none examine specifically the patterns of natural imagery in the poem.⁸ Susan Gubar's influential essay 'The Echoing Shell' illustrates *Trilogy's* revisionist concerns succinctly:

inheriting uncomfortable male-defined images of women and history, H.D. responds with palimpsestic or encoded revision of male myths through recurrent references to secret languages, codes, dialects, hieroglyphs, foreign idioms, fossilised traces, mysterious signs, and indecipherable signets. H.D. dares to "re-invoke, re-create" what has been "scattered in the shards / men tread upon".⁹

Trilogy is deeply invested in the revision of male-centred myths and cultural traditions; this reading reads the deconstruction of patriarchy as a challenge to accepted power structures that also takes

⁵ Claire Buck, *H.D. and Freud: Bisexuality and a Feminine Discourse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 139.

⁶ Michael Hardin, 'H.D.'s *Trilogy*: Speaking Through the Margins', *Sagetrieb*, 15(1–2) (1996), 151–60: 159.

⁷ Susan Edmunds, *Out of Line: History, Psychoanalysis & Montage in H.D.'s Long Poems* (Palo Alto, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 23.

⁸ Elizabeth Anderson, 'Burnt and Blossoming: Material Mysticism in *Trilogy* and Four Quartets', *Christianity and Literature*, 62(1) (2012), 121–142: 123.

⁹ Susan Gubar, 'The Echoing Spell of H. D.'s *'Trilogy'*', *Contemporary Literature*, 19(2) (1978), 196–218: 210. Gubar's H.D. quotation is from *TA* [1].

into account human and non-human hierarchies. My reading of *Trilogy* here builds on the feminist-revisionist reading of Gubar to understand the poem through the lens of ecofeminism. Feminism and ecology both seek an understanding of the world that destabilises accepted power structures; H.D.'s gynocentric vision of a post-war earth is conceived in littoral imagery, a new Eve bringing a new Eden.

While H.D. overhauls the patriarchal patterns and narratives of Western tradition, she also recognises that such narratives around dominion and control have contributed to environmental degradation, and that the dismantling of such power structures forces us into new understandings of the natural world. This chapter examines the littoral in *Trilogy* to demonstrate how H.D.'s vision of post-war healing and a renewed world is ultimately envisioned as the end of a cycle of nature, of which the tide is a central image, and that her gynocentric new world vision is predicated on a shift in our relationship to the environment.

Patterns of natural imagery across *Trilogy* lead to the key importance of the shore. The new Eve constructs, by extension, a new Eden, which is built around her in a way that makes her inextricable from her natural environment. The sea-shore is the birthplace of this female messiah and the source of spiritual inspiration for the Mage Kaspar on his quest to the new world: he hears the 'echo of an echo in a shell' (*FR* [28], [33], [35]) from the 'maid-of-the-sea', 'mermaid' female prophet (*FR* [22]). If *Trilogy* transmits, as Adalaide Morris writes, '[t]he ultimate, audacious hope [...] a formula for regeneration', this hope is found at the mutable site of the shore.¹⁰

This chapter is structured into three sections that loosely trace the chronology of the poem. I argue that H.D.'s shore and sea imagery establishes a poetic interest in cyclical tides, divine nature and

¹⁰Adalaide Morris, *How to Live/What to Do: H.D.'s Cultural Poetics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2003), p. 115.

genderless life-forms that informs the entire poem, stretches over land habitats and ultimately provides the framework for H.D.'s vision of a new, post-war, healed humankind. This chapter first gives a close reading of sections 5–8 of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', exploring H.D.'s use of littoral animal consciousness and conflation between species. Such imagery interrogates the use of animals in cultural iconography, particularly in religious and ritualistic contexts, and how such symbolisms impact our understanding of and empathy for such animals. The shore here becomes a site where the boundaries between human and non-human are dissolved. The second section of this chapter looks in-depth at the figure of Eve and the shore as her sacred domain, outlining ecofeminism as a significant way to read the feminist revisionism of *Trilogy*. The third and final part of this chapter looks at the migratory flock of geese and Kaspar's ecstatic littoral visions in 'The Flowering of the Rod'. This concluding part of *Trilogy* follows patterns of animal transcendence from the animal conflations of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', ultimately linking Kaspar and Eve to the shore and the perspective of the shore's animal lifeforms. The image of the geese as a flock flying over various littoral sites uses the littoral to portray the geese as fluid, multitudinous identities, signalling a transcendental evolution of humankind into a 'deep ecological' understanding of the natural world. The geese are themselves littoral creatures, occupying habitats of both land and water, but H.D. traces the specific migratory patterns of snow geese to the east coast of the United States, foregrounding the littoral in both their ecological and metaphorical narratives.

This chapter will thus explore the ecological sensibility of *Trilogy* by picking out moments in the text where H.D. examines and specifically blurs the separation between human and non-human. Whilst this often happens in the text through the exploration of land-dwelling creatures and larger concerns about evolution and the destruction of land-based habitats, it provides a useful framework for considering the role of the littoral elsewhere in the poem, where the shellfish becomes a central symbol of the poet, and the shore a site of regeneration through its physical properties and layers of geological history. Cynthia Hogue reads another of H.D.'s Second World War texts, *The Sword Went*

Out to Sea, as a 'profoundly eco-poetic vision of a healed and restored earth'.¹¹ Of the texts examined in this thesis, *Trilogy* allows for the most straightforward ecocritical reading: a poem dealing directly with the decline of the physical world in war, apocalyptic in outlook and looking for ways to heal.

I. A Spell in Every Seashell : *Trilogy's* Littoral Animal Conflations

'The Walls Do Not Fall', the first poem of the sequence, opens with an image of a destroyed world, overlapping the war-torn, industrial landscape of Blitz London with the opening of an Ancient Egyptian tomb:

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

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

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

there, as here, ruin opens
the tomb, the temple; enter,
there as here, there are no doors:

the shrine lies open to the sky,
the rain falls, here, there
sand drifts; eternity endures:

ruin everywhere, yet as the fallen roof
leaves the sealed room
open to the air,

so, through our desolation,

¹¹ Cynthia Hogue, '(Re)Storing Happiness: Toward an Eco-poetic Reading of H.D.'s *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (*Synthesis of a Dream*), by Delia Alton', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 18(4) (2011), 840–860: 841.

thoughts stir, inspiration stalks us
through gloom

[...]

we wonder
what saved us? what for? (WDNF [1])

The opening tercet immediately invokes the notion of an urban place destroyed and exploited by war: rails are taken in order to make guns, removing the boundary of the 'old town square'. The reader becomes part of a spatial community with the poet, the square becoming both 'yours and mine', and the disappearance of the rails creates a sense of open, unmarked space in which the poet writes and speaks. The image of a modern, war-time city is replaced with the stone chamber of an Egyptian tomb, which is similarly characterised by a lack of borders: no doors, and a fallen roof, leaving the shrine open to the sky, wind and rain. The 'ruin everywhere' of this discovered ancient site, foreshadowed in the opening 'Karnak 1923' inscription, links the wreckage of a Blitz-torn London to the time-eroded and hidden ruin of an ancient civilisation, placing modern London on the precipice of historical change. Immediately in this image of the opened tomb, the poem aligns itself with the notion of unearthing and re-discovering, of 'sealed rooms' being opened to the elements. There is an analogy here between the natural erosion of the ruin, exposed to the wind, rain and drifting sand, and the man-made destruction of the town square, placing long historical process in a direct encounter with immediate historical process, and centring a conflict between man-made and natural kinds of destruction and decay.

The rest of *Trilogy* is written in couplets, suggesting that this opening section, written in a three-line structure, forms something separate to the rest of the poem, such as a prologue or framing device. The searching final lines, 'what saved us? / what for?' elucidate a poem searching for meaning in acts of war-time destruction. If this section establishes the main concerns of the poem, there is a striking emphasis on the natural world as both a physical and cultural entity: the separation between

the ruins and the surrounding desert is dissolved as the walls and roof are overcome by rain, wind and sand, and the tomb itself is patterned with animal hieroglyphs, the 'bee, chick, and hare'. The animal images are not mere decoration; they 'prophesy / from the stone papyrus', mimicking H.D.'s own act of poetic writing as a way to conjure the post-war future.

The removal of the physical fence elicits a dissolution of other boundaries, too, as H.D. begins a text that spans human consciousness, reaching into a number of animal incarnations. These non-human consciousnesses and images explore both the ecological life of the creatures and their place in cultural narratives and mythology. As the tomb of this opening section becomes a shrine to both nature and culture, revealing lost civilisations and an image of endless seasons as 'the shrine lies open to the sky, / the rain falls, there, there / sand drifts; eternity endures', H.D. introduces a poem that considers, through the arrival of Eve and a healed earth, the ways in which culture and nature overlap.

In many instances the poem defends the role of the poet in the expression and remembrance of war experience, and links the act of poetry-writing to understanding the world at its most basic biological level. Ingrained in the natural imagery of *Trilogy* is an understanding that an engagement with the natural world from the top of the food-chain downwards is a vital part of human consciousness, and therefore of artistic endeavour. 'In the beginning, / was the Word' (*WDNF* [10]), H.D. writes in the tenth poem of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', an allusion to the Gospel according to St. John that links artistic creation to natural creation and suggests a return to the beginning of creation through poetry in order to alter the course of mankind.¹² In the third section of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', the speaker establishes the purpose of the poem in recovering 'the Sceptre, / the rod of power', the 'Caduceus' of Hermes, which begins the process of regeneration by rebirth by bringing 'life to the living' (*WDNF* [3]).

¹² Bible (St John 1:1).

It is significant how rapidly the littoral appears in *Trilogy* as part of this exploration into a dissolved boundary between the human and non-human, a search for meaning across physical and cultural iterations of nature. The littoral first appears in *Trilogy* in the fourth poem of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', where the poet is transformed into a mollusc. The poet recognises the beauty and value in the minutiae of the natural world, and in doing so blurs the lines between human and non-human forms of consciousness. The poem, in its entirety, is as follows:

There is a spell, for instance,
in every sea-shell:

continuous, the sea thrust
is powerless against the coral,

bone, stone, marble
hewn from within by that craftsman,

the shellfish:
oyster, clam, mollusc

is master-mason planning
the stone marvel:

yet that flabby, amorphous hermit
within, like the planet

senses the finite,
it limits its orbit

of being, its house,
temple, fane, shrine:

it unlocks the portals
at stated intervals:

prompted by hunger,
it opens to the tide-flow:

but infinity? no,
of nothing—too—much:

I sense my own limit,
my shell-jaws snap shut

at invasion of the limitless,
ocean-weight; infinite water

can not crack me, egg in egg-shell;
closed in, complete, immortal

full-circle, I know the pull
of the tide, the lull

as well as the moon;
the octopus-darkness

is powerless against
her cold immortality;

so I in my own way know
that the whale

can not digest me:
be firm in your own small, static, limited

orbit and the shark-jaws
of outer-circumstance

will spit you forth:
be indigestible, hard, ungiving.

so that, living within,
you beget, self-out-of-self,

selfless,
that pearl of great price. (WDNF [4])

The runes and hieroglyphs of the previous sections become the 'spell' of the shell mollusc opening this fourth section of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', but perhaps surprisingly this 'spell' takes the reader into the mind and perspective of a mollusc under the sea. A number of conflated terms then overlap human civilisation with the mollusc, and also transform the mollusc from one specific littoral species to another, a play on the idea of a magic metamorphic 'spell' that also maps a littoral ecological web.

It is worth noting exactly how many different creatures feature in this part of the poem: H.D. lists oysters, clams, shellfish, octopus, sharks and whales to illustrate the shellfish in a larger, vivid ecological system. The poem does, however, emphasise the mollusc's resilience and resistance to being predated and consumed by others, the mollusc becoming 'immortal' and 'indigestible' through closing its shell. The ecology of this littoral scene is conceived, therefore, as a kind of web rather than hierarchical chain, species becoming incorporated into one another rather than destroyed. In a mollusc's natural food chain, they are both predator and prey, eaten by whales, sharks and octopus but filter-feeding and eventually ingesting the bodies of such predators. In *Trilogy*, the mollusc's life within a web takes into account the fluid balance of such cycles.

References to temples, fanes and shrines directly recall the Egyptian tomb of *Trilogy's* opening, but these structures are also conflated with structures of coral 'built' by the mollusc. The building of the coral by the mollusc is not literal, but the conflation of the mollusc 'builder' and the coral's reef-building places the mollusc immediately within an ecological web, foregrounding the mollusc's incorporation and transformation into various species within the same habitat. The description of building materials 'bone, stone, marble' similarly traces meaningful parallels between natural and man-made building materials and buildings, placing the coral structure and a marble temple in equal importance and poetic value. The connection of the ruins of war-time London and Ancient Egypt with the underwater constructions of coral is in part anthropomorphic, offering a sense of comfort to the speaker through their identification with the protect shellfish, but also invites reflection on the shellfish's creation being so perfectly adapted to its surroundings: the sea thrust is 'powerless' against it, and it houses multiple species of mollusc. It is important to consider anthropomorphism in performing an environmental reading of H.D.'s identification with the shellfish and, later in the poem, worms and geese. Anthropomorphism is a fraught subject in ecopoetics and ecocriticism, being seen as another mode of domination of the natural world, demanding that the non-human be understood in reductive human terms and without agency. Anthropomorphism also serves to

highlight the separation between human and animal; as Lawrence Buell writes, 'One can speak as an environmentalist, [...] but self-evidently no human can speak as the environment, as nature, as a nonhuman animal'.¹³ The philosopher Thomas Nagel's famous question 'What is it like to be a bat?' remains a genuine question and a looming shadow over ecopoetics and its animal forms.¹⁴

H.D.'s animal transformations in *Trilogy* therefore present a challenge to any ecocritical reading of the poem: are these animals given agency within the poem, or are they mere projections of human feeling? As I will argue in this chapter, H.D.'s animal imagery is used in part to deconstruct the human projection of culture onto nature, specifically of cultural symbolisms onto particular animal species, but H.D.'s poem also works towards recognition of the fluidity of human and non-human consciousness with ecological specificity. One of the final poems in 'The Flowering of the Rod' reads:

No poetic fantasy
but a biological reality,

a fact: I am an entity
like bird, insect, plant

or sea-plant cell;
I live, I am alive. (FR [9])

This section of *Trilogy* situates H.D.'s human-animal transformations into the context of understanding the human within an ecological web, illustrating Sandra Mitchell's formulation that 'similarity between humans and nonhuman animals is just what we should expect on the basis of an evolutionary account of the origin and diversification of life on the planet'.¹⁵ As Buell goes on to write, in recognition of the limitations of human expression in writing about the non-human: 'At most we can attempt to speak from the standpoint of understanding humans to be part of what

¹³ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford, Blackwell: 2005), p. 7.

¹⁴ Thomas Nagel, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', *The Philosophical Review* 83(4) (1974), pp. 435–450.

¹⁵ Sandra D. Mitchell, 'Anthropomorphism and Cross-Species Modeling', *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 100–117, p. 102.

Aldo Leopold called “the biotic community” – attempt, that is, to speak in cognizance of human being as ecologically or environmentally embedded’.¹⁶

George Levine’s concept of ‘zoomorphism’ may be more apt to describe what H.D. is doing in *Trilogy*. He argues for the recognition of ‘zoomorphism’ in human writing about the nonhuman: one animal mind attempting to understand another.¹⁷ In *Trilogy*, H.D. attempts to dissolve the boundaries between the human and nonhuman completely, recognising the human as a ‘biological entity’ on the same plane as ‘bird, insect, plant / or sea-plant cell’. H.D. purpose is not to understand the human by projecting human qualities onto animal forms, as would be anthropomorphic, but to understand the similarities between the human and non-human in order to reach an ultimate vision of symbiosis, and a recognition of the human-as-animal.

It is the shellfish’s ability to survive in hostile habitats that so draws the poet; the mollusc’s natural instincts give an uncanny understanding of the surrounding environment, a fluidity with minute changes in the surroundings: ‘I know the pull / of the tide, the lull // as well as the moon’. The mollusc is ruled by natural instinct, ‘prompted by hunger’ to open according to the patterns of the ‘tide-flow’. The half-rhyme of ‘pull’ and ‘lull’ in these lines resonates and echoes the sounds of tidal movement; H.D.’s usually sparse mode of writing focuses in on a moment of physical sensory perception to vividly evoke the mind of the mollusc and its experience of the world.

H.D.’s fascination with the mollusc’s self-knowledge and self-protection, which becomes a personal symbol for the poet later in the section, is grounded in ecological fact. Helen Scales, in her popular

¹⁶ Buell, p. 8.

¹⁷ George Levine, *Darwin Loves You: Natural Selection and the Re-Enchantment of the World* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 197.

study of shellfish life *Spirals in Time: the Secret Life and Curious Afterlife of Seashells*, compares the strength of bivalve shells favourably against their gastropod relatives:

As for the hard calcium carbonate shells secreted by the mantle, these are first and foremost a means of protection and a safe place to hide: a portable home. Bivalves are the best protected of all the molluscs; with their two halves closed shut, they are extremely difficult to get into.¹⁸

H.D. keenly identifies her mollusc and symbol of self-preservation as a bivalve, listing oysters and clams as its species and grounding her personal symbolism in ecological reality. H.D.'s mythology of the mollusc image is engaged directly with its biological life, blurring the lines between mythological and scientific observation.

Similarly, the coral-building image is reminiscent of the building of coral polyps in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, where the naturally multitudinous creatures are representative of a collective consciousness as here they symbolise the cities and built habitations of human civilisation. In the same essay, the transparency of the physical body of the jellyfish blends the creature into its surroundings, and H.D. reflects on the transformation of one animal to an entire ocean. Coral polyps furthermore are able to build land that rises out of the sea, often becoming Coral Islands, some of which are settled and inhabited by humans.¹⁹ It is an apt metaphor for human civilisation-building and the life of the individual in collective society that acknowledges the real ways in which the human and non-human worlds overlap and interrelate.

The poem's entry into the shellfish's life enacts a consciousness of prey and survival; the mollusc escapes the danger of the continuous 'sea thrust' and its own vulnerability as a 'flabby, amorphous hermit', sensing 'its limit' and shutting itself in its shell, where it cannot be eaten by whales or sharks

¹⁸ Helen Scales, *Spirals in Time: The Secret Life and Curious Afterlife of Seashells* (London: Bloomsbury Sigma, 2015) p. 43.

¹⁹ There are a number of coral islands with human populations, such as, St. Martin's Island in the Bay of Bengal, Banaba Island in the Micronesian Republic of Kiribati, the Maldives and a number of atolls in India's Lakshadweep islands.

and is shut off from the surrounding water. There are clear connections to H.D.'s war-time experiences here: the sense of vulnerability and need for protection draw stark parallels with civilian experience of air raids and the need to hide underground. As the shellfish must live always on the lookout for predators, the civilian H.D. teeters constantly on the edge of survival. H.D. writes often of the experience of war as reverting her mental state to a 'primitive' one in *The Gift*, a memoir of her childhood and war experience also written during the Second World War:

I am paralysed, frozen rather, like the rabbit in the woods when it senses the leaves moving with that special uncanny rustling [...] My body is "frozen"; nerves, tendons, and flesh are curiously endowed, they regain the primitive instincts of the forest animal. (*TG* 110)

Fear of death in a war-time context here is conceived as a return to primeval forms, the onset of a 'fight or flight' instinct that aligns war and civilian to predator and prey. H.D. uses the hierarchy of the food chain to illustrate a feeling of powerlessness, but does not portray her similarity to the rabbit as a form of negative regression. Her body becomes 'curiously endowed' in its closeness to death, a new sense of instinct 'regained' as something previously lost. Humankind beginning again from the point of pre-history, is a subtle metamorphosis present throughout *Trilogy*, as the poem brings humans back to the sea, conflates them with underwater creatures, and visits the world 'before Eve' (*FR* [32]). This too is presented as a positive movement 'backwards', where humankind regains a previously lost connection to the earth and systems of spirituality rooted in ecology. In 'The Walls Do Not Fall', the speaker's promise that 'there is a spell in every sea-shell' reveals the mollusc to be much more than mere prey; the mollusc understands itself as its own being, senses its 'own limit' as 'the planet /sense[s] the finite'. There is a slippage between human and animal in these passages that illuminates the civilian experience of war while challenging conventional boundaries between human and animal experience.

Albert Gelpi sees the shellfish as representative of the psyche, and, continuing the poem's pattern of occult 'spell' imagery, writes that the shell becomes an 'alchemical crucible' so that 'the hermetic crucible splits in birth [...] to deliver the pearl, the precious oils, the bird, the butterfly—all images of

the parthenogenetic self'.²⁰ To get the pearl, the shellfish must protect itself through self-knowledge: the shellfish recognises itself as a fully-formed part of the universe, sensing its physical form 'like the planet / senses the finite' before snapping shut so as to become 'closed in, complete, immortal / full-circle'. The result of this is not just survival, but transcendental self-knowledge, the 'pearl of great price' of becoming the 'self-out-of-self'.

By protecting the self, the ultimate reward is a removal of the self, a transcendence into a kind of self-less state. The building coral polyps recall the language of the collective over-mind in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, as does the transcendent underwater state achieved by the shellfish parallel the jellyfish experience of a transparent sense of self that is able to transcend the physical and the singular. This transcendent state, that H.D. aligned crucially with her creative mind, accesses a kind of communal consciousness, similar to *Trilogy's* shellfish that moves through a collective of various mollusc species. H.D.'s entry into the consciousness of the mollusc dissolves the trappings of the human 'self', which allows for a transcendental rebirth. The protection of the transcendent inner self is paramount to post-war survival, H.D. tells us. The notion of the mollusc's survival as safely contained in its shell links to the title of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', where the walls of buildings and cities vulnerable to the destruction of war become synonymous with the shell, and civilians with the vulnerable hermit within. The walls of the title being unaffected by such destruction allows for the survival of H.D. herself, whilst her artistic self is respectively protected by the imaginary walls conjured in her poem. The 'spell' of this shell is the offer of new beginnings that can protect H.D. and promise healing. At this point in the poem, this form of selfhood appears as an egocentric way of living, in which the mollusc is closed off and its world closed in on itself, but the poem later resolves this self-centredness in images of animal conflation and communal living. The mollusc's closed-off

²⁰ Albert Gelpi, 'Re-membering the Mother: A Reading of H.D.'s *Trilogy*', *H.D.: Woman and Poet*, ed. by Michael King (Orono, ME.: National Poetry Foundation, 1986), pp. 173–90, p. 176.

individualism leads to a kind of immanent ecological consciousness, where the survival of H.D.'s self in war begets understanding and empathy between human and non-human.

Elsewhere in H.D.'s writing, the shell of the shellfish becomes an ever-widening form of consciousness and being, often imaging the shell as a deposit of a new cycle in time, tracing the patterns of historical periods. In her novel *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, also written during the Second World War, H.D. conceives of reality and time as the spiral shell of a gastropod shellfish:

They say we make the pattern or spiral of our life, as a shellfish does. We go round and round. Yes, I do think I was getting somewhere, all those years, but it may have been rather a large shell for the fish inside it. I may have put too much of myself into making a shell that would permit me to spiral ahead, without coming back to the exact point I started from, when the door shut. Life advances in a spiral, we all know. (SWS 40–41)

While this is written by a character of the novel, Delia Alton, we see H.D.'s preoccupation with the spiral shell image. Moreover, the spiral shell as an image of history appears repeatedly over H.D.'s late writing: it appears in this novel, in *Trilogy*, and is a central image of her 1961 verse novel *Helen in Egypt*, as discussed in the next chapter of this thesis. Like the shell, the spiral circles outwardly, layering new paths over itself and creating a pattern of endless cycles. The structure of *The Sword Went Out to Sea* reflects this conception of layered time, portraying a cast of characters over a number of historical periods (Ancient Greece, Elizabethan England and the twentieth century) whose souls remain the same through each life-cycle. In the third poem of *Trilogy's* sequence, 'The Flowering of the Rod', the spiral of the gastropod shell appears to conceive a forwards/backwards time movement that propels humankind into the future while returning them to a harmonious relationship with the earth. A 'spiral upon spiral of the shell' becomes a 'memory that yet connects us / with the drowned cities of pre-history', the 'drowned cities' forming a clear connection to the coral structures of the mollusc poem (FR [33]).

Scales writes that the logarithmic spiral shell of the Nautilus is a pattern that recurs throughout nature, resounding in different places as H.D.'s widening spiral shell reaches across time:

These expanding spirals pop up all over the natural world; you can spot them in patterns of seeds in a sunflower, in spiralling galaxies, in the bands of rain and thunderstorms that swirl around the eye of a tropical cyclone, and in the path taken by a doomed moth as it flies mesmerised towards a candle.²¹

This recurring pattern of the gastropod shell becomes a symbol for *Trilogy's* spiritual narrative; Kaspar following the 'echo of a shell' in order to locate the second coming, where Eve becomes the new spiritual figure-head of a renewed, post-war world. Kaspar, the Mage, catches 'the whole secret of the mystery' in 'a grain, a flaw, or a speck of light' which open like flowers and 'go on opening [...] to infinity' (*FR* [30]).

Through the spiral shell, individual memory and history are not so much transcended as densely layered. Adalaide Morris notes that the complex weaving of past and present aligns secular and sacred dates, foregrounding the presence of linear history. She cites the composition dates included at the end of 'Tribute to the Angels' and 'The Flowering of the Rod' (May 17–31, 1944, and December, 18–31, 1944, respectively), the time and place included in the dedication of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', and the climax of the final poem, the Feast of the Epiphany, or 6th January.²² *Trilogy's* timeline, therefore, becomes embedded in this circular, spiralling pattern of the shell, where time is overlapped over itself rather than moving cleanly from one linear moment to the next. The final dates in particular emphasise process, an immanent passage from an end date to a new beginning. H.D.'s conception of time centres around repeated liminal thresholds: the spiral shells themselves are found at the liminal boundary of the seashore, where the boundary itself is shaped by the repetitive movement of the waves.

The overlapping movement of time in *Trilogy*, as outlined above, evokes the fluid movements of a tide. A later passage in *The Sword Went Out to Sea* imagines this shell of time as uniting the

²¹ Scales, *Spirals in Time*, p. 51.

²² Adalaide Morris, 'Signalling: Feminism, Politics, and Mysticism in H.D.'s War Trilogy', *Sagetrieb*, 9(3) (1990), 121–133: 133.

individual and the collective, and seems to directly reference, or at least repeat the image of, the self-enclosed mollusc of *Trilogy*:

when the ego or centre of our amorphous, scattered personality crystallises out, then and then only, are we of use to ourselves and to other people. [...] In saving oneself, one creates a shell, not the isolated, highly individual spiral-shell I spoke of, but a minute coral-shell, one of a million. (SWS 67)

There are numerous instances of mirrored imagery between the mollusc poem and this passage: the 'amorphous' inner body in the shell, the 'isolated, highly-individual' mollusc, and coral polyps building into multitudes. The notion of becoming 'of use' mirrors the premise of *Trilogy*, where the poet searches for meaning and recuperation through reimagining and recreating a world destroyed by war, becoming 'of use' by finding some kind of answer or resolution. Again, H.D.'s littoral imagination moves fluidly: from the individual to the collective, and between species from the coral-shell to the spiral-shell and direct references to the oyster/clam hybrid of *Trilogy*. This fluidity between species is central to the portrayal of various animal forms in the poem, as each creature morphs through various sub-species or through species linked in cultural association. The above passage suggests that such transformations are a way of understanding the world in multiplicity: the mollusc achieves the 'self-out-of-self' state that protects the self by erasing its singularity, and other creatures find fortitude in collective forms of consciousness. Whilst such animal conflation is not biologically possible, they promote a relationship to the natural world grounded in the symbolic, the communal and the sympathetic, and suggest ecology through the slippage between different members of the same ecosystem.

At the beginning of the mollusc poem, the connections between the mollusc's building of a 'temple, fane, shrine' and the Egyptian tomb of the start of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', described also as a 'temple' and 'shrine' and emblazoned with animal hieroglyphs, construct a connective overlay between animals, mythology and spirituality. In the poem following the mollusc section, H.D. suggests that the mollusc reappears in her narrative about Kaspar and the female second messiah:

His, the track in the sand
from a plum-tree in flower

to a half-open hut-door,
(or track would have been

but wind blows sand-prints from the sand,
whether seen or unseen):

His, the Genius in the jar
which the Fisherman finds,

He is Mage,
bringing myrrh. (WDNF [5])

There is a deliberate duality to the 'sand' of this landscape, which would at first glance seem to be the desert sand usually associated with the journey of the Magi. The passage's close setting to the mollusc section, however, seems to hint at it being beach sand, as does its reference to the 'Fisherman'. The wind, blowing the human traces of footprint from the landscape, also seems to be characteristic of H.D.'s coastal spaces, recalling the harsh littoral climate of *Sea Garden*, where wildflowers and coastal human settlements are in constant battle with the wind. The 'Genius in the jar / which the Fisherman finds' is an ambiguous image, but could be a reference to the mollusc, who is referred to earlier as the 'master-mason', building 'marvels' and living with a precise intelligence to the surrounding world. Later in *Trilogy*, myrrh becomes a significant image linked to the second coming and a renewed, post-war world; at this early point of the poem, a chain of religious and littoral imagery links the shellfish and its many connotations to H.D.'s image of post-war future. The detail of the 'half-open hut-door', a reminiscent shifting of the shut shell jaws of the mollusc, suggests that Kaspar's narrative will play into a movement from the shellfish's shut-in individualism to the poem's later revelations of communal living in a flock of geese, and the poet becoming a symbiotic part of an ecological system.

In the sixth poem of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', the speaker becomes a second animal incarnation, and follows the consciousness of a worm as it survives natural disasters and predatory hunts. Whilst the worm is not itself a littoral creature, H.D.'s treatment of the worm overlays spiritual mythology with ecology, which adds certain nuances to the treatment of the littoral later in the poem, and extends the mollusc's conflation with various shellfish species and central role in the journey of Kaspar. The full section is as follows:

In me (the worm) clearly
is no righteousness, but this—

persistence; I escaped spider-snare,
bird claw, scavenger bird-beak,

clung to grass-blade,
the back of a leaf

when storm-wind
tore it from its stem;

I escaped, I explored
rose-thorn forest,

was rain-swept
down the valley of a leaf;

was deposited on grass,
where mast by jewelled mast

bore separate ravellings
of encrusted gem-stuff

of the mist
from each banner-staff:

unintimidated by multiplicity
of magnified beauty,

such as your gorgon-great
dull eye can not focus

nor compass, I profit

by every calamity;

I eat my way out of it;
gorged on vine-leaf and mulberry,

parasite, I find nourishment:
when you cry in disgust,

a worm on the leaf,
a worm in the dust,

a worm on the ear-of-wheat,
I am yet unrepentant,

for I know how the Lord God
is about to manifest, when I,

the industrious worm,
spin my own shroud. (WDNF [6])

The worm's consciousness is immediately evoked in acutely observed detail: the blades of grass it divides as it crawls through them, its path over a leaf, its tiny size overcome by the forces of wind and rain. Again, a sense of a rich ecological web is formed through predatory birds, hunting with claws and beaks, and the spider ensnaring the worm in its web. There is a rich sense of flora in the poem's cataloguing of vine-leaf, mulberry, rose-thorn, grass, and an immediate sense of climate in its descriptions of mist, wind, rain, valleys, forest. H.D. reveals her naturalist eye in detailing her worm's surroundings. As with the mollusc poem, the worm is situated in the details of its ecological habitat, suggesting its place in a larger ecological web.

As with the mollusc, the worm finds a transcendent consciousness through the process of survival: by 'escaping' the dangers of its environment it is allowed access to a kind of 'magnified beauty' that is unknown to others, that 'dull eye[s] cannot focus.' The worm develops time-sense by measuring its life 'by every calamity', and dissociates itself from human limitation by finding 'nourishment' in that which makes others 'cry in disgust'. In the same way that the mollusc is able to build its own

temples and shrines under the sea, the worm's transcendence is a kind of religious apex: 'I know how the Lord God / is about to manifest'. The worm's religiosity is a direct challenge to conventional Christian tradition, where the worm carries negative associations with the serpent and devil. The opening of this section, 'In me (the worm) clearly / is no righteousness' alludes to Psalm 22, 'I am a worm and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people'.²³ H.D.'s attention to the 'hidden' beauty of the worm's ecological life directly subverts the reference into a renegotiation of conventional power values and posits empathy between the human and non-human. H.D. re-examines the 'magnified beauty' of the worm through the lens of its cultural mythology, ultimately becoming a poet who 'rewrites' the worm image in order to realign the power balance between the lowly worm and the human whose 'gorgon-great / dull eye' disregards it.

Later in *Trilogy*, the worm is referred to again as a specific part of H.D.'s poetic vision, representative of a transcendental movement towards the reclamation of mythological power. H.D. rails against critics who call poems 'trivial intellectual adornment' and poets 'useless'; H.D.'s poets are 'bearers of the secret wisdom', and she conceives her defence in a regenerative nature image, 'you have a long way to go / walk carefully, speak politely / to those who have done their worm-cycle' (*WDNF* [8]). The passage itself wears its poetic legacies lightly, referencing Blake's worm and Milton's transformation of Satan into a serpent.²⁴ H.D., as poet, is able to speak as the worm and shift our perspective of the worm as a cultural image, teasing out the processes of myth-making through art. At the end of the above passage, the worm overcomes its hostile interlocutors in the act of creation, finding a manifestation of the divine when it spins its own 'shroud', or cocoon, aligning the dismissal of the worm with the dismissal of the role of the poet.

²³ Bible (Psalm 22:6).

²⁴ William Blake, 'Invisible worm' in 'The Sick Rose' [*Songs of Innocence and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) (original work published in 1789), p. 147], and John Milton, 'Thus the orb he roamed / With narrow search and with inspection deep / Considered every creature: which of all / Most opportune might serve his wiles and found / The serpent subtlest beast of all the field' (l.86, Book Nine), [*Paradise Lost* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005) (original work published in 1674), p. 199].

In the worm's transcendence, it begins to transform into different species, and H.D.'s Judeo-Christian references become ritualistic practices grounded in animal iconography. The worm becomes a silkworm, able to spin its own cocoon, and butterfly images later in the poem also hint towards it being a caterpillar. The eating of mulberry leaves and wheat suggests a beetle or fly grub, and 'the worm in the dust' suggests a worm on the ground, an earthworm. The worm's biblical grounding also suggests parallels with a snake, its habitat of the grassy, rose-growing valley becoming a kind of Eden. The literal metamorphosis of the worm as it enters its cocoon brings about a regeneration of the worm's cultural meaning, the word 'shroud' suggested that old modes of meaning have been destroyed. In the section following the worm poem, we are reminded that our conception of divinity has, throughout history, been illustrated in animal imagery, through a series of obscure, ritualistic images:

Gods, goddesses
wear the winged head-dress

of horns, as the butterfly
antennae,

or the erect king-cobra crest
to show how the worm turns. (WDNF [7])

The implied or actual metamorphoses here of the worm 'turning' into a cobra, and the visual slippage between horns, wings and antennae, rebuilds the worm's religious associations into something esoteric and obscure, away from the projected meanings of human consciousness. H.D. acknowledges that human spirituality is construed through animal imagery such as the biblical worm or the animals of Egyptian hieroglyphs, but shifts this spiritual relationship by interrogating the act of myth- and ritual-making and causing it to slip between various animal connotations. In the above passage, where the significance of each ritual piece is unknown, or at least not alluding to any common cultural knowledge, the concealment of shared human narrative shifts the focus onto the act of ritual-making itself. The preceding worm passage makes clear that H.D.'s aim is to reimagine

and re-centre creatures typically discarded or marginalised by cultural tropes: the ‘turning’ of the worm signals a change in the worm’s cultural reception, influencing too the cultural lives of the fragile and romanticised butterfly, the feared cobra, the association of horns with the satanic.

H.D. discusses this particular passage in a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson in 1943. Here, H.D. figures the American landscape of her youth as a palimpsest of various cultures and colonial topographies. She layers Egyptian allusions onto modern American and Native American places:

I like the “winged head-dress” touch— it links Egypt with Aztec and with our own Indians. Do come and talk about rivers! I find the Delaware was first called Zuydt, South River by the Dutch, then Swenska, Swedes River by Swedes— the Lord de la Ware forced his claim and the river and the Lenape [tribe] “roaming along its course” were named Delaware. The Delaware, the river of the Lenape, was the Lenape-wihittuck, its branch the Lehigh (where I was born) was where there are forks or Lechauweeki, shortened into Lecha, corrupted into Lehigh, and so on.²⁵

In H.D.’s own personal historical parallels, her seemingly Egyptian imagery connects to the Americas through the Aztec, to the United States through the Lenape tribe, and to H.D. herself through the Lehigh River she lived near as a child. It is also noteworthy that the bedrock in this chain of signifiers is a river, and specifically human settlements and naming of that river, a littoral image that connects the human to the natural. The layering of various cultures and geographies over littoral spaces resounds throughout her career, with her layering of classical and American coastlines in *Sea Garden* and the layering of historical periods on the beaches of Cornwall in *Bid Me to Live*: H.D.’s conception of place relies on the layering of cultural signifiers, but *Trilogy* actively interrogates such chains of meaning to examine our relationship to the environment. The letter above suggests an acknowledgement of colonial naming and landscape distribution: Lord de la Ware ‘forcing’ his claim on the land over the Lenape tribe, for instance, and Native American terms being ‘corrupted’ into their Anglicised equivalent. The letter also displaces the Lenape and indigenous Americans as the

²⁵ H.D. to Norman Holmes Pearson, 1943, *Between History and Poetry: The Letters of H.D. and Norman Holmes Pearson*, ed. by Donna K. Hollenberg (Iowa City, IA.: University of Iowa Press, 1997), p. 33.

'first' namers of the river, beginning with its Dutch name. The slippage between the river's various names follows a thread of aural association and subsumation that parallels the patterns of visual association in the passage, where horns and antennae become incorporated into one another. As Astrida Nemanis has argued, bodies of water like rivers reminds us that water connects bodies to one another and to worlds beyond the human; and that a 'body' of water linguistically reminds us that human bodies are not the only bodies to exist. Water's challenge to individualism thus becomes a challenge to other systems that privilege particular kinds of bodies: colonialism, phallogocentrism, anthropocentrism. While *Trilogy's* feminist revisionism is well-documented, H.D.'s search for new ways to conceive of molluscs and worms outside of Western traditions represents an upheaval of other power structures, between human and non-human, between exploiting land for Western material or cultural use and other cultures.

In line with its implicit upheaval of old power structures, *Trilogy* repeatedly returns to images of natural renewal, reincarnation and resurrection: bees, eggs, pearls, shed exoskeletons, empty shells, a worm hatching from its cocoon into a butterfly. H.D. reveals distrust and uncertainty in war-time human society: 'It is no madness to say / you will fall, you great cities' (*FR* [10]), imagining each fallen civilisation as a fallen lily petal. Yet where H.D. finds hope for survival and regeneration is precisely in her images of animals. In the mollusc poem, the coral is continuously being rebuilt by molluscs who survive through self-protection, time renews itself through the spiral patterns of gastropods, and the worm transcends death from bird beak and claw but also the disgust levied at it by human narratives. In 'The Flowering of the Rod', one of H.D.'s final visions of a post-war world, both after the Second World War specifically and beyond the systems of power that beget war, is of an acceptance of the human as part of a sympathetic, harmonious ecological chain:

No poetic fantasy
but a biological reality,

a fact: I am an entity
like bird, insect, plant

or sea-plant cell;
I live, I am alive. (FR [9])

This conception of the human in nature is one based on peace, on drawing out the connections between the human and the plant, the insect, the bird. This vision of an understanding and empathetic inter-species relationality is central to H.D.'s conception of post-war regeneration: literal survival in war begets life as a biological being. It is striking that H.D. achieves this sense of equilibrium between herself and animals through metaphor: she is led here by conceiving of human trauma and survival in the patterns of survival by molluscs, renewing both their cultural lives and her own. H.D. said that when she wrote 'Tribute to the Angels' she 'really DID feel that a new heaven and a new earth were about to materialize', and that optimism is evident in the image of the human/non-human boundary dissolving to become 'biological entities'.²⁶ The final line of the poem is not only a statement of survival but a new recognition of what it means to 'live' beyond the events of war: in her survival, H.D. emerges with new understanding of the slippage between human and non-human ways of being.

If the central concern of *Trilogy* is, as Elizabeth Anderson writes, 'the response of a poet to the physical, psychic, and spiritual desolation of her time', her strategy is not only 'the invocation of ancient wisdom allied with contemporary inspiration', but the interrogation of accepted wisdom and images allied with the construction of a new mode of expression.²⁷ H.D. weaves religious imagery with animals and nature to reveal the meaning and value we both project onto and take from animal ecologies, and to construct a divinity that separates itself from specific religious tradition and instead embraces the ritualistic cycles of the environment. In the image of the worm and the turning 'worm-cycle', H.D. extends the resonance she finds in the shore image to a world-wide view that reaches

²⁶ H.D. to Norman Holmes Pearson, December 1944, quoted in his introduction to *Trilogy* (Cheadle: Carcanet Press, 1973), p. ix. H.D.'s own capitals included.

²⁷ Anderson, 'Burnt and Blossoming', p. 123.

across habitats, elements and human/nature divisions. She interrogates the ways in which human meaning is projected onto a natural image through religious and cultural association (such as that of the worm in the Psalm), and in doing so constructs a space in which new meanings may appear, removing the oppressive portrayal of animals in 'poetic fantasy' in favour of a portrayal of their biological lives.

II. The Shore and the New Eve

Kaspar's discovery of the fisherman's jar sets in motion *Trilogy's* overarching narrative; Kaspar the Mage journeying toward the birth of the messiah, this time imagined as a hybrid of various female cultural figures such as Eve, Lilith, Venus, Isis and Mary Magdalene. The figure is named as Eve, linking her arrival with the growth of a new Eden, which is strikingly conceived in littoral terms in 'The Flowering of the Rod'. The images of the mollusc and the fisherman's jar anticipate the arrival of this new Eve, a prophesied 'maid-of-the-sea' who is born at the shore as Venus, and leads Kaspar through the sound of 'an echo of an echo in a shell' to a series of ecstatic visions through the eye of an airborne flock of geese flying over coastal human settlements (*FR* [22], [28]). The fisherman's jar of 'The Walls Do Not Fall' becomes the jar containing myrrh that Kaspar leaves at the birthplace of the messiah in *Trilogy's* closing lines.

While 'Eve' becomes the dominant identity of this female messiah, numerous other female cultural figures are referenced in relation to her, each with the overall movement toward the reclaiming of cultural narrative: 'this is the new Eve who comes / clearly to return, to retrieve / what she lost' (*TA* [36]). Female spiritual figures first appear in the narrative of 'Tribute to the Angels', where the spiritual searching of 'The Walls Do Not Fall' is given specific names and patterns of identity. The figures of Venus/Aphrodite, Lilith, Eve and Mary Magdalene appear as both aspects of H.D.'s new-world vision and as tools for dismantling old convention. The figures appear as part of H.D.'s project

to reject and renew patriarchal cultural images in the poem: the name of Venus, for example, switches its associations from 'venereous and lascivious' to 'kin to venerate, venerator' through the lighting and re-lighting of an alchemical flame (*TA* [10]). The Virgin Mary becomes rooted in the everyday and morphed with the classical figure Persephone when H.D. invokes her: 'Our Lady of the Goldfinch / Our Lady of the Candelabra / Our Lady of the Pomegranate / Our Lady of the Chair' (*TA* [29]). Male cultural figures are also transformed into their female counterparts. The Egyptian figure of Osiris is split into 'Isis, Astarte, Cyprus' (*FR* [25]) through aural wordplay: over the course of 'Tribute to the Angels', Osiris is turned into Isis, Osiris into Sirius the binary star into Astarte, and Osiris into Psyche into Cyprus and, later, Siren. The story of Helios and Phaeton meeting the Scorpio constellation in the sky is also rewritten into a story of female strength, as Eve 'the original great-mother' drives 'harnessed scorpions / before her' (*WDNF* [34]).

The slippage from andocentric and male-authored myths to gynocentric ones culminates in 'The Flowering of the Rod', where Mary Magdalene, Lilith and Eve become innately linked to the shore, and to shoreline places. Mary is 'Mary [...] of Magdala', who 'stands on the shore' and is likened to a 'maid-of-the-sea' and 'mermaid', again playing on the transformative possibilities of aural slippage (*FR* [16], [22]). Kaspar is led to the new Eve and Lilith through a series of littoral images:

And he heard, as it were, the echo
of an echo in a shell,

words neither sung nor chanted
but stressed rhythmically;

the echoed syllables of this spell
conformed to the sound

of no word he had ever heard spoken,
and Kaspar was a great wanderer,

a renowned traveller;
but he understood the words

though the sound was other
than our ears were attuned to,

the tone was different
yet he understood it;

it translated itself
as it transmuted its message

through spiral upon spiral of the shell
of memory that yet connects us

with the drowned cities of pre-history;
Kaspar understood and his brain translated:

*Lilith born before Eve
and one born before Lilith,
and Eve; we three are forgiven,
we are three of the seven
daemons cast out of her. (FR [33])*

The littoral object of the gastropod shell leads Kaspar to the new world heralded by Eve. The echoing shell becomes a physical manifestation of time, its spiral shape denoting cycles of history. The shell requires its meaning to be 'translated' and 'transmuted' by Kaspar, allowing for previously hidden female histories to be read and seen. The notion of decoding a message within a shell links to *Trilogy's* theme of rewriting patriarchal Western narratives, but also interrogates the notion of the nature image as symbol. The shell is a symbol of the new Eve but the symbolism is grounded in ecological realities: gastropod spiral shells do trace the passage of time in that the mollusc never sheds the shell and therefore the outermost whorls indicate age. This passage also exemplifies the significance of the shore as a place where such 'translation' can occur, providing the prerequisite fluidity through which H.D. liquifies the boundaries between various cultural and religious figures and allows for their rewriting.

The shore's connection to Eve furthermore highlights the unexplored undercurrent of ecofeminism in *Trilogy*, where the arrival of Eve necessitates a new Eden, linked in the poem to an erasure of

human/non-human hierarchies as discussed in the previous section of this chapter. In working to find new modes of feminist meaning, *Trilogy* uses the shore as a symbol of fundamental change and erasure of previous boundaries, positing new ways for the human to inhabit the natural world.

In 'The Walls Do Not Fall', humankind is imagined as regenerating at the shoreline, the cyclical tide renewing the ways humans live on the land. The journey to the shore also builds a conventional evolutionary image, where humankind returns to the sea, the place where life began, and the shore, where land-dwelling lifeforms first exited the water. In poem 14, the end of one world and the start of the next is conceptualised with the imagery of crustaceans in moult, bringing the 'I' of the shellfish to a 'we' of collective human responsibility and recovery:

Yet we, the latter-day twice born,
have our bad moments when

dragging the forlorn
husk of self after us,

we are forced to confess to
malaise and embarrassment;

we pull at this dead shell,
struggle but we must wait

till the new Sun dries off
the old-body humours (WDNF [14])

The 'husk of self' is reminiscent of a shed exoskeleton, the coastal sun 'drying out' the naked skin beneath. The metaphor plays into a pattern of metamorphosis and transformation imagery throughout *Trilogy*, usually concerning animal species, but applied here to the human. H.D. again reveals her naturalist's eye, contrasting the ability to shed a shell with the ability to hold on to it. The image of the shell links back to the mollusc poem, but molluscs only ever make a single shell and do not grow out of it. They carry the same shell all their lives, expanding it to make room for their

growing bodies.²⁸ The 'dragging' of this shell linked to the mollusc's permanent attachment to the same shell, but the poem also hints that 'we' are able to make a choice to leave it behind: we drag at something 'old', 'forlorn' and 'dead', but also 'wait' for the moment it can be shed.

The cyclical imagery of the tide and the shedding of crustaceous exoskeletons is linked directly to human culture and ritual a few poems later, where humans are found gathered on the shore to create new ritualistic practises:

...coals for the world's burning,
for we must go forward,

we are at the cross-roads,
the tide is turning;

it uncovers pebbles and shells,
beautiful yet static, empty

old thought, old convention;
let us go down to the sea,

gather dry sea-weed,
heap drift-wood,

let us light a new fire
and in the fragrance

of burnt salt and incense
chant new paeans to the new Sun

of regeneration;
we have always worshipped Him,

we have always said,
forever and ever, Amen. (WDNF [17])

The shoreline's liminality here becomes a threshold from one worldview to another, crossing a historical time boundary, 'for we must go forward', and a renewal of culture to replace 'empty / old

²⁸ Scales, *Spirals in Time*, p. 53.

thought, old convention'. H.D.'s lifelong interest in classical ritual emerges here as an interest in new rituals, new 'paeans' that look towards a pagan or cult past for new direction. I am reminded here of H.D.'s letter to Bryher in 1932, when H.D. had taken a Hellenic cruise on which the Reverend Wigram, Canon of Malta, delivered lectures largely paraphrasing Jane Harrison's *Prolegomena* (1903) and *Themis* (1912). H.D. wrote in amazement that 'there were *mother*-cults under *all* the Zeus cults, from Dodona, down the coast!'²⁹ This interest in coastal cults led by matriarchal figures has a clear analogy in *Trilogy's* rituals towards a female messiah born of the sea.

As with the mollusc, there is a movement between the singular and the collective: pebbles and shells are washed up in scattered groups, and the 'us' of the poem forms a multitude of individuals. The movement 'forwards' of the poem's opening and implied cultural move forward is challenged by the end, where humans making fire seem to evoke an image of early human settlements and evolutionary development. As H.D.'s own conception of time forms the spiral shell shape, moving laterally rather than linearly, the shore itself becomes a manifestation of such time-sense, moving simultaneously forwards and backwards with the tide. There is also a sense of stasis, of remembering enduring forms and images of spirituality. The poem declares, 'we have always worshipped him' and 'we have always said' (my emphasis). The words 'Sun', 'Him' and 'Amen' are placed at the end of alternate lines and form a play-on-meaning between the worshipped 'sun' and the notion of Christ as the Son of God, suggesting a small shift in spirituality rather than a complete upheaval and renewal.

The poem participates in enduring conceptions of the shore as a place of rebirth, the primeval, and the fluid; these littoral symbolisms permeate our understanding of the shore to this day. Rachel Carson writes of a particular human pull to the shore:

²⁹ H.D. to Bryher, 1932, Box 11 of the *H.D. Papers*.

When we go down to the low-tide line, we enter a world that is as old as the earth itself – the primeval meeting place of the elements of earth and water, a place of compromise and conflict and eternal change. For us as living creatures it has special meaning as an area in or near which some entity that could be distinguished as Life first drifted in shallow waters – reproducing, evolving, yielding that endlessly varied stream of living things that has surged through time and space to occupy the earth.³⁰

In *Trilogy*, the waves uncover ‘old thought’ and ‘old convention’ but also bring the humans into contact with flux and change, mirroring Carson’s identification with the shore as an ancient site subject to eternal change. The fluid forwards/backwards movement of *Trilogy*, of life advancing in a spiral along the pattern of a spiral seashell, is also curiously evocative of Carson’s connection between the shore and evolutionary life. As the humans of *Trilogy* must engage with both the past and the future, rebuilding past conventions to form new cultures, the shore throws them into confrontation with the past through ‘old thought’ and the shore’s links to evolutionary beginnings. From this standpoint at the beginning of what Carson calls ‘that endlessly varied stream of living things that surges through time and space to occupy the earth’, the human figures are able to reverse problematic conventions and forge new pathways toward a regenerative future. H.D. herself is tracing a similar path, moving through a ‘varied stream’ of animal confluences in order to return to the beginning of a new historical and cultural cycle.

From H.D.’s portrayal of the shore in *Bid Me to Live*, we know that Atlantic shores held significance as places that showed the layering of various time periods over one another. This chimes directly with H.D.’s conception of time as an ever-widening spiral with no beginning and no end. As the Cornish landscape of *Bid Me to Live* layered druid, Roman, Victorian and modern features of the shore, the shore in *Trilogy* similarly overlays past, present, and future: the ‘old thought, old convention’ with the possibility of ‘new paeans’, new systems of meaning and spirituality. The

³⁰ Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (1951), collected in *The Sea* (Bristol: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), p. 1.

chanting of 'Amen' at the end of the passage links such new rituals to the grasshopper/praying mantis on the bank of a canal a few poems later:

Take me home
where canals

flow
between iris-banks:

where the mantis
prays on the river-reed:

where the grasshopper says
Amen, Amen, Amen. (WDNF [23])

H.D.'s closing line combines Christian prayer with the chanted name of Amen, Ancient Egyptian God of Wind and King of the Gods, and playfully includes the natural praying stance of the mantis as an ally to these. This poem's littoral site on the meeting of the river with the bank finds new sacred space in the cycles of nature.

These patterns of connection between the littoral and the sacred become a profound spiritual longing by the end of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', where littoral spaces become invocations for the appearance of spiritual meaning and guidance. H.D. yearns for the appearance of a spiritual being in the midst of war—'the children cry for food / and flaming stones fall on them'—and finds such presence 'among the fishing-nets / by the beached boats on the lake-edge' (WDNF [29]), where fish and bread are being cooked. This allusion is specifically biblical, referencing Christ's miraculous feeding of the five thousand, but elsewhere the shore's spiritual coding is laid out in more esoteric terms.³¹ In poem 41, the perceived 'mystery' of the binary star Sirius is also found in the 'spring freshets' of a riverbank, both 'drowned' in the river's water and seeded into the 'ploughed land' (WDNF [41]).

³¹ Bible (Matthew 14: 13–21).

These small moments of connection between littoral spaces and spiritual meaning trace *Trilogy's* narrative toward its conclusion, when a new cultural/spiritual leader appears as the earth regenerates in the second poem of *Trilogy*, 'Tribute to the Angels'. H.D. traces Eve's portrayal in art, conflating her with portrayals of Venus, eventually finding her staring 'past a mirror', her own image, into a littoral scene, 'where boat follows slow boat on the lagoon; / there are white flowers on the water' (TA [30]). Later in 'Tribute to the Angels', Eve's arrival heralds the forwards-backwards movement of H.D.'s shell-time:

her book is our book; written
or unwritten, its pages will reveal

a tale of a Fisherman,
a tale of a jar or jars,

the same—different—the same attributes,
different yet the same as before. (TA [39])

This new Eve is partly a Venus hybrid, suggesting the significance of the shore image as manifesting the story of Venus's birth in sea foam, but the characteristic quoted in the above passage of Eve being 'the same—different—the same' also suggests that H.D.'s Eve is able to move between binary positions, being both of the old world and signalling the new, much as the shore has signified such fluidity in other parts of H.D.'s work. Again, the narrative of the fisherman and the jar links Eve to the shore in a pattern of imagery connecting the mollusc and littoral sands to Kaspar's search; the aforementioned Sirius star, conceived as the meeting of land and river, emphasises the littoral in Kaspar's usual narrative of following a star toward the birth of Christ. Later in the poem, as discussed in the next section of this chapter, Kaspar receives a vision of the new world that follows an expanse of sea-line cliffs, before being drawn to Eve via the fisherman's jar and the myrrh that appeared in poem 5 of 'The Walls Do Not Fall'.

Why is the shore so emphasised as the domain for this new Eve? Beyond her connection to Venus, the littoral Eve emphasises a break from conventionally 'masculine' and oppressive relationality to

nature, providing patterns of gynocentric and yonic imagery that anticipate an ecofeminist viewpoint of environmental remediation. The following description of Eve in 'The Flowering of the Rod' emphasises her connection to the earth as well as her place in cultural tradition:

she looked like a heathen

picture or carved idol
from a forbidden sea-temple

he [Kaspar] might re-name them,
Ge-meter, De-meter, earth-mother

or Venus
in a star. (FR [25])

Here, Eve is explicitly called an 'earth-mother' in the same lines as something littoral: a carving in a sea wall and Venus. While the concept of the 'earth-mother' can be reductive in conversations around environmental destruction and healing, positing uncomfortable and essentialist connections between the female and the maternal, it does gesture toward H.D.'s imagery of littoral sites and environmental healing as intrinsically linked to gender, or some particular construction of gender. Susan Gubar argued that H.D. was drawn to the shell and pearl in *Trilogy* because of their 'feminine evocations'; in a poem in which the new world is heralded by the coming of a new Eve, the regeneration of the world heralded by the shell's pearl signals a movement away from patriarchal structures into a female-led society. Gubar writes:

Associated iconographically with Venus and the Virgin, the shell is also said to represent the female genitals. It may represent female pregnancy, since the pearl is a kind of seed in the womb of the shellfish, or a hope of rebirth, as the traditionally termed "resurrection shells".³²

Shells and molluscs become individual voices primed to re-establish the importance of female forms, and are traced in parallel to the narrative of *Trilogy* which redeems Lilith, Eve and Mary Magdalene

³² Gubar, 'The Echoing Spell of H. D.'s *Trilogy*', p. 202.

and establishes feminine god-forms to a position of equal importance to male ones. This process of re-writing history begins with the sea, the 'spiral upon spiral of the shell / of memory that yet connects us / with the drowned cities of pre-history' (*FR* [33]). In 'Tribute to the Angels', the concept of the sea undergoes a linguistic alchemical process to create the words 'Mary' and 'mother':

sea, brine, breaker, seducer,
giver of life, giver of tears;

Now polish the crucible
and set the jet of flame

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

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

Star of the Sea,
Mother. (*TA* [8])

H.D.'s alchemy is, as Susan Stanford Friedman suggests, a 'revisionist alchemy',³³ a metaphorical transformation that strives to change a status quo, and this alchemical ritual presents a twist on *Trilogy's* earlier metaphors of renewal and transformation by participating in both natural and cultural processes. The connection between H.D.'s biblical hybrid Eve and the shore is spelt out here with the chains of meaning emanating from 'Mary' and 'mere'; once again the fluidity of the seashore signals the 'melting', 'musing', 'joining', 'changing' and 'altering' of meaning.

The notion of the mother is significant to *Trilogy's* female-led post-war world, and also has striking connections to the shore itself. Anna Ryan, in her architectural study of the coast, quotes the photography critic and historian Vicki Goldberg on the seashore 'as mother':

³³ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 215.

Surely one reason the beach is so universally beloved is that life long ago crawled out of the sea and began the land voyage that ultimately brought about human beings. The sea is our ancient mother; the eighty-four mineral elements in our bodies are the same as the eighty-four in the ocean.³⁴

The littoral directly establishes Eve as an ‘earth-mother’ by engaging with this sense of evolutionary birth at the sea. This notion of the ‘earth mother’ anticipates our modern connection of the word with environmental remediation, but *Trilogy’s* use of the littoral site as a kind of alchemical rebirth suggests that *Trilogy’s* portrayal of Eve can also be read through the lens of ecofeminism and Deep Ecology. Ecofeminism can really be considered in the plural, covering a wide diversity of disciplines and sub-fields. Ecofeminism(s) can cover the colonial, the feminist, the queer, but also environmental justice and protest, philosophical and sociological approaches and non-human and post-human concepts. To discuss them in-depth here, or align H.D. to a specific formulation, would be gratuitous as not all are contemporary or relevant to H.D. or her writing of *Trilogy*. However, what I want to illustrate is that *Trilogy* expresses a longing for a philosophical shift that is in line with ecofeminism’s core belief, that a cultural system rooted in dominance has implications for both marginalised women and marginalised nature, and that this power imbalance reveals itself in mimetic ways. *Trilogy’s* parallel concerns of remedying patriarchal cultural dominance and seeing a redress in the separation between human and non-human is implicitly eco-feminist.

This appearance of these ideas in other places in H.D.’s writing brings them into focus. At the same time as writing *Trilogy*, H.D. was also writing a memoir of her childhood in Pennsylvania, published posthumously as *The Gift*. In *The Gift*, H.D. shows an awareness of the earth as an interrelated system, and engages with the influence of human agency on the planet. The closing passage of the memoir recalls a family trip to the woods, where the young H.D. saw a landscape changed physically by the presence of the human: ‘we saw that the thousand-thousand little frogs lay like leaves on the

³⁴ Vicki Goldberg, ‘By the Sea’, *Oceans*, ed. by Sue Hostetler (New York: Rizzoli, 2002), p. 21. Anna Ryan quotes Goldberg in *Where Land Meets Sea: Coastal Explorations of Landscape, Representation and Spatial Experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 39.

track in the woods, that had just two marks in it, just as wide as the wheels on the man's cart' (*TG* 123). H.D. also points out a collective responsibility in the destruction of war, and therefore collective role in recovery, through imagery of environmental disaster:

We must never forget how each one of us (through inertia, through indifference, through ignorance) is, in part, responsible for the world-calamity. For it seems, we are not able to stabilise our purpose, to affirm in positive or concrete terms, our debt to the past and our responsibility to the future, until we are forced to face up to the final realities in a shipwreck or an earthquake or a tornado (*TG* 109–110)

The notion of 'responsibility' has a dual meaning in this passage, referring to both being to blame for something, 'responsible for the world-calamity', and being able to resolve something, 'our responsibility to the future', paralleling modern nuances of the word when used in an environmentalist context. Those responsible, 'each one of us', are implied to be human, suggesting that the human has a particular responsibility that the non-human does not, and that the human shoulders a blame that the non-human does not. While natural disaster is here used as an analogue for war-time destruction, it is telling that the war is conceived in this way in much of H.D.'s late writing. In *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, the midst of war in September 1940 is conceived as a 'tidal wave' from 'some volcanic region' that almost submerged Britain and then 'branched off into rapids, currents and whirlpools of night and day attack' (*SWS* 13–14). While H.D.'s texts, and especially *Trilogy*, are not explicitly environmental, there is an awareness of the interconnectedness of the human and the non-human, and recognition that this relationship is often destructive and problematic.

In 'The Flowering of the Rod', H.D. recognises herself as a being that exists within an ecological community. It is worth returning to the following passage to establish the portrayal of interconnections between the human and non-human in *Trilogy*:

No poetic fantasy
but a biological reality,

a fact: I am an entity

like bird, insect, plant

or sea-plant cell;

I live, I am alive. (FR [9])

This statement sheds light on the poet's transformations into non-human identities, suggesting that each transformation is an attempt by the poet to understand herself as a 'biological reality', on an equal footing to birds, insects, plants and cells. It also connects H.D.'s vision of a healed human world to this realisation of our place in the ecological web, revealing H.D.'s exploration of nature and natural cycles in the poem to be a gesture forward to future ecocritical principles. H.D.'s poem explores ideas around human and non-human identity that foreshadow the Deep Ecology movement of the late twentieth century. Deep Ecology, a term coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1972, advocates a holistic approach to environmentalism, proposing a shift in our relationship to the environment to focus on humans as part of a greater, and equalised, ecological web. Naess believed that the environmental crisis of the twentieth century had arisen due to governing Western principles and philosophies that allowed for environmental dominion and exploitation, and that to solve such a crisis Western societies would need to live by new principles founded on a rebalancing of such power.³⁵ Whilst H.D. predates such discussions, there are connections here to *Trilogy*, namely the idea that environmental destruction and remediation is rooted in the narratives of Western culture. Deep Ecology furthermore moves beyond a purely scientific approach to the environment in favour of considering spiritual and cultural factors and shifts, as H.D. in *Trilogy* interrogates the use of animal imagery in religious culture and personal symbolism and attempts to redirect them.

However, Deep Ecology has been criticised for its emphasis on 'male' relationships to nature, treating these as default. In her 1984 article 'Deeper than Deep Ecology', ecofeminist Ariel Salleh

³⁵ David Rothenberg and Arne Naess, *Is It Painful to Think: Conversations with Arne Naess* (Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 126–7.

showed how Naess's original approach criticised the man/nature dualism without seeing the man/woman dualism that lay within it: she criticised the Deep Ecology movement for using the word 'man' as a generic term for humans as a whole that did not take into account the significance of gendered perspectives of the landscape.³⁶ Although Salleh praised Deep Ecology for moving beyond a 'hard headed scientific approach' to environmentalism in favour of new metaphysical and cultural consciousness and a non-exploitative steady-state economy, her main criticism was that the principles of deep ecology did not take account of exploitative social relations, particularly between men and women.³⁷ Such categories of 'male' and 'female' perspectives of nature are rather restrictive in their binarism, particularly for H.D. who considered herself 'the perfect bi', but there is a sense in *Trilogy* that H.D.'s narrative toward empathy between the human and non-human is grounded in the rejection of patriarchal power systems, framing her Eve as an alternative understanding of the non-human world away from patriarchy and other narratives of dominion and oppression. As Andrew Maclaughlin has argued, 'both feminism and ecology seek an understanding of all nature that is relational, holistic and non-hierarchical': Eve connects H.D.'s vision of a dismantled and rebuilt patriarchal Western culture to a renewal of our relationship to the non-human world.³⁸

As Carolyn Merchant has shown, some branches of Western scientific rationality have constructed a view of the non-human natural world as philosophically 'dead', and therefore materially, politically and ethically available for exploitation.³⁹ For deep ecologists and ecofeminists, nature must be seen as alive, as having its own agenda and agency. Such principles are seen directly in H.D.'s writing of nature in *Trilogy*, where animals are transposed and decontextualised from their environments to

³⁶ Ariel Kay Salleh, 'Deeper than Deep Ecology: The Eco-Feminist Connection', *Environmental Ethics*, 6(4) (1984), 339–345, 340.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 339.

³⁸ Andrew Maclaughlin, *Regarding Nature: Industrialism and Deep Ecology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 150.

³⁹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, CA.: Harper & Row, 1980).

religious iconography, fundamentally changing the ways in which the animal relates to its human-dominated habitat, and where the poet's search for peace and renewal ultimately facilitates her disappearance into a living, biological nature.

Trilogy demonstrates an effort towards an understanding of the natural world that dismantles outdated systems of power: not just a movement from a patriarchal world to a redressed gynocentrism, but a reconnection with the natural world that understands cultural myth and narrative as a central part of our engagement with the natural world. As my previous chapters have shown, H.D.'s nature-writing is focussed on myths surrounding place and landscape, and works towards a writing of the natural world that understands it as both a physical place and, from a human perspective, a site where particular narratives and symbolisms are made.

In *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, H.D. projects the fate of the American buffalo onto humankind, recognising humankind's destruction of the environment and the commodification of animals. The language H.D. uses is modelled on the violence and trauma of war, but also links the destruction of the environment to patriarchal and colonial systems:

I thought the almost extinct American buffalo was not extinct. I saw thousands of beautiful animals, driven across plains and into the opening of a secret cave. There were other caves, as well. I don't know how these caves could have been secret, but they were. The Indians and a few white men had had a formal conference and decided to save the buffaloes. [...] The earth was furrowed with the irrational assaults that man had made upon her. She was always mother earth. I felt that man was actually assaulting woman. (SWS 52–54)

This critique makes humankind's role in the extinction of the American buffalo an act of gendered violence, a 'mother earth' assaulted in a patriarchal worldview. Similarly, the buffalo are saved by a dismantling of power structures when the 'white men' and 'Indians' collaborate to save the species. Annette Debo has argued that these remarks articulate a gynocentric view that has its roots in both Transcendentalism and an American environmental movement represented by contemporaries of

H.D. such as Mary Austin.⁴⁰ H.D.'s nature imagery in *Trilogy*, therefore, is an enactment of the same process, an interrogation and deconstruction of patriarchal systems in order to restart environmental renewal.

III. 'This duality, this double nostalgia': Transcendent Ecology and Post-war Healing

Marti Kheel sees the Deep Ecologists search for an expanded self, beyond and across the binaries of gender, as a way of 'transcending the concrete world of particularity in preference for something more enduring and abstract'.⁴¹ In the final part of *Trilogy*, 'The Flowering of the Rod', H.D. portrays a kind of transcendence through a flock of geese, manifesting the notion of being able to live communally with other species and a personal journey beyond the trauma of war. The flock migrates over littoral scenes, finally becoming Kaspar's ecstatic vision that leads the Mage to Eve's birth. The geese move between ecological portrayal (H.D. traces their migratory patterns from cold to warm climates along the American northeast coast) and being metaphors for the transcendence of post-war healing, but the geese also evade easy symbolism in the speaker's uncertainty and unreliable memories. Kheel calls for a 'deep holistic awareness of the interconnectedness of all life [...] a *lived* awareness that we experience in relation to *particular* beings as well as to the larger whole'.⁴² In 'The Flowering of the Rod', Eve's imminent arrival focusses the poetic eye on the migratory life of the geese, while looking toward the littoral Eve for a fundamental shift between the human and non-human in her renewed Eden.

Throughout *Trilogy*, H.D. emphasises the need to live as both singular individuals and as multitudinous collectives: as an oyster and clam within a collective coral structure, a group of

⁴⁰ Annette Debo, *The American H.D.*, p. 128.

⁴¹ Marti Kheel, 'Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference', *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. by Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein (San Francisco, CA.: Sierra Club Publishers, 1990), pp. 128–137, p. 136.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 136–7, italics in original.

humans collected on the shore, one biological entity amongst many. H.D. moves from the symbolic singular organism to a collective group in 'The Flowering of the Rod', the final poem of *Trilogy*, in which the poetic voice remains human but watches a flock of geese flying over the shore, before entering into their consciousness. 'The Flowering of the Rod' follows Kaspar's journey towards the arrival of the new Eve, culminating in a conventional Nativity scene. 'The Flowering of the Rod' opens with an image of transcendental resurrection, where the poem's symbolic human 'we' has risen above 'the smouldering cities below' and is told by the poet to 'not look below' at the flowers, ice-floes and man-made bridges of the earth. The opening is a decisive movement forwards, beginning *Trilogy's* final imagery of transcendence in a post-war future. The geese fly over a landscape of islands, later cliffs, and also continue the poem's pattern of littoral imagery with an emphasis on snow and ice, where parts of land melt into water.

The geese, their flight symbolic of this transcendental geography, are introduced in the third poem of this section, firstly as an individual:

does the first wild-geese stop to explain
to the others? no—he is off;

they follow or not
that is their affair;

does the first wild-geese care
whether the others follow or not?

I don't think so—he is so happy to be off—
he knows where he is going;

so we must be drawn or we must fly,
like the snow-geese of the Arctic circle,

to the Carolinas or to Florida,
or like those migratory flocks

who still (they say) hover

over the lost island, Atlantis;

seeking what we once knew,
we know ultimately what we will find

happiness; *today shalt thou be
with me in Paradise.* (FR [3])

Like the self-preserving mollusc of 'The Walls Do Not Fall', this animal finds strength and hope in its individualistic outlook: it is the first to fly, not looking to see if others are following, and ends its journey in paradise. Kaspar and the goose follow the same migration toward this paradisaical site. However, the single goose image is subsumed by the image of flocks around Atlantis, and then eclipsed by the poem's 'we' perspective, suggesting that in flight the goose becomes part of a multitude. The path of the goose's flight is also intriguing, moving from the Arctic to the American East Coast, and mirroring other geese hovering above the mythological realm of Atlantis. The geese's migration is rooted in ecological reality: snow geese do migrate to the eastern coasts of America in winter. There is a parallel movement for H.D. as her poetry moves between descriptions of physical and imaginative place, such as between American coasts and classical Greek coastlines in *Sea Garden*. The strange movement from air to water also moves the geese between ecological and imaginative depictions, one minute tracing natural migration patterns and the next somehow underwater in a lost, unreal civilisation.

The geese are liminal creatures, flying over the liminal space of the shore and combining the elements of water, air and earth. They are also slippery in their mythology, and the poet seems unable to pin them down as symbols. In the next poem, the goose becomes a collective group of geese that moves between a visual binary of blue and white, and also come to represent contradictory and liminal feelings of nostalgia and memory as they fly over a coastline:

Blue-geese, white-geese, you may say,
yes, I know this duality, this double nostalgia;

I know the insatiable longing

in winter, for palm-shadow

 and sand and burnt sea-drift;
 but in the summer, as I watch

 the wave till its edge of foam
 touches the hot sand and instantly

 vanishes like snow on the equator,
 I would cry out, stay, stay;

 then I remember delicate enduring frost
 and its mid-winter dawn-pattern;

 in the hot noon-sun, I think of the grey
 opalescent winter dawn; as the wave

 burns on the shingle, I think,
 you are less beautiful than frost;

 but it is also true that I pray,
 O, give me burning blue

 and brittle burnt sea-weed
 above the tide-line,

 as I stand, still unsatisfied,
 under the long shadow-on-snow of the pine. (FR [4])

The passage is strikingly personal, as the poetic voice moves from the collective 'we' back to an 'I', as the geese move from the individual of the preceding poem to this collective group of snow geese across the species' two morphs (white and blue). The geese are both plural and singular, individual and collective—each member of the flock is a whole animal, but they fly together in the V formation that fuses their shapes into a single image. In their communal flight, the geese elude binary definition; there are both blue geese and white geese, male and female, a 'duality' that is subsumed into the singular group effort of flight, the 'eternal desire / to equilibrate'. The geese, the shingle, the pine-trees, and the 'brittle burnt sea-weed' evoke a shoreline reminiscent of H.D.'s East-coast American upbringing, linking their symbolic nostalgia to H.D.'s personal memory. As with the

mollusc, H.D.'s animal symbolism is rooted in the animals' natural lives, using the notion of cyclical migration to characterise a state of mind which is rootless and moving between points of nostalgia and past dissatisfaction. The cyclical nature of the waves and tide similarly manifest a sense of transience; the landscape feels intangible in its constant cycles of seasons, tides, shadows, and bird migrations. The speaker's longing moves between the 'beauty' of the frosted beach in winter and the vivid heat of summer, finding security in neither. While the coastal geese bring about a kind of transcendence in multiplicity, there is also uncertainty, a recognition of post-war trauma. The shore's metaphorical power as a place of fluidity manifests here in a feeling of dissatisfaction, of 'double nostalgia' and emotional disjoint.

Janice Robinson believes that H.D. wrote 'The Flowering of the Rod' with a sense that 'peace was imminent'.⁴³ The flying geese are certainly a peaceful image, but H.D. seems to find sudden peace a difficult reality to accept. The speaker becomes confused and restless by their conflicting desires for summer and winter, crying 'stay, stay' to the disappearing waves while remembering the beauty of winter frost (*FR* [4]). In the geese animal incarnation, H.D. finds a kind of transcendence for her post-war world, but recognises the difficulty with which it may appear. In the next poem of 'The Flowering of the Rod', the geese reappear as an image of the emotional detriment of searching for meaning in the destruction of war. Whereas in earlier parts of *Trilogy*, the poet is seen as a prophetic keeper of knowledge and interpreter of culture, here H.D.'s poetic voice feels uncertain of its purpose, tentative in assigning objective or communal meaning:

Satisfied, unsatisfied,
satiated or numb with hunger,

this is the eternal urge,
this is the despair, the desire to equilibrate

the eternal variant;

⁴³ Janice S. Robinson, *H.D.: The Life and Work of an American Poet* (Boston, MA.: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), p. 328.

you understand that insistent calling,

that demand of a given moment,
the will to enjoy, the will to live,

not merely the will to endure,
the will to flight, the will to achievement,

the will to rest after long flight;
but who knows the desperate urge

of those others—actual or perhaps now
mythical birds—who seek but find no rest

till they drop from the highest point of the spiral
or fall from the innermost centre of the ever—
 narrowing circle?

for they remember, they remember, as they sway
 and hover,
what once was—they remember, they remember—

they will not swerve—they have known bliss,
the fruit that satisfies—they have come back—

what if the islands are lost? what if the waters
cover the Hesperides? they would rather
 remember—

remember the golden apple-trees;
O, do not pity them, as you watch them drop
 one by one,

for they fall exhausted, numb, blind
but in certain ecstasy,

for theirs is the hunger
for Paradise. (FR [5])

Again, the emotional narrative of these poems is indecisive, both 'satisfied' and 'unsatisfied', exhausted and ecstatic, despairing and determined. The poem breaks out of the couplets that shape the rest of *Trilogy* to reflect this conflicting inner state. The poem locates the geese as flying at the locus of a 'spiral', the centre of the 'ever-narrowing circle' which in *Trilogy* signals the 'spiral shell of

history'. Here, they are stuck in memories of what came before, 'remembering' and not able to escape the spiralling, narrowing circle of memory. Their desire to find the 'will to enjoy' and 'will to live' as opposed to mere survival revisits the patterns of survival of the mollusc and earthworm, subtly referencing post-traumatic healing in the poem's war-time context. The geese are trapped by memory in their search to overcome the 'will to flight' and the 'will to endure', finding 'no rest' until they can drop from the spiral-point of history, and disengage themselves from memory.

Sarah Graham has written sensitively on the narratives of post-war trauma in *Trilogy*, particularly on civilian and female forms of war trauma often overlooked in narratives focussed on male soldiers' shell-shock.⁴⁴ She argues that H.D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision* in 1919 had a similar remedial function after the First World War; as well as coming to terms with the war itself, H.D. was also at this time grieving the loss of her brother, father and stillborn daughter, and the breakdown of her marriage to Richard Aldington. It is telling that in both, the shore is a central image, and shore imagery becomes a productive vocabulary for expressing a healing mental state: through the jellyfish and the Isles of Scilly in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, and in *Trilogy* this return to northeastern American shorelines and the migratory patterns of geese over the shore.

Despite the resignation and uncertainty of these passages, the shore also transmits a landscape of hope and regeneration. The appearance of the Hesperides begins a pattern of island imagery that gathers around Kaspar's discovery of the second messiah and post-war healing. While the islands here consider the possibility of further destruction in the image of rising water levels consuming the land, the islands actually form the basis of Kaspar's ecstatic vision, leading the world into a new, healing cycle. Island imagery appears again in the next poem to typify both captivity in and escape from memory:

⁴⁴ Sarah Graham, 'Falling Walls: Trauma and Testimony in H.D.'s *Trilogy*', *English: Journal of the English Association*, 56(216) (2007), pp. 299–319.

So I would rather drown, remembering—
than bask on tropic atolls

in the coral seas; I would rather drown
remembering—than rest on pine or fir-branch

[...]

I would rather beat in the wind, crying to these others:

yours is the more foolish circling,
yours is the senseless wheeling

round and round (FR [6])

The poet rejects the circular wheeling of the flock's spiral movements above this archipelagic geography, breaking a cycle of remembering. The movement is both individual and collective, with the speaker's rejection of the flock's movement here tempered in the next section with the poet pronouncing they are 'so happy' as the 'first or the last / of a flock or a swarm' (FR [8]). The balance between individual and communal leads H.D. to the passage discussed earlier, where she is released as a 'poetic fantasy' into a 'biological entity' with birds, insects and sea-plant cells. Graham's scholarship on H.D.'s expressions of war trauma in 'The Walls Do Not Fall' suggests that H.D.'s war trauma is communicated through 'wall imagery and a concern with the disruption of various boundaries'; by 'The Flowering of the Rod', H.D. uses the fluid liminal boundary of the shore to restore healing by modelling a fluidity between the boundaries of individual and communal ways of living.⁴⁵ The image of the community subsumes the image of the individualist mollusc in *The Sword Went Out to Sea*: 'in saving oneself, one creates a shell, not the isolated, highly individual spiral-shell I spoke of, but a minute coral shell, one of a million' (SWS 67). In their littoral and communal migrations, the geese mimic the transcendence narratives of the mollusc and the worm, who both move from a consciousness based on hunger, instinct and survival to self-knowledge. The geese move over a littoral landscape and a fragmented self to Kaspar's vision of a healed earth, where

⁴⁵ Graham, 'Falling Walls: Trauma and Testimony in H.D.'s *Trilogy*', p. 300.

individual and collective concerns are addressed over an archipelago that also forms a cohesive place.

As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, Eve is intrinsically connected to the shore, as is Kaspar's journeying to find her. In 'The Flowering of the Rod', Kaspar follows 'an echo of an echo in a shell' not only toward Eve but toward a series of ecstatic visions of a healed, post-war earth grounded in the littoral and archipelagic. Two sections are quoted here, in order to examine them against each other:

he was lost,
out-of-time completely,

he saw the islands of the Blest,
he saw the Hesperides,

he saw circles and circles of islands
about the lost centre-island, Atlantis

[...]

he, in that half-second, saw
the whole scope and plan

of our and his civilisation on this,
his and our earth, before Adam. (*FR* [31])

He saw it all as if enlarged under a sun-glass;
he saw it all in minute detail,

the cliffs, the wharves, the citadel,
he saw the ships and the sea-roads crossing

and all the rivers and bridges and dwelling-houses

[...]

and through it, there was a sound as of many waters,
rivers flowing and fountains and sea-waves washing the sea-wrecks,

and though it was all on a very grand scale,
yet it was small and intimate,

Paradise
before Eve (FR [32])

The migratory geese anticipate the birds-eye-view that Kaspar receives in his ecstasy. The visions are triggered by patterns of imagery that mimic the gastropod spiral of time earlier in *Trilogy* as a lily unfurls its petals in a circle that encompasses the individual/collective binary manifested in the geese: 'each petal was separate /yet still held, as it were, / by some force of attraction / to its dynamic centre'. The first vision, from Adam, alludes to Book Eleven of *Paradise Lost*, where Adam is led to a vision by the archangel Michael which is both personal and the totality of human history. Milton's vision specifically chronicles 'what shall happ'n till the Flood'; H.D.'s locates a scattering of island groups, a hopeful image of the Hesperides not subsumed by the sea.⁴⁶ H.D. furthermore gives a vision of a paradise before Eve as well as before Adam, crucially building Eve's as something with harmonious human settlement on a littoral boundary.

In Kaspar's vision of the 'Paradise / before Eve' in which the sound of water is all-encompassing, of 'rivers flowing and fountains and sea-waves washing the sea-rocks' (FR [32]), the sea is conceived in the birds-eye of the geese, examining a whole landscape from above. These geese, therefore, have a transcendent quality and are able to fly beyond normal thought; harbingers of both the new world and the old, they have escaped the dualities of imbalance. As with her previous work, H.D. yearns for existence as a being between objective definitions, able to move between various states. Again, there is a strange movement both forward and backward, to the 'paradise / before Eve' and the gynocentric post-war future. The view is 'grand' and 'small and intimate' at the same time, and the

⁴⁶ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 260 (prose caption).

water merges between freshwater and saltwater. The littoral scene allows for Kaspar's new world to be built on the fluidity of the shore, and for natural imagery to build a new kind of symbolism. The geese are given a fluidity in identity which does not tie them to existing narratives, building a new structure of cultural mythology that equalises the human and non-human.

At the end of 'The Flowering of the Rod', *Trilogy* closes with the image of Kaspar placing the fisherman's jar on the floor of the ox stall with gifts from Melchior and Balthasar. In an act of deferring power, Kaspar bows only his head when the other kings bow low, showing that 'his part in this ritual / was almost negligible' (*FR* [42]). This small moment of self-negation by Kaspar encompasses *Trilogy's* narrative of begetting a 'self-out-of-self' by dismantling power structures between genders and between the human and non-human, and signifies the new world borne by Eve. The poem's pattern of littoral imagery links back to Kaspar's jar, originally found by a fisherman, as Kaspar follows a series of littoral images towards Eve's birth. The shore is made a sacred space by Eve's presence, but is also necessary to Eve's construction, allowing for her to become the 'earth-mother' and producing her gynocentric symbolism of pearls and shells. John R. Gillis's comments on modern shores neatly summarises the potency of the shore image in *Trilogy*:

Paradoxically, they are modernity's primary place of dreams but also of its nightmares. It is at the edge of the sea that we imagine both the birth of new worlds and the death of old ones.⁴⁷

The shore's cycles of tides and migratory birds allow for an interchange of old and new, allowing H.D.'s vision of humankind to return to evolutionary beginnings and start again. Susan Acheson asserts that 'the whole point of [*Trilogy*] is that it is [...] a new beginning'.⁴⁸ H.D. conceives this beginning in a simultaneous forwards/backwards motion in 'The Flowering of the Rod', in which she

⁴⁷ John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 158.

⁴⁸ Susan Acheson, 'H.D. and the Age of Aquarius: Liturgy, Astrology and Gnosis in *Trilogy*,' *Sagetrieb*, 15(1-2) (1996), 133-150, 146.

renounces human progress as before and suggests a new direction into a better future that rejects the industrial:

I am the first or the last to renounce
iron, steel, metal;

I have gone forward,
I have gone backward,

I have gone onward from bronze and iron,
into the Golden Age. (FR [8])

H.D.'s animal connotations signify metamorphosis and movement from one state to the next, not necessarily moving in a forwards motion but in an exploratory, non-linear motion, like the pattern of the spiral shell and history. It is one way that H.D. illustrates the overall trajectory of the poem to locate and build new possible worlds for humankind to inhabit: as the animals change from one state to the next, H.D.'s image of human culture is conceived in similarly fluid, liminal terms.

The human element of *Trilogy*—its myth-making, its interrogation of patriarchal culture, its narrative of war trauma—has thus far dominated critical discourse, but there is evidence that H.D. is interested and invested in the natural world on an ecological level, particularly linked to human destruction of the natural world, and human connections to the natural world sought and forged through myth and spiritual narrative. Natural history is, in *Trilogy*, linked inextricably to human history. *Trilogy* explores Western patriarchal dominion over spirituality and civilian life, but also understands the narratives of dominion and control exercised over nature within this system of power. The image of the littoral rituals, of the alchemical nature of the sea-tide, brings about a fundamental shift in the relationship between the human and the natural.

In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D.'s final piece of writing, the Trojan War is portrayed with new emphasis on fluidity in Helen's identity and role in the war. The 'spiral shell' as a symbol of layered history

reappears to explore the cultural legacy of Helen of Troy and to rewrite it. The central concern of *Trilogy*, to rewrite and renew the patterns and tropes of patriarchal culture, continues in *Helen in Egypt*, and the littoral again plays an important role as a liminal site where alternative readings and imaginaries are made visible.

CHAPTER FIVE: LITTORAL ANTIQUITY AND THE REINVENTION OF HELEN IN *HELEN IN EGYPT* (1961)

All Greece hates
the still eyes in the white face,
the lustre as of olives
where she stands,
and the white hands.

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.

Greece sees, unmoved,
God's daughter, born of love,
the beauty of cool feet
and slenderest knees,
could love indeed the maid,
only if she were laid,
white ash amid funereal cypresses. (CP II. 1–18)

In this poem, 'Helen', from the 1924 collection *Heliodora*, H.D.'s Helen is presented as confined by the story of her legacy. 'Reviled' and 'hated' by Greece, she is described in terms of stasis, her 'white' hands and 'wan' face reminiscent of an alabaster statue. Greece, remembering 'past enchantments / and past ills' reciprocates her inertia in being 'unmoved' by the sight of her, and will only accept Helen as 'white ash / amid funereal cypresses'. The poem imagines Helen as defined by her part in the Trojan War and resultant alienation from her homeland; the hatred of 'all Greece' turning her beauty into her oppressor. As Susan Stanford Friedman writes in *Psyche Reborn*, 'the speaker understands the connection between the traditional worship of woman as symbol and the death of the living woman'; Helen's public image suffocates her inner life.¹

¹ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1987) p. 235.

H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, written between 1952 and 1955 and published in 1961, the year of her death, follows the narrative of Helen of Troy living in Egypt during and after the fall of Troy. This particular version of the Helen story was first inscribed by the Greek poet Stesichorus sometime between 640 and 555 BC and was picked up by Euripides in his play *Helen* in 412 BC. References to Stesichorus's 'Pallinode' emphasises a tradition of apology and retribution for Helen; Stesichorus exonerates Helen and her blame for the Trojan War by asserting that she never reached Troy, appearing on the Trojan ramparts as a phantom double. While Helen appears at Troy in this phantom state, her physical living self is in Egypt; H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* focuses on this sense of doubling and, as Horace Gregory writes in his introduction to the work, the 'rebirth and resurrection' of her narrative.² The identical prefixes to Gregory's chosen words emphasise cycle, repeated episodes of the death of an old form making way for the new, and this reflects the cyclical, forwards-backwards motion of the narrative itself.

The opening sections of *Helen in Egypt* refer to the vitriol directed at Helen in the earlier *Heliodora* poem, calling her 'Helena, Helen hated of all Greece', 'this evil philtre / this curse of Aphrodite', and describing how heroes, both Trojan and Greek, will be 'cursing Helen through eternity' (*Helen* 4).³ However, the crucial difference between this earlier Helen and the Helen of *Helen in Egypt* is that where the former's emphasis falls on Helen as a statue frozen beneath the male gaze, the latter presents and explores Helen's inner world and memories with vivid attention, ultimately revising and retelling her myth from her own perspective. H.D.'s 1924 *Helen*, as Susan Stanford Friedman writes, is trapped inside 'the patriarchal cage of traditional hate and adoration' as part of an implicit attack on the use of female symbols in masculine myth-making.⁴ The 1924 H.D. is observer in this

² Horace Gregory, 'Introduction' to *Helen in Egypt* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. viii.

³ Following the typography of the text, references to prose captions in *Helen in Egypt* will be given in italics, and references to verse will be non-italic.

⁴ Friedman, *Psyche Reborn*, p. 235.

poem, commenting on Helen's growing paralysis and silence and her cultural legacy under patriarchy, distanced from both the 'all Greece' of the poem and Helen herself. In contrast, *Helen in Egypt* is written in first person from Helen's perspective and acknowledges H.D.'s role as writer in prose captions that summarise Helen's passages: H.D. moves away from commenting on existing cultural narratives to take on the role of myth-maker, rewriting Helen's narrative from its origin. The opening of the text signals its revisionary nature; its opening phrase, 'We all know the story of Helen of Troy but few of us have followed her to Egypt' speaks to a sense of communal and cultural knowledge about to be expanded and revised (*Helen* 1). Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas, in his essay on *Helen in Egypt* as a response to Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, points out that H.D.'s choice of words in this opening section, telling that Helen was 'transposed or translated' to Greece rather than a more obvious verb like 'transported', predicates the poem's insight into issues of re-interpretation, and its aim in making Helen more comprehensible.⁵

Written at the end of H.D.'s career, and her final finished piece of work, *Helen in Egypt* is often read as a feminist resistance to the patriarchal world of classicism, and as a meditation on the nature of memory and ancient-modern relations. As Eileen Gregory writes, H.D. sees 'her role [as poet] in terms of a subversive, erotic, and visionary endeavour fundamentally challenging the assumptions of classical transmission'.⁶ H.D.'s poem fuses epic and lyric narratives in a text that refuses, like most of H.D.'s work, narrow definitions, but that also builds a response to the story of Helen and a regeneration that is grounded in the personal. In the unpublished journal *Compassionate Friendship*, written around 1955, H.D. writes, '[in the figure of Helen] I had found myself, I had found my alter-ego or my double—and that my mother's name was Helen had no doubt something to do with it'.⁷ In

⁵ Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas, 'Seaward: H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* as a Response to Pound's *Cantos*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 44(4) (1998), 464–483: 465.

⁶ Eileen Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 57.

⁷ H.D., *Compassionate Friendship*, unpublished typescript, Box 38 of the *H.D. Papers*, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

the following passage, Helen breaks from her identity as wife and mother in order to reconstruct her memories and identity:

now I remember, I remember
Paris before Egypt, Paris after;
I remember all that went before,

[...]

I had all that, everything,
my Lord's devotion, my child
prattling of a bird's nest,

playing with my work-basket;
the reels rolled to the floor
and she did not stoop to pick up

the scattered spools but stared
with wide eyes in a white face,
at a stranger—and stared at her mother,

a stranger, that was all,
I placed my foot on the last step
of the marble water-stair

and never looked back;
how could I remember all that?
Zeus, our-father was merciful. (*Helen* 227–228)

This passage, Friedman writes, presents Helen's life as 'a stark, timeless expression of the potential invisibility and hollowness of women within the satin cage of a "happy marriage" as a wife and mother'.⁸ What is especially striking, moreover, is the detail of the moment in which Helen rebels against this life. She steps out onto a 'marble water-stair', a movement from dry land to a land/water borderline state, onto a staircase which later in the text becomes a spiral staircase associated with the spiral shape of a seashell. The littoral details here signal liberation from confining gender roles, literally providing the boundary over which she leaves behind a familial

⁸ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Creating a Women's Mythology: H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*', *Women's Studies*, 5(2) (1977), 163–197: 195.

domestic sphere, and also appeal to further investigation into the presence of these littoral landscapes and details in the work. *Helen in Egypt* returns throughout to littoral landscapes both imagined and real: the sensory experience of the Aegean Sea is paired with the sands of Egyptian deserts, Helen's memories revolve around the post-battle 'desolated beach' of Troy, and the spiral of a sea-shell becomes emblematic of Helen's memories and worldly mystery, a 'finite' image representing the 'infinite'.

The narrative of H.D.'s poem follows Helen's remembering of the Fall of Troy and her part in the Trojan War, as well as her alienation in Egypt where she cannot read or speak the native language. The poem is split into three parts: 'Pallinode', 'Leuké' and 'Eidolon'. Helen's feelings of displacement are dramatised by recurrent images of the shore; she describes the present and past, for instance, as a separation from 'coast to coast', magnifying the sea journeys between Sparta, Troy and Egypt as crossings between dimensions of time (*Helen* 116). The shore becomes a central image for H.D.'s reinvention of Helen; Thetis takes on a central role in the narrative as a powerful representative of the sea. Poseidon is ignored in favour of the nereid as she equips Helen with the self-knowledge and metaphor needed to understand her own story.

The process of remembering is a recurring theme in *Helen in Egypt*, as Helen constructs her sense of self through the recollection of particular places and events. As George Hart has pointed out, H.D. created an 'art' of remembering in order to make sense of her past in the last decade of her life, writing her memories of Ezra Pound into her memoir of him, *End to Torment*, in 1958, four years after *Helen in Egypt* was finished, and seeking repatriation in her birth country after a lifetime spent in Europe. In *End to Torment*, H.D. outlines particular kinds of remembering and their effects on selfhood and perception of reality. Remembering becomes an active production of memories rather than a passive recall: H.D. writes 'It is hardly a process of remembering, but almost, as I have said, of "manifesting"' (*ET* 46). This description also grounds memory in a kind of bodily experience, where

physical dimensions of memory and being lead to remembering. As this chapter will discuss, Helen's own tracing of memory often follows physical leads linked to the shore: the feeling of sand beneath her feet, the feeling of coastal wind, or the act of picking up objects originally found on the shore. In *End to Torment*, another form of memory is defined by H.D.: in a scene where H.D. discusses with a doctor the recent resurfacing of a memory regarding her and Pound as young lovers, she says: "I couldn't have forgotten it, but it only became real when I wrote of it; past, present and future, as you say, came together [...] This is the sort of remembering that is reality, *ecstasy*" (ET 55). Helen similarly forms memories through a fusion of past, present and future events, and of her dual narratives as a living body and a phantom, forming a new kind of ecstatic consciousness that is both dream and reality. The littoral becomes a central symbol in this joining of disparate and oppositional elements, its mutable boundary between land and sea symbolising this process of remembering through fluid movement between past, present and future. Harking back to the presentation of new kinds of consciousness in *Notes on Thought and Vision* [1919], *Helen in Egypt* uses the shore's physical qualities to understand fluidity between states of consciousness and pass into a kind of transcendent self-actualisation.

This chapter explores H.D.'s use of the shore in *Helen in Egypt*, examining its recurring presence in the poem. This analysis will take three parts. This first part will map and discuss the multiple presences of the shore in the text and their links to Helen's identity, focussing on the shore's inherent liminality and fluidity as a central image for Helen's fluctuating construction of self. This section considers John R. Gillis's work on ecotones to explore Helen's origins from 'a sea-faring people' as part of H.D.'s portrayal of her fluctuating identity. This section also gestures towards the patterns of shell imagery in the poem, slipping between bird's eggs, seashells, sand and coral islands.

The second section discusses the text's recurring image of the seashell and the multitude of meanings and symbolisms encoded into it by H.D., leading into a discussion of the text's use of

nature hieroglyphs to dramatise the human impulse to project meaning onto the landscape and to 'decode' the physical world. The shell, and hieroglyphs depicting snakes, birds and farm animals are cryptograms that must be decoded by Helen, H.D. and the reader, echoing the tensions between living creature and symbol H.D. first explored in *Sea Garden*, discussed in Chapter One. As H.D. recognises throughout her work the dual life of the natural object as a biological being and a poetic image, Helen is confused by her memories of the coastal Trojan landscape mixing with the images of hieroglyphs in Egypt. As Helen learns to decode these hieroglyphs, she enacts a process of human understanding of the non-human. How, the poem asks, do we mythologise the world around us, in both personal and collective cultural experience? It is *Helen in Egypt* that seems to suggest most forcefully that H.D. not only uses the shore landscape as a metaphor in her work, but actively interrogates the role and function of how we understand the natural world around us through language. By transcribing the physical world visually, linguistically and metaphorically, *Helen in Egypt* uses the littoral imagery of H.D.'s previous work to explore how a human figure relates to the environment around them.

The third section explores the doubling of Helen and Achilles in the text. As the two central narrative voices, Achilles and Helen are both bound to their littoral origins: Achilles, the son of land-dwelling mortal Peleus and sea-nymph Thetis, and Helen daughter of Zeus in the guise of a swan and Leda. Both are portrayed as marginal, in-between identities, Helen as 'both phantom and reality' and Achilles as torn between land and sea. Whilst they are both ecotonal figures, H.D. portrays their coastal Aegean landscape as phenomenologically dependent on the character viewing it. For the soldier Achilles, imagery of cliffs, coasts and harbours denote a site that is conquerable and militaristic. Helen, on the other hand, focuses on the meeting of water and land over the beach, on shells, sea-birds and sand. Helen's shore compared to Achilles' coast is a liminal space where she finds expression for the abstract and intangible narrative of memory.

The chapter also considers the grounding of the shore in classical sources, namely Homer, Euripides and Stesichorus. During the composition of *Helen in Egypt*, between 1952 and 1955, H.D. kept a notebook recording her reading of various sources for the Helen story.⁹ A third of this is dedicated to Euripides, 11 pages out of 33, with the rest dedicated to modern sources.¹⁰ Gregory has outlined in great detail the ways in which *Helen in Egypt* engages with *Hecuba*, *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Rhesos*, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Andromache* as well as the obvious sources of *Helen* and *Women of Troy*. *Helen in Egypt* is grounded in the narratives of Euripides's plays, but the shore is an intriguing departure from any particular source, alluding to different Homeric and Euripidean narratives as well as taking on new symbolism.¹¹ In particular, it is worth noting that the shore rarely appears in the primary Stesichorus or Euripidean texts, and the central image of the spiral shell is entirely H.D.'s own addition.

However, H.D.'s notes on Euripides's play *Helen* (within the unpublished 'Notes on Euripides, Pausanius and Greek Lyric Poets') emphasises the opening Egyptian setting as a littoral site. Euripides's *Helen* opens at the royal palace in Egypt, which is specified as being 'not far from the shore'; Helen's opening speech similarly emphasises the proximity of the mouth of the Nile.¹² H.D. wrote *Helen in Egypt* with this opening scene in mind, and stresses the presence of an elemental boundary, imagined in her notes as a sea-shelf:

I visualise this opening scene of *Helen* of Euripides not with stage-property and ceremonial of the religious drama, but as taking place out of doors upon some exquisite sea-shelf. I do not hear music but a blending of waters...¹³

⁹ H.D., 'Helen in Egypt Notebook', Box 31 of the *H.D. Papers*.

¹⁰ The modern sources are: *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1951) and *The Greek Myths* (1955) by Robert Graves, and *The Ancient Secret: In Search of the Holy Grail* by Flavia Anderson (1953).

¹¹ Eileen Gregory, 'Euripides and H.D.'s Working Notebook for *Helen in Egypt*', *Sagetrieb*, 14(1-2)(1995), 83-109: 85.

¹² Euripides, *Helen, The Bacchae and Other Plays*, trans. Philip Vellacott (Middlesex: Penguin, 1954), p. 125.

¹³ H.D., 'Helen in Egypt Notebook', p. 1, Box 31 of the *H.D. Papers*.

Here, the theatrical elements of Euripides's play are superseded by the presence of the littoral; the 'blending of waters' forming a kind of soundscape in place of theatrical music. The littoral originates from Euripides's original text but is magnified and centred by H.D.'s own imaginative interpretation. *Helen in Egypt* is grounded on the instability and fluidity of memory and selfhood, and the littoral becomes both the physical setting of the poem and its metaphorical framework.

The shore landscape in *Helen in Egypt* is materialised in its full metaphorical power: as a liminal space, a boundary between one state and another, and a site of self-exploration. In her ecocritical reading of H.D.'s *Paint It Today* and *HERmione*, Annette Debo has convincingly argued that 'place becomes an active spirit that constructs identity' and nature is valued as 'a place of absolute freedom'.¹⁴ Similarly, throughout *Helen in Egypt*, the changeable and liminal nature of the shore is seen as a site of constant freedom for Helen, defined by a transient state of being 'neither there nor here' (*Helen* 116). The shore, being neither fully sea nor fully land, welcomes and elucidates the half-phantom Helen and her searching dream-state, and the constant changing of the tide offers new readings and definitions for Helen herself.

I. 'After a Wreck': Helen's Shoreline Self

Helen in Egypt is written in a series of three-line stanzas, with each change of scene or voice introduced by a prose caption. The narrative follows Helen's process of understanding what she calls the 'dream', a vivid sequence of images that seem to exist neither in memory or reality, which is hidden by a 'veil'. When Achilles asks, cryptically 'Helen, which was the dream?', Helen is drawn to the words 'War and the sea-enchantment', immediately linking the fall of Troy to the marine (*Helen* 42–44). The 'sea-enchantment' is not distinctly defined in the text, but does encode the sea's associations with changeability, depth, the mysterious and the non-human. The notion of the 'lure'

¹⁴ Annette Debo, *The American H.D.* (Iowa City, IA.: University of Iowa Press, 2012), pp. 4 and 8.

of the sea is also repeated in the text, paralleling the sea to the 'lure' of Helen's own beauty. In a dialogue with Achilles, Helen is described as a 'mist / or a fountain of water / in that desert' which left the Spartans dying of thirst; the image of Helen as an air-borne mist or a desert water source aligns her with the meeting point of two elements. And so to a similar meeting point must Helen return; 'the sea roads', Achilles tells her, lie between her and 'the answer', and unidentified solution to Helen's crisis of selfhood (*Helen* 47).

In the text's opening, H.D. introduces the story of Helen and her main sources, naming Stesichorus's *Pallinode* and Euripides's *The Trojan Women*. H.D. ties the issue of narrative authority to the faculty of sight, emphasising the narrative of Stesichorus being supposedly blinded for reviling Helen and healed when he pardoned her in the *Pallinode*; Euripides too reviled her, she writes, but retained his sight. Immediately H.D. highlights Helen's power and agency in the telling of her own narrative, but also emphasises the sight of the poet as controlling not only whose narrative is seen, but how. Her Helen, she writes, is a pallinode like Stesichorus's text, 'a defence, explanation or apology' (*Helen* 1). While this encapsulates the definition of the pallinode, it also signals H.D.'s own reinvention of Helen's narrative: a defence and explanation of Helen's sense of self, and a subconscious apology against her mistreatment in Western literary culture. Whilst H.D. recognises the wider implications of this doubling narrative—'the Greeks and Trojans alike fought for an illusion'—she also explores the effect of the doubling on Helen's sense of self, particularly the state of 'being but not being' that permeates the littoral alienation in H.D.'s writing.

After Helen's first speech, which sets out the quest for 'peace/ for Helena, Helen hated of all Greece' (*Helen* 2), the fall of Troy is imagined as a memory that is both fluid and literally sea-bound:

the glory and the beauty of the ships,
the wave that bore them onward
and the shock of hidden shoal,

the peril of the rocks,
the weary fall of sail,
the rope drawn taut,

the breathing and breath-taking
climb and fall, mountain and valley
challenging, the coast

drawn near, drawn far,
the helmsman's bitter oath
to see the goal receding (Helen 3)

The opening places emphasis on the ships within their environment, combining physical details of the coastal landscape with their military purpose. As the ships leave the harbour, the mountains and valleys 'challenge', the rocks and cliffs promise danger and the 'hidden shoal' of sea-floor rocks anticipates shipwreck. Strikingly, the movement of the boat is directionless; the 'bitter oath' of the Helmsman at the 'goal receding' suggests a loss of momentum. The mountains and valleys 'challenge' the waves and yet mimic their shape, blurring their definition between solid and fluid. The ships move up and down on the waves, but make no progress, recalling Helen's earlier stasis in H.D.'s *Heliadora* poem. With the rocking rhythm of the triplets, the boat seems static, and stuck in the liminal space of the coast which is 'drawn near, drawn far'. The image of the ships is a single moment, an 'everlasting memory' of their arrival or departure. Helen's memory of Troy is suspended and liminal, and foregrounds a movement from land to sea that combines the militarism and dangerous voyaging of her classical sources with the liminal fluidity of the changing shore. This description of the shore as a place both fluid and in stasis echoes other writing on the shore, specifically of littoral horizons. In *Coastal Works*, John R. Gillis writes:

The blue horizon is one that can never be reached, always retreating as we approach it. Its beyond is ultimately unattainable, making it the safest repository for the dreams and nightmares we deposit there.¹⁵

The boat's constantly moving stasis reflects this notion of the littoral horizon never becoming truly reachable or tangible, ever-moving and yet remaining in one distant place. The notion of this littoral boundary furthermore being a place for 'dreams and nightmares' is similarly reflected in the construction of Helen's identity, where the shore becomes both a site of war and a site of self-actualisation and homecoming.

Throughout *Helen in Egypt*, Helen's identity is rediscovered and reconstructed at the site of the shore. Her memories centre on the beach at Troy, and begin to clarify through images of seashells and washed-up objects. Achilles and Helen are constantly tied to the shore and its capabilities as a destructive, adventurous space: Achilles is 'shipwrecked', his eyes full of 'sea-enchantment' and Helen is born of a 'sea-faring people' (*Helen* 7, 24). She is described metaphorically as having 'half-dried wings', an image which evokes Helen's human and swan parentage but also places her literally between the elements of land and shore (*Helen* 166). Helen is described throughout in marginal terms; she is only 'half of earth' and 'neither there nor here', emphasising the shore as a place for the in-between, the neither-sea-nor-land (*Helen* 111). The patterns of shore imagery that lead Helen to a kind of self-fulfilment play into this shoreline origin, but they also suggest that Helen's marginality as both phantom and real woman is intrinsically linked to the littoral. Gillis defines the shore as a kind of ecotone, a boundary zone between one ecosystem and another that creates a unique environment different from both. Gillis argues that the ecologies of such ecotones, including human settlements, form a category of 'edge species', their lives perfectly adapted to life between

¹⁵ John R. Gillis, 'Afterword: Beyond the Blue Horizon', *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge*, ed. by Nicholas Allen, Nick Groom and Jos Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 261–268, p. 265.

two biomes.¹⁶ Whilst *Helen in Egypt* predates such thinking, it is intriguing that H.D. couches Helen's selfhood in images that trace her back to her origins as both 'sea-faring people' and the littoral swan. H.D. does not call Helen an explicitly 'edge species', but the dominant role of the shore in Helen's retrieval of identity and memory forms connections between her littoral origins and future selfhood, mirroring Gillis's thinking on shoreline human settlements being both shaped and marginalised by their littoral lives.

There is a sense that the coastal landscape has somehow absorbed Helen's memory, that the poem is Helen's own wrestling with Proteus to unlock the journey home. In *The Odyssey*, Menelaus meets Proteus's daughter Idothea when he is trapped in Egypt and, mistaking her for a goddess, asks her to direct him home to Greece. Idothea tells him of her father, an 'old immortal' who governs the bottom of the ocean. Idothea tells Menelaus how to find Proteus in a cave of seals, and that 'if you can snare him and hold him tight, he will tell you about your voyage, what courses you are to take, and how you are to sail the sea so as to reach your home'.¹⁷ When Menelaus grabs hold of Proteus, he finds the sea deity to be changeable and slippery, transforming into a lion, leopard, wild boar, tree and running water. Menelaus manages to keep hold of him and learn his route home. In *Helen in Egypt*, the changeability of the sea becomes both Helen's way home and her obstacle to getting home; her understanding shapeshifts into various animal hieroglyphs in Egypt until she manages to find her answers. H.D. here casts Helen in a traditionally male heroic role, moving her from her narrative as a phantom and beautiful conquest to active protagonist. It also casts the shores of home and foreign lands into a central role.

When H.D. describes the war and Helen's part in it, the sea becomes an autonomous character. She asks, 'who will forget Helen?' amidst the violence of the sea:

¹⁶ John R. Gillis, 'Not Continents in Miniature: Islands as Ecotones', *Island Studies Journal*, 9(1) (2014), 155–166: 155, 158.

¹⁷ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Walter Shewring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 44–45, ll. 384–469.

who will forget Helen?
forever the swirling foam
threatens the ship's keel,

[...]

the Sea would revenge the wrong,
the Sea would take its toll,
remorseless, with Victory

as a mocking echo, from shoal
and the straits and the ground-swell (*Helen* 121)

The ships in this scene are 'floundering and tempest-driven'; a sharp contrast to Helen's suspended ships that challenge the physical world. The soldiers on board pray, and the sea answers 'with shock on shock / of thundering breakers' (*Helen* 122). The sea is also sentient enough to play a role in human affairs; it is personified as 'remorseless' and able to judge and exact revenge. It harks back to the visceral descriptions of coastal landscapes in *Sea Garden*; the 'swirling foam' is even reminiscent of H.D.'s Vorticist poem 'Oread', but also reminds the reader of the danger of classical seas. In Book Two of *The Aeneid*, a sea storm brings sea serpents emerging from the waves to exact revenge from the gods on Laocoön after he attempted to expose the ruse of the Trojan horse by striking it with a spear. The event is described in a similar, visceral and violent way: the serpents are completely subsumed in the water, moving together with a 'swelling tide' and burning the bottom of the sea, with 'sputtering' and 'hissing' jaws that mimic the sound of waves.¹⁸ H.D. emphasises the power and danger of the sea as being as much in the immediate sensory assaults of the waves as in the deep sea's mystery and unknowns. The sea is something we feel through its power, through its movement, rather than its material being. H.D. understands the meeting of water and land as something in process, defined by its movement.

¹⁸ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. David West (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 35.

In H.D.'s early work, the site of waves meeting rocky shores is both liminal and destructive and signals a moment of transformation. The repetition of Achilles' invocation throughout *Helen in Egypt*, 'O Thetis, O Sea-mother', casts the sea nereid Thetis into a central role, turning her into a catalyst for the events of Troy, rather than her Homeric role as an aid to Achilles, and a female Proteus figure leading Helen home. Again, the focus on the mother figure here recalls Jane Harrison's anthropological work that recast matriarchal figures and goddesses as leading figures of Greek culture. Thetis sends Helen back into her memories of Troy: 'it was Thetis, the sea-mother / recalled me from Egypt' (*Helen* 185). Helen asks Thetis to 'teach me to remember, / teach me not to remember' (*Helen* 186). Helen's memory is predicated on the idea of remembering and forgetting at the same time. Harriet Tarlo quotes the following discussion of Merleau-Ponty's writing on memory as a way of theorizing the tension inherent in Helen's kind of remembrance.¹⁹ Quoting Merleau-Ponty, David Farrell Krell describes this tension between remembering and forgetting as memory:

Remembering is not the contrary of forgetting. "True memory" is found at the *intersection* of remembrance and oblivion, "at the instant where the memory returns that which was both forgotten and preserved by our forgetting" [...] That instant of intersection *is* the verge.²⁰

This contradictory action, where forgetting can also preserve and access memory, models the way in which Helen evades the constricting legacies offered to her by the patriarchal canon. As Tarlo writes, 'there is a tension in the poem between the two dialectics, one backwards, the other forwards, [...] Helen continually insists on going back in time, into the memory process, refusing the possible afterlives offered to her'.²¹ Tarlo writes that such contradictory psychic states and modes of consciousness in Helen combine to create a 'landscape of the mind', citing the following passage as an example where 'surroundings' and 'state of mind' become synonymous:

¹⁹ Hart, "A Memory Forgotten", p. 168.

²⁰ David Farrell Krell, *Of Memory, Reminiscence, and Writing: On the Verge* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 100.

²¹ Harriet Tarlo, 'The Underworld of H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*', *Sagetrieb*, 15(1-2) (1996) 173-201: 191.

*We have had the dream, delirium, trance, ecstasy. We have had Helen in Egypt and Helen in Leuké, l'isle blanche. Where is she now? ... We feel that there is a balanced perfection in her surroundings, her state of mind... This is a waking dream or day-dream (Helen 222)*²²

We know from *Notes on Thought and Vision* that H.D. established a particular connection between the shore and modes of unconscious thought; in *Helen in Egypt*, again, the 'landscape' of the unconscious is the shore, the 'balanced perfection' itself a mutable 'waking dream' state. The shore provides the cyclical fluidity necessary for Helen to move between modes of remembering and forgetting, so that her memories are able to manifest.

Towards the end of the poem, Helen pieces together her identity by finding items, 'reliques', scattered along a beach after an imagined shipwreck:

a pearl, a bead,
a comb, a cup,

a bowl half-filled with sand,
after a wreck. (*Helen* 164)

As in H.D.'s early poetry, the shore's liminality couples with its destructiveness to allow marginal figures to reconstruct their identities. Helen's identity is found after a shipwreck, a moment of destruction at sea, washes up items that help her to construct a new identity out of her marginal state, in the marginal space of the shore. Helen is found both in and because of the wreckage, rebuilt from the wreck of a ship crashing into the shore. Helen's quest in *Helen in Egypt* is to find her memories of Troy but also to understand the self that has thus far eluded her. As H.D. looked to the shore to resolve her marginal identity as a bisexual, female poet in a patriarchal and heteronormative world, we see this played out in Helen's own search for meaning in memory and self-knowledge. Helen's rebirth must be a complete fusion of the self, H.D. writes in a prose caption: 'Helen must be reborn, that is, her soul must return wholly to her body' (*Helen* 162). Barbara Guest writes that the myth of Helen is about H.D. herself, and that H.D. felt that only through Helen could

²² Ibid, p. 198.

she remain alive.²³ As H.D. de- and re-constructs the life and cultural legacy of Helen, *Helen in Egypt* also forms the resolution of a writer who, at the end of her career, has finally come to terms with her own fractured sense of self.²⁴

In 1949, H.D. met with Eliza M. Butler, a fan of Bryher's who had communicated with H.D. after sending Bryher fan mail. Butler discussed with H.D. Goethe's use of the legend of Helen, particularly of her imagined doubling at Troy. Butler, in her own writing, is keenly sensitive to Helen's narrative living 'but as a shade', 'feeling and thinking as a real woman' but who 'has never had a real existence except in the minds of men' as a 'strange, beautiful, mythological being.'²⁵ Helen's marginal and in-between state is one attached to her by (mostly male) writers. Whilst H.D. highlights her sources in the opening of the poem, they are unmentioned thereafter; distance is deliberately placed between Helen and the men who previously told her story. The speaker of the poem is said by Gregory in his introduction to the text to be H.D. ventriloquising Stesichorus, but it can just as easily be read as Helen herself, or H.D. speaking as Helen.²⁶ When other characters speak—Theseus, Menelaus or Paris—their names are written next to their speeches as in a play, therefore Helen's voice, and H.D.'s governance over her narrative, are our default storytellers.

Helen's memories of Troy are disjointed and hinge upon shore imagery, specifically the 'desolate beach' at Troy. When Helen learns to 'remember', the poem gives way to what H.D. calls the Waking Dream, a state characterised by 'a balanced perfection in her surroundings, her state of mind' (*Helen* 222). The Waking Dream, as Helen refers to her fragments of memories, places Helen in a place that is not only timeless and absent of any particular geography, but emphasises individual consciousness. Whilst there are similarities between Stesichorus's source and H.D.'s text, H.D.

²³ Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (London: Collins, 1984), p. 292.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

²⁶ Gregory, 'Introduction' to *Helen in Egypt*, p. viii.

emphasises the image of the shore and shoreline objects in Helen's experiences at Troy, and its power as a metaphorical image to enable Helen's understanding of her own history. Helen's memory is meeting Paris on a 'desolate coast', and this liminal and changeable image prompts her to question her memories: 'did I ever stand on the ramparts?' (*Helen* 224).

The physical space of the shore allows Helen access into her previously lost memories. Helen recounts 'scraping' dried weed from the sand while Achilles gathers driftwood for the fire. As in the passage where she walks with Achilles on the sand, it is the physical and sensory details of the shore landscape that evoke the memory's significance:

I remember
the crackle of salt-weed,
the sting of salt as I crept nearer

over shale and white shells;
O I remember, I remember (*Helen* 223).

The harsh physical elements of the shore—the stinging air, the smell of the salt spray—help ground Helen in reality enough to remember her own past, and to keep it from being re-written. Later, the shore becomes directly linked to the events of war by transforming into corporeal images of the bodies slain by the Trojans: 'I only remember the shells / whiter than bone', 'Dust of shells— / Dust of skulls, I say' (*Helen* 235). Rachel Blau DuPlessis emphasises the importance of the colour 'white' here, a descriptor which resounds through the text when describing the beach of Troy and various images of seashells: 'in the quest of Helen's unfragmented identity, whiteness is often an image of the integrated self, the place where prismatic colours fuse'.²⁷ There is an intriguing parallel here between the 'white' of an integrated self found through the white beach and shell matter and the 'white' of H.D.'s original Helen poem from 1924, where white denoted the cold stillness of a Helen frozen into an alabaster statue. The shells being 'whiter than bone' also encodes the significance

²⁷ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, 'Romantic Thralldom in H. D.', *Contemporary Literature*, 20(2) (1979), 178–203: 197.

between physical and metaphysical; beyond bone matter and the physical shore there is the shore of Helen's memory, ancestry and marginal self.

The shore landscape allows Helen the fullest and most concrete vision of her identity; earlier in the text, when the memory of being on the 'desolate beach' appears to Helen and jolts her from her 'trance', she attempts to disguise her body to hide from Achilles by blackening it with charcoal from a dying fire. Achilles recognises her by her eyes and rebukes her, rhetorically asking "'are you Hecate? Are you witch?'" (*Helen* 38). It is a striking moment in the text for its portrayal of Helen as something solid, bodily and recognisable by Achilles. Far from being the translucent and fluid phantom of Stesichorus, Helen's identity is tangible and knowable at the point of the shore.

Elizabeth A. Hirsch emphasises the confusing multiplicity of Helen's character in her psychoanalytic study of the text. She describes H.D.'s Helen as being swamped 'by masculine narratives that contradictorily define her and unable to construct an image or truth scene of her own'.²⁸ It is true that the fragmentation of Helen's self is initially posed as a burden set by male-authored sources; Helen's amnesia of the events of Troy is set in the tension between the story 'we all know' and the events of Egypt. H.D.'s littoral landscapes throughout her work find a space for such prismatic identities and allow them to move between many definitions at once. Helen does not describe her freedom as a separation from the stories that came before, but a refusal to internalise them:

let them sing Helena for a thousand years,
let them name and re-name Helen,

I can not endure the weight of eternity,
they will never understand
how, a second time, I am free (*Helen* 109–110).

As the text continues, this sense of 'freedom' becomes a precise movement through a space between land and water as Helen remembers her nocturnal escape from Troy:

²⁸ Elizabeth A. Hirsch, 'Imaginary Images: H.D., Modernism, and the Psychoanalysis of Seeing', *Signets: Reading H.D.*, ed. by Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 430-454, p. 440.

I only know that I slipped
on the floating weed

near the edge – was it Simois' river?
was it the sea?
it was a harbour, bay or estuary;

I only know that I lay
on the salt grass and my hands
tore at the bitter stems

that cut me like adders' tongues;
it was dark, I had not the power
to leap from the platform to the wharf (Helen 266).

Again, the physicality of the landscape is what keeps Helen anchored in her memory; the bank moves between sea and shore, weeded bank and freshwater river, a conflation of flora and fauna in the adder-like grass and human and natural in Helen tearing at the grass that, in turn, tears at her skin. Helen lies in the grass, we presume, to evade capture: the instinctive movement from one place to another is what aids Helen to escape. Slipping on weeds, Helen reaches out for a nearby ladder and is filled with oxymoronic strength: she escapes because she 'had not the strength to drown' (Helen 267).

This particular episode once again presents a heroic Helen in the surroundings of the sea, where her movements and the treacherous waters are reminiscent of Odysseus surviving a sea-storm in Book Five of *The Odyssey*. Odysseus describes the rocks tearing at the skin on his hands in the same way that the sea-grass pulls at Helen, and feels the same desperate exhaustion.²⁹ Odysseus is saved by the appearance of Cadmus's daughter, the goddess Ino, who Homer describes as moving in and out of the sea like a seagull. She 'flew up from the waves as a seagull might' and 'then sank once more, as a seagull might, into the billowy sea, and a dark wave covered her'.³⁰ In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen is

²⁹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, p. 65.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 65.

figured as a sea-bird as Achilles watches her from the helm of his ship, in a pattern of imagery that places Helen as her own saviour. After a description of his ship that emphasises the various ‘fluttering’, ‘half-balanced’ and ‘taut’ sails, one of the sails is lost as Achilles glimpses a figure over the waves. ‘Who was it?’ he asks, ‘who did I see?’ (*Helen* 163). Achilles assumes it is ‘Helen on the sea-road / nearing Troy’ and is silenced by the figure turning to watch a bird above the water:

and a head half-turned to watch
a reeling tern, a sleeve,
a garment’s fold, no word, no whisper,

nor glance even... or was it a gull
she watched, a heron or raven
or plover? (*Helen* 163–164)

The appearance of the Helen-phantom, tellingly identified by clothing rather than Helen’s actual body, is signalled by the flight of the sea-bird traversing water, air, and sand, before Helen is invoked to collect items along the shore from a shipwreck. Once she ‘remembers other loves, small things, “a pearl, a bead, a comb, a cup, a bowl”’, Achilles tells her that she must ‘return to the Shell, your mother’ (*Helen* 165). The shell becomes a layered natural object, referencing the shells found along Troy’s ‘desolate beach’, reconstructing Helen’s past and propelling Helen towards her future:

what bird, ever, was less beautiful than man?
live with the swan, your begetter,
return to the shell, your mother (*Helen* 165).

The instruction to return to her ‘mother’, a ‘shell’ of the egg cared for by Leda, leads Helen to the other mother of *Helen in Egypt*, Thetis, who governs the white island of Leuké to safeguard Achilles from the war:

only let Thetis,
the goddess hold me for a while
in this her island, her egg-shell. (*Helen* 197).

This conflation of shell symbolism between Helen’s birth, Thetis’s island and the seashells of the Trojan beach, gestures toward the pattern of seashell imagery in the poem, where a single natural object takes on manifold meanings. The ‘shell’ slips between the egg of a bird, the built islands and

the gastropod spiral shell symbol seen before in *Trilogy*, again emphasising Helen's grounding in ecotonal sites. The shell's hieroglyphic image is furthermore linked to new forms of writing and reading, providing a model for a new, radical narrative structure. The appearance of the shell signals the appearance in *Helen in Egypt* of animal-based hieroglyphs, an image to be translated and decoded and a way of reading the physical world.

II. 'an infinite number / yet one whole': Helen's Hieroglyphic Landscape

As Helen comes to terms with her memories of Troy, patterns of shore imagery also lead to the resurfacing of the spiral shell image, which H.D. uses to conceptualise time in her other writings. In *Tribute to Freud*, the shell becomes linked in her mind to immortality and infinity, a 'personal soul's existence in some form or other, after it has shed the outworn or outgrown body' (*TF* 64). The shell's spiral shape represents the infinite for H.D., continuing the imagery of the gastropod shell in *Trilogy* and *The Sword Went Out to Sea* as something that encapsulates a sense of layered, cyclical time and history. The seashell in *Helen in Egypt* becomes an object of personal history and memory for Helen, encapsulating a layered doubling that allows her to be both at Troy and in Egypt.

The spiral seashell is introduced as 'the infinite reduced to a finite image', and something that 'may tell a tale more ancient than these mysteries' (*Helen* 114). What are the 'tales' they may tell? For H.D., their seemingly infinite nature suggests a reach across historical periods, even across life and death. As DuPlessis writes, for H.D. 'stories are not created but recovered; they are not new-made but really old'.³¹ DuPlessis is referring to H.D.'s feminist revisionism with Helen, but we could extend this principle to H.D.'s act of 'recovering' the 'ancient' tales of natural objects and their unending cycles of regeneration. Rachel Carson conceives a similar image of littoral antiquity in *The Sea*

Around Us, where she writes of sea floor sediments:

³¹ DuPlessis, 'Romantic Thralldom', pp. 191, 192.

The sediments are a sort of epic poem of the earth. When we are wise enough, perhaps we can read in them all of past history. For all is written here. In the nature of the materials that compose them and in the arrangement of their successive layers the sediments reflect all that has happened in the waters above them and on the surrounding lands.³²

The suitably literary metaphor used by Carson grounds H.D.'s conception of a historical, infinite littoral space with the natural history of the sea floor. When the sea floor reaches land it becomes the shore, which is where Helen finds both physical seashells and shells depicted in hieroglyph and myth. The notion of reading the history and memory that is 'written' into this littoral site is reflected in the patterns of hieroglyphs and hieroglyphic meanings that are to be translated and understood by Helen.

The shell is extended not only to represent but to contain the deaths of war:

O the tomb, delicate sea-shell,
rock-cut but frail,
the thousand, thousand Greeks

fallen before the Walls
were as one soul, one pearl;
I was asleep,

part of the infinite (*Helen* 114)

The Greeks are described as a soul growing within a shell; though a pearl-producing shell is a bivalve rather than a spiral-shelled gastropod, the shore as a site of death and funereal rites is still transformed into a macro image of a tiny coastal object. This contrast between the 'rock-cut but frail' brittleness of the shell with the infinite and spiritual pearl imbues the object with universal significance. The regenerative image of the pearl and the dead Greeks becoming 'one soul' couples with the almost surreal image of the seashell becoming a tomb; the dead on the beaches of Troy thus become abstract and phantom-like, encapsulating Helen's own experience. Once again, the

³² Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (1951), collected in *Sea*, ed. by Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1964), p. 76.

physical littoral object of the shell roots Helen in her experiences and brings her out of her phantom-state.

H.D. sees these liminal objects as necessary in understanding personal experience and protecting the self. She writes in a prose caption, ““encounters with those half-seen” must balance and compensate for the too intense primary experience’ (*Helen* 162). The ‘half-seen’ here references the marginal characters of Helen and Achilles, but also allude to the half-and-half nature of the littoral, which H.D. cites as necessary for understanding and decoding experience. The image of the shell recurs throughout Helen’s experiences at Troy; its spiral shape becomes the staircase leading Helen through passages to the sea; the besieged Troy becomes a ‘blasted shell’; and the sand on the battleground beach moves between a dust of shells and a dust of skull and bone (*Helen* 133, 155). The ‘intensity of too primary an experience’ that H.D. sees as threatening to the self is diminished by Helen’s attachment to a finite image which helps her to understand her experiences.

The shore becomes an image liminal enough to encode the nuances of a subjective reality. H.D.’s descriptions of time and reality hinge on the balance between the infinite and the finite encapsulated by the seashell image. Helen ‘will encompass infinity by intense concentration on the moment’; she has ‘finished her cycle in time’ but continues living through the images that patterned her life and consciousness, like the shell. Descriptions of time in *Helen in Egypt* mimic both the spiral shape of the shell and the finite/infinite duality it represents; time is ‘widening star-circles’, a ‘moon-shape’, ‘a cloud or swirl of snow’ yet ‘small as a pebble’ (*Helen* 200). It is multitudinous and visceral, ‘a swarm’, ‘one cluster of bees’, ‘a galaxy of numberless stars’ and also singular, ‘an infinite number / yet one whole’, stars ‘that seem one / but are many’ (*Helen* 43).

Helen, in her phantom doubling, is herself both finite and infinite by being there and not there; the shell is situated on an ecotone where the boundary between land and water is both finite in its

physicality and infinite in its constant changeability and cycles. In another surreal image of the shell, which plays with its small form, Helen climbs inside the shell to reach the infinite:

if I am small enough,
held in this smallest sphere,
this moon-crystal, this shell,

I will encompass the infinite (*Helen* 200–201)

What it means for Helen to encompass the infinite is elusive, and perhaps it is fruitless to try to observe any kind of objective meaning or answer, and better to note significance in its very liminality. This text itself is circular and elusive and often difficult to read. Twitchell-Waas compares the nature of the text to the seashell image of H.D.'s war-time poem *Trilogy* which proceeds in a centrifugal, centripetal manner, opening and closing itself to the tide. He writes, 'the texture of the poem—its constant circularity, folding back on itself, and apparent contradictoriness—is intended to release us from irritable reaching after certainties'.³³ Helen's initial reach for concrete meaning, followed by a final understanding achieved through an acceptance of its elusivity, mimics our own reading of *Helen in Egypt* which also must accept its lack of coherence and clarity and give way to a more intuitive kind of interpretation.

H.D. implies that this structure is deliberate in one of the text's prose captions: 'let the temple walls flower with "the indecipherable" Amen-script. It is not necessary to "read" the riddle. The pattern itself is sufficient and it is beautiful' (*Helen* 32). Such an exercise is often read as an act of resistance; DuPlessis examines the attempts of twentieth-century women writers (including H.D. in *Helen in Egypt*) to find ways that 'sever the narrative from formerly conventional structures of fiction and consciousness about women', which she terms 'writing beyond the ending'.³⁴ Robert O'Brien Hokanson similarly argues that text 'is more concerned with questioning than affirming' but that this

³³ Twitchell-Waas, 'Seaward', p. 470.

³⁴ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. x.

'indeterminate character qualifies Helen's status and its own revolutionary endeavour', establishing 'a larger context of questioning and qualification'.³⁵

The text certainly challenges the notion of textual authority; the prose captions that are read along the verse often contradict each other. DuPlessis summarises this well:

There are prose passages preceding every poem which summarise the contents of that section. This is helpful, because the material is difficult and obscure. But the prose also has the effect of making the events seem more elusive, challenging both their place in time and their reality. Sometimes the prose passages make a statement implying that something has happened, while the poetry which comes later poses the same fact as a question. After having read the two statements, the reader is unsure whether or not something has occurred.³⁶

When Helen recalls the fate of her sister Clytemnestra in what seems to be a meditation on fate and an attempt to fix an identity for herself, Helen asks 'has it ever happened, / or is it yet to come? / do I myself invent // this tale of my sister's fate?' as if unsure about the veracity of both the story and its relation to her sense of self (*Helen* 93). The image of the shore becomes a useful strategy for H.D. to ground her work in something groundless; its constant mutability and shifting boundaries between water and land reflect the nature of a text that aims both to revise and to open itself up for revision.

In the same essay, DuPlessis examines the stock narrative of romantic thralldom in *Helen in Egypt*, defining romantic thralldom as 'all-encompassing, totally defining love between two unequals' that relies on an imbalance of dominance and submission.³⁷ For DuPlessis, *Helen in Egypt* is the 'archaeological site' where such recovered stories are found, centering on the relationship between Helen and Achilles as fundamentally unequal in the performance and interpretation of their

³⁵ Robert O'Brien Hokanson, 'Is it all a Story?: Questioning revision in H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*', *American Literature*, 64(2) (1992), 331–346: 331, 344.

³⁶ DuPlessis, 'Romantic Thralldom', p. 193.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 192.

respective gender: the 'fame of Achilles' versus the 'beauty of Helen' (*Helen* 258–259). *Helen in Egypt*, writes DuPlessis, concerns the 'flame of thoughts' excluded from the traditional story, focussing on Helen's inner life. H.D. defines this version of the story, according to DuPlessis, in subversion to masculinist forms of epic: 'this story will be different, untraditional, unheroic, even eerie where epic was direct'.³⁸ DuPlessis provides the following quotation from the text as an encapsulation of such renewed narrative forms:

the million personal things,
things remembered, forgotten,

remembered again, assembled
and re-assembled in different order (*Helen* 289)

At the centre of this narrative structure is circling, layering, repeating, spiralling: the exact pattern of the spiral seashell, and H.D.'s conception of its physical evocation of layered, cyclical time. The spiralling shell, and the fluidity of its littoral surroundings, therefore enable H.D. to ground her reinvention of Helen in the mutable, the re-assembled, the re-remembered, providing a visual symbolism to this expression of experience and construction of story. Philip Steinberg describes the movement of the sea as being central to our conception of littoral place: 'instead of being subsequent to geography, it [movement] is geography'.³⁹ As H.D. constructs Helen's identity as fluctuating between various sources—Stesichorus, Homer, Goethe, Euripides, H.D. herself—the littoral becomes a necessary fluid geography mapping out these various iterations, both as a system of imagery and a structural model.

Through this circular structure, the spiral-shell is not only defined as a poetic image, but offers new ways of reading. The final pages of the poem layer the narrative in a way that brings its closure back to its beginning. The lyric from the end of the poem reads:

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Philip E. Steinberg, 'Free Sea', *Spatiality, Sovereignty and Carl Schmitt: Geographies of the Nomos*, ed. by Stephen Legg (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 268-275, p. 272.

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. (*Helen* 303)

The 'simple' path echoes lines from 'Pallinode':

a simple spiral-shell may tell
a tale more ancient
than these mysteries (*Helen* 107)

The 'simple path' of the 'simple spiral-shell' reflects the poem's circular structure, turning in on itself as the poem does and complicating the notion of a finite ending. The idea of returning 'in' to the 'innermost' part of something plays on the structure of the spiral shell, where the innermost whorl is the juvenile shell. This representation of time as a spiral is both physical in the symbol of the shell, and made metaphysical by H.D.'s ideas of layering and widening time-circles. The 'Pallinode' passage is also striking for its notion of tale-telling on the part of the shell, as though H.D. is speaking not only for Helen in the text but through the shell itself.

By examining the ending of the poem, we can see that this may be true, that H.D.'s cyclical structure in *Helen in Egypt*, figured as a challenge to patriarchal notions of narrative, is actually modelled on the physical shape of a gastropod shell. H.D. owned two books about shells and littoral objects in her personal library: an illustrated field guide to British seashells and a slim volume by marine biologist

T.A. Stephenson.⁴⁰ Stephenson's 1944 book, titled *Sea Shore Life and Patterns*, examines the inherent beauty in the shapes made by shells, tentacles and starfish movements, particularly the way they follow Fibonacci sequences. The book is mostly filled with diagrams and stylistic linocuts of whelks, starfish and cuttlefish, but his reading of spiral shells is particularly striking to read alongside *Helen in Egypt*, reading the pattern of the shell itself against the movement of the creature inside, which the human eye knows is there but does not always see, creating a secondary kind of 'phantom' movement alongside the shell's spiral patterning:

in other words, the pattern is built up partly in relation to visible lines, which we may call *explicit* ones, and partly to invisible lines which may be called *implicit*; and both sets are vital to the effect produced.⁴¹

This tension between the visible and the invisible, the 'phantom' creature and the solid and the seen is similarly central to *Helen in Egypt's* narrative. Helen herself is both a phantom and a material body, and Helen's story is read always with the 'phantom' of her legacy alongside, which we as readers inevitably compare to. The poem 'ends' with this stanza:

only Achilles could break his heart
and the world for a token,
a memory forgotten. (*Helen* 304)

Hokanson argues that the poem's final conclusion avoids being finite by slipping into 'formal indeterminacy', "escaping" back into the form it has been constructing all along.⁴² Achilles' memory is forgotten but ultimately recognised in its forgetting; Achilles' journey toward this forgotten memory parallels Helen's own recovery of a forgotten self. The poem begins and ends in forgetting, forming a spiral pattern whereby any resolution is displaced by the poem returning to its beginning. The poem itself takes on the image of the shell in its construction: as Helen reads her own animal hieroglyphs on the walls of Egypt, we too learn to 'read' the physical shape of the spiral shell.

⁴⁰ Martin F. Duncan, *British Shells*, (London: King Penguin, 1943); T.A. Stephenson, *Seashore Life and Pattern*, (London: King Penguin, 1944). Both inscribed by H.D.

⁴¹ Stephenson, p. 14.

⁴² Hokanson, 'Is it all a Story?', p. 344.

As Helen learns to access her Trojan memories, she also begins to 'read' the writing of Egyptian hieroglyphs on the walls around her in Egypt. The spiral shell, as offered to Helen by Thetis and her white island, holds the key to being able to read the physical world and mythologise the landscape. Thetis, governess of the white island Leuké and holder of the spiral shell, offers Helen access into the understanding and deconstruction of natural symbols and their human meanings: 'a tale more ancient / than those mysteries' (*Helen* 107). The 'mysteries' of Helen and Achilles at Troy are coded, Thetis tells Helen, into the visual language of hieroglyph, which links the physical landscape to our liminal experiences and communications. Thetis tells her that images of 'a flying fish' and an 'octopus' are reminders for her to seek out her home, and urges her to find significance beyond the human world:

the mystery of a forest-tree,
whispering its secrets upon Cithaeron,

holds subtler meaning
than this written stone
or leaves of the papyrus;

let rapture summon
and the foam-flecked sand,
and wind and hail,

rain, sleet and the bewildering snow
that lifts and falls,
conceals, reveals,

[...]

Helen – come home. (*Helen* 108)

Here, H.D. presents a disjoint between the worlds of nature and culture. The forest tree becomes a holder of spiritual meaning equally significant to the cultural artefacts of stone and papyrus; the littoral boundary of the 'foam-flecked sand' also inspires rapture. Helen learns to read meaning into the animal icons of hieroglyphs, but also turns this translation outwards, attempting to code and

decode natural forms. As Carson writes of the 'reading' of human history in layers of sediment, H.D. too recognises the interrelations of human culture and nature, and especially acknowledges the limitations of human culture that hold less subtle 'meaning' than natural objects. Furthermore, the meaning encoded by these natural forms is ambiguous and esoteric, 'concealing' and 'revealing' itself at intervals; the translation is more a recognition of meaning rather than a specific statement of a particular statement or meaning. The natural objects therefore are able to exist beyond the projection of human meaning and symbolism; Helen merely recognises their importance as equal to human culture and cultural objects.

Helen is linked to the natural world throughout *Helen in Egypt* through regenerative natural images as well as the shore. She is called 'Helena of the trees', something that has 'slipped from a husk', 'a butterfly' (*Helen* 141). She is described as 'waiting for the sap to rise' and told that 'one does not die here [in Egypt] (*Helen* 141)'. The image of a flowering, dying and re-flowering tree appears in *Trilogy*, where the reblossoming of a tree outside H.D.'s London home signals the rebirth of the world with the arrival of a female spiritual leader. Natural regeneration is linked in H.D.'s work to female empowerment and an assertion of female identity. In the following passage, Helen's rebirth is figured as the flowering of a tree: 'A tree is struck down or blighted by the frost, it flowers again' (*Helen* 131). The mystery of resurrection and rebirth in nature provokes a sense of awe from Helen:

what mystery is more subtle than this?

what spell is more potent?

I saw the pomegranate,

blighted by winter,

I saw the flowering pomegranate

and the cleft fruit on the summer branch;

I wait for a miracle as simple,

as inevitable as this ...

Now it is dark upon Leuké (*Helen* 131)

The simple 'miracle' of the pomegranate re-flowering after the harshness of winter presupposes Helen's own regeneration, but also highlights further patterns of cyclical nature: night and day (as dusk falls on Leuké), seasons (as winter is replaced by summer), and crucially the observation of the cycles of the human world. The pomegranate is symbolically linked to these cycles through interpretations of the myth of Persephone and Demeter as a myth of the seasons. The unending circular motion of the spiral-patterned shell and its tidal origins link to the unending cycles of nature and, by extension, time, granting Helen a form of immortality, an escape from the limitations of her cultural legacy and infinite chances of regeneration.

As Helen is presented with the mysteries of a restorative natural world, she also feels the impulse to decode and transcribe them. In Egypt, she is surrounded by an unreadable set of natural objects and animals in the form of hieroglyphs; her journey to understand this alien language parallels a human need to understand the physical world and form a connection to nature. As Helen comes to understand a 'script' made up of natural symbols, there is the distinct sense of H.D., in her late writing, coming to terms with her own expression and its intuitive attachment to natural forms. However, this searching ends in a strange conclusion, as Helen explores and accepts the impossibility of such objective decoding: Helen embraces a lack of objective meaning behind natural symbols and searches for a way of understanding the natural world that moves beyond the knowable and the objective.

Helen often feels 'the lure of the invisible' on occasions through the poem, and here she discusses an 'unheard' sound of nature:

a whisper – a breath
to invite the rose;
a summer touch,

night-wings or vermillion
of the day-butterfly;
was Troy lost for a subtle chord,

a rhythm as yet unheard (*Helen* 229)

Here the details of the natural world are deconstructed into unfamiliar images: the 'night wings', the 'breath' of the rose, the vermillion 'day-butterfly'. The final image of the 'rhythm as yet unheard' probes the unknown and misunderstood parts of the natural world, the subtle chord and unknown rhythm suggesting something unseen and alien. H.D. is keen to present the physical world as something that is made up of cryptograms asking to be decoded, bringing *Helen in Egypt* full-circle to the concerns of her early poetry, where the deconstructed forms of wildflowers were studied in both botany and poetic trope. As Helen enacts a process of reading and understanding the hieroglyphs around her, H.D. questions the role of natural objects in the human world as poetic and cultural signifiers.

As Helen learns to read hieroglyphs on Egyptian walls, she also sees and makes unknown hieroglyphs in nature:

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

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

H.D. explores human understanding of the natural world through a series of other hieroglyphs. The idea is introduced as an intuitive endeavour. Helen 'denies an actual intellectual knowledge of the temple-symbols' but 'is nearer to them than the instructed scribe' because she understands that 'the secret of the stone-writing is repeated in natural or human symbols and therefore 'she herself is the writing'. Helen is the 'writing' in two senses here: as the subject of male writers reinventing her narrative, and as a biological entity written in the same way as natural objects are in hieroglyphs.

Helen begins to understand her own narrative through animals:

so in the Book of Thoth,

the serpent, reared to attack,
is Achilles' spring in the dark;
so the goddess with vulture-helmet

is myself defenceless (Helen 66)

The serpent and vulture imagery link the text back to Ovid's tale of Proteus, and Homer's telling of the myth in *The Odyssey*.⁴³ Proteus transforms into numerous animals and natural elements in order to escape the grasp of Menelaus; in Ovid's version, Proteus stalks the shore shape-shifting into various natural forms like snakes, wild boars, stones, trees and bulls, though encounters Theseus rather than Menelaus. Helen's hieroglyphs throughout *Helen in Egypt* follow the same pattern of imagery, also portraying trees, wild boars, snakes and cattle. Proteus's shapeshifting narrative in both accounts draws a bold distinction between the human and the non-human: the human Menelaus or Theseus can only remain human compared to the sea element Proteus who encompasses whole ecosystems, including the human, and whose freedom reveals the porousness of human/non-human boundaries.

In the following passage, Helen projects her experiences onto a lily hieroglyph and transforms it into a bird flying over the sea, yet also recognises the limits of her human understanding of nature:

a hieroglyph, repeated endlessly,

upon the walls, the pillars,
the thousand-petalled lily;
they are not many, but one,

enfolded in sleep,
as the furled lotus-bud,
or with great wings unfurled,

sailing in ecstasy,
the western sea,

⁴³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin, 1955), p. 98.

climbing sea-mountains,

dividing the deep valleys of the sea;

[...]

I have “read” the lily,

I can not “read” the hare, the chick, the bee (Helen 20–21)

The image of the ‘thousand-petalled lily’ envelops the ‘many’ Greek soldiers and throws their shadow across the landscape. Helen asserts that many of the natural symbols are left indecipherable: ‘the hare, the chick, the bee’. It is interesting that Helen has been granted knowledge of the lily, a cultural symbol of feminine virginity and sexuality that parallels the ways in which Helen herself has been read as a cultural object. As DuPlessis writes, Helen traditionally is ‘sex, temptation, allure [...] a one-dimensional love goddess’, but in *Helen in Egypt* Helen is ‘multi-dimensional, far beyond the sexual category, possessed by her history and her visionary experiences’.⁴⁴ In finding ‘unread’ natural objects Helen finds new visionary possibilities for herself, and she herself becomes more complex, more ‘unread’ than her previous iterations. In freeing such natural objects from being read ‘analytically’ under cultural tradition, she too frees herself. As she feels ‘the lure of the invisible’, we are reminded of the ‘unheard rhythm’ and ‘subtle chord’ governing events in Troy; a sense of the mysteries of the natural world eluding human understanding. As Helen runs her hand over a hieroglyph of a bird and insect, feeling the ‘invisible curve’ of its paint, she asks ‘where are we? / and what is the answer?’ (*Helen* 16). While it may be coincidence, there is a pleasing pattern in her misunderstood hieroglyphs; the hare representing in reality the verb ‘to be’ or ‘to exist’.⁴⁵ Being able to read this particular sign is a physical representation of not just being but understanding what it means to be beyond restrictive cultural categories. In *The H.D. Book*, Robert Duncan points out that the hare, chick, bee image appears in

⁴⁴ DuPlessis, ‘Romantic Thralldom’, p. 196.

⁴⁵ Ruth Schumann-Antelme and Stephane Rossini, *Illustrated Hieroglyphics Handbook* (New York: Sterling, 2004), pp. 232-233.

Trilogy 15 years earlier, emphasising these hieroglyphs as symbolic of a deconstruction of male-defined modes of 'knowing', positing instead a form of knowledge that follows 'knowing as feeling'.⁴⁶

When Norman N. Holland attempts to pinpoint the thoughts underpinning H.D.'s experimental and eclectic use of mythical source material, what he calls 'The H.D. Myth', he writes the following as a preliminary statement on H.D.'s behalf: 'when I concretize the spiritual or mythologise the everyday, I create a perfect, timeless hieroglyph-world which I can be and be in. Or, very briefly, I want to close the gap with signs'.⁴⁷ As Helen attempts to 'close' the gap between her two selves by, on the one hand, learning to read existing hieroglyphs in Egypt and also, on the other, creating new signs to represent her Trojan self in the seashell, we see H.D. enacting the creation of her poetic world, where natural objects become signs loaded with meaning that help us to understand the mysteries of the self. While H.D. recognises and resolves the destructive misunderstandings of Helen's character by patriarchal legacy, she in turn interrogates the ways in which we attach symbolism to images and icons of nature. The shell as a symbol of layered time is 'readable' as such symbolism is linked explicably to the shell's structure and reality living on the layered sea floor; other images, such as the hare and the tree, are given a significance that, like the shore, is unmappable and understood in ways that conventional knowledge cannot express.

III. The Reconciliation of Achilles's Coast and Helen's Beach

Leuké and Thetis bind Helen and Achilles to the same shore, but they interpret the littoral landscape in vastly different ways, each using a distinctive vocabulary and web of cultural and personal

⁴⁶ Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, ed. by Michael Boughn and Victor Coleman (Oakland, CA.: University of California press, 2011), p. 638.

⁴⁷ Norman N. Holland, 'H.D. and the "Blameless Physician"', *Contemporary Literature*, 10(4) (1969), 474–506: 492.

association. When Helen spots the sea-bird flying past her, the shape of the bird in flight invokes a symbol of Thetis, but to Achilles, this bird is a symbol and reminder of war, a 'carrion creature' (*Helen* 13). As Helen begins to recall her memories of the Trojan beach, she is aware that Achilles experiences the same landscape very differently:

he only saw the ships
assembled at Aulis,
he only remembered his own ship

that would lead them all,
he only saw an image, a wooden image,
a mermaid, Thetis upon the prow. (*Helen* 240)

Again, Achilles and Helen are linked through the image of the marginal, the neither-one-nor-the-other, in the image of the half-aquatic, half-human mermaid. Thetis, for Helen, represents a 'life-symbol', a passage from self-doubt into self-knowledge, and the shore of her sea provides the liminal backdrop needed to find and merge the lost fragments of the self. For Achilles, the mermaid carving unites the competing binaries of his identity as half land-dweller, half nereid. His Thetis represents the prow of a war ship: protection, victory and conquest.

Achilles' preoccupation with the objective details of the ship and the surroundings of war grounds him in a state unable to access the dream-like memories of Helen. In their initial meeting at the beginning of the poem, Achilles is presented as a lesser part of the landscape than Helen, his place on the ubiquitous shoreline more transient. The shore physicalises the clear boundaries and military factions of Achilles' experiences, but his inability to access its liminality prevents him from reaching the same point of self-actualisation as Helen. The account of Achilles' memories of Troy begin very similarly to Helen's at the start of the poem, focussing on the details of the ships and hinting at strangeness with 'a sail sensed, not seen':

a bow, a familiar prow,
a hand on the rudder,

ropes, rope-ladders, the smell of tar,

I think he remembered them all,
[...]

scattered tackle and gear,
a wheel, a mast, a dipping sail (Helen 238)

Where Helen's memories rely on the relation of the ship to the surrounding sea and rocky coastland, Achilles' focus is on the ship itself and its familiar smells and objects. There is a moment on this ship where Achilles is invited to remember Troy through the same consciousness accessed by Helen, but Achilles escapes it. Achilles strikes a piece of flint and a spark falls onto an 'inflammable weed / in a sudden flare / and a sputter of salt', and Achilles is met with the same questions posed to Helen:

what scent? what wind? what hope
on the ledge of a desolate beach?
what did he remember last, what first?

I think he remembered everything
in an instantaneous flash,

[...]

a host of spirits crowded around the fire

but I did not see them;
he could have named them all,
had he paused to remember (Helen 239)

Where Helen's memories are characterised by the 'waking dream', Achilles' come in an 'instantaneous flash', the speed and suddenness of which impairs his memory and access to a more liminal world. Instead, Achilles' memory is drawn to the ships assembled at Aulis. Later, this contrast between Helen and Achilles is emphasised in their differing experiences of Egypt, and different constructions of the shore landscape. Achilles is fixated on the shore as a 'coast': a national symbol, something to be claimed and defended. Achilles' work is to 'reclaim the coast, / to keep and maintain the Pharos' (Helen 89). The lighthouse of Alexandria in Egypt represents salvation for the displaced people of Greece; Achilles' view of the shore is practical and related to his military aims. Achilles' use of 'coast' here is also telling in its contrast to Helen's focus on the 'beach', of walking

along the sand and finding objects washed up by the tide. These two constructions of the coast engage with the symbolism of the shore in classical texts, moving between the feminine beach and the masculinist coast.

In Book Six of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus is washed up during the sea-storm, and is found by Nausicaa as she does laundry on the shore and plays games with her maids. The contrast between the two gendered experiences of the same landscape is clear: Odysseus is washed up from a shipwreck on the same beach that Nausicaa uses for domestic chores and bathing.⁴⁸ H.D. seems aware of this gendered expectation for classical shores and references it in Helen's gentler beach scenes against Achilles' aggressive coasts. However, H.D. is also keen to undercut these dichotomies and complicates Helen's shore.

In *The Iliad*, Homer dramatises the seashore as a central ground for military tactics. Ships and armies are received and sent at the coast, and Achilles breaks the ceasefire between the Trojans and Greeks by enlisting the help of his sea-dwelling mother, the nereid Thetis, to gain the favour and support of the gods. In Book Twenty-three, Achilles builds a funeral pyre for Patroclus after his dead companion visits him in a dream, and later drags Hector's body along the sand to mutilate it.⁴⁹ Homer's text has little interest in the ecological particularities of the coastal landscape, but emphasises its metaphorical importance as a site of communion between mortal and god, life and death. The shore in *The Iliad* is often a site of sacrifices made to the gods. In Book One, Menelaus bids the Greeks to purify themselves by washing in the sea, before sacrificing hecatombs of bulls and goats on the seashore. Similarly, H.D. herself recounts that the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis was her first encounter with Greek classicism. She records in a letter to Gemma D'Auria that she saw a production of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* while still at school and that this performance first 'awakened' her to

⁴⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Homer, *The Iliad*, trans Martin Hammond (London: Penguin, 1987), pp. 368–372.

Greek drama: 'I felt I had heard Greek at last,' she writes.⁵⁰ If H.D.'s interest in classical narratives derives from the story of a woman sacrificed on the coast, we can read parallels in her portrayal of Helen as being reborn on the shore. In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen often accesses the memories of the shore through smell, particularly the charred smells of burning, referencing the Trojan activities as described by Homer. H.D. is aware of the opposition of the spiritual and mortal worlds on Homer's shores; the central role given to the sea-nymph Thetis by H.D. emphasises the shore as a central location for the crossing of mortal and divine.

Helen and Achilles reach a stalemate in Book Three of 'Pallinode', as Helen uses Achilles' language of geography and conquest in an attempt to 'charm' his memories from him. She asks, "'what island shall we seek [...] shall it be Cos or Crete?'" but recognises that she herself would 'rather forget', and asks 'must the Battle be fought and fought / in his memory?' (*Helen* 35). Helen 'must fight for her identity'; Achilles' 'sea-eyes' endanger Helen by drawing her into a littoral narrative that is not hers. She 'does not like the fixed stare of Achilles'; their distrustful 'metallic glitter' is suddenly militaristic and hard compared to their usual 'sea-enchantment' (*Helen* 35).

Yet, when Helen takes on the littoral language of Achilles and combines it with her own, she is rewarded with 'a heroic voice, the voice of Helen of Sparta' (*Helen* 176). She merges with the figure of Thetis to embrace the destructiveness and danger of the sea; the shore becomes a meeting point for both the opposing experiences of the shore by Achilles and Helen, and the site of re-emergence for the doubled and redoubled Helen. The prose caption reads that the lives of Helen and Achilles have become 'ephemeral and unimportant' beside their devotion to 'the rage of the sea, the thunder of battle, shouting and the Walls' (*Helen* 176):

O, the surge of the sea,
O, the billows,

⁵⁰ Guest, *Herself Defined*, p. 20.

O, the mighty urge

of the oak-prow,
the creak of the oak-beams,
the sway of the mast,

[...]

O, the rage of the sea,

The thunder of battle,
[...]

each bringing surcease, release;
do I love War?
is this Helena? (*Helen* 177)

Helen becomes a participant in the masculine experience of warships and stormy seas, as important to her memory and her identity as her acts of collecting items from the beach when in a fluid state.

The emphasis on littoral experience culminating in this show of strength also suggests a reconciliation of Helen's marginality and alienating doubling. H.D.'s later work is concerned, as Friedman writes, with the identity of the mature poet and the act of poetry-writing; in Helen's rebirth as the raging and destructive sea we may read an image of H.D. herself finally able to reconcile the marginality she felt and expressed throughout her writing career.⁵¹

H.D.'s imagining of Helen's memories veering between the abstract and philosophical and the raging and militaristic is striking; in some parts of the text, she also replaces Achilles with herself as a new military leader. The prose captions emphasise that she is ecotonal, born of a 'sea-faring people' but stuck on land, and her soldiers seem to twist themselves into and out of the rocky shore landscape. They are 'half-rotted from the salt', 'sun-warped on the beach' and have wandered 'as Odysseus did', indeed, as Helen did (*Helen* 24). She takes the soldiers and ships from Achilles in her new narrative, but also reinvents his system of military imagery to be more in-line with her own:

⁵¹ Friedman, 'Creating a Women's Mythology'.

they were mine, not his,
[...]

mine, all the ships,
mine, all the thousand petals of the rose,
mine, all the lily-petals,

mine, the great spread of wings,
the thousand sails (*Helen* 25)

Helen uses flower imagery to reclaim her own strength, re-reading the image of the lily and its familiars. There is also a return to H.D.'s early writing: the images of the rose and lily, particularly, recall H.D.'s first collection *Sea Garden*, where wild versions of domestic lilies and roses grow haphazardly along the shore. In these poems, the flowers' strange balance between fragility and hardiness is emphasised as their beauty; here the same concept is applied to the precarious identity of Helen.

The balance between Achilles' aggressively masculine outlook and Helen's liminality is crucial. When Helen recounts Achilles' death, there is a tenderness that Homer's accounts of mourning soldiers omit. Helen realises that the 'death' of Achilles is his 'desire to return to the old thunder and roar of the sea' (*Helen* 255). The 'desolate beach' that Helen remembers at Troy becomes the 'ecstasy of desolation', but also leaves Achilles 'numb with memory' on the floor of a ship (*Helen* 256). Achilles enters a state that, whilst numb in the physical world, is 'fearless to plough the sea', a release from his ambitions of conquest and adventure in Helen's liminal consciousness.

The closing verses of *Helen in Egypt* show Helen rejecting her lover Paris for his lack of knowledge of the sea. She asks:

but what could Paris know of the sea,
its beat and long reverberation,
its booming and delicate echo,

its ripple that spells a charm

on the sand, the rock-lichen,
the sea-moss, the sand,

and again and again, the sand;
what does Paris know of the hill and hollow
of billows, the sea-road?

what could he know of the ships
from his Idaean home,
the crash and spray of the foam,

the wind, the shoal, the broken shale,
the infinite loneliness
when one is never alone? (*Helen* 304)

In a passage that is strikingly lucid and straightforward in comparison to the rest of the poem, Helen spells out the physicality of the shore landscape with tender attention. Details of the landscape such as lichen, reverberations of waves, shoals and shales sit alongside an understanding of the shore's personal significance: its loneliness for Helen and her comfort in its solitude. The shore becomes intertwined with Helen's self, and Paris's lack of understanding seems to imply disjointedness between them. H.D., throughout her career, is invested in the idea of a shore landscape fully encapsulating the liminality, power and beauty of the realised self and the refranchising of marginalised identity. In one of the final poems of *Helen in Egypt*, the cyclical patterns of nature bring peace to Helen's disjointed identity:

thus, thus, thus,
as day, night,
as wrong, right,

as dark, light,
as water, fire,
as earth, air,

as storm, calm,
as fruit, flower,
as life, death,

as death, life;
the rose deflowered,

the rose re-born;

Helen in Egypt,
Helen at home,
Helen in Hellas forever. (*Helen* 90)

This passage delineates states of oppositional binaries against Helen's homecoming, emphasising the poem's tension between forwards and backwards movement. As Helen's memories depended on a meeting of remembering and forgetting, so do other oppositions meet and find value in their intersection. Across H.D.'s career there is a sense that H.D. is looking for a resolution to disparate forces, the marginal and in-between made knowable. *Helen in Egypt* ends in a celebration of multiple states of being, and the ability to be fluid between them; Helen is finally defined in multiple identities—as Helen in Egypt *and* Helen in Hellas—and this culminates in her final homecoming. In being able to be both, Helen evades the confinements of her previous narratives, of being either to blame for the Trojan War or a mere phantom alienated from her home, and this protects Helen's image against stasis, allowing her 'home' to be forever able to change and adapt.

In these lines, H.D.'s symbolic associations with the shore come to a close. There is an emphasis on natural cycles—deflowering and reflowering, weather, day and night, life and death—and on the elemental, of water, earth, air and fire being able to meet. These elements meet at the site of the shore, and the shore's mutable boundaries between them is what leads Helen to this self-actualisation in fluidity. The shell becomes a central image in this conception of flux, allowing for states to constantly layer, overlap, and spiral repeatedly. *Helen in Egypt* begins with Euripides's sea-shelf but finishes on H.D.'s close study of the shore, and the possibilities of fluidity it offers between the human and the physical world.

CONCLUSION

When Donna K. Hollenberg, as quoted at the start of this thesis, writes about wanting to read H.D. next to the ocean, she too is apprehending the myriad and often subtle ways the shore runs through H.D.'s writing, moving between physical evocation and imaginative vision, and the ways in which H.D.'s fluid, marginal, multitudinous writing is enveloped by the same qualities in the shore.

This thesis has traced the presence of the shore throughout H.D.'s writing career, showing it to be a geographical location and symbolic space with which she was particularly preoccupied and which recurs across her poetry and prose. The shore's multiplicity in H.D.'s texts makes its appearance and purpose complex to define in any singular or coherent way. Just as the shore contains and gives a home to a multitude of identities, so is H.D.'s shore continuously being revised and revisited in flux.

The shore is constructed with inherent multiplicity, its constantly shifting sands and tides representative of its ever-changing physical and metaphorical guises. H.D. is especially interested in layering various definitions of the shore, blurring the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. The result is a portrayal of the shore recognising both its ecologies and its cultural lives, building a hyperreal picture of this special, ecotonal landscape. The real geographies of Atlantic coasts in Maine and New Jersey, Cornwall and the Scilly isles, and of the Greek archipelago are evoked in rich detail, cataloguing various coastal floras, observations of sea-birds and fish and portrayals of the bodies and lives of littoral creatures such as jellyfish, coral polyps and molluscs. These animals also become personal symbols: for new forms of consciousness outside human sensory experience, for individualism and collectivism, for new ways of conceiving the passage of time. The shores of Ancient Greece become sites where old paradigms of myth are inherently shifted and disrupted in *Hymen* and *Heliadora*, and are mapped over and alongside H.D.'s familiar American coastlines and the British shores she visited as an adult.

The texts share a recognition of the fluidity of the shore and the symbolisms of this unmappable quality: a site that is not completely land, not completely sea here finds space for a queer female poet left marginalised by a male-dominated modernism and heteronormative society. The site of the shore dissolves the binary of water and land, further manifesting H.D.'s own desires to live across and in-between binary gender conventions. Once a binary is dissolved, she is able to work backwards into multiplicity, giving many of her female characters in her novels and poetry freedom in fluid identity. The shore, by extension, becomes a place of potential and real freedom for H.D. In *Sea Garden*, the harsh and isolated conditions of her wild shores shape wildflowers into ideograms of fragile strength, liberating the flowers and the speaker away from the confines of conventional, domestic femininity. The young H.D. of *HERmione* dreams of the shore at Point Pleasant, where the transparent barriers between water and land indicate new possibilities away from her stifling hometown, and lead her to her first queer relationship with Fayne. The shorelines of the Scilly Isles, as recounted in *Notes on Thought and Vision*, similarly lead H.D. to an encounter with her own creative mind, where she is able to conceive of a form of subconscious thought that legitimises female creativity.

Throughout H.D.'s work, her keen naturalist's eye is evident, drawing sensitive and observant narratives around the lives and bodies of jellyfish, bivalve and gastropod molluscs, migratory snow geese, coral, octopuses, and coastal flora. The ecology of the shore becomes layered with personal and cultural symbolism, but such symbolism is grounded in physical fact: geese do cross specific shores in their exacting migratory paths, coastal wildflowers are specially adapted to life on the shore, shells do manifest a sense of time in their ubiquitous appearance in fossils and along the living shoreline, jellyfish do visually merge with their watery environments and in certain species live as a collective gathering of individual organisms. Particular shorelines are similarly depicted with geographic details: the sea-birds and pine trees of Maine, the seaside resorts of New Jersey, the

Mediterranean flora of Scilly, the druid and Roman histories of Cornwall, the archipelagos and ancient cultures of Greece. H.D. moves between literal and imaginative visions of the shore. By framing our reading of H.D.'s work within these geographies, this study opens new possibilities for H.D. scholarship and our understandings of modernism and ecocriticism.

Examining H.D.'s use of the littoral reveals H.D. to be more interested in landscape and place than is currently thought, and particularly that she is attuned to the living ecologies of shoreline spaces and the ways in which these interact with cultural mythologies. Whilst there have been a few studies of H.D.'s portrayal of place in recent years, this study is unique in its attentiveness to the shore in particular, showing H.D.'s interest in one landscape and its cultural associations, an approach that places the shore itself at the centre of reading.¹ Scholarship on H.D.'s portrayal of non-human lifeforms usually starts and ends with her coastal wildflowers in *Sea Garden*, but this study suggests that her writing of seashells, molluscs, jellyfish, coral, octopus and sea-birds reveals a rich and attentive biological knowledge.

This in-depth approach to H.D. has implications for H.D. scholarship by adding new layers and nuances to her palimpsestic writing and imagery. Where the shore has previously been seen as a backdrop to metaphors around female identity and sexuality in H.D.'s work, we can now understand it as a central subject in its own right, with its own metaphorical systems and cultural resonance. For H.D., the shore offers permeations of selfhood, meditations on the ways physical beings and places become mythologised, new narratives built in the unmappable space of the shoreline, and experiences of the real coastal places that H.D. knew and transcribed. H.D.'s lifelong search for self-knowledge, usually discussed with reference to her interests in astrology, psychoanalysis and mysticism, also takes into account the ways in which we are shaped by a particular landscape, and

¹ Annette Debo's *The American H.D.*, for instance, Cynthia Hogue's study of eco-poetics in *The Sword Went Out to Sea* and Harriet Tarlo's study of Classical gardens, even Charlotte Mandel's and Adalaide Morris's respective research into the influence of science on H.D.'s work-

the mythologies and metaphors we project onto that landscape. While the shore image is often, for H.D., linked to metaphors for female identity and queer sexuality, it is also significant that H.D. constantly returns to this same littoral space for answers and existential comfort.

This thesis also models an approach to analysing the shore in literary texts, particularly in modernism. H.D.'s clear and sustained interest in littoral nature offers new contributions to the field of rural modernism, and asks particular questions about rural modernism for a writer who was a visitor to the shore rather than an inhabitant. With our modern knowledge of rising sea levels and fragile shores, H.D.'s work takes on new resonance, underlining the work that has been done in 'greening' modernism as an important environmental endeavour. Matthew Griffiths, in his reading of climate change poetics in modernist verse, argues that 'changes in our environment, broadly conceived, affect our reading of texts of the past', and that modernist poets by their nature do the important work of 'challeng[ing] defined, formal boundaries between the cultural and natural as well as the presumption that we can master climatic forces'.² In revisiting the shore as the modernists understood it with our own contemporary understanding of littoral, we are able to find new connections and tensions between their world and ours.

The essay collection *Modernism on Sea*, discussed in the introduction to this thesis, delineates the presence of the shore in other important modernist writers, such as T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath. The collection furthermore shows the productive engagement with the shore made by artists like John Piper and in modernist architecture such as the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill on Sea, East Sussex. This collaborative study explores the importance of British coastal places, such as Swanage, Margate, Morecambe and Hythe, and argues that these towns form a significant

² Matthew Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change: Modernist Aesthetics for a Warming World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) p. 30, p. 125.

modernist geography alongside modernism's usual mapping over Paris, London, Berlin, and Dublin. Studying the shore in H.D. provides a productive addition to this expansion of modernist British geography by illustrating her close ties to the Isles of Scilly, particularly St Mary's and Bryher, in *Notes on Thought and Vision* and to Cornwall in *Bid Me to Live*.

While this particular study only focuses on one modernist writer, it sets out a way of thinking about the shore that benefits and offers new possibilities to our reading of others. The poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, for instance, similarly engages with Atlantic and Aegean coastlines in poems across her career, and this aspect of her writing is unexplored. In particular, Bishop's interest in the industries and communities of the American East Coast extends John R. Gillis's scholarship on the unique lives of 'edge species', species capable of exploiting the marginal ecotone space.³ Gillis points out the importance of differentiating people who live *on* coasts from people who live *with* them, making their livings by crossing the tideline as fishers, gatherers, or mariners: 'Today, increasing numbers of people live *on* the shore, but fewer and fewer know how to live *with* the sea, in an ecologically sustainable manner'.⁴ Bishop's portrayal of fishing communities and coastal towns in New England and Florida would offer a productive application of such littoral theory to modernist poetry, even in comparison to H.D.; where H.D. is more concerned with the metaphysical and symbolic stock of the shore and in layering geographies, Bishop presents the shore at its most realistic and industrious. It is also intriguing that the shore appears across the work of various women who, like H.D., were queer women in a male-dominated literary sphere. While the shore also appears in the work of other modernist writers, Eliot, Joyce and Plath to name a few, the shore does have a unique value to H.D. as a model of fluidity that can be mapped onto expressions of gender and sexual identity. Perhaps this particular value of the shore is a pertinent one to queer modernist women, or more widely to modernists with marginal identities.

³John R. Gillis, 'Not Continents in Miniature: Islands as Ecotones', *Island Studies Journal*, 9(1) (2014), 155–166, 158.

⁴Ibid, p. 158.

The strength of H.D.'s investment in the physical and cultural life of the shore not only challenges misconceptions of modernism as a movement which has minimal interest in nature, but also informs how we continue to think about nature and the role of poetry in reconnecting us to the natural world. Through poetry we are able to imagine new ways of being and thinking, to play out imaginary transformations and consider their effects. H.D.'s shores enact the ways in which we are shaped by particular landscapes, and imagine narratives which dissolve human dominance over and disconnection from the non-human world.

In *Trilogy*, H.D.'s attention to non-human consciousness and to herself as part of an ecological web deconstructs cultural associations to particular animals and to our relationship with the non-human; her poem confronts harmful human assumptions and in doing so builds a new world where the separation between human and non-human is non-existent. H.D.'s palimpsests of ecological and human meanings on the shore are evasive of conventional approaches to ecocritical reading, which focus on the physical environment and ecological, didactic aims of the writer. H.D.'s work therefore raises questions as to how we might approach animal and landscape mythology from an ecocritical standpoint, or where our cultural symbolisms and associations with particular places and beings stand within an ecological consideration of a literary text. This thesis follows environmental ways of reading by considering the literal meaning of H.D.'s shore landscapes, and shows that their symbolic meanings are inextricably linked to the physical and ecological life of the shore. The resulting reading confirms H.D.'s interest in the living, physical qualities of the landscape while showing an awareness of the vulnerability of the environment to human destruction.

Reading H.D. through an ecocritical approach also asks us to consider the role of mythology in our conception of landscape, and how mythology and cultural symbolism impact upon our relationship with a littoral environment. In *Trilogy*, H.D. shows that close engagement with the cultural tropes

around a particular animal or landscape can lead to an acknowledgement of damaging human projections and narratives, but also that storytelling and myth can lead to empathy with the non-human world, as H.D.'s poetic transformations into molluscs and worms lead her to becoming a 'biological entity', part of a larger ecological web. H.D.'s use of closely-observed Aegean and Atlantic shores in her retellings of classical mythology furthermore suggests that the use of heightened or fantastical imagery does not prohibit an ecocritical reading, but can create new ways of representing place that capture the ways in which a particular landscape shapes human culture and individual experience. H.D.'s use of the shore challenges conventional ways of thinking and writing about nature by showing that literary texts do not have to be a scientific reproduction of a place or particular species or ecology, but can express the multiple ways humans have engaged with the physical landscape through their collective and individual imaginations. If ecocriticism is primarily concerned with reconciliation in the turbulent relationship between nature and culture, H.D. presents an ecocritical approach that examines the exact, interrelating layers between nature and culture, exploring their dialectical relationship. From her first poetry collection, H.D. bridges the gap between the scientific eye of her grandfather and her own imaginative poetic visions.

The shore's marginality as not-quite-land, not-quite-sea physically and imaginatively locates emancipation for H.D. as a queer woman poet in modernism; H.D.'s decentralised position produces new ways of thinking about the intertwined lives of the human and non-human. H.D. was writing in a period when, for the first time, more people lived in the city than the countryside in Britain, and there was less direct reliance on the land for livelihood and survival. H.D. herself lived her creative life in London, an urban, industrial metropolis, yet despite this urban living, her work expresses a continued desire for contact with the natural world, specifically with the littoral. Her work, therefore, reveals something essential about the deep and complex relationship between humans and nature that means that even in the modern age, with its emphasis on industry, technology, and urban centres we still need, as David Abram writes, 'that which is other than ourselves and our own

creations'.⁵ In our contemporary age, the shore has taken on new, urgent nuances: rising sea levels threaten coastal towns and low-lying archipelagos, and we are more aware than ever of the piling up of plastics and other waste on the shore, and of the shore as a place for the landing of displaced peoples for the construction of dangerous, insular national myths. The mythologies and cultural resonances of the shore expressed in H.D.'s work—as a place of voyaging, of homecoming, of national demarcation, of ever-shifting land, of a boundary between known land and unknown sea-depth—are present across time and geography. This matters because it demonstrates our instinctive relationship to the shore, the ways its symbols match its physical geography, and the great contribution it has given to our culture.

Examining our changing relationship with the shore through literature places this fragile ecosystem at the centre of our reading. As Carl Zimmer puts it in *At the Water's Edge*, our relationship to the shore is a vital one, rooted in our evolutionary beginning: 'from water to land, and from land back to water: in the history of life, organisms have crossed such seemingly impenetrable boundaries many times'.⁶ Shores connect the human with all other life on earth: the 'impenetrable boundary' between us and the non-human is dissolved literally at this site. In the contemporary climate of disconnection from the natural world, shores remind us of our inherent connection to the earth. This study of H.D. contributes an in-depth look at the way these landscapes have shaped and continue to shape our cultural lives, and how we can, as Gillis argues, learn once again to live with them. As the protagonist of *Bid Me to Live*, Julia Ashton, describes the Cornish shore:

An inhuman element, a divine element. It did not play vile tricks, it did not shatter windows, it did not break nerves. Rather, it sustained the being of man (*BMTL* 159).

⁵ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p. ix.

⁶ Carl Zimmer, *At the Water's Edge: Fish with Fingers, Whales with Legs, and How Life Came Ashore but then Went Back to Sea* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), p. 6.

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