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Post-traumatic doubling in H.D.'s bio-mythography: *Hermione* and *Paint it today*

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The traumatic experiences of H.D.'s adult life are profusely documented in autobiography, memoir, and fiction, beginning with her academic failure at Bryn Mawr College, ostensibly for poor performance in mathematics and English classes. Hilda's late adolescence was dominated by a short-lived engagement to Ezra Pound, as well as by a turbulent infatuation with Frances Josepha Gregg. A devastating series of personal and cultural traumas circulated around H.D.'s maturation during the Great War: her precipitous marriage to Richard Aldington, followed by an unexpected pregnancy in 1914 and a shattering stillbirth in 1915; the death of her brother Gilbert in combat at Thiacourt in 1918; her father's sudden death from a stroke soon afterward; a second unplanned (and "illegitimate") pregnancy; a life-threatening bout with influenza; and the dissolution of her troubled relationship with Aldington after the birth of Perdita, Cecil Gray's child, in 1919. H.D. fictionalized the tale of her ill-fated adolescent love for Frances Josepha Gregg at least three times in transparently autobiographical texts: *Paint It Today*, which she composed in 1921; *Asphodel*, probably drafted around 1921-22 and revised a few years later; and the novel *Hermione*, which she worked on in 1926-27. She needed to articulate this powerful obsession not so much to get it right, but simply to get it out and get clear of it psychologically. Haunted by traces of a lesbian passion that rarely spoke its name, H.D., alluding to Frances, declared in a 1935 letter to Silvia Dobson: "Love terrible with banners only emerges or materializes once or twice in a life-time" (Guest 228)[1].

According to Barbara Guest, H.D. "had intended to tell the story of her life in four books: *Paint It Today*, *Asphodel, Her*, and *Madrigal*" (34), all of which were generated by the traumatic resonances of World War I. This original plan, however, had to be abandoned: "'Madrigal' emerged as her autobiography, entitled *Bid Me to Live*. 'Asphodel' was written during a bitter and sometimes distraught period of her life, after the marriage to Aldington had broken up" (Guest 34). The composition of both autobiographical texts, thinly disguised renditions of H.D.'s experiences immediately prior to and during the Great War, seems characterized by traumatic obsession.

Only the impetus of severe trauma could fully explain H.D.'s continued efforts to revise, reiterate, and reinterpret her experiences prior to and during World War I. As late as the 1950s, she

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[1] Cassandra Laity, in her introduction to *Paint It Today*, also cites this quotation and notes that the "terrible" aspect of her love for Frances Gregg "continued to fuel H.D.'s imagination long after the relationship had ended", indeed, until the poet was "nearly fifty years of age" (xxxiii).

was still trying to work through with Erich Heydt at Kusnacht Klinik the "repressed emotion centered on the birth of her stillborn child in 1915" (Friedman *Psyche* 21). It seems clear that maternal loss, followed by spousal abandonment in the context of wartime deprivation and political upheaval, so disturbed H.D.'s psychological balance that it provoked symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder that would slowly be unraveled over the next several decades through the healing mechanism of "scriptotherapy" (or writing as healing). It was Freud who specifically prescribed autobiographical reformulation as a cure for the protracted writer's block that tormented H.D. in the 1930s. Overwhelmed by a "flood of war memories" evoked by reading the recently published letters of D.H. Lawrence, H.D. was ordered by Freud, her psychoanalyst, to combat symptoms of dysphoria and psychic fragmentation by articulating trauma in therapeutic life-writing. In a letter to Bryher, H.D. confesses: "Evidently I blocked the whole of the 'period' and if I can skeleton-in a vol. about it will break the clutch... the 'cure' will be, I fear me, writing that damn vol. straight, as history, no frills" (Friedman, *Analyzing Freud* 264). *Madrigal*, the *roman à clef* composed in response to Freud's directives, was eventually published as *Bid Me to Live*, the draft of which seemed to release H.D. from the stranglehold of post-traumatic stress disorder[2]. As Ann Douglas and Thomas Vogler remind us, the twentieth century has seen the "transformation of witness as victim to witness as survivor, and to witness as performer, telling the tale of survival as a form of self-therapy". Such "narrative testimony, in the form of an active remembering and telling can enable a move from the state of helpless victimage to a mode of action and even potential self renewal" (42).

In this essay, I would like to suggest a return to H.D.'s earlier biography, and especially to her unrequited love for Frances Gregg, in order to analyze how her late adolescence set the stage for extreme psychological fragility and vulnerability to traumatic triggers. In *Hermione*, a *roman à clef* depicting Hilda's troubled search for sexual knowledge, the protagonist apparently suffers from linguistic dementia precipitated by a loss of self-esteem:

> Her Gart went round in circles... "I am Her, Her, Her". Her Gart had no word for her dementia, it was predictable by star, by star-sign, by year (*H* 3).
>
> Her Gart... was no longer anything. Gart, Gart, Gart and the Gart theorem of mathematical biological intention dropped our Hermione. She was not Gart, she was not Hermione, she was not any more Her Gart, what was she?... Nothing held her, she was nothing holding to this thing: I am Hermione Gart, a failure (*H* 4).

One of the ways to re/member and recuperate the dysphoric self is through a deployment of psychological technologies of replication – a doubling, or *dédoublement*, of the injured, traumatized, and fragmented subject. Replication promises an infinitely deferred vision of theological coherence adumbrated by multiple, palimpsestic versions of an always dispersed and deferred (mythic) totalization of the self. Hence the numerous references to doubling and twinning in both the autobiographical texts and the biomythographies that emerge from H.D.'s confessional narratives[3]. Branding herself a failure for her inability to master a mathematical understanding of conic sections, Hermione Gart is initially lost in a whirl of disconnected verbiage, a traumatic discourse of repetition that must, she fears, "lead to

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2 Susan Stanford Friedman elaborates on H.D.'s Freudian strategy by comparing her autobiographical writing to the scene of psychoanalysis: "As analyst, the 'I now' who narrates eyes the 'I then'. As analysand, the narrated self is positioned in the part of resisting analysand whose unfolding story works through the tangle of repression into the clearing of recovered memories" (*Penelope's Web* 83). H.D. apparently emulated in her autobiographical prose the kind of autoanalysis practiced by Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams*. "H.D.'s self-analysis in the scene of writing boldly asserts that she can split the subject so as to reconstitute it – not as a unitary subject, but as a self with unconscious as well as conscious manifestations" (ibid.).

3 Friedman notes: "*HER*, written in 1926-27 after H.D. had read a good deal of psychoanalysis, demonstrates a self-conscious play with splitting, then doubling, the self into analyst and analysand... Invoking psychoanalysis, the narrator is analyst to her own troubled younger self whose fragmented story is recovered in the free-associational text" (*Penelope's Web* 83).

certifiable insanity" (*H* 6). Tormented and helpless, she cannot define the locus of insatiable desire; she can only reach, desperately, "toward something that had no name yet" (*H* 8) in a gesture that verbally echoes Oscar Wilde's homoerotic love that "dare not speak its name[4]".

"It was AUM. I am the word AUM. God was in a word" (*H* 38). Repeating, like an ineffectual mantra, the assertion of an ever-elusive identificatory phrase, "I am HER", Hermione first melds her sense of nonbeing with the transcendental AUM of visionary experience, then reaches outward to a doubling of the self in triumphant twinship with the mysterious Fayne Rabb: "for she is HER and I am HER. People are in names, names are in people" (*H* 131)[5]. These two young women, both "fey with... the same sort of wildness" (*H* 50), resemble "two convex mirrors" that, "placed back to back became one mirror" (*H* 138). The seductive Fayne Rabb serves as Lacanian mirror to Hermione's fragmented ego – the Janus image of a coherent (em)bodied personality. Playing the role of Pygmalion in an amateur dramatic performance, she emerges as an androgynous figure reminiscent of a Greek ephebe, the hermaphroditic embodiment of female perfection. In a genderbending replication of roles, Fayne plays the boy making a girl who will function as soul-mate and plaything; then she herself doubles as the soul-sister fashioned from sculptor's clay. It is she, Hermione believes, who will amalgamate the disparate selves of HER into a statuesque whole, a model of psychic coherence. Hermione places Fayne in the subject position of Lacanian object of desire, the *objet petit a* that doubles, in the world of the Imaginary, as Attic deity, mother-goddess, and sister/lover. Claiming prophetic powers, Fayne is cast in the mythic role of Pythoness and Apollonian consort, Delphic oracle and Pythian seer[6].

In contrast to Fayne/Josepha, George Lowndes, named after the dragon-slayer of Christian myth, seems little more than a Renaissance courtier, an inferior copy of Greek heroism artifically constructed by an Italian quattrocento artist. Josepha, in her remote, marble, classical stance, is a model of Attic purity:

> I am Her. She is Her. Knowing her, I know Her. She is some amplification of myself like amoeba giving birth, by breaking off, to amoeba. I am a sort of mother, a sort of sister to Her. "*O sister my sister O fleet sweet swallow*" (*H* 158).

"I" and "she" both meld into the single identificatory pro/noun "Her", as Hermione narcissistically envisages an amoebic process of reproduction, a simple cellular division of identity that multiplies one into two and transgresses osmotic boundaries of the self; twinning and doubling the univocal "I" into a polyvocal "we"; expanding protoplasmic (self-)definition to encompass the other and become the not-self – the antithesis of ego, the "not-I" absorbed by primitive, protoplasmic,

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4 Barbara Guest tells us that "Hilda decided that what she really needed was a girl her own age, a twin sister... Frances Gregg. H.D. wrote their story in 1922, entwining it with the drama of her wooing by Ezra Pound... H.D. was Her (short for "Hermione") Gart... Frances she named Fayne Rabb; and Pound, George Lowndes" (Guest 22-3). It is not surprising that Ezra Pound is named after Saint George the dragonslayer. Guest thus designates the keys to Hilda's "life description": "her bizarre beauty, her attraction to danger, and the need for a rescuer... Pound needed a disciple. Williams was one; he was joined by Hilda. 'Dryad' Ezra called her" (3).

5 Hilda's relationship with Ezra Pound must have been difficult, and the breakup of their engagement traumatic: "Williams had noted that Pound was shifty and scretive in his relations with women. Though Pound may have 'betrayed' Hilda, become interested in another lady of tapestries (the Irish Bride Scratton, whom he met in London), married Dorothy Shakespear, and invested his life in Olga Rudge, in spirit he never ceased to care for H.D." (Guest 6-7).

6 It is interesting that in *Paint It Today*, Josepha confesses in a letter to Hermione the gleeful dissimulation she practiced in her clairvoyant role: "Why did you always believe in all the lies I told you? ... Do you know why? Because you never grew up... I never saw any of the things I pretended to see... You are the only wise person I ever knew and I like you because I could tell you the most lies" (50-51). Her single authentic vision transpired when she "really did see a lot of blue sparrows or bluebirds fly and fly and fly around, above the bed" (50). In H.D.'s compulsive search for narcissistic self-completion through lesbian sister-love, Kloepher postulates a "deeply encoded" and "insistent, maternally connoted homoeroticism" (122). Fayne, observes Friedman, "draws out her unconventional, visionary, and creative potential" (*Penelope's Web* 144), in contrast to George, whose kisses "smudge" her out, and who insists that Hermione is herself a poem, though her "poem's naught" (*H* 212).

translucent being. The single-celled amoeba "bisects" in biological proliferation to become double-celled/selved. The parodic scientific metaphor surely calls attention to Her Gart's purported failure to master logocentric discourses and echoes the experimental concerns of both father and brother in the novel. One cannot but notice the playful homophone suggested by "bisectual" reproduction, a figurative process that adumbrates the bisexual desire gradually emerging from the textual unconscious of H.D.'s passionate *Kunstlerroman*.

In the same paragraph celebrating pseudo-scientific self-cloning, Her Gart quotes Swinburne's "Itylus", a poem that serves as a lyrical trope for the lesbian sisterhood of Hermione and Fayne. The nineteenth-century lyric recalls the tragic narrative of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. According to Ovidian legend, Tereus raped his sister-in-law Philomela, then cut out her tongue to prevent disclosure of the crime. Weaving the story of her victimization into a tapestry sent to her sister, the tongueless Philomela ingeniously sought revenge. Procne, outraged by the perfidiousness of her husband, killed their son Itylus and served his infantile corpse to Tereus in a lugubrious banquet meal. Cognizant of his cannibalism, the enraged father tried to murder both wife and sister-in-law, who were vindicated by the gods and transformed into swallow and nightingale, respectively. In this myth of metamorphic acquittal, both sisters occupy the subaltern subject position of wounded, oppressed and betrayed females – mutual victims of patriarchal violence, dissimulation, lust, and irascibility. Tongueless, Philomela nonetheless manages to weave the text of her tremulous tale on a tapestry that signals inarticulate despair but ironically enables the silenced subaltern to speak. Sororal (com)passion erupts in a sudden outburst of righteous indignation directed against male violence, sexual betrayal, and a brutal colonization of the female body[7].

Philomela has been raped and symbolically castrated. In this mythic paradigm of feminist solidarity, Procne manages to read the grotesque story of her sister's physical and psychic scars, which embellish a tapestry of sexual and textual transgression. Unspeakable crime elicits monstrous recompense. The story so powerfully affects Procne that she inscribes her narrative of sororal retribution onto the helpless body of Itylus, the holocaust sacrificed in expiation of a father's libidinous passion. In this tale of Attic violence, gender-bonding transcends even the notorious power of maternal love. Transformed into the unrecognizable icon of a monstrous mother, Procne divests herself of maternal responsibility in order to avenge sororal injury. The only text that the unscrupulous king can read is the integumental remnant of his son's sacrificial corpse, tasted with a transgressive tongue that once solicited the prohibited territory of Philomela's body. Multi-tongued and many-phallused, the authority of the father can only be dismantled by the painful tongue-work of paternal cannibalism.

Although the majority of H.D. criticism has focused on the mother/daughter relationship, it seems clear that the author bonds sister, mother, and lover in a relationship constructed in triangular opposition to the Oedipal father whose sexual identity breeds violence and disaster. The father is perpetually present in the mode of absence, as the failed hero whose (self)-removal from the field of heterosexual romance sutures the wound of mother/daughter separation and triangulates – in oppositional terms – the passionate bond of female affection. Sisters and mothers must ally themselves against husbands and fathers in order to punish the treachery of megalomanic lovers, power-mad patriarchs, and testosterone-driven bullies. True male affection, it seems, is homoerotic and cross-generational. Hence the cruel paradox of Tereus' unwitting ingestion of his beloved son, a replica of his potency and the corporeal agent of both genetic continuation and discursive immortality.

"Sleep, sleep my Itylus" (*H* 180), croons Hermione Gart before the dormant body of Fayne Rabb. But why this curious melding of her sister/twin with son/victim Itylus, rather than with the

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[7] Cassandra Laity, in her introduction to H.D.'s *Paint It Today*, writes: "H.D. and Gregg read Swinburne's 'Itylus', which emphasizes the sister-bond between the Procne and Philomel of Greek myth, almost obsessively to each other during their early intimacy, until the poem and particularly its refrain – 'sister, my sister, O fleet, sweet swallow' – became their ode to lesbian love" (xxvii). "The *Kunstler* narrative of *HER*", notes Friedman, "is fundamentally pre-Oedipal. The daughter, rejecting Oedipal love, returns to the fusion of the pre-Oedipal in her love for Fayne, to the merged identities of two women" (*Penelope's Web* 116).

sororal swallow Procne? Has Hermione inadvertently confused the sexual symbolism of Greek myth? Why are son and sister amalgamated in this murmuring love-chatter, in epithets evinced by a trance-like state of waking dream? Hermione, accosted by George the male dragon-(slayer), can only blurt out a proclamation of narcissistic self-love and lesbian sister-love in an outburst of ambiguous iteration: "I love Her, only Her, Her, Her" (*H* 170). George enigmatically responds: "Narcissus in the reeds. Narcissa. Are you a water lily?" (*H* 170)[8].

Hermione's erotic attraction to the Delphic Fayne saves her from capitulating to the power of an Olympian patriarch in the form of (Saint) George. But his amorous entreaties and physical passion, along with Fayne's own seductive interest in George, thrust Hermione into an inexplicable state of fever and delirium. Amy Dennon, the nurse standing in for the ideological state apparatuses of Edwardian society, "will say you were harassed, disintegrated and disassociated by preliminary erotic longings, wakened as it were in sleep, sleeping in a dream" (*H* 213). According to Shari Benstock, Hermione Gart "discovers through the mad dreams of her illness the power to make herself the subject of language" (*Left Bank* 341). Deborah Kelly Kloepher offers a similarly positive, matrifocal interpretation of Hermione's descent into madness when she asserts:

> Although her dementia is occasioned by loss – alienation from Eugenia, betrayal by both Fayne and George – it is also a space where the current of the subtext rises... Thus, although Fayne is in one sense a false prophet, she is also the force that redeems the mother textually, filling the text with body and sexual rhythm and delirium – all aspects associated with maternal, semiotic discourse (127).

In *Penelope's Web,* Susan Stanford Friedman ingeniously illustrates the way in which Hermione's metaphorical "psychic death" is metamorphosed into the "chrysalis of rebirth, the emergence of a healed Hermione" (115) by the end of the novel. "The birth of Her", Friedman tells us, "depends on an Eleusinian subtext that resides in lost and muted form within the dominant family romance" (122) – the repressed narrative of maternal desire. Hermione's "search for the Eleusinian Demeter... connects with the lost mother, the powerful mother... Re/membering Eugenia as Demeter helps usher Her into a symbolic world of language essential to her development as a poet" (124-25). In substituting the pre-Oedipal (female) developmental plot for the Oedipal family romance of male master narratives, H.D. has cunningly rescripted the *Kunstlerroman* as a revolutionary portrait of the artist as a young woman. The woman artist, through emotional identification with the sister/mother/lover of the infantile Imaginary, emerges as writing subject rather than as specular object. Even the shattering loss of sister/love to Oedipal entanglement would eventually be used as a dramatic (and mythic) subtext in the autobiographical story of H.D.'s emotional and artistic maturation.

Paint It Today, H.D.'s initial fictional attempt to come to terms with the loss of Frances Gregg's love, is far more lyrical and schematic than *Hermione*. The closer the narrator, Helga Dart, comes to a description of lesbian attachment to either Josepha or Althea in *Paint It Today*, the more she tries to remove herself from first-person narrative identification with her fictional alter-ego Midget:

> But I will not let *I* creep into this story. I will not let *I* go on banging the tinkling cymbal of its own emotion. You and I are out of this story, are observing and (if you will let *I* still intrude by way of speaking out opinions) I think, myself, that Midget really was a lucky girl. (*P* 26)

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[8] Friedman observes that George's taunting comment evokes Freud's theory of narcissism, "which regards homosexual love as a return to an infantile stage of object choice. But Hermione's narcissistic love is creative, not regressive. It accomplishes the birth of the subject 'She' and 'I' out of the object status of 'Her'" (*Penelope's Web* 119). Parodoxically, "instead of spelling sterility and death, sister-love as self-love leads to Her's birth as butterfly, as psyche, by the end of the novel" (124). Friedman also points out that the "Swinburne poems that Pound brought H.D. in their courtship become in the novel the code for the lesbian love through which Hermione creates both her self and her sense of artistic vocation... Hermione quotes Swinburne's lines about Itylus to vow that she will never forget Fayne" (120).

The novel is framed with a series of classical Greek analogies and alludes to Virgil's epic incantation in the *Aeneid*: "That runs in my head, *arma virumque*, that beats down the battered fortress of my brain, *cano*. I sing of arms and a god. Rome and the Tuscan foothills" (*P* 26). "I sing of arms and a god. Was there no god to save his ancient postulates?" (*P* 27). Why, one might ask, has H.D. deliberately mistranslated Virgil's famous invocation, a line known to every student familiar with the rudiments of Latin? The sole defect in Josepha's character, we are told, is her failure to learn Latin – a fault that Midget is hard-pressed to forgive. The narrator, deliberately abdicating the subject position of her protagonist, has nonetheless begun to merge, psychologically, with her beloved Josepha. If the seductive temptress cannot master Latin, then the author/narrator will deliberately forget Virgilian iterations. Or does H.D. self-consciously appropriate and alter Virgil's peroration? If one were to attempt a Lacanian symptomatic reading of *Paint It Today*, then this surprising translational "error" would provide a *ficelle* for unraveling the curious knot of genderbending affections embedded at the heart of this lyrical text. An early work, it functions as a *roman à clef* in which focalization constantly shifts between first and third person, and thinly drawn *dramatis personae* fill out the sketch of H.D.'s shifting romantic thralldom.

Not until *Asphodel* would Hilda/Hermione declare her love directly to Frances/Fayne and offer her the proposal of a lesbian *ménage*:

> "I, Hermione, tell you love you Fayne Rabb. Men and women will come and say I love you. I love you Hermione, you Fayne. Men will say I love 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 you to so be. I don't feel a girl... Do people say it's indecent? Maybe it is. I can't hear now, see any more, people". (*A* 52-53)

Ezra Pound, recast as Raymond in *Paint It Today*, seems little more than an erstwhile fiancé to be mentioned and disposed of. In *Asphodel*, Ezra/George is caricatured as "Sir Know-all" (*A* 55) and dismissed as "a monkey in its velvet jacket" (*A* 97). His most significant gesture occurs when he protests Midget's plan to accompany Josepha and Seaford on their honeymoon trip to Berlin (*P* 34): "As your nearest male relative, I tell you this won't do" (*A* 86).

Raymond's engagement to another woman thrusts Midget into the arms of the poet Basil (Richard Aldington) – a suitor whom Josepha dismisses as a whited sepulchre. Basil is ridiculed by the contemptuous nickname "Basil-pot. I mean the pot of Basil" (*P* 51) – an epithet that, by erasing the "e" in "poet", reduces the man to absurd caricature as an empty vessel. Fayne/Josepha attributes other pejorative names to Aldington/Darrington in *Asphodel*: "I suppose he's an earl's bastard and an accomplished black-mailer" (*A* 82). She malevolently writes to Midget in *Paint It Today*: "I do hope he gets killed in the war" (*P* 51). Although Basil does survive fighting on the French front, he returns to England contaminated by violence. Who, wonders Midget, "was this person that came back to her, with the smell of gas in his breath, with the stench of death in his clothes?" (*P* 46). The war clearly constitutes an ineffable trauma barely mentioned until it becomes a scene of post-traumatic stress disorder and tentative psychological recovery:

> So it was over, not only the peril, the suffering, the agonizing we called the war, but the years of (to some of us) even more painful period of convalescence. I mark, from my personal experience, this period of recovery as two years. (*P* 67)

The traumatic moment embedded at the heart of both *Paint It Today* and the first section of *Asphodel* is Fayne/Josepha's rejection of her sister/lover/twin in favor of a "trial marriage" to Louis Wilkinson, in an arrangement that proves to be an amorous ruse. The news of this wedding conjures up a flood of mythological associations in Hermione's imagination: "She had risen from Hell as Persephone from the underworld" (*A* 75). The language H.D. uses to describe Hermione's reaction depicts a seering psychological wound analogous to the rape of Persephone and the subsequent loss of her mother/lover Demeter: "The blue vitriol of Fayne's letter had left its scar... Scar that she hadn't turned from, wound that she had not repudiated" (*A* 77).

H.D.'s obsessional story of lesbian rejection is framed in *Paint It Today* by Josepha's mocking elusiveness and by the author's lyrical celebration of Frances Gregg's Janus-image, the idealized Althea – a sister-savior who offers the promise of physical love, mythic vision, and utopian bliss:

> Midget's lesbian redeemer, white Althea (based on Bryher), suddenly materializes in a Sapphic utopia at the end of *Paint It Today*. There Midget, exhausted by war and the loss of Josepha, rediscovers love, community, and freedom. In an uncharacteristically bold encoding of lesbian sexuality, H.D. depicts the two women as naked "daughters of Artemis", joyfully battling a storm-wracked landscape. (Laity xxiv)

In *Asphodel* and *Paint It Today*, Fayne/Josepha embarks on a duplicitous marriage that stuns Hermione/Midget and leaves her thoroughly disillusioned when she learns the truth from George: "I mean it's Llewyn that she's in with. The other person is only a sort of mari" (*A* 84). Feeling utterly betrayed, Hermione entertains a carnivalesque image of Fayne as a Degas figure "with a white face painted like a circus rider, ... doing her little 'stunt' balancing on toe on a white galloping stallion and holding two clowns (Llewyn and Morrison?) balanced on quivering buttocks" (*A* 97).

In both versions of the story, Frances/Josepha's triangular plot of amorous intrigue backfires when she finds herself unexpectedly pregnant in Italy. "I will bear the Christo", Josepha triumphantly announces, as if her progeny were the result of an immaculate conception or a virgin birth. "He will be a Christo or a bore" (*P* 51). She acerbically compares her parturition to "slimy seaweed that propagates itself by breaking off itself" (*P* 51). Impregnated by her husband Seaford, despite the charade of a marriage of convenience, Josepha will give birth to a symbolic exudation of seaweed that suggests, at the very least, maternal ambivalence and fear of evolutionary regression. "You will have a her", she prophesies to the pregnant Midget. "You will have a sort of witch thing that will know all that you don't know" (*P* 51).

At this point, one might reconsider H.D.'s deliberate appropriation and mistranslation of Virgil's master narrative. The Roman poet sings of "arms and the man". In *Paint It Today*, H.D. apotheosizes the Virgilian protagonist and elevates her to the status of a god. Only a deity, perhaps, could satisfy Hilda/Midget's monumental, deferred desire for a partner worthy of her refined, ethereal spirit. Only a goddess – or the Artemisian figure of woman – could satiate her indefinite and infinitely deferred locus of amorous longing. "Man" is erased from the classical text and literally dis-armed, his figure giving way to the Mother-goddess of H.D.'s mythic imagination. The historical trauma of World War I has virtually been erased from this version of the story. H.D.'s narrator self-consciously refuses to condone or celebrate masculine bellicosity, to sing either of arms or the man. Her song ends, instead, with a lyrical celebration of the childlike goddess/sister/lover who has illumined Midget's life and ostensibly erased the traumatic resonances of earlier romantic thralldom to figures like Raymond, Josepha, and Basil – fictive representations of Pound, Gregg, and Aldington. The union with this new sister/lover is sealed by a miracle:

> A small amber-colored being crept into Midget's life, a creature unbelievable, far less convincing than white Althea. A creature, white as a camellia, amber as a honeybee, black as a gypsy's baby. White and black, amber and camellia white, not to be believed yet easily proved as existent by cupping its firm black head in the hollow of a hand and watching it laugh, clutching with a hummingbird's claw (*P* 89).

H.D.'s daughter Perdita, the lost child so miraculously found, cannot be named or autobiographically represented. Historical chaos has itself been repressed in a schematic tale that consigns the Great War to the text's unconscious and allows H.D./Midget to give birth in the utopian spaces of the author's romantic and pastoral imagination. Perdita's fictional alter-ego must be evoked with mysterious, magical circumspection, as a fairy progeny or serendipitous gift of the gods, a "gypsy's baby" that resembles a mirage. This amazing creature erupts from subliminal spaces as a sign of future hope and delight – a sign confirmed by Althea, who will sanctify the kismet infant and initiate her into the mythic cult of the goddess Artemis.

The Frances Gregg figure who emerges in *Paint It Today* is a dark and witch-like seductress, a Faustine/Hecate caricature violently displaced by the idealized Artemisian savior, Althea/Bryher. *Paint It Today* ends on a note of utopian fantasy – a phantasmic identification with a female goddess-cult that will be replicated in *Asphodel*. H.D. is apparently working through the vicissitudes of adolescent and wartime trauma by fashioning a coded confession that offers the possibility of authorial mastery and mythic empowerment – as well as tools of aesthetic expression that allow her to reformulate trauma narrative in the genre of scriptotherapy.

In working through her lesbian identification with a lost beloved object in *Hermione*, H.D. incorporates the imago of deferred and insatiable desire into the shattered self as a eucharistic image of wholeness and plenitude. The atavistic desire to identify with the beloved harks back to primitive instinctual drives to devour and assimilate the "other" in cannibalistic gestures of physical incorporation. By designating Frances/Fayne, the elusive *femme fatale*, as an Itylus figure, H.D. fantasizes, through art, the eucharistic ingestion of a lover who has always evaded her. Strengthened by gestures of psychic incorporation, the newly empowered author will unite with the white Althea of her dreams to create a lesbian community that offers the bond of maternal protection and succor essential to the female artist.

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