H.D.’S INCANTATIONS:
READING TRILOGY AS AN OCCULTIST’S CREED

by

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A THESIS

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2010
The focus of this thesis is H.D.’s epic poem, Trilogy, composed during 1942-1944, while she was living in World War II London. This project’s primary aim is to investigate how the poet’s participation in occult spiritual practices impacts the work’s language. This reading examines terms, concepts, and ritualistic language from a range of esoteric traditions. While H.D. was involved in a wide range of occult practices, the specific traditions with which this paper is mainly concerned are: astrology, spiritualism, Kabbalism, and gnostic Christianity. Explicating Trilogy exclusively through this lens places significantly more importance on the poem’s metaphorical, historical, and archeological concerns, in contrast to directly psychoanalytical and secularly feminist criticism.

Keywords: H.D., Trilogy, Occultism, Spiritualism, Kabbalism, Gnosticism
I dedicate this thesis to my parents John and Emma. Without their patience, understanding, support, and most of all love, the completion of this work would not have been possible.
I would like to thank Ann Hoff for her guidance and support throughout this project. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to Kieran Quinlan, Daniel Siegel, and Jessica Dallow for their invaluable contributions to my thesis. I am also indebted to Graduate Program Director Gale Temple, who was instrumental in facilitating this project’s final stages, as well as to Jill Pruett for her helpful advice on the final chapter. And finally, I would like to thank the librarians at the Mervyn Sterne Library, the Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and the John Rylands University Library for their assistance with my research.
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INTRODUCTION

“dared occult lore, / found secret doors unlocked” (*Walls Do Not Fall* 30:16-17)

Since the early nineteen-eighties, criticism on modernist poet Hilda Doolittle has resurfaced after decades of relatively minimal comment following the end of her Imagist years. Dubbed “H.D. Imagist” by Ezra Pound in 1912, H.D. is usually categorized in literary anthologies as one of the original Imagist poets whose early career was mentored and launched by the man who permanently initialed her name.\(^1\) The publication of Susan Stanford Friedman’s *Psyche Reborn: the Emergence of H.D.* in 1981 revived fervid investigation of the poet’s work; moreover, Friedman’s biography created a renewed interest in H.D.’s mature oeuvre. *Trilogy*, H.D.’s ambitious war epic, is one of her most pivotal post-Imagist poems to gain popular scholarly interest. A tripartite poem, it was composed during 1942-1944 while H.D. was living in London with Annie Winifred Ellerman. The three parts were originally published separately: *The Walls Do Not Fall* was published in 1944; *Tribute to the Angels* was published in 1945; and *Flowering of the Rod* was published in 1946. They were posthumously published as one work in 1973. Narrated in a stream-of-consciousness style, each section discursively presents its own distinctive theme. *Walls* is often noted as a perusal of Egyptian history, while *Tribute* pays homage to the biblical angels and

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\(^1\) On the grounds that Hilda Doolittle was too “quaint,” Pound shortened the poet’s name to her initials before submitting her first published poem.
to Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary founder of alchemy. *Flowering*, the trilogy’s last book, chronicles Mary Magdalene’s purchase of the alabaster jar. Following Friedman’s book, additional scholars have examined figures in the poet’s personal and professional life who inform her later aesthetic. Other than H.D. biographers, however, critics have largely overlooked the poet’s occult practices, minimizing an especially dominant influence on *Trilogy* in particular. *Trilogy*’s numerous occult allusions warrant an isolated look at H.D.’s involvements with esoteric traditions and, more importantly, how those traditions inform the epic as a work of occult theology.

Because the term *occult* remains subjective in religious scholarship, H.D.’s specific occult engagements must first be outlined. For the purpose of encompassing the variety of her faiths, *occultism* will refer to the poet’s spiritual practices that explored the supernatural and involved secret rituals shared among an “elite” group of initiates—namely astrology, Tarot, spiritualism, numerology, Kabbalism, and Christian gnosticism. An examination of these allusions provides fuller insight into the poet’s unique perception of language’s mystical capacities; H.D. indeed believed that language’s power was not limited to the symbolic, as *Trilogy*’s spiritualist and Kabbalistic undercurrents most especially show. Furthermore, reading *Trilogy* as an occultist’s creed reveals the extent to which H.D. manipulates language to invoke both the literal ghosts of the deceased, as well as the phantoms of ancient esoteric traditions—traditions literally buried in the sands of Egypt and resurrected by hunters of antiquity.
Chapter one provides an account of H.D.’s life after her separation from Aldington in 1918. After beginning a relationship with heiress and writer Annie Winifred Ellerman, informally known as “Bryher,” H.D. became engrossed with Egyptology and with interpreting the “visions” she experienced on her worldly excursions. Both of these fascinations are intrinsically linked with the poet’s submersion into the occult world. Chapter two focuses on H.D.’s spiritualist practices that she began at the time she was undergoing psychoanalysis and how those practices shape Trilogy’s language. Chapter three examines Kabbalistic rituals and linguistic techniques that H.D. employs in what is usually called her “alchemical” poem. Moreover, this chapter works to illustrate that H.D. became a serious practitioner of the Kabbalah much earlier than scholars typically suggest. And finally, chapter four presents a reading of Flowering of the Rod as a dialogic exchange with the Christian gnostic Gospel of Mary.

While H.D. did not officially engage in occult practices until she was well into her thirties, her pious Moravian upbringing significantly informed her predilection for occult disciplines as an adult. The poet was born in 1886 in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania where she spent her early childhood years in a sequestered Moravian community. Her mother, Helen Wolle, had been part of the Moravian community in Bethlehem her entire life, and Wolle’s father (H.D.’s grandfather) had lived with the Bethlehem Moravians since his early child. H.D.’s father, Charles Doolittle, was not Moravian and came from a lineage of Puritans who had immigrated to America from England. Nevertheless, the Doolittle children were raised in a strictly Moravian household, even when the family
moved to Upper Darby when H.D. was nine. The Moravian faith of H.D.’s early childhood during the late nineteenth-century was, in some ways, similar to other “dissenter” faiths, such as the Quakers. Men and women entered church buildings separately and sat divided from one another during services, the women wearing small white caps. Also like the Quakers, the Moravians valued self-sufficiency and hard work: they grew their own produce (even building their own merchant ships to export their goods) and made their own furniture (Guest 9-10). As a result of the hardship that the founding Moravians underwent—escaping religious persecution in Moravia and establishing an independent haven in the United States—younger generations felt tremendous pressure to be tirelessly productive. Eric, H.D.’s half-brother, was reported to have died from the strain of overwork.

In fact, H.D.’s own relentless drive to write and obsessively revise can be attributed to the Moravians’ “emphasis on industry” (10). The culture’s value of independence and strenuous work largely explains why H.D. was such a prolific writer, even during her severest bouts with mental illness in sanitoriums. Despite the zealousness with which the Moravians adhered to tradition, H.D.’s childhood religion had a profound appreciation for mysticism and intuition. The “Brethren” (or Unitas Fratrum, as they are also called) contend that God makes contact with humans through “supernatural” means. Once a person experiences “a joyous revelation” from God, he or she is to share that divine experience with others, hence the Moravians’ emphasis on missionary work. It is no surprise, then, that the occult traditions in which H.D. immersed herself as an adult all rely on trance, intense meditation, or intuition for access to the spiritual realm. Even her
Kabbalistic and astrological practices, which used complex cerebral symbols, ultimately rely on intuition to interpret those symbols. Moreover, the Moravian church also demanded tolerance of faiths different from its own; Moravians were to extend love and acceptance to all persons within and outside of the community. H.D.’s innate curiosity about other religions and in the fact that she was never uneasy about simultaneously engaging in multiple spiritual practices reflects the solidarity and acceptance that she witnessed in this sect of esoteric Christianity.

By and large, scholars have briefly mentioned H.D.’s occult engagements but have insufficiently investigated the extent to which those practices formulate Trilogy’s imagery and language. The primary reason that occultism has played such a subsidiary role in H.D. criticism is that, since early H.D. scholarship, the poet’s notorious association with Freud as patient and lay analyst has been depicted as the most pervasive influence in her life and career. From 1933-34, H.D. regularly underwent psychoanalysis with Freud, a process that she described as “opening up mines of hidden treasure” (Tribute 75). As opposed to her occult alliances, H.D. explicitly wrote about her relationship with the “Professor” in Tribute to Freud, an autobiographical work comprised of what were originally two books: Advent, a collection of journal entries that H.D. wrote while she was in therapy and Writing on the Wall, an intimate reflection on those years, written in 1944 (ten years after her therapy sessions had ended). H.D.’s book-length account of her work with Freud attests to the monumental importance of this relationship. Certainly, one can see the continued impact of this mentorship in parts of Trilogy. Lines such as “childhood’s mysterious enigma, / is the Dream”
recall the numerous hours H.D. spent with Freud analyzing her dreams and mystical “visions.”

While psychoanalytic terms intermittently surface throughout the epic, it is important to note that the number of allusions to occult practices are significantly greater than evocations of psychoanalysis—and yet, the majority of scholarship on *Trilogy* has contextualized its interpretation within the larger scope of psychoanalysis. Friedman’s *Psyche Reborn*, arguably providing the most exhaustive account of H.D.’s esoteric practices, presents the poet’s occult interests as, foremost, a reaction against Freud’s rationalist perspective. According to Friedman, Freud was the most crucial impetus for H.D.’s exploration of the occult during the nineteen-thirties: “[H.D.] believed that her initiation into mystical traditions depended fundamentally upon [Freud’s] psychoanalytic séance” (158). Other leading H.D. scholars, such as Susan Gubar, Barbara Guest, and Racheal Blau DuPlessis reinforce the idea that H.D.’s occult involvements were always in direct reaction to parts of Freud’s theories with which H.D. famously disagreed. Freud’s cynical views of religion, especially the mystical, were a significant point of contention between him and his poet-analysand. Considered a classic work of H.D. criticism, Gubar’s “The Echoing Spell of H.D.’s *Trilogy*” explicated H.D.’s “lexical reconstruction” of traditional Western myth (206). Gubar’s argument is one of the most concentrated observations of H.D.’s use of peripheral Egyptian, Greek, and Biblical matriarchal myths, and she provides a useful look at *Trilogy*’s alchemical symbols. Gubar’s interpretation of the epic’s religious mythologies, however, does not extend
beyond reading *Trilogy* as a work concerned with challenging patriarchal (and especially Freudian) interpretations of myth. Instead of tracing *Trilogy*’s motif of peripheral deities to occult and intellectual figures H.D. encountered outside of psychoanalysis, Gubar asserts that the poem’s central purpose is to “under[cut] the traditional Freudian interpretation” (197).

By emphasizing H.D.’s departures from Freud, such scholarship ironically deemphasizes mystics and occult works that were as pivotal as Freud to H.D.’s development as an occult artist. A few critics, such as Adalaide Morris, have identified the limitations of psychoanalytically-minded feminist criticism that avoids dealing with *Trilogy*’s “sacred realities” and that concentrates instead on its secular and political implications. By privileging a psychoanalytic reading, Morris argues, “feminism and mysticism seem alternately to subsume and all but erase each other… critics tend to find one true and the other false, one commendable and the other embarrassing… [these] contradictory elements are both necessary and proper to a reading of *Trilogy*” (132). But Morris’ own observance of *Trilogy*’s “mystical politics,” similar to other scholarship that consciously avoids a materialist interpretation, does not fully compensate for the lack of biographical attention given to H.D.’s occult affiliations.

Suzanne Young also acknowledges that critics, “following Friedman’s lead,” have primarily focused on H.D.’s particular *differences* with Freud, rather than on their areas of concord. Young instead focuses on H.D.’s resistance to, not Freud, but those who made psychoanalysis marketable to the general public. By also examining H.D.’s use of scientific language from disciplines such as
geology, astronomy, and physics, Young claims to resist “the continuing critical practice of treating psychoanalysis as a fixed and privileged way to read H.D.’s work” (326). She is correct in stating that Friedman and others have successfully shown that H.D. was in no way a passive analysand under Freud and that she strongly challenged him on topics such as the nature of religious experience (her “visions” in particular) and women’s creativity. Young’s argument, however, does not acknowledge that continually probing H.D.’s resistance to Freud’s imitators still reinforces the assumption that psychoanalysis was always the dominant context within H.D. was writing (or rebelling).

H.D. formed a number of critical alliances in the occult world both before and at the same time she began her sessions with Freud. H.D.’s lover Kenneth Macpherson introduced her to astrology, numerology, and Tarot in 1927, six years before she began psychoanalysis. Of these interests H.D. shared with Macpherson, astrology is one of Trilogy’s most pervasive occult themes; references to stars, constellations, and their relation to personality and human fate abound throughout all three books. Additionally, psychic mediums Arthur Bhaduri and Sir Lord Hugh Dowding initiated H.D. into the world of spiritualist séances in 1933, a practice that was part of H.D.’s daily routine during the period she was composing Trilogy. Leading H.D. biographers Friedman and Guest provide accounts of H.D.’s work with psychic and spiritualist mediums, but their discussion of these figures is minimal, outside of placing them within the realm of psychoanalysis. Their emphasis on Freudian politics does not convey that H.D.’s spiritualist work and her alliances with individual occult practitioners served
outside of psychoanalysis as catalysts for her immersion in those traditions. Moreover, the disparity between the attentions given to H.D.’s Freudian training and that paid to her occult initiations suggests that the poet’s psychoanalysis instigated her interest in occult signs and symbols. This implication neglects the fact that H.D. began to show intense interest in the occult world years before her collaboration with Freud. It is more likely that H.D.’s Moravian background, her propensity for mystical “visions” (experienced as early as adolescence and considered a dangerous “symptom” by Freud), and her preliminary curiosity in Tarot, numerology, and astrology enabled her willingness to explore the subconscious.

There is also a tendency in H.D. scholarship, as exemplified by Sarah Graham and Norman Kelvin, to present Trilogy as a didactic “heal-all” to the travesties of war. While Kelvin offers a much-needed look at H.D.’s spiritualist practices, he does not establish Trilogy as an encapsulation of this tradition. Instead, he asserts that the central purpose of all of H.D.’s work is a self-protective response to the Great War. Not only does this kind of reading favor a psychological interpretation, it inaccurately presents Trilogy’s occult language from a materialist perspective. Similarly, Graham—while providing keen observation of the epic’s pagan and magical elements—also argues that “the poet’s skill with language [is] the key to achieving peace” (16). As a woman living in London during World War II, H.D. visibly shares her horror as a survivor of war. On the other hand, presenting Trilogy’s mysticism as a temporal call for peace occludes other historical and anthropological phenomena to which
H.D. was responding, such as the discovery of the polemical gnostic script, The Gospel of Mary, at the turn of the century.

In sum, this investigation of Trilogy’s occult elements contributes to a more panoramic view of the cultural and autobiographical factors that shape Trilogy’s language. By shifting to this perspective, this paper provides a context that more fully illuminates Trilogy’s astrological, spiritualist, Kabbalistic, and Christian gnostic sensibilities; moreover, reading the epic in this light reveals that Trilogy’s language is not limited to only symbolic or healing purposes. Rather, many of the work’s prayers and incantations stem from practices H.D. used to invoke supernatural forces. In addition, a view of Trilogy’s Mary Magdalene as a gnostic revealer applies existing scholarship on fin de siécle anthropology in a new way. Without this deliberately more isolated reading of Trilogy’s occult language, current scholarship is apt to overlook H.D.’s overriding identity as a supernaturalist.
THE POST-IMAGIST ODYSSEY

“There is alchemy and mystery in this, / no cross to kiss, / but a cross pointing on a compass-face, / east, west, south, north” —H.D.,
“Erige Cor Tuum Ad Me In Caelum”

Entwined with the work’s mystical incantations, its autobiographical
referents point toward specific occult figures who were as significant to Trilogy’s
gestation as the poet’s well-documented sessions with Freud. Psychic mediums
and connoisseurs of magic, Tarot, and astrology aided H.D. in realizing what she
perceived as a “gift” for supernatural divination. In addition to H.D.’s personal
fellowships with mystics in the occult world, she steadfastly read works written
by historians and theorists of occult religions; the most influential of these writers
were syncretist theorists attempting to trace the Christian church to ancient
polytheistic cultures. An examination of the esoteric literature she repeatedly read
illuminates the alliances Trilogy draws between the modern Christian church and
arcane pagan religions. From an autobiographical standpoint, H.D.’s arguments
concerning the etymology of biblical myth parallel her excavation of her own
abstruse past. During the course of two decades preceding Trilogy’s publication,
H.D. had to initially focus her creative energies on resolving traumatic psycho-
historical events from the Great War. Transcending what she referred to as her
“war trauma” became, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis states, “a major psychological
and literary project for more than twenty years” (Career 72).
Before the Great War, H.D.’s beginnings with Pound were largely responsible for her initial success as an Imagist poet, as well as her struggles with moving beyond that label. H.D. had been acquainted with Pound since she was fifteen in Upper Darby, and the two had an intense romance in 1905 while H.D. was attending Bryn Mawr; they were briefly engaged in 1907, but by 1908, their engagement was broken.¹ They reunited in 1911 when H.D. came to Europe to independently study literature and Greek and Egyptian sculpture. At that time, H.D. Pound, and Richard Aldington (H.D.’s future husband) formed a poetic cohort and called themselves the first Imagist poets. Under Pound’s direction—Aldington later referred to this time period as “Ezra’s’s Imagism”—H.D. had a poetic breakthrough and received critical praise for her crystalline images (Guest 41-43). Even in Trilogy, she never completely abandoned the Imagist aesthetic, but it would take decades before she formed it into a style that was completely her own. Her tumultuous relationship with Pound, and their two broken engagements, continued to impact her work. Her autobiographical fiction, such as Bid Me to Live and End to Torment, largely revolve around this relationship and Pound’s resistance when his “pupil” began to slowly break away from the Imagist aesthetic he had helped shape.

The Great War had destroyed the Western world’s infrastructure and resulted, both directly and indirectly, in devastating personal losses for H.D. In 1915, she had a stillborn child, which she attributed to learning of the sinking of

¹ The 1907 engagement was broken because Pound had become engaged to another woman, Mary Moore, at the same time he proposed to H.D. The two became engaged for a second time when H.D. came to Venice in 1911, though those marriage plans were soon also terminated.
the Lusitania. The miscarriage, in fact, seemed eerily foreshadowed, as H.D. learned of her pregnancy the day war was declared (Guest 72). Rachel Blau DuPlessis explains that the Lusitania tragedy was especially traumatizing for H.D. because it indicated that women, children, and noncombatants were now just as susceptible to attacks as the soldiers fighting in the trenches (72). In 1918, her brother Gilbert, with whom she was particularly close, was killed in France where he was enlisted. Less than a year after his death and during the last trimester of her second pregnancy, her father also died—it was believed, from grief over the sudden loss of his son. It is not hard to see why H.D. always associated the Great War with tremendous personal loss; in her mind, it directly caused all three deaths.

Even in the maternity hospital toward the end of her pregnancy with Perdita, H.D. could not find solace. Her ex-fiancé Ezra Pound visited her multiple times and angrily expressed his dismay that he was not the father of her child. In reality, the father of the baby was aspiring musicologist 23-year-old Cecil Gray, who was in love with H.D., although she did not reciprocate his devotion. It is unknown when H.D. told him about their child, but it is clear that the affair ended before Perdita was even born. He did not meet his daughter until she was twenty-eight years old (Guest 95-96). Far more distressing, Aldington, who was then H.D.’s husband, appeared at the maternity ward with his mistress, Dorothy Yorke. Both Aldington and H.D. knew the child was not his. He and H.D. had had several affairs by this point (often with each other’s permission), and he demanded her assurance that she would list the baby as illegitimate. He had
previously promised to take care of both of them until H.D. “got back on her feet”—though she was literally dying—but it appeared that now he was revoking that promise (Career 72). They were now permanently separated, although they did not officially divorce until 1938. Still injured by the separation ten years later, H.D. told Pound in a letter that she had still “loved [Aldington] very much” at the time of their separation (Friedman 27).

In addition to the severed ties with Aldington and Gray, another pivotal relationship in H.D.’s life simultaneously unraveled. D.H. Lawrence, whom she considered her “twin brother,” ended their friendship while she was pregnant with Perdita. The two of them had been inseparable since the war began, and it was primarily Lawrence who had been her source of comfort after her miscarriage. He expressed his dismay at H.D.’s decision to run away with Gray and never saw her again after she left for Cornwall in April of 1918. Lawrence had made it clear that he thought she was making a grievous mistake by following Gray to Cornwall. To a large extent, Lawrence was right in his admonition, as H.D. soon became disenchanted with Gray and left him before he knew she was pregnant. However, she believed that Lawrence rejected her because he did not want to share her emotional attentions with her new lover (Guest 90). In either case, the end of their friendship was detrimental to H.D., who felt a unique aesthetic and spiritual affinity with Lawrence.

In the midst of H.D.’s interpersonal divisions, she formed an alliance that same year with a woman who would provide pivotal financial and emotional support for the rest of the poet’s career. Annie Winifred Ellerman, otherwise
known as Bryher, was the daughter of a wealthy shipping magnate and an ardent admirer of H.D.’s poetry. They met in the summer of 1918, during the early stages of H.D.’s second pregnancy. Bryher soon demonstrated that she was wholeheartedly devoted to her new companion when H.D. almost died during the Influenza epidemic. Without her, H.D. would not likely have survived in the extremely understaffed hospital where she was “recuperating” from pneumonia. After one of the nurses inquired about H.D.’s funeral arrangements, Bryher quickly hired a private nurse; under constant medical attention, H.D. physically recovered, although her marital stresses and family deaths led to a mental breakdown shortly after Perdita’s birth. She always remembered her indebtedness to Bryher for saving her life and would specifically mention it every year on the anniversary of their first meeting (Guest 110).

After Perdita’s birth, H.D. and Bryher soon embarked on a number of travels that permanently shaped H.D.’s identity as an occult artist. There were, specifically, three excursions that took place during the late teens and early 1920s that were life-altering for the poet. On two of these trips, she experienced clusters of “visions” that largely kindled her occult interests in the thirties and forties. In 1919, Bryher took H.D. to the Scilly Isles, where H.D. had her “bell jar” experience. This ethereal sensation prompted her to write Notes on Thought and Vision, in which she expounds on her theory of human consciousness. In Notes, she argues that the human mind is comprised of essentially three major states of consciousness: the conscious mind, the subconscious mind, and the over-conscious mind (or over-soul). H.D. believed that she had directly experienced
what she termed the *over-conscious mind* while in the Scillies and tried to lucidly articulate that state of mind in *Notes.* In addition to comparing the sensation to being under a bell jar, she also describes it as being inside a jellyfish or having “a cap of consciousness over [her] head” (*Notes* 18).

In 1920, H.D. had another profound set of “visions” which she claimed were projected on her hotel wall while visiting Corfu with Bryher and which she later saw as a prediction of her work with spiritualist Sir Lord Hugh Dowding more than twenty years later. She recorded these Corfu images in *Writing on the Wall* (some ten years after her sessions with Freud and directly preceding the first book of *Trilogy*), which later became the first half of *Tribute to Freud.* The most striking images in her first Corfu “vision” were that of a soldier or airman, a chalice, and, most importantly, a tripod. H.D. immediately saw the tripod as a signifier of the Oracle at Delphi—not surprising, given H.D.’s early fascination with ancient Greece. The second vision at Corfu involved a projection of the goddess Nike, a ladder, and a series of question marks on the same wall (*Tribute* 44-45, 54-55). One can clearly identify the magnitude of this vision in *Trilogy* with its frequent invocations of Nike. On a wider scale, these particular images at Corfu largely ignited H.D.’s occult explorations from the thirties onward. She perceived a vital affiliation between herself and the psychic mediums she would later collaborate with, categorizing these “visions” as a kind of half-way state between everyday consciousness and genuine psychic experiences. Dowding, who claimed to have been contacted by dead RAF pilots while he was Air Chief Marshal, was an especially important medium in H.D.’s life. She believed her
“vision” of the airman on her Corfu hotel wall indicated that she was supposed to collaborate with him.

Those “visions” would later be at the forefront of H.D.’s mind as she sought out psychic mediums and occult practices during the thirties; but in the early twenties, her “visions” in the Scillies and at Corfu simply underscored her preexisting fascination with extrasensory awareness. Before she became seriously involved in the occult, she invested her energy in simply trying to understand those experiences and in resolving her personal trauma from the Great War years. In 1927, she wrote about her early visionary experiences in her autobiographical novel, HERmione. Narrated in a stream-of-consciousness style, H.D. (named HERmione in story) recalls memories of mystical experiences that she shared with friend and love interest Fraces Gregg (Fayne Rabb in the novel) in her adolescence. It is no coincidence that she decided to revisit these early trance-like states in a year closely following her “bell jar” and “tripod” visions. Of H.D.’s early visions with Frances Gregg, Friedman writes, “This experience, along with the puzzling projections of light on the Corfu hotel wall, probably provided H.D. with the greatest impetus to begin serious study of esoteric traditions in the twenties” (160).

In 1923, H.D., her mother, and Bryher visited Egypt, expanding H.D.’s geographical fixation on Greece to include Egyptian mythology. After Howard Carter discovered King Tutankhamen’s tomb that same year, the media and the public became obsessed with the Egyptian excavation. Books on Egyptian history were in constant demand, and multitudes (including H.D.’s party) flocked to
Egypt to visit the tomb (Witte 52, 56). Viewed in this context, Trilogy reflects a larger effort on the part of the West to uncover its Eastern origins. Sarah Witte remarks, “With the archaeological excavation of King Tutankamen’s tomb, the layers of Western consciousness shifted . . . As with Joyce’s Finnegans Wake, H.D.’s writings after 1923 bore the archaeological and spiritual stamp of that shift” (56). Furthermore, it is telling that Trilogy immediately commences with a scene out of Egypt. At the beginning of The Walls Do Not Fall, the poem opens with the scene of King Tutankamen’s tomb superimposed on an image of war-torn London: “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” (1:10-15).

Although Bryher continually provided H.D. with finances and world travels that motivated H.D.’s post-Imagist works, the dynamics of their relationship were far from simple. Bryher entered into two separate marriages of convenience (to establish independence from her parents)—the first to Richard McAlmon in 1923 and the second to Kenneth Macpherson in 1927. The arrangement between H.D., Macpherson, and Bryher was especially complicated by the fact that Macpherson and H.D. were romantically involved. Macpherson, who was twenty-four at the time of their introduction in 1926, had a passionate, though complicated, affair with H.D. that lasted several years following his alliance with Bryher. In 1929, H.D. became pregnant with Macpherson’s child and took a train to Berlin to have an abortion and enter under the care of him and Bryher who were lodging there at the time. (Guest 175-95).
For H.D. the nineteen-thirties through the early forties were transitional years in which she stopped publishing her Greek-themed Imagist poems. In fact, *Red Roses for Bronze* (1931) was the last book of poetry that she published until *These Walls Do Not Fall* (1946), the first book of Trilogy. A number of critics, such as Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert, have viewed these years as an extended “poetic death” caused by H.D.’s insecurities as a bisexual woman writing in a literary climate dominated by men. What H.D. biographer Susan Friedman calls a “writer’s block” was actually a time of fervent experimentation for H.D., during which she primarily turned to prose (37). As Friedman correctly notes, though, the experimental novels H.D. began writing in the twenties “exhibit considerable experimentation with plot centered on reflection instead of action and with narration that render[s] stream of consciousness” (67). Furthermore, the fiction she wrote during her supposed silent period served as primers for Trilogy. Works such as *Paint It Today* (1921), *Asphodel* (written in 1921-22), *HERmione* (1927), *Hedylus* (1928), *The Usual Star* (1928), *Kora and Ka* (1934), *The Pilot’s Wife* (1934), *Nights* (1935), *Bid Me to Live* (1939), and *The Gift* (1942) are more inwardly focused than the narratives of her early poems and are written in a progressively more discursive style.

The reason for this shift toward introspection is that, as with many leading writers, H.D. was occupied during this time with developing an art form whose inherent themes and structures would enable her to extract—or at least simulate—some sort of meaning in a world devastated by war. As Friedman remarks, “[Imagism] could not explain the violence of war and the fragmentation of belief
“systems” (4). Although H.D. was not actively publishing, it was discovered posthumously that she was writing poems at this time, only occasionally publishing them individually in Life and Letters Today (including sections of Walls). These poems were intended as a collection entitled A Dead Priestess Speaks. Her failure to complete this short volume and her concentration on writing prose indicate that she was, like her contemporaries, searching for a new poetic voice that could effectively express her identity crisis. Ultimately, the epic genre became a popular poetic form that poets found conducive for exploring the existential dilemmas of war. In 1922, Eliot explored the West’s spiritual crisis in The Waste Land and narrated his Anglican conversion in his later epic, Four Quartets (1946). Joyce’s Ulysses, a modern-day version of the Odyssey, also took center-stage in the early post-war years after it was published in 1922. Pound began dedicating himself to composing his epic Cantos, which would remain his central project for the next forty years. Famed Imagist William Carlos Williams was also devoting himself to building his neo-epic, Paterson, published in 1946.

Despite her apparent productivity during this time, it is clear that H.D. did struggle with acute insecurities regarding her “place” in the literary world. Her prolonged infatuation with occultism that started during the early thirties is likely a partial reflection of her sense of isolation from her peers. Just as her visionary experiences as an adolescent left her feeling estranged from Pound (as revealed in HERmione), her peripheral status as a female author contributed to her sense of alienation. Furthermore, Randall Jarrell’s blunt assertion in 1945 that “H.D. is history” reflects a sentiment within parts of the literary community that H.D.’s
poetry would never move beyond the passé Imagist aesthetic (Burnett 1). While the experimental novels she was writing at the time were ultimately preparations for Trilogy, many of the unpublished poems that she wrote during this period portray the female artist as either dead or dying. In “Priest,” the dead priestess Delia of Mietus contemplates her own funeral. Poems such as “Chance Meeting” also clearly depict H.D.’s self-debilitating inferiority complex in comparing her work to the long lineage of male authors. Even in her experimental novels, the story conveys a sense of helplessness. In Nights, for instance, the protagonist commits suicide. H.D. diminutively referred to her novels, The Usual Star, Kora and Ka, and Nights as “Peter Rabbit” books (Guest 228). Further distancing herself from her peers, she never fully surrendered her early Imagist style.

Norman Kelvin notes: “The themes implicit in her poems of [the Imagist] years and at times the technique employed in them, are the point of continuous return” (171). Although she continues to use crystalline descriptions in her later works, these images are infinitely more complex and reflect the significant intellectual and spiritual alterations she underwent during her “silent” period. Friedman writes: “The First World War and its subsequent personal and cultural consequences had constituted a kind of death for H.D., a descent to the underworld from which she had to emerge in a process of spiritual rebirth that was decades in the making” (9).

H.D.’s “spiritual rebirth” initially stemmed from approximately two years of regular psychoanalysis with Freud, from 1933-1934. Her weekly trips to “the Professor’s” office at 19 Bergasse Street in Vienna provided her with a rich
lexicon of psychological and symbolic terms that greatly aided her in her later autobiographical novels and mature poems. Moreover, Freud shared H.D.’s extensive knowledge and enthusiasm for Greek, Roman, and Egyptian mythologies. In Tribute to Freud, H.D. often describes his impressive collection of artifacts and statuettes of mythological figures. He would even use these small figurines during their sessions to help H.D. articulate and deepen her own self-knowledge. 1944, toward the end of WWII, was a time when she was excavating the past—most especially, the Great War that she had physically and psychically barely survived. In Tribute, she wrote: “The past is literally blasted into consciousness with the Blitz in London” (v). Tribute’s second section, Advent, is the published version of the journal she had kept while she was undergoing analysis. Composed around the same time she wrote Writing on the Wall, Trilogy was her artistic analysis of the past, with its evocation of ancient myths and palimpsests of past wars.

H.D. and Freud disagreed on several issues, including Freud’s assertion that women’s creativity is contingent upon masculine authority and influence. In Writing, H.D. recalls a specific occasion when Freud showed her a figurine of Nike from his collection of artifacts on his desk. She records, “‘This is my favorite,’ he said. He held the object toward me. I took it in my hand. It was a little bronze statue, helmeted, clothed to the foot in carved robe with the upper incised chiton or peplum. One hand was extended as if holding a staff or rod. ‘She is perfect,’ he said, ‘only she had lost her spear’” (68-69). Implied by her vivid memory of this incident in her memoir, H.D. refuted Freud’s theory that penis
envy is intrinsic to the female psyche. The gender politics of matriarchal myth clearly underline much of Trilogy and her discord with Freud concerning this matter. One of the more obvious reflections of this tension between patient and analyst in Trilogy lies in its challenge against equating oblong objects with masculine power. In Trilogy’s first book, The Walls Do Not Fall, the speaker proclaims, “Let us, however, recover the Sceptre, / the rod of power: / it is crowned with the lily-head / or the lily-bud: / it is Caduceus; among the dying / it bears healing: / or evoking the dead, / it brings life to the living” (3: 1-8). Here H.D. explores the “rod of power” beyond its usual associations with male figures, such as the Biblical Moses and the Classical Hermes.

By evoking the caduceus’s history, H.D. questions the long-time association between the ancient rod of healing with masculinity. The caduceus was a two-sexed, double-headed serpent that was originally associated with the Mesopotamian healing god Ningishzida, a lover of the goddess Ishtar. Biblical writers later changed its name to Nehushtan, and it eventually became an emblem of the God of Moses (Walker 85). Considering the caduceus’ sexual duality, it is not surprising that it was also later associated with the two-sexed sage Tiresius of Thebes. To pair a symbol representing masculine power with a lily image also works to intimate that the caduceus is a bisexual, rather than an exclusively masculine, symbol. The lily has long been a yonic symbol, as well as the virgin aspect of goddesses such as Lilith, the Triple Goddess, Astarte, Juno, Hera, and Venus, as H.D. suggests here.
In *Tribute*, H.D. also discloses another significant debate with Freud: the nature of the “visions” she had had while visiting Corfu in 1920, which Freud believed were hallucinations, “a flight from reality” (*Tribute* 44). These “hieroglyphs,” as she called them, were so significant to her that they continued to propel her later research into mystical and occult practices. Of her “vision” at Corfu she writes, “The tripod, we know, was the symbol of prophecy, prophetic utterance or occult or hidden knowledge” (*Tribute* 51). These visions from the poet’s youth are visibly underscored in *Trilogy*; tripods, the Goddess Nike, and a chalice are all central images. The meaning of these visions, which Freud believed were symptomatic and H.D. believed were sacred, became an extended quest for the poet beyond psychoanalysis. Regardless, her sessions with Freud facilitated more meaningful interpretations of her unconscious, and ultimately, she transcended what she believed were Freud’s spiritual limitations. So, unlike many poets who began immediately exploring new developments in poetry right after the Great War, H.D. was avidly studying new frontiers in the field of psychology. Despite H.D.’s occasional assertions that “the Professor was not always right,” these sessions were essential to her poetic rebirth (18).

Certainly, Freud was instrumental to the breakthrough of her later work and had become an important friend and mentor; but when he died in 1939, H.D. did not relapse into the creative frigidity that had consumed her after her brother and father’s deaths. Remembering the news of Freud’s death in *Writing*, she admits, “Yes, he was dead. I was not emotionally involved. The Professor was an old man. He was eighty-three. The war was on us. I did not grieve for the
Professor or think of him. He was spared so much” (12). It was right after Freud died that H.D. completed *Walls*, her most ambitious poetic work at that time. Because her work with Freud is so clearly documented, it remains the most studied of her personal and professional connections. Not surprisingly, the majority of H.D. scholarship relies heavily, almost by default, on this biographical connection to inform its criticism.

After H.D.’s divorce from Aldington in 1938, she and Bryher lived together on-and-off for the rest of H.D.’s life. A generous patron and companion, Bryher was so devoted that she later adopted Perdita. Throughout the course of H.D.’s mental breakdowns and recoveries, she and Bryher traveled extensively (including visits to H.D.’s beloved Egypt) and eventually set up house together during World War II in London. The apartment in which they lived was in a respectable area called Lowndes Square—relatively simple for Bryher’s ample income, but by no means squalid. In 1940 Bryher established H.D. with a large lifelong income. By this time, H.D. had also inherited a generous sum of money from her family, due in large part to her brother Harold’s wise investments for her. In addition to presenting H.D. with a life membership to the London Library, Bryher also gave the poet limitless access to her own vast personal library (Guest 264).

Benefiting from Bryher’s financing and connections, H.D. was fortuitous in other ways as well. In spite of its destructiveness, WWII was a lucrative time to be a writer, especially one of poetry. The public was reading voraciously, desperate for some kind of escape from the daily tragedies and stresses of war.
This need for escape is also evidenced by the popularity of concerts and the outdoor performances of Shakespeare at Regent’s Park. The only surviving British poetry magazines, *Life and Letters Today* (for which Bryher regularly wrote), *Penguin New Writing*, and *Poetry London* were continually sold out. Poetry readings also drew large crowds. In 1943 H.D. read from parts of *Trilogy* at a “Reading of Famous Poets,” an event arranged by the poet Edith Sitwell and her brother Osbert Sitwell, close friends of Bryher’s and admirers of H.D.’s work (262-63).

While H.D.’s financial security and her previous psychoanalysis were requisite to her furious output of work in the forties, the particulars of her daily life in wartime London also helped foster her restored ambition. Living in a snug apartment in an exclusive area of London, her living situation provided her with a paradoxical, but crucial, balance of freedom and restriction. As Guest comments, “Concentrated living, squirreled away in a small apartment, fewer social activities, a narrowing of her dimensions would give her a concentrated world so necessary to her craft” (253). Indeed, the constant disruption and displacement that characterized her life in the first post-war years did anything but foster her creativity. This balance gave her the enthusiasm and sense of urgency she needed to complete her breakthrough epic *Trilogy*. Since 1938, she and Bryher had been, for the first time, living together indefinitely in London; by now, there was no question regarding mutual loyalty. Because of the blackouts, the two women spent much of their time in dimly lit rooms. People rarely went outside for fear of getting lost in the pitch dark or falling and injuring themselves among the city’s
rubble. Bryher gave H.D. the one proper writing desk and used the ledge in her bedroom room to do her own writing. It was at this desk that H.D. furiously wrote most of her _Trilogy_. Not surprisingly, she dedicated her first book, _The Walls Do Not Fall_, to Bryher (253).

Their life in London must have required a great deal of adjustment at first. They moved into a two-bedroom flat at 49 Lowdnes Square. During the Blitz, destroyed buildings and bomb shrapnel were their everyday surroundings. Perdita, now in her twenties, lived in a flat right across the square. There were built-in bookcases in the sitting room and large windows that overlooked the garden in the square. Both H.D. and Bryher loved flowers and kept the rooms constantly stocked with bouquets (Guest 223). Though a maid came regularly to clean the flat (supposedly, she was not allowed to clean up the petals that littered the floors), their residence in wartime London required that both women contribute to the domestic duties of the apartment. H.D. was responsible for the cooking—there was no choice, really, for Bryher only just learned what an icebox was after they had leased the flat. Both women shared the household chores, along with Mrs. Ash, the charlady. Other than decorating, H.D. did not have much more domestic experience than Bryher. After the blackout, she resorted to cooking over a small jet flame by candlelight. At night, Perdita came over and darned, and Bryher took pleasure in polishing the furniture. H.D. sewed on her tapestry2. Mozart and Beethoven were frequently played on the gramophone (273).

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2 In letters, H.D. describes several images in her tapestry that would later appear as important symbols throughout _Trilogy_, such as pomegranates, grapes, and various animals. This tapestry she made would eventually hang over the mantle piece.
The tragedies H.D. experienced in the 1920s were no longer in the immediate past, allowing her to objectify her war experiences. In other words, H.D. used this period to not only respond to the war she was presently experiencing, but to also react, if belatedly, to the previous war that had silenced her for so long. According to Trudi Tate, H.D.’s debilitating response to the Great War was by no means unusual. By the late teens, it was widely accepted that civilians often experienced genuine “neurotic” symptoms as a result of indirect exposure to violence. Both civilians exposed to air raids and soldiers in the trenches exhibited similar symptoms of what is now termed “post-traumatic stress disorder” (242-243). As Gilbert and Gubar assert, World War II became “a palimpsest for the Great War and for all wars” (No Man’s Land 188). As Tate explains, “HD takes this point further, however, to suggest that violent events can cause physical or psychic shock even to people who are not present…In other words, HD’s response to the sinking of the Lusitania, like her writings about the First World War, suggest that the stories which circulate in a society can damage people’s bodies, or send them mad” (247).

By the time she began writing Trilogy, with the help of her past Freudian analysis, H.D. was more adept at objectifying painful memories from her past. The dates H.D. scrawled on Trilogy’s last two books are, as Sarah Graham argues, “a survivor’s badge” that boasts of the poet’s survival of the bombing raids, as well as testaments to her impromptu response to war (37). Graham contends that Trilogy is ultimately H.D.’s “declaration of faith in the importance of a means of communication that endures; the act of communication, its reach, and its survival
Norman Kelvin finds a unifying theme in all of H.D.’s post-Imagist works: “[H.D.’s] method, circling back and freely associating along the way, made her life-work a palimpsest whose uttermost layer are the years of the First World War” (171). In many ways, Trilogy is a work in which H.D. resolves the past while she simultaneously examines it closely. The routines of her life in her small apartment juxtaposed with the chaotic air raids prompted her response to the present, as well as to the past.

Her residence in London, however, was not without welcome sabbaticals. She and Bryher took numerous vacations when the dark, cramped living space in Lowndes Square became overwhelming. Though they took comfort in one another’s daily domestic routines, the couple took their vacations separately. H.D. often visited Kenwin, Cornwall, and Kent, drawn to their peace and quiet. Able to leave war-torn London at her bidding, H.D. had the physical freedom to choose the timing of her own confinement. When Kenneth Macpherson’s father, whom they called “Pop,” came to live with them, she and Bryher became even more pressed for room. Sharing such a small space with an elderly person did not appear to bother H.D., who did not like to think of herself as well-off (Guest 264). Until her later breakdown after the war, she experienced heightened energy and creative stamina. She never feared the bombs. Bryher and Perdita, on the other hand, were miserable. Years later, H.D. confided to Norman Holmes Pearson that she had constantly worried that Bryher might end her own life during the war. According to H.D., one night she happened upon Bryher injecting herself with the
intention of committing suicide. H.D. claimed that she stayed with her throughout the night and helped her recover (277). During the war, Bryher heavily relied on H.D. to keep her distracted from thoughts of self-annihilation.

Before she wrote Trilogy, H.D. had, importantly, become more interested in the uniqueness of female creativity. Just before she wrote Walls, she had just finished composing The Gift, an unpublished novel based largely on her Moravian childhood. A direct precursor to Trilogy’s focus on overlooked female power, H.D.’s autobiographical novel traces “the gift” of creative talent that she believed she directly inherited through the matrilineal side of her family. Having been largely consumed with the intellectual achievement of her father in her younger years, for H.D., her mother’s creative capacities in music became a more focal source of inspiration after her analysis with Freud (Friedman 138). In the novel, she describes her mother’s and grandmother’s talents as both visual and musical artists. While recalling her relationship with her mother, H.D. realized how crucial it was that her mother had emphasized that the worth of female creativity is not diminished by the fact that it is undervalued by others. Perhaps this gave her the encouragement she needed to begin publishing her post-Imagist poetry, which she previously feared would be met negatively by the public.

H.D. had always spoken of the “shifts and allusions” of her work, indicating that the focus of any given creative project was always contingent upon the subject matter of the work preceding it. In 1942, the same year she completed The Gift, H.D. wrote the rest of Walls. After exploring the psychological importance of her mother’s creativity in The Gift, her focus on matriarchal myth
in Trilogy became a natural extension of that interest. In the last three weeks of May 1944 she wrote all forty-three sections of the second book of Trilogy, Tribute to Angels. She wrote the third, Flowering of the Rod, in one animated sitting in December of that same year; and like Trilogy’s other two books, it also was comprised of forty-three poems. The dedications of the second and third books indicate, yet again, how much H.D. benefited from the aid and support of Bryher’s literary connections. Tribute to Angels was dedicated to Osbert Sitwell, who enthusiastically praised Walls in his review in the Observer. Flowering was dedicated to Norman Holmes Pearson, who had become a devoted personal and literary advocate for H.D. while she was living in London. He wrote the foreword to Walls and was given power of attorney by H.D. for all her work (266-69).

Just as H.D.’s sessions with Freud taught her to open “the hieroglyph of the unconscious” (TF 93), she applies a similar penetrative analysis to the matriarchal history of Egyptian, Greek, and Judeo-Christian symbolic systems. Jeanne Larson observes that H.D uses hieroglyphs in Helen in Egypt to transcend the limits of masculinist language (88-89); the poet’s undermining of the patrius sermo in Helen is also visible in Trilogy, in light of its fluid symbols that convey the cross-cultural shifts of matriarchal myths. Meredith Miller explains that the early twentieth-century’s leading anthropologists, such as Sir James Frazer and Jane Harrison, connoted Egypt and the East with “femininity, fluid excess, and magical thinking” and Greece with “crisp masculine rationality and restraint.” By contrast, a distinct group of early male modernists began to depict Egypt as a “virile, hard-lined alternative origin for European art.” They described Greek art
as too soft, too “empathetic” for them to embrace as a direct antecedent of their own art. At the time, it might have appeared that H.D.’s feminist re-appropriation of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs was loyal to classical anthropological studies (78). H.D.’s modern apotheosis, however, of both Greek and Egyptian goddesses is more reminiscent of the anomalous theories of J.J. Bachofen, a nineteenth-century anthropologist, who presented a controversial view that all societies originated out of matriarchal clans; this theory suggests that it is impossible for an intrinsically “masculine” culture to exist when all civilizations stem from groups who derived many of their cultural values from “feminine” deities or principles. While many disputed Bachofen’s theories when he was alive, many twentieth-century anthropologists reiterated his views.

In addition to H.D.’s lifelong fascination with Egypt, Trilogy was also influenced by her exhaustive research and practice of esoteric religions. And like much of the literary circles living in London, she became heavily immersed in the occult. She had always been intrigued by visionary experiences, but she did not begin seriously exploring occultism until the late twenties. She had had several significant visions during trips to Greece with Bryher, including her most significant vision at Corfu. Though these visions were discussed during her psychoanalysis, she actively sought explanations of them outside of Freud’s materialist evaluations.

Bryher had been the one who had essentially introduced H.D. to psychoanalysis and who had arranged her sessions with Freud. It was Macpherson, though, who likely pushed her to more seriously study esoterica.
H.D. indicated in a letter to Frances Gregg that Macpherson had piqued her interest in numerology. Though H.D. was quite guarded about with whom she discussed her occult interests, a substantial number of letters from 1929-1945 testify to her ongoing absorption with these practices. By the time she had begun her sessions with Freud in 1933, she was an adept scholar and practitioner of numerology, Tarot, and astrology. Her interest in astrology was partly prompted by the fact that her father was an astronomer, it also appealed to her because of her interest in classical mythology, since so many planetary bodies are named for Greek and Egyptian deities (Friedman 160-61).

After WWII had begun, her interest in the occult intensified, and she expanded her readings on mystical sects even further. Though intensely private about how seriously she took these traditions, “the occult helped H.D. endure the omnipresence of sudden, random death” (Friedman 170). As her research into these traditions evolved, she took on a more syncretist outlook. One of the most important texts that informed her pluralist views was Denis de Rougemont’s *Love in the Western World*, an extended version of his original *Passion in Society*. Referring to it as her “Bible,” H.D. read it numerous times before she wrote *Trilogy*, first obtaining it in the French edition in 1939. De Rougemont’s book centers on linking Western mystical sects to the Manichaean tradition, which

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3 Many of these letters were written to Viola Jordan, a trusted friend of H.D.’s who had been part of Pound’s original coterie of artists.

4 Charles Doolittle had been severely disappointed when H.D. failed her studies in mathematics at Bryn Mawr. It was a disappointment that hurt H.D. deeply. She wrote about this disappointment explicitly in several works, including *HERmione* and *Tribute to Freud*. As Suzanne Young points out, H.D.’s father upheld Marie Curie as the ideal model of female accomplishment (338).

5 H.D.’s interest in forming connections between astronomy and mythology is seen in her copy of Lewis Richard Farnell’s *Cults of the Greek States*, in which she drew numerous astrological notes and symbols next to their corresponding mythological figures (Friedman 161).
originated as a mystery religion in the Middle East. Its doctrine that “Love is the Divine Spirit” must have appealed to H.D., since the Moravianism of her childhood often touted similar rhetoric and was itself a persecuted religion in Europe. What also likely made de Rougemont’s outlook so attractive to her was his view on the interdependency between art and religion. Friedman explains: “Art and religion are potentially tied together by their symbolic mode of thought and their refusal to limit the real to the material. Rooted in the unconscious, originally fused in function, religion and art capture the transcendent truths invisible to empirical reality-testing” (101-102). H.D.’s disagreements with Freud’s dismissive view of religion were largely based on De Rougemont’s critique of Europe’s materialist perspective. Ultimately, she would form her own comfortable synthesis of scientific thought and “spiritual reality.”

H.D.’s exhaustive research also propelled her to further research peripheral mystical sects in Judaism and Christianity which became assimilated into the poet’s Hermetic practices. In an occult context, Hermeticism traditionally refers to “teachings” by Hermes Trismegistus, a legendary figure from the medieval period who purportedly founded alchemy, astrology, magic, and other occult sciences (Walker 204). The denotations of this term, as used by H.D. critics, however, are inconsistent. Some scholars, such as Dianne Chisholm, use Hermeticism to refer to a variety of philosophical and literary traditions, including romanticism, French symbolism, Neoplatonism, and transcendentalism (43). Other critics immediately connote the term with the art of alchemy. Though the word is often used interchangeably with alchemy, alchemy is only one of several
magic arts within the larger Hermetic discipline. As Timothy Materer explains the term *Hermeticism* does not signify any one occult practice; rather, it has come to encompass a general philosophy regarding secret supernatural knowledge shared among a select group of initiates (89).

Robert Ambelain’s *Dans l’ombre des cathédrales*, or *In the Shadow of the Cathedrals*, was another authoritative text on mystical sects and informed much of H.D.’s understanding of the connections between Christianity and Hermetic arts. Ambelain decodes numerous symbols in cathedrals, including Notre Dame, to be early pagan emblems disguised in acceptable Christian forms (170-72). One of the strongest appeals of Ambelain and De Rougemont’s work for H.D. was their emphasis on the secretive aspect of these traditions, many of which are based on passing down secret visual symbols, codes, and numbers. Throughout *Trilogy*, the speaker often refers to the “initiates” of forgotten Hermetic traditions, as well as to secret pagan codes cloaked in Christian symbolism.

During the early forties, spiritualism became a significant part of H.D.’s life. Just as it had gained popularity during the Great War, spiritualism surged in WWII as a result of the number of casualties. Many writers, such as Elizabeth Bowen, often wrote of the superstitions and reported paranormal activity that circulated throughout England. Guest writes on the popularity of spiritualism in England: “The blitzed houses of London—silent, dead—would provoke this. Ghosts were everywhere. The world was a place where there were only the ghosts and the living, and the distinction between the two must have been close” (260). The supposed confirmation of an afterlife and the possibility of communicating
with the dead strongly appealed to H.D. Usually messages from “the other side” came in the form of table-rapping or in the “possession” of a psychic.

It appears that H.D.’s primary spiritual interests later centered on Kabbalism several years after she wrote *Trilogy*. She continued to refer to astrological charts on a daily basis, while relying heavily on Ambelain’s “practical Kabbalah” in *La Kabbale pratique*. She also aided Gustav Davidson’s research in his still widely used reference book, *Dictionary of Angels*. After H.D.’s death, Davidson spoke of her extensive knowledge of Kabbalistic traditions, as well as of her devout belief in the Kabbalah’s seventy-two angels. She called upon all of their names in song and exhaustively read about Kabbalism until her death. Friedman indicates that H.D. did not become a devotee of Kabbalism until the nineteen-fifties. However, H.D.’s preoccupation with angels and her concentration on the mystical and tangible powers of the spoken word in *Trilogy* (in the form of “anagrams” and “cryptograms”) (*Walls* 39:7) suggest that she was already fully immersed in Kabbalism at the time she was composing *Trilogy* in the early forties (175).

One can see evidence of H.D.’s propensity for romantic and ideological enthrallment years before she wrote her war epic or claimed any particular belief system. Ironically, her life before she began living in the midst of bomb raids during World War II was especially chaotic. Her significant losses during the Great War, especially the loss of Pound’s direction and her divorce from Aldington, contributed to her sense of confusion; both Pound and Aldington had reinforced H.D.’s early Imagist aesthetic, but after their literary circle had
dispersed, H.D. turned her attention toward spiritual search. What she found was that her occult practices provided her with new ways of using and interpreting poetic language. It seems H.D.’s occult practices, Freud’s analysis, and Bryher’s support—each in its own way—provided her with a greater sense of spiritual and creative purpose.
“My utterance is mighty, I am more powerful than the ghosts; may they have no power over me.” –*Egyptian Book of the Dead*

As noted earlier, to merely skim through H.D.’s occult practices or to contextualize them solely within the framework of Freudian analysis is to minimize a vital aspect of the poet’s life at the time she wrote her war epic. This is not to argue that Freud did not largely enable H.D.’s resurgence as a poet or that he did not affect the way she understood esoteric traditions. It is, in fact, impossible to discuss the scope of the poet’s dynamic intellectual interests during the 1930s without addressing her involvement in psychoanalysis. H.D. criticism, however, has largely failed to stress how essential H.D.’s astrological, and more importantly, her spiritualist practices also were to her spiritual “rebirth.” It is often suggested that the poet’s occult practices were a natural extension of her illuminative psychoanalysis; and thus, as the predecessor of H.D.’s occultism, psychoanalysis is typically presented as *Trilogy’s* dominant discourse. In contrast to how this “chicken or the egg” question is usually answered, it was actually H.D.’s initiation into the occult world that predisposed her interest in interpreting the “hieroglyphs” of the unconscious (*Tribute 47*).

One likely reason that scholars have given less credence to H.D.’s occult influences is that twentieth-century critics have tended to downplay modern
poetry’s frequent evocation of occultism. As Timothy Materer explains, academic scholars tend to “reduc[e] mystical beliefs to aesthetic visions” because of the skepticism in academic discourse regarding any beliefs that might seem naïve or outmoded (7). Moreover, H.D. scholars who do investigate H.D.’s occult engagements similarly contextualize their criticism largely within psychoanalysis. Friedman’s *Psyche Reborn*, while providing a detailed biographical account of H.D.’s occultism, ultimately centers on the poet’s close association with Freud. Though Friedman provides a useful chronology of H.D.’s esoteric involvements, she ultimately asserts that “[no] one figure like Freud stood as the guardian of H.D.’s esoteric beginnings” (158). One of the main results of her Freudian focus is that she does not establish a link between H.D.’s “fascination with visionary experience” and the poet’s later engrossment with the occult (159). The latter, Friedman repeatedly maintains, was predominantly initiated by H.D.’s psychoanalysis with Freud. However, she overlooks that fact that information on the occult was available through widely circulated occult presses during H.D.’s youth.¹ Moreover, Friedman does not adequately explicate the important roles syncretist scholars and spiritualist mediums played in instructing H.D.’s occult education.

Several critics have also acknowledged the fact that scholars underscore H.D.’s connection with Freud more than any of her other relationships. In challenging the critical precedence given to H.D.’s mentorship under Freud, Sarah Graham, for instance, asserts that *Trilogy* has not been adequately recognized as a direct response to war; she believes critics have chosen to examine the work from

¹ A fuller discussion of 19th century occult presses will come later in this chapter.
other, “less obvious” perspectives, thereby abandoning its most immediate premise. After surmising that Trilogy as a response to war has been largely overlooked in favor of the poet’s work with Freud, Graham also mentions that critics often focus on Trilogy’s feminist, linguistic, and religious revisions (7). While Graham correctly points out that little criticism has looked at Trilogy exclusively as a war poem, a similar criticism could also apply to scholarship involving Trilogy’s hermetic elements. In other words, Trilogy’s occult influences are almost always placed within the context of H.D.’s resistance to Freud—making them implicitly subsidiary to a psychoanalytic reading of the text. Graham herself reinforces Freud’s critical preeminence by first addressing H.D.’s psychoanalysis before mentioning other central topics in H.D. criticism.

Critics such as Susan Gubar and Alicia Ostriker have examined Trilogy primarily as a work of revisionist mythmaking designed to challenge gender norms. Gubar argues that after playing the roles of Freud’s patient, Pound’s lover, and D.H. Lawrence’s friend, “H.D. was conscious ever after that mythic, scientific, and linguistic symbols are controlled and defined by men” (197-98). More specifically, she finds major significance in H.D.’s use of ambiguous verse: individual words and stanza lines in Trilogy can often be read in two or more ways. Gubar likens these indeterminate line interpretations to H.D.’s palimpsest trope, ultimately arguing that the poet’s palimpsest-like technique is a reflection of female poets’ anxiety about male-controlled language. While Gubar does liken H.D.’s lexical revisions to an “alchemical bowl,” she frames them solely as a metaphorical challenge to patriarchal presuppositions about language. In
mentioning Trilogy’s “recurrent references to secret languages, codes, dialects, hieroglyphs...[and] mysterious signs,” she portrays them as merely products of the poet’s imagination, despite the fact that H.D.’s research of occultism largely provided her with these alternative stories to Western patriarchal myth. Moreover, Gubar’s frame of reference for discussing H.D.’s use of matriarchal myth remains exclusively within the biblical tradition. While she does not heavily delve in H.D.’s rebellion against Freud’s phallocentric theories, neither does she seek to identify primary sources and/or people who might have informed H.D.’s alternative religious narratives. As Ostriker importantly points out, however, “revisionist poems do not necessarily confine themselves to defiance and reversal strategies” (74). She goes on to explain that such poems are also frequently a reflection of the poet’s search for identity. Certainly, ample criticism has been written on Trilogy’s reflection of H.D.’s psychoanalysis and insecurities as a woman writing in an epic tradition historically dominated by men. However, little has been written on the work as an apolitical expression of occult belief systems.

Even though H.D. did not begin eruditely researching occult traditions until she began her sessions with Freud, her awareness and actual practice of several of these occult traditions began years before her psychoanalysis. This is due in large part to the occult revival that was propelled by a growing number of periodicals dedicated to occult subject matter. As Mark Morrison explains, both Britain and America’s interests in spiritualism dated back to the late 1840s when a spiritualist movement surged in New York and then spread to Britain. Beginning in the 1850s, there was a wide circulation of spiritualist papers. After the turn of
the century, the “new occultism” was defined by the prolific number of occult periodicals that continued to spring up throughout the Anglophone world.

Theosophist figureheads, including Helen Blavatsky, G.R.S. Mead, William Q. Judge, and Henry S. Olcott, were largely responsible for forming the Theosophical Societies in Britain and America. Throughout the later part of the nineteenth century and the early modernist period, Blavatsky, one of the founders of theosophy, helped establish a number of occult periodicals and spiritualist/theosophist presses, including: *The Occult Review, The Quest, The Unknown World, The Equinoz, The Theosophical Review, The Spiritual Telegraph* and many others.

Spiritualist practices in Britain soon followed; it is estimated that between 10,000 and 100,000 spiritualists practiced in Victorian Britain. During the modernist period, the West’s interest in spiritualism resurged because of the large number of occult periodicals that were being generated. Morrison notes a distinct irony in the fact that occultists’ emphasis on *esotericism*, or “ideas of secret or hidden knowledge passed on only between initiates,” was conveyed to the public through *exoteric* means: that is, church institutions and traditional forms of group worship and propaganda. He contends, “The occult journals, like those of the suffrage press or the radical political press, intentionally built upon existing or emerging models of the commercial periodical press in Britain and America”.

Ironically, the surging interest in the pursuit of secret wisdom was the result of a growing number of very public occult presses.

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2 By 1900 there were 71 branches of the Theosophical Society in America (Materer 8).
Considering the prevalence of occult periodicals during her youth, H.D. certainly was aware of “Hermetic” traditions years before she began experimenting with Tarot, astrology, and numerology in the late twenties. Furthermore, she would have also been attuned to other poets’ fascinations with the occult, especially Yeats. Yeats, who was a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn for forty-years, was closely associated with Blavatsky and frequently published work in occult periodicals such as *Lucifer* and the *Irish Theosophist* (Morrison 1-2). He also founded, with the support of Blavatsky, the Hermetic Society in Dublin in 1886. Though, as Materer points out, Yeats often took an ironic tone when addressing his occult interests to everyday audiences, his genuine “interest in magical practices” was well known to almost anyone at all invested in the modern occult movement (27, 51). Pound, a close friend of Yeats and H.D.’s ex-fiance, was also fascinated by the occult. Although Yeats was responsible for most of Pound’s occult knowledge (his *Cantos* especially reflects Yeats’s influence), Pound was much more skeptical of occultism as an authentic practice. His interest primarily centered on Hermetic elitism, idealizing what Materer calls “the poet as magus” (49); he showed little interest in occultism outside of his poetry. H.D., who continually corresponded with Pound throughout her life, would have been indirectly affiliated with Yeats, and thus his occult practices. However, as Friedman notes, Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society held no interest for H.D. when she first began exploring the occult (160).

What distinguished H.D. and Yeats from other poets such as Pound and Eliot who also made Hermetic allusions in their works, is that H.D. and Yeats
were genuine “practicing occultists” (Materer 87). Materer does, however, make a distinction regarding H.D.’s occult practices:

Of all the poets of the occult, and despite her psychoanalytic insights into it, H.D. seems the least self-conscious about occultism. She discriminated less than Pound among its various strands, embracing equally the knowledge from classic Greek texts and from table-tipping séances. The countertradition represented by occultism seemed to her a native heritage she need never doubt. (87-88)

H.D. did not express doubts about her multifarious occult practices in her poetry, as did Yeats, who frequently wavered between open endorsement of occultism and ironic detachment from it.

In the late twenties, years before her psychoanalysis, H.D. began working in numerology, Tarot, and astrology. H.D.’s interest in astrology especially became more intense in 1933, the year she began her analysis with Freud. Attributing the poet’s interest in astrology to her psychoanalysis, Friedman explains that Freud indicated that H.D.’s interest in astrology was an unconscious attempt to make a connection with her father, who had been so disappointed by her failed studies at Bryn Mawr (166-67). It is likely, however, that Kenneth Macpherson was the primary instigator of her work with astrology, numerology, and Tarot. In a letter to Frances Gregg in 1927, H.D. wrote that Macpherson was regularly configuring her numerology (160). Her friend Viola Jordan also shared H.D.’s interest in occultism, and the two women exchanged numerous letters on

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3 In addition to Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and H.D., Materer’s book also examines other poets’ involvements with the occult, namely Robert Duncan, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, and James Merrill.
the subject. In 1933 Jordan gave H.D. *Astrology: Your Place in the Sun* and *Astrology: Your Place among the Stars* (167).

From the twenties until her death, H.D. referred daily to her horoscope and regularly had her astrological chart drawn up. It is not surprising, then, that her belief in astrology is evidenced everywhere throughout *Trilogy*. One of the significances of the repeated Hermes figure, aside from his association with occult arts such as alchemy, is that Mercury (the Roman version of Hermes) was the ruler of H.D.’s sun sign (Materer 94). In addition to Hermes, H.D. references numerous other astrological/astronomical figures. In *Walls Do Not Fall*, she writes, “Or anywhere / where stars blaze through clear air, / where we may greet individually, / Sirius, Vega, Arcturus, where these separate entities / are intimately concerned with us” (24:1–6). Here, H.D. illustrates her belief that astronomical constellations have a direct bearing on human lives. Her interest in these cosmic alignments reaches far beyond nostalgia for her father’s work as an astronomer, demonstrating her faith in horoscopes. As with her other occult practices, H.D. considered such systems progressive, not obsolete. Later in the poem, the speaker declares, “I heard Scorpion whet his knife, / I feared Archer (taut his bow), / Goat’s horns were threat, / would climb high? then fall low; / across the abyss / the Waterman waited, / this is the age of the new dimension” (1-8). While *Trilogy* is also interspersed with traditional scientific references, it is telling that an occult practice such as astrology is depicted as a surer path toward enlightenment than empirical developments in the field of psychology.
H.D.’s close proximity to the violence of WWII in the nineteen-forties drew her to another practice which offered opportunities to communicate with the dead. She was mainly attracted to spiritualism because of its cardinal belief in the soul’s immortality and in the potential of contacting dead loved ones through a medium. Serious spiritualist practitioners believed that the dead communicated with the living by possessing a psychic or by knocking on a table, otherwise known as “table-rapping.” The impetus for H.D.’s involvement in spiritualism was when she joined the Society for Psychical Research in 1942 so that she could gain access to their library and attend their lectures. Founded in 1882, it was an organization dedicated to scientifically investigate claims of psychic activity but did not advocate spiritualism or any other occult practices (Friedman 172-73).

Her decision to join the Society was a life-changing one, mainly because it put her in contact with two particular spiritualists: Arthur Bhaduri and Sir Lord Hugh Dowding were largely responsible for redirecting H.D.’s occult interests at the time she was writing Trilogy. It was at the Society she first met psychic medium, Arthur Bhaduri, a Brahman Indian psychic medium who was to ultimately ignite H.D.’s dedication to performing daily séances in her London flat. Very little has been written about their relationship (only brief mentions in H.D. biographies), even though it was her first séances with Bhaduri that served as the catalyst for her new spiritual life during WWII. Like Freud, who was the “gateway” to interpretation of the unconscious, Bhaduri was the initial gateway to one of the occult practices that would, arguably, inform Trilogy as much as psychoanalysis. By 1943, Bhaduri and his mother were joining H.D. and Bryher
once a week for a séance. While impressed with Badhuri’s psychic ability, H.D. was not completely convinced that the “messages” he conveyed during these séances were truly from the dead and not simply mind-readings. During these séances, though, H.D. had several hieroglyphic “visions” which prompted her to continue her spiritualist practices (Friedman 173). In this way, spiritualism affirmed her earlier “visions” at Corfu, unlike Freud who, in H.D.’s mind, was dismissive of spiritual reality.

Another important spiritualist figure whom H.D. encountered at the Society was Lord Hugh Dowding. She heard him lecture twice in 1943 on his claimed communications with dead pilots. H.D.’s earlier “vision” at Corfu of an airman must have played a large role in her sense of a “cosmic connection” to Dowding. She was so impressed with his spiritualist capabilities that she initiated a correspondence with him that lasted for decades. He had been Chief Air Marshal of the Royal Air Force and was largely responsible for England’s victory in the Battle of Britain. His pilot son was killed in combat and he had lost his wife early, sparking his interest in contacting the dead. After being relieved of his position for political reasons (Churchill disliked him), he became a well-known lecturer on spiritualism (Friedman 172-74). After some correspondence, Dowding soon asked H.D. to join his own séance group, which she declined because of an admonition she received while conducting a séance on her own. However, H.D. felt a strong spiritual connection to Dowding, which she believed

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4 These séances were performed on a small, oak tripod table that had originally been built and owned by William Morris.

5 He wrote a book titled *Many Mansions* (1943), in which he cites numerous instances of dead airmen being contacted through mediums, which H.D. read and shared with friends (Friedman 174, Guest 261).
was evidenced in her séances in the form of “signs.” Specifically, she believed that several of Dowding’s RAF pilots had contacted her with messages for Dowding, warning him about the dangers of atomic energy.

It is important to note that H.D.’s collaboration with spiritualist medium Arthur Bhaduri paralleled her initial gravitation toward, and eventual departure from, Freud’s ideas. Bhaduri served as an initial “gateway” for H.D.’s explorations of the unknown, but like Freud, she came to perceive that there was a limit to how far Bhaduri could guide her in her spiritualist practice. In a letter dated June 2, 1945 that H.D. sent to Dowding and written approximately six months after she finished the last book of Trilogy, she reveals both the significance of her initial work with Bhaduri and her eventual disappointment in his capabilities: “The work or experiment with Bhaduri did open a window—though here again is the catch. Bhaduri cannot follow the intricate psychological build-up; he can see a picture, project it—then he ‘forgets’ it.” Indeed, the ephemeral nature of Bhaduri’s visions did not concord with H.D.’s Freudian training, which had called for intensive metaphorical explication of her “visions.” In the same letter to Dowding, H.D. concludes, “Well, we all need each other but the weaving of threads from one pattern to another, from one state of being or perception to another, is, in a sense, my personal concern.” In a way, she had a similar attitude to psychoanalysis in that she perceived its insights, too, were limited in a collaborative atmosphere. H.D. eventually worked in both of these traditions autonomously.
The direct relationship between H.D.’s spiritualist practices and her use of “extended associations”—her alchemical technique, as it is often called—in \textit{Trilogy} is one that has been critically neglected. Norman Kelvin is one of the few critics to identify spiritualism’s important influence on H.D.’s later works, namely \textit{Bid Me to Live} and \textit{The Sword Went Out to Sea}. Kelvin illustrates a special connection between \textit{Sword}, which largely revolves around a séance group, and H.D.’s own involvement with spiritualism. In the context of this particular novel, Kelvin acutely observes, “[After the Great War], H.D.’s genius for multiple and extended associations had been taken in hand, as it were, by her deep absorption in spiritualism” (185). Certainly, the “hieroglyphs” H.D. saw during her séances were, similar to her Scilly and Corfu “visions,” of a subjective nature, calling for diverse interpretations of those symbols.

One of \textit{Trilogy}’s most recurrent themes is its fascination with invoking or communicating with the dead,-affirming Materer’s assertion that “[w]ithout her belief in séances with the dead . . . H.D. could not have written \textit{Trilogy}” (2). Indeed, the speaker consistently asserts the existence of an afterlife (a major point of contention between H.D. and Freud), as well as a potential for the living to make contact with the dead. Passages such as “like a ghost, / we entered a house through a wall” (\textit{Walls} 20:7-8) and “so what good are your scribblings? / this—we take them with us / beyond death” (\textit{Walls} 10:3-5) are prime testaments to H.D.’s belief in the spiritual survival of the deceased. In one of the poem’s numerous references to Hermes, the speaker evokes the Greek Conductor of Souls between earth and the afterlife to signify that the world of the living and the world
of the dead are never absolutely separate: “it is Caduceus; among the dying / it bears healing: / or evoking the dead, / it brings life to the living” (Walls 3: 5-8).

H.D.’s fixation in Trilogy on “evoking the dead” indicates that Hermes is not just a reference to mythology; he represents the literal practice of summoning spirits into the earthly realm through “prayer, spell, / litany, [or] incantation” (Walls 24:21-22).

Aside from H.D.’s pivotal alliances with spiritualists Bhaduri and Dowding, her eclectic occult interests were also deepened by her extensive readings of occult literature. Eileen Gregory explains that, as a young woman, H.D. was familiar with leading positivist theories of myth that emerged during the 19th century. Some of the leading works that embraced a positivist view of myth were: Sir James Frazer’s The Golden Bough (1890), E.B. Tyler’s Primitive Culture (1871), and Andrew Lang’s Myth, Ritual and Religion (1887). Like much of the West at the turn of the century, these in-depth studies of seemingly exotic, “other” cultures enthralled H.D. from the start. According to Gregory, H.D.’s early poetry demonstrates that the poet was critical of the way positivist anthropologists dismissed those who believed ancient myths held supernatural capabilities. Gregory comments on this theme in H.D.’s earliest Imagist book of poems, Sea Garden: “H.D. has in mind as well the late ministers of science, like Tylor, Lang, and Frazer, who specifically try to resolve the issue of indiscriminate awe and who condemn the irrational system of spirits” (“H.D.’s Gods” 29-30).

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6 Gregory explains that intellectuals and artists in the early twentieth-century demonstrated a tension between positivism and Romantic Hellenism. To summarize, positivism demanded that all observations of natural and anthropological phenomena should be based on strictly empirical evidence, whereas Romantic Hellenism supported a more deliberately mystical use of myth. For a more comprehensive overview of this tension, see Gregory’s article in full.
However, Gregory also contends that H.D. herself was conflicted between scientific and romantic views of myth, a struggle that is reflected in these early poems (27).

H.D.’s expansive reading of occult literatures in the 1940s contributed to her more decisively critical outlook on positivist thinkers, which is reflected in *Trilogy*. In *Walls*, the speaker directly addresses her positivist skeptics:

bearers of the secret wisdom, / living remnant / of the inner band / of the sanctuaries’ initiate, / are not only ‘non-utilitarian’, / we are ‘pathetic’: this is the new heresy; / but if you do not even understand what words say, / how can you expect to pass judgment / on what words conceal? (8:9-18)

These lines from *Trilogy* are the words of an experienced occultist who now gives greater precedence to mysticism than to science. Those whom she perceives would call her belief in the supernatural “pathetic” are those who have accepted empirical analysis as the more “accurate” way of assessing spirituality. Mysticism is no longer as threatening as it used to be to the modern Church; its “heretical” stance now relates to the world of science and objectivism. The confidence H.D. had for Freud’s overall work shows that the poet believed that both empirical and intuitive knowledge have value. And yet empirical thinkers, she argues here, do not reciprocate the same degree of respect for mystical schools of thought. On this point, Gregory writes, “As she does with so many authoritative, hierarchical models, H.D. accepts the usefulness of the description without its censoriousness” (33). Gregory’s point about H.D.’s tendency to find a limited amount of truth in science can also apply to her outlook on Freudian psychology: she appreciates the
medical advancements of Freud’s theories but ultimately places more weight on occultism as a livable philosophy.

*Love in the Western World* also largely informed the unusual nature of *Trilogy*’s occult quest. The book’s cursory premise is an examination of cross-cultural variants of the Tristan-Iseult myth. On a more analytic level, de Rougemont asserts that the West has become increasingly more skeptical of mysticism, or any form of experience that cannot be expressed in quantitative terms. He writes, “We can no longer express ourselves figuratively. The last surviving formalities of love were swept away by the war of 1914” (240). More specifically, de Rougemont contends that the Western world is progressively losing its ability to express and understand symbolism. Gubar’s assertion that *Trilogy*’s language works as a kind of “alchemical bowl”—a truly *Hermetic* verse that evokes a variety of meanings and esoteric allusions—is congruent with H.D.’s intensive reading of de Rougemont’s text. *Trilogy*’s tendency to compound diverse occult traditions and symbols within a few short lines illustrates that she purposefully made such lines ambiguous. The secrecy implied in *Trilogy*’s references to occultism or the history of esoteric religions suggests that H.D. heeded de Rougemont’s assertion regarding modern poetry:

> [f]ew no doubt of our latter-day poets have experienced a ‘fatal love’. For some, the quest dwindles into a pleasant cruise from which they return with a manuscript ready for the press. Others distil a drug productive of picturesque visions. Nearly all give the secret away. (144)
In other words, *Trilogy* is, in part, a response to de Rougemont’s complaint that contemporary quest poetry had lost the mysticism that previously characterized it as a genre because poets “can no longer express [themselves] figuratively” (24). Robert Ambelain’s *Dans l’ombre des cathédrales*, or *In the Shadow of the Cathedrals*, also published in 1939, also seems to have contributed to H.D.’s occult epic. As H.D. became more interested in fitting all of her occult practices into a “single syncretist tradition during the forties,” she intentionally used her “figurative” language (to use de Rougemont’s term) to create a Hermetic poem. Unlike de Rougemont, who largely focuses on the lack of symbolic language in contemporary narratives, Ambelain argues that there is a hidden lineage between Christianity and the Hermetic arts of alchemy, magic, astrology, and ancient goddess religions. Materer states, “As [H.D.] found her own voice as a poet, hermeticism became her intellectual and poetic inspiration” (89). Much of *Cathedral* examines how multifarious esoteric sects have historically maintained and communicated with their secret followers by using secret symbols, often embedded in mainstream Christian works or architecture. What must have drawn H.D. to *Cathedral* the most is Ambelain’s exhaustive argument that the Notre Dame Cathedral is riddled with Hermetic symbols left by the artisans who built it. According to Ambelain, Notre Dame was built on the site of an ancient temple to Isis who was worshipped by Paris’s early settlers.

Materer, who addresses H.D.’s occultism more exclusively than most critics, contends that Ambelain was a momentous influence on *Trilogy*. Undoubtedly, Ambelain’s arguments regarding the intermarriage of pagan and
other esoteric religions over time with Christian beliefs certainly informs much of H.D.’s war epic. Furthermore, his emphasis on Hermeticism’s foundation of a secret, elite group of initiates is also evidenced in Trilogy, which repeatedly refers to a covert band of “initiates.” For instance, in Walls, the speaker states:

we know each other / by secret symbols, / though, remote, speechless, / we pass each other on the pavement, / at the turn of the stair; / though no word pass between us, / there is subtle appraisement; / even if we snarl a brief greeting / or do not speak at all, / we know our Name, / we nameless initiates, / born of one mother (13: 13-24)

Here, the passage underscores H.D.’s absorption of both de Rougemont and Ambelain’s arguments regarding the history and importance of secret codes. The speaker depicts her role as being part of the secret “remnant” of ancient goddess worshippers who—according to de Rougemont and Ambelain—continue to clandestinely subvert the father-god at the center of the Christian church. The secrecy the goddess “initiates” have had to sustain in order to pass on their symbols has become, the speaker asserts, an integral part of their identity; their forced stealth provides them with a stronger sense of reverence for the “mother” goddess whom they continue to preserve in the form of encoded tokens throughout the very church that suppressed them.

Since Ambelain’s central thesis in Cathedral is that the Christian church deliberately suppressed esoteric religions that it perceived overly valued female deities and because H.D. repeatedly consulted this book while writing Trilogy, it is clear that Cathedral strongly directed Trilogy’s attention to suppressed or
disguised female deities in Christianity, such as the “cult of Mary Magdalene.”

H.D. found in Hermetic philosophy and occult practices an affirmation of feminine spiritual principles she did not find in science or in her early Imagist subjects. Materer comments, “The ‘feminine aspect of God’ is crucial to H.D.’s interpretation of the Hermetic tradition and is related to the importance of Hermes in her poetry” (94). *Tribute to Angels* most directly reveals H.D.’s knowledge of Hermeticism; beginning immediately with the first line, *Tribute* continually alludes to Hermes’ various Greek, Roman, and Medieval forms and symbols. In the first line, the speaker refers to Hermes Trismegistus, a legendary figure who supposedly lived during the Middle Ages and founded Hermetic systems of magic, astrology, alchemy, and other connections between mysticism and natural sciences. Since *Tribute*’s most recognizable conceit is alchemy, it is no surprise that the poem also calls upon Hermes’ less known cross-cultural manifestations. Barbara Walker explains that Hermes was originally a universal Indo-European god and also the original “hermaphrodite,” physically united with Aphrodite. This characteristic is important to keep in mind because, as Materer rightly points out, critics almost always refer to Hermes as exclusively male, whereas “Hermes is too mercurial a figure to be considered specifically male or female.” H.D. took full advantage, symbolically speaking, of Hermes’ sexual nature in order to subvert phallocentric church orthodoxies (89).

It should be observed that H.D.’s interest in Hermeticism was not exclusively rooted in her disagreements with Freud. On a personal level, she

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7 H.D.’s response to Mary Magdalene’s amorphous roles in the Christian church will be the focus of Chapter four.
found Hermetic elements in her own Moravian heritage, which she likened to other esoteric religious traditions that had been driven underground by the prevailing church in Europe. Like other esoteric traditions condemned in the Inquisition, the Church of Love, as Moravianism was also called, directed an “inordinate” amount of attention on Mary, the mother of Christ. On the feminist aspect of H.D.’s Hermetic and occult interests, Friedman comments, “As a woman, H.D. was particularly sensitive to the concept of divinity in esoteric tradition which differed sharply from the masculine monotheism of the mainstream” (179). In general, the Hermetic traditions to which H.D. was drawn affirmed a feminine aspect of a “divine One,” a masculine and feminine spiritual principle/energy. H.D. likened Moravianism to other esoteric traditions such as Kabbalism’s recognition of the Shekinah, the female form of God (179).

Moravianism, H.D. learned in her research during the 1940s, descended from a mystical sect known as the Unitas Fratum, which was established in Moravia in the fifteenth-century. After being persecuted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (many Moravians were burned for witchcraft), Count Zinzendorf revived the tradition in 1772. H.D. compared the “Hidden Church” from which her family descended to the Hermetic traditions she studied and incorporated in *Trilogy*.

Her perception that she was personally linked to a mystical sect illustrates that her interest in occult and Hermetic traditions is rooted far beyond any disagreements she had with Freud during her analysis in the 1930s. The mystical nature of her Moravian background, the confusion of writing as a bisexual woman
in a heterosexually male literary climate, and the incessant “hieroglyphs” that
haunted her informed H.D.’s perception of herself as an isolated, yet privileged,
visionary. Freud’s own fascination with the occult revolved around its
psychological (pathological might more accurately reflect Freud’s analytic
persuasion) significance; while H.D. does occasionally examine occult arts in
Trilogy from a psychological perspective, the epic’s more central argument is that
psychoanalysis is itself an extension of occult spirituality, rather than a clear-cut
subject of the analyst’s gaze.
ENCODING INFINITY: TRILOGY AS KABBALISTIC PRAYER

“Boundless the deep, because I am who fill Infitude, nor vacuous the space.”
- The Book of Splendor (Zohar)

An occult reading of Trilogy suggests that while H.D.’s interest in mysticism took on a syncretist bent during the 1940s, her dedication to particular occult practices simultaneously intensified. Syncretist scholars like Robert Ambelain deepened H.D.’s understanding of the traditions which she had already been practicing for years, such as astrology. Additionally, those same writers also incited her interest in Kabbalism. Although there are disagreements concerning Kabbalism’s historical origin and development, the term generally refers to anagogic investigations that developed within esoteric Jewish circles. The Kabbalah, which literally means “to receive,” was rooted in oral teachings passed down through generations of initiates. While Kabbalism itself is comprised of varying schools, all sects teach systematic meditative and linguistic techniques for attaining knowledge about the structure of the universe and for experiencing direct essences of God. A central preoccupation within Trilogy, and a cardinal tenet of Kabbalism, is that, through meditation upon particular symbolic systems, a practitioner can attain a partial glimpse into the infinite mystery of God and the universe.

In Friedman’s biography of H.D.’s occult practices, she contends that H.D. did not become a serious Kabbalist until the 1950s, just after she was
released from Kusnacht Klinik where she had spent several years recovering from her mental breakdown at the end of the war. Friedman maintains that it was only after H.D. had abandoned spiritualism (following Dowding’s sudden dismissal of her seance work), that she became a serious Kabbalist (175). By this account, H.D. was not an ardent believer in Kabbalistic teachings before she read Ambelain’s *La Kabbale pratique* in 1951 when at Kusnacht. Furthermore, Friedman argues that *Helen in Egypt*, published in 1961, is the first of H.D.’s works, with its themes of conflicting dimensions and search for wholeness, to reflect “specifics of the Kabbalah” (279).

Friedman, however, does suggest that Ambelain’s abridgement of Kabbalistic teachings in his earlier work on occult rituals indirectly shapes *Trilogy*’s elusive puns and wordplay. To posit, though, that H.D.’s knowledge of Kabbalism was only rudimentary during the 1940s does not satisfactorily explain *Trilogy*’s prevailing Kabbalistic theosophy or its strikingly anagrammatic language. While there are numerous Kabbalistic symbols throughout *Trilogy*, the most prevalent Kabbalistic ideas it presents are: God is infinite and unknowable, language has the capacity to directly affect the material and metaphysical world, and linguistic rituals such as anagrams can reveal or create hidden meanings in texts. In fact, a more comprehensive look at the epic’s Kabbalistic symbols and techniques reveals that *Trilogy*’s discursive language is largely shaped by the Kabbalah’s most fundamental conceptual systems.

A major reason that *Trilogy*’s Kabbalistic influences have received such little critical attention is that, of all of H.D.’s occult involvements, scholars
repeatedly identify alchemy as the epic’s primary conceptual framework.

Certainly, alchemy is Trilogy’s most conspicuous extended metaphor, and the speaker directly references this practice in all three of the epic’s books. Forming part of the Hermetic tradition, alchemy, at its most literal level, refers to the secretive art of transmuting base metals into gold. Many twentieth-century scholars and practitioners wrote that alchemy’s spiritual aim is to transform the practitioner’s consciousness (different levels of which are represented by various metals) so that he or she can ascend to God and achieve spiritual redemption.

Practitioners fundamentally believe that in order to accomplish this spiritual transformation, one must fully understand that all matter, whether organic or inorganic, is joined by divine consciousness—hence the object lesson of uniting metals (Smoley and Kinney 198). References to the Greek god Hermes and Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary founder of alchemy, clearly indicate alchemy’s textual presence in Trilogy, especially in Tribute to Angels. Numerous other alchemical references abound throughout the epic, such as the Philosopher’s Stone (an obscure substance that supposedly enables this elemental fusion), crucibles, and alchemical bowls. These alchemical symbols, accompanied by copious mythological allusions, suggest that the pagan, Christian, and occult traditions evoked throughout Trilogy follow alchemy’s major axiom: solve et coagula, or “dissolve and coagulate” (Smoley and Kinney 187). Works by Robert Ambelain and Jean Chaboseau, which H.D. read religiously, for instance, draw numerous connections between ancient alchemy and modern Western Christian and mystical sects. Feeling implicitly challenged by De Rougemont to restore
complex symbolism to modern quest poetry, H.D. clearly responded by
“alchemically” infusing a number of cross-cultural myths throughout Trilogy.
Certainly, then, “H.D.’s genius for multiple and extended associations” in her
later work, to borrow Norman Kelvin’s phrase (185), is largely rooted in her
extensive reading of syncretist and Hermetic scholarship.

While H.D.’s epic exhibits a strong alchemical theme, Kabbalistic
principles are an equally—though less conspicuously—significant concept
girding the work’s formal and symbolic morphology. When critics do address
Trilogy’s occult language, there is a tendency to categorize each of the work’s
esoteric references as a vague “alchemical” element, rather than to explicate
additional occult traditions housed within the extended metaphor of alchemy. For
example, in Susan Gubar’s “The Echoing Spell of H.D.’s Trilogy,” she frequently
likens Trilogy’s feminist revisions of Western myth to an “alchemical bowl,”
“alchemical art” or “alchemist’s key.” Gubar also argues that the work’s
evocation of “secret languages” and “indecipherable signets” indicate that H.D.
was “[a]mbivalent over self-expression” (198). Gubar’s suggestion that H.D. uses
alchemy as a psychologically protective barrier minimizes the authenticity of
H.D.’s occult beliefs by foregrounding a psychoanalytic reading of the text in a
way that reduces occult metaphors to an emotional coping mechanism; moreover,
it fails to illustrate that occult rhetoric provided H.D. with a non-rational discourse
that was necessary for conveying the subjective nature of mystical experiences.
Adalaide Morris discusses the limitations of interpreting Trilogy’s mysticism
through a psychoanalytic lens: “H.D.’s poetry is also passionately involved with a
variety of languages that insist on sacred realities, realities which a concentration on the poem’s psychological, social, and discursive elements inevitably occludes” (“Signaling” 131-32). For H.D., language is not merely a reflection of the writer’s inner state; it contains magical potency that must be contained by encoding its most sacred meanings.

Other H.D. scholars similarly generalize Trilogy’s language as a nebulous alchemical metaphor. Sarah Graham concludes that “it is by evoking the metaphor of the lost art of alchemy that the poet’s craft can be understood as performative, concerned not just with witnessing but also with creation” (Graham 184). Alicia Ostriker similarly writes that “[w]ords for H.D. are like material substances capable of alchemical refinement,” the spiritual overtones of which convey the speaker’s trance-like state (“The Concept of Projection” 349). On the other hand, Graham and Ostriker’s alchemical readings provide significant insights into Trilogy as a spoken art form. Graham illustrates that the work “performs” a new kind of language meant to transcend the conventional meanings of words. This aspect of Graham’s reading echoes the Kabbalistic meditation on words and letters. As Perle Epstein explains, language is considered an intermediary between knowable and unknowable aspects of God. In order to overcome the limitations of rational thought, a Kabbalist must learn to separate letters and words from their designative meanings and transcend “the circular and constricting round of thought” (74). Graham’s interpretation intimates, even if unknowingly, Kabbalism’s systematic rituals for contemplating creation. Ostriker also identifies Trilogy as a “performative” work by demonstrating “the sense it gives us of a
mind working…and the vision it gives us of how far the problem-solving motions of the mind are from logic” (349). Although Ostriker does not identify Trilogy’s Kabbalistic theosophy, she indirectly conveys the Kabbalistic function of H.D.’s language: it replicates the “working mind”—or, to refine Ostriker’s idea further—the praying mind, far removed from logic and the rational meanings of words.

In a cursory reading, it may seem difficult to differentiate between Trilogy’s alchemical and Kabbalistic references, especially since occult traditions use similarly obscure terms to conceal information designated for the “initiated.” The principle that alchemy and Kabbalism most closely share is the idea that one can ascend through higher levels of consciousness and make contact with the divine through particular symbolic acts; and given Trilogy’s frequent compression of multiple occult, mythological, and autobiographical allusions within one line or stanza of verse, the task of distinguishing individual Kabbalistic elements becomes more challenging. Both alchemy and Kabbalism center, each in its own way, on the process of individuation and the idea that all physical matter contains some form of “life.” However, the symbolic and meditative systems within alchemy and Kabbalism greatly diverge. In Kabbalism, the hierarchy encompassing earthly and celestial existence(s) is far more complex. Kabbalism is also originally rooted in the Jewish tradition and focuses, most importantly, on the magical capacities of language, which alchemy does not. One of its supreme aims is to decipher mysteries concealed in written language, especially the Torah. Practitioners believe that the sound and shapes of Hebrew letters are, in essence, “a blueprint for the construction of the universe” (Smoley and Kinney 89).
The phonetic and visual aspects of language are, for Kabbalists, routes toward accessing partial essences of the Ein-Sof, or origin of all creation. The reason human beings cannot comprehend the Ein-Sof in its entirety, as Joseph Dan explains, is because it has no “anthropomorphic or ethical phrase.” Its perfection and unchanging nature are beyond the capabilities of language and human thought (39-40). The closest that human beings can come to “visualizing” God’s existence is through contemplating the sefirot, or the Kabbalistic *Tree of Life*, a mysterious geometric shape of ten spheres used to explain multiple dimensions of reality in the universe. Amir D. Aczel writes, “Since God is Infinity and cannot be comprehended, the Sefirot are the finite aspects that the Kabbalists have gleaned from the immensity of the Ein Sof. The attributes of the Sefirot can be studied and meditated upon, and prayed with” (35). It consists of ten “pillars” or principles, each of which represents various aspects of God’s existence and levels of reality that God has created. The *Tree of Life’s* most significant purpose is to provide insight into the dilemma of how an infinite entity could manifest itself in so many individual and conflicting forms—often referred to by Kabbalists as “the problem of *the one and the many*” (Aczel 36). A concrete image that divides God into numerous “personalities” is supposed to show that God is a multi-dimensional being, whereas humans typically only experience one dimension, the material realm. In meditating upon the sefirot, the Kabbalist’s eventual aim is to access other dimensions, or beings from those dimensions (such as angels).
H.D. directly references the *Tree of Life* by name in *Flowering of the Rod*:

“He journeys back and forth / between the poles of heaven and earth forever; / He was the first to wing / from that sad Tree, / but having flown, the Tree of Life / bears rose from thorn / and fragrant vine / from barren wood” (11:5-12). The speaker does not specifically name the “He” in this passage, other than to call him “(the heavenly pointer)” in the preceding lines (11:2). But because the speaker designates “He” as a proper noun and describes him as traveling “back and forth between” heaven and earth, the pronoun appears to refer to God, or possibly Christ (given the reference to thorns). It is not unusual for H.D. to designate symbols that multiple religious traditions share, such as the Tree of Life, and it is important to bear her syncretist leanings in mind when investigating connections between symbols and specific religious traditions. Nevertheless, the “journeying” between the “poles” of the heavenly and the earthly realm, coupled with the explicit reference to the Tree of Life, are strongly reminiscent of Kabbalistic ideas regarding divine manifestation. When read in the broader larger context of *Trilogy*’s numerous allusions to infinite, multi-dimensional manifestations of God—a central concept in the Kabbalah—the Tree of Life appears to refer to the sefirot.

In addition to naming the Tree of Life *Trilogy* frequently alludes to a divine or godly principle that is *infinite* in nature, and yet consists of multiple principles. Throughout *Walls Do Not Fall*, the speaker invokes a number of male deities and implies that they are all varying forms of an infinite “Presence” (29:14). When the speaker attempts to describe this presence, she finally resorts to
the Kabbalistic idea of a literally unnamable God: “indecipherable palimpsest
scribbled over / with too many contradictory emotions, / search for finite
deinition / of the infinite, stumbling toward / vague cosmic expression” (31:4-8).
In light of H.D.’s extensive occult knowledge during WWII and her exclusive
devotion to Kabbalism during the fifties, this passage suggests that Trilogy is a
contemplation on the “indecipherable,” “infinite” nature of God.

Despite Trilogy’s indication that God is infinite and unknowable, the
speaker embraces the poem’s ironic quest: the search for a “finite definition” of
God (WDNF 31:3). She asserts that any attempt to describe God through language
will result in contradiction, which underscores a vital aspect of the sefirot. Each
sphere represents a particular divine principle, or “characteristic,” which
simultaneously contradicts the sefirah opposite of it on the tree. On the subject of
the sefirot’s apparent incongruities, Christian Ginsburg writes that the Kabbalistic
Tree is comprised of three pairs of opposites, each of which is mediated by the
Middle Pillar that acts as a go-between for each contradiction (101). Aczel
explains that Kabbalists do not understand God as being inherently “good” or
“evil,” but rather, God is an infinite spectrum of every possible kind of action
(mercy, wrath, giving and taking away life). Images such as the sefirot are used to
isolate “discrete” aspects of God because that is the only way humans can
understand divine reality (37). In other words, God is so vast and complex that
God is always manifesting in multiple dimensions. Harold Bloom helpfully
resolves this paradox by explaining that each sefirah (or any divine name)
functions as a synecdoche for a boundless God (26).
The divine’s revelation of itself in multifarious forms is an additional Kabbalistic concept throughout Trilogy, the idea that one cannot directly know God’s entire being, only limited manifestations of God’s self. The speaker most directly alludes to this belief when she proclaims in one of the first stanzas, “for I know how the Lord God / is about to manifest [my emphasis]” (6:33-34). The poem’s innumerable cross-cultural references to religious and mythological icons bolster this Kabbalistic framework. When the speaker specifies an individual deity, she often reminds the reader that that god or goddess is a single manifestation of an infinite presence. In one of the speaker’s evocations of ancient Egyptian religions, she implores the reader to “recover the secret of Isis, / which is: there was One / in the beginning, Creator, / Fosterer, Begetter, the Same-forever” (lines 19-22). Here, the speaker implies that God can exist both as a manifestation in the form of an Egyptian goddess and as an infinite, unnamable entity. The suggestion that Isis, the “One” and “the Same-forever,” all refer to the same entity parallels the Kabbalistic view concerning the relationship between God and God’s individual parts.

The speaker’s illustrations of divine manifestation in the forms of Greek, Egyptian, and Biblical deities reinforce the unique role of language in Kabbalistic theology. As Steven B. Katz argues, “the Kabbalah as a rhetorical theory explicitly addresses questions central in the rhetorical tradition of the West concerning the relationship between language, thought, and reality, but in a way not treated in any other rhetoric” (108). Though Kabbalists believe that they can never know God’s true name, linguistic rituals are the only way humans can
transcend static representations of the divine and experience a fraction of God’s essence. As a linguistic theory, Katz continues, Kabbalism considers the Hebrew language to be “the fundamental means and units of creation” (111). It is believed that God originated language, not humans, and imprinted God’s self in human speech. On the sacredness of Kabbalistic language, Smoley and Kinney contend, “Implicit in this is the idea, deeply rooted in Judaism, that the name of something is identical with its essence” (90). So while it is impossible to encapsulate God’s totality in speech, language is never merely symbolic; it is always a literal extension of God.

The belief that language literally houses partial essences of God was not a newly formed one for H.D. when she wrote Trilogy. Morris suggests that as early as H.D.’s Imagist years with Pound, she intuited that language functions as a conduit between the physical world and divine dimension(s). Of the Imagist school, Morris writes, “Where contemporary theorists hold that we see what we know, imagists insist that we know what we see. They find in vision the release from a shared system of signs into spontaneous, intuitive, unmediated apprehension of essences” (“The Concept of Projection 276). As Morris suggests, Imagism appealed to H.D. because it provided her with a way of replicating the concentrated energy of her mystical “visions”\(^1\) in crystalline descriptions of nature. As opposed to other Imagists, though, the natural scenes in H.D.’s early poetry are not rooted in objectivism: “Unlike other of the imagists, H.D. conceived of essence as god-stuff…Projection as phanopoeia, a poetic technique, here, in H.D.’s first important modification, broadens into a technique of

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\(^1\) For a biographical account of H.D.’s mystical “visions,” see chapter 2.
meditation or prayer: an imaging used to summon a being from another world” (277). Decades later, when H.D. composed her epic, her Kabbalistic studies codified her Imagist conception “of essence as god-stuff” by giving her systematic rituals for revealing God through language manipulation.

H.D. reveals her Kabbalistic fascination with the infinite nature of God even more explicitly. In addition to Kabbalistic ideas of manifestation, the epic’s particular illustrations of divine infinity are keenly similar to descriptions of God in Kabbalistic texts. The divine, in its continuous form, is frequently visualized as an infinite ray of light or a point in infinity. As Aczel explains, God is “like the vanishing point of a Renaissance painting, lies hidden behind the ten Sefirot of the Kabbalah. This point encapsulates the entire nature of the Sefirot, along with infinitely many other qualities of God hidden within the Ein Sof” (43). The Zohar (or Book of Splendor), written in twelfth-century Spain and considered the most significant book of recorded Kabbalistic teachings, often depicts God as an infinite, colorless ray of light. The following verse from the Zohar is a prime example of such a description:

A blinding spark flashed / Within the Concealed of the Concealed / From the mystery of the Infinite, A cluster of vapor in formlessness, / Set in a ring, / Not white, not black, not red, not green, / No color at all (Aczel 35)

There are several passages in Trilogy that describe God in strikingly similar rhetoric. One such passage in Tribute to Angels appears to allude to verses from the Zohar:
And the point in the spectrum / where all lights become one, / is white and white is not no-color, as we were told as children, / but all-color; where the flames mingle / and the wings meet, when we gain / the arc of perfection (43:1-8)

Both passages clearly refer to a vanishing point where “disparate” parts of creation ultimately meet. The speaker’s obsession with infinity throughout the epic and the illustration of God as a colorless, or “all-color,” vanishing point hardly suggest a superficial acquaintance with Kabbalistic teachings. Gubar also identifies this vanishing point in Trilogy: “instead of moving backward in a linear, sequential manner, she chooses three time bands that seem to be relatively self-contained, like ever-narrowing circles enclosing some still point of origin” (213). As Gubar’s observation demonstrates, the vanishing point is a conceit that is not just alluded to in individual lines, but that Trilogy’s entire structure replicates.

In addition to infinite light, Trilogy employs other Kabbalistic visualizations of God. A major reason Kabbalistic mysticism places such emphasis on infinity is because the tradition was heavily influenced by Pythagorean geometry and Plato’s mathematical developments. Like these two ancient schools of “number worship,” the Kabbalah places a great deal of emphasis on sacred geometry and numerical magic. According to Aczel, early Kabbalists found Pythagorean geometry useful in helping them represent God’s complexity. Because God’s infinite expanse is so central to Kabbalistic mysticism, it is easy to see how Greek geometry offered exceptional metaphors for God: “Geometry deals with lines and planes and angles, all of which are
continuous” (Azcel 19). It is not surprising, then, that the Kabbalah’s use of numerology to decode hidden meanings within texts is called *gematria*, or geometry.

In the stanza following the speaker’s proclamation of her “search for finite definition of the infinite,” she states, “but we found the angle of incidence / equals the angle of reflection” (*WDNF* 32:23-24). Clearly an allusion to the Pythagorean Theorem, H.D. appropriates the Kabbalah’s illustrative use of geometry to describe mystical experience. Typical of the epic’s wordplay, “the angle of reflection” refers to a literal prismatic reflection and to Kabbalistic meditation. Later, in *Flowering of the Rod*, Kaspar has a mystical experience that stupefies him. As in the previous passage, the speaker compares Kaspar’s fruitless search for an explanation of the incident to a failed mathematical theorem:

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no one will ever know / whether it was a sort of spiritual optical-illusion, / or whether he looked down the deep deep-well / of the so-far unknown / depth of pre-history; / no one would ever know if it could be proved mathematically / by demonstrated lines, / as an angle of light / reflected from a strand of a woman’s hair, / reflected again or refracted / a certain other angle— (40:14-25)
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The references to lines and angles and the task of mathematically “proving” the experience is a clear reference to the sacred Greek geometry that forms the Kabbalah’s foundation. As Azcel explains, the idea of infinity developed after the Pythagoreans discovered irrational numbers; infinity was the only way to explain the existence of numbers that never end (19). Read in this context, the central
implicit argument in H.D.’s “irrational language” is the same as that of irrational numbers: the existence of infinity.

The poem’s fixation on triangles also stems, in part, from Kabbalistic theosophy. Recalling that the sefirot is comprised of a trinity of opposites, this brings an obvious new connotation to the epic’s title and its legion of threes. Gershom Scholem explains that, in addition to the sefirot’s groups of threes, there is a kind of Kabbalistic trinity that is thought to have preceded the first three sefirot and which are considered part of God’s actual “body” (95-96). Deborah Kloepfer identifies several explanations for Trilogy’s motif of threes: “Suffused also with mystical, numerological, and Delphic associations, the trilogy accommodated both emotional triangles and arcane trinities, offering H.D. the textual space in which she could work both the psychic and spiritual aspects of her vision” (187). Kathy J. Phillips, in examining the disjointed nature of H.D. and Gertrude Stein’s writings, describes this type of writing as “literature of cut-off triangles,” which uses fragmentary language in a way similar to Cubism. This enables a powerful form of communication, “a theme of seeing and not seeing at the same time, of not mentioning things while still somehow harping on them” (217-219). Because H.D. melds multiple religious symbolisms in Trilogy, it is clear that she purposefully chose not to limit the reader’s interpretation of the work’s title and its myriad of triangles. On the other hand, the speaker constantly “harps” on this mystical number, especially in her repeated references to the Pythagorean Theorem.
Trilogy’s numerous calls upon angels can also be attributed to the monumental role of angelology in Kabbalism. Certainly, angelology is not an exclusively Kabbalistic tradition, but knowledge of angel names and their associations with particular sefirot, stars, metals, and planets, is a fundamental aspect of Kabbalistic prayer. Morris writes, “This entry of another dimension into our familiar figuration is the equivalent in H.D.’s work of the process by which material from the celestial or astral planes manifests on the earthly plane. It’s this that haunts and compels her” (“The Concept of Projection” 278). According to Friedman, after H.D. became a serious Kabbalist during the 1950s, she regularly summoned the seventy-two angels who are believed to be assigned specific hours of the day, often listing their names in ritualistic songs (175). H.D.’s correspondence with Gustav Davidson regarding their mutual interest in angelology does not appear to have begun until the 1960s. However, a passage from Trilogy suggests that she knew of the seventy-two angels guarding the hours and was already regularly invoking their help. After listing multiple angels, including Raphael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Annael, the speaker states, “Every hour, every moment / has its specific attendant Spirit; / the clock-hand, minute by minute” (24:1-3). Mirroring Graham’s assertion that Trilogy is “performative,” Joseph Riddel concludes that the major difference between Trilogy and H.D.’s early poems “is that the poem has become a process or act of discovery. No longer a closed form, a thing itself, it has become a generative act” (468). Part of that “generative act” is the summation of angels. Not surprisingly, H.D. aided Davidson in compiling his still widely used Dictionary of Angels, published in
1967. As Davidson’s letters to H.D. show, he referred to her numerous times for advice on many articles he wrote on angels. They also exchanged books, one of which was H.D.’s copy of *La Kabbale practique* which she sent to Davidson in 1960. Though this collaboration does not appear to have taken place before 1960, it is clear that Davidson held H.D.’s knowledge of angels in high esteem from the beginning of their acquaintance, referring to her as “a fellow traveler in the realms of gold” in one of his earliest letters.

One of Kabbalism’s most notable techniques for both creating and uncovering hidden meanings within texts is the use of anagrams, which, unlike palimpsests, are words and phrases created by the permutation or substitution of letters. Hebrew is considered to be an exclusively sacred language by Kabbalists, but H.D. clearly developed her own version of this technique in English. Her knowledge of these rituals largely came from Ambelain’s work (though it is likely she read other Kabbalist literature, such as the *Zohar*, during the forties), but she also took great liberties in altering Kabbalistic practices to conform to her syncretist religious views (Friedman 175, 284). In traditional Kabbalism, the computation of letters is highly systematic, with rules governing letter reversals, omissions, and substitutions (Ginsburg 135-37). Although the application of anagrams, in theory, adheres to systematized rules, Katz explains that the ultimate goal of Kabbalistic wordplay is to “access and stay as close as possible to the subjective event of the mystical experience” (110). In other words, ambiguous meanings, extended interpretations, and paradoxical language that result from
deconstructive language, such as anagrams, reinforce the subjective nature of mystical experiences (117).

The prevalence of idiosyncratic spellings throughout Trilogy and their resulting puns illustrate that H.D. appropriated this Kabbalistic ritual to instill multiple meanings within single words and phrases. In her evocation of various male deities in Walls Do Not Fall, H.D. uses a distinctly anagrammatic technique to unify these various religious myths: “Splintered the crystal of identity, / shattered the vessel of integrity, / till the Lord Amen, / paw-er of the ground, / bearer of the curled horns, / bellowes from the horizon: / here am I, Amen-Ra, / Amen, Aries, the Ram” (21:1-8). Here, H.D. creates a new word, “paw-er,” and by separating it into two parts with a hyphen, she forms at least two distinct meanings: first, the speaker suggests that the Egyptian God Amen, the Greek God Aries, and the Egyptian sun god, Ra, are all archetypal or cross-cultural variants of one another. The word “paw-er” implies that the Egyptian gods can be represented by Aries’ traditional signifier, the ram, an animal that literally paws the ground. The second play on words is that “paw-er,” eliciting the vernacular “paw” or “pa,” denotes that these three gods are all paternal projections of the Ein-Sof—visibly manifested in a cross-cultural legion of patriarchal gods. Appropriately enough, the god Amen was called “the Hidden one” in ancient Egypt, (Walker, Encyclopedia 27) further reinforcing the idea that mysteries can be hidden in everyday language. Moreover, the calembour on “Amen” invokes the Hebrew imperative, “let it be,” which was considered magical by its ancient
speakers. Its “magical” roots and its Hebrew origin further suggest a Kabbalistic theme in *Trilogy* (27).

Later in the poem, the speaker explicitly identifies the poem’s anagrammatic technique, leaving little doubt that her alterations of deity names are not just stream-of-consciousness whims, but based on a coded system: “I know, I feel / the meaning that words hide; / they are anagrams, cryptograms, / little boxes, conditioned / to hatch butterflies…” (39:6-9). Given H.D.’s obsession with Egyptian mythology, it is not surprising that in the next stanza she anagrammatically modulates another Egyptian god’s name, Osiris: “Osiris equates O-sir-is or O-Sire-is; / Osiris, / the star Sirius, / relates resurrection myth and resurrection reality / through the ages” (WDNF 40:2-7). The separation of Osiris’s name to “reveal” hidden words housed within a single word unit is enabled through slight permutations, namely dashes, and additions of letters (the addition of “e” to create the word “Sire”). H.D.’s most immediate influence on her use of puns is other modernists, namely James Joyce, whose wordplay is comparable to the puns H.D. crafts in her own epic. On this connection between H.D. and Joyce’s poetic language, Joseph Riddell comments:

[H.D.’s] later poems are filled with etymological and homonymic puns (Joycean puns, she called them), which probe words for their internal textural relatedness and revelations. The secret which each word inevitably must reveal is that they all are rooted in the same beginning, in the Word or Dream. (461)
Not surprisingly, H.D. greatly revered both Joyce and Virginia Woolf, employing a similar stream-of-consciousness narration to *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*. Like other modernist figures who employed a Joycean/Woolfian narration styles, H.D. made this technique her own by using less lyrical language than Joyce and focusing on more religious concerns than Woolf (Friedman 67, 198).

From an anthropological perspective, H.D. places such emphasis on the words “sir” and “Sire” because Osiris was worshipped as a savior god up through the early Christian era. According to Barbara Walker, early Christians heavily borrowed from Egyptian scriptures regarding the Osiris myth. Like Christ, Osiris is often referred to in these scriptures as the “Son of God,” “King of Kings,” and “the Good Shepard.” Even more compelling, the Egyptian god’s coming was announced by three stars called the Three Wise Men, and his followers were instructed to eat his “flesh” in the form of communion bread. Moreover, the star Sirius is a signifier of Osiris and is depicted similarly to the North Star in the New Testament story of Christ’s birth (*Encyclopedia* 748-49). Through an anagrammatic technique, H.D. seems to imply that there was a cross-cultural exchange regarding these two messiah-based religions: she emphasizes the words “sir” and “Sire,” the latter an explicitly kingly address, in the middle of the Egyptian god’s name. In the last lines, the connection becomes clearer as the speaker tries to “relate” these two resurrection myths.

*Walls*’s apparent androcentric perusal of male deities is offset by the sacred feminine revealed in the anagram. Albert Gelpi identifies the alterations of Osiris’ name as a fusion of the names of the Egyptian god and his sister-wife Isis;
he argues that the ultimate aim of this fusion is to “conjoin the maternal haven with the paternal heaven” (327). Jeanette Larson writes, “H.D. found in signs with such multiple and shifting significances the means for a deconstruction of myths central to the Western patriarchal tradition and the model for a new understanding of the nature and possibilities of language itself” (88). Larson’s observation illustrates that one of the goals of H.D.’s creative etymology is to establish her syncretist views of myth, an outlook H.D. repeatedly demonstrates with the associations she builds between various deities. Moreover, as Gelpi suggests, the syncretist implications of H.D.’s wordplay also allow the poet to “uncover” feminine manifestations of God.

H.D. uses rhyme and other poetic devices as “clues” to help the reader identify anagrams. When Ostriker declares that “H.D. is a mistress of the inconspicuous off-rhyme,” (340) she refers to subtle poetic devices as exemplified here: “What fruit is our store, / what flower? / what savour do we possess?” (26:1-3). The off-rhymes of “store,” “flower,” and “savour” indicate there is a meaning to be decoded. Immediately, the word “store” suggests that multiple messages are literally stored in these lines. The most cryptic of the off-rhymes, “savour” seems to recall both the traditional spelling of the word “savor” and furtively allude to “savior.” Riddel explains that Trilogy’s particular stanza forms, usually divided into couplets, “reveal some internal formal or verbal relatedness in the concluding word” (464). The strategic placement of “store” and “flower” at the ends of lines and their phonetic similarities to “savour” urge the reader to “probe words for their internal textural relatedness and revelations” (461). Of H.D.’s unusual
wordplay, Gelpi writes, “the punning throughout Trilogy is no mere trick or game. It makes a language appropriate to a world in which there are meanings within meanings, meanings beyond meanings…merged into the cosmic design” (326). The pun on “savior” in the speaker’s rhetorical question suggests that the reader is already in “possession” of his or her own redemption; and yet the stubborn ambiguity of “savour” continues to reinforce the subjective nature of mystical experience. Katz perfectly captures the spiritual potency of H.D.’s Kabbalistic wordplay when he writes that the goal of coded language is “interpretation without end, amen” (110).

In order to “break the code” of Trilogy’s anagrams, the speaker implies, the reader must overcome any skepticism regarding the possibility that rational language is a “husk” for sacred meanings. In Flowering of the Rod, Kaspar briefly glimpses into the infinite nature of the divine when he notices that the homely woman named Mary who has come (though coldly received) to join the disciples is wearing a headband emitting a mystical light, which seems to reveal a hidden, though ever-widening dimension. At first, the divine appears to him as a “speck of light” and then portrays its illimitable presence:

And the flower, thus contained / in the infinitely tiny grain or seed, / opened petal by petal, a circle, / and each petal was separate / yet still held, as it were, / by some force of attraction / to its dynamic centre; / and the circle went on widening / and would go on opening / he knew, to infinity;

(30:6, 31:1-10)
Alicia Ostriker writes, “Trilogy is a poem about things which seem closed and resistant until they open and are infinite. Just so, the poet implies, to the materialist, rationalist, or militarist sensibility the world itself will remain closed; to the receptively spiritual self it will open” (“No Rules of Procedure” 346). Joseph Riddel states, “The collapsing of images and events into one time, the discovery of the infinite in the lived moment, confirm for the poet what endures and what falls. The ‘war trilogy’ is a quest for permanence” (465).

In light of Trilogy’s scriptural language, Scott Boehnen asserts that it is “simultaneously modernist and medieval” (199). Boehnen writes that the Kabbalah, psychoanalysis, astrology, and spiritualism were appealing to H.D. because they all, in some way, revolve around concealed truth. However, Boehnen ultimately concludes that Trilogy is most directly influenced by medieval allegorical writing. He explains that allegorical writing, which characterizes medieval literature, was largely based on emulating the language of Biblical scripture. Since scriptural writing focuses on “sheltering sacred meaning,” Boehnen concludes that in Trilogy, “[H.D.] self-consciously quotes the rhetoric of medieval allegory” (185). More specifically, Boehnen argues that H.D. uses the medieval involucrum, closely translated as “envelope,” a medieval device that functions similarly to a scroll by hiding a text’s innermost meaning (188-90). The involucrum Boehnen identifies closely resembles Trilogy’s anagrams.

Considering H.D.’s tireless studies of religious scriptures, she was likely familiar with medieval allegorical writing and its scriptural roots. Boehnen’s contention that Trilogy’s allegorical writing and its obscuration of meaning(s) are rooted in
medieval language is apt. It addresses the work’s ecclesiastical language, and, more importantly, it reveals that the poet’s seemingly modernist wordplay aims to revive a historical period in the English language. Boehnen argues that *Piers Plowman* and *Everyman* served as paradigms for the epic’s allegories (186); however, it is far more likely, in light of *Trilogy’s* Kabbalistic elements, that the *Zohar* is most directly echoed in H.D.’s language. Recorded in twelfth-century Spain, it employs both medieval allegorical writing and coded language. Moreover, H.D.’s allusions to Kabbalistic language reinforce her fascination with the esoteric aspects of all literary and religious history, including the medieval time period.
TRILOGIZING MARY MAGDALENE

“No one will know exactly how it came about, / but we are permitted to wonder”

–Flowering of the Rod, 41:1-2

As an exteriorization of H.D.’s occultist identity, Trilogy bears the imprint of esoteric texts that the poet deeply absorbed. One of the epic’s premier textual engagements is with the gnostic Gospel of Mary, fragments of which surfaced at the turn of the century and shed a radically new light on early Christianity. All three of Trilogy’s books culminate in a fictionalized narrative centered on Mary Magdalene and her purchase of the alabaster jar of nard which, as narrated in the New Testament, she used to anoint Christ. Surprisingly, nothing has been said of the fact that H.D. began composing Trilogy four years after C.H. Roberts published an excavated Greek fragment of the “lost” gospel in 1938. Dated to the third century and one of the earliest Christian gospels, it was once included with the books of the New Testament but later eliminated from the canon. Before Roberts’ translation was published, a similar fragment had been excavated in the town of Oxyrhynchus in Upper Egypt.¹ It is hard to imagine that H.D. did not read one or both of these fragments, considering her vast personal library of books on Egyptian material culture and her sacred pilgrimages to Egyptian archeological sites. Trilogy’s papyrological imitations, the speaker’s “revealer” persona of Mary

¹ From 1897 until around 1920, Egyptologists Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt orchestrated a massive papyrological excavation in the town of Oxyrhynchus, where thousands of historical and literary fragments were discovered (Deuel 150-64).
Magdalene, and H.D.’s similar approach to other fragmentary works indicate that the epic is a dialogic exchange with one of the most controversial occult texts ever discovered in literary history.

The Greek fragment of the *Gospel of Mary* published by Roberts was originally purchased in an antiquities market in Cairo in 1917 by German scholar Carl Reinhardt. It was then transferred to the John Rylands University Library in Manchester that same year; after Roberts eventually published it in 1938, a translation of the papyrus was available at virtually every scholarly library in the Western world (King 10).² It is likely, however, that H.D. read the *Gospel of Mary* fragment before its 1938 translation and publication.³ A Coptic version of the fragment had been found in one of numerous buried jars containing codexes of papyri. Before Carter discovered Tutankhamun’s tomb in 1922, papyrus hunting was a focal ambition in Egyptology. In Oxyrhynchus, archeologists had made exciting literary discoveries, such as previously unknown works by Greek writers Euripides, Menander, Bacchylides, and Sappho. Many early Christian documents, including a number of suppressed fragmentary gospels and apocryphal writings, were also among the most significant findings. The Egyptian Exploration Fund acquired most of the papyri at Oxyrhynchus and published parts of the excavation in serial volumes (Deuel 150-63). Scholarly journals of Classical and Biblical studies also regularly published topical debates surrounding

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² According to Rylands Library archival records, the physical fragment was temporarily moved out of the library in 1941 during World War II. Even then, a translation would have been easily accessible.
³ H.D. was fluent in Greek and had translated several Greek writers, so she would not have had to rely on an English translation.
the unidentified writings. As early as 1911, an issue of *The Biblical World* posited that one of the Oxyrhynchus fragments was from the *Gospel of Mary* (349).

Although the *Gospel of Mary* remains incomplete to this day, even after the Nag Hammadi excavation in 1945, its departure from the canonical New Testament is clear. The fragment depicts Mary Magdalene as Christ’s most intimate confidant and a privileged receiver of secret *gnosis* (knowledge) that he never revealed to the disciples. As a post-resurrection gospel, most of the surviving pages of the fragment center on Mary’s conversation with the disciples after Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. She comforts the weeping apostles, who are afraid that they, too, will be crucified, and Peter asks Mary to share Jesus’ secret teachings with them: “Sister, we know that you were greatly loved by the Savior, as no other woman. Therefore tell us those words of the Savior which you know but which we haven’t heard” (King 15). Mary states that Christ appeared to her in a vision, but the fragment is missing most of the pages that contain her teachings. The following intact pages portray a dispute between the disciples over Mary’s reported vision, incited by Andrew and Peter who pronounce that the teachings Mary has relayed are “strange ideas.” Peter, losing his temper, utters, “Has the Savior spoken secretly to a woman and openly so that we would all hear? Surely he did not want to show that she is more worthy than we are?” Levi, chastising Peter for his perpetual anger and jealousy, comes to the defense of Mary as Christ’s most cherished friend, stating, “Assuredly the Savior’s knowledge of her is completely reliable. That is why he

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4 The Nag Hammadi excavation is the most significant discovery of gnostic Christian writings to date. Archeologists found numerous codexes containing translations of gnostic works such as the *Gospel of Thomas, Apocryphon of John, Dialogue of the Savior*, and the *Gospel of Mary.*
loved her more than us.” The disciples then disperse to continue spreading the Christian movement (17-18).

In terms of the fragment’s traceable impact on Trilogy, Mary Magdalene is the poem’s most prominent occult figure, largely because her story is more cohesive than the rest of the epic. Compared to Flowering of the Rod, the poetic narratives in the first two books are so evanescent that it is usually impossible to pinpoint physical location or historic time. At the beginning of Walls, for example, the speaker quickly moves from an image of Londoners confiscating train rails for guns to a scene of an Egyptian tomb being opened (1:1-12). And because the overall work is written from a syncretist viewpoint, various deities are often invoked outside of their traditional context; for instance, in Walls, the speaker prays to the Egyptian god Amen in an early colonial church (18:7-12). Because Mary Magdalene’s “unrecorded” story serves as Trilogy’s denouement, most of the poem’s syncretist energy works to re-contextualize its modern gospel. For instance, the frequent references to “Mary” and “myrrh”—the epic’s concluding images—in Trilogy’s first two books anticipate what Scott Boehnen calls her “Marian vision” at the end of Flowering of the Rod (192).

The most compelling similarity between the two texts is Mary Magdalene’s relation to the disciples is that of a “ revealer figure.” Central to the majority of gnostic groups, the revealer figure is a catalyst for others’ spiritual transformation. Simply put, this figure conveys gnosis aimed toward establishing a relationship with God through introspection, self-knowledge, and the transcendence of material attachments (O’Leary 29 and King 37). In the gnostic
gospel, Mary is depicted as the only person knowledgeable of Christ’s secret teachings, and after his death, inherits the responsibility of revealing his most recondite knowledge to the apostles. Though Mary is the first to see the resurrected Christ after the crucifixion in the canonical gospels, the gnostic account differs in that Christ communicates to Mary through a mystical trance, rather than in person. In the surviving pages, Mary tells the disciples that, after Christ’s death, she spoke with him in a trance and asked him if a person sees visions through the “soul” or through the “spirit.” Four pages of Jesus’ response are missing, but the fragment does contain part of his answer in which he states that a person sees visions through the “mind,” which exists between the soul and the spirit. After the missing pages, Mary continues to shares what Christ revealed her about the ascent of the soul. In this section, Jesus elaborates on transcending “the seven Powers of Wrath,” worldly desires that obviate spiritual development (King 15-16). The rest of the pages then record the disciples’ dissention over Mary’s teachings.

The core of Mary’s role in Flowering is fundamentally the same: her spiritual revelation is uncharacteristically embedded in mysticism. Only in H.D.’s fictionalized version, Mary reveals gnosis to Kasper, an Arabian merchant. She follows Kaspar to his home and asks to purchase his most expensive jar of myrrh. He repeatedly dismisses “the un-maidenly” woman and refuses to sell her the jar (15:16). Suddenly, Mary removes her headscarf, and Kaspar experiences a profound, but unexplainable, mystical vision: “how convey what he felt? / he saw as in a mirror, clearly, O very clearly, / a circlet of square-cut stones on the head
of a lady, / and what he saw made his heart so glad / that it was as if he suffered, / his heart labored so / with his ecstasy” (28:36-42). Mary leaves the house before Kaspar changes his mind, and in the revised nativity scene at the end of the poem, he presents her with a gift of myrrh.

In relation to their mystical decrees, the *Gospel of Mary* and *Trilogy* share some unusual metaphorical language, namely in their terms for referring to God and for describing spiritual blindness. In the case of the former, there are two distinct places in the gnostic fragment where the speaker refers to God as “the Good.” The first time the gospel uses this term is when the spirit of Christ (speaking to Mary in a vision) states, “There is no such thing as sin; rather you yourselves are what produces sin . . . For this reason, the Good came among you, pursuing (the good) which belongs to every nature” (King 13). After Mary has disclosed the last of Christ’s secret teachings, the narrator of the gospel records, “When Mary had said these things, she turned their heart [to]ward the Good, and they began to debat[e] about the wor[ds] of [the Savior]” (15). At the beginning of *Walls Do Not Fall*, the speaker describes the need for spiritual replenishment in a land torn by war: “Evil was active in the land, / Good was impoverished and sad . . . Good was the tasteless pod, / stripped from the manna-beans, pulse, lentils: / they were angry when we were so hungry / for the nourishment, God” (2:1-2, 7-10). The speaker personifies the “Good” as though it is a sentient entity emotionally devastated (“impoverished and sad”) by the physical and spiritual destruction wrought by humans. The “Good’s” presence in the “tasteless pod” recalls the gnostic Christ’s statement that “the Good” “came down” to earth in
response to human-derived “sin.” Using wordplay that is typical of her poetic language, H.D. conflates “Good” and “God” by emphasizing phonetic similarities between the two. Moreover, the structure of the last two lines indicates that the “pods” the war survivors are eating are a metaphor for God’s slowly rejuvenating presence, “impoverished” in a world of evil but struggling to “come among” the ruins. The placement of “nourishment” next to “God” is a source of syntactical ambiguity: it is unclear if the speaker is directly addressing God or if “nourishment” is God’s antecedent.

*Trilogy*’s description of spiritual blindness also parallels one of Christ’s secret lessons that Mary shares with the disciples in one of the fragment’s surviving passages. In this instance of symbolical correspondence, both texts use the image of a “garment” as a metaphor for humans mistaking the body, or physicality, for the essence of their existence. *Flowering* opens with the passage, “O the beautiful garment, / the beautiful raiment—do not think of His face / or even His hands . . . do not be beguiled by the geometry of perfection” (1: 1-4, 13-14). This particular stanza features two speakers: the stanza begins with a speaker who is in awe of outward beauty (the beautiful clothing); a second speaker responds by warning the first speaker to not be distracted by outside appearance. The speaker’s admonishment several lines further to “not be beguiled by the geometry of perfection” reinforces this “lesson” regarding spiritual shallowness. In the gnostic gospel, Christ gives a similar instruction in which he says, “The soul answered, ‘I saw you. You did not see me nor did you know me. You (mis)took the garment (I wore) for my (true) self. And you did not recognize me”
(King 16). As in H.D.’s verse, the “garment” in the gnostic text represents the transient nature of the body, and the speaker urges the listener to not become “beguiled” by the “perfection” that physical beauty illusorily projects. The fundamentally gnostic ideas regarding the transcendence of material attachments and the call for self-knoweldge are emphasized in both Mary’s gospel and in H.D.’s syncretist rendition of it.

Another notable congruence is that Simon Peter is the disciple most antagonistic toward Mary Magdalene in both the gnostic gospel and in H.D.’s version. The last of the surviving pages of the Gospel of Mary revolve around Peter’s irate disbelief that a woman was Christ’s most esteemed follower. Unlike the canonical gospels, the Gospel of Mary directly examines the gender politics underlying Mary’s isolation from Christ’s tight-knit circle of male apostles. The speaker in H.D.’s revised version of the Mary’s gospel alludes to the dissention over Mary’s teachings in the original gnostic script: “In resurrection, there is confusion / if we start to argue” (Flowering 3:1-2). Kaspar’s later expression of his distrust of Mary recalls Magdalene’s position as a revealer in the gnostic text. He is initially reluctant to sell her the alabaster jar because the mere is an alchemical concoction whose formula is a family secret: “it was never written, not even in symbols, for this they / knew— / no secret was safe with a woman” (Flowering 14:26). The last line of the stanza, “no secret was safe with a woman,” ironically reaffirms Mary’s position as a revealer in the gnostic text.

It is also telling that Peter’s contestation in Mary’s gospel regards the gender of the revealer and not the actual discrepancies between her “strange
ideas” and Christ’s more public teachings. Simon Peter’s gendered distrust is echoed in Flowering’s banquet scene (a revised version of the Last Supper), Simon Peter becomes “over-wrought and excited” over Mary’s close proximity to the special “Guest.” The heathen sitting on the floor was not invited, and Simon Peter wonders what sort of “Master” would allow this kind of woman to be present, much less kiss his feet: “[Simon] had kept careful count of his guests; / things had gone excellently till now, / but this was embarrassing; / she was actually kissing His feet; / He does not understand; / they call him Master, / but Simon questioned: / this man if he were a prophet, would have known / who and what manner of woman this is” (23:6–14). As in the Gospel of Mary, Simon Peter responds with hostility to the fact that the “Guest” (assumedly Christ) is closely engaged not only with someone outside the coterie of disciples, but a woman.

In light of Mary Magdalene’s signal role in Trilogy, it is curious that H.D. changes the gospel’s storyline and that she does not directly quote full passages from it. One can see her respond to other fragmentary works in a similar way, namely in her relation with Sappho’s incomplete lyrics. As Eileen Gregory explains in H.D. and Hellenism, H.D.’s intertextuality with Sappho’s fractional works is not limited to “explicit namings” (148). H.D. directly refers to Sappho in six poems; but, as Gregory contends, most of H.D.’s Sapphic-inspired lyrics (usually referred to as her “fragment poems”) are refabrications of Sapphic fragments, in which Sappho’s fusion of maternal and homoerotic desire is covertly engaged, rather than directly referenced. In this respect, Trilogy’s textual exchange with the Gospel of Mary parallels many of H.D.’s Sapphic poems that,
as Gregory explains, “wor[k] like a riddle, in presenting an image or images that clearly point beyond themselves and at the same time with[hold] the name of the referent” (155). Though she often translated and quoted writers such as Euripides, Homer, and Ovid, H.D. felt that it would be irreverent to approach the Sapphic fragments discovered at the turn-of-the-century with the same display of confidence. When newly discovered Sapphic poems were found at the Oxyrhynchus excavation—the same site where the *Gospel of Mary* fragment first surfaced—H.D. believed it would be a “sacrilege” to translate or quote the new Sapphic fragments in her own work. Nevertheless, she enthusiastically shared the new literary discoveries with other poets in her literary circle such as Pound and Aldington, even aiding Aldington in accessing the Sapphic fragments from the British Museum library for his own translations (150).

A more furtive way H.D. alludes to Mary Magdalene’s gospel is by interspersing fictionalized biblical quotes with actual passages from the New Testament. Her central purpose in doing this is to attribute textual authority to the “refabricated” gnostic fragment. H.D. uses italics to indicate when she is directly “quoting” an outside text, signifying that *Trilogy* is a work of scriptural correspondence. Aside from the fictionalized biblical passages, all but one of the italicized lines in *Flowering* are taken from the four canonical gospels. Lines such as “to-day shalt thou be / with me in Paradise” and “the least of all seeds…it is the greatest among herbs / and becometh a tree,” both taken from Luke, establish the speaker’s initial engagement with the New Testament. Several New Testament quotes are excerpted from the traditional gospel’s portrayal of Mary
Magdalene as a licentious woman from whom Christ cast out seven demons and who later anointed him with expensive nard and cleaned his feet with her hair. Such discernible gospel verses as “the house was filled with the odour of the ointment” and “in her were forgiven / the sins of the seven / daemons cast out of her” are diffused with fictionalized gospel passages, including: “I am Mary, the incense-flower of the incense-tree, / myself-worshipping, weeping, shall be changed to myrrh; / I am Mary, though melted away, / I shall be a tower” (34:17-20). H.D. makes no typographical distinction between the gnostic referent and its orthodox counterparts, thereby asserting that the “heretical” scripture belongs alongside the orthodox gospels.

As exemplified here, H.D. is evoking the Gospel of Mary’s lacunas as much as its text. Trilogy is not in dialogue with only The Gospel of Mary, but also with syncretist theories regarding suppressed goddess images that have covertly survived in the Christian church. Further complicating her work of textual exchange, H.D. infuses a dialogue not just onto her own poem, but onto the gnostic gospel itself by personifying Mary as a descendant of an ancient goddess. The Gospel of Mary provides very little information about Mary Magdalene’s personal history, other than its indication that she was Christ’s favorite apostle. In addition to the gospel’s literal fragments, H.D. identifies other missing information in the gospel’s avoidance of Mary’s cultural history; she the “fills in” those gaps with information she gathers from writers such as Ambelain and de Rougemont.
More significantly, by collating verses foreign to the biblical canon with well-known passages from the New Testament, H.D. suggests the existence of expurgated scriptures. It is not until the middle of *Flowering* that she introduces the first non-canonical “quotation” so that the first eighteen stanzas of the poem create an assumption in the reader that all italicized lines are excerpted from an “authoritative” source. Amy Benson Brown likens H.D.’s “theft of biblical language” in *Trilogy* to, what Mikhail Bakhtin terms, a *hybrid construction*, “a double-voiced discourse” that, in this case, “refers to both the Word of the Father and to H.D.’s word” (45). This displacement of biblical discourses through hybrid construction creates an unforeseen transference of authority to gnostic reinterpretation. By falsely presenting fragments of “her word” as scriptural quotations, H.D. proselytizes her unorthodox gospel.

In addition to creating a hybrid construction of canonical and fictionalized scriptures, H.D. also replicates the physical characteristics of fragmented papyri through the poem’s formal and narrative qualities. Almost the entire poem is written in short couplets, resulting in abrupt stops and cryptic transitions between stanzas. The sense of “missing” information is further heightened when the speaker “quotes” partial scriptural passages and integrates them with her refabricated gospel. The synthesis of incomplete biblical passages with Mary Magdalene’s story underscores her palimpsestic status, whose actual role within the early Christian movement and whose identity has been endlessly recapitulated. As the speaker lists various speculations on how Mary acquired the alabaster jar, she incorporates a biblical passage not originally related to Mary
Magdalene: “some say she took the house-money / or the poor-box money, / some
say she had nothing with her, / *neither purse nor script*, / no gold-piece or silver”
(*Flowering* 12:13-17). By taking a biblical passage from Luke (“*neither purse not
script*”) and citing it in completely new context, the speaker suggests that the
canonical scriptures themselves are fragmentary palimpsests—they
simultaneously overwrite and exclude as they “record.” Moreover, the use of
partial biblical passages demonstrates that H.D. was aware of the physical
characteristics of papyri found at Oxyrhynchus. In a 1915 volume of *The Journal
of Egyptian Archeology*, A.E. Cowley describes the condition of unidentified
papyrus fragments found at the site, revealing that the beginnings and endings of
individual lines are frequently missing (211). By quoting excerpts of biblical
lines, H.D. replicates the Oxyrhynchus fragments of which large portions of entire
pages are missing.

H.D. conjures the literal and metaphorical lacunas in early Christian
writings by illustrating inconsistencies between/within different records of the
“past.” Throughout *Flowering*, the speaker fluctuates between the “authoritative”
biblical story of Mary Magdalene’s life and discrepant outside accounts of her
identity. Phrases such as “it is written,” “it was never written,” “it is exactly
written,” “it is translated in the Script,” “some say,” and “you say,” signify the
presence of multiple—and therefore subjective—perspectives. In her chronicle of
Mary and the alabaster jar, the speaker indicates that a single authentic account of
Mary Magdalene’s life does not exist: “Some say she slipped out and got away, /
some say he followed her and found her, / some say he never found her / but sent
a messenger after her / with the alabaster jar” (Flowering 20:1-5). In the next stanza, the speaker contrasts these alternative accounts with orthodox scripture: “Anyhow, it is exactly written, / the house was filled with the odour of the ointment” (21:1-2). In H.D.’s Imagist poems, Noman Kelvin identifies “H.D.’s endless need to confront opposites with each other and to explore the many possible ways of relating them—from deconstructing their apparent differences to transferring the defining characteristics of one form to the other” (171). Clearly, the Gospel of Mary serves as a prime source of continuous deconstructive and transformative activity for H.D. in her mature years. Rather than attempting to force these oppositional views (what “some say” with biblical accounts) into a single congruent narrative, she presents “many possible ways of relating” authoritative and non-authoritative fragments.

H.D.’s assimilation of disparate biblical, gnostic, and fictionalized accounts of Mary Magdalene mirrors what Bret Keeling calls H.D.’s “Sapphic gaze.” As opposed to Gregory’s analysis of H.D.’s fragment poems, Keeling’s description of the poet’s Sapphic influence emphasizes the multi-dimensionality, rather than the remote proximity, of H.D.’s inspection of fragmentary texts. Keeling claims that H.D.’s “multiple way of seeing” involves not only directly looking at a fragment for what it is, but considering how a reconstituted script might look if its partial scraps were experimentally rearranged and if its gaps were supplemented in various ways. H.D.’s multi-dimensional gaze is essential for responding to discontinuous texts because “there can be no logical progression of events and actions laid bare from a scattering of papyrus scraps” (178). Rather
than drawing literal, but limited, conclusions from words that verifiably exist, a Sapphic gaze “breaks down an object into its constituent elements without necessarily establishing an explicit relationship between the parts and the ‘whole’—neither as such a relationship may or may not have existed before” (178-79). Moreover, it is what the incomplete script withholds that “keeps H.D.’s curiosity in the fragment awake,” making its gaps an eternally compelling source of return (179). Considering the leeway H.D. takes in refabricating the Gospel of Mary, she appears far more driven to imaginatively reconstruct what the papyrus censures than to dwell on the particulars of occult knowledge it reveals.

Analyzing the Gospel of Mary through a Sapphic gaze, with its allowance for incongruities, also enables H.D. to recreate biblical figures by imbuing them with fluid identities. As Flowering progresses, Mary Magdalene’s persona morphs into other Marian personalities from the New Testament. In her aside that “I am Mary—O, there are Marys a-plenty,” Magdalene claims that her textual presence in the gospels is more expansive than traditional interpretation assumes. As Marjorie Malvern explains, early Christians made innumerable attempts to collapse all the Marys in the canonical gospels into one person. Many religious writings and chronicles of visions from nascent Christianity through the Middle Ages profess that Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary are the same woman (39). Moreover, a long-standing source of scholarly debate centers on whether or not Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany refer to the same person. H.D. indirectly acknowledges this debate and uses it to support her deconstruction of the canonical gospels: “the first to witness His life-after-death, / was an
unbalanced, neurotic woman, / who was naturally reviled for having left home / and not caring for house-work…or was that Mary of / Bethany?” (Flowering 12:5-9). The reason behind these “reckless identifications,” according to Malvern, has been to “tighten the bond” between Christ and Mary Magdalene (30). As Trilogy’s speaker repeatedly confuses and conflates Mary Magdalene with the other “Marys-a-plenty,” she foregrounds the unknown extent of Magdalene’s textual pervasiveness and her affiliation with Christ.

Moreover, Mary Magdalene’s transformation from a meretricious heathen into a heroine in the Gospel of Mary reveals the “efforts of early Christians to create a feminine counterpart for their man-god” (Malvern 30). Mary eventually transgresses her role as a redeemer figure and stands alone without the infant Christ in Trilogy’s modified nativity scene. Fused with “the bundle of myrrh / she held in her arms,” it is unclear if Mary is now the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, or a fusion of all three. H.D. had originally titled Walls Do Not Fall as The Coming One, indicating that the messiah anticipated by the epic’s early speakers is feminine (Riddel 464). Alicia Ostriker, in “A Word Made Flesh: The Bible and Revisionist Women’s Poetry,” writes that H.D.’s “fusion of the virgin-whore with the Christ” comes from the same hermeneutical ambition that drove other women writers, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Emily Dickinson, to create “feminized versions of sacred narratives” (18, 24). This initiative is what Ostriker calls a “hermeneutics of desire,” in which “one finds in the text what one desires to find.” With the gnostic Mary Magdalene as her muse, H.D. “disentangles” the “Christos-image” from its institutional
framework to wield a goddess branch from of the Christian trinity (Walls 18:1-2). As Ostiker points out, the tendency among female poets since the 19th century to redact their own desires onto biblical texts stems from a broader realization that their revisions were “of course, no more than what biblical exegetes have been doing throughout the history of exegesis” (18). Certainly, H.D. justifies her own rewrite by illustrating, with the previously discussed formal and narrative devices, that the canonical gospels are themselves subjective interpretations of Christianity’s genesis, imposing what their writers desire to see.

As Christ’s posthumous “voice” in the Gospel of Mary, Mary Magdalene speaks with an authority that collates with her unobtrusive position in the biblical canon. Though she herself is not a Christos figure in the gnostic gospel, her compassion and her teachings render her as the “shepherd” guiding the apostles in their time of fear. Using her syncretist scholarship, H.D. traces Mary Magdalene’s unusual prerogative in the gnostic gospel to her primal origins as the Triple Goddess. Lines such as “I am Mary, though melted away, / I shall be a tower” and “I am Mary, she said, of a tower-town, / or once it must have been towered / for Magdala is a tower” invoke Mary Magdalene’s most obvious goddess prototype (19:3-4, 16:1-3). Magdalene literally translates “she of the temple-tower,” referring to an ancient temple of priestesses in Jerusalem that had a triple tower representing a tripartite deity; one of the towers symbolized the Goddess Mari (Walker 614). Much of the nineteenth and twentieth-century anthropological research H.D. read propelled J.J. Bachofen’s theory that all patriarchal societies were preceded by matriarchal, goddess-worshipping cultures. Bachofen believed
that Western mythology is full of “vestiges” of goddess cultures from the East and that the Christianized versions of Eastern goddesses “encod[e] the uneasy transition from matriarchal to patriarchal societies” (Friedman 266). In this light, *Trilogy* works to decode Mary Magdalene as a demoted relic of female deities.

The associations H.D. makes between Mary Magdalen and goddess religions largely reflect the tendency in some modernist circles to situate Egypt, rather than ancient Greece, as the matrix of modern civilization. This point of contention within the field of Egyptology and its impact on modernist thought is what Marsha Bryant and Mary Ann Eaverly term *Egypto-Modernism*. As Bryant and Eaverly explain, H.D.’s profound interest in Egyptian polytheism was largely due to James Henry Breasted’s *New Past theory*, which posited that Egypt was responsible for the development of western civilization. Certainly, one can see H.D. employ Breasted’s New Past theory as she discursively invokes Egyptian deities that, as has been posited by 19th and 20th century anthropologists, were absorbed by Christian icons. Throughout *Walls*, the speaker invokes the Egyptian male savior god Amen, arguing that he was Christ’s mythological precursor: “The Christos-image / is most difficult to disentangle / from its art-craft junk-shop / paint-and-plaster medieval jumble / of pain-worship and death-symbol…for now it appears obvious / that Amen is our Christos” (18:1-5, 11-12). As *Walls* progresses, the speaker directs her attention to female Egyptian goddesses: “recover the secret of Isis, / which is: there was One / in the beginning, Creator, / Fosterer, Begetter, the Same-Forever / in the papyrus-swamp / in the Judean meadow” (40:19-24). H.D.’s complex interweaving of Egyptian gods and
goddesses provides an elaborate exordium of the primordial goddess’ journey of metamorphoses since pre-Christianity. Clearly, the literal gaps in the Egyptian “papyrus-swamp” of excavated fragments were a compelling invitation for H.D. to imagine the missing pages through a New Past lens. As Bryant and Eaverly contend, “her Biblical knowledge enhanced rather than diminished her appreciation of ancient Egyptian spirituality” (449). For H.D., foregrounding Mary Magdalene’s polytheistic roots does not decrease her power as a spiritual image; rather, it celebrates her omnipotence as a cross-cultural goddess.

In spite of its modernist and feminist sensibilities, the mystical search at Trilogy’s core perpetuates the epic genre’s trope of pilgrimages. While deconstructing scriptural authority, H.D.’s poem parallels the classical epic’s delayed return to its protagonist’s origins. Of Trilogy’s anagogic language, Adalaide Morris writes, “As a quintessential site of mystical politics, epics are not only poems that include history but also poems that invoke the divine” (129). Like The Odyssey, The Aeneid, and The Divine Comedy, Trilogy responds to social crisis by presenting a new spiritual code of conduct. On the other hand, by supplanting the Gospel of Mary’s absent pages with anthropological and syncretist research, H.D. underscores Christianity’s heterogeneous roots—its multiple new pasts. What gnostic Christian writings such as the Gospel of Mary reveal, asserts Elaine Pagels, is that “early Christianity is far more diverse than nearly anyone expected” (xxii). In its developmental years, there was no catholic doctrine that universalized images of God or religious practices. Many Christian gnostics, in fact, continually upheld goddess images and found no conflicts
between goddess and Christian worship (48-69). The most crucial gnostic idea that H.D. specifically takes from the Gospel of Mary is Mary Magdalene’s ecstatic, trance-like means of accessing the divine. Unlike orthodox circles, Christian gnostics “do not dismiss visions as fantasies or hallucinations. They respect—even revere—such experiences, through which spiritual intuition discloses insight into the nature of reality” (12). Gnostic sects were also known for criticizing institutional Christianity’s literal interpretation of Christ’s resurrection; they understood the resurrection as a metaphor for enlightenment.

As a composite of the Virgin Mother, Mary Magdalene, and pagan goddesses, Trilogy’s heroine resurrects consciousness of feminine divinity.

Viewed as a “fragment poem” on an epic scale, Trilogy reveals that H.D. gazes into isolated papyri during her post-Imagist years the same way she reconstructs Sapphic fragments in her early work. And similar to her Sapphic-inspired lyrics, Trilogy is paradoxically fictional and yet not entirely independent of the scriptural referent it distantly evokes. Both Christianity and poetry are self-revising traditions, a commonality that invites a Bakhtinian construction of incongruent sources. H.D. responds to this solicitation by positioning herself as a many-times-removed viewer of the Gospel of Mary in order to balance her desired roles of both revisionist poet and responsive reader. Most clearly, however, H.D.’s liminal allusions to the gnostic gospel illustrate the intense delight she repeatedly found in encountering and re-imagining the evasive past.
CONCLUSION

In a letter composed on June 2, 1945 to Sir Lord Hugh Dowding, H.D. wrote “there IS a connection, though the problem is one of bridge-building” to describe her interpretation of the “visions” she and Arthur Bhaduri experienced during seances. The intuitive process H.D. depicts in this letter also accurately characterizes her poetic process in Trilogy. As previously mentioned, H.D. adopts a typically modernist narrative style, but individualizes it to accommodate her prevailing identity as an occultist. Using deceptively simple language, H.D. saturates her verse with haunting, yet evasive, allusions. It is through the poet’s seemingly sparse language that she is able to convey the vague sense of “connections” between dreams, mythologies, ghosts, planetary bodies, and arcane sacred texts. H.D. avoided unequivocal references to other texts and autobiographical events; doing this would have directly contradicted the way she sensed—as opposed to knew—connections between everyday and sacred signs. For the purpose of critically interpreting Trilogy, H.D.’s enigmatic language presents the challenge of deductively establishing junctions between the epic and particular esoteric works. Drawing on autobiographical information about the poet’s esoteric involvements, however, provides a context that is useful for winnowing Trilogy’s occult creeds from the epic’s amorphous language.
In chapter one, the chronicle of H.D.’s life after her separation from Aldington has provided an autobiographical overview of both the propitious and unfortunate circumstances she encountered during the years between the Great War and World War II. This abridgement of H.D.’s personal life explains the cultural and personal factors that caused her to abandon (or partially abandon) her early Imagist aesthetic and turn to Egypt and the occult arts as sources of inspiration. The account of H.D.’s relationship with Bryher was intended to remind the reader of the fortuitousness of Bryher’s financial and literary connections, for it is easy to mistake H.D.’s anomalous aesthetic for autonomous work. Furthermore, it is critical to emphasize Bryher’s role in H.D.’s life after the Great War to show how, logistically, H.D. was able to gain first-hand knowledge of Egyptian tombs and establish a necessary network for publishing her epic after a decade of poetic silence. More importantly, an account of H.D.’s world travels with Bryher illustrates how H.D.’s early “visions” and her Egyptian pilgrimages were pivotal thresholds for her gradual journey into the occult world. Her 1919 “bell jar” experience and her 1920 Corfu “visions” were catalysts for her eventual experiments in numerology with Kenneth Macpherson and for her introduction to spiritualism through the Society for Psychical Research, Sir Lord Hugh Dowding, and Arthur Bhaduri.

Chapters two, three, and four have more heavily relied on close readings of *Trilogy* and have attempted to identify individual esoteric traditions that shape the poem’s imagery and language. Viewing the work as a mass of inter-textual bridges is crucial for recognizing connections between these occult theologies and
the epic. The stream-of-consciousness narration H.D. revises and employs in *Trilogy*, such as her Joycean/Kabbalistic anagrams, suggests that she intended for the reader to experience a similar form of intuitive “bridge building” that H.D. used in deciphering supernatural and subconscious images. In this way, one could argue that the main “agenda” in the work relates more to how H.D. wants to change the way readers of poetry understand language than to mediate the devastations of World War II. The earlier examination of the contrast between different feminist critical perspectives, as exemplified by Gubar and Morris, has been included to show that an occult reading contributes to a more varied interpretation of the work.

As has been discussed earlier, while both World Wars provided the immediate premise for her interest in spiritualism, H.D.’s esoteric involvements more directly stem from her childhood faith and her syncretist outlook. The Moravian sect H.D. grew up in had an extensive history and, despite the sequestered nature of its community in Bethlehem, promoted awareness of other faiths; this toleration can be attributed to the fact that Moravianism itself has a history of being demonized by the Church and driven underground. Additionally, the syncretist theorists Ambelain and de Rougemont significantly contribute to H.D.’s fascination with resurrecting suppressed heretical symbols. H.D. absorbed de Rougemont’s arguments concerning cross-cultural “manifestations” of the Tristan-Iseult myth and applied them to pagan goddess mythologies. As previously explored in chapter four, the implication in *Flowering of the Rod* that Mary Magdalene is a descendant from goddess cults in Jerusalem reflects the...
extensive impact of these readings. Ambelain’s *Cathedral* even more significantly informs the way H.D. uses figurative language to encode her knowledge as an “initiate” of the Cult of Mary Magdalene.

From an autobiographical point of view, the Moravians’ decree that humans experience God through divine revelation also informs H.D.’s textual exchange with Kabbalistic theology. Kabbalism’s use of exceptionally abstract symbols for representing divine and material order must have resonated with the poet, since the Moravian church depicts religious experience as a supernatural phenomenon. Moreover, both of these esoteric traditions also demand constant dedication from their followers. Recalling the Moravians’ value of industry and self-sufficiency, the mystical Kabbalism into which H.D. immersed herself requires steadfast meditation, as well as pious memorization of angelic names and planetary bodies. Its emphasis on “inner work” and ecstatic solitary prayer complements the Moravians’ emphasis on self-containment and joyous revelation.

It is important to mention H.D.’s Moravian background again because it is her earliest influence and one that continued to bolster her occult theological views that have been described in these chapters.

In many ways, an occult reading of *Trilogy* is more faithful to H.D.’s personality as a poet. Given the mystical constitution of her religious involvements, an analysis of the way *Trilogy* reflects those religious practices is, to an extent, inherently fluid. In other words, there is less of a tendency to impose an empirical reading of poem when the text and its references being analyzed are concerned almost exclusively with the supernatural world. Outside of relying on
autobiographical evidence for contextual facts, an occult interpretation, like the Kabbalah, forces the reader to transcend “the circular and constricting round of thought (Epstein 74). This type of criticism is largely similar to the protean readings that a critique of Joyce’s *Ulysses* requires. However, *Trilogy*’s deceptively simple language makes it an especially difficult modernist work to referentially trace. H.D.’s famous “alchemical technique” involves “interbreeding” discrepant myths and infusing religious language that multiple religious traditions share. Her alchemical metaphor, again, points toward the syncretist theorists whose works shaped her occult outlook more than any other school of thought.

In sum, the overarching principle guiding *Trilogy*’s occult exchanges can be summarized in Bakhtinian terms. H.D.’s epic functions first and foremost as a dialogic text in constant communication with other literatures; the *Zohar*, the *Gospel of Mary*, *Dans l’ombre des cathédrales*, and *Love in the Western World* are the works with which this paper has primarily been concerned, although there are other influential occult texts. One of the epic’s highest aims is to present language (religious language, in particular) as an encapsulation of occult history. Viewed in this light, what makes H.D.’s dialogic poem especially intriguing is that its verses are intended to communicate beyond texts. *Trilogy* is a reliquary for the underside of religious history—whose ghosts are invoked to pass through the poet’s supernatural walls that do not fall in the face of modern science.
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