

OF SWANS, THE WIND AND H.D.: AN EPISTOLARY PORTRAIT
OF THE POETIC PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a qualitative case study of a woman's poetic process. Rather than examine creativity from the outside, I have viewed it from the inside in an attempt to document my direct engagement, as an emergent woman poet, with my own writing. I have conducted personal, poetic research throughout this project in an attempt to construct a self-portrait of my own creativity.

To do so, I have not attempted to prove a thesis, or strive for scientific objectivity. As the portrait of a woman's imagination, this text narrates the winding course of a transformative journey brought about by my experimentation with a number of writing strategies, or heuristics. Because the drafting of poems is a highly unpredictable endeavour, I have drawn on various techniques, discarding one if I became blocked in order to experiment with the hoped for success of the next.

Chief among the heuristics I have employed was a year-long fictive correspondence that I entered upon with the Modernist poet, H.D. [Hilda Doolittle]. During our exchanges, I would send her my musing about the writing process along with my poetry which she would critique and send back to me. After completing this epistolary venture, I analysed what our letters revealed about what both blocked and freed my developing voice. I conducted this investigation by laying down a secondary strata of

theoretical intertexts addressed to a "Dear Reader" who symbolized my audience made up of my academic committee, in specific, and of writing theorists and scholars in general.

I then appended this two-tiered effort with an introduction, multiple conclusions, and a closing-poem. The resulting structure of my dissertation is that of a palimpsest, a genre that H.D. herself often employed to create a more fluid convergence of autobiographical and mythic motifs. Other heuristics such as key word analysis, bodywork, a photograph exercise, dreams, travel, and the retelling of a fairy tale have been called upon, as well, to further inspire this palimpsest of the poetic process.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse de doctorat consiste en une étude de cas qualitative sur le processus poétique d'une femme. Plutôt que d'examiner la créativité de l'extérieur, je l'ai envisagée e l'intérieur, en m'efforçant de rendre compte de mon engagement direct, en tant que femme poète en herbe, avec ma propre écriture. Menant une recherche personnelle et poétique tout au long de ce projet, j'ai essayé de composer un auto-portrait de ma propre créativité.

Pour ce faire, je n'ai pas cherché à prouver une thèse ou à atteindre l'objectivité scientifique. Portrait de l'imagination d'une femme, ce texte raconte le cours sinueux d'un voyage de transformations jalonné par mes expérimentations de stratégies d'écriture heuristiques. C'est parce que la composition de poèmes est un travail des plus imprévisibles que j'ai mis à profit diverses techniques, éliminant celles qui m'inhibaient dans l'espoir d'expérimenter les autres avec succès.

La principale stratégie heuristique que j'ai employée a été d'imaginer une correspondance d'un an avec la poète moderniste H.D. [Hilda Doolittle]. Pendant notre échange de lettres, je lui envoyais mes méditations sur mon processus d'écriture, accompagnées de ma poésie, et elle me renvoyait mes poèmes après en avoir fait la critique. Une fois cette aventure épistolaire terminée, j'ai analysé ce que nos lettres révélaient sur ce qui inhibait ou libérait ma voix

d'auteure naissante. Pour mener cette enquête, j'ai déposé une deuxième strate d'intertextes théoriques adressés à un "Cher lecteur," lequel symbolisait mon lectorat immédiat (les membres de mon jury de thèse) ainsi que mon lectorat plus général (théoriciens de l'écriture et autres universitaires).

J'ai complété ce travail en deux parties en y ajoutant une introduction, des conclusions multiples et un poème de clôture. Il en résulte pour ma thèse une structure en palimpseste, genre que H.D. elle-même utilisait souvent pour créer une convergence plus fluide entre des motifs autobiographiques et mythiques. Ce palimpseste du processus poétique a également inspiré par l'utilisation d'autres stratégies heuristiques, telles que l'analyse par mots clefs, le travail corporel, un travail photographique, les rêves, le voyage et la renarration d'un conte de fées.

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THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Under the brimming water among the stones
Are nine-and-fifty swans.

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trod with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build.
By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

W.B. Yeats (147-48)

INTRODUCTION: MAPPING THE FLIGHT OF WHAT HAS ALREADY FLOWN AWAY

This dissertation is a palimpsest. Literary critic Deborah Kelly Kloepfer defines such a palimpsest as "a parchment that has been written over several times, earlier versions having been imperfectly erased" (Friedman and DuPlessis 185). As such, my text's first layer consists of a year-long, fictive correspondence between the modernist poet H.D. [Hilda Doolittle] and myself. After completing this exchange, I analyse what our letters reveal about the poetic process by laying down a secondary strata of intertexts addressed to "Dear Reader." I append this two-tiered effort with three conclusions, "A Final Letter about Letters," "Another Conclusion: Doing Heuristics," and a closing poem entitled "Map of a Hospital Room." The process of composing these various layers necessitated that I go back and rewrite the introduction. In fact, it "has been written over several times." True to the conventions of the palimpsest, each version has "imperfectly erased" earlier versions so that the reader is left with both a text and its provenience.

The base mode of this dissertation is poetic rather than analytic and expository. I attempt to engage not only the intellect, but all of our faculties in this text. To do so, I rely heavily upon anecdote, metaphor, and imagery, all of which actively involve the reader by stimulating and appealing to the senses. By entertaining and giving pleasure, these literary devices liberate us to imagine and free-associate, to remember and speculate rather than merely directing us into one avenue of thought. Although a lot of theorizing will be done along the way, the overall impulse behind this undertaking is poetic. It calls upon the reader

to move at a somewhat leisurely pace similar to the one Samuel Coleridge describes in Chapter XIV of his Biographia Literaria:

The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward. (11)

My apologies to the hurried reader wishing to skim the methodologies chapter and jump to the conclusion. This text unfolds to a seasonal cadence that follows the poetic imagination's serpentine path. But take heart, Dear Reader, it can be taken up in fits and starts, a letter or two at a time.

Another unusual aspect of this qualitative case study of the poetic process is that it did not evolve from a sharply defined research question. It evolved from experimentation with what Linda Flower calls "heuristics," otherwise known as writing strategies, or "discovery procedures" (36). Contemporary composition students often employ "heuristics" drawn from a rhetorical tradition at least as old as Aristotle. Similar techniques are and have been plied by poets, novelists, and playwrights. Those accustomed to a focussed study may find my propensity for changing heuristics in midstream unusual. The reason I jump from heuristic to heuristic is that I can never deliberately trigger my own writing process. "A heuristic procedure,"

writes Flower, "is only a high-probability way to proceed" (37).

Compared to more traditional, "readerly" dissertations, this inquiry is a "writerly" one. That is, I am wending my way as most writers must do. A practical lot, we know we must keep restarting, failing, changing direction in order to stay close to our chosen medium. Abandoning one unsuccessful heuristic to try a more promising one, we must fly in the face of failure so that what is fresh and surprising can form itself.

Unlike a lab report built around one thoroughly tested procedure, this dissertation narrates the winding course of a transformative journey brought about by my experimentation with a repertoire of writing strategies. Unlike a scientific study, it does not attempt to prove a thesis, or strive for objective distance. Rather than examine creativity from the outside, I have viewed it from the inside in an attempt to document my direct engagement with my own poetic process. Like the early psychoanalysts who worked with their own dreams, I have conducted what art therapist Shaun McNiff, in his Art as Medicine: Creating a Therapy of the Imagination, calls "personal artistic research" (66). Like him, I try to avoid becoming a secondary interpreter of the experiences of others. I aim, then, to achieve what he calls "self-portraiture" or "portraiture of imagination" (67).

This palimpsest of the imagination shares certain characteristics with the picaresque novel. Poetically recursive, its structures are circular and episodic. Following the course of a year from November 1996 to November 1997, it is comprised of many episodes and discontinuous movements generated by the different heuristics that I have employed. The first of these strategies is that of **the mentor-mentee correspondence.**

While today's aspiring poets can enrol in creative writing workshops, traditionally a fledgling writer honed the craft by apprenticing with a senior practitioner through an ongoing correspondence. Rilka's Letters to a Young Poet is one example. Allen Ginsberg, while still a surprisingly conservative youth, mailed his metered verse to William Carlos Williams for the doctor's approval. Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton sent their vivid confessions to Robert Lowell, while Denise Levertov and Robert Duncan posted their rough drafts to H.D.'s Zürich address.

I have recently undergone such an apprenticeship while completing a low-residency Master of Fine Arts program whose curriculum was innovative precisely because it harkened back to this traditional, non-academic mentor-mentee correspondence. For each six-month semester, I was assigned one senior poet with whom I corresponded, mailing him or her what we called "packets" every three weeks or so. These packets, which my advisor would then respond to in writing, were comprised of the three sorts of discourses that appear in this dissertation. They included drafts of my poems, a chatty cover letter not unlike a writer's log in which I discussed my poems and my writing process, and my annotations.

I would like to describe these annotations in some depth, in order to clarify whether I have written this dissertation as a poet who dabbles in scholarship, or as a scholar who scribbles down the occasional poem. The training I received while writing my MFA annotations was closer to the former description, but with a difference: I was to conduct such scholarship in a writerly fashion. To do so, I was encouraged to read widely in contemporary and classical literature, not as a literary critic must do, but as a writer might. This meant that the annotations I was to

produce needed to reflect my passionate espousal of a given text and its writer. I was not to churn out literary criticism for its own sake, but was taught to make discoveries about language, tone, structure, imagery, and themes that would help me write a better poem.

Thus, the annotations mailed off at regular intervals to my advisor reflected my engagement, at a particular moment in my writing life, with another writer. This meant that I could no longer place the best poets, living or dead, on a remote pedestal. Rather, I was being encouraged to model my writing and life after theirs. To become a writer, I was to imagine myself as one. I was also taught to view these authors as approachable teachers and friends that could be written about and, perhaps, even to.

This leads me directly to the second key heuristic I used to shape my qualitative study of the poetic process--**the guide**. Influenced by certain exercises found in Deena Metzger's Writing for Your Life: A Guide and Companion to the Inner Worlds (199-214), I began a dialogue with an imagined mentor in the person of the dead poet, H.D. Following Metzger's suggestions, I read all of H.D.'s writings and much of what her biographers and critics had to say about her before entering into our fictive correspondence. For a delightfully extended period, I lived and breathed H.D., taking her in more by impassioned osmosis than through dry analysis. H.D. joined me for a breakfast coffee, or for a curry at the grad club; she sat with me on busses, subways, and in innumerable doctors' offices. Carrying at least one of her books with me everywhere, I was able to read through her oeuvre in an attempt to see how her mind and poetry had evolved over a lifetime.

By allowing H.D. to guide my writing, I was employing

one of humankind's oldest heuristics. Its origins can be found in those Palaeolithic palimpsests of spirit keepers and animal helpers whose shapes of crushed ochre and charcoal, etched one on top of the other, still pulsate from the pitch-dark walls of an Altamira or Lescaux. Much later in our history, Dante followed Virgil through Hell and Purgatory. Nietzsche waxed poetic under the guidance of the Persian sage, Zarathustra. And, of course, Socrates, the father of rational discourse, lost his life following such an intermediary. As McNiff explains, Socrates, along with many other ancient Greeks, believed in a "daemon" or personalized force that acted to guide one's own creative uniqueness and destiny:

For thousands of years the daemon, closely related to soul, has been known as the movement or force of creation. Experienced as a personalized and intimate agency from which both angels and demons are derived, the concept of daemon is based on an acceptance that inspiration arises spontaneously during the creative process. (89)

As a result of my being influenced by the writer-to-writer camaraderie that I had been encouraged to foster while drafting annotations for my MFA, H.D. emerges as my personalized mentor. She helped me initiate changes just as McNiff indicates such daemons are wont to do (83). For example, my slowly unfolding correspondence with H.D. abetted my gradual move away from the confessional towards the artistic.

McNiff reminds us of another important quality that characterizes an imaginal helper: such a daemon often comes spontaneously to the assistance of one who is lost (16). William Blake, for example, appeared as a "soul guide" for one of McNiff's clients who was being institutionalized for

severe depression (11). As Islamic scholar Henry Corbin explains in his treatise on the medieval philosopher Avicenna, often when one discovers him or herself "to be a stranger and alone in a world formerly familiar, a personal figure appears" who acts to symbolize one's "most intimate depths" (20).

Struggling to undertake a dissertation on the poetic process at a writing centre housed in a faculty of education whose discourses were primarily those of the social sciences, I had grown accustomed to feeling like a stranger in a strange land. For example, even before H.D. announced herself, I had begun to chafe against the rigid strictures of the doctoral dissertation. I was heartened one day to find an article by Susan W. Stinson, a University of North Carolina Professor of Dance, who does not require her doctoral students to include the formulaic review of literature section in their theses:

The "Review of Literature" does not necessarily go in Chapter II; it may even be woven throughout the paper, so that voices already in the literature speak in response to newer voices. "How do you know where to put anything? How do you decide?" my students ask. I tell them everything goes where it fits best; the choices are usually aesthetic ones, not unlike those they make in choreography. (52)

During my third semester, I took a qualitative methodologies course from a sympathetic professor who inspired me to adapt her participatory research approach to the creative writing course I was then teaching to the Cree in Northern Quebec. To do so, I spent hours negotiating with my translator and students in order to come up with a curriculum that would suit their needs. This seemed a reasonable thing to do, as my course was to be given in

Cree, a language they understood and I did not. My students appreciated being involved in the design of their own course; all was going well. So well, in fact, I considered doing a participatory research study on our course.

To do so, I needed a Cree co-researcher with whom to work, but none availed themselves. Dangling bits of earlier conversations kept haunting me. "Why do you want to study us?" "Why don't you look into your own traditions?" "What crisis, what suffering forced your families to leave Europe and come to our lands?"

Sensing I had reached an impasse, my understanding methodologies professor suggested taking time off from her course to regain my bearings. On one of my melancholic campus rambles, I happened upon an announcement for a lecture on the Homeric Helen and her twentieth-century phantoms to be given by a Norman Austin. This sounded deliciously poetic; I would attend. Austin re-introduced me to the work of the early twentieth-century modernist, H.D., whose Helen in Egypt retells the Trojan saga from Helen's point of view. Austin even made a special plea to the handful of Classics aficionados and English majors in attendance for some of us to research H.D.'s neglected oeuvre. My daemon had appeared!

Or was I being blessed with two such guides? About the same time, I discovered Anne-Louise Brookes' highly innovative Feminist Pedagogy: An Autobiographical Approach. Seeking a self-reflective standpoint, Brookes, like myself, felt uncomfortable working within the confines of the traditional dissertation. She courageously trail-blazed a new approach. Driven by a need to resist "the kinds of academic practices which separate us from ourselves," she wrote her doctorate as a series of letters to her academic committee (10). These letters allowed her to address her

committee members directly and from a "perspective of responsibility and care" (128).

Brookes' epistolary dissertation recalled the personalized packets I had exchanged with my MFA advisors. The forthrightness and flexibility of such an open-ended form would allow me to include the expository and the poetic in one text. In fact, Brookes' ground-breaking work provided me with a model from which to shape the primary layer of this palimpsest—the H.D. correspondence. More precisely, it influenced its secondary strata—the "Dear Reader" letters. Following Brookes' example, I have addressed these more theoretical meta-texts to my academic committee in an attempt to explain H.D.'s agency and support.

I draw primarily on the autobiographical theories of Marilyn R. Chandler. Using Chandler as a lens, I examine how H.D.'s tutelage enabled me to begin shaping my chaotic confessional outpourings into crafted poems. Written a few months after my exchanges with H.D. had ended, this "**Dear Reader**" heuristic also enabled me to chart how our initial discussion of the mother-poet that triggered this dissertation metamorphosed into a more genuine concern for mother-loss in all its guises.

Before closing, I would like to mention other strategies I used to initiate and shape this undertaking. Shortly after I began writing to H.D., she advised me to excavate my creative matrix, a repository of memories associated with my thirteenth year. To do so, I explored images related to this traumatic period that came to me during **bodywork** sessions. I employed two strategies. The first is Authentic Movement, a form of dance therapy that was first taught by Mary Starks Whitehouse in the early 60s. Working with a bodyworker trained in this improvisational

method, I learned to read my bodily gestures and rhythms. With her help, I began discovering how these spontaneous physical movements could reveal my own authentic images. The three-winged swan which helped crystalize my final letter about letters comes from such Authentic Movement work. The second somatic technique I used is Jin Shin Do, a form of acupressure massage that my body worker would do for me on days when I was too tired to move. One day, as she applied pressure to the area surrounding my heart, I began to receive images relating to my thirteenth year that were being released from tense chest muscles. These images formed the basis of the "old pictures" that I free-write about during the early stages of my H.D. correspondence.

I then probe these somatically-released impressions or "old pictures," through a **photographic heuristic** developed by the poet Maggie Anderson (231-235). This technique encouraged exploring such visual memories through quick shifts of perspective, metamorphosis of persona, and dislocations in time and space. Forcing myself to do this autobiographical work prematurely, I blocked because, as McNiff explains, "the intense desire to 'break through' to the core of creativity is often itself the cause of "paralysis" (60).

To escape from this quandary, I replaced the photograph heuristic with one that came with a better guarantee—**the journey**. Mired in thoughts and anxieties, I needed to break out of my mid-winter stasis. The latin saying, *solvitur ambulando*, or we'll work it out by walking, came to mind. Putting oneself in motion by undertaking a long walk, a car trip, or simply a relaxing train-ride can act almost ritualistically to renew creative flow. Knowing all this on some level, I decided to attend a yoga retreat

act almost ritualistically to renew creative flow. Knowing all this on some level, I decided to attend a yoga retreat outside of New York City. The long rhythmical train rides and the rigorous demands placed upon my body during this retreat freed me temporarily from the sterility of my academic life and from the draining demands of my family. This journey immersed me in new landscapes, while a powerful dream, incubated by my yoga camp initiation, led me back to poetry. Thus, **dreams** became another heuristic opportunity, providing me with images for poems. For example, at the climax of my yoga camp journey I received a vivid dream set at the retreat centre in which a groundhog and a cat appeared. Working with these oneiric images, I constructed persona poems about two conflicting aspects of myself—the mother and the poet.

Returning to Montreal, I developed a heuristic called **hatching the words** derived from Brookes' **key word analysis** (82). It enabled me to start a number of new poems that, nevertheless, remain unfinished. After another period of stasis, I took up a final heuristic—the **retelling of a fairy tale** (Metzger 117-182). As mentioned, my intense desire to break through to my creative matrix blocked me in the extreme. Unable to achieve anything as dramatically heroic, I was forced to discover how the creative impulse is always at work in the immediate, the quotidian, the commonplace. Unable to reconnect with past trauma, I had no choice but to let my art flow from my present feelings—those of passivity and paralysis. To do so, I chose to write about feelings of bewitchment as they are expressed in the story of "Swan Lake." Although paralysis and bewitchment were not good feelings, they were what I had to work with. As McNiff reminds us, "Over and over again, I

came to engage my state of paralysis aesthetically, a transformation began to occur. "Art replaces apathy and hopelessness with focussed action," writes McNiff (146). "Through art," just as he continues, "I was able to bring grace into my life" (36).

By identifying with "Swan Lake's" archetypal state of bewitchment, I was able to connect the present with the mythic in an act that generated, as we shall see, more poetry than any other heuristic in my dissertation. Speaking through the personae of the Swan Princess and Prince enabled me to dialogue with certain masculine and feminine aspects of myself, while allowing me to move beyond a private towards a more public vision. In so doing, I began to empathize with voices other than my own.

I hope this brief introduction will provide you with a map to chart your course through the poetic process explored in this epistolary palimpsest. I hope you will have patience with my writerly need to structure it around not one, but a whole repertoire of writing strategies. I hope, too, that this poetic portrait of the imagination will show how our unseizable creativity always darts ahead of any thoughts and reflections we might have about it. As Carl Jung reminds us, the bird always flies before we can explain its mystery (Psyche and Symbol 199).

THE LETTERS

REMEMBRANCE DAY BEGINNINGS

These letters from November 11, 1996 through January 6, 1997 were begun* on the day we remember our war dead. November 11th is also St. Martin's Day when the Irish would kill a pig to honour Caillech, goddess of winter.

I see on myself the shaggy cloak of age—
no, I am wrong: grey is the hair
that grows through my skin,
like the lichen on an old tree.

From "Caillech Bérrí." (Deane 34).

* Each of the following, seasonal groupings of letters was "unintentionally" begun on or around an ancient astronomical, or agricultural festival that shaped the European notion of a yearly cycle.

November 12, 1996

Dear H.D.,

So glad to have met you on Parson's Beach. It was dawn. I was catching my breath, having just run my Rottweiler, and could barely make you out. Just a dot, originating where? Perhaps from the great, Victorian cottage on the point?

Yes, you began as a dot. Slowly you advanced down the empty beach where I sat lulled by the drag of the waves. I had settled down on a dune, as if awaiting you. As you drew closer, my dog suddenly bolted towards the surf, pursuing something. A sandpiper? A water sprite? I ran through a patch of fog to fetch her back, and that is how we really met. You stopped like a bemused sleep-walker to watch me drag my drenched companion out of the surf. (Water in her ears gives her bad infections.) At first indistinct, you began drawing closer, your pretence common enough: pat the dog and ask her name. "Freya. The Nordic goddess, Freya."

"Ah, Freya!" you said, giving it the proper German pronunciation.

As the climbing sun burns off the last gauzy bits of fog enveloping your form, I begin to make you out: a long lilac skirt and a vest embroidered with meanders and flowery motifs soften your largeness. Light glints off the silver work of bracelets that jangle along a lean wrist.

Restlessly, you brush back a lock of bobbed, white hair to expose high cheek bones, a gaunt, determined face. I offer to get you a beach chair from the car, but you refuse, quickly sitting down beside me with the agility of a person much younger than yourself, as if we had no time to lose.

And so we do not make small talk, but address only the largest of subjects. In fact, our conversation reminds me of

one that often took place at your family dinner table, when your mother would suddenly announce:

"Your father is about to speak!" Silence immediately ensued. Then in a slow and deep voice, and with his eyes fixed on nothing, as Ezra Pound said, just above, nothing nearer than the moon, he said what he had to say. (Guest 17)

"Why do you need to write poetry," you immediately ask me?

"Oh, Libra in my mid-heaven—the sign of a poet," I say, half-joking about the fact that my horoscope indicates poetic abilities.

"But," you remind me, "it takes more than a sign. What drives you?"

"It's what I do. Poetry is my passion, enabling me to enter a dreamy space, a place of inner visions. It is, as you once said, the way "to make real to myself what is most real" (Helen in Egypt ix). Poetic discourse allows me to dramatize images and episodes drawn from my dreams, fantasies, emotions, and bodily sensations. It is also the best method I have for bringing my inner world to consciousness."

"You know," you say, "I believe in a world that exists outside of time and space as we know it. I also believe in a divine plan."

"Yes, I know," I say, being polite, although really I don't have a clue. "This is so evident from your work and from how you finally could not continue with Freud, as I could not with my psychoanalyst."

"It is important for you to ask at this time, 'How does my poetry fit into such a divine plan?'"

"The divine plan? Ah," I manage, "as the patriarchy has always depicted, or expressed it, it has become devoid of

mother's point of view. I guess my contribution could be to explore the poetic processes from the vantage of the mother-poet."

(Recently I have been reading Teri Degler's The Fiery Muse: Creativity and the Spiritual Quest, in which she discusses Milton's evocation of the muse (160-62). He calls out for inspiration at the beginning of Paradise Lost:

Sing Heav'nly Muse

. I thence

Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song,
That, with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime

.

That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,

And justifie the wayes of God to men. (1.6-26;
8-9)

Degler points out that Milton "doesn't frantically beseech or passionately plead; he just asks" (160) his muse for aid. She also underlines the "unabashed boldness" that characterizes Milton's relationship with his muse:

He doesn't shyly ask the muse to help him write some pretty little piece of poetry. . . . He even assumes, with the help of the Holy Spirit, that he can accomplish what countless others have failed at: an explanation of God's mysterious ways that the human race will understand. No small task!
(162)

Quite frankly, quoting this passage provokes my anxiety. How can I model myself after Milton? I lack his self-confidence and ambition. I am unsure of my purpose, as

you were in your early work. Yet, remarkably, your hesitancy and low self-esteem became your very topic. Facing yourself, you wrote openly about your own uncertainty, conflicts, and fears.)

Brushing bits of sand from the crinkles of your lilac cottons, you lean closer, your sea-grey eyes examining mine. "How can you use your poetic gifts to make the world a better place?"

"I don't know . . . let me think for a minute—to help other women who, like myself, are struggling to hone their powers of vision and language. I would do so by cultivating my abilities as a teacher, scholar, seer, and poet. Like Audre Lorde, I believe that poetry can provide the revolutionary with a fertile vision. It

forms the quality of the light within which we predict our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. (Lorde 37)

"This is a lot for this morning, and the sun is already hot. I must be getting back to the Point for breakfast; they will be expecting me, but write me, now and again, c/o of The Parson Family, Kennebunk, Maine—everyone knows who they are. You won't have any trouble getting it delivered. I am a recluse, you know, and may not be able to meet with you again," you add suddenly standing, shaking the sand from your skirt.

You retreat without further comment up the strand, stopping with eyes fixed on nothing or, at other times, to watch the watery outline of a new moon blur over the horizon and into the rising sea. **CH**

Response to Letter of November 12, 1996

Dear Reader:

Written in early November, this opening letter poses a number of questions which represent awkward attempts to initiate dialogue, establish a thesis, begin a search. Can I use my gifts to make the world a better place? Do I want to cultivate Miltonic aspirations? These are a few of my conversation openers, but the most central is, *what drives me to write?*

Chandler discusses the importance of asking questions that might lead to other questions, queries that might catalyse the poetic process:

The task of the questioner is less to elicit a right answer than to find the "right questions." The "right questions" heal because they appeal to the whole person; to form an answer one must integrate the parts of him-or herself that have been fragmented and bring them together in the frame of reference established by the question. Healing depends, however, on finding the "right questions." (113)

The question about what drives me to write points the way towards issues of fragmentation and hoped-for healing. It asks me to examine my motives and wavering will. Discussing the work of "intensive journal" therapist, Ira Progoff, Chandler summarizes his belief that

thought does not begin with statements . . . but with questions. Good questions are endlessly generative and lead to surprises. They are catalysts, suggesting new ways of organizing or connecting different aspects of experience. (114)

Further, as we shall see, "different stages in questioning reflect different needs" and also "produce different answers" (116). Chandler goes on to distinguish different types of questions and their answers:

"What," "when," and "where" questions yield facts; "why" questions yield speculations; "how" questions trace connections. The thematic patterns of an autobiography can be traced in terms of what questions are being posed. (116)

In my first letter, my primary concern is a "what" question—what drives me to write? This suggests that I am looking for a factual answer. Other of my questions ask "how" and are searching for connections: how to aspire to great things, how to use my writing to help others, etc.

The letter-writing format itself encourages connections, since in the give-and-take of its dialogue questions are raised and answers attempted. The conversing I do with the H.D. persona can be seen as an act of healing. Chandler continues discussing Progoff:

Commenting upon the healing aspects of writing, Progoff claims that the dialogue format makes the unconscious accessible in a peculiarly direct way: in the encounter between two assumed personae—the inquiring and the answering selves—something new, a third aspect of self, emerges. This process can bring to light unacknowledged things that hide and fester, repressing truths and causing sickness.

(117)

Chandler goes on to say that "sometimes voices of the dead figure—in the autobiographical dialogue" (120). The significance that H.D. is a dead (mother) poet cannot be underestimated, although I did not, at the onset, consciously characterize her as such. Her appearance also

gives credence to the old Celtic belief, as explained by Winter Cymraes, "that those poets who had gone before inhabit the realms between the worlds, overlapping into ours so that the old songs and stories will be heard and repeated" (1-2).

As we saw, H.D. begins as "just a dot, originating where"? Mysteriously, she materializes out of sea-fog, dispenses with small talk, and begins conversing "right away about the largest of subjects." As such, she acts as an archetypal guiding spirit who is "not quite of this world." Milton evoked a similar "Spirit" in Paradise Lost (1.17; 9). Clearly from the start, the voices of the dead (mothers) are speaking.

The other striking thing is the fictional tone of this opening letter. In it, I am dramatizing how the creative process might work. I am depicting how one calls up images in the mind's eye. At first they appear as blurry dots, but when concentrated upon become clearer as do those of H.D. A model for this process that engages the inner senses in active imagining can be found in a Yeats' poem, "The Magi":

Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye,
 In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale
unsatisfied ones
 Appear and disappear in the blue depths of the sky
 With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten
stones. (141)

Like the Magi, H.D. appears and disappears in beach fog. I establish her presence by focussing on such concrete details as her skirt and bangles; Yeats does the same through his exacting description of the "stiff, painted clothes" and "rain-beaten stones." Although H.D. will exist primarily as an epistolary voice throughout this dissertation, I must initially see her body, face, and what

she is wearing. I need concrete proofs in order to start believing in and dreaming about our relationship. For this reason, I place her in a realistic setting—a beach in Maine that I often visit.

John Gardner reminds us in The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers that the reader must be "regularly presented with proofs—in the form of closely observed details—that what is said to be happening is really happening" (26). "The importance of physical detail," he explains, "is that it creates for us a kind of dream, a rich vivid play of the mind. We read on—dream on—not passively," he says, "but actively" (30-31). I would add that for an author to engage "actively" in the writing of a given text, she must convince not only her readers, but herself of the validity of her narrative creations.

Immediately launching into an academic exchange would not have convinced me that I was addressing H.D. Being somewhat literal-minded, I need to experience H.D. with my senses, as well as with my intellect. As such, I set about to conjure her up, as Coleridge did his "characters supernatural" from those "shadows of imagination," by way of an act which, as he reminds us in his "Preface to the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads," necessitates a "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (6; ch.14). But once H.D. materializes, I call upon scholarly sources to legitimize her. Quoting from her biographer, Barbara Guest, I try to substantiate that H.D. might abruptly leap into a serious discussion because her eccentric astronomer-father often did so at the dinner table. This scholarly "proof" adds credence to my fictional opening. Was I feeling uneasy about beginning my doctoral dissertation as a story, rather than as an essay?

Describing how autobiographers such as Adrienne Rich or Christa Wolf choose to work in similar "hybrid forms" (142), Chandler lists the sorts of fluctuations found in such autobiographical texts as between the fictive, the expository, and even the therapeutic. Admittedly, Dear Reader, starting a dissertation in a fictional mode is a leap of faith, but as Chandler reassuringly states, "there are no truths, only narrative structures" (138).

November 13, 1996

Dear Charlotte,

Our August encounter was fortuitous. It got me out on the beach, wet and sandy, qualities I haven't considered in some time.

Rest assured, I am an experienced mentor—Bryher, my life-long companion, always played the younger pupil to my accomplished artist. She even presented me to her wealthy parents, Sir John and Lady Ellerman, "as a chaperone, an older woman who would safely lead Bryher out into the world" (Guest 117). Going a step further, my once-upon-a-time Bloomsbury friend, John Cournos, in his insightful, if somewhat degrading parody of me, entitled Miranda Masters, writes that at times I acted as a daemon, or

an invisible being who takes possession of one, an *Alter-Ego*, whose presence you feel, who urges you to do the things that are in you to do, though they may seem utterly mad to the person who doesn't understand. (164)

Let's see, what can I do for you? Or to put it another way, why do you need to write poetry? Yes, you sense your gift, given confirmation by your astrological chart, as I sensed a similar calling, one that I wrote about in The Gift. The other little girls in my immediate family had all died in childhood—one even burnt to death at Christmas because her hooped skirts caught on fire! I was the girl who must make up for these lost ones. I felt a great responsibility early on, one that you did not feel so acutely. Also, my father encouraged my talents, while your father felt threatened by yours. You discovered your poetic gifts at Wheaton College, by default—you wanted to take

other courses like music appreciation or anthropology, but they were over-enrolled. You got into your third choice, a creative writing workshop in which you eventually drafted a poem about Irena, your caretaker who had died when you were thirteen. The teacher, a journalist on loan from the Boston Herald, recognized the authenticity of this poem and encouraged your writing.

Try now to remember the genesis of your poetic career, the poem you wrote to Irena, which goes something like this:

You died at the muddy end
of a rutted drive
near a mill pond—
thirsty,

and you died unkempt
as your blueberry patch
where I used to kneel,
eating my fill.

You died
perfumed with cat piss
and mouldy hay,

without a man
to hitch up a plough
or pick up a hammer.

The wind
undid your shingles
one by one
undressing you,

and the roof
 came down
 around you,

and you died
 with crows in your hair
 and rain in your mouth
 and wind in the chimney.

Fires went out,
 windows broke
 and mice even now
 eat the straw in your cot. (Hussey 15)

The motive behind this poem is what drives you to write. It is a need to voice the loss that you felt on the threshold of adolescence. These feelings originated when you were sent away to a Quaker boarding school in Philadelphia, and Irena's job as your nanny came to an end. After spending nearly 10 years together, you were being expelled from your childhood Eden. Sent away, you survived and Irena died shortly afterwards. You must continue excavating this boarded-over well like the one on her dilapidated farm, covered with an enchanted thicket of brambles and blackberries that you once foraged as a country child.

And you are right to speak of a poetry of "revelation," or if you wish to use a more Quaker-Moravian turn of phrase, a poetry of witness. You must bear witness to what happened to you and Irena and to the pain that ensued. Keep writing: you will find your poetic process progressing in waves, or spirals, but never in a straight line. Your task is to witness the peaks of insight and troughs of denial as they flow through you. **HD**

Response to letter of November 13, 1996

Dear Reader:

H.D.'s first letter delineates what Chandler, in A Healing Art: Regeneration Through Autobiography, refers to as those "core questions. . . . that break taboos, penetrate forbidden territories, name hidden things, and challenge 'basic beliefs" (111). H.D. asks, "why do you need to write poetry?" (11). Her own need was occasioned, she says, by the death of the other little girls in her immediate family. She began writing to "make up for these lost ones." H.D. then quotes my "first" poem, an elegy for Irena, that also sought to "make up for" a lost one. Thus, "pain and loss," similar to that experienced by H.D., drive me to write.

Educational theorist and sexual abuse survivor, Anne-Louise Brookes, in attempting to draft her doctorate, also asked herself what "are some of the crises which lead me to write a thesis" (35)? Chandler notes that autobiography often springs from a trauma "beyond all telling" (3). Brookes' trauma was one of sexual abuse. She confesses, "I could neither complete my thesis nor do the work of teaching until I wrote my abuse stories" (85).

Concentration camp survivor Elie Wiesel and Vera Brittain, an English woman who recorded her W.W.I experiences, wrote similar stark autobiographies. These "crisis narratives" (Chandler ix) provided the raw data from which to draft the numerous works of their fiction that would follow. For example, Chandler reports that Brittain "tried at first to put the autobiographical material into a novel, but came to feel that only by telling her 'true story' directly and starkly could she fulfil her own obligation to bear witness" (56).

H.D. urges me to write "a poetry of witness." I must "bear witness to this deeply impacted pain" for myself and for the dead ones. Further, if I cannot immediately confront this trauma "beyond all telling" (Chandler 3), I can begin by recording "the peaks of insight and the troughs of denial" —a statement that describes the poetic process that this thesis will track.

Shortly before beginning my graduate studies, I had written the following poem, entitled "The Education of a Young Poet," as if already searching for an answer to H.D.'s query about my need to write poetry:

What brought me to poetry? Desire.

My roommate's for her Classics professor, Sam
Allen.

Alone, discussing the orgy, Liz leaned
sylphlike over coffee-stained desks
while translating Aristophanes' farting
and belching sequences. Sam's talent:
interpreting the caress of an indolent slave,
Liz's the tickle of an ostrich feather
at the back of the throat. Gag reflex.
She drags me along to his East Village flat
where the wife hovers like a Hera
snuffing out our candles.

Beneath a last flickering halo,
I feign sleep on folding cot
amid piles of Greek tragedies,
while Liz tokes grass. Conspicuously
choking as if on a small bone,
she solo-dances smoothing the raw
silk of her negligee to cling
like second skin. She makes small,

reassuring adjustment (I'd give anything
to be in Classics, desirous Sappho!)
patting down panels of futuristic blue
over breast bone, erect nipples.

Finally Sam delivers himself
creeping past the Janis Joplin
that screams, "Come on" like a fury
blossoming out of a humid wall;
merging hermaphroditic shadows
that sweep over my tingling skin
get sucked into a glare of bathroom light.

In their steamy wake, I splaying open books,
some pristine, some dog-eared, some bandaged with
tape lazing about me on their demotic backs.

Grabbing the spine of one that flops shut,
I begin stroking its hide
of slaughtered calf, tooled with raised welts
like the shoulders of some Cymian slave
and cut with this stamp:

Songs of Innocence and of Experience:

Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul

that I will dream of in cursive fits and starts,
etching erotic scripts
on the Empire State Building all night long.

Here, I appear as the voyeuristic ingenue who must
resort to her sense of humour. I cannot go deeper, or
further back in time. The Celtic slave or slaughtered calf,
whose hide covers the above mentioned copy of William Blake,
stands-in for the sacrificed one and thereby masks my loss
of Irena. I have not yet identified my thirteenth year as a

creative matrix. I am writing about my first years away at college where, through a room-mate, I was introduced to the East Village poetry scene, Allen Ginsburg, the Fugs, et. al. This was a formative period intellectually if not emotionally. These juicy jaunts to the Village brought poetry alive for me as my staid education in a New England women's seminary never could.

My omniscient muse, H.D., overlooks this memoir of the 60s for a much earlier poem written during these college years. Completely lacking in the humour that typifies "The Education of a Young Poet," "Just Irena" is a much simpler text by a young co-ed. H.D. singles out this awkward undergraduate poem, believing it contains vestiges of my "authentic" voice.

In keeping with the impulse to write an autobiographical poem, H.D. counsels me not to retell my whole life story, but to focus on a central incident—the death of Irena. One of the common features of autobiographies, writes Chandler,

is their frequent focus upon a single critical period rather than upon the entire span of years from childhood onward. In a sense, every autobiography is a story of crisis, in that it recounts change, turning points, conversions, critical lettings-go and breaks with the past. (9)

Irena's death signalled the end of my sheltered middle-class childhood. I left home for good at age 13.

H.D., then, is helping me map out a site for further poetic excavation. As Chandler somewhat hopefully explains, "to draw perimeters around a period of crisis is the beginning of authorial control" (160).

November 15, 1996

Dear H.D.,

Thanks for your insightful reply. Rereading your letter as my dog sunbathes in a welcome patch of late fall sunlight, I feel encouraged. You are helping me focus on who I must write about—Irena.

I have been thinking about how the body can help us do the sort of remembering that you are asking me to do. You, yourself, wrote about the subtle corporeality of the creative act in Notes on Thought and Vision, saying:

When a creative scientist, artist or philosopher has been for some hours or days intent on his work, his mind often takes on an almost physical character. That is, his mind becomes his real body. (18)

Recuperating on the Scilly Islands from your childbirth trauma in 1919, you experienced what felt like "a cap of consciousness over your head" or, "like, water, transparent, fluid yet with definite body, contained in a definite space. It is like a closed sea-plant, jelly-fish or anemone" (18-19).

In this trance-state, you perceived this "serpent" (40), or jelly-fishlike mind extend down through your whole body. This "jelly-fish" consciousness had "long feelers" that permeated "down and through the body," coming out from and encircling the body like "the long, floating tentacles" (19). Your description suggests what Sanskrit scholar Swami Veda Bharati calls a "subtle body" that runs in three channels from the base of the spine to the nostrils:

Ida and *pingala*, the left stream and the right stream, are pictured as two snakes wrapped around a central pole. This is the caduceus. Naturally,

these three channels have to interact; in the vicinity of those interactions, eddies and whorls are created. These are the chakras. (61)

As your kundilini-like awakening continued, you envisioned what you describe as the opening of the head and seemingly navel chakras:

I first realised this state of consciousness in my head. I visualise it just as well, now, centered in the love-region of the body or placed like a foetus in the body. (Notes 19)

From these visceral awakenings, you came to define two kinds of artistic vision:

Vision is of two kinds—vision of the womb and vision of the brain. In vision of the brain, the region of consciousness is above and about the head; when the centre of consciousness shifts and the jelly-fish is in the body (I visualise it in my case lying on the left side with the streamers or feelers floating up toward the brain), we have vision of the womb or love-vision. (20)

This definition emphasizes not only the cerebral, but also the visceral aspect of creativity. There is a seat of creativity not only in the brain, but in the belly, the site of a "love-vision." "We cannot have spirit without body, the body of nature," you write, "or the body of individual men and women" (48). Degler also points to "a decidedly erotic component in . . . spiritual experiences and bursts of creative expression" (100).

Your conclusion? One must care for his/her body as one would a field, in order that the "seed or spirit" of our creativity can flourish:

No man by thought can make the grain sprout
or the acorn break its shell. No man by
intellectual striving can make his spirit expand.

But every man can till the field, can clear
weeds from about the stems of flowers.

Every man can water his own little plot, can
strive to quiet down the overwrought tension of
his body. (Notes 52)

But how to "quiet down the overwrought tension" of the
body, so that we can remember and create? Degler suggests
doing bodywork and breathing exercises (56).

Yesterday, Wednesday, I went to a yoga class, followed
by lunch with a fellow doctoral student. I mentioned that
you had directed me back to the first "real" poem I had
written. After reading "Just Irena," my friend said that
this early poem reminded her of an Andrew Wyeth landscape.
Long ago in my psychoanalysis, I had made a similar
connection: Irena's run-down Maine farm reminded me of those
Wyeth had painted. Writing about Wyeth's collection,
Christina's World, then, might open pandora's box.

Later that afternoon, I went for my weekly body-work
session. S.B., my masseuse-movement therapist, helps me to
lie down on her "magic table." Draping me with a soft green
blanket, she asks, "Where shall I start today?"

"This part," I say, running my hand up from my breast
bone to my throat (heart to throat chakra).

S.B. often does acupressure for me. Today she places
her warm hand on my upper chest. I feel an irresistible urge
to cough. No! Not in her face! I tense.

"Is the alligator here?", she jokes softly, referring
to an earlier dream that had occurred to me on Halloween
morning:

Holding her hand, I step outside with Zoë, my seven year old, inviting her to go for a swim in a smallish pond of still, near-to-stagnant water. In its depths are blocky, submerged objects. Suddenly a giant crocodile bursts to the surface with a toothy, gaping mouth. I push Zoë behind me, placing myself in the croc's path. Zoë escapes up the embankment and hides behind a door, peering out to cry, "Mommie! Mommie!" The croc lunges, biting me in the heart. I awake screaming.

Telling S.B. this dream, I kept pounding punitively on my own chest where the Death Dealing One had focussed its attack. Now when I cough, S.B. feels stopped short by its inhibitory force. She persists, resting her hand calmly on my upper chest despite my off-and-on, rather violent coughing fits; I began to relax.

Calming down, I receive a strong impression: it is as if I have stepped inside the Wyeth painting of crippled Christina. I am now watching her crawl that vast distance up the empty field to her stark farm house. This scene wells up from my chest, somewhat darker than the original canvas, bringing me to tears. At first, dry convulsions shake me, but gradually I am able to tell S.B. many things: the painting makes me feel homesick, as if I were a cripple, far from home, and unable to crawl to safety.



"Christina's World" by Andrew Wyeth,
courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art,
New York City. © Andrew Wyeth

The inner vision shifts to an imagined version of the only photo that I have of Irena. (The composition of the actual snapshot depicted below is different). In my imaginings, she stands poker straight in front of a low rock wall in the backyard of our Wells, Maine cottage. A work apron covers her shapeless, cotton frock. Her white hair straggles out from a knot at the nape of her neck. She is unadorned, in her country way, except for the support hose covering her swollen legs. Muffin, our fat wirehaired terrier, sits at her corduroy slippered feet.



This inscape fades into a final scene: the last time I saw Irena. She has open sores on her legs. Sitting on the edge of her hospital bed and obviously in intense pain, she is asking my mother for a basin to throw up in.

I am mentioning this body-work session because it illustrates how attending to those "over-wrought" tensions of the body can release memories and emotions held in its rigid musculature. Body-work is helping me to reconnect with my creative nexus as you advise me to do.

Need to stop now. The dog is whining to go out. We'll walk to the mail box on Parc and post this to you. CH

Response to letter of November 15, 1996

Dear Reader:

This letter announces the beginning of a year-long struggle to follow H.D.'s advice. Earlier during some ten years of a psychoanalysis, I had learned that it is hard to return to the distant past. I still cannot find my way to Irena's grave. Consequently, the death theme reappears with my mention of how H.D. and the newly born Perdita escape death for the Scilly Islands. World War I and its aftermath provide the creative confluence from which H.D.'s work continued to flow. Eager to analyse someone else's life-crisis, I am not ready to explore how my own impacts upon my poetic process.

Of course there is the problem of scanty recollections. Chandler explains that "often the effect of crisis is to numb the imagination," as Wiesel's internment in Auschwitz did to him (67). And fear is another roadblock. Chandler mentions that Adrienne Rich's poem, "Diving into the Wreck," dramatizes how "remembering is dangerous" (45). Rich's dive into "the Wreck" provides an apt metaphor for describing the work of the poet-autobiographer (Poetry and Prose 53).

Chandler explains that

once crisis is past and the vestiges mercifully
buried under obscuring layers of intervening time,
it takes an act of exceptional courage, and a
strong need, to risk reopening old wounds. (45)

Poised to go back into the wounds received during her unhappy marriage, Rich dons equipment to keep from drowning:

I put on
the body-armour of black rubber
the absurd flippers

the grave and awkward mask.
 I am having to do this
 not like Cousteau with his
 assiduous team
 aboard the sun-flooded schooner
 but here alone. (Poetry and Prose 53)

The dive is perilous because it "must be undertaken alone" (Chandler 45). Rich explains:

First the air is blue and then
 it is bluer and then green and then
 black I am blacking out and yet
 my mask is powerful
 it pumps my blood with power.
 (Poetry and Prose 54)

The "mask" grants unpredictable power: the poet must assume a poetic persona, readying herself to receive the accompanying forces that may speak through it. There are no guarantees. In spite of her potent mask, Rich could black out like an amnesiac or, at least, lose track of her intent:

And now: it is easy to forget
 what I came for
 among so many who have always
 lived here (54)

A similar loss of resolve will come to plague me as this dissertation progresses.

Passing through "the ribs of the disaster," Rich manages to confront

the thing I came for:
 the wreck and not the story of the wreck
 the thing itself and not the myth
 the drowned face always staring
 towards the sun
 the evidence of damage

worn by salt and sway into this threadbare
beauty (54)

In the deepest layers of the wound, one finds nothing as coherent as "story" or "myth." Instead of answers to the question of how everything connects, one finds pieces to the puzzle of what? What resides in the depths of the wound? Scant "evidence." Traces of "the thing."

Typically in a crisis journal, reports Chandler, the "units of thought are brief—often single unconnected sentences" (32). One finds "abrupt" beginnings and endings, a lack of chronological order, and numerous self-contradictions (32). The note-like compression of C.S. Lewis's A Grief Observed comes to mind, along with the ragged thoughts of Handke's A Sorrow Beyond Dreams, and the telegraphic vignettes of Wiesel's Night.

The dangers of autobiographical reconstruction are many: forgetfulness, sentimentality, paralysis, despair, even madness. Am I, too, going astray?

The "intellectual" discussion of yoga that opens my November 15th letter is a red herring of sorts. One of the first acts of resistance I undertook after Irena's death was to offer my support to the cause of an aspiring beatnik, a boy at my boarding school who refused to practice the required two-and-a-half hours per day of soccer. Arguing that soccer was a violently competitive sport, he wanted to practice yoga on his own. I became his only yoga student, or rather shared a tattered book of yoga exercises with him. Was I championing the cause of an under-dog to amend the fact that Irena and myself had been marginalized outcasts? At any rate, this act of resistance was one of the most memorable events from my thirteenth year, or, to be more precise, was one of the few that I can successfully recall.

Thus, my letter about yoga, resonating as it does back

to my boarding school days, acts to side-step the central crisis of Irena's death. My discussion of yoga exists on the periphery of a wound that cannot as yet be re-entered. Yoga, on the other hand, has always provided me with a way to calm myself during difficult periods as it did when, at boarding school, I developed anorexia and an ovarian cyst. My body knew that something was amiss.

The body is a portal into the wound, a ladder by which to climb down into the wreck. Sexual abuse survivor Anne-Louise Brookes came to realize that

abuse is learned as body memory. It is therefore difficult to unlearn at the level of cognition only. A number of abuse survivors have spoken to me about the need for body therapy as a means of releasing learned trauma. This kind of therapy might include dance or exercise. (37)

Lying on S.B.'s massage table, or moving in a light trance around her sunlit studio, I would converse with my bodily intelligence. I would listen to its impulses, sensations, images, and emotions. That day when S.B. worked along my heart meridian, I received three key images: the Wyeth painting of Christina's famed crawl across that stubbly field, a photograph of Irena in the backyard of our Wells' cottage, and a memory of her death-bed scene. These inscapes have been locked for years in bodily memory.

November 18, 1996

Dear Charlotte,

Interesting that your last letter mentions wounds—the wound as creative source. You know in the Moravian religion in which I was raised, there were many hymns that addressed the ritual of "Christ's suffering, scars, and wounds," (Robinson 82). For the Moravians, such a woundology was close to a morbid obsession. In some of these hymns, Christ was feminized such that the wounds on his sides became like little wombs out of which souls were born. In this remembered hymn, Christ's wounds represent both the feminine and the genital:

If those dear little wounds I did know,
Which now with blood's juice overflow,
What else could satisfy me?
But Blood, that's good
Still to wash me, and refresh me;
In that Ocean,
I do ever find my potion. (Sessler 140)

Ah yes! And I remember singing this in church:

My soul feeds on roses sweet,
When she smells wounds-flavour,
And reviews her safe retreat
In thy grave, my Saviour.

Draw us to thee, and we may come
Into thy wound's deep places,
Where hidden is the honey-comb
Of thy sweet love's embraces. (Sessler 128)

And as Janice S. Robinson has pointed out, my poem "Hymen" still resonates with this Moravian symbolism (89):

There with his honey-seeking lips
 The bee clings close and warmly sips,
 And seeks with honey-thighs to sway
 And drink the very flower away.

(Ah, stern the petals drawing back;
 Ah rare, ah virginal her breath!)

Crimson, with honey-seeking lips,
 The sun lies hot across his back
 The gold is flecked across his wings.
 Quivering he sways and quivering clings
 (Ah, rare her shoulders drawing back!)

One moment, then the plunderer slips
 Between the purple flower-lips.

(Collected Poems 109)

This sexualized wound imagery was part of my early heritage. I understand, then, what happened to you on S.B.'s "magic table"—you entered a wound/womb in your own body/psyche. The perfume, or "wounds-flavour" (Sessler 128), released once you contacted this bodily source is what I call the "old pictures." I spent much of my career writing about similar primal images that sprang from psychic scars received during World War I—a stillborn child and the near-death from influenza of myself and my infant daughter, followed upon by my husband's desertion of us in 1919. Images of this suffering grew to larger-than-life proportions. After my trip to Egypt in 1923 to visit the newly excavated tomb of King Tutankhamen, I began likening these memories of wounding to hieroglyphs. As Robinson explains, "the hieroglyph appealed to H.D.'s imagination because the sensation experienced and recorded sensually is

disproportionate in size to the object through which that sensation is received" (368).

I feel that you too will unearth emotions "disproportionate in size" to those "old pictures"—the Wyeth painting of Christina, the photo of Irena and Muffin, and your last memory of Irena. Try to render these hieroglyphs not by telling why they occurred, but by presenting what ensued physically and psychically as they occurred. Renact these formative sensations. Photograph them from as many different angles as is possible. Trained as an Imagist and then as a film-maker, I myself sought a poetry that would permit "simultaneous perceptions of the event presented" (Robinson 74). I would advise that you do the same. And, because these primal pictures appeared when you were in a state of acute physical sensitization, stay in touch with your bodily intelligence as you work further on this material. **HD**

Response to letter of November 18, 1996

Dear Reader:

In this letter, H.D. is encouraging me not just to cry into my wounds, but to sing out of them. Although sounding unnecessarily morbid, her childhood Moravian hymns underline a way of proceeding. What one finds if one can summon the courage to re-enter the "wound's deep places" (Sessler 128) are the "old pictures"—hieroglyphic memory traces embedded in our bodies not unlike the "stigmata" that Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud found troubling certain hysterics (15). While likening these patients to a Lady MacBeth who must "wash her hands repeatedly," Breuer and Freud describe them as suffering from "nervous symptoms," such as "pains and vasomotor phenomena and perhaps purely motor convulsive attacks" (245). Treated by Freud in Vienna, H.D. tried piecing together similar memory traces during their sessions: We "patiently and meticulously patch together odds and ends of our picture puzzle," writes H.D. of her analysis (Tribute 119). In Helen in Egypt, she describes this "picture puzzle" as composed of

the million personal things,
things remembered, forgotten
remembered again, assembled
and re-assembled in different order. (289)

Memory is described as "the million personal things" that can be "assembled / and re-assembled" as one might a photographic collage. H.D. would have me construct such an assemblage of remembrances. H.D. critic Charlotte Mandel sees these hieroglyphic recollections residing "beyond the surface view understood by the intellectual mind" that she calls "something beyond something" (44). Such imagery allows

us to express the non-linear and irrational qualities that typify traumatic memories. Chandler explains:

Pushed [by trauma] to the limits of rational discourse, writers seize upon images that will bypass the rational faculty and convey the multi-dimensionality of events and feelings, healing by direct appeal to imaginative and visceral apprehension. (37)

German author and playwright Peter Handke takes an even more extreme stance in regards to language and trauma. In his autobiography, A Sorrow Beyond Dreams, he describes how language failed him when he tried to express the grief his 52-year old mother's suicide evoked. Language, Handke says, is an external discourse. It could never capture his feelings of loss, or those of his mother's suicidal despair, which he sees as residing in an indescribable, inner world. Handke, in introducing us to A Sorrow Beyond Dreams, states:

In stories we often read that something or other is "unnamable" or "indescribable"; ordinarily this strikes me as a cheap excuse. This story, however, is really about the nameless, about speechless moments of terror. It is about moments when the mind boggles with horror, states of fear so brief that speech always comes too late; about dream happenings so gruesome that the mind perceives them physically as worms. The blood curdles, the breath catches, "a cold chill crept up my back, my hair stood on end"—states experienced while listening to a ghost story, while turning on a water faucet that you can quickly turn off again, on the street in the evening with beer bottle in one hand; in short, it is a record of states, not a well-rounded story with an anticipated, hence

comforting, end. (30-31)

In such "states" of trauma an "extreme need to communicate coincides with extreme speechlessness" (Handke 31). Less pessimistic than Handke, Chandler, like Rich and Brookes, would place greater faith in the image's recuperative power. Images, Chandler writes, can provide a "unity [that] is achieved not so much through structures as through the repetition and resonance of certain centralizing motifs" (36). Her emphasis on "repetition and resonance" echoes H.D.'s suggestion to approach the "old pictures" like a film-maker shooting them from "many different angles."

Christa Wolf, in her memoirs of growing up in Nazi Germany, can find no stable vantage point and so must write as if "constantly aware of the shifting shapes of her own memories and perceptions" (Chandler 141). Handke likewise admits to never fully grasping his mother's character: "And because I cannot fully capture her in any sentence, I keep having to start from scratch and never arrive at the usual sharp and clear bird's-eye view" (30).

Such a shifting of shapes and vantage-points emphasizes the interplay of memory and the imagination. "If memory is rooting, imagination is branching," Chandler explains (69). Many autobiographers, then, record a handful of disconnected facts and then interpret and expand upon them. "The imagination that can make much of little—a story from a few scraps of facts—is a regenerative force . . . a long extrapolation upon a few retrieved fragments" (69).

Autobiography moves from being "primarily archaeological" to becoming "architectural, as new structures [albeit non-linear ones that proceed by way of recurring images and themes] are built upon old foundations" (71). H.D. is thus encouraging me to photograph my "old pictures" from many angles, in an imaginative act that will

extrapolate new meanings from those "few scraps of facts." We must attempt to revise and embellish our traumatic experiences: "By finding a way to tell one's story differently," writes Chandler, "a sense of possibility is restored, and free will, expressed in the act of authorship, re-engages in the old, valiant struggle against fate" (37).

November 19, 1996

Dear H.D.,

Your advice to write about what you call "the old pictures" is helpful. Your emphasis on exploring them from different angles and moments in time is well taken. I have always admired how your long poems, such as the Trilogy or Helen in Egypt, continuously play with point of view. I recently discovered a similar strategy by Maggie Anderson entitled "In a Dark Room: Photography and Revision" (231-35). It aims to achieve what you, Audrey Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and even Emily Dickinson were attempting: snapshots of a serial yet fluidly discontinuous self. Through its numerous shifts in perspective, Anderson's exercise allows us to experiencing the impermanence of our subjectivity:

EXERCISE: Select a photograph that compels you to it in some way. Write about what you see in it in as much detail as possible: objects, landscape, people, clothes, trees, architecture, light, and shadow. In a sense, you will have to narrate the photograph, or at least create a discernible image so that we can, literally, see what you are talking about. Then, using the same photograph, write at least three different poems from it, from any of the following perspectives:

1. Speak the poem as the photographer.
2. Speak the poem as someone or something in the photograph.
3. Speak the poem as someone or something in the photograph addressing the photographer.
4. Address the poem to someone you know who has not seen the photograph.

5. Address the poem to someone in the photograph.
6. Address the poem to the photographer.

And additional shift in perspective can be uncovered by writing two or three more poems in which you manipulate time, still using the same photograph:

1. Write what happened just before the photograph was taken.
2. Write what happened just after the photograph was taken.
3. Write what happened as the photograph was being taken, outside the range of the camera.
4. Write the poem as if you have found the photograph years after it was taken.
5. Write the poem as if you were planning to take the photograph.
6. Write exactly the same poem in three versions: present, past, and future tense. (232-33)

Am planning to use this heuristic to teach my students about revision. The act of revision, or of re-seeing the "old pictures," endorses the fact that we are ever-changing, plural selves. "The energy of revision," writes Anderson,

is the energy of change and creation, which is also the energy of destruction. Any photograph is a record made by a person who was shifting around something shifting that they saw. When we look at a photograph, we shift around what they have made to stand still. Poems, too, elude us in this way, and they dig their heels in. Each time we re-see

them, we change our perspective, which also changes what is there and what has been recorded, like light in a dark room moving through time.

(235)

Must rush off at the speed of light to teach a creative writing class. Will give myself the same assignment today as my students. Hope this Anderson heuristic will get them writing and me exploring my "old pictures." Stay tuned. **CH**

Response to letter of November 19, 1996

Dear Reader:

My short, mid-November letter announces my intent to explore the "old pictures" via an exercise based on still photography. "In a Dark Room: Photography and Revision" offers a number of strategies for shifting personae, addressing different audiences, and manipulating time itself (231-5).

Planning to take "snapshots of a serial yet fluidly discontinuous self", I am trying to answer one of Chandler's basic questions—"what models of the self" does the writer assume (11)? Chandler reminds us that "surely if any single notion of reality might be used to characterize 'modern sensibility' it would be fragmentation and dissonance rather than integration and wholeness" (39). Modernists like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound exemplify this sensibility. According to Maud Ellmann, they see writing as "an act of self-estrangement" (3), or "an odyssey to anonymity" (8). For Eliot, the poetic process consists of constructing and then dismantling a persona or mask (3). Anderson similarly describes the art of revision as involving "change," "creation," and "destruction" (235).

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot reminds us that writing is about creating and destroying personae:

There will be time, there will be time
 To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
 There will be time to murder and create

 And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
 And for a hundred visions and revisions. (4)

Ellmann suggests that Eliot's prepared "face," or series of them, appears as the nomadic voices echoing throughout The Wasteland. Poetry's impersonal force, then, must speak through a constructed persona, not through the poet's personality. For Eliot, the poet serves as a "mere amanuensis, whether his dictation comes from God, the unconscious, the tradition, or the dead" (Ellmann 4).

This notion of the poet as channel is an old one. Caitlin Matthews in Arthur and the Sovereignty of Britain: King and Goddess in the Mabinogion writes that "the earliest harmonic of the seer-poet may well be tied to a primitive cult of child sacrifice in which chieftains established their sovereignty by 'giving' a child to the Otherworld" (232). The only other figure allowed to step "in and out of the Otherworld at will" was the "seer-poet" (233). Many of today's theorists, in their rush to homogenize and do well by all, would dismiss the notion of the poet suffering in a garret. To ignore the fact that many writers still take vows of poverty for poetry devalues the power of the archetype of the poet as a sacrificial walker-between-worlds. In our prehistory, this bardic figure was "a son of Sovereignty who never aspires to the kingship yet who functions as its guardian on a mystical level" (Matthews, Arthur 233). Rooted, perhaps, in the rites of child sacrifice, the poet's commission still implies offering up one's ego and much else to his/her calling.

Ezra Pound, who edited Eliot's Wasteland and guided H.D.'s early Imagist career, characteristically hesitates to claim a robust sense of self:

In the "search for oneself" . . . one gropes, one finds some seeming verity. One says "I am" this, that, or the other, and with the words scarcely

uttered one ceases to be the thing.

I begin this search for the real in a book called Personae, casting off, as it were, complete masks of the self in each poem. I continued in a long series of translations, which were but more elaborate masks. (Gaudier-Brzeska 85)

Clearly it is easier to give up an "I am" that you own rather than one that you do not. Men like Pound and Eliot can submit to an impersonal power because they are already powerful. Powerless women, which includes most of us, find surrender difficult because we resent having been cowed for so long. Nor have we been encouraged to receive and nourish our creative gifts. Rather than accommodate impersonal poetic forces, we either let them overwhelm us, or struggle guiltily to shut down these misunderstood energies.

Our subjectivity is fraught with division, and the masks we would create often break apart in our hands. Brookes talks about the things that "bifurcated consciousness" (10). Susan Stanford Friedman, in "Creating a Woman's Mythology: H.D.'s Helen in Egypt," speaks of the female writer's "multiple selves and dual voices" (Friedman and DuPlessis 399). And, Alicia Ostriker states that the power of women's poetry today comes from our struggle with and against a "split self" (77).

Ostriker underlines that the crisis of self is more acute for a woman than a man:

Whatever the historic and social causes of silence in Prufrock and his lonely crowd of alienated modernist brethren, they do not include the powerlessness of the female who must buy love with silence, the female excluded from public

discourse, the female subject to physical violation. (69)

Silenced, excluded, even violated, a woman often lacks a sense of autonomy and assertiveness. Traditionally, she resigned herself to being an under-valued care-giver. Locked into this nurturing role, she could not purposefully sacrifice an identity that had already gone missing as has that of the mother's in Patricia Dienstfrey's "Circling the Pond":

Half my tongue is ivory.
 Half is shadow. Half
 of each plate
 I fill is empty.
 A leg seems to be missing,
 teeth and fingers.

In my dreams I am completely
 missing.
 I pass through groups
 like a breeze
 at skin temperature.
 Children follow me,
 stumble and tilt.
 They're mine, of course—
 my own little ones. (17)

Ostriker argues, somewhat militantly, that a woman who tries to rebel or develop her intellect is either dismissed, or judged as monstrous. These destructive pressures serve to divide the female self even further. H.D. expresses this dilemma in the following stanzas which pits her desire to be a singer (poet) against societal expectations that she be a loving mother and wife:

I know not what to do,
 my mind is reft:
 is song's gift best?
 is love's gift loveliest?

 as two white wrestlers
 standing for a match,
 ready to turn and clutch
 yet never shake muscle nor nerve nor tendon;
 so my mind waits
 to grapple with my mind,
 yet I lie quiet,
 I would seem at rest.

(Collected Poems 165-67)

Gripped by this conflict, H.D., who "would seem at rest," tries to present a calm exterior to the world. Donning an emotionless mask, she armours herself against further hurt. For example, images of amazons, suits of armour, weaponry, and seashells appear in H.D.'s early poetry.

The danger, of course, is that the armouring grows rigid, keeping life at bay. H.D.'s body is nearly paralysed: she can "never shake muscle nor nerve nor tendon." Her "mind waits." What to do?

December 3, 1996

Dear H.D.,

I haven't heard from you and frankly am at a standstill. Can't seem to get up from my cluttered desk and do something practical like Christmas shopping. Can't seem to write about the "old pictures" either.

Will retreat today onto the seemingly safer ground of theory. Perhaps before undertaking the Anderson heuristic, I need to establish a theoretical standpoint from which to investigate these somatically-based images.

Before embarking anew upon the poetic process, I need, in my imaginings, to justify my post-Imagist project to a group of feminists whom I met at The National Poetry Foundation Conference last June in Orono, Maine. They centred their presentations around the work of a Linda A. Kinnahan. When approached, one of these women, who had just given a paper, tried to dismiss me for not understanding how French feminism was impacting their research. I continued in my assigned role of "Dumb, and from Canada, so enlighten me, please," until she begrudgingly suggested I read a Joan Retallack article, entitled " :RE:THINKING:LITERARY:FEMINISM: (three essays onto shaky grounds)."

In her essay, Retallack refutes what she calls "A Picture Theory of Literary Feminism" (349)—(a post-Imagist approach of sorts similar to your own, H.D.). As Retallack points out:

The domain of women's silence (of what can/not be spoken/heard) has been until relatively recently almost entirely appropriated—within the domain of Anglo-American feminist thinking—by a literature dominated by visual metaphor: linguistic "as/like"

snapshots organized into narrative family-of-woman albums meant to reveal, through startling disclosure (word-image "picturing" lived experience) herstory. For this project, the task of the feminist novelist, poet, critic has been that of literary photographer and darkroom technician—to record our present experience and expose poorly or un(der)developed images from our long period of cultural latency. (348)

Retallack faults the American Feminist's Picture Theory of Literature for its over-reliance on visual imagery. Such imagery, she states, over-simplifies the rich welter of our experiences, because "the picture that is to mean anything at all shall have a fairly simple (this=that) correspondence to what is preconceived as fully available, intelligible reality" (350).

Retallack would forgo pictorial illumination for the "dark, noisy silence of a Finnegan's Wake." She seeks a literature such as that of a Nicole Brossard or Carla Harryman that "cannot be illustrated" (351). She aims for a preconscious "discourse in process" that gathers its energy not from the mind's over-riding tendency to make sense of the constant and near-to chaotic bombardment of sensory images, but "from their grammatical/syntactical, particle-wave interruption" (358). Retallack yearns for a discourse (I hesitate to be as genre specific as to call it poetry), springing from "a dominatrix with polymorphously perverse appetites and ambitions," that will produce "a joyful, troublesome, gender/genre exploding noise" (360, 351).

Retallack prizes disruptive, "noise"-making grammar and syntax above visual tropes. She nevertheless overlooks a simple truth—different people are predisposed towards

writing different sorts of poems. Poet Gregory Orr once opened a lecture entitled "Four Temperaments and the Forms of Poetry" by saying, "I'd like to propose that poets are 'born' with a certain innate form-giving temperament that allows them to forge language into the convincing unities we call poems" (1). He went on to explain why Retallack might feel antipathy towards an approach that values the visual:

These temperaments are distinct from each other, even antipathetic at times. If a poet is born with one temperament, then he or she grows as a poet by developing that temperament, but ALSO by nurturing the others. The greatest poem is one in which all four temperaments are present in the strongest degree, though no one in English but Shakespeare could be said to exhibit all four with equal vigour. The main point is, great poems show the presence of all four, though in varying proportions. ("Four Temperaments" 1)

Orr defines the four temperaments as those of "story," "structure," "music," and "imagination." He summarizes them as follows:

1. Story: dramatic unity—a beginning, middle and end. Conflict, dramatic focus, resolution.

2. Structure: the satisfaction of measurable patterns. It is akin to higher math, geometry, theoretical physics—the beauty and balance of equations. It manifests itself in sonnets, villanelles, sestinas (closed structures) and, to a lesser extent, in metrical lines, rhymed couplets and repeated stanza patterns (open structures).

3. "Music": rhythm and sounds. Its developments and resolutions involve syntax, the syllabic qualities of English that determine rhythm (pitch, duration, stress, loudness/softness), and the entire panoply of sound effects (alliteration, assonance, consonance, internal rhyme, etc.).

4. Imagination: the flow of image to image or thought to thought. It moves as a stream of association, either concretely (the flow of image) or abstractly (the flow of thought). ("Four Temperaments" 1-2)

In Orr's schema, Retallack's predisposition is a musical one. Her desire to express "polymorphously perverse appetites and ambitions" suggests she possesses an irrational, emotionally-charged, musical temperament (360). Such a constitution prefers "Dionysus' flute rather than Apollo's lyre—more ecstasy and trance than measure and order" (Orr, "Four Temperaments" 7). In its more corrupted forms, the musical temperament empowers the cadences of the evangelist and demagogue. More positively, it springs from "the infant's joy in the babble and coo of sound, the child's pleasure in nursery rhymes" (7), a state representative of the French feminists' desired return to the pre-oedipal.

Retallack's disposition also typifies the musical because it would make "a joyful, troublesome, gender/genre exploding noise" (351), suggestive of a literature lacking both form and closure. Orr explains why musical poetry is often open-ended:

In many completed and fulfilled patterns of sound and rhythm, there is still something left over, some vowel, say, that calls out across the poem's final period to its fellow in the silence beyond, asking to go further, to generate new possibilities and combinations.

("Four Temperaments" 7)

The American Feminists' Picture Theory of Literature is more akin to the temperament of the imagination. Orr believes that there are two kinds of imagination—the flow of images (concrete), as in the poetry of a Blake, Wordsworth, or Whitman, and the flow of thought (abstract), as in the work of Donne and Herbert ("Four Temperaments" 8). The Picture Theory ascribes to a flow of visual images not unlike what Pound, in his "How to Read" essay, meant by "phanopoeia, the casting of images upon the visual imagination" (Literary Essays 25). Spiralling themes and obsessions shape "the wildest, most free-ranging imagination" of a poet like Whitman, writes Orr ("Four Temperaments" 9). In fact, the imaginative temperament (American pictorial) shares with the musical (French feminism) the difficulties of closure.

According to Orr, a poet must attempt to find a balance, or temperamental synthesis:

It is essential to recognize that the four temperaments form another pattern. Story and structure are INTENSIVE in their impulse; "music" and imagination are EXTENSIVE. Story and structure concern limits and correspond to our desire for and recognition of the role of law. "Music" and imagination concern our longing for liberty, the unconditional and limitless.

("Four Temperaments" 2)

During my MFA apprenticeship with Orr, he typed my temperament as that of the imagination combined with some musical leanings. To rein me in, he suggested that I introduce narrative elements into my poems, as well as read Aristotle's Poetics, Stanley Kunitz, and W.H. Auden. He did this because he believes the following:

Although each of the temperaments is capable, in and of itself, of creating the unity we call a poem, for a poem to have the stability and dynamic tension that comes of a marriage of contraries, it must fuse a limiting impulse with an impulse that resists limitation. Thus Dylan Thomas' most successful poems are those where his primary musical temperament is constrained by the limiting qualities of structure (the villanelle "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night") or of story (the minor but effective story progressions of "Poem in October" or "Over Sir John's Hill"). (2)

With Orr in mind, let's return now to Retallack's critique of the American Feminists' Picture Theory of Literature, i.e., to the temperament of the concrete (visual) imagination. Unlike Orr, who sees the temperament of the concrete imagination resulting in an extensive, associative flow of images, Retallack believes that such visual imagery results in over-simplification and deathly stasis. "De-picting," she writes, is "a distinctly static modelling *from* life with only a limited life principle of its own" (348). "In the picture all has been isolated in space and stopped in time," she continues, "reflecting not glorious, multifarious (chaotic) reality, but the vanishing point of the photographer's, painter's, or writer's single-pointed imagination" (355).

Earlier, Ezra Pound had worried that the highly visual nature of your Imagist poems would be misunderstood by "diluters" (Literary Essays 23), not unlike Retallack.

According to Pound, these misinformed ones

took the handiest and easiest meaning, and thought only of the STATIONARY image. If you can't think of imagism or phanopoeia as including the moving image, you will have to make a really needless division of fixed image and praxis or action.

(ABC 38)

Andrew Welsh defines Pound's notion of "moving image" in terms of two kinds of poems: (1) the short Imagistic poems, written by you and Pound, "that catch metamorphosis at a crucial point" (97); and, (2) poems in which the temporal intersects with myth, fable, and trance as in the work of Yeats and of your own late epic poems (95). This exploration will confine itself to your shorter Imagistic poems, in which you and Pound do exactly as Orr would have you do—curb your imaginative temperaments by introducing narrative elements into your highly visual poems. Principal among the narrative strategies that you employ is Aristotle's notion of peripeteia—defined in his Poetics as the "Reversal of the Situation" (13; 63). Aristotle described such peripeteia as the acts comprising a plot, or making up "a sequence of events, according to the laws of probability or necessity, [that] will admit of a change from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad" (7.7; 66). Such plot reversals result in a sudden "Recognition," a "change from ignorance to knowledge" (11.2; 72).

Welsh analyses Pound's poem "The Return" to show how peripeteia, or "movement caught at the still point of a turn," acts to mobilize what might have been just another description of a Greek frieze into a text that deftly

catches "time and action within a phanopoeic form" (81-2):

See, they return; ah, see the tentative
 Movements, and the slow feet,
 The trouble in the pace and the uncertain
 Wavering!

See, they return, one, and by one,
 With fear, as half-awakened;
 As if the snow should hesitate
 And murmur in the wind,
 and half turn back;
 These were the "Wing'd-with-Awe,"
 Inviolable.

Gods of the winged shoe!
 With them the silver hounds,
 sniffing the trace of air!

Haie! Haie!
 These were the swift to harry;
 These the keen-scented;
 These were the souls of blood.

Slow on the leash,
 pallid the leash-men!

(Collected Early Poems 198)

Welsh points to certain narrative elements that drive "The Return" beyond the mere description of a static art object:

There is a rhetoric: a visual imperative ("See . . ."), a speaker and audience implied, and thus a dramatic situation implied as well. Furthermore, images from the past occur in the poem ("These

were . . . "), giving, at first, the illusion of narration. Yet beneath these are the basic principles of the Image, with the dramatic situation and the illusion of narration caught up in the forms of phanopoeia. (81-2)

I would go even further to say that Pound does not merely create "the illusion of narration" in his poems, but actually employs narrative strategies to check his extensive temperament. For example, he adopts the rhetorical stance of a character addressing a specific audience, while conjuring up the dramatic situation of men returning from the hunt or from war. He also employs many instances of peripeteia. Numerous lyric turns and paradoxical juxtapositions occur, such as the arrival of the troubled men set against a lull in the retreating wind, the paradoxical contrast between "souls of blood" vs. the "pallid leash-men," and the fleet "Awe"-full, "Gods of the winged shoe" who metamorphose into those that are "slow," troubled, and "wavering." Pound has cut this poem "free from geography and history," to create a sense "of dynamic stasis" (Welsh 82). And, although he employs such constraints as the poem's ragged line lengths, it is the story elements that restrain and shape the pictorial images and musical cadences of "The Return."

I would now like to do a similar analysis on one of your early poems, entitled "Pursuit":

What do I care
 that the stream is trampled,
 the sand on the stream-bank
 still holds the print of your foot:
 the heel is cut deep.

I see another mark
on the grass ridge of the bank—
it points toward the wood-path.
I have lost the third
in the packed earth.

But here
a wild-hyacinth stalk is snapped:
the purple buds—half ripe—
show deep purple
where your heel pressed.

A patch of flowering grass,
low, trailing—
you brushed this:
the green stems show yellow-green
where you lifted—turned the earth-side
to the light:
this and a dead leaf-spine,
split across,
show where you passed.

You were swift, swift!
here the forest ledge slopes—
rain has furrowed the roots.
Your hand caught at this;
the root snapped under your weight.

I can almost follow the note
where it touched this slender tree
and the next answered—
and the next.

And you climbed yet further!
 you stopped by the dwarf-cornel—
 whirled on your heels,
 doubled on your track.

This is clear—
 you fell on the downward slope,
 you dragged a bruised thigh—you limped—
 you clutched this larch.

Did your head, bent back
 search further—
 clear through the green leaf-moss
 of the larch branches?

Did you clutch,
 stammer with short breath and gasp:
*wood-daemons grant life—
 give life—I am almost lost.*

For some wood-daemon
 has lightened your steps.
 I can find no trace of you
 in the larch-cones and the underbrush.

(Collected Poems 11-12)

This highly visual poem presents a well-rendered setting—albeit one that has been lifted out of a specific geography, or historical period. Like "The Return," it succeeds by not degenerating into mere description. As in the Pound example, narrative elements achieve temporal movement and an accompanying sense of drama. "Pursuit" is also a dramatic monologue, but unlike Pound's, is more

personal in its delivery. For example, H.D.'s persona is addressing the poem's subject, the missing person, rather than a general audience as does Pound's. She, nevertheless, employs "visual imperatives" similar to those in "The Return," such as "I see another mark," "it points toward," "But here," and "this," "this," "This is clear." Initially, she would clarify things for herself, rather than for others.

As with "The Return," the audience immediately gets caught up in a dramatic situation in which the speaker is tracking a missing person over rough terrain. "Pursuit" begins in the midst of action to lead us by "the print of your foot," over a "trampled," seemingly agitated stream bed. A continuously moving close-up shot reveals, by way of its many enlivening verbs and details, a series of clues such as "a wild-hyacinth stalk [that] is snapped," or "a dead leaf-spine / split across, / [that] show[s] where you passed."

You also structure "Pursuit" with peripeteia to keep from bogging down into a prosaic depiction of a woodland trail. For example, the poem opens paradoxically with the speaker's admission: "What do I care," which stands in contrast to her obsessive search for some seemingly cared-for person. Your text also wavers between sight and its loss with such lines as, "I see another mark," as opposed to "I have lost the third." At poem's end, after its catalogue of vivid clues, we are left without a "trace" of the subject.

You also contrast an act with its antithesis, such as when descent follows ascent. At first the vanished one climbs swiftly up from the river bed. In stanza 7, a peripeteia signalled by such words as "whirled" and "doubled" sets the descent in motion:

And you climbed yet further!
 you stopped by the dwarf-cornel—
 whirled on your heels,
 doubled on your track. (Collected Poems 12)

The swift, athletic person apparently doubles back, falls downhill to bruise a thigh, and begins limping and clutching desperately at things. The visceral details of this denouement are reinforced by stanzas that ask unanswered questions—"did your head, bent back / search further?" "Did you clutch, / stammer with short breath and gasp?"

Another daring turn occurs when the missing person cries out for the first time to mythological "wood-daemons." After the build-up of realistic details that vividly portray the trail and the chase, this leap towards otherworldly realms seems won. Introducing an unexpected element, it helps resolve the poem, as one might a plot.

The poem turns again in the last stanza:

For some wood-daemon
 has lightened your steps.
 I can find no trace of you
 in the larch-cones and the underbrush. (12)

The pursuit ends here; no more visual evidence can be found. "Some wood-daemon" has spirited away the subject, leaving "no trace."

I hope the preceding has shown that Retallack is wrong to assume that anyone in possession of your imaginative temperament must be discouraged from writing visual poetry. Certainly, you and Pound have employed intensive narrative strategies and short, swift line lengths to dynamically shaped the extensive imagery of both "Pursuit" and "The Return."

Ah, but am I stalling? Caught in my less than spacious study, I am still without any new poems and, worse yet, Christmas presents for my daughter. Hope to hear from you soon and that this rambling rehash of Imagism has not put you to sleep for the winter. **CH**

Response to letter of December 3, 1996

Dear Reader:

This early December letter shows me fearful and blocked. "I have retreated into the seemingly safer ground of theory." I will adopt a "theoretical standpoint" from which to investigate the "old pictures" instead of simply free-writing about them. And H.D.'s voice is silent; it was her turn to write to me!

My predicament reminds me of one that Brookes describes. She admits that for a period she "wrote essays which suggested a state of readiness, on one hand, and a continuing state of retreat and resistance on the other" (143). Writing, then, can be a tool for regeneration, but also a "weapon of defense," a protective armouring that blocks the creative process (Haug et al. 39).

In part, I am grappling with my non-conventional task. Will anyone condone this dissertation if I continue fictionalizing a dead poet's voice in a mix of genres that include essays, letters, poems, and vignettes? And what academic wants to hear me grieve for a long-lost nanny?

I constantly struggle to take myself seriously. As Brookes writes, "I feared that I would not be taken seriously if I were to tell my story," and "at another level," she continues, "I did not actually consider my experience to be significant, certainly not with respect to my academic work" (13). For heaven's sakes, no one in my family even went to Irena's funeral. After all, she was just an old maid housekeeper—someone relegated to eating alone in the kitchen with the dog!

Much of my anxiety about this dissertation focusses on the Orono, Maine incident in which I am taken to task by

English majors advocating a French feminist standpoint. Is my interdisciplinary research passé because I am not up-to-date on literary criticism? Will I be able to successfully bridge the gap between education, English literature, and creative writing? Or is my rehash of Imagism hopelessly irrelevant? Confused, I am trying to second guess the latest trends in "academic correctness," described by Brookes as the "preconceived notions of what constitutes *serious academic work*" (13).

A discernible shape does begin to emerge from this December 3 letter. Retallack's French feminist standpoint represents an early stage in the autobiographical healing process described by Chandler as that of "catharsis, or purgation" (31). Retallack, for example, would purge herself by making "gender/genre exploding noise" (351). "Autobiography," continues Chandler, "purges by externalizing forces, which, held inside, would poison or corrupt; evil memories, fears, fantasies, anxieties" (31). But, unlike Retallack, Chandler feels healing comes when the writer shifts his/her attention "from the content of the experience to the problems of composition" (35)—a formal task that Retallack would avoid.

In one way, my early December letter represents an attempt to educate myself about "the problems of composition" (Chandler 35) that the "old pictures" project will entail. Certainly my engagement with the ideas of Chandler and the others cited in this study is assisting my own self-exploration and healing. In another way, my reliance on the theories driving this and my other letters can be seen as evasive in so far as they act to veil or deaden my emotions. When drafting a confessional text, Christa Wolf often deceived herself similarly, by driving

"with the brakes on" (348). It is difficult, she adds, "to escape the mortal sin of our time: the desire not to come to grips with oneself" (406).

Chandler lists three stages of crisis that the autobiographer often passes through. The first step is that of a "descent" accompanied by a sense of "loss . . . increasing confusion" and despair (20). The second stage represents "stasis . . . paralysis, isolation, and silence" (20). My December letter represents this deathly stasis. My striving to find techniques with which to move the "STATIONARY image" (Pound, ABC 38) mirrors my struggles to overcome writer's block. That these techniques are narrative ones suggests that a retelling of my crisis story might shift and free-up my thoughts. Chandler depicts stage three as that of a "reascent: an experience of epiphany or paradigmatic shift" (20).

In spite of my paralysis, chimeras begin flickering beneath my letter's surface to hint at a sub-text of figures and meanings. The first presence that shimmers forth is that of Greg Orr, a poet I studied with for a semester while completing my MFA. His own creativity springs, like mine, from a childhood wound: at the age of twelve, he killed his younger brother in a hunting accident. In the following, Orr describes how he will spend the rest of his life coming to terms with this tragedy:

The deer carcass hangs from a rafter.
 Wrapped in blankets, a boy keeps watch
 from a pile of loose hay. Then he sleeps

 and dreams about a death that is coming:
 Inside him, there are small bones
 scattered in a field
 among burdocks and dead grass.

He will spend his life walking there,
gathering the bones together.

(New and Selected 17)

And back of Orr stands his teacher, Stanley Kunitz, who wrote "The Portrait" about his father who hung himself in a city park:

My mother never forgave my father
for killing himself,
especially at such an awkward time
and in a public park,
that spring
when I was waiting to be born.
She locked his name
in her deepest cabinet
and would not let him out,
though I could hear him thumping.
When I came down from the attic
with the pastel portrait in my hand
of a long-lipped stranger
with a brave moustache
and deep brown level eyes,
she ripped it into shreds
without a single word
and slapped me hard.
In my sixty-fourth year
I can feel my cheek
still burning. (86)

At sixty-four, Kunitz continues to write about this childhood crisis, as Orr also must do. I, too, would join this lineage of wounded singers characterized as the "stranger" in the following:

The stone strikes the body, because
 that is what stones will do.
 The wound opens after the stone's kiss,
 too late to swallow the stone.
 The wound and the stone become lovers.
 The wound owes its life to the stone
 and sings the stone's praises.
 The stone is moved. At the stone's center,
 a red hollow aches to touch the wound.
 The grey walls of its body tear open
 and the wound enters to dwell there.

A stranger picks up the stone
 with the wound inside and carries it
 with him until he dies. (Orr, New and Selected 14)

Other chimeras shift in and around the Imagist poems analysed in this letter. Pound's "The Return" evokes the "pallid," "wavering" figures of the dead, i.e., Irena, Orr's brother, or Kunitz's father. And, H.D.'s "Pursuit" recreates the search for someone gone missing.

Thus, Dear Reader, I hope this letter will point to what Brookes accomplishes in her doctoral study and to what this dissertation might help me do: "understand myself as a *subject producing this text*" (8).

January 6, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Am trying to reconnect, after the Christmas holiday. I came close to visiting you in Kennebunkport (if you are still there). Instead, I got mired down with family and didn't get over your way. The poorly ploughed dirt roads leading to Parson's Beach, our elaborate family dinner preparations, and last minute shopping expeditions up the icy turnpike to Portland deterred me.

Back in Montreal, I am struggling to get my bearings. In the fall, for that month or so, I was so connected: my body and mind, the events in my inner and outer life, were in sync. But then, I got derailed writing those fourteen or so pages of Imaginst theory. An ad hoc doctorate is a pathless land: am I wasting my life in this, at times dreamy and at other times anxiety-ridden, pursuit?

Before going to Maine, I did do some free-writing about one of the "old pictures," that of Wyeth's "Christina's World." I spent the first two hours, after dog-walking and breakfast, sitting on my sofa, staring through half-open blinds at the snow and the sparrows, the distant cars and passers-by. I did this with determination, over-riding twinges of guilt for abandoning Zoë to her TV programs. After writing pages and typing most of them up, I felt that all too familiar aversion: not wanting to read what I had written. Finally overtaken by the holidays, I sat around at my mother's, compulsively reading People Magazine and throwing my tarot cards again and again, until nothing whatsoever made any sense.

This morning was the old routine: walk dog, Zoë up, dressed and fed, lunch packed, snowsuit and those stubborn

boots on for the walk to school. Back at home, I feel the same compulsiveness that kept me throwing tarot cards but, surprisingly, it is getting laundry in the dryer, bills paid, and this very rough draft of "Christina's World" sent off to you:

Wyeth

Each wind-bent blade of grass,
I paint to lift, somehow to lift, what
is so fleeting and place it down
gently on the earth.

Field

until she comes dragging herself all over
what I have so carefully rendered.

Daemon

Just before you painted this,
you were gazing out at a sombre field
when something started up—

uncalled for light through a broken screen,

insect in a thicket,
pinkish, part
flesh, part bony protrusion.

Pie

I laboured over it for months,
hearing a body scrape
across floorboards and her
calling at the bottom stair,

"Andy,

Andy, have cooked you some pie."

Epidemic

spooks the yard,
the rough fields

with its bloodied neck
and bedraggled wings.

Ladder

Left to lean over the door-hole,
deserted rungs

scar the house front, the face
that looks out.

Shed

So much empty space atop a hill,
swallows
from the hay racks,
boiling up, up
through a broken pane,

as fog lowers in over fields
where, condemned to crawl on its belly,

a serpent rises its twisting spine,
casting branch-like shadows
over astringent weeds.

Christina's

pale crusts
stretch over tart apples
like unsullied skin.

But you sneak down to glimpse
only her rough hands
leaving a sugary slice on the stairs,

and make your wife crawl,
crawl through the harsh grass

"like Christina," you say. "I am
too shy to ask this exposure of her."

Preparation

Waiting ladders.
Scale them with Jacob
and his sooty angels,
flapping like rags
on a frayed line.

White flour sacks stuffed
into broken window panes
make ghoulish faces: wings
beat the upper regions.

Barn swallows

Straw, mouldy sweet barn,
the hay ledges hold
shored boats and our nests.

Road

ruts pebbled,
slithers belly-down
towards distant steeples,

is guarded by a gull.
 Hung from a pole,
 by a rubbery foot,

its body swings,
 its blackened beak pointing earthwards.

With Brookes' Feminist Pedagogy: An Autobiographical Approach in mind, I have been studying the above, rough sketches to determine their "key words," as she advises doing (97). Brookes began analysing her texts' "key words," along with ones that attracted her in certain Virginia Woolf essays. These "key words," Brookes writes, "signalled that aspects of my development were arrested" (98). Unable to acknowledge she had been sexually abused by her brother, Brookes read her own creative blockages as "signs of my failures as a human being, the one in the family who seemed unable to get herself together" (98).

Brookes admits, "[I] did not feel empowered until I wrote from an inner place where I could find the key words to name my experience" (99). She searched out "the words that were key to exposing a previously untouched part of myself" (99). The following key words appeared in my first draft of "Christina's World":

months, weeks,
 labour, crawl, drag, strain, claw
 earth, field, grass,
 hunkered down, bellydown, serpentlike
 fleeting, fading, reality not the thing itself
 bird with broken wings: bony, cripple, beached,
 broken, arrested, averted, shell-like body
 crippled in a harsh land far from home

must paint you or die, a slow crippling death, too
 haunted, phantom, spirits
 hang, flap,
 high up in a garret, gazing,
 sacrifice, initiation, threshold

Two phrases from this list stand out for me: "crippled in a harsh land far from home," and "must paint you or die, a slow crippling death, too." They encapsulate how I felt unearthing the image of Christina in her field. I discovered this key image, if you remember, while on S.B.'s massage table.

For me, the phrase, "crippled in a harsh land far from home," speaks of my lonely struggle to finish this dissertation crawling, as it were, inch-by-inch up a near-to-insurmountable height. I am stunted, emotionally at least, and cannot simply sprint the distance. This phrase also expresses how much my dissertation isolates me from others—my family in Maine and my husband and child in Montreal.

H.D., I keep hearing you say, "write, write, or die" (Hermetic Definition 7), words that get translated, as if by osmosis, into my second key phrase—"must paint you or die, a slow crippling death, too." Oh this is getting a tad morbid. Must get out for some fresh air. Write me when you can, **CH**

Response to letter of January 6, 1997

Dear Reader:

Again what I am experiencing at the beginning of 1997 is a continuing creative stasis. The Christmas holidays have fragmented my momentum even more. Although in Maine, the site of my first "encounter" with H.D., I lack the energy to drive the snowy, dirt road to Parson's Beach to look for her. I feel guilty that my doctorate is preventing me from being a good mother. I am anxious about losing my way in some interdisciplinary labyrinth, while squandering my time drafting new poems.

Returning to Montreal, I do manage this January 6th letter and the free-write about "Christina's World." I then compile a list of the latter's key words.

Why, you might ask, do I draw up such a list? Rich, as you might remember, said that the words were the "maps" that guided her descent into the wreck (Poetry and Prose 54). These word-maps remind us of the ones that Chandler sees the autobiographers in her study using:

certain key words that become a nexus of thought—words whose definition . . . proceeds from and determines a world view—words that abound with associations, generating both memories and speculations. (97)

But, as I mentioned in my January 6th letter, Brookes was my primary source for this key word analysis. She reread her own academic essays in order to highlight the key words that came from that "innerplace" of "unspeakable" memories (99, 5). For example, she identified "absent" as a key word in her essay on Virginia Woolf. Brookes explains:

I was drawn to the term *absent* because it was for me a key word. It describes my experience of "hiding in an essay." As well, it describes what happens to me when I am afraid. (98)

Brookes, in turn, derived this key word technique from Teacher, a book by the New Zealand educator Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Teaching primary school Maori children, Ashton-Warner came to believe that they often performed poorly because they had been wrenched away from their village culture and forced into our Western educational system. Struggling to motivate these children to read and write, she soon realized they were in possession of "two visions, the inner and the outer. Of the two," writes Ashton-Warner, "the inner vision is brighter" (32).

She set out to draw-up a "Key Vocabulary" of words associated with their "inner world" (35). Those "two-dimensional and respectable" stories of Dick and Jane written in "the vocabulary of the English upper middle class" would not do for the Maori in her infant room, because their inner vision "centers round two main instincts, fear and sex" (41, 42). Ashton-Warner goes on to describe the Maori children sharing their inner words with her:

Out press these words, grouping themselves in their own wild order. All boys wanting words of locomotion, aeroplane, tractor, jet, and the girls the words of domesticity, house, Mummy, doll. Then the fear words, ghost, tiger, skellington, alligator, bulldog, wild piggy, police. The sex words, kiss, love, touch, *haka* [Maori war dance]. . . . Out push these words. The tendency is for them to gather force once the fears are said. (39)

As mentioned earlier, Chandler acknowledges that "the inner life is difficult to bring to language precisely because we have not developed an adequate vocabulary for it" (79). Contemporary society places little value on this inner world, and our "academic correctness," which is just a more adult version of Dick and Jane's two-dimensional respectability, serves to cut us off from our own vitality. Fear and sex, these are not popular dinner table topics.

The key words of my "Christina's World" free-writes bear little resemblance to those found in the Maori children's "wild" outpourings. Like Brookes' word "absent," my list signals my own thwarted emotional development. Its key words call up states of exile, crippling, and an arrested dissertation struggle.

What of my draft of "Christina's World," which has those "brief," "abrupt" units of thought Chandler found in crisis stories (32). And what to make of the fact that the crippled Christina arrives unannounced to drag herself "all over what I had so carefully rendered"? Is this why the writer seems angry at her? Can I let the objects, the luminous details such as the barn, ladder, house, and swallows tell me more? Is this "old picture" really about my divided self—the obsessively perfectionistic academic versus the bumbling, yet infinitely more intuitive poet?

DREAM PALIMPSEST: GROUNDHOG'S DAY, CANDLEMAS,
ST. BRIDGET'S BIRTHDAY

These letters written between January 23 and February 28, 1997 culminate in a dream I received upon the convergence of these late-winter holidays. Spring lambs are being born and Imbolc, the birthday of Bridget or Bride, the patron of Celtic poetry, is celebrated. If at this time, a serpent comes forth from its hole like our groundhog, the spirit of winter, Caillech, will continue her reign.

The serpent will come from the hole
On the brown Day of Bride,
Though there should be three feet
of snow
On the flat surface of the ground.

On the day of Bride of the white
hills
The noble queen will come from the
knoll
I will not molest the noble queen,
Nor will the noble queen molest me.

From Carmina Gadelica.

(Carmichael 1:169)

January 23, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Montreal has slowed to a stupor with temperatures suspended for the past week at around minus twenty-five Celsius. I've taken to reading for hours in hot baths—not texts required for my doctorate, but ones on yoga.

This obsession may take me away from my dissertation entirely. I want to become a yoga teacher. I am again considering alternative ways to supplement my modest teaching income, because of the precarious university employment situation. I imagine myself resuming the freelance editing I once did, while teaching yoga.

Over the Christmas holiday, I happened upon a video by a Sikh kundalini yoga teacher who shall be referred to as S.R. White-turbaned and in possession of a dry sense of humour and a propensity for the poetic, he sits on a dais, talking the viewer through a series of invigorating breathing exercises and poses, while a young, extremely supple woman demonstrates them.

At any rate, after a few phone calls to order more books and videos, I am signing up for S.R.'s weekend intensive. (You need 5 such intensives to become a certified teacher.) What cinches it is the train-ride away from frozen Montreal south to Poughkeepsie—8 hours alone to write, meditate, and stare out the window.

Growing more obsessed as my departure nears, I read one of S.R.'s books that refers to ten Sikh gurus and to a text that I quickly track down in the Religious library. It is Duncan Greenlees's translation of The Gospel of the Guru-Granth. I put Zoë to bed and rush to read its introduction which traces the rise and demise of the ten Sikh saints.

Can't put it down; can't fall asleep because the political intrigues, poisonings, betrayals, and military turmoil surrounding Sikhism disturb me. In the middle of the night, I dream that I have fallen into a pit trying to avoid a throng of over-zealous disciples of some unidentified guru.

Have you ever experienced such a split between what you were required to read and what you hunger for? Probably not, as you never forced yourself to do a PhD. Before this turns into pure complaint, I'll sign off. A good book and a hot bath awaits. **CH**

Response to January 23, 1997

Dear Reader:

This quick note jotted down on January 23 evidences my divided self. I am torn between the texts required for my doctorate and the much more compelling books dipped into at odd moments while waiting in our car for my husband to come out of a shop, or relaxing in the bath before bed. In the past, this almost-too-obsessive-to-be recreational reading even resulted in attempts to reposition my dissertation!

Last night, soaking in a hot bath, I was investigating Sikhism and planning a trip to the Catskills to train as a kundalini yoga teacher. This flight towards yoga re-enacts my leaving Maine for boarding school. The Deer Hill Centre outside of Poughkeepsie where I go to join S.R. and his students, is situated in a landscape similar to the one outside of Philadelphia where I went to school—a genteel, middle-Atlantic countryside forested with lush hardwoods and surrounded by rolling farmlands, roadside hedges, and the horse paddocks of the rich.

I cannot contain my anxieties enough to sit down and write poetry about Irena at this time. At least this rash leap away from the dissertation towards yoga will evoke a response from H.D. at last. She will write back to me on the same day to point out that I am the sort who jumps "from thing to thing"—propelled by passion or fear. She hopes that I can focus in on my writing, but whatever happens is o.k. as long as I witness it.

January 24, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

Passion causes your quick, intense mind to flit from thing to thing. Do not put yourself down for your changeable nature. Realize, though, that you often leap out of fear and can end up in a pit. Stop running away from confrontation. Do not avoid meeting others on the road, no matter who they are.

You do need, as well, to understand what the word discipline means. If you must go on escaping into your recreational reading, ask yourself how it figures into your overall dissertation process. Relax, go about collecting your data in whatever form it presents itself.

One thing that strikes me about these diversionary texts of yours is that they are often about the other—about Native Americans, Sikhs, and the like. I, too, was driven to understand other cultures, especially those of ancient Greece and Egypt. These far-away places provided me with a landscape on which to project and work through my fantasies. Critics have accused me of cultural appropriation (Edmunds 145-48). I cared more, they say, about reinventing an "ideal" image of ancient Egypt, than about their early twentieth century liberation struggle. You, too, seem to be going through something similar. Your off-duty readings focus on the "ideal" life of some medieval Sikh saint, rather than on contemporary Punjabi politics.

What does this mean about how we view the interplay of our fantasies and our creativity? Are we driven to symbolize the forces emerging from our unconscious as the other, the foreigner? **CH**

January 31, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Bound for Poughkeepsie and ultimately New York City, my train is spending the day pleasantly skirting Lake Champlain and other smaller bodies of water. Layered with snow-covered ice, the numerous bays that we pass support little ice fishing shacks and even the occasional pickup truck. Can't help thinking about how a friend's brother-in-law and his 6-year-old drowned when their jeep broke through such ice a few years back.

In spite of a window seat to dream for, I soon bury my head in B.N. Parimoo's The Ascent of Self: A Re-interpretation of the Mystical Poetry of Lalla-Ded. In this text, Parimoo translates and comments upon the poetry of Lalla-Ded, a fourteenth century Kashmiri woman mystic. Her vahks (poems composed of four lines, each with seven syllables and an a-b-a-b rhyme scheme) document her ascent via kundalini or laya Yoga to penultimate enlightenment. Her vahks are highly aphoristic, not unlike the poems you love in The Greek Anthology. In these texts, Lalla uses humble images from domestic Kashmiri life to speak metaphorically about her spiritual ascent.

For example, in the following lines, she would withdraw into an inner realm by shutting down her senses like she might seal up the doors and windows of a house:

Closing fast the windows and doors of the house of
my body,
I caught hold of the thief, Prana, and barred him
in;
Tying him hand and foot inside the closet of my
heart,

I lashed him hard with the whip of OM. (75)

As her translator, B.N. Parimoo, writes, "Prana" is the breath "personified as a thief, who makes off with our life, if he is not engaged usefully" (75). And so Lalla sets out to whip him into shape with OM, the sacred syllable received from her teacher.

The poem of Lalla's that truly haunts me is the one occasioned by her receipt of this mantra from her Guru:

The Guru gave me only one Word:
 Enter into thyself from the outer world.
 The guru's precept came to me as God's word,
 That's why I started dancing nude. (59)

There has been great scholarly debate over whether Lalla actually tore off her sari and danced naked through the village streets. Parimoo, in defense of her virtue, believes that she is only speaking metaphorically. However, some scholars think that this yogini is called Lalla because "lal" in Kashmiri means a loose, hanging abdomen: as she danced and ran up and down the streets, the loose abdomen came so low as to cover her female parts" (61). Parimoo mentions that, in certain folk tales, she is depicted as a god-mad bag lady who wandered nude until the end of her days (61). Who knows?

What is striking about her biography is that this declaration of nudity occurred not only after receiving the holy mantra, OM, but shortly after her husband's death. Lalla, the daughter of refined Brahman parents, married at age 10 into a family who abused her severely. Her mother-in-law starved, overworked, and beat her. Her husband, a mama's boy, did nothing to protect her. She escaped through ardent worship of Lord Siva. As the folk tell it, one early morning her husband found Lalla preparing to ride off on the Divine Lion's back to visit Siva's mountain cave. Grabbing the

lion's tail, he was dragged up and down such steep terrain that he died the next day. No longer called upon to be the demure daughter and wife, Lalla ripped off her clothes and danced for joy. Some believe she danced the "Tandava," as do Siva's naked devotees (61).

Released from domestic oppression, Lalla steps boldly out into her life, a self-possessed yogini who derives great pleasure in her spiritual calling. Why does this story resonate so with me at this time?

Writing to Lalla about this nakedness as the train lurches along, I receive her answer in this improvised vakh:

Over the vastness of space,
through eons of time, echoes
of light overflow page
after naked page. OM, OM

clothed in that go where you wish.
Knots will loosen, even as flesh
falls from bones. Your dress,
the Name, woven into your heart.

Is she advising me to chant a mantra, an activity that I fear may dull my mind even further? She replies:

The mind is already dull.
Breath is the goal, not the mantra,
breath like a silken thread,
no longer knot or tangle.

The mind, dull or wild in turn,
throbs, a wounded limb,
burns, a dry field,
waits, shadowy thing.

Asking Lalla how I can let go of my unconscious reserves of rage, she answers with the following:

Bells beat the steamy air,
 incessant beating—him,
 your self, daughter . . . Why?
 What's outside this burning field?

Given that this Amtrak seance is going well, I decide to try one more question. Will S.R., whose yoga teacher-training I am embarking upon, have something of value to teach me?

Ask and you shall receive nectar,
 moonlight from a silver sieve,
 deep ethereal blood over bony places—
 the Guru awaits, your heart

is divided, bewildered by
 the body of a woman, tubes, a net
 of wires insert their will-less currents
 into her weakening heart.

This communication with Lalla-Ded is strange; she seems to be another poetry muse. Must sign-off and get my bags down from the rack. The train is pulling into Poughkeepsie.

CH

January 31, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

I am tired tonight, not that I am, vanishing into less than a mustard seed, speck on the retina, drawing your gaze upward, blood-reddish purple light between the closed eyes—moving with the pulse. Lalla-Ded is quite a find! I love her aphoristic delivery. And yes, you are afraid to dance naked in this doctoral dissertation.

Lalla-Ded, did you say she was a Kashmiri yogini? Control of the breath is something we aspire to in our modern poetry. This vahk form is rather like an extended haiku and, as you know, the haiku was an early influence on my own poetry. Still, am not too sure of Lalla's desire to renounce the senses. I always tried to open mine up when I wrote poetry. How does the act of perception fit into all of this mysticism?

Write and let me know if the Saint will let you express yourself through your own writing. I believe it is important to develop a powerful imagination, a reflection in the human realm of the Divine creative capacity. That is, expressing yourself and writing your poems is as much a manifestation of a higher creative force as is the repetition of a mantra. Shattering her ego by chanting, Lalla seeks to express the Divine. In the West, we poets annihilate our ego by channelling the Divine energies through the poetic personae we create.

More practically, will you have the hours to meditate yourself towards sainthood, while writing poems and caring for your family? There is much about the tactile qualities of housework and childcare that can open the senses to poems, as well as to the Divine. **HD**

February 3, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Am riding northward in a lurching train through thick, snow-covered groves. Window rattles slightly as I think of last night—the only yoga student left in the creaky, old Deer Hill Centre—huge inn-like building, room after echoing room where I barricaded myself. Dragging a bedside table and my full suitcase across the bunkroom, I jammed them against the closed door. Also, hung an army blanket from the top mattress of the adjacent bunk bed, so the hall light glaring through the door cracks won't disturb me, and so from the doorway, no one could see me sleeping on a cot pressed against a far wall.

Ah, but I wake up. 2 a.m. Need to pee. Fortunately a bathroom adjoins my room; don't need to wander deserted hallways to find one. Back in bed, I want to drop swiftly to sleep, but small noises catch my attention. Are they coming from the hallway? From the floor above? I panic—is a person waiting outside my door, the only closed door in the whole Centre or, worse yet, are the cavernous, drafty rooms haunted by someone who fell from the rock-face with the Outward Bound group that was here last week, or perhaps by some camper who was pushed from a window fifty years ago?

Why had the Centre looked so haunted that first night my taxi strained up the arcing drive? Losing and finding our way through a dense forest, the driver and I emerged on a shadowy knoll where a deserted mansion perched. Each of its windows lit mysteriously from within called to mind these lines by Yeats:

off the floor, he would say, "This is a sort of initiation. Marine boot camp has nothing on us."

As you can imagine, there was little small talk, just extreme physical exertion—everything personal became subsumed by the effort to maintain a near-to-impossible posture. We lost ourselves to this struggle—no time to worry about who was the most limber. Ex-drug addicts, Europeans who had spent their childhood in D.P. camps, bodyworkers, computer programmers, we all sweated our prayers together.

What brought me to this edge? Seeker of masochistic thrills, or of cleansing and release? Today, seated in the swaying Amtrak car, my thighs still burn from the weekend exertions. But my generally out-of-line back feels great! Breathing easier, I keep thinking about S.R.'s response to my question about priorities: "If you put the spiritual first, the universe will provide time for you to do the artistic as well." What he really means is get up at four am and do two-and-one-half hours of chanting and yoga postures, and then let the rest take care of itself. But will it?

Before starting a kundalini yoga set, we repeat "Ong Na-Mo Gu-Roo Dev Na-Mo" three times. It means something like, "Infinite Creative Consciousness, I call on you. Divine Wisdom within, I call on you." Done reverentially, this evokes the protection of a higher power.

It also reminds me of the beautiful "Chant to Call Spirit" performed by the Metis healer Brooke Medicine Eagle that goes "Way Ya Hey Ney No." As Medicine Eagle explains on her tape, "Singing Joy to the Earth," this chant begins on a sharp, high note, as if to say to the spirits, "Hey, listen! Here I am. Pay attention!!" This high, piercing attack reaches the spirits and calls them down. She then drops her voice to a gentle, lower register resembling that of a

lullaby. Medicine Eagle explains that by softening and lowering her voice she is making a "sweet place" in her "belly," in her "healthy body," for spirit to dwell.

How foreign this is to most of us who write poetry today. We do not call spirit, nor do we prepare our bodies or minds for receiving the creative forces that might enter us. Of course, your already discussed Notes on Thought and Vision similarly acknowledges the belly—or womb—as a site of vision (19). Your Notes also stresses that we must care for, even purify, our bodies in order that they can channel creative energies into art (52).

If I can burden you with a bit more of this, H.D., I dreamed about this issue of self-commitment that night I slept at the Centre alone, which was, as a friend later pointed out, on Groundhog's Day! The dream goes as follows:

Outside the Centre I find a very fat groundhog with longish orange hair. It seems friendly, even cuddly, and easy to pick up. Consequently, I bring it home thinking it would make a nice pet. After a while, I realize it is a she and that her pleasing plumpness is not from overeating, but from her pregnancy. She suddenly gives birth to a small, orangish, catlike baby, but a large orange cat with sharp claws arrives to bat at it, tumbling it around until I fear for its life. I manage to get the newborn away from the mature cat. The baby seems bruised and stunned, but is breathing.

And the mama groundhog has made such a mess—there's a sort of bloody, mucus-like stuff from the birth on the floors and the bedcovers. I regret having brought her home. She belongs outside. . . .

Why is this relevant? When I looked up groundhog and cat in Ted Andrews' Animal-Speak: The Spiritual & Magical Powers of Creatures Great and Small, I found the following. The groundhog, a burrowing rodent, digs its tunnels at the edges of woods and forested lands, such as those surrounding the Deer Hill Centre. (I actually saw groundhog burrows while out walking the property.) Andrews writes of the groundhog's propensity for such burrowing:

Symbolically this reflects the ability to get deep within an area of interest. It is not unusual to have a groundhog appear at a time when a new area of study is about to open up. Since a groundhog does not fully mature for about two years, its appearance as a totem can reflect an endeavour that may take two years to come to full fruition. This may reflect two years of intensive study, digging, and building. (280)

This groundhog could represent my attempts to begin the yoga teacher training at this time. Although it only takes five weekend intensives to become certified, it may take several years to become a good teacher. But yoga is an artful ploy that is tricking my mind away from the poetic process and its examination of my crisis narrative. "The endeavour that may take two years to come to full fruition" is more realistically this dissertation.

Groundhogs, as we well know from our celebration of them in early February, hibernate most of the winter. Andrews explains:

They will curl up in a frost free chamber of their burrow, and their life processes will slow. Their temperature will drop from its normal 96 degrees to about 40 degrees, barely above freezing. The respiration slows to one breath per minute and the

heartbeat plunges from 110 beats per minute to about four or five. They achieve a state of unconsciousness and will usually awaken in late winter or early spring. Hibernation has always had great significance to it. It symbolizes death without dying. (281)

When someone dreams about a groundhog, as I did, Andrews believes that

there will be opportunity to explore deeper altered states of consciousness. Lessons associated with death and dying and revelations about its process will begin to surface. (281)

This interpretation of the groundhog symbol concurs with what kundalini yoga would do—slow down the metabolism and heart rate through postures and breathing exercises to achieve altered states of consciousness. It also relates to how the "old pictures" can provide me with "lessons associated with death and dying."

But what of the cruel cat that toys with the baby? Andrews says many flattering things about the cat but, since my dream cat was not a nice creature, I will mention only its more rascally characteristics. Witch's familiar, denizen of the dark, the cat is known for its "independence and unsociability" (Andrews 259). Thus, my dream cat seems to represent my fiercely independent nature that will not submit to S.R.'s ascetic regime, or to the rigours of scholarship. Wounding the baby groundhog, this sceptical side of myself acts like a force that would undermine fragile, new beginnings. The cat and the groundhog images are both dream configurations predetermined by my cultural conditioning and my individual personality, factors that colour, distort, and finally split apart the creative force that would pass through me. Thus the meaning that these

dream images present me with speaks of a divided self.

It is nearing dusk and the train's lurch and sway is making me drowsy. Am going to close and nap for an hour before getting to the border. Although much more civil than their American counterparts, Canadian customs agents always give me an awakening rush of adrenaline and paranoia. Must rest up. **CH**

Response to letters of January 24, January 31 and February 3, 1997

Dear Reader:

Rereading these yoga camp letters, I am struck by certain recurring themes. For example, the word "death" appears some eleven times. Nine references to nakedness or vulnerability occur. There is frequent mention of physical abuse and its endurance while the divided heart announces itself as a major trope.

Although my Catskills jaunt represents an escape from my domestic and student obligations, many such digressions in this thesis lead directly back to its central theme: the spectral presence of death. For example, I reflect upon a tragic drowning accident and the somewhat more welcome demise of Lalla's husband. The hospital imagery found in one of Lalla's poetic transmissions refers to my mother-in-law's worsening health. The holistic centre where I stay seems more like a haunted house than a peaceful retreat. My teacher jokes about dying and being reincarnated as a yogi. I receive a groundhog dream that contains lessons "associated with death and dying" (90). Must I drag Irena's corpse with me everywhere?

Sidonie Smith, in her Subjectivity, Identity and the Body, writes of an "embodied subject," or recognition of the body "as a location of autobiographical identity" (23). As such, my "embodied" self (or selves) remains troubled. I had come to this yoga retreat to get my certification, as well as to reconnect with a body neglected for a dissertation. What, then, to make of my Sikh teacher's boot-camp mentality? And what of Lalla-Ded's desire to transcend, rather than converse with the body?

H.D.'s short response to my first yoga camp letter shows her perplexed by the saintly woman's violent renunciations. Abused by her mother-in-law, Lalla, in turn, would tie up prana (her own breath) in a closet and lash it with a whip, which suggests the punitive ascetic disciplines not unlike the gruelling Sikh warrior work-outs. S.R., for example, encourages his students to concentrate on a mantra to transcend the pain induced by the more challenging postures. Would Brookes call this denial? Instead of vacating my body for intellectual pursuits, was I abandoning it for a transcendental chant?

What can I make of Lalla's nakedness? Concentrating on OM, she leaves the sensuous "outer world" (59) for an inner spiritual realm, as my yoga training would have me do. Why then does Lalla dance nude? Are we missing something because we know nothing about the Shaivite tradition of the naked ascetic dancer? Viewed through an autobiographical lens, Lalla, as naked wanderer, symbolizes my own desire to leave behind the confining roles of wife, mother, and scholar in order to journey alone. Discussing Virginia Woolf, Smith writes that travel, whether "geographical, cultural," or "psychological," can shatter notions of a unified self (95). In "Street Haunting," Woolf writes that an excursion can help a person

penetrate a little way, far enough to give oneself the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and minds of others. (165)

This seems to be what I am doing in my Amtrak seance with Lalla-Ded. I am travelling out of my own body to "escape a constraining identity" (Smith 95). Reading Lalla's trance-inducing vahks to the accompaniment of the train's monotonous rattle, I temporarily become her amanuensis. The

Lalla episode, then, provides a miniature portrait of the continuing acts of ventriloquism I perform while adopting H.D.'s voice. Interestingly, both the Lalla and H.D. personae describe themselves as a "dot" of light, or "speck on the retina, drawing your gaze upward, blood-reddish purple light between the closed eyes." Much discussion will ensue later about this clairvoyant site, a portal in the mind's eye that opens onto imaginary realms.

Brookes and Virginia Woolf were both sexually abused writers for whom vacating the private body with its threatening appetites and aggressions could be exhilarating, but also debilitating. For some, the extreme absenteeism of such out-of-the-body experiences can result in schizophrenia. Joan Dexter Blackmer, a Jungian analyst and Martha Graham company trainee, writes that in the more "psychotic states," one finds an "absence of tactile definition—the lack of physical boundaries":

An ego not anchored in the reality of the body is fragile, susceptible to being swamped by the unconscious. The injuries schizophrenics inflict on themselves—cigarette burns, wrist slashing, sticking their feet into fire, head knocking, for example—may be attempts to awaken some sensation, a sense of life, into an otherwise numb body. (31)

Although hopefully not psychotic, I have temporarily abandoned the poetic process in an attempt to communicate with my numb body through the extreme physical exertions of Sikh boot camp. Earlier in my doctoral study when I had first started reading H.D.'s work, I drafted the following about how one must suffer the writing of her body. In my case, I woke up to find scratches like the stigmata of an alien script marring my face:

SPHINX

*Why must I write?
You should not care for this,
but She draws the veil aside,

unbinds my eyes,
commands,
write, write, or die.*

H.D.

Mirror, beneath flecks of toothpaste,
a scratch on my cheek,

as if a toothpick, a common pin
was drawn down it. Fingers trace

two more whorls like flames
lapping up over my chin.

"You'd have woken up,
if someone did this to you."

Another, fine as a wisp of smoke's
by my nose. "It's just your self-hatred."

From cheekbone to chin and up once more,
"you hate yourself," the backwards J

of some ghostly sign's breaking,
"It's not that unusual," is breaking

over my face like a wave. "And you've
left the tap water running."

Clouds, sun:

the yesterday and today of her faces.

Carl Jung, in The Visions Seminars, writes that people who cannot inhabit their bodies "need a good deal of suffering before they can feel themselves—they almost inflict upon themselves situations in which they have to suffer" (126). This is how they learn more about themselves.

Pain, explains Dexter Blackmer, especially for a dancer, is the path to physical awareness that provides information about the state of one's musculature, knees, or spine. Pain can unlock what hides in the body because "pain and memory are interconnected" (54). For example, meditating on an aching shoulder, which was distracting me from my writing, led to this poem entitled "The Kick":

It was the right side, armpit, no, shoulder
Dad said to brace the gun butt against
when I was twelve and we went past the garden
where Mother knelt feeding the roses,
went below what was protected by the terrace
to a place covered in gravel and ending
where the marsh began and then the forest.

It was the right shoulder I rubbed, small
chilled by a damp breeze, as Dad made
clay pigeons fly from a black box.
"Shoot!" I shot. My shoulder tensed
as the thin fingers of my right hand did,
forced in my first school year to guide
a fat pencil, stumbling through the alphabet.

It was the right side after the blast—
 was it still a part of my body?
 I twisted my chin in line with shoulder to check
 then leaned against the split cedar fence,
 catching my breath beside the weathered
 vertebra of a whale, gate-keeper
 to a world of stones and hunted things.

Stand again to pull the trigger
 with the first finger of the right hand—
 easier to operate than a pencil
 and as expressive, not of what grows a rose,
 but of the pleasure that calculates violence,
 splits atoms, shatters a clay pigeon.
 Control the kick. This I learned,
 steadying my sweaty shoulder with nerves
 trained now and expectant, eyes following
 the flight of the scattering, black shards
 blown apart like blighted petals,
 nose filled with the burnt scent of ripped air,
 as I savoured the report. (Hussey 11-12)

Brookes also notes the connection between bodily pain and memory. The abuse, she writes, remains locked in "bodily memories which I carry as tension in my body" (27). Suffering a stomach ulcer, she explains, "only through bodily symptoms did I feel my abuse as real" (97).

"When afraid," Brookes continues, "I still vacate my body" (30). One disassociates from her body because it has long been defined as an embarrassing problem (Stinson 45). Ostriker also explains that the despised body is "both corrupt and corruptible; that is, it is, both inherently sinful and inherently subject to change and death" (97). H.D., in an early poem, depicts how the voluptuous Helen of

Troy was debased:

All Greece hates
 the still eyes in the white face,
 the lustre as of olives
 where she stands. . . .

could love indeed the maid,
 only if she were laid,
 white ash amid funeral cypresses.

(Collected Poems 154-5)

Smith describes how Descartes valued reason over the suspect emotions and body. Consequently, as Dexter Blackmer points out, the body has become our "shadow," an untouchable "second-class citizen" (31). "Untouched, repressed, denied, the body moves into the shadow, where dwell those aspects of ourselves we are loath to look at" (31). Cut off from our body, we lose a powerful "source of natural wisdom and energy" (31), and often the body, in a desperate attempt to communicate, creates "compulsions, eating disorders, injuries, physical illnesses and of course many psychological problems" (32).

More complex and subtle than we often imagine, bodily intelligence communicates best, not through language, but through imagery and pain (Dexter Blackmer 69)—the two ways it spoke to me earlier on during my Jin Shin Do massages. Provoked by my 4:30 a.m. cold showers and yoga workouts and, at night in the empty centre, by my childlike terror of ghosts in the dark, my body responded through the powerful images of a dream. My dream depicted groundhogs, cats, and the like, inhabitants of the fields and lawns surrounding the centre, who as animals, also symbolized the body itself.

Ostriker points to how many contemporary women are employing such nature imagery to give voice to their bodily intelligence (108-19). In so doing, the body is often depicted as a wild animal that lives within us. In my yoga camp dream, this shadow-self splits into two such animals—the motherly groundhog and the free-spirited cat. The latter represents my artistic side that would avoid child rearing responsibilities and scholarly discipline. A college drop-out and absentee mother, H.D. often referred to herself as "Cat" (Schaffner 4).

Unlike the *independantiste* cat, my groundhog self is a responsible, security-conscious parent who prefers the safe confines of her burrow. She also knows how to surrender to the necessities of hibernation. Autobiographically, this suggests my desire to give myself to the disciplines of yoga, motherhood, and scholarship, practices that teach lessons associated with death and dying.

Seasoned travellers on a Montreal-bound train, my "wandering, slippery" selves revel in acts of ventriloquism, having sought out painful experiences so as to feel more embodied and alive (Smith 123). Divided but not yet conquered, they struggle with whether to submit to the more demure roles of wife, mother, and scholar, or to flaunt their artistry.

February 28, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Haven't heard from you in some time. Perhaps my letters aren't reaching you in Greece where I imagine you have sequestered yourself. On my part, the hiatus is circumstantial. My family has contracted a severe flu, and my mother-in-law has undergone another near-fatal heart operation. Things are precarious.

As the pressure builds, I grow rebellious about my dissertation, finally pushing it aside to draft the following poems:

GROUNDHOG TO HER CHILDREN:

Dig. Dig
is what you were born for,
bulldozing with your wide heads,
tapping ledges with blackened nails
to shore up storage rooms
near a wood. Cold and fattened,
let the plunge hole take you under:
loosening gravel, you'll slip
through hollowed tunnels,
rooms of drying dandelions,
stolen cabbages and beets,
to where the leafy sleep nest waits,
cloistered between frost-line
and flood. Plug up its door
with a wad of straw, mixed
with your spittle. Then kneel,
head below heart,
as you curl like a woolly fiddlehead
into a ball. Water will slow

to ice, your body stiffen,
 beyond panic to where
 the heart grows light.
 Surrender will be sweet—
 three or four bitter months,
 unless your shadow calls you back.

CAT TO HERSELF:

I like to play
 at tapping and toying
 with moonbeams, fireflies,
 some such *peu de chose*. And,
 what of it? Will o'the wisp,
carte blanche, I fend for myself
 ad-libbing a high-wire artist,
 impersonating a big top lion.
C'est moi. The one who
 swallows the canary, sees
 fit to leap in the dark,
 eyes riveted, claws tensed
 for the back of her prey—
 just killing a little time.

The cat likes toying with things—my dissertation, or the yoga training. The groundhog, on the other hand, defines boundaries, digs in with commitment, and finally submits to her hibernation coma, a sort of stupor to which any good graduate student must succumb. The cat feels too independent, or too scared to do so. Curious when at first presented with a new thing, she prefers to go her own way.

This catlike aspect finds it difficult to surrender to the dissertation and even the poetic process. Her avoidance might be explained by a passage from Susan Gubar's essay,

"'The Blank Page' and Female Creativity," which describes the terrors many women feel when they must submit to their creative urges. Society has only recently allowed women to express themselves freely in poetic forms. A woman's weak boundary definitions and lack of self-assurance can still prevent her from surrendering to her creativity. Gubar continues:

If artistic creativity is likened to biological creativity, the terror of inspiration for women is experienced quite literally as the terror of being entered, deflowered, possessed, taken, had, broken, ravished—all words which illustrate the pain of the passive self whose boundaries are being violated. (256)

Gubar goes on to explain the woundology of a woman's creativity:

Like their nineteenth-century foremothers, twentieth-century women often describe the emergence of their talent as an infusion from a male master rather than inspiration from or sexual commerce with a female muse. This phallic master causes the woman writer to feel her words are being expressed from her rather than by her. (256)

There are a number of woman poets, points out Gubar, who describe themselves as wounded by their own creativity:

Like Mary Elizabeth Coleridge who sees her lips as a silent wound, or Charlotte Brontë who suffers from a "secret, inward wound" at the moment she feels the "pulse of Ambition," or Emily Dickinson who is bandaged as the empress of Calvary in some poems and as the wounded deer in others, women writers often dread the emergence of their own talents. (256)

By writing to you, am I trying to gain inspiration from a female rather than male muse? Is the little groundhog mother such a muse figure? If so, she is edgy, surrounded by dangerous rustling, and quick to resort to the "plunge hole." She counsils her fledgling poems to submit to a seasonal trance, but her final words ring ominously—the shadow may call them back to a womb of death. If a hibernating groundhog wakes up too quickly, it may die. It needs to shiver for a few hours to increase its body temperature and heart-rate before moving about. Surrender to hibernation is perilous. Too big a temperature drop during aestivation results in deadly ice forming inside a groundhog's body.

A hibernating groundhog's life is beset with dangers. Predators await her above ground, such as my dream cat who bloodies the groundhog baby, while below, hibernation can be deadly. The groundhog's precarious state mirrors my own and is one, H.D., that you have experienced, as well. Gary Burnett points to the terror you felt at the emergence of your poetic voice. In H.D., Between Image and Epic: The Mysteries of her Poetics, he adds that you often experienced the creative process as a state of daemonic "possession" (25).

For example, you explore this dangerous merger of the human and divine in your second collection. Its title poem, "Hymen," says Burnett, expresses an "undercurrent of fear," "a wavering between ecstasy and annihilation" felt by a bride on her wedding night (35, 36). Here, an attendant choir voices this fear:

Where love is come
 (Ah, love, is come indeed!)
 Our limbs are numb
 Before his fiery need;

With all their glad
 Rapture of speech unsaid,
 Before his fiery lips

Our lips are mute and dumb. (Collected Poems 110)

In this and other early poems, you continue to struggle with "a variety of powers . . . of human and divine connection and possession—and these powers contain both great promise and great terror" (Burnett 52). In your "Phaedra," you don the mask of a tragic Greek noble woman who falls in love with her stepson, Hippolytus. When he rejects Phaedra's advances, she slanders him by telling his father, Theseus, that he had propositioned her, for which Hippolytus is killed. Phaedra then commits suicide.

In Hades, she speaks to her soul about that awful power that the desire for her stepson set in motion:

Think, O my soul—
 what power has struck you blind—
 is there no desert-root, no forest-berry
 pine-pitch or knot of fir
 known that can help the soul
 caught in a force, a power,
 passionless, not its own? (Collected Poems 135)

The blinding erotic desire that enters Phaedra could stand for that alien force that at times inspired your early poetry. It results in an "Art undreamt in Crete, / strange and dire." This "strange" energy acts like a "counter-charm" to prevent "my charm," to limit "my power" (136). Suppressed, this "dire" passion can turn malignant as it does with Phaedra. You liken Phaedra's suicide to "the scarlet flower [that] is wrecked / in the slash of the white hail" (136). As such, the "hail" represents self-destructive forces that you compare to those residing in the dangerous poppy:

The poppy that my heart was,
 formed to bind all mortals,
 made to strike and gather hearts
 like flame upon an altar,
 fades and shrinks, a red leaf
 drenched and torn in the cold rain. (136)

In another early poem, "She Rebukes Hippolyta," the speaker deciphers a vision of Hippolyta from the flames of a fire oracle. Worshipped as a mare, this Amazon Queen is slain by Hercules for her magic girdle:

far and away
 (through fire I see it,
 and smoke of the dead, withered stalks
 of the wild cistus-bush)
 Hippolyta, frail and wild,
 galloping up the slope
 between great boulder and rock
 and group and cluster of rock. (139)

These opening lines portray Hippolyta somewhat ambivalently. She is both "frail and wild." And throughout the poem, the oracle keeps obsessively questioning, "Was she so chaste?" (139). Does this refrain mirror your own anxious attempts to come to terms with your promiscuity and bisexuality which accompanied the emergence of your creativity? The oracle continues:

Was she so chaste,
 (I see it, sharp, this vision,
 and each fleck on the horse's flanks
 of foam, and bridle and bit,
 silver, and the straps,
 wrought with their perfect art,
 and the sun,
 striking athwart the silver-work,

and the neck, strained forward, ears alert,
and the head of a girl
flung back and her throat.)

Was she so chaste—
(Ah, burn my fire, I ask
out of the smoke-ringed darkness
enclosing the flaming disk
of my vision)
I ask for a voice to answer:
was she chaste? (139)

Watching the flames, the oracle sees Hippolyta shape-shift into her equine form with "flanks of foam" and head "flung back." Hypnotized by this scene, the poet-seer keeps asking, "Was she chaste?" She cannot divine an answer. Her mantic inspiration pales as "the smoke-ringed darkness" begins "enclosing the flaming disk of" her "vision." She beseeches: "I ask for a voice to answer." Lacking her own voice is she appealing to some daemonic one? (Am I channelling yours for the same reason?)

"Who can say?"—the answer is no answer. At this point the ground over which Hippolyta courses metamorphoses into the dangerous body of her lover. His laughter sends "mountain boulders" thundering down to kill her as Hercules will do:

Who can say—
the broken ridge of the hills
was the line of a lover's shoulder,
his arm-turn, the path to the hills,
the sudden leap and swift thunder
of mountain boulders, his laugh. (139)

You close your text implying that perhaps Hippolyta deserves this end because "she was [a] mad" barbarian queen

who drank and fought like a warrior—a woman whose magical (poetic) powers threatened the patriarchy (140). Early in your career were you terrified to write poetry because passionate song depends not just upon love, but more fundamentally upon power and violence? Distrusting your new-found voice and unable to establish protective boundaries for yourself, did you project its fury onto the murderous Hercules, or even onto certain of your male friends?

You seem to be expressing this dilemma in the following passage from Paint It Today when you write about the ill treatment you suffered at the hands of the "youth," your fiancé, the Modernist poet Ezra Pound:

When she was nineteen, she had parted with the youth, having gained nothing from him but a feeling that someone had tampered with an oracle, had banged on a temple door, had dragged out small curious, sacred ornaments, had not understood their inner meaning, yet with a slight sense of their outer value, their perfect tint and carving, had not stolen them, but left them, perhaps worse, exposed by the road side, reft from the shelter and their holy setting. (7)

In this passage, you see yourself "as both oracle and temple" (Kloepfer, "Flesh" 30). Pound has just raped you, the oracle, and your mantic poetry. Ruthlessly editing your early poems, those "small, curious, sacred ornaments," your supposed mentor appropriates them as the stellar examples on which to found his Imagist movement. Kloepfer adds that Pound, who invites you to Europe, brings about a forced "separation from the mother" (30). He wrenches you from her sacred temple, then rushes off to marry the more docile Dorothy Shakespeare. He leaves you and your poems "exposed by the roadside" far from home.

Forced from your mother's side, you are terrified. Resuming your Philadelphia life as a dutiful daughter is impossible. Your European adventures have put you in touch with "another speech" of a darker, more rebellious sort. You begin to fear that this emergent voice might strike out, injure, or even destroy your parents. Here, your protagonist would tell her mother what really runs through her heated mind:

There was another speech. That speech she could not rehearse in words. That speech was a hot wave across her brain. . . . There were no words to this speech. A fear possessed her that suddenly she might find words to this speech, that she might shout or sing those words, and that they would break, those good and simple people, shrivelled to ash, before her utterance, or that they might seize her, somehow tear the fiery sandals from her feet and bind her down forever.

(Paint It Today 41)

This "hot wave across her brain" threatens to explode into a challenging counter-song. You continually fear that this volcanic, inner stream of consciousness might erupt, causing you to be seized, bound, and dragged off to an asylum.

Returning to the United States to become like your submissive mother whose oracular mutterings have been appropriated for interpretation by the patriarchy is no answer. Instead, as Kloepfer writes, "it is in language itself that the longed for mother must be found" ("Flesh" 32). She states that after the break with your Imagist brethren, you begin

to resurrect the female pantheon, invoking a universal and archaic mother who will manifest herself not only within an arcanum but within language: a maternal voice and rhythm, a muttering, a grotto in language which is the mother's space. (27)

Such a maternal language, not unlike the hieroglyphs that you saw in 1923 at the opening of Tutankhamen's Tomb, "arbitrarily confer[s] 'meaning' . . . which must be consulted, returned to, interpreted" (Robinson 262; Kloepfer, "Flesh" 42). Your attraction to such hieroglyphs differentiates you from Retallack. Although you both enjoy playing with language you, unlike her, also value articulating the inarticulate with as much precision as is possible. Writers like Retallack would wallow in a "dark, noisy silence" (351). You, on the other hand, search for *les mots justes* to express the hieroglyphic nature of that silence. For the sake of your own edification, you want to bring the unintelligible as close to consciousness as you can, while Retallack prefers a raw, preconscious gender/genre-defying welter that, of course, is not poetry *per se*. The unstructured noise that she values risks jamming the airwaves with its monotonous static.

Hieroglyphs, writes Andrew Welsh, were employed "by Egyptian priests to foreshadow divine ideas"—ideas that often resisted the logic of the conscious mind (52). Their emblematic riddles challenged the initiate to contemplate them over time as a Zen koan might a monk. In "The Walls Do Not Fall," you write:

the meaning that words hide;
they are anagrams, cryptograms,
little boxes, conditioned

to hatch butterflies. (Collected Poems 540)

In this vein, I started playing with my groundhog poem, hoping to generate some more images or phrases that could be added to it. To do so, I free-associated off each word of the poem. This strategy sought to combine Anne-Louise Brookes' notion of key word analysis with your use of past, present, and future tenses. In Paint It Today, you write that

the visible world exists as poignantly, as ethereally as the invisible. There is another world, or a combining of two worlds. When we get the visible and the invisible together that makes another world. I used to believe in the past and what I called the future; when you get the past and the future together you get what I call, now for the sake of argument, the present, at least a poignant and ethereal present which I call the visible world. (80)

Inspired by this passage, I began free-writing about each word in "Groundhog to her Children." I asked: what does the word tell me about (1) my past, (2) my present, (3) my future, and (4) what strong emotions does it express? In my quick, free-associative spills, I strove to capture the "poignant and ethereal present" composed of the interplay of memory (the past) and desire (the future) that can bring about a synthesis of external and internal states.

Finally, I let a few more butterflies out of their boxes by jotting down ten metaphors for each of the poem's words. I have decided to call this exercise, "hatching the words," because as you write in Bid Me to Live, "she brooded over each word, as if to hatch it" (163).

This heuristic came to me while I was sick with flu and ensconced on the living room couch. Here, I spent over a

week submitting myself to "the language of lying-in. . . . a dissolving of the boundaries of self and other, inside and outside, a vertiginous moment in which language unlatches" (Kloepfer, "Flesh" 43). I let the words' sounds, rhythms, and rhymes lead me. For example, in the poem's opening line, "Live on a field's edge," I let the word, "past" reverberate off, or collide with "field," or "edge" such that their juxtaposition jump-started a train of thought.

I filled up one journal and begin a second with words that became, as you say, like "cryptograms, / little boxes" containing so much beneath their surfaces. Am sending you along some of the hidden sub-texts, the absent presences that emerged from beneath the simple wordings of "Groundhog To Her Children."

Am still feeling quite drained by my flu, so must bring this to a close. See what you think about my hatchlings, **CH**

From line 13 of my poem, the word "heads" generated this unsuspected landscape. It will not be worked towards a poem until the very end of this dissertation.

Bulrushes behind newly built cottages,
 winter homes for a few, the curving
 road heads you past them to the river.
 Turn your head and look across
 to your mother's land,

where yesterday morning, you and the dog
 floundered
 through snowy thickets to the point,
 but lost your way heading back—No
 walker or bushwacker had broken trail
 in some two years,
 low growth so fast—lost in minutes
 in spite of how you try to keep
 the low growl of the sea
 at your back. Too distant, the past summers
 when Dad revved up the chain saw
 and sliced the trail free—head bending
 over the whirring blade,
 he moved methodically towards the creek,
 never a stumble, a lost beat, swatting
 mosquitoes he went through the now
 quiet forest, scattered with deer spoor
 that the dog paws at before racing ahead,
 through swampy patches, drifts of snow.

You head to what you think will be east
 of the neighbour's property
 to come out on the main road near the monastery,

but, at last, find yourself a mile west
in a tidal marsh you'd never seen before—
rushes, ice-edged pools of salt water
and an old railroad bridge
on a long elbow of land to wander along,
hoping for a road, a way home—heading east
you've come out west to startle up ducks
that fly north
with more certainty than yourself.

"Granite," a word that was removed from the later drafts of my Groundhog poem, lead to this poem which was revised during December of 1998:

WINTERING GRANITE

bears granite,
 is rubus, arcanum of mica purged in fire,
 as snow floats down on passersby
 clutching bulky coats to chests.

Powdery, in the near distance
 are trees. No breeze stirs
 their boughs, their angular grasp
 of dimensions that were molten once:
 boulders, coarse out-croppings.

Only their roots can fathom the street,
 where snow melts upon impact
 like the penetration of eyes searching
 for icy patches. We pass
 and pass over, bent heads frost bitten
 like the flowers.

From the word "hollowed," we get this little riff which has not been reworked:

Mourning the house, empty of family
 sold even, but reverberant with the shift-
 ing of our ways along and along the walk.
 Hollow earthen space under the porch,
 could return there, close to the edge
 of those stone steps? Where?
 in the moist dank, marbles were lost,

grew dusty-eyed, muddied, the cat
disappearing undercover too—hollow,
hallowed by memories of being small enough
to crawl under the low frame, behind the steps
with the other darting things that vanished.

And this unrevised spill came from "hollowed," too :

Cracked window, sound rushing and stirring
like a vacuum, the upstairs tenant moving
over hollow cement, drops something,
as the entryway echoes with comings, goings:
the Chinese toddler and his salt and pepper-haired
granddad on an explore: screams and
remonstrations,
little knuckles are pounding on our door.
And soon the bathroom will resound
with the blow dryer, styling the girl's hair
for her recital—as morning light illuminates
new snow and the wind goes sucking at the crack,
like an emptiness never filling up.

HEURISTICS FOR HATCHING THE WORDS

She brooded over each word as if to hatch it.

H.D., Bid Me to Live (163)

1. Circle the key-words of a given text (Brookes 1992).
2. Freewrite about these key words and any others as well. Start this writing off by answering the following questions about each word:
 - (1) what does this word have to do with my past?
 - (2) with my present?
 - (3) with my future?
 - (4) what strong emotions does it express?
3. A fifth question you might ask as well is, "What would someone real or imagined, dead or alive, have to say about this word?" Whoever first comes to mind, let them speak, ie, try adopting a persona, a mask.
4. Now quickly write 10 metaphors for your word. I.e., "granite is like . . . "
5. Go to the thesaurus and look up your word, and freewrite phrases that come quickly to mind as you scan the word-lists of which your word is apart.
6. Now from all these verbal broodings, start nuggeting, or extracting the authentic, energized bits and see if you can make a poem, or add a metaphor, a vivid memory or vignette to your essay or story. Hopefully some butterflies will fly out of those little boxes, some meadowlark out of its egg.

Response of letter of February 28, 1997

Dear Reader:

Rebellion is a key theme of this ungainly letter. I will not continue repressing my poetry. Even if it takes longer to complete a poem than an essay, I will draft some poems. They will be included in this outlaw dissertation because poetry is the best tool for teasing meaning out of the groundhog and cat, those images of my divided self.

"Groundhog to her Children" and "Cat to Herself" are the first "finished" poems to appear. As such, they signal my letting "the artistic motives overtake the therapeutic" (Chandler 23), although like the young H.D., I still align my creativity with a dangerous rebelliousness. I have, nevertheless, stopped analysing my groundhog dream in order to re-fashion it into two persona poems. Shifting my attention from the raw overabundance of dream data to the selection of key images, I begin shaping them further by way of regular line lengths and by such narrative strategies as character, monologue, and setting. In so doing, I manage to curb, shape, and externalize that "hot wave across her brain" (H.D., Paint It Today 41).

Along with this rush to complete new poems comes an upsurge of fear. Attempting to dampen down my still questionable creativity, I will abandon my poetry again and re-engage myself in a discussion of how a woman artist often distrusts her emergent voice (Gubar 256; Burnett 35-6). One step forward, two steps back—instead of staying with my poems, I undertake an extended analysis of why the creative process is problematic for myself and others. The artist in me begins fighting back against the somewhat overbearing literary critic, until I fall sick. Expecting little of

myself, I take up my poetry again not from a place of empowerment, but from a dreamy, flu-induced reverie. Lying on the couch, I develop a heuristic to lighten my mood, jokingly referred to as "Hatching the Words." This word-play results in the possible beginnings of a few new poems. But none will be reworked for months. I am caught in a cycle of creative rebellion followed by obliterating collapse.

Seemingly I have aligned my artistic with my antisocial self as I do in the persona of "Cat to Herself." Sensuous, playful, even dangerous, the cat enjoys shape-shifting as it wanders about. At first, she holds her power in check—"tapping and toying" with things. But by poem's end, the cat has metamorphosed into a "lion" with "claws tensed for the back of its prey." Is this what the nineteenth century called a "*lusus naturae*," a "monster-woman" who has chosen to be "a creator rather than simply a procreator" (Smith 15; Ostriker 73, 74)?

If you remember correctly, this subversive power communicated to H.D. by way of an inner "speech [that] was a hot wave across her brain" (Paint It Today 41). Talking only to herself, is my cat submerged in a similar stream of consciousness? In contrast, the groundhog persona speaks not to herself, but to her children. Her external discourse, rather than indulging in fantasy and introspection, directs and advises others. The groundhog, then, plays the procreative, good woman to the more dubious bohemian one. Clearly, maternal love and creative assertion remain divided.

Both the groundhog and cat embody what Ostriker sees as a positive trend in contemporary poetry—that of women who celebrate their bodies through an identification with animals and nature (108). One of their most common metaphors

is the earth (110). For example, the groundhog's burrow sets up protective boundaries between the self and the outer world, as a body might do. Deep in its sheltering belly, one can surrender to sleep or to more trance-like (creative) states, thereby escaping the bareness of those "three or four bitter months."

One might ask, am I celebrating the body, or merely expressing how ambivalent I feel about it? Here, the mother/body seems tinged with death. As "the shadow [that] calls you back," the earth shifts from fecund womb to chilly grave-site. Not surprisingly, other references to the dead and dying reverberate throughout this February letter—my mother-in-law is in intensive care, Phaedra speaks from beyond the grave, and Hercules will soon murder Hippolyta.

Thus, if the procreative woman can be easily threatened with bodily and psychological death, and the creative one is virginal or, at best, an absentee mother, where can we turn but to language, itself, in the hopes of claiming a revivifying, female source?

VERNAL EQUINOX: THE WANDERER AND THE WELTENWIND OF MARCH

These letters from March 18 to April 29, 1997 were begun on the vernal equinox, a time when the Norse tribes gathered at Upsala to honour Odin with a nine-day festival. Males of every species were sacrificed. Dogs, horses and men hung side-by-side from trees in the sacred grove.

I ween that I hung on the windy
tree
Hung there for nights full nine;
With the spear I was wounded, and
offered I was
To Othin [Odin], myself to myself,
On the tree that none may ever know
What root beneath it runs.

From "Hovamol." (Bellows 60)

March 18, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Cabin fever has driven me to work at a McGill library today. I need to sit with others, if only to stare dumbly out a second story window at clashing hockey players harrying a coveted puck across their melting, outdoor arena. Am at a low point; a scathing inner voice blocks my way, saying, "How dare you presume to write about H.D.? You aren't even doing a doctorate in literature!"

Stunned by its attack, yet bored by the prospects of student hockey watching, I have decided to spend the morning exploring what Gubar means by the "terror of inspiration" instilled in a women writer by "a male master" (256). I had already begun doing so in a poem entitled "The Visitation," drafted earlier during a period when I could write poetry:

Topped by its acorn, the bedpost waits;
the dressing table gathers its skirts
as a salt breeze billows the curtains,
exposing their white, carefully stitched linings.

Jerk and flap of them against
the cane-backed chair,
edged with lilies of the valley,
sets him muttering as the wind once did,
rattling the canvas-covered jeep
he drove through fields
of sleeping turnips and mustard gas.

Re-charting those muddied trenches
blasted as if by seizures deep,
deep in the brain,

doesn't exist within themselves; it is an alien male force. For example, Emily Brontë ambivalently addresses her unpredictable muse, saying: "Thee, ever present, phantom thing— / My slave, my comrade, and my King!" (208).

Memorialized in the following stanzas, Brontë's first encounter with this mecurial muse occurred shortly after her mother's death. Emily was a barely weaned three-year-old:

And, with my wet eyes raised on high,
I prayed to God that I might die.
Suddenly, in that silence drear,
A sound of music reached my ear;

And then a note; I hear it yet,
So full of soul so deeply sweet,
I thought that Gabriel's self had come
To take me to my father's home.

Three times it rose that seraph-strain,
Then died, nor lived ever again;
But still the words and still the tone
Swell round my heart when all alone (116-17)

This childhood memory haunts Brontë, driving her to describe her angelic daemon as an external presence whose "words" and "tone" "swell" not within, but around her heart uncontrollably. Although welcomed as a comforter, her unpredictable muse perpetuates further suffering through his association with "her mother's departure rather than the memory of her tenderness" (Tayler 41). In the following, this unbidden daemon, like Brontë's own dead mother, cannot be called back:

O Dream, where art thou now?
 Long years have past away
 Since last, from off thine angel brow
 I saw the light decay.

Alas, alas for me
 Thou wert so bright and fair,
 I could not think thy memory
 Would yield me nought but care!

The sun-beam and the storm,
 The summer-eve divine,
 The silent night of solemn calm,
 The full-moon's cloudless shine,

Were once entwined with thee,
 But now with weary pain,
 Lost Vision! 'tis enough for me—
 Thou canst not shine again. (Brontë 87)

When the visitant, an image of Emily's creative assertion, disappears, poetic vision vanishes. At first, she aligns him with a "sun-beam," a "summer-eve divine," night calm, and the full moon. She also associates him with a violent "storm." Characterizing him as an ambivalent, poetic elixir residing outside of herself, Brontë writes: "My spirit drank a mingled tone, / Of seraph's song and demon's moan" (196).

Here in a dream, the speaker is "rapt away" by a "shadowy thing" in a graveyard:

It was just the time of eve
 When parted ghosts might come
 Above their prisoned dust to grieve
 And wail their woeful doom.

And truly at my side
 I saw a shadowy thing
 Most dim, and yet its presence there
 Curdled my blood with ghastly fear
 And ghastlier wondering. (37)

As this death-vision progresses, the speaker cannot free herself from its presiding daemon. She cannot "turn away," as it bends over her hypnotically (38). "My breath I could not draw," she states as her "words die in a voiceless moan" (37, 38). Instead of inspiring poetic eloquence, her demonic muse drowns out her words with "a sound" that "awoke the stillness reigning round" (38). Reverberant with death, "the earth shrank / and heaven's lights shivered 'neath its power" (38).

Alfred Ribi in his Demons of the Inner World: Understanding our Hidden Complexes writes the following about creative impulses imprisoned in the unconscious:

There is nothing more destructive in the psyche than a creative complex that is repressed; the complex then becomes creative in destruction. . . . It goes without saying that creativity is bound up with suffering and privation, because one no longer belongs to oneself but to the demon. Many of us fear this determination of our destiny by the demon and try to hold ourselves back. (87)

Ribi gives an explanation for the appearance of Brontë's numerous maleficent muse figures—her repressed creativity has grown destructive. Certainly, men suffer from destructive complexes, but women's blockages often appear more severe because our culture does not encourage them to express themselves. For example, many women grow uneasy when overtaken by a creative fever. They rarely give themselves

to bouts of creative exaggeration as do men. Trained to be accountable morally and maternally, women have had to tend their babies and gently stir the fire. They did not dash off poems with a hasty nonchalance, if they wrote them at all.

In her Creation Myths, Marie-Louise von Franz retells an Iroquois story that dramatizes the creative ruthlessness that most women would avoid. Here, Maple Sprout God and Firestone argue in their mother's womb:

Firestone says, "I see light, let us now go that way." But Maple Sprout God says thoughtfully, "No, we do not want to do that, for we do not want to kill our mother," and then gets himself into the normal position an embryo must have in order to be born naturally. But Firestone cannot wait and tears his mother apart, and she dies. He is the hasty one, the one without patience who chooses to take the shortcut and thereby represents the destructive. That is the shadow aspect of creativity. (149)

von Franz provides another explanation for the demonization of Brontë's male muse. Such a demonic, yet inspirational force ushers the preverbal into consciousness. When unconscious materials first break to the surface, they can estrange and even frighten us:

In a letter, Jung even went so far as to say, "Demonic powers are archetypes in an initial stage of moving towards consciousness." This means that all archetypes, as they begin to move toward consciousness, have demoniacal aspects. It is only after the threshold into consciousness has been broken through and the content has been integrated that its positive meaning becomes apparent.

(151-2)

If we can dialogue what seems demonic, it will naturally move towards verbal integration. The artist must learn to tolerate what von Franz calls "a creative disturbance":

And this explains why it is that creative people are very closely exposed to demonic, devilish forces, for in them, archetypal contents are breaking through the threshold into consciousness. This is also why one very often sees that before there is a creative concretization, there is a creative disturbance and certain demoniacal impulses appear. (152)

"No coward soul" (Brontë 243), Emily wrestled with such "devilish forces" (von Franz 152) in "that struggle of distress and fierce impatience" (Brontë 239). Conserving her energies for this inner battle, she retreated into the reassuring predictability of domestic seclusion. From an early age, she rarely attended school or church and shunned all social contact outside her immediate family. Those who did meet her found her "untidy" and "rude" (Frank 169). With her mother dead and her aloof, Anglican minister father taking his meals alone in his study, she maintained "the liberty of the orphan—the lonely freedom of the parentless child" (Tayler 13). Emily wandered the desolate Yorkshire moors with her dogs during the day and secretly penned poems on her rosewood lap desk late into the night.

Did Emily align her poetry with a lonely nightscape because, like you, she dared not let the endangering "hot wave" (H.D., Paint It Today 41) of inner speech overflow its course during the day? Demonizing her creative urges, did she succumb to subversive bouts of inspiration followed by collapse, even illness?

Brontë's nocturnal writing rituals evoked visitations from a male muse figure closely aligned with another repressed issue, the losing of her mother at an early age. In Brontë's poem "Stars," the speaker flourishes in a peaceful night world whose "boundless" firmament shines down like her departed mother's eyes. In contrast, the sunlight strikes her face mercilessly as a scorching paternal presence that would censure her work and herself:

All through the night, your glorious eyes
 Were gazing down on mine,
 And with a full heart's thankful sighs,
 I blessed that watch divine!

I was at peace, and drank your beams
 As they were life to me
 And revelled in my changeful dreams,
 Like petrel on the sea.

Thought followed thought—star followed star
 Through boundless regions on,
 While one sweet influence, near and far,
 Thrilled through and proved us one.

Why did the morning rise to break
 So great, so pure a spell,
 And scorch with fire the tranquil cheek
 Where your cool radiance fell?

Blood-red, he rose, and arrow-straight
 His fierce beams struck my brow:
 The soul of Nature sprang elate,
 But mine sank sad and low! (225-26)

As Tayler points out, "the stars are mothering lights" (37) that illuminate Emily's nocturnal search for her lost parent's "female speech":

a mode of private introspection and retrospection contained within a "room" of Emily's own, shut away from the world of audience and the claims of community, and untainted by the motives of ambition that she attributed to the father world. (27-8)

Her father's competitive, sunlit domain demanded that she deny her initial pain and loss. "The returning daylight world of ordinary human action, of rational consciousness, of bustling business, goal-oriented rivalry, ambition, and achievement" perpetuated self-alienation by encroaching upon Brontë's need to grieve privately (Tayler 35).

Between October, 1844 and October, 1845, Emily wrote her "most arresting poems" (Frank 199). Unfortunately for her, if not for the world, the much more ambitious Charlotte found Emily's notebook and forced her sister to publish its poems under the pseudonym, Ellis Bell. Using male pseudonyms, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne self-published Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell in 1846. Needing recognition, Charlotte persuade Emily "to uncloak her inner being and sacrifice her God of Visions to publication and the public" (Tayler 70). Once her sacred poems were exposed to the world's profane eyes, Emily began devaluing her own creativity. "Charlotte reports that Emily mentioned her published poems rarely and only with scorn" (108). In fact, she abandoned poetry to dash off "in less than 8 months" (68) her harsh and furious Wuthering Heights. This, her only novel, became, according to Tayler, Emily's "suicide note" (104).

Upon the success of Wuthering Heights, Charlotte broke confidence again, telling its publishers that the poet, Ellis Bell, was sister Emily. Thereupon Emily abruptly stopped writing and abstained from putting pen to paper during the last two and a-half years of her life. After her severely emaciated and tubercular brother died, Emily ceased speaking to her family and refused proper nourishment and medical attention for her own worsening consumption. She passed away three months after Branwell on December 19, 1848.

Closely bonded with her opium and alcohol-addicted brother, unmarried Emily seems to have projected the demonic impulses of her own repressed creativity onto him. Although the more conservative Charlotte grew impatient with their brother's breakdowns, "Emily's feelings for Branwell warmed the further he fell from grace" (Frank 176). Her "heart, usually so inaccessible and impenetrable, instinctively went out to the maimed, ill, dispossessed, poor, and all who had failed" (176). In fact, as Frank reports, Emily eerily "ate shortbread and biscuits off a small blue and white Wedgwood plate of her own which depicted a little girl in a cart wielding a whip with her brother, in harness, pulling the cart" (45). The plate was inscribed with the following: "What pleasure filled my little heart when seated in thy little cart to see thee act the horse's part, my brother" (45).

Branwell often played out this alien, animal projection. Frank describes his chthonic mood-swings:

His exuberance, charm and good will could, at a moment's notice, give way to raving anger and violence, culminating in uncontrollable fits. These may have been epileptic seizures, rather than emotional outbursts, but whatever their

cause, they quite naturally terrified his family.
(102)

Branwell was a failed portrait painter who could not hold down a job. His final breakdown came after being fired as a tutor due to an affair he was having with his student's mother, a wealthy, older woman who had allegedly seduced him. Upon his disgraceful retreat to the Haworth Parsonage, Emily, who "scarcely conversed with any man" became her disgruntled brother's caretaker (Frank 130). She would sit up late into the night, writing in her notebook, while awaiting Branwell's return from his drunken rampages at the Black Bull. Physically the largest of her siblings, she would unbar the door, drag him up stairs, and undress him when necessary. She empathized with Branwell's suffering and the "illicit passion" he harboured for his wealthy paramour, the by-then-widowed Lydia Robinson (Frank 214). (The will of Lydia's deceased husband stated that she would forfeit her considerable inheritance if she ever saw Branwell again!)

Branwell's retaliatory pistol-waving histrionics and drunken lamentations would provide Emily with the sordid details from which to develop Wuthering Heights's alcoholic Hindley and the raving and cruelly miserable Heathcliff. These forbidding muse figures incorporated aspects of her brother's rapid decline. As Tayler writes, this subversive male element "was a lost and straying part of her wholeness, active because detached from his female source" (9).

This "lost and straying part" often appears as a spectral wanderer in Brontë's work. Homans reminds us that he is usually associated with the wind:

The repeated identification of a masculine wind with the preemption of language clearly refers to the tradition of the Word as the spirit or breath

of God, or wind blowing from God. The poet's fear that she neither originates nor controls her own speech, a fear that she presents as a fear of death, arises from her being a woman writing in a masculine tradition. (Women Writers 128)

In this well-known fragment from the Gondal Poems notebook, a wanderer appears allied with the winter winds:

Silent is the House—all are laid asleep;
 One, alone, looks out o'er the snow wreaths deep;
 Watching every cloud, dreading every breeze
 That whirls the 'wildering drifts and bends the
 groaning trees.

Cheerful is the hearth, soft the matted floor;
 Not one shivering gust creeps through pane or
 door;
 The little lamp burns straight; its rays shoot
 strong and far;
 I trim it well to be the Wanderer's guiding-star.

Frown, my haughty sire; chide my angry dame;
 Set your slaves to spy, threaten me with shame:
 But neither sire nor dame, nor prying serf shall
 know
 What angel nightly tracks the waste of winter
 snow.

(Brontë 236)

Although this Gondal fragment is set in the mythic country of that name that Emily and Anne Brontë invented in childhood and continued to write about as adults, it is highly autobiographical in nature. For example, the third stanza suggests Emily's night vigils held for brother Branwell's safe return from the Black Bull. Is Emily

pointing to the fact that she and her brother will be shamed by their "haughty" father and "angry" aunt if they are caught illicitly drinking and/or writing? Certainly this passage shows that Emily often considered her nocturnal writings to be a troubling, "creative disturbance" (van Franz 152). Tayler suggests that like Coleridge, Emily "regarded the experience of creative power as profoundly disruptive of ordinary life, deeply subversive of orthodox social and religious values" (52). Tayler continues describing Emily's rebellious spirit:

The living artist's turbulent presence is disruptive if not destructive to the dearest values of community; and for the artist herself, society's values can serve only to corrupt her from her purpose. But her passage through the community, though painful for everyone at the time, brings vitality, heightens life—even if she leaves life behind her. (94)

The mood in the above "Silent is the house" passage is deceptively cheerful. The isolated speaker appears removed from a community of humans who "are laid asleep" in their beds, or in the graveyard surrounding the Parsonage. And, although Emily calls her visitant an "angel," he "nightly tracks the waste of winter snow" like the dreaded "breeze. . . that bends the groaning trees," like the "shivering gust" that would threaten her "little lamp."

There is much to suggest that the male energies infusing Brontë's work spring from pagan sources. Taylor describes Emily's muse as a "savage giant" (302). Certainly, Heathcliff is a wrathful, Father Nature figure. One might also argue that Brontë's many wanderers have a Teutonic predecessor, among others. According to Ralph Metzner in his The Well of Remembrance: Rediscovering the Earth Wisdom

Myths of Northern Europe, the father of the Norse gods, Odin/Wotan, was a similar wandering truth-seeker. "The Old Norse word odr," writes Metzner, means "possessed," and is connected to words meaning inspiration, prophetic trance, rush, ecstasy, seizure, divine madness, intoxication, rage. He is the god of shamans, sorcerers, poets, singers, storytellers, prophetic seers and seeresses, soothsayers and berserker warriors—all of whom were described as "seized" by Odin, when in their special state of ecstatic inspiration. . . . The meaning of Wotan, like that of Odin, is related to words meaning possessed, enraged (German, wütend, and the archaic English wood, "mad". . . . Wuotanes Her was the medieval German name for the legendary Wotan's Band, or Wild Hunt, that fearsome band of ghostly hunters, led by Wotan on his eight-legged horse, who rode the storm winds through the night forest. (112)

Does the protagonist of "Silent is the House" feel "shame" because her Odin/Wotanlike wanderer is a projection not only of her disruptive creativity, but of an aggression verging on the rage of a Teutonic berserker? Would she invite a member of Odin's "Wild Hunt" to sit by the "cheerful. . . hearth?" And why is her storm-king described as an awaited "angel"?

According to Metzner, Odin/Wotan was considered to be an archangel, who had declined to advance to a higher level of evolution in order to work with human beings. Odin worked on the human psyche, the soul, in order to bring language. Through a nine-day initiation of hanging on the World Tree, he became a "master of the power of speech"

(Sprachgewalt). . . .Speech is connected to breath, and breath manifests in the outer world as the movements of air, the winds. (115)

As the "Silent is the House" fragment continues, we meet a gentle woman imprisoned in a crypt, a woman who manages to keep from despair because an angelic, Odin-like protector visits her:

A messenger of Hope comes every night to me,
And offers, for short life, eternal liberty.

He comes with western winds, with evening's
wandering airs,
With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the
thickest stars;
Winds take a pensive tone, and stars a tender
fire,
And visions rise and change which kill me with
desire— (Brontë 238)

Like Odin astride his horse Sleipnir, Brontë's daemon rides the "western winds" and the "wandering airs." His passage clears away clouds, revealing "the thickest stars" in a scene that combines divine breath with the illumination that Odin was known to bestow. An incarnation of the holy word, ghost, or "*hagion pneuma*," (Tayler 42), Odin appears as a gentle benefactor associated with "a pensive tone" and "a tender fire." Benevolently blessing our heroine with celestial "visions," he also "kills" her with "desire." Here, she dramatizes how she is "seized" by him:

Desire for nothing known in my maturer years
When joy grew mad with awe at counting future
tears;
When, if my spirit's sky was full of flashes warm,

I knew not whence they came, from sun or
thunderstorm; (Brontë 238)

In the close-to-unintelligible second line, the persona struggles to articulate the ineffable—a "desire for nothing known," an antinomial wedding of "joy," madness, and "awe." The perspective shifts to a point inside the speaker's subjectivity described as her "spirit's sky [that] was full of flashes warm." Or is this sky-possessing spirit her angelic visitant? This merger of spirit and speaker results in a rich confusion.

Kathryn Burlinson writes that often the persona of a Brontë poem "cannot find the 'Spirit' or 'Word' which might assure stability, and this produces a despair which is seen to find relief only in release from self-consciousness" (43). Often, adds Burlinson, there is "a complex interfusion in which absolute positions are difficult to distinguish," as with those of the poem's persona and the wind spirit (43). Brontë, nevertheless, brilliantly captures this dizzying merger of self with muse. "It is through temporal shifts in Brontë's texts that the flux of subjectivity is registered," explains Burlinson, "as the lyrics slide and skip between different temporal locations" (44). For example, the above quoted passage quickly flits from "maturer years" to "future tears" and back to a past tense where "my spirit's sky was full."

Burlinson goes on explaining that Brontë's "texts are the site of a struggle in which self-representation is fraught with doubt and difficulty" (42). Some lyrics succeed "in locating the self in language and in time; others explicitly address self-division and yearn for its cessation" (42). Such longing can result in "an unqualified death-wish," or in the mystical annihilation that the next passages from "Silent is the house" articulates (42). The

female prisoner is continuing to describing her angel's visitation:

But first a hush of peace, a soundless calm
descends;
 The struggle of distress and fierce impatience
ends;
 Mute music soothes my breast—unuttered harmony
 That I could never dream till earth was lost to
me.

Then dawns the Invisible, the Unseen its truth
reveals;
 My outward sense is gone, my inward essence
feels—
 Its wings are almost free, its home, its harbour
found;
 Measuring the gulf it stoops and dares the final
bound! (Brontë 239)

David P. Drew points to a similarity between the rendering of mystical experience in the poetry of both Emilys, Brontë and Dickinson. "The climax of the experience is," he writes, "in the case of both poets' verse, marked by the abrupt cessation of natural imagery and a groping among abstractions in an attempt to portray the unportrayable" (229). The above passage is characterized by vague, oxymoronic auditory images such as a "hush," "soundless calm," "mute music," and an "unuttered harmony" suggestive of states outside of language and nearly outside the human auditory register as well. There are a number of abstract descriptions of this self-annihilating merger with her muse, but the most striking is "my outer sense is gone, my inward essence feels." And again, this inward essence intermingles with her archangel's being, such that the mentioned wings

seemingly belong to both male muse and female mystic.

This transcendental coupling of imprisoned poet with angelic muse must shortly end. As Drew points out, "the agony of the withdrawal of the spirit" from such a divine seizure is terrifying (230):

Oh, dreadful is the check—intense the agony
When the ear begins to hear and the eye begins to
see;
When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think
again,
The soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel
the chain! (Brontë 239)

This has gone on much too long and, alas, it is another mini-essay. Am overburdening you with the expository, rather than uplifting you with the poetic. Finally, do today's women still have difficulty containing the destructive aspects of their creativity? Are we still projecting our aggressiveness onto men? I would love to hear how you dealt with these issues in such early texts of yours as Hymen and Heliadora. **CH**

Response to letter of March 18, 1997

Dear Reader:

H.D.'s voice has receded, and an inner critic attacks me for misrepresenting my absent daemon. Fortunately a key word, my life-saver, has announced itself. "Possession" made its first appearance in the previous letter of February 28, 1997. Burnett used it to discuss how H.D. often experienced the creative process as a state of possession. The Oxford English Dictionary glosses possession as coming from the old French possessium, or Latin possessio-nem—seizing, possessing, holding, occupying something such as property, wealth, slaves, etc. It also means a state of demonic possession, or madness (2248-49). Why has this become a key word?

Clearly, I cannot write about Irena, or channel H.D.'s voice. I am not ready to take charge of this traumatic material. Chandler reminds us that "healing becomes a process of growing self-possessed" (157). Like Brontë and the early H.D., I feel overwhelmed by my creativity and haunted by the wound at its source. "An author's power," writes Chandler, "lies in taking possession of the events of his life and recasting them" (157).

Nevertheless, new questions are constellating in my "quest. . . not only for answers, but for. . . new ways of seeing and describing experiences" (25). The shift away from the initial question of how to be both mother and poet began in the preceding letter, which focussed on the terror many women, mothers or not, feel at the emergence of their artistic gifts. I then investigated Emily Brontë's work, asking "how this terror was often associated with her use of male muse figures."

To answer this new question, my ever nomadic self prepares to don a novel guise. Unable to ventriloquize H.D., I would become Emily Brontë's biographer. I did not consciously choose to write about her because she was a motherless artist. Making a marginal note that her mother was dead, I focussed on her troubled relationships with a series of male muse figures. When I reread my Brontë letter, I was amazed to see how issues of mother-loss were continuing to "be refracted through multiple gazes" (Smith 100).

In Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss, Hope Edelman writes that the "impulses to both acknowledge and deny a parent's death represent precisely the type of rich ambiguity that inspires artistic expression" (266). This "rich ambiguity" perfectly defines Brontë's depiction of her dead mother. On the one hand, she idealized the deceased as a heavenly angel. On the other, she projects her despair, anger, and the horror evoked by her mother's abandonment onto a series of demonic messengers from the mother's malignant, night realm.

Many of Brontë's poems seemingly repeat an early scene: some family member points up at the stars while telling young Emily that her mother is now with the heavenly hosts. In her positive guise, the moon-mother is associated with "Gabriel" and his "seraph-strain" (117). She possesses an "angel brow" and "glorious eyes" whose starry "beams" Emily drinks in at night as she might her mother's milk (87, 225).

Belonging to the night sky, this maternal goddess can also become a subversive figure associated with Brontë's late night writing vigils kept for the drunken Branwell. Emily's "haughty sire," the reclusive Reverend Brontë, and "angry Dame," her spinster aunt-cum-surrogate-mother, "spy"

on and "shame" her (236). Surviving family members, points out Edelman, typically make taboo any mention of the dead because remembering can result in distress and even collapse. She quotes from this case-history:

"Ultimately, the thing that makes you crazy isn't that your mother died," says twenty-nine year old Rachel, who was fourteen at the time, "but that you can't talk about it." The sounds of silence, left to echo without response, become more haunting than the actual words. To keep our mouths soldered shut only means the grief will find a way to seep out elsewhere, through our eyes and our ears, through our very pores. (11)

Nobody encouraged me to speak about my lost other-mother. What was my problem? My birth mother was still alive. The miles separating me from my family served to silence me further. Nobody at my Pennsylvania school had ever hear of an Irena. Even if there had been a sympathetic ear, I was much too pre-occupied with appearing as normal as possible. I kept despair at bay by playing varsity sports, heading up the social committee, and serving as student body president.

As Edelman explains, "at the same time the teenager pushes the mourner's emotions aside, she may also be expending a great deal of energy to appear as normal as she can to the outside world" (51). Captain of this and president of that, "she tries to manufacture a new identity, one that exists independent of her past" (51). And, as in my case, "she frequently aims for a persona of competence and control" (51-52).

But why, in my discussion of negative male muse figures did I include "A Visitation," the poem about my father? Did I wish to show how he discouraged the expression of strong

feelings? After all, ours was a house of mother-loss. In the 1930s, my father's first wife and their son and then a second wife all died of post-natal infections. My own mother raised my father's two sons from his second marriage.

Silence was the norm in Brontë's family and my own, but Emily managed to mourn her mother during her moon-lit writing sessions. A stifled subject, her anguish quickly takes on a morbid tone as in poems like "In all the hours of gloom," or "And now I've come this evening." Struggling with her suppressed feelings, Brontë is driven to explore not only the idealized mother, but the demonized one as well.

For example, in the already discussed "O Dream, Where art thou now?," both of the dead mother's dark and light aspects are described as:

The sun-beam and the storm
The summer-eve divine,
The silent night of solemn calm,
The full-moon's cloudless shine

Were once entwined with thee (87)

In many other poems, a horrific messenger comes from the land of the dead, wearing a "ghastly" face and "spectre's look" that cause the blood to become "as chill as stone" (114). In poem #12, the fiend that will presumably take the infant's life suggests an underlying death-wish on Brontë's part. Did she, as a young child, wish to be taken so her mother could be spared? Was death a way to reunited with those already dead?

As we have seen, in one of her more autobiographical poems, Brontë depicts herself as a bereft child "with my wet eyes raised on high / I prayed to God that I might die" (116). Should we interpret this as a death-wish coming from this short-lived woman? Edelman explains:

I won't say motherless women consciously want to die; I don't know one who truly hopes for a life-threatening disease. But I have met daughters who longed for a connection, any connection, with the mothers they lost during childhood or their teens. (227)

At best, Brontë's suicidal longings propel her towards mystic dismemberment and transcendence. She would become "only spirit wandering wide / Through infinite immensity" (63). But during her short thirty years, does Brontë succeed in healing herself with her art? Chandler writes that such healing involves:

accepting the dead as dead, and finding a way to make a new relationship with them through memory and writing that allows the writer to stop longing for what was and begin to create something actual and positive. (120)

In "O Dream, where art thou now?," Brontë cannot let go of her mother whose memory "would yield me naught but care" (87). In "All the hours of gloom," the poem's persona is possessed by a ghastly vision of death as is the child confronted with a ghoul in "And now I'm come this evening fell." Idealizing her mother and then succumbing to the horror of her mother's death, Brontë seems barely able to accept "the dead as dead" and only partially able to "create something actual and positive" out of her early trauma (Chandler 120).

Edelman explains that the death of a small child's mother will leave a toddler, like Emily, with fuzzy feelings of confusion and abandonment (32). Children at that age lack the maturity to understand, or the linguistic skills to express what death means. One of Edelman's interviewees who lost her mother at the age of three confesses:

I remember feeling lost. My father told me once again that the hardest part of those next few months for him was that I would wake up in the night screaming for her. Screaming and screaming. But I don't remember that. (33)

Although possessing an impressive command of language, the adult Brontë often regresses to an inarticulate child. Is this because the memories of her mother's death are pre-verbal and amorphous? Does the raw heath wind that often obliterates Emily's half-written poems represent the bereft toddler's unbearable screams?

Brontë's "Lost Vision" occurs because her "words [have] died in a voiceless moan" (87, 38). In "The Night Wind," she struggles against a "murmur" of "thick leaves" whose "myriad voices / instinct with spirit" would drown out her human words (146). Again and again, Brontë tries to create something positive through her writings, but the winds only bring her pre-linguistic inspirations described as the "Wild Words of an ancient song— / undefined, without a name" (90). Estranged from her emotions, Brontë asks, "what language can utter the feeling / that rose when, in exile afar?" (92).

Brontë, like a toddler whose words often fail her, cannot make a new relationship with her dead mother as Chandler would have her do. Even when she does resort "through memory and writing" (Chandler 120) to mourn her lost parent in the poem, "Honour's Martyr," a "bleak" east wind drowns out Brontë's "unheard. . .farewell" (216).

If Brontë could not finally heal herself by "accepting the dead as dead" (Chandler, 120), what have I been able to do? I was thirteen when Irena died. A teenager, writes Edelman, experiences "both positive *and* negative emotions

towards her mother at this time, often within minutes of each other" (44). In her struggle to "develop an independent identity," an adolescent may feel "embarrassed, ashamed," or even angry with her mother. How did I actually see Irena? She was a plain country spinster, hardly a feminine role model. Her allegiances were with my mother, and both women often whispered disparagingly about my father and his domineering, elderly mother. I felt torn and suffocated. My acts of independence were not encouraged. How would my rebellion have progressed had Irena and I stayed together?

If Brontë could not heal herself because her three-year old feelings remained arrested at a pre-verbal level, I cannot vent unresolved feelings of adolescent rage. "A daughter," writes Edelman, "whose relationship with her mother is marked with conflict and anger often feels tremendous guilt if her mother dies at the peak of her rebellion" (45). This, Dear Reader, must be my task: to stop idealizing Irena while caving in to the guilt and shame that has blocked my accomplishing one of the tasks set for me by H.D.—to explore the creative matrix associated with my thirteenth year.

April 29, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

Just as you might imagine, my Greek holiday was restorative and spent mostly in Kiparissi, a port south of Sparta. The culminating event was a village wedding where two wealthy Greek merchants, one a Kenyan fruit and vegetable supplier and the other a California restaurant chain owner, returned to their village to build sumptuous mansions in which to prepare for the wedding of a son to a daughter. On that glorious day, the winding streets soon teemed with celebrants, some riding donkeys and some playing drums, flutes, and bouzoukies as they led the groom's extended family over the rough cobblestones towards the resplendent bride. It recalled my own wedding mask, "Hymus," the title poem of an early collection you wanted me to comment on.

The poem begins with the same "temple music, deep, simple, chanting notes" that I heard echoing along Kiparissi's medieval streets and up to my sunlit balcony where I sat sipping a cup of that aromatically muddy, local coffee (Collected Poems 102). One could see the same "small maids or attendants of the sixteen matrons" that I wrote about—the flower girls spilling petals to perfume the measured steps of the shyly advancing bride (102). The "slightly older serene young women" came next, "each holding before her, with precise bending of arms, coverlets and linen, carefully folded, as if for the bridal couch" (107).

And that timeless "band of boys" congregated there too (109). Someone must have pointed me out—"That's the house of that eccentric, old Americano poet and Sappho lover" because as the joyous procession danced passed in the basil-scented air, these boys stopped under my balcony to serenade

me. They sang in those same "clear, half-subdued voices" of which I once wrote (109). And although I could only make out the occasional word of their song, I closed my eyes and pretended that they intoned:

Ah, sound of reed,
 Ah, flute and trumpet wail,
 Ah, joy decreed—
 The fringes of her veil
 Are seared and white;
 Across the flare of light,
 Blinded the torches fail.

(Ah, love is come indeed!)(110)

And then, looking neither left or right, the veiled bride glided past, "swathed in folds of diaphanous white, through which the features are visible, like the veiled Tanagra" (105). Swanlike, she was swept away by her brood of downy bridesmaids who circled the awaiting boat that would ferry her across the aquamarine harbour towards an island, so small that only the party on her caique and those on the groom's could debark and enter the chalky, sea-scrubbed church. Then the whole village gave itself over to paddling, rowing, or sailing out, in whatever craft they could manage. Surrounding the rocky island, they bobbed like a flock of gulls until the by-then-married couple re-emerged with the sea sleeping at their feet and the laughter of a boy rippling off the stern like a wave.

As for your copious correspondence, I don't know where to begin. I am no theoretician as you well know. I have enjoyed reading your mini term papers and appreciate your struggle to situate your own writings in my Imagist lineage. Certainly, you are right to stress that someone like myself who values the visual would not wholeheartedly endorse Retallack's stance. I would not aim to "produce joyful,

troublesome, gender/genre exploding noise" (Retallack 351).

Just to qualify this a bit, my Helen in Egypt did challenge the epic genre's tight constraints. It mixed lyric poetry with prose to retell the Trojan saga from the perspective of a questing female, rather than the expected, heroic male protagonist. But, I never revelled in, or sought to reproduce, the noisy, pre-verbal sprawl admired by Retallack.

As to whether my allegiances lie with Freud, or Jung, I do have a much greater affinity for a Jungian approach as your recent reading of Brontë reminded me. How else can you discuss her male muse figures except in terms of a Jungian "animus?" As you know, I left Freud after a short, intensive four-to-five month analysis that took place in Vienna during 1933-34 (Tribute 3). Freud terminated it. Although I still have great respect for him, the fact that my analysis ended quickly was a relief. Often, Freud appear more needy than myself as when "he beat on my pillow or the head-piece of the old couch" where I was lying, because "he was annoyed with me" (117). One day he even said, "The trouble is—I am an old man—you do not think it worth your while to love me" (16).

I have nothing but respect for him. He did attempt to dismiss my occult visions "as the danger-signal" that could easily escalate into a "megalomania" (41, 51). I, on the other hand, believed my mystical experiences sprang from "a suppressed desire for forbidden 'signs and wonders,' breaking bounds, a suppressed desire to be a Prophetess" (51)—something our rational age would not allow. A medical doctor and materialist, Freud cajoled me like a child when I tried to tell him how sacred the poet's commission really is.

Jung would have been a more likely choice had the politics of World War II not gotten in the way. I lived just across the Lake of Zürich from him, but didn't cross the waters for an analysis. Robinson has written:

Part of the reason was that H.D. was aware that Jung acted as president of the Nazi-controlled International General Medical Society for Psychotherapy from 1933 to 1940 and as editor of Zentralblatt für Psychotherapie, the official organ of the society. After the war H.D. lived down the road from Jung for many years. She never spoke to him. (304)

Norman Holmes Pearson in his "Foreword" to my Hermetic Definition rightly calls me a "quasi-Jungian" (ii). Late in my career, I began reading Jung, but was disappointed to find him quite constipated in contrast to Freud who is such a marvellous stylist. To be honest, I have gravitated primarily towards the Jungian women. And, your discussion of Brontë's muse figures brought to mind Emma Jung's Animus and Anima.

Her definitions of a woman's animus and a man's anima could help your study of the poetic process because, as she writes, both "are two archetypal figures of especially great importance" (1). Mediating between the "individual" and the "collective unconscious," they provide "a connecting link or bridge between the personal and the impersonal," the mundane and the numinous (1). And, as compensatory complexes, they act as "inner personalities" that put forth "characteristics which are lacking in the outer, and manifest, conscious personality" (1). As such a man's animus is feminine and a woman's, masculine.

A woman must struggle to make conscious the shadowy aspects of her animus, rather than let them possess her as

they certainly did Brontë. Clarissa Pinkola Estés, in Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype, stresses how important the animus can be to a woman's creativity. "There is tremendous correlation," she writes,

between women who are afraid to create, making their ideas manifest in the world, and their dream images of injured or injuring men. Conversely, the dreams of women strong in outer manifesting ability often feature a strong male figure who consistently appears in various guises. (310-11)

Referring to the animus as the "merchant of a woman's soul," Estés continues:

Animus can best be understood as a force that assists women in acting in their own behalves in the outer world. Animus helps a woman put forth her specific and feminine inner thoughts and feelings in concrete ways—emotionally, sexually, financially, creatively, and otherwise—rather than in a construct that patterns itself after standard masculine development in any given culture. (311)

I can sense how much you long for such a "merchant of the soul" to help you manifest your poetry. Brontë also battled against what was more often than not a perverted animus figure. Her animus became, as you quote from Tayler, "a lost and straying part of her wholeness, active because detached from his female source" (9). It was split-off and then projected upon her motherless, alcoholic brother Branwell and the wolfish orphan, Heathcliff. What to do?

Emma Jung's study of the animus, although a bit dated and overly essentialist, does lay the necessary groundwork for an understanding of what the animus is. A first step for

you, or any woman in the grip of a negative animus, is to recognize what it is and then work to withdraw such a projection. Calling to mind Tayler's discussion of the holy word or "*hagion pneuma*" (42), Emma Jung writes that the animus manifests not so much as an image, but more fundamentally as "a voice commenting on every situation in which we find ourselves, or imparting generally applicable rules of behaviour" (20). As such, this commanding, often critical voice can nip "in the bud all initiative and every wish for self-expression," as yours often does (20). To compensate, it offers "exaggerated praise as well" (20).

Again and again in Brontë's poems, her male muse incarnates primarily as a voice. We hear him rather than see him. She describes him as a "seraph-strain" (117), a horrific "sound / Awoke the stillness reigning round" (38), "mute music" (239), or as "the wooing voice" (146) of the wind that also "sobs and sighs" (216). This voice also appears as "a sound sweeps o're thee like a knell," or like a "spectre's call" (39) in a poem where the wind comes to claim a seemingly abandoned child.

To return to our definition of the animus, Emma Jung sees its masculine "quintessence" as that of a logos which consists of four stages: "power," "deed," "words," and "meaning" (3). Certainly, Brontë is dealing with logos in its most primitive stage—the wind as a raw power that is "not yet human, nor is it spiritual" (E.Jung 3). As such, the squalls overtaking the desolate moors tend to eradicate those higher stages that represented Brontë's words and her search for their meanings. Often her poetic powers fail her as when "the words died upon my tongue" (57). The wind "drowns" out her "undistinguished" and "unheard. . . farewell" (216). And in "The Night-Wind," a summer breeze

would seduce a maiden, threatening to overpower her mind, annihilate her "human feelings," and break her will (146).

Emma Jung points to a typical lack of "will" in women (16), and I know you have expressed concern about this in relation to your own work—i.e., how unprolific you are. Fortunately, for my literary career, if not for my family, I was disciplined to the point of being a workaholic. But for many women, as you so well know, this is not the case. Some might find the following comment by Jung demeaning; it is still worth considering. Many women, she writes, still possess an "underdeveloped, childlike character." This "feminine mentality" manifests itself as a "curiosity" rather than a "thirst for knowledge;" as "prejudice" rather than "judgment;" as "imagination or dreaming" rather than "thinking;" and as "wishing" rather than willful determination (E.Jung 16).

Examples of such passive wishing and dreaming abound in Brontë's work. She prayed to god and to a "Lost Vision," (87) begging them to return. She writes: "I dreamt I stood by a marble tomb / where royal corpses lay," or of how "visions rise and change" (37, 238).

By the way, your discussion of Odin/Wotan was one of your last letter's most stimulating parts. Now, Emma Jung, although you might not know it, describes this primal animus-figure, Odin/Wotan, as the "lord of wishes" (17). She goes on to quote a brother Grimm who wrote that "an ancient Norse name for Wotan or Odin seems to be Oski or Wish, and the Valkyries were also called Wish Maidens" (qtd. in E. Jung 17). For Grimm, "wishing is the measuring, outpouring, giving, creating power," explains Emma Jung. "It is the power that shapes, imagines, thinks, and is therefore imagination, idea, and form" (17). Jung develops Grimm's idea further, saying "that power to imagine means to man

nothing less than the power to make at will a mental image of anything he chooses, and that this image, though immaterial, cannot be denied reality" (17). And yet, what I think both Jung and Grimm don't quite get to is the fact that it takes acts of will and discipline—that slowing down of von Franz's Mr. Hasty—to move from an immaterial wish to an actualized poem, painting, etc. How can you ground the poetic process and transform your imaginings into acts, into art, to escape that vicious circling of "wishing, and fearing (i.e., negative wishing)" (E. Jung 19)?

Another feature of the animus is that it "possesses the magic power of words" (E. Jung 19) as Odin did his runes, or the Biblical Yahweh his Word. Emma Jung points to the fact that "a woman is more susceptible to such magic spells than a man," especially in the forms of "Indian *mantras*, prayers and magic formulas of all sorts" (19). Brontë wrote poems in which the persona was often possessed by "so great, so pure a spell," (226), by words that "awakened a spell" (90), or by that "tyrant spell" (56).

Also, a women's animus, especially if it is negative, can appear to descend upon her, or to meet her as she strives to lift herself up:

Up to now in our world, the feminine principle, as compared to the masculine, has always stood for something inferior As a result, when a man enters into relationship with his anima he has to descend from a height, to overcome a resistance—that is, his pride—by acknowledging that she is the "Sovereign Lady" What we women have to overcome in our relation to the animus is not pride but lack of self-confidence and the resistance of inertia. For us, it is not

as though we had to demean ourselves (unless we have been identified with the animus), but as if we had to lift ourselves. In this, we often fail for lack of courage and strength of will.

(E. Jung 23)

Brontë attempts to raise herself up, as when she bears her "soul from its home of clay" up into "worlds of light" (63). In another poem, she succumbs to a deathly inertia, as when, in a graveyard, she "fell down on the stone," overtaken by a "shadowy thing" (37). In a mystical passage from "Silent is the house," there is a double movement of "a soundless calm" that descends, coupled with a new found sense of direction that abets her flight up from the earth towards momentary freedom:

But first a hush of peace, a soundless calm
descends;

 Then. . . my inward essence feels—
 Its wings are almost free, its home, its harbour
found;
 Measuring the gulf it stoops and dares the final
bound! (239)

Before her "essence" bounds over "the gulf," it momentarily "stoops" to gather up its courage and rededicate its will.

Not surprisingly, Emma Jung's description of the animus suggests Brontë's wandering strangers. "Perhaps," Jung writes, "this form in particular is the most characteristic, because, to the purely feminine mind, the spirit stands for what is strange and unknown" (28). And yet, he is often "familiar to her in spite of his strangeness," being "an ambassador, [who brings] some message, or command from the distant Prince of Light" (38). One thinks immediately of the awaited "ambassador" in "Silent is the house." Brontë's

messengers, of course, are not always as angelic. In "I saw thee, Child one summer's day," a ghastly envoi of death hovers over a baby's crib. Unable to "weep" for this short-lived child, he is an archetypal traveller impassively journeying that "road" to the "desolate shore" (40).

Interestingly, Emma Jung also points out that a woman with a negative animus problem often suffers anxiety attacks, insomnia, headaches, and even eye and lung problems:

Perhaps, the organs of breathing have a peculiar relationship to spirit, as is suggested by the words animus or pneuma and *Hauch*, breath, or *Geist*, spirit, and therefore react with special sensitivity to the processes of the spirit. (10)

It has been well-documented by Brontë scholars, such as Frank (125) and Tayler (278), that Emily suffered from all of the above ailments—the anxiety, the nervous withdrawal from all social contact, and the sleeplessness evidenced by her late night writing sessions. Frank even attributes Brontë's visionary power to her near-to-ecstatic bouts of anorexia (125). Like Catherine Earncliff in Wuthering Heights, rebellious Emily occasionally went on starvation strikes that may have caused her to hallucinate. Brontë died, as have so many writers, from tuberculosis. She died when her negative animus problem was highly exacerbated by the death of the severely disabled Branwell.

Keep up your pranayama practice is all I can say. The breath, as the yogis well know, controls the mind. As for an analysis of my early poetry in the light of my terror of the creative process, I would rather you did it than I. I abhor the thought of dissecting my own poems. By all means go ahead. It's never too late to give me some feedback, HD

Response to letter of April 29, 1997

Dear Reader:

As you see my exploration through the eyes of H.D. continues in these letters. In this April letter, H.D. introduces us to Emma Jung's work. Does it matter whether she would have read Emma or Carl Jung in her lifetime? Susan Stanford Friedman reports that Norman Holmes Pearson, H.D.'s literary executor, once told her:

H.D. lived in a Zürich sanatorium just down the road from Jung during the last years of her life; he [Pearson] also said that she undoubtedly read a great deal of Jung, but out of loyalty to Freud, never met him. (Friedman and DuPlessis 404)

Animus and Anima, Emma Jung's only book, remains true to her husband's ideas. Whether H.D. ever read it is less important than her sympathy to Jungian thought. Also, by making H.D. an omniscient figure, I have allowed her to comment on whatever texts she wants.

In order to give credence to the re-entry of H.D.'s voice after its absence from the preceding three letters, I begin by generously quoting from her early poem, "Hymus." I blend these "Hymus" fragments with remembered images from a homemade video that I once saw of a wedding that took place in my mother-in-law's Greek village. Although the wedding in "Hymus" unites a man and a woman, H.D. wrote it to celebrate the lesbian marriage of herself to Bryher. "Hymus" is another example, among many, of the chimeras at work in this correspondence.

H.D.'s re-entry into the dialogue underlines my need to understand how the lost feminine relates to a woman's animus. Emma Jung defines the animus as a woman's inner,

male personality that often appears as "strange or unknown" (28) to her. Examples drawn from Emily Brontë's life and writings are the motherless Branwell Brontë and the heartless orphaned Heathcliff, supposedly of gypsy origins. Derelict, deviant, or diabolic, these men represent parts of Brontë not yet reclaimed by language, or consciousness.

Unreclaimed parts of one's personality can, as we have seen, become destructive. Edelman describes the shame and sense of inferiority that a daughter often feels "for having lost the figure she sees as so central to her well-being" (178). Such a motherless daughter defines herself as a "survivor" (180), someone characterized by the tough resilience of a man, or the cheekiness of a rebellious boy, qualities Brontë projected onto Heathcliff. A motherless woman often misses out on the softer qualities that a nurturing female guide might have instilled. Edelman writes that without a mother, a daughter often lacks an internalized sense of self. Our predominantly patriarchal society does not encourage feminine authority and power. For a motherless woman, it is even harder to achieve a sense of self-worth:

She has difficulty understanding, appreciating, and accepting herself as a gendered being when she has no constant model for adult femininity, or when the model she has convinces her that being female is wrong. (Edelman 180)

Motherless daughters who lack an inner sense of nurturance can fall prey to unknown, often violent, parts of themselves. These unmothered ones often experience bouts of extreme self-alienation. Although less at risk, the majority of women growing up in our culture quickly learn to devalue themselves. Our rebellious, anti-social animus finds most of us to be easy targets.

The key word "possession" appears several times in this April letter. It suggests that the animus can easily possess a woman with a weak sense of self. As Emma Jung reminds us, this scathing animus often issues forth as a disembodied voice not unlike the one that keeps undermining my doctoral work (20).

An inner personality, the negative animus can lure a woman towards silence or insanity, especially through the non-verbal medium of music (E. Jung 35-7). Here, one thinks of Brontë's "The Night Wind" where the seductive, sirenlike anti-song of the summer breeze would draw her protagonist beyond human language and into a savage forest. As such, a woman is pulled back into a disorganized, near-to-inexpressible inner world whose crises subsume her. Chandler explains:

the silence each writer has experienced pulls like a black hole: the narrative is a strategy to stay on its outer edge—a struggle for survival and a resistance to the obliteration of memory and the dulling of consciousness. (104)

SPRING: THE SWAN'S RETURN

These letters from May 1 to June 30, 1997 were begun on May Day or Beltane, a time of mating and of purification by fire. This is also when the great migrations of water fowl are taking up domicile in the North once again. The swan's appearance at this time represents a quickening of metamorphic power, symbolic acumen, and magic.

"I will come," she said, if you promise me that I may return to the water." "I promise that," he said. She went to him, then; he put his arms around her, and they slept in the form of swans until they had circled the lake three times.

From "The Dream of Óengus." (Gantz 112)

1 May, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Thanks for your generous reply. Your last letter clarified what the animus seems to be. And yes, I am probably drawn to Brontë because my own animus configuration often blocks my creativity. At any rate, this discussion of negative animus figures has driven me to seek out the Jungian analyst—R.Y. Was not sure I wanted to start another analysis. And, was worried R.Y. would not understand my poetry because his mother-tongue is French. But so far so good.

I brought a poem that dramatizes my animus problem to our first session. It sprang from an earlier attempt to rewrite "Swan Lake." In it, the animus who is an evil sorcerer bewitches a swan-maiden. But, let me go back to the origins of this project. About a year ago when my Freudian analysis ended, I began casting around for other ways to heal myself. I decided to rewrite "Swan Lake" to make more conscious the fact that I felt "bewitched" like a fairy tale princess. I often joked about being under a spell that was keeping me from finishing my dissertation along with a second poetry manuscript. As a way of making conscious my entrapping inertia, I would use "Swan Lake's" imagery and episodes to give shape to my depressive bewitchment.

Bewitchment differs from enchantment. In The Celtic Spirit: Daily Meditations for the Turning Year, Caitlin Matthews writes that to be bewitched, or disenchanting, is to undergo "depressive illness, addictive behaviour, and malaise from which there seems no escape" (70). On the other hand, enchantment once meant "to infuse with song" (70). Someone who is enchanted exists in a state of perpetual song in which he or she maintains "the interconnection between this world and the other world" that keeps "the land harmoniously connected and whole" (70).

But what if one has become disenchanted? Matthews believes we can heal this modern malaise. She writes that we can mend this rupture, "only by returning to the story of the soul and retelling it up to the point of fracture; only by placing our own story within the context of the greater song" (70).

Intuitively, I began searching for ways to infuse the notes of my little story with the cadences of a "greater song." To do so, I followed a prompt mentioned in Deena Metzger's Writing for your Life: A Guide and Companion to the Inner Worlds (134-50) that led me to retell "Swan Lake" from the princess's point of view. Towards the end of this prosaic draft, I became fearful because, as you probably know, "Swan Lake" ends in a double-suicide—the drowning of the prince and princess in a lake of the mother's tears. I put "Swan Lake" on hold for nine months.

Recently after acknowledging my lethargy and continuing inability to write into my creative matrix, I dusted off my fairy tale project and set to work. My way back was to retell "Swan Lake" in one sentence that reads—a *young prince and princess can't grow up and marry, because he is bewitched by his possessive mother and she by her sorcerer-father.*

I then expanded the story to ten sentences, as Metzger suggests doing (142), and from these picked three of their most intense moments to explore further. They were episodes that could be structured around at least one "peripeteia," or "movement caught at the still point of a turn" (Welsh 82), such as:

1. the metamorphosis from bird to girl and back;
2. Odette, the swan-maiden outside the stained-glass window staring in at the sumptuous ball;

3. the drowning and rebirth of the prince and princess.

I then focussed on the first incident, following another of Metzger's prompts:

select one very small moment in the story. Write about it as if it happened to you. What is the larger meaning? (142)

At first, I retold the fairy tale's bird-to-girl metamorphosis verbatim and then, as Metzger advises, rewrote it as if it had happened to me. Struggling to do so, I remembered my recent poem, "The Visitation," in which a punitive father silences his teenaged daughter as the sorcerer does the princess. I decided to overlay "The Visitation" with this "Swan Lake" episode in which the bewitched princess turns into a mute swan. Instead of setting the poem in a fairy tale realm, I used such narrative principles as characterization, monologue, conflict, and peripeteia to reshape certain of my own memory fragments into a modern retelling. This seemed in keeping with what you and Pound were doing with Greek mythology--to give the old stories a contemporary context and colloquial tone:

HOW TO BECOME AN UGLY DUCKLING
 Stay out past curfew—preferably
 on a deserted beach in the arms
 of a young wrestler, 14 or 15,
 or the son of one at least.
 Say your reluctant good-bys,
 kissed and unnoticed, sneak up
 to your room and lie down,
 as you did on that warm
 sand dune, laughing
 and speaking softly together,

but now he is hitting you—
your father that is—
making a coldness travel
up your spine in waves,

"Whu, whu,"

like an exhausted swimmer,
you pant, but he tells you,
"Shut up," your voice
is too human. So you swallow
down more salt water
until what issues forth
is the angry honking
of some lame waterfowl;
who yearns to fly south
to where her snaky neck points,
to where the mother is driving
the boyfriend home, she drowns
in a babble of voices, echoing
across the brain, like a storm
darkening surfaces,
churned now by those thrashing,
rubbery feet . . .

"Can't distinguish the tremor
of waves from my trembling
limbs. The coldness travelling
up my spine draws him closer,
singling out a poor swimmer.

I stagger, black
rubbery feet pattering
towards shore. Lake's
perfection shattered, I
fall heavily on what
appears as sand. Awaken,
a prince is grasping hands—
mine—opening not webbing,
but fingers out, out!"

Here, I am creating a peripeteia by turning the girl into a voiceless duckling. Because of her voicelessness, the persona must sacrifice the first person point of view to become omniscient; disassociating from her body, she hovers over it to escape its suffering. I think "How to Become an Ugly Duckling" is more dramatic than the original "Visitation." "Ugly Duckling" also extends "The Visitation's" little story to include not only the father, but the mother and boyfriend as well. Am also sending you another early draft of a new poem called "Voice." Would like to know which of its passages seem energized or haunting to you? Am just nuggetting out the more arresting bits, collaging them back together, and re-writing from there. Could do with some feed-back. See what you think, CH

VOICE

"The wind is in truth the All-Devourer."

Khandogya Upanishad

Again and again,
little muttered
warnings

that grow,
blustery, brutish—

whirling some
who lose their footing;
others, no matter what,

lift off,
necks thrust forward,
wings outstretched

into some headwind,
and with the beak,
sharp, able
to give a good nip,
saving themselves;

Valkyrie "shit.

No one can read
this shit," bird
-droppings from the sky

into some hell-hole
where she's put me,
half-corked

most nights—dust,
dropped off pants,
shirt into a sodden clump,

as a strange bird
swoops in over the balcony,
long neck undulating

to the beat of its wings,
"Did you see it?
Was it white?,

sinking down into a nest
of dirty bed-sheets,
and still stunned

by those angry words
swallowing
everything up. The room's

parquet floors,
scraped by the nails of a
dog,
cowering under a table,

as it goes on blighting
every wish upon a star
the child makes,

tied to a bed post
with only a spoon, a
book
of matches for
toys.

Mother toils below
in a small shop. No
flyway for wishes that
dim,

as thunder-clouds wing
across the sky,
clouding shapes:
blight

issues from the depths
of a voice,
snarling
like a hostage

tied to some bed post,
door knob: violent
banging as it pushed
open
to the night. The
lord's
prayer strikes the
palate,

the tongue-shaped
sounds

muted by an inrush
of fiery breath:

"Did you see its

wings stiffen,
as it plunged down,
screaming?"

"White?" "No dark,
dark," as those smoky
bits of burning tar-
paper

flaming from a rooftop,
where speech dies
into breath,

breath into wind,

devouring fire,
the waters,
the stars up.

Response to letter of May 1, 1997

Dear Reader:

This May Day letter begins on a chatty note suggestive of my growing familiarity with the H.D. persona. I am overcoming "a great deal of inertia", going to the extreme of getting up at 5 a.m. to do yoga. Better organized, I am going "directly to work," while my Jungian analyst offers his support. Buoyed up by the spring weather, I begin re-engaging the "Swan Lake" project abandoned some 9 months earlier.

Before this dissertation, as my ten-year Freudian analysis was ending, I began rewriting "Swan Lake." Such fairy tale work, I hoped, would provide me with a more self-directed alternative to a seemingly interminable analysis. I had not read Chandler at that time, but was determined to stop therapy and use my poetry as a means of self-healing. After a few months, I put my "Swan Lake" project away worried I had picked a bewitchment story that ends in a double suicide.

After recently realizing that "possession" (meaning, of course, a bewitchment) was a key word in my H.D. correspondence, I decided to reconsider my "Swan Lake" texts. I was not yet ready for the autobiographical nakedness that the Irena story demands. In fact, I had forgotten the "old pictures" entirely. H.D. once told me that if I could not "witness the peaks of insight," it would be best to focus on "the troughs of denial." Chandler, likewise, mentions that self-healing often begins with a diagnosis of exactly where one is (188). To perform such a self-diagnosis, I needed to by-pass my "controlling mind" (McNiff 60) that dramatically anticipated breaking through to some creative core. Instead, all I could do was prepare a

space in which to take advantage of what accidentally might show up. In this instance, the key word "possession" introduced itself in my expository writings. Like a passkey, it would unlock my near-to-forgotten "Swan Lake" explorations. As McNiff reminds us, "like dreams, art works are surprising syntheses of elements on the threshold of consciousness that *present themselves*" (60).

Unable to recover enough memory fragments to reconstruct a coherent story about my last days with Irena, I will try to recast my present impasse in terms of "Swan Lake." Borrowing its characters and narrative situation, I will begin working with fictional givens because I can not access my own adolescent trauma. I will begin imagining what it means to be bewitched from a different vantage point than my own, that of "Swan Lake's" prince and princess. Chandler points out that

the transforming moment in this dialectical process comes when new questions emerge that call not only upon memory, but upon imagination: What might the situation look like from a different angle? (41)

What, for example, does denial look like from the Swan Princess' view point? What light can this fairy tale shed on my own creative blockages?

Post-modern anti-structuralists might find my sudden enthusiasm for external forms a bit overzealous. My early morning yoga regime is somewhat extreme. My swift decision to work with a new therapist while turning, in my writing, to a fairy tale format for support suggests I am struggling to stay afloat. But, I am in good company. H.D. and many other Modernists "stole" their narratives from the classics. Chandler reminds us that Elie Wiesel often based his stories

"upon forms of prayer or midrashic tales" (148). Like Matthews (Celtic Spirit 70), Chandler believes that myths stabilize us:

because by building upon mythic patterns, individual stories link to a broad base of human experience and situate the individual within the world in a reassuring way. (148)

Nevertheless, myths and fairy tales do have their drawbacks. Chandler explains that the model of "crisis" appearing in many autobiographies consists of a "descent and reascent" suggestive of a mythic journey "into the underworld" (20). For example, the drowning of the prince and swan-princess is followed, in some versions, by their rebirth as either humans, mating swans, or the spirit keepers of the lake itself.

In the following passage, Chandler puts more value on autobiographical fragmentation than on aesthetic synthesis:

This orderly notion of crisis is certainly aesthetically satisfying, implying as it does a rather neat sequence of events that moves steadily towards resolution and closure. However, it overschematizes, as mythic patterns tend to, a complex, and even chaotic, process. (20)

Chandler attributes "an alternative model of crisis" to the more radical Modernism of an Eliot or Pound that would stress destruction rather than construction (20). William Butler Yeats writes of this post-war wasteland in "The Second Coming":

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. (211)

H.D. likewise advises me not to fake ecstasy, but to face my own denial and suffering.

Chandler does mention, nevertheless, that even the more pessimistic Moderns have needed "to construct some new vision of reality" (21). And, as she explains, both the mythic and the Modernist model of crisis involve "decomposition and recomposition, or dismemberment and re-membering" (21). Traumatized by the chaos of World War I, Modernists either described a pile of mythic fragments as in Eliot's "Wasteland," (27-54), or eschewed them altogether for the Imagists' haiku-like lyrics that captured, like a camera flash, a brief, discontinuous moment of perception. Eventually Pound and H.D. put aside their impressionistic short lyrics and began employing structuring devices drawn from story and myth to craft their longer poems.

How does this "dismemberment and re-membering" of tale and myth play itself out in my reworking of "Swan Lake?" My first step was to retell the narrative from the swan's perspective. As a linear account, it was a tedious rendition. Dismembering this retelling nine months later, I broke the plot up into three or four key episodes. I chose them, or they chose me, because of their relevance to my life. I also excerpted these passages out of my "Swan Lake" free-writes because of their arresting language and imagery.

For example, I selected the scene where the princess metamorphoses into a bird because of its potential to dramatize my own divided self. A voiceless outsider, I was also drawn to write about the forgotten swan peering in at the ball. Lacking a strong sense of peripeteia, her paralysis will be the hardest episode to transform into a workable poem. Moreover, the evocatively haunting language used to render the prince and princess's drowning incident signalled its troubling relevance to my fairy tale effort.

After culling out the autobiographically significant scenes from my free-writes, I decided to dismember the "Swan

Lake" original even further. I would not use a heroic age, or medieval fairy tale setting, but a contemporary one.

To inaugurate this process, I overlaid the girl-to-swan metamorphosis incident onto the already finished "A Visitation." The resulting "How to Become an Ugly Duckling" represents the metamorphosis episode where the evil sorcerer (the father) silences the princess (the adolescent self). Like a good Modernist, I shattered the fairy tale to extract its more telling images and incidents from the debris. In so doing, I reached for the ones around which "life patterns" could be re-constellated "in new ways" (Chandler 36), ways that rely upon the intensive impulses of "structure" and "story" (Orr, "Four Temperaments" 2).

"Voice," the second poem included in this April letter, took me by surprise. It is based on a fourth event from "Swan Lake," the sudden appearance of the sorcerer, disguised as an owl, out of a brisk wind. I had not planned to write from the sorcerer's persona. The poem somewhat forced itself upon me. In this early draft, the voice of a raw northern wind metamorphoses into that of a troubled man who remembers his mother's disturbing absences. Thus, in this rant against mother-loss, my negative animus is given his due. The unexpected emergence of this alien voice seems hopeful because, as Chandler states, a writer must attempt "not only to heal him or herself by transforming crisis into story, but also to speak on behalf of others who have experienced similar life crises" (5). And of course, as Matthews has already reminded us, fairy tale and myth allow us to "infuse" our little story with a "greater song" (Celtic Spirit 70) linking it, as Chandler explains, "to a broader base of human experience" (148).

May 30, 1997

Dear H.D.,

The walk to R.Y.'s office is pleasant enough along carless Prince Arthur, passing the sidewalk cafés where the late afternoon crowd assembles on white metal chairs to sip cocktails and preen in the sun. I feel uncertain, crossing Carré St. Louis, wondering if I should give him the poem "Voice." My mind numbs out as I encounter a number of successively wider East End streets that leave me stranded on concrete islands swamped in a rush of traffic.

Climbing up the Victorian staircase to R.Y.'s office housed in a Cherrier St. townhouse, I feel anxious to begin. I slip into a leather-backed chair as a pressure builds in my chest, a pressure to speak, but how? R.Y. is very welcoming, and I quickly show him my poem, mumbling something about not knowing what else to do.

We spend the hour that rushes by discussing it! Sometimes I feel embarrassed at how good his English is and how timid I am about speaking French. He is perceptive and points out many things. "Voice," my poem's title, is ironic. The swan's voice is known in myth and story to be a repressed, or non-existent one, except for its much celebrated "swan song." Given that, R.Y. asks what I mean by lines like:

wings stiffen,
as it plunged down,
screaming

I explain that when the trumpeter swan prepares to land, it often plunges straight down, screaming like a dive-bombing plane. Why did this image jump out at me from all the books I had been reading on swans? Suicidal plunge? The

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as it plunged down,
screaming

I explain that when the trumpeter swan prepares to land, it often plunges straight down, screaming like a dive-bombing plane. Why did this image jump out at me from all the books I had been reading on swans? Suicidal plunge? The

scream of a voiceless bird? Desperate? Defiant? Aggressive? (Swans are the biggest birds in North America, weighing up to 40 lbs. They can make fierce opponents.)

Another image that R.Y. keeps asking about is the "bird /-droppings from the sky." What do I mean by this? "Shit?" I have bird shit in another of my poems because I grew up on the coast of Maine where sea-gull poop is ubiquitous. Does poetic inspiration shit down on me from the sky? Why does the male voice in my poem introduces this earthly, humorous, yet somewhat denigrating element? He does so as if to say that my high flying, swanlike poetry is, at worst, unreadable bull shit and, at best, way beyond his intellectual pretensions.

R.Y. and I discuss how the swan—white, aristocratically reserved, at times cold (swans live primarily in sub-arctic climes)—feels ambivalent about the male figure, aligned as he is with the "strange" black bird who swoops in over the balcony. The swan needs this black element in so far as it represents the earth and the fire that the small boy's matches can start. But this black earthen element has been severely neglected. For example, the mother ties up the boy-child so she can do her work.

Worse yet, as R. Y. points out, the man is clearly the victim in this poem—of his neglectful mother and of the white swan as well. The aloof swan desires intimacy and her domestic comforts, but loves flying off for adventure. R.Y. comments on how the poem circles from white swan to black, from the sky to the earth and back up to the sky to end with the wind.

Another issue is the anger. The wind swirling through "Voice" is an all-pervasive, undifferentiated rage. But whose is it? It seems to be the man's, but what of the Valkyrie and the plunging bird?

Walking back west along Cherrier, I cross to the street's south-side in order to take a better look at a wall-sized mural depicting Cree life in James Bay. Prominent in this painting is a large Canada goose with spread wings and serpentine neck curved to attack a black war plane swooping towards it. This, of course, expresses how the Cree feel about whites invading their land. This image of the Canada goose also echos my discussion with R.Y. The goose is a waterfowl cousin of the swan and the closest to anything swan-like that I have seen in the bush. Have even roasted goose in a Northern Quebec tipi, but have never encountered the reclusive wild swan.

Hope this gives you some idea of what R.Y. and I are discussing in our session. Hope, too, you'll let me know what you think of "How to Become an Ugly Duckling," as I am eager to revise it when I have a moment. Must close now as my daughter needs help with her homework, **CH**

June 3, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

Sorry for my slow reply. From my unrestricted vantage point, I often lose track of what time it is in your apparent reality. My apologies and now let's get back to work. I found "How to Become an Ugly Duckling" effectively compressed, but could you end it after the first mention of "rubbery feet?" The last two stanzas beginning with the line "Can't distinguish the tremor" seem to belong in another poem. I would break your "How to" poem up into the following stanzas to put more emphasis on its points of transition:

HOW TO BECOME AN UGLY DUCKLING

Stay out past curfew—preferably
on a deserted beach in the arms
of a young wrestler, 14 or 15,
or the son of one at least.

Say your reluctant good-bys,
kissed and unnoticed, sneak up
to your room and lie down,
as you did on that warm
sand dune, laughing
and speaking softly together,

but now he is hitting you—
your father that is—
making a coldness travel
up your spine in waves,

"Whu, whu,"

like an exhausted swimmer,

you pant, but he tells you,

"Shut up," your voice
is too human. So you swallow
more salt water
until what issues forth
is the angry honking
of some hurt bird

that yearns to fly south
to where her snaky neck points,
to where the mother drives
the boyfriend home. She is drowning
in a babble of voices, echoing
across the brain, like a storm
darkening surfaces,
churned now by those thrashing,
rubbery feet . . .

As for the bit beginning with "Can't distinguish," am not sure what's happening here. "Awaken," do you want it in this verb tense? What's going on? It's all too compressed. There seems to be a hiatus, a loss of consciousness that could be indicated by making a generous break between the word "sand" and the next "Awaken," such as:

appears as sand.

Awaken,

a prince is grasping hands—, etc.

Concerning your other poem "Voice," its ragged spill down the page seems appropriate for its topics of anger, voice, and wind. Have edited it down to its most engaging parts. Am not sure what you are left with but, yes, you are right to keep what sings and discard the rest:

Again and again,
 little muttered
 warnings
that grow,
 blustery, brutish—

and with the beak,
 sharp, able
to give a good nip;

Valkyrie "shit.
No one can read
 this shit," bird
 -droppings from the sky,

as a strange bird
 swoops in over the balcony,
 ("Was it white?")

sinking down into a nest
 of dirty bed-sheets,
 and still stunned.

Parquet floors,
 scraped by the nails of a dog,
 cowering under a table,

as it goes on blighting
 every wish upon a star
 the child makes,

a voice that snarls like a
 prisoner—

The lord's
 prayer strikes the palate,
 the tongue-shaped sounds:

"Did you see its
 wings stiffen,
 as it plunged down,
 screaming?

("White? "No dark,
 dark")—

where speech dies,
 into breath,
 breath into wind,

devouring fire,
 the waters,
 the stars.

Am not sure what this nuggeting leaves you with in regards to the poem's overall meaning. There seem to be several voices in this text. Can you differentiate them, one from the next? The one talking about bird shit seems earthy, even angry, while the one asking about the whiteness of the bird seems more poetic. I like how this second voice needs reassurance. Could you express its wavering insecurity even more?

A few niggling details. Do you want to end this poem on a preposition? Watch out for the over-use of the word "blight." It works best the first time it appears. Again, I applaud your courageous attempts to write about anger—it still seems that the anger in "Voice" is as all pervasive as Brontë's wind. How to identify it more? Whose anger is it?

Hope this critique has helped. Send more drafts along soon. I do ask for you to be patient with my tendency to disregard time as you know it. **HD**

Response to letters of May 30 and June 3, 1997

Dear Reader:

The point of view in the late May letter shifts to that of a Jungian analyst. After describing the setting and quickly summarizing my feelings, I begin reporting on R.Y.'s reading of my poem "Voice." He makes note of its themes of mother-loss, rage, and death, the ones recurring throughout my dissertation. As he mentions, the repressed swan only sings as she is dying, and her plunge appears suicidal.

Interestingly, the aristocratic swan is remote because "the black earth element [of the mother] has been severely neglected." Does the ethereal swan mask my own tendency to be an absentee parent who leaves her daughter behind for her work in James Bay? Is the swan (myself) remote because I cannot embrace the "whiteness" of my own northern European background? And how does the "all-pervasive anger" of "Voice" compare to the raw preverbal power of a Brontë poem?

The June 3 letter, on the other hand, shows H.D. engaged in a critique of both "Voice" and "How to become an Ugly Duckling." Her communique replaces the therapeutic analysis of the previous text with an aesthetic one. Line-breaks, stanza patterns, verb tenses, and closure are some of the discussed topics. Chandler has pointed out that "the writer is more nearly healed whose focus has begun to shift from the content of the experience to the problems of composition" (35). H.D.'s advice to not worry about the text's content exemplifies such a transition in my poetic process. Instead she would have me "keep what sings and discard the rest."

June 25, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Thanks for your expert critique of my poems. Am trying to get a lot of redrafting done as this is Zoë's last week of school before her summer holiday. Have been attempting to rebuild "Voice" around your suggested nuggets. The poem keeps permutating. Will spare you the eight-page version. Have edited down to the following:

The wind is in truth the All-Devourer.

Khandogya Upanishad

Again and again

 little muttered

 warnings

that grow

 blustery, brutish

& from time to time,

that smelly breath in your face,

over the balcony. A new moon

 for burning rubbish,

 catching, flaring up.

 "Was it white?"

where he sits sipping beer,

 unsteady, metal table

 pinions streaked with pinkish light,

 "Was it white?"

skimming over the rough concrete,
"white that the light bleaches through?"

over parquet floors,
scraped by the nails of a dog
cowering under the table.

"I love children;
will never have any."
"But you're a saint. . ."
"Oh no, not that,"

& the beak
sharp, able
to give a good nip,

& a body, long and ungainly
as the width between
his house and the next,
sinks down into a nest
of dirty sheets,

as it goes on blighting
every wish upon a star
(half-formed, picking
its way out of a largish shell),
the child makes,

as the lord's prayer
strikes the palate,
tongue-shaped sounds
lisped out like water

supplicating stone
where it boils and weeps.

"Did you see its
wings stiffen,
as it plunged down
screaming?"

"White?" "No dark, dark"
slicing down through the ether,
you cry,
air rushing into your mouth,
as if my questions panic you—

speech dies
into breath,
breath into wind,

Oh *walcyrie*, sister of Kali,
(whose arms wield swords, jewels, & skulls)

the wind is a stomach
that never can be filled—

foetus into body,
flame into fire

devouring fire,
the waters,
the stars up.

Oh well. This still has a way to go, and now the Hindu goddess Kali has plummeted into the soup! This is partly due to my last bodywork session. As S.B. "witnessed" my movements, she saw in them both those of an angry boy and a powerful black woman whose repetitive gestures suggested either a mourning or cleansing ritual. Of course, this black woman suggests the Hindu Kali, an archetypal triple goddess of "creation, preservation, and destruction" who, according to Barbara G. Walker, is most commonly seen "squatting over her dead consort Shiva and devouring his entrails, while her yoni sexually devours his lingam" (488). This ghastly gesture suggests that of a scavenging battle crow or raven, as well as that of an ecstatic lover.

Such a horrific Kali is a female logos figure similar to that of Odin, or Yahweh. As Walker explains:

Indo-European languages branched from the root of Sanskrit, said to be Kali's invention. She created the magic letters of the Sanskrit alphabet and inscribed them on the rosary of skulls around her neck. (491)

Walker adds that the runes inscribed on Kali's rosary of skulls "stood for primordial creative energy expressed in sound—Kali's *mantras* brought into being the very things whose names she spoke for the first time, in her holy language" (491). In sum, continues Walker, "Kali's worshippers originated the doctrine of the **Logos** or creative Word, which Christians later adopted and pretended it was their own idea" (491).

Fortunately logos had a maternal origin, predating that of its storm-god manifestations. But does the Kali work in my poem? Was trying to write about logos as a wind-god, or at least as the black swan aspect of Odin's valkyries.

Should I stick with the black swan and let the Kali go?

Another problem: the figures in the poem lack definition—the voice of the man drinking at the table blurs into that of his companion who says she will never have children. Are their personae unclear because both are questioning whether the apparition was white or black? Still can't get straight whose destructive impulses I am addressing here—a problem I share with Brontë. When I started writing "Voice," a animus-wind figure spoke, but who is it now, some blackish bird deity cum Kali, some warlike valkyrie, or even the carrion crow manifestation of the Celtic Morrigan?

At least, am introducing the mother's dark, even horrific side into this correspondence—an issue that all women artists must address—how to incorporate Kali's aggression and martial energy into their work. Could go on and on, but must get my daughter off to bed. **CH**

Response to letter of June 25, 1997

Dear Reader:

As you can see revision continues. I won't bore you with a line-by-line explanation of the changes except to say that I am managing somewhat to shape the poem's omnipresent anger. The animus is beginning to vent his rage, but there are other personae as well—the woman companion who doesn't want to be a "saint" and the poet who is a sort of voice-over presence.

By expanding and contracting, free-writing and cutting parts away, I discover new images and singing bits of language. This winnowing process also unmask Kali. A wonderful discovery, Kali is a primordial female logos figure who contains our most repressed female aspects—aggression and rage.

To revitalize female creativity, many today would reinstate a great goddess figure who can contain these terrible powers. Unfortunately none exists in our Biblical past, or in our post-industrial present. Instead, we must look farther back for a model that might help us redefine a female core. One valuable source is the work of Marija Gimbutas. In her massive archaeological study, she traces the "gradual hybridization" of a Paleolithic goddess religion with that of a later Indo-European patriarchal system (318). "There is no trace of a father figure in any of the Paleolithic periods," states Gimbutas, only a Great Goddess (316).

Vestiges of this Old European Goddess can be found in the Black Madonna cult and in certain massive Virgin Mary figures that dwarf the Baby Jesus held in their vast arms. Prehistoric goddess motifs also appear in folk customs and tales concerned with the Germanic Frau Holla, the Russian

Baba Yaga and the Arthurian Morrigan and Caillech, whose name is pronounced Kali-ach! But, points out Gimbutas, the Paleolithic Goddess in all her anthropomorphic and zoological forms was not primarily that of the sexualized martial and/or maternal figure that she would later become. Instead she represented Nature, a vast force of "multiplication, growing and flourishing" of which the human was but one small part (317).

Even in her human forms, the great goddess was not originally polarized into our notions of good and evil. "The Life Giver and the Death Wielder are one deity," writes Gimbutas (316). For example, the Goddess's deadly vulture, owl, or crow masks were always "interwoven" with symbols "promoting regeneration" (316). "The concept of regeneration and renewal is perhaps the most outstanding and dramatic theme that we perceive in this symbolism," concludes Gimbutas (316). The goddess that many contemporary women would reinvent to empower their creativity, then, originally represented "a strong belief in the immediate regeneration of life at the crisis of death" (321). But with her gradual humanization, this icon of reincarnation bifurcates into seemingly opposing roles—that of the virginal flower bride and the gory, albeit glorious, war goddess.

H.D.'s depiction of the archetypal mother goddess as creative agent evidences a similar unresolved split between the emotive possibilities of love and rage. This problematic polarization shows up in H.D.'s own "troubled motherhood" (Hollenberg 5). Not surprisingly, she lacked a role model. Her own self-effacing yet distant mother remained mired in domesticity and preoccupied with caring for her famous astronomer husband and his four promising sons (Guest 14). Alienated from her patriarchal mother, H.D. gave birth to a stillborn daughter—a crisis that pitted her maternal

instincts against her artistic inclinations. In the aftermath, she felt both "inadequate" and fearful that she had neglected her child's health for her poetic career (Hollenberg 36-37). Trauma surrounded the birth of a second daughter whose name, Perdita, means lost one. Quickly, H.D. let her wealthy lover, Bryher, and Bryher's husband adopt and raise Perdita.

Hollenberg stresses "the painful discrepancy between an ideal of motherhood that H.D. wished to reconcile with her work and the incessant reality of child care that threatened to impinge upon it" (31). Here, H.D.'s daughter, Perdita Schaffner, tells us what it was like to be H.D.'s child:

H.D. was hardly an archetypal mother, nor would one expect her to be. At the time, I really didn't expect or know anything otherwise. We lived in Switzerland with her friend Bryher, isolated from the world. Visitors came by from time to time; mostly writers, adults only. I never consorted with other children, other families, other mothers. So, for all I knew, everybody's mother was a poet; a tall figure of striking beauty, with fine bone structure and haunting grey eyes; and frequently overwrought, off in the clouds, or sequestered in a room, not to be disturbed on any account. (4)

Perdita goes on to describe the disparity that existed between H.D.'s idealization of motherhood and her actual mothering practices:

She was intensely maternal—on an esoteric plane. She venerated the concept of motherhood, but was unprepared for its disruptions. She flinched at sudden noise, and fled from chaos. Mercifully for her, she was well buffered. We had a staff, almost

a body guard, I could always be removed. "*Madame est nerveuse; viens ma petite!*" Or Bryher would step in and marshal me off. "Your mother's very nervous today." Every day, it seemed. So, fair enough, that's the way it was. A mother was someone who wrote poetry and was very nervous. And who walked alone and sat alone. And was capable of overwhelming affection, but on her own time and terms, preferably out of doors. (4)

Largely unmothered, H.D. becomes an absentee-mother who attempts in her art to compensate for those losses by inventing the idealized mother goddess that she herself cannot be. This heritage of unmothered women hungering after some sense of an authentic female source is more common than not. In my own case, my great-grandmother, Ann Heathe, lost herself in the care of her thirteen children; her daughter, my maternal grandmother, Eva Brooks, worked as a mender in a woolen mill and sold Avon products on the weekends to make ends meet during the Depression. Eva certainly was an absentee-mother to her three children. My own mother, Marion Allen, dedicated her energies to caring for my father, my half-brothers, and my paternal grandparents. My paternal grandmother, Helen Mansfield, told my mother as she was preparing for my birth that women from our family "don't give birth to girls!"

Hollenberg writes that H.D.'s early poetry evidences an unresolvable split between the roles of mother and poet (31-2, 67, 91-2). Although Albert Gelpi points to "H.D.'s deepening engagement with the mother archetype" in such later works as The Trilogy (330), H.D. continues to tame and compromise the female principle whereby a virgin troubadour bears a book instead of a baby in her arms. The pages of

this virgin-poet's book are blank. Later, she is Mary Magdalene, then the Virgin with Child. Gelpi concludes:

in the sequence of things, the Madonna with Child subsumes the Virgin with Book. Or rather the Virgin-scribe writes the book of the Virgin-mother. (333)

Although H.D. alludes to Mary Magdalene's darker passions, they quickly become assimilated into that of the Immaculate Virgin-mother. Wishing to rectify her own devalued female source along with her haphazard attempts at mothering Perdita, H.D. continues to idealize the Great Goddess. In Helen in Egypt, she tidies up the notion of the unfaithful temptress, Helen, whom the Greeks hated for causing the Trojan War. Although intending to defend Helen's right to pursue her desires, H.D. also masks her own guilt for abandoning Perdita in the following, where supposedly the Helen persona is explaining:

I had all that, everything,
my Lord's devotion, my child
prattling of a bird-nest,

playing with my work-basket;
the reels rolled to the floor
and she did not stoop to pick up

the scattered spools but stared
with wide eyes in a white face,
at a stranger--and stared at her mother,

a stranger--that was all,
I placed my foot on the last step
of the marble water-stair

and never looked back (228)

Is the H.D./Helen figure a stranger to her own daughter because in a patriarchal marriage everyone exists in a state of estrangement? Or, are the mother and daughter disaffected from each other because the former has abandoned the latter? (Helen, of course, was the name of H.D.'s own mother.) Given the patriarchal tendency to value sons over daughters, both questions could be answered in the affirmative.

In her defence of Helen, H.D. adopts the Greek lyric poet Stesichorus' argument that the actual Helen was never in Troy but, like a faithful Penelope, waited out the war in an Egyptian temple under the protection of a benevolent Pharaoh. This depiction of Helen the Good shows H.D. attempting to mend a split that arose with the demise of the Old European nature goddess—that existing between "the loving wife or a castrating bitch," writes Friedman (Friedman and DuPlessis 395).

In her reinvention of the great pagan goddess, H.D. tellingly chooses to focus on her more "civilized" aspects, such as Helen's capacity for love and Demeter's and Thetis' maternal natures. She never writes about such war-mongering Greeks as the Erinyes, Enyo sister of Mars, or Tisiphone, supernatural female presences having much in common with the bellicose goddesses of H.D.'s own Anglo-Germanic heritage.

H.D. may also err on the side of the Good Mother because throughout her career which spanned World Wars I and II, it was not politically correct to be German. Thus, political correctness, lack of role models, and feelings of inadequacy that the demands of motherhood evoked led H.D. to

emphasize the Good Mother in her oeuvre. For example, she pits the male forces of Thanatos, envisioned as a war cult suggestive of Hitler's fascist regime, against the female ones of Eros in her Helen. She tries, at times, to work her way around these gender stereotypes, as Friedman points out, by using androgynous alchemical imagery and the shifting of multiple selves and voices. In so doing, she ensures "that the conflicting polarized worlds of love and death relate to each other dialectically as well as confrontationally" (Friedman and DuPlessis 399).

Life becomes death and death life just as Helen's love results in Achilles' death or, as Friedman points out, "Achilles' death in Troy evolves into his resurrection as a New Mortal limping along the beach in Egypt" (Friedman and DuPlessis 399). But this dialectical interweaving of love and hate, male and female energies in the Helen plays itself out primarily in Aristotelian plot reversals and swings of fate rather than within the person of the Great Goddess who was originally conceived of as a life-bearing and death-wielding source.

In her characterization of Clytaemnestra, H.D. does attempt to confront the darker passions of the Paleolithic "Killer-Regeneratrix" (Gimbutas 319). In so doing, Clytaemnestra appears as her sister Helen's evil twin. Hollenberg describes her as "a split-off part" of Helen (189), a term that could also be used for Brontë's malign strangers. Helen's repressed aggression reasserts itself, empowering Clytaemnestra to murder her husband, Agamemnon. She does so to avenge the death of their daughter, Iphigenia, whom Agamemnon had sacrificed to raise the winds for the becalmed Greeks who would sail for Troy.

Before becoming a cold blooded killer, Clytaemestra displays a more appropriate sort of female aggression

—maternal protectiveness. Here, H.D. depicts her as a threatened swan defending her cygnet:

Have you ever seen a swan,
when you threaten its nest—
two swans, but she was alone,

who was never alone;
the wings of an angry swan
can compass the earth,

can drive the demons
back to Tartarus,
can measure heaven in their span;

one swan and one cygnet
were stronger than all the host,
assembled upon the slopes

and hills of Aulis. (Helen 76)

Aside from this cameo portraying the positive use of maternal aggression, H.D. aligns Clytaemnestra's murderous intentions not with the death-wielding, yet regenerative aspects of the Old European goddess, but with those of a fascist male war cult. Ironically, Clytaemnestra fights like a man to end the victimization of womankind:

Clytaemnestra struck with her mind,
with the Will-to-Power,
her Lord returned with Cassandra,

and she had a lover;
does it even the Balance
if a wife repeats a husband's folly?

never; the law is different;
 if a woman fights,
 she must fight by stealth,

with invisible gear;
 no sword, no dagger, no spear
 in a woman's hands
 can make wrong, right (Helen 97)

Dismissing this masculinized Clytaemnestra from her goddess pantheon, H.D. is left with a somewhat meek figure. "The whole demonic aspect of the 'feminine' image in fact never appears" in Helen of Egypt, explains Friedman (Friedman and DuPlessis 395). Instead H.D. reinvents the Great Goddess as a principle of female purity, idealizing the patient Penelope, while dismissing the vengeful Clytaemnestra. As Friedman reiterates, H.D.'s Eros "is not violent or aggressive; it is intangible, invisible, omniscient, and operating without might but with magic, the power of Isis" (Friedman and DuPlessis 387).

Isis, according to Kathleen Alexander-Berghorn, represents the female healer who sustains the cosmos (91-8). Hers is a regenerative power not "interwoven" with the icons of destruction that typified the Paleolithic Goddess or that characterize her warlike northern European descendants such as were venerated in the war cults of the Germanic and Celtic tribes (Gimbutas 316). But what of our present dilemma—the repression of the darker passions that might fuel a woman's writing?

Susan Rubin Suleiman in her thought-provoking essay, "Writing and Motherhood," argues that "the pervasive check on aggression" that a "writing mother" like H.D. evidences is "intimately linked to a sense of guilt about her child"

(364). To let her aggression, wilfulness, and the cold calculation of craftsmanship come to the fore, a mother must temporarily forego the self-sacrifice of the ever-tender caregiver. Suleiman feels that mothers must write more about their own self-violating guilt, as well as of the violent energies of artistic creation. Mothers need to mine both the dark and light sides of the female source in a way that H.D. could not.

Adrienne Rich explains the writing mother's predicament:

My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness. (Of Women Born 21)

Like many of us, H.D. struggled to reinvent a more empowering muse for herself. Avoiding the demonic feminine, she envisioned a meeker daemon. Often her Great Goddess seems to float somewhat hesitantly above a text's surface, as if incapable of containing those "murderous alternations" between maternal tenderness, scrupulous attention to the craft, and the artistic need to destroy as well as to create.

June 30, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

Your poem succeeds for not having to make rational sense. Its imagistic collage achieves a dreamlike reality similar to that of the surreal, experimental films of the '60s. The beginning part about "white" and "black" is hauntingly effective. I do have a few suggestions—small ones really. One of the poem's strengths is how it keeps changing perspectives. But these imbedded yet untagged bits of dialogue are confusing. Why not use italics, for example, in the first six stanzas or so, where the voice keeps asking about the colour "white." Also, this same voice seems to be referring to the plunge with stiffened wings, so why not put that section in italics, too.

In the stanza that begins "White?" "No, dark, dark," I would place the white on a separate line to make clear that there are two voice speaking to each other—perhaps those of the couple sitting on the terrace. I like the walcyrie-Kali association and will say more about it later, but you could cut out "whose arms" and just have a line like "wields swords, jewels & skulls." That's it for the small suggestions. Oh yes, perhaps you could retitile it "Logos," which seems more precise than "Voice." At any rate, will retype how my edit might look:

LOGOS

The wind is in truth the All-Devourer.

Khandogya Upanishad

Again and again

little muttered

warnings

that grow

blustery, brutish

& from time to time,

that smelly breath in your face,

over the balcony. A new moon

for burning rubbish,

catches, flaring up.

Was it white?

where he sits sipping beer;

unsteady, metal table

pinions streaked with pinkish light

Was it white?

skimming over the rough concrete,

white that the light bleaches through?

over parquet floors,

scraped by the nails of a dog

cowering under the table.

"I love children;
will never have any."
"But you're a saint . . ."
"Oh no, not that,"

& the beak
sharp, able
to give a good nip,

& a body, long and ungainly
as the width between
his house and the next,
sinks down into a nest
of dirty sheets,

as it goes on blighting
every wish upon a star
the child makes—

the lord's prayer
strikes the palate,
tongue-shaped sounds
lisp'd out like water
supplicating stone
where it boils and weeps.

*Did you see its
wings stiffen,
as it plunged down
screaming?*

"White?"

"No, dark, dark,"

slicing through the ether,

you cry,

air rushing into open mouth,

as if my questions panic you—

speech dies

into breath,

breath into wind,

Coredua
Oh walcyrie, sister of Kali
(who wields swords, jewels, & skulls)

the wind is a stomach

that never can be filled—

fingers into center
foetus into body,

flame into fire

devouring fire,

the waters,

the stars up.

foetus (in mos)

Yes, Yes! Kali cum *walcyrie* has flown unexpectedly into your poem. You set out to draft a text about a male logos. Thankfully, you surrendered to the language, letting it take you through many shape-shifting drafts (one 8 pages long!). As you kept expanding and contracting your text, the Kali presence appeared. It is striking how the intensity of your "words" led you like Rich's "purposes" or "maps" towards the discovery of Kali as female logos (Poetry and Prose 54). HD

Response to letter of June 30, 1997

Dear Reader:

If one follows Chandler's line of reasoning then some healing must be taking place, as the bulk of this June letter from H.D. concerns itself with the crafting of my poem. Chandler goes on to speak of our need for such aesthetic wholeness even though it may be an illusion. Time drives us forward from one incomplete episode to the next. Nevertheless, "we need to experience physical and spiritual integrity," writes Chandler. "And one way to assure ourselves of that integrity is to shape experience in writing, giving it comprehensible contours and boundaries (39).

Thus, H.D. critiques how I might create "comprehensible contours and boundaries" for the poem's different voices. Self-healing occurs as I begin to distinguish the "various versions of the self" that are finding expression in this poem, such as that of the man drinking with his companion, along with the poet whose questioning seems to overwhelm the others (Chandler 67). The "intensive" (Orr, "Four Temperaments" 2) impulse toward dialogue that would give these overly-merged voices their "contours and boundaries" allows me to achieve a certain amount of "objectifying, distancing, opening out, branching" that Chandler defines as characteristic of the aesthetic process (71).

This poetic process also demands surrendering to the surreal movement of language, something that H.D. condones. For example, a typical H.D. protagonist, such as Julia in Bid Me to Live, foregoes intuitive utterance. Like McNiff, who would let "the controlling mind step aside" in order to take advantage of the accidents and interactions that emerge

as the artwork presents itself (60), Julia prefers simply to "write the story. The story must write me. The story must create me" (H.D., Bid Me to Live 181).

Submitting to this intuitive muttering, one hopes eventually to connect with the primordial female source, described by H.D. in The Gift as:

Mary, Maia, Miriam, Mut, Madre, Mere, Mother, pray
for us. . . This is Gaia, this is the beginning.
This is the end. Under every shrine to Zeus, to
Jupiter, to Zeus-pater or Theus-pater or God-the-
father . . . there is an earlier altar. There is,
beneath the carved superstructure of every temple
to God-the-father, the dark cave or grotto or
inner hall or cellar to Mary, Mere, Mut, mutter,
pray for us. (10)

By intuitively surrendering to utterance, H.D. begins following the ghostly presence of an archaic mother who most often appears as a maternal rhythm, or loosened iambic trimeter line. The lines of this haunting and "as yet unheard" metre often fall off by way of whispery feminine endings, such that they resist the trumpeted cadences and harder masculine climax of the canonical iambic pentameter. For example, in Helen in Egypt, H.D. speaks metaphorically of her intent to undo the imperialism of the male metric by way of:

a touch--so a hand
brushes the lyre-strings;

a whisper—a breath
to invite the rose;
a summer touch,

night-wings or vermillion
of the day-butterfly;

.

because Apollo granted a lute-player,
a rhythm as yet unheard,
to challenge the trumpet note. (229)

Another way H.D. invites maternal absence to speak is by disrupting the surfaces of her end-stopped lines with a number of caesuras:

Do not despair, ||| the hosts
surging beneath the Walls,
(no more than I) ||| are ghosts. (Helen 1)

These caesuric interruptions colloquialize the seancelike tone. They somewhat destabilize lines 1 and 3, falling as they do between the second and third feet. Also, they effect subtle tonal shifts, making for greater ambiguity. For example, the comma that isolates the phrase, "do not despair," keeps us from moving forward as if confronted by an actual presence. Momentarily stopped, we ask who is speaking and to whom? This slight rupture opens a space for different readings: is the poem's speaker addressing Helen and/or the reader?; or is Helen speaking to the reader, or to the hosts themselves?

Similarly, line 3's medial caesura gives rise to multiple perspectives. For example, if you remove the parentheses, then it is possible to say that the "hosts" are "ghosts." If you consider just the parenthetical aside, then the "I" may really exist, or may simply be a ghost, too. Thus, the caesuras in stanza one destabilize the authority of the prophet, dead poet, or other oracle-like being who is beginning to intone the poem. H.D. seems to be using these

pauses to create an inviting emptiness for some maternal ghost to fill. In so doing, she evokes Helen's ever-shifting identity and abets the modulation of the archaic goddess' voice into her epic's many echoing voices.

July 14, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Thanks for your discerning critique of my poem. I do think it's nearly done! I showed it to R.Y. who says that the poem is like a scream—logos as a scream. "Why do you panic when you think about being white?," he asks. "It's my background," I blurt out. "What is it about your whiteness that makes you anxious?"

R.Y. feels that the strongest, yet most troubling part of the poem is when the woman says she loves children, but will never have any. He reads this as my rejection of my childhood and heritage. It also points to my relationship with children, my inner child, my actual daughter, etc. I tell him that the inspiration for this childless woman in my poem came from a forthright person in a recovery group who said she will never have children because she identifies with her drunken father, whose brutal honesty and playful abandon she admired much more than her mother's hypocritical sainthood.

Anyway, R.Y.'s comments have been helpful, as have your editorial suggestions. However, am not sure that the winged thing is the valkyrie that R.Y. suggests it is. My question: is it the winged thing that has flown into the poem, or am I beseeching the valkyrie (sister of Kali) for help because this darkish thing has plunged into my life? Am not sure.

Have been reading some texts about Kali, such as Pranab Bandyopadhyay's somewhat inscrutable Mother Goddess Kali, David R. Kinsley's The Sword and the Flute: Kali and Krsna, Dark Versions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology, and the lushly illustrated Kali The Feminine Force by Ajit Mookerjee. According to Mookerjee, Kali, when

she first appeared, "filled the skies with her roar" (61). This is interesting because in my own poem, as R.Y. points out, logos is really a scream. Of course, one also thinks of the Celtic Morrigan's battle cry that allegedly frightened warriors to death as when she "shrieked above them that night in Gairech and Ingairech so that a hundred of their warriors died of terror" (O'Rehilly 231).

Mookerjee draws on Jungian theory to explain Kali's scream (61). For example, in The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature, Carl Jung writes:

the impact of an archetype, whether it takes the form of immediate experience or is expressed through the spoken word, stirs us because it summons up a voice that is stronger than our own. Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices. (82)

This summoning up of suppressed, archetypal images makes the artist's task both terrible and sublime. The poet must struggle not to be possessed by what is compellingly strange, even demonic about the archetype. And how does a mother relate to this Great Mother thing anyway?

Ramakrishna (c.1836-86), a childless Bengali priest and fervent Kali worshipper, became like an inebriated child in her presence:

Like a drunkard, he would reel to the throne of the Mother, touch Her chin by way of showing his affection for Her, and sing, talk, joke, laugh, and dance. . . . As his spiritual mood deepened he more felt himself to be a child of the Divine Mother. He learnt to surrender himself completely to Her will and let her direct him. (Gupta 14-5)

Is this the child I cannot become because I must be the responsible mother-provider? As Mookerjee reports, one day

at the Dakshinesvar Kali Temple in North Calcutta, Ramakrishna's longing to see Mother Kali became irresponsibly suicidal. Mookerjee quotes Ramakrishna as saying that he felt

as if someone had taken hold of my heart and mind, and was wringing them like a wet towel. My eyes fell on the sword on the wall of the Mother's temple. I made up my mind to end my life that very moment. Like one mad I ran and caught hold of it, when suddenly I had the wonderful vision of the Mother and fell down unconscious. (77)

Other things about Kali are striking—she is often depicted as an intoxicated nude dancer. Or as Kinsley describes her, Kali is mad: "In her mad dancing, dishevelled hair, and eerie howl there is made present the hint of a world reeling, careening out of control" (135). As such, Kali represents "the ephemeral, unpredictable, spontaneous nature" of the phenomenal world, a world he likens to "an insane asylum" (135).

Gupta reports that Ramakrishna once asked, "Who would create this mad world unless under the influence of divine drunkenness?" (13). The eighteenth-century Bengali devotional poet, RamPrasada, also depicts the mad Kali and her equally insane consort, Siva, in the following:

Crazy is my Father, crazy my Mother,
And I, their son, am crazy too!
Shyama [the dark one, meaning Kali] is my Mother's
name.
My Father strikes His cheeks and makes a hollow
sound:
Ba-ba-bom! Ba-ba-bom!
And my Mother, drunk and reeling,

Falls across my Father's body!
 Shyama's streaming tresses hang in vast disorder;
 Bees are swarming numberless
 About Her crimson Lotus Feet.
 Listen, as She dances, how Her Anklets ring.

(45-6)

Disturbing Kali makes no such appearance in Christianity. One reason is that maybe she represents everything in nature a Western patriarchal mind has tried to control.

Kinsley explains that Kali is "prakrti":

the inherent urge, the driving force that impels matter to multiply and diversify into increasingly grosser forms. . . . *Prakrti* is never still, for *prakrti* is life and the thirst for life.

Unchecked, *prakrti* careens along on a rampage of blind creativity, completely obscuring the underlying unity and reality of the world. (137)

And for Kinsley, "Kali's mad, tumultuous dancing" symbolizes

the possibility of a world completely overcome by intoxication with the sensual and the physical. She is the jungle, lush and voluptuous in her nudity, untamed, uncultured, uncaring, and uncompromising in her ongoing struggle to survive and grow. Living on the periphery of civilization, she threatens to invade and destroy it, threatens to overgrow it or trample it in her mad dance of life and death. (137-8)

Kali-the-Insatiable is also the goddess who represents those uncomfortably "inevitable realities of sickness, old age, and death", things that our youth-worshipping western

society finds most distasteful (138). Kali, the cyclonic dancer, is also the Goddess of Time and Death (Kinsley 139). Ramakrishna once had the following sublimely horrific vision of Mother Kali:

He saw an exquisitely beautiful woman, heavy with child, emerge from the Ganges, give birth, and begin tenderly to nurse her infant. A moment later, she had assumed a terrible aspect, and seizing the child in her jaws, crushed it. Devouring her offspring she re-entered the water. (Mookerjee 83)

Surprisingly horrific Kali nevertheless treats her devotees with a tender affection, inspiring them to develop a sense of compassion for all sentient beings:

Meditation on Kali, confrontation of her, even the slightest glimpse of her, restores man's hearing, thus enabling or forcing a keener perception of things around him. Confronted with the vision of Kali, he begins to hear, perhaps for the first time, those sounds he has so carefully censored in the illusion of his physical immortality. (Kinsley 141)

Sister Nivedita explains that meditation on Kali might lead one to hear "the wail of all the creatures, the moan of pain, and the sob of greed, and the pitiful cry of little things in fear" (34).

Kali's scream, then, reverberates from what Kinsley refers to as

a dimension that is completely unbound, primordially free. It is an untamed, fertile dimension from which the world is born and upon which the world rests, a dimension that pervades the world with throbbing life but that threatens

to render the world chaotic when it unpredictably changes its rhythm, breaking in on the ordered, artificial routine of citified and civilized man.

(157-58)

Well, this is my reading of Kali to date. Perhaps I should conduct similar research into the nature of the valkyries or the Morrigan. R.Y. is right. I know more about East Indian mythology than my own. Somehow the Atlantic is a great cauldron of amnesia that obliterated the old horizons as it washed my family westward.

Must close and try to sleep; it is hot and the honking carloads of flag-waving French nationals racing up and down Sherbrooke Street are only adding to my restlessness. Viva la liberté, **CH**

Response to letter of July 14, 1997

Dear Reader:

This letter returns to the voice of the "expert" analyst. I have already begun to equivocate. I am seeking to approach the audacious Kali not through giving vent to her voice, but through my own, more tame, expository musings. In fact, I am not certain that the winged thing in my poem is a valkyrie. Perhaps I am merely calling out to a valkyrie, or to a Kali-like figure not as yet materialized. Perhaps "Logos" enacts the breakthrough into consciousness of archetypal imagery.

Hedging slightly, I reintroduce the analyst as well as the confessional tone characteristic of therapeutic discourse. My poetic voice(s) have fallen silent for a time, pulled back into the "black hole" where, according to R.Y., my rejected "childhood and heritage," "my inner child," and other unresolved issues about motherhood reside (Chandler 104).

Recently sick with flu, I stare out the window to watch a squirrel burying nuts in an exposed patch of earth. I begin daydreaming about climbing with this nimble animal. Instead of going up, I follow her down a ladder fashioned of two slim pines. This initiation is a lesson in the headfirst plunge. Lacking a tail with which to balance myself, I struggle to grip the rough bark of each rung, while my legs thrash behind, threatening to flip me off the ladder. Finally, we land at the bottom of a deep, kiva-like hole, surrounded by the slightly claustrophobic smell of packed earth. As my eyes adjust, the grainy blackness lightens to a shadowy grey revealing a group of seated forms. Swollen root shapes, they seem like dusty potatoes. As my eyes grow

more accustomed to the eerie earth light, I see they are bulbous women with massive stomach folds of greenish brown skin who rock rhythmically on their egg-shaped buttocks, hands clasped to fat knees. Their whisperings rustle like leaves.

Among the many questions this July 14th letter poses is "how to relate to this Great Mother thing, this bulbous, winged thing?" My recurrent use of the word "thing" suggests I have not fully reinvented her as a creative source. A two-dimensional image in the mind's eye that can approach the ridiculous—is she more black hole than sustaining earth mother?

And what of R.Y.'s observation that "Logos" is but one long, sustained scream? Banshees, carrion crows, and other of death's messengers scream, as do martial artists, people in pain, and colicky babies. My research tells me that Kali announces her arrival with a scream. The scholarly pretense of this letter continues to be troubled by such key words as "suicide," "drunkenness," "possession," and "surrender." Can I submit to the Kali archetype, or will it drive me mad? What if my one raging voice becomes amplified to speak "with a thousand voices" (Jung, Spirit of Man 82)?

FEAST OF ATHENA SCIRAS

These letters written from July 15 to September 23, 1997 were begun on or around the date of this ancient Greek festival at which time Athena's priestess offered olives, figs, and pears to evoke the goddess' protection of crops from the fierce Greek sun.

I begin to sing of Pallas Athena, the
 glorious goddess,
 grey-eyed, resourceful, of implacable heart.
 The bashful maiden is a mighty defender of
 cities,
 the Tritogeneia, whom Zeus the counselor
 himself
 bore from his august head, clad with golden
 and resplendent
 warlike armor, as awe lay hold of all the
 immortal onlookers.

From "To Athena." (Homer, Hymns 66)

"Why have you come to me?" I asked.
 "I have never been mothered," Athena
 answered.

Deena Metzger, Writing for your Life

July 15, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Before leaving for my Maine vacation, I want to answer your question—how in your early poems do you deal with the terrors of poetic inspiration, especially as they take the form of possession by male muse figures?

To simplify this voluminous task, I have decided to focus on one of the most obvious animus figures in your early poetry—Apollo (Helios). As Thomas Burnett Swann points out in The Classical World of H.D., Apollo, "friend of the Muses, patron of the fine arts, medicine, and eloquence," is your "favourite god" (79). But, was he the paragon of virtue as Herodotus suggests, or the lady killer that Pindar and Ovid make him out to be? Poets, continues Swann, tend to fall into two opposing camps—"those who regard him as a god of light and those who celebrate his loves." H.D., he writes, "is decidedly a member of the first group: not only does she hail the god as a light-bringer rather than a lover, but sometimes she even makes him an enemy of love" (80).

I wish to question whether Swann is correct to group you with those who see Apollo in such a positive light. Or do you characterize him as an ambivalent muse-figure in your early work? To begin answering these questions, I will look at your "Helios and Athene," a text written during your "first trip to Greece in 1920 with Bryher" (Burnett 25). In it, you paired Helios, the Greek sun god who is another manifestation of Phoebus (shining) Apollo, with Athene, the goddess of war, wisdom, and the liberal arts. Gary Burnett, in his H.D. between Image and Epic: The Mysteries of Her Poetics, sees this pairing as your attempt to make a male

and a female god "stand as equal yet different incarnations of the divine." He also points out that Athene, the female element, "contains Helios" (30). You describe this containing of the male Apollonian-Helios energy as "the Love of Athene." You write of these Athenian and Apollonian elements, saying:

Love for Athene is the surrender to neither, the merging and welding of both, the conquering in herself of each element, so that the two merge in the softness and tenderness of the mother and the creative power and passion of the male. In her hand is the symbol of this double conquest and double power, the winged Niké. (Collected Poems 330)

Athene or Athena does not "surrender to" but, rather, conquers "in herself," "the softness and tenderness of the mother and the creative power and passion of the male," such that "the two merge" in an act of Love. That Athena contains Helios suggests that he is an animus figure which is, as E. Jung states, the "inner" personality that puts forth "characteristics which are lacking in the outer, and manifest, conscious personality" (1). For example, a woman experiences her inner being as masculine; a man sees his as feminine.

In this passage from "Helios and Athene," you portray Helios-Apollo, your heroic serpent-slaying animus, more ambivalently than Swann might admit:

When Helios the god slays the serpent, he slays in reality not so much the serpent, as fear of the serpent. The god learns from the serpent. Be wise as serpents. (Collected Poems 326)

This passage rapidly shifts point of view: at first Helios is a questionable serpent killer who then metamorphoses into someone who only eradicates "fear of the serpent." He overcomes not the reptile, but his aversion to it. Why do you so destabilize this passage's point of view?

Let's investigate the classical sources of your Apollo serpent-killer. Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon tell us in their Classical Mythology that Pythian-Apollo of Delphi slew two serpents, a Cyclops as well as one called Pytho whose name means "rot" because Apollo's solar rays made their corpses rot (148). Zeus punished Apollo with exile for the death of these dragonlike beings who allegedly manufactured thunderbolts for him. The slaying of Pytho took place at Crisa while Apollo was establishing his oracle there. The Crisa "site was occupied by an oracle of the great mother-goddess of the Minoan-Mycenaean period, sometimes know as Ge-Themis" (148). Morford and Lenardon write that "the slaying of the dragon (the traditional manifestation of a deity of earth), therefore, represents the subsequent conquest by Hellenic or Hellenized Apollo" of an earlier earth goddess cult (148). Are you rewriting the myth so that Apollo no longer kills the Goddess's reptilian representatives, but merely conquers his fear of their matriarchal power? Is this wishful thinking on your part?

You begin your poem, "Helios and Athene," with praise for the reclaimed serpent whose skin adorns Athene's aegis, a remnant of the older mother-goddess Gorgon cult:

The serpent does not crouch at Athene's feet.
The serpent lifts a proud head under the shelter
of her shield.

The serpent is marked with pattern as
exquisite as the grain of the field-lily petal. He

is hatched from an egg like the swan. (Collected Poems 326)

Your snake does not crawl shamefully on its belly as does the Biblical serpent in its Edenic exile, but "lifts a proud head." Its beauty is "exquisite," and its origins are the same as that of "the swan," the bird who draws Apollo's chariot. The phrase, "lifts a proud head" is repeated: "The serpent lifts a proud head beneath the massive shield-rim of Athene, guardian of children, parton of the city" (326). Much can be made of this gesture of "lifting up" the head.

Remember E. Jung's remark that the patriarchy gradually degraded the feminine principle into something lowly and inferior. Undervalued in our culture, women must overcome a "lack of self-confidence and the resistance of inertia" (23). We must "lift ourselves" in order to meet the masculine principle embodied as it is as each woman's animus (23). Not surprisingly, many of "Helios and Athene's" images suggest ascent, such as the birds, swans, and winged Niké along with the rising serpent.

More tellingly, in the second section of "Helios and Athene," you have embedded an aesthetic ladder of ascent, symbolic of your three-tiered, "poetic manifesto" (Burnett 26). Its first stage concerns itself with "the physical fact of falling in love" (25) with Helios as a work of art, which is, in this case, "the Statue of Helios on the Olympic frieze":

The naked Greek, the youth in athletic contest, has set, accurately prescribed movement and posture. This convention made of him a medium or link between men in ordinary life and images of Pentallic frieze or temple front. We gaze upon this living naked embodiment of grace and decorum.

We are inflamed by its beauty. We love it.

(Collected Poems 327)

Here, you encourage us to contemplate a "naked Greek . . . youth," the athletically-proportioned Apollo found on a "Pentallic frieze or temple front." But, as Burnett explains, Apollo's "sexuality is once removed, held at a distance from" a personal, emotion reaction (26). You seem not to want us to remain at stage one of your manifesto which advocates a direct visceral reaction to the sculptured image of a god. We must quickly ascend to stage two—a more controlled mental response to the Apollo:

The statue was like a ledge of rock, from which a great bird steps as he spreads his wings.

The mind, the intellect, like the bird rests for a moment, in the contemplation or worship of that Beauty.

The mind grips the statue as the bird grips the rock-ledge. It would convince itself that this is its final resting place. (Collected Poems 328)

Just preceding this passage, you make reference to "the priest at Delphi, the initiate, even the more advanced worshipper," which suggests that this "ledge of rock" from which "a great bird [Apollo's swan or Athene's owl] spreads his wings" represents one that might actually be found on Delphi's Sacred Way (328). You admit in Tribute to Freud that the real purpose of your 1920 trip to Greece was to visit "Delphi and the shrine of Helios (Hellas, Helen)," but were told "at Itea that it was absolutely impossible for two ladies alone, at that time, to make the dangerous trip on the winding road to Delphi" (49). The authorities felt that you and Bryher were unequal to the task of travelling alone in Post-War Greece. Surely they were concerned for your safety, or were they just patronizing you?

Forbidden to climb the Sacred Way in real life, you imagine yourself doing so in "Helios and Athene" and many other of your early poems. Swann points to the fact that your original contribution to the reworking of Greek myths is that you "add ritual to narrative" (44). He states that in a number of these poems such as "The Cliff Temple," "The Shrine," "All Mountains," and "Hyacinth," the persona undertakes a "cleansing" ritual climb, or "flight towards the arms of a protecting god," whose temple sits at the "utmost peak" of a cliff (29). Such a purification rite suggests the female principle's ascent towards a remote Apollonian animus.

Before returning to our discussion of "Helios and Athene," let's consider Morford and Lenardon's description of Apollo's Delphic temple:

The sacred area (temenos) was built on the lower slopes of Mt. Parnassus, about two thousand feet above the Corinthian Gulf. It is an awe-inspiring spot to this day. As one traces one's steps along the Sacred Way up to the great temple of the god, it is not too difficult to sense the feelings of reverence and exaltation that filled the heart and the soul of the ancient believer. (149-50)

In "Helios and Athene," we have traced your steps up from a visceral to a mental appreciation of the statue of Apollo. In the final stage, the work of art must become "a vehicle for vision so powerful that it takes the form of possession, a literal inspiration" (Burnett 25). Thus, climbing your aesthetic ladder, or Delphic Sacred Way, you would contemplate your Apollo sensually, then mentally, to merge with him in an ideal visionary state of mystical passion.

Your obsessive re-enactments of this ritual climb in your early poems may well have been inspired by a waking vision that occurred to you in which a woman scales a ladder of light. You and Bryher had gone to the Greek island of Corfu after being forbidden access to Apollo's Delphi. In your Corfu hotel, you entered a clairvoyant trance in which stencil-like figures composed of "dim light on shadow, not shadow on light" began to appear on the "dull, mat ochre" wall of your room. You describe them as being "stamped" like pictures on "playing cards," or like "Greek vase silhouettes" (Tribute 45, 44, 45, 169).

The first, a soldier, perhaps one of those killed in World War I, seemed "a silhouette cut of light, not shadow, and so impersonal it might have been anyone, of almost any country" (45). You then perceived "a circle or two circles, the base the larger of the two . . . joined by three lines" that you recognized as "the tripod of classic Delphi . . . this venerated object of the cult of the sun god, symbol of poetry and prophecy" (45, 46).

The classicist A.B. Cook writes that such a tripod was a miniature replica of a sacred sky-pillar "on the top of which libations were poured" (2:193). To sit atop such a tripod indicates one has taken up a "celestial seat" (2:204). When the Pythia "mounts the tripod," she "lays by mortality and becomes more than human in her insight and foresight," explains Cook (2:206). Astride the tripod, she becomes the "bride of Apollo," as you seemed to have wanted to do (2:208). Some classical scholars, Cook continues, even felt that "Apollo impregnated the *Pythia* as she sat on the tripod and filled her with his own divinity" (2:209).

As your Corfu trance continues, you begin to see "a ladder of light," of "seven rungs . . . maybe five" on which

a winged "Niké, Victory" is climbing (Tribute 53, 54). Cook describes a similar illuminated "Soul-Ladder" as an emblem common to early Germanic-Orphic cults that believed "in a soul path leading up to a summit of the heavenly vault" (2:114). Like the one in your vision, these cult ladders often had "seven or eight steps" (Cook 2:128). In spite of Freud's dismissal of your Corfu visions, these revelations appear to be part of what Cook calls a "Hagiography," a tradition of hagio(sacred)-graphos(written writings) in which your illuminated ladder is commonplace (2:117). For example, numerous early Christians saw a Jacob's Ladder such as the Cappadocian saints, Sabas and Basil the Great, as well as Saint Ephraem the Syrian (2:116). "In the case of Celtic and Saxon saints," adds Cook, the sky-ladder "is almost a commonplace" as in the visions of Saint Bridget of Kildare, Saint Brioc of Brittany, Saint Keyne of Wales, and Saint Cuthbert of Melrose (2:116-17). Contrary to Freudian thought, "hagiography, like history, tends to repetition," (2:117), as it does in Dante's Paradisio:

I saw a ladder, glimmering like gold
Lit by a sunbeam, running up so high
That my sight could not trace it to the top.

I saw so many splendours stepping down
On all its rungs that I thought every star
In heaven was cascading down from it.

(bk 12.28-33; 542)

A Niké ascends your "Soul Ladder" (Cook 2:114). Instead of being "flat or static" like the other images of dim light, "she is in space, in unwallled space," and she moves not swiftly exactly but with a sure floating that at least gives my mind some rest, as if my mind had now escaped the bars of that ladder, no longer

climbing or caged but free and with wings (Tribute 55).

Bryher reports that she too has seen this last hagiograph as "a circle like the sun-disk and a figure within the disk; a man, she thought, was reaching out to draw the image of a woman (my Niké) into the sun beside him" (56). Like Brontë's imprisoned heroine, Niké would "escape the bars of that ladder" to fly up towards an animus-figure, but who is it that awaits at the ascent?

I will argue, unlike Swann, that your light-bearing Apollo is a dangerous champion. This is why in "Helios and Athene," you write of "the arrogant selfish head of the Acropolis Apollo" (Collected Poems 327), while describing the relationship between Helios and Athene (symbolized by the rivalry existing between the city states of Delphi and Athens) as one of equals caught in an "inter-dependence of hatred" (328). You describe Apollo's city as:

Delphi, the serpent, the destructive heat, Delphi
the devastatingly subtle seat of oracles, Delphi
whose centre of religion was a centre of political
intrigue, Delphi the lie, the inspiration, the
music, found in Hellas, in the world, one equal:
Athene. (329)

Delphi, then, represents a perplexing admixture of "political intrigue," lies and "the destructive heat," along with "music," "subtle" oracles, and the power of "inspiration." Here you align your poetic powers, those symbolized by Apollo, with his city's "destructive heat," to indicate how ill at ease, like myself, you are with your emergent creativity.

You are not the first to fear the light-bringer's harmful powers. In the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, lines 66-76, when Apollo's mother Leto asks the island of Delos if she

can give birth to her son on its rocky land, it reminds her of a frightening prophecy made about this uncontrollable sun-god:

But, Leto, I shall not hide the fear this word
brings me.

They say that Apollon will be haughty
and greatly lord it over the immortal gods
and the mortal men of the barley-bearing earth.
Thus I dreadfully fear in my heart and soul
lest, when he first sees the light of the sun,
scorning an island whose ground is rocky,
he overturn me with his feet and push me into the
deep sea.

And there a great billow will incessantly flood me
up to my highest peak, while he arrives at another
land,

where it may please him to establish a temple and
wooded groves. (17)

Although the ancient Greeks depicted Apollo as a musician and healer, they also saw him as "haughty" and lording it over others. For example, "nearly all Apollo's affairs (and they are numerous) are in one way or another tragic; he is perhaps the most touchingly human and the most terrifyingly sublime of all the Greek gods" (Morford and Lenardon 155). In your poem "Delphi," you are quick to defend your sun-god, saying, "I know that the tale of his lust /is lies." Those who speak ill of him are afraid of their own inner light, like when people

are holding their souls to a mirror,
light threatens, is active, is gone,
so it is with a song

.....
the blame is your own;

he knows not remorse nor repents
 he remains

faultless and perfect and whole;
 he is (Collected Poems 401)

"Faultless" Apollonian inspiration remains fickle,
 remote, even remorseless. Blaming herself, the devalued
 feminine plans to forego "wine," "love," "child and my
 home," in order to ascend the sacred mountain:

I wandered alone;
 I said,
 on the height, I will find
 him;
 I said,
 he will come with the red
 first pure light of the sun; (403)

The disappointed renunciate returns home to conclude
 that "he knows / no pity":

his tune is his own;
 in his, not in your time,
 ecstasy will betray you;
 if he cares,
 he will flay;
 if he loves,
 he will slay you. (405-6)

"Delphi" testifies to the fact that your Apollonian
 inspiration is an incorrigible, even alien power. More
 negatively than positively-expected, Apollo waits at the
 ladder's apex, not as a mystical lover, but as an evil
 enchanter who "will flay" and "slay you." Rash Apollo didn't
 suffer a fool. Marsyas, a pipe-playing satyr, foolishly
 challenged Apollo to a musical duel whose winner could have
 his way with the loser. Apollo won and chose to "flay"

Marsyas alive (405-6). Ovid depicts the defeated satyr bemoaning his sealed fate:

"Why tear me from myself? Oh, I repent!
 A pipe's not worth the price!" and as he screamed
 Apollo stripped his skin; the whole of him
 Was one huge wound, blood streaming everywhere,
 Sinews laid bare, veins naked, quivering
 And pulsing. You could count his twitching guts,
 And the tissues as the light shone through his
 ribs.

The countryfolk, the sylvan deities,
 The fauns and brother satyrs and the nymphs,
 All were in tears, Olympus too, still loved,
 And every swain who fed his fleecy flocks
 And long-horned cattle on those mountainsides.

(Metamorphoses 6.387-98; 133)

The line at the end of your poem, "Delphi," that reads "if he loves, he will slay you"—alludes to the flaying of the satyr Marsyas, a member of the old earth-queen Pytho's realm, as well as to the death of Apollo's beloved Coronis (Collected Poems 406). Both Marsyas and Coronis died challenging the supremacy of Apollonian inspiration. Apollo cherished the beautiful mortal Coronis and, of course, impregnated her with his child. One day, his raven reports that she has been lying with a young Thessalian. Suddenly Apollo's mood turns ugly:

Composure, plectrum, colour, all were lost.
 Swept in a storm of rage, he seized his bow,
 By habit, strung the string, and shot a shaft
 Unerring, inescapable, to pierce
 Her breast whereon so often his own had lain.
 She screamed and, as the arrow came away,

Her fair white skin was drenched in crimson blood.

(Ovid, 2.604-10; 42)

Undergoing another mood swing, Apollo fondles his lover's limp body, making desperate attempts to marshal his miraculous healing powers to restore Coronis' life. He saves their child, but has regrettably killed his beloved.

I remember you mentioning in your letter that E. Jung described four types of animus figures that can abet or block a woman's creativity. One is aligned with "power," another with "the deed," a third with "the word," and a fourth with "meaning" (3). Brontë's animus most often appears in the most primitive stage, that of the wind, an elemental Power" (E.Jung 3). Your Apollo is both god and fallible human, a light-bringer, a jealous lover. An example of Jung's second stage, Apollo is a man of "the deed," or hero of legends (3). Women under the positive influence of this second type of animus-logos are "active, energetic, brave and forceful" (4). Your Apollo, as we shall see, is also a man who controls "the word" and its "meanings," in short, a woman's "intellectual gifts" (4).

Here, the persona of your poem "Delphi" describes the activities she undertakes during her cleansing pilgrimage:

I read volume and tome
of old magic,
I made sign and cross-sign;
he must know the old symbol,
I swear I will find him.

(Collected Poems 403)

More steeped in their lore, the bookish lore of a classical translator—than Brontë was, you search for Apollo in ancient tomes of magic and religion. Developing your intellectual gifts in the hopes of approaching him as a deserving equal, you come to feel strangely forsaken as does

another of Apollo's victims—the Trojan prophet Cassandra. In one of your early dramatic monologues, you don the mask of this tragic woman whose life Apollo destroys. Clearly he rules over "the word" and its "meaning" as evidenced by his power to bestow Cassandra with the gift of prophecy (E. Jung 3). She accepts this mixed blessing, but will repay him with but one kiss. A spurned ladykiller, Apollo spits in Cassandra's mouth, dooming her to utter unheeded prophecies, such as her disregarded warnings about the Trojan horse.

In your dramatic monologue, Cassandra's punishment is to have her mind invaded by Apollo's words and "uttered will." She beseeches him:

speak, nameless, power and might;
when will you leave me quiet?
when will you break my wings
or leave me utterly free
to scale heaven endlessly? (Collected Poems 170)

Cassandra seeks a repose beyond sex and the ravages of "this bitter power of song" (171). Instead, her Apollonian animus not only breaks her heart, but throws her into a frightening trance that "empties the market-place" (170). People "mock" her and "shrink" from her face which is "burnt with your light/ your fire." Singled out by Apollo, whose deadly rays burn rather than illuminate her, she asks,

is there none left
can equal me
in ecstasy, desire? (Collected Poems 170)

Your poetic gifts, like Cassandra's prophetic ones, compelled you to flaunt convention. Not the typical mother, you were often found over-wrought, solitary, and sequestered in your writing room. Cassandra likewise suffered the consequences of devoting herself to her creative urges. Shaman, prophet, or poet, all have resisted submitting to

such an ego-shattering experience. Struggling against your own creativity, you transformed your Apollonian muse from an illuminating inspirer to a cruel Mediterranean sun-deity who parched crops and laid waste to the earth. Cassandra's flirtations with Apollo similarly grew toxic.

Occasionally, even the Delphic oracle refused to surrender to Apollo. Calling upon an ancient shamanic image, Vergil in the Aeneid likens the Pythia to a wild horse that Apollo would break:

. . . . But the prophetess
Whom the bestriding god had not yet broken
Stormed about the cavern, trying to shake
His influence from her breast, while all the
more
He tried her mad jaws, quelled her savage
heart,
And tamed her by his pressure. (6.43-51; 162)

Felicitas D. Goodman, an anthropological linguist who studies glossolalia, the speaking in tongues practised by Apostolic congregations in Mexico city and the Yucatan, reports on the violent nature of such a possession trance. The participants often undergo a severe physical struggle before dissociating into altered states. One worshipper explains, "All of a sudden I started trembling, and without wanting to, my lips began to move and the sounds came tumbling out, and there was light all about and I knew nothing more" (How About Demons 3). Some report severe headaches; others say that as they start to vocalize, they feel as if their "tongue was locked in place, it was stuck" (Speaking 30). Another experienced "a general lowering of inhibition:"

she shouts, cries, and cannot control her comportment. She perceives of herself as being enclosed in a prison; the experience is so intense that her veins seem to burst open, and due to this very intensity, she is unable to decide whether to label what she undergoes as positive or negative. (40)

Interestingly, although your much lighter, Corfu trance results in "a picture or an illustrated poem" rather than in the glossolalia of a fully-possessed Pentecostal priestess, you too experience a bodily struggle (Tribute 51). You undergo "a sort of pictorial buzzing" and a fear that a swarm of little things will come into your eyes, blinding you (48). Then your head begins "splitting with the ache of concentration," (49). You write that your "facial muscles seem stiff with the effort" and that you felt "frozen" like someone "to whom Perseus showed the Gorgon head" (52). Goodman explains that at the onset of a trance state, "facial muscles alter radically, and there is a change in muscle tension." Such "increased muscle tension" is "one of the most telling external signals for the 'arrival' or coming out of an alternate personality in multiple" (How About Demons 20).

Not only do you suffer perceptual disorientation, muscle spasms, and headaches, but you also feel that you are drowning. Here, your life and death struggle illustrates Gubar's belief that a woman's inspiration often appears to violate, possess, and even break her utterly (256):

I am drowning; already half-drowned to the ordinary dimensions of space and time, I know that I must drown, as it were, completely in order to come out on the other side of things (like Alice

with her looking-glass or Perseus with his mirror). I must drown completely and come out on the other side, or rise to the surface after the third time down, not dead to this life but with a new set of values, my treasure dredged from the depths. I must be born again or break utterly.

(Tribute 53-54)

Here you plunge into what Cook refers to as the "Cauldron of Apotheosis," in which one endures a purification ritual such as the "real or simulated boiling of the person concerned" (2:210). Cook goes on to explain:

A mortal plunged in the seething cauldron thereby lost his mortality. Old age dropped away from him: perennial youth remained. He died the death of a man: he lived the life of a god. This strange belief points backwards—it may be—to a time when the dead, or even the aged, were dismembered and boiled for readier removal of the flesh from their bones and the consequent liberation of their souls. (2:210)

In your "Cauldron of Apotheosis," Athenian love confronts its horrific opposite—the Gorgon's Head reflected in Perseus' mirror. Like many a quester, you must encounter and even kiss the loathsome hag who represents the denigrated feminine. You must accept this dark goddess to be reborn. Embracing what is ugly about the feminine principle, you begin to see things differently. Your trance deepens and shifts from one-dimensional stencil-like images to those of the three-dimensional winged Niké who breaks free to float up a ladder of light. At that point, like the Apostolic speaker of tongues or a Brontë heroine, you describe being suddenly freed from a prison-like state. No longer "caged," you escape "the bars of that ladder" (Tribute 55). Finally,

you drop your head in your hands succumbing to "complete physical and mental exhaustion" (56).

At the onset of your Corfu vision, you seem racked by uncertainties, saying "my head . . . is already warning me that this is an unusual dimension, and unusual way to *think*, that my brain or mind may not be equal to the occasion" (Tribute 47). Exhausted, you cut short your trance journey, averting your eyes just as the sun-god begins to consume Niké. You explain: "I thought, 'Helios, the sun . . .'" And I shut off, 'cut out' before the final picture, before (you might say) the explosion took place" (56). You "admit that now [you] have had enough, maybe just a little too much," and it is your companion, Bryher who completes the vision for you—it is she who sees Apollo "reaching out to draw" Niké "into the sun beside him" (56).

Ladder, stairs, or Sacred Way—Apollo's swan-drawn chariot awaits you at the ascent. But why do you who have just conquered the Gorgon hesitate to meet your muse? In Tribute to Freud, you speak of your "fear to be dissolved utterly" by submitting yourself to the microscopic scrutiny of Sigmund Freud, an animus figure who had devalued your psychic gifts and accused you of penis envy (116). You make the following free-associative connection:

My older brother and I took our father's magnifying glass, and he showed me how to "burn paper." Our father stopped us as he found it dangerous, "playing with fire." (116)

Averting your gaze as Niké disappears into the Apollonian sun-disk, you fear this "playing with fire" will lead to self-annihilation. Confronting your Gorgon in the depths of the Dark Goddess' cauldron, you still can not make your own masculine assertiveness conscious, or controllable.

You continue to project its aggressions onto such untrustworthy intimates as Freud, Pound, or Lawrence, who like your negative Apollonian animus, will turn and attack you. As you explain in Tribute to Freud, "If I do not let ice-thin window-glass intellect protect my soul or my emotion, I will let death in" (117). E. Jung reminds us that it is when a woman begins to develop her "intellectual gifts" that the animus becomes most "problematical" (4). Conflicted and uncertain, you seem to be using the intellect that your animus would give you to fight off your projections of him. Rather than allowing your aggressiveness to become creatively self-protective, you turn it against yourself, scrutinizing and castigating your own poetic efforts.

Your other line of defense is to project your creative assertions onto your male friends. Your autobiographical novel Bid Me To Live provides us with example of how you did this. Its protagonist, Julia, deliberates on whether or not to climb up a set of stairs. She finally decides against going up to the bedroom of Rico, the D. H. Lawrence character. Here, Julia speaks of her attempt to resist Rico's lure:

How could I climb those stairs, not knowing what you wanted? . . . How could I walk up those stairs? . . . I would be drawn, literally, up those stairs." (163-7)

These lines conjure up the image of your winged Niké floating up the Corfu ladder towards Apollo. Janice Robinson explains:

The central issue of Bid Me to Live is H.D.'s unwillingness to go up the stairs to the room Lawrence occupied during his stay at her flat in the winter of 1917. It had been arranged. If she

had gone up to Lawrence's room (Frieda was not sleeping with him), something would have been decided, would have been made final. Richard Aldington would have held off his decision about whether to stay with his mistress, Arabella, until H.D. made her decision about Lawrence. (248)

You, as Robinson points out, could not develop your own poetic abilities and act as a bohemian earth mother for Lawrence:

Frieda had given up everything for Lawrence's genius. H.D. could not, would not give up everything. . . . She could not be Eve. Frieda was Eve. Lawrence, H.D. decided, needed Eve. (249)

Apollo needed to consume his many consorts. Apollo was the great healer, and Lawrence encouraged your art for a time. But Apollo, like Lawrence, Pound, and your husband, Richard Aldington, came to carry your negative animus projection. Like Apollo, these your artist brethren were quick to enthrall and then abandon you. You resisted Apollo's lure at the climax of your Corfu ascent, fearing entrapment yet again in what DuPlessis calls a "Romantic thralldom":

an all-encompassing, totally defining love between unequals. The lover has the power of conferring self-worth and purpose upon the loved one. Such love is possessive, and while those enthralled feel it completes and even transforms them, they are also enslaved. (406)

Although Swann would have you hail Apollo as a "light-bringer" (80), you involved yourself in a perplexingly destructive cycle of submitting to and then rebelling against an Apollonian figure described by DuPlessis as a

héro fatal, a man whom she [H.D.] saw as her spiritual similar, an artist, a healer, psychic. Again and again this figure that she conspired to create betrayed her: again and again she was reduced to fragments from which her identity had once more to be painfully reconstructed. (407)

Again and again you sought to recreate yourself from the ashes of such thralldom. Athena, the primary stand-in for yourself in your early poetry, was unmothered. If you remember, Zeus swallowed Athena's mother, Metis, because of prophecies that their off-spring would be greater than himself. Battle-clad Athena leapt from Zeus' head shouting a war cry at birth. Athena's love would unite male passion with maternal tenderness. Without a mother, Athena never knew such tenderness, as her armouring would suggest. You, too, were insufficiently nurtured. Lacking self-love, you could not overcome self-hatred. As DuPlessis explains, your only recourse was to heal yourself through art:

Telling and retelling these stories of defeat and manipulation, playing and replaying the events of the past in diary and memoir, and studying the overlay of other events from a further past helped H.D. control her experience. (414)

Would that I might do the same! Fondly, **CH**

July 20, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

I am still digesting your Jungian analysis of my Apollonian muse figure and his relationship to my Corfu visions. I am delighted you have placed my visions in the tradition of hagiography, rather than mis-diagnose them as Freud once did. Am also glad you have decided to focus on that seminal period of my life between 1919 to 1924.

Another key episode in my own creative process occurred to me during this post-war interval while sailing to Corfu with Bryher and Havelock Ellis aboard her father's liner, the Borodino. It took place when our dinner companion, the charming architect Peter Van Eck, appeared on deck one stormy day—or at least his double did. I later determined that Mr. Van Eck was actually elsewhere, but his look-a-like and I watched dolphins leaping through the perfectly patterned waves of an uncannily serene sea. Although suffering from post-war burn-out, I suddenly felt revived.

Hollenberg reasons that I had been "momentarily transported out of historical time into a mythic dimension" because of my war trauma (25). In this visionary episode, Apollo, accompanied by his dolphins, materialized in the guise of Van Eck. This deckside vision was an omen sent to prepare me for my coming Corfu initiation. I know this sounds unbelievable, or do you know what I mean about signs?

At any rate, this encounter occurred on or around the anniversary of Apollo's birth, which is "at the end of February on the seventh day of Bysois" (Hoyle 26). It was then Apollo came to me as he once did when, disguised as a great fish, he jumped on board the ship of those Cretans from Cnossos. Leading them to shore, he transformed back

into his godly splendour and commanded them to worship at his nearby "Crisa" shrine (Morford and Lenardon 149). Now he was calling me, not to "Crisa," but to Corfu.

I do want to shift registers and tell you that I dislike reducing Apollo to a negative animus figure. It reminds me of the time when Freud dismissed my Corfu visions as a "dangerous symptom" verging on "megalomania" (Tribute 51). Clearly Freud misunderstood what Socrates tells us in Plato's Phaedrus: "there are two kinds of madness, one produced by human illness, the other by a divinely inspired release from normally accepted behaviour" (264A, 63). Having done away with religion, Freud could only define madness as pathological. I was deemed ill because of my "divinely inspired" visions. Freud accused me of wanting to be a prophet and found a new religion. Socrates, nevertheless, would remind us: "the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god" (244A, 27).

Socrates defends divine madness, saying:

The people who designed our language in the old days never thought of madness as something to be ashamed of or worthy of blame; otherwise they would not have used the word 'manic' for the finest experts of all—the ones who tell the future—thereby weaving insanity into prophecy.

(244B-C 27)

I aspired to be a modern day Pythia, drawn to "the kind of madness" Socrates described as "possession by the Muses," which

takes a tender virgin soul and awakens it to a Bacchic frenzy of songs and poetry that glorifies the achievements of the past and teaches them to future generations. If anyone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet

by acquiring expert knowledge of the subject without the Muses' madness, he will fail, and his self-controlled verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds. (245A, 28-9)

Given Socrates' wise words, I would prefer to discuss Apollo's role in history and myth, rather than psychoanalyse him in our exchanges. For example, his Delphinian shrine has dubious origins. Earlier, it housed the oracle of Ge-Themis, a python-goddess of the Minoan-Mycenaen period (Morford and Lenardon 148). Apollo, as you were so right to point out, killed this dragonlike being in a battle that represented the struggle between darkness and light, between Eros and Thanatos. Delphi, "the centre of the world so loved by gods and men, would have been the scene of dissension and the field of battle" as well as the source of healing epiphanies (Hoyle 58).

Somehow, in the depths of my post-partum depression, I knew I must go to Delphi. I longed for that climax experienced by so many Apollonian pilgrims who, after struggling up the steep path through olive groves, suddenly see a white marble and limestone city perched on a mist-covered ledge. But as noted, one has to be careful when approaching such a god whose cult names were not only "Phoebus the 'shining one', Musagetes the 'leader of the muses'", but also "Loxias the 'devious'" (Hoyle 51).

Originally, an inquirer at the oracle offered up a "pelanos," or soft white honey cake along with a goat that had to agree to its sacrifice (Hoyle 29). Cold water was sprinkled on its head to obtain its nodded consent. If an impassive creature ignored this prompt, the oracular reading abruptly ended. After all, it was paramount to obtain the victim's permission. Priest of the Delphic

Apollo, Plutarch, in Section 51 of his commentary on "Oracles in Decline" found in his Moralia, tells us of what happened to the Pythia when certain inquirers forced a response from a balky beast:

She went down into the chamber unwillingly and reluctantly, they tell us; and with the very first replies it was evident from the hoarseness of her voice that she was not recovering; she was like a ship in distress, full of a dumb and evil spirit. In the end she became totally disoriented, rushed to the door with a horrible, inarticulate cry, and threw herself down. The visitors, the priest Nicander, and all the *hosioi* who were there fled. After a while, however, they went in and picked her up, restored to her senses. She lived a few days longer. (56)

Afloat on the high seas, I cast myself in the role of Apollo's Pythia. But how was I to play the part? To do so, one must be a virgin (I was not), or a matron who takes a vow of chastity (which I could do). One must isolate themselves in a special temple hut (a problem). A true Delphian priestess must confine herself to a sacred space outside of society in order to incubate visions; for those god-inspired words to come through she had to be pure and one-pointed. How could I cultivate the self-discipline required for any serious artistic efforts while remaining stable enough to care for my infant daughter?

Did the Pythia speak in tongues as you have suggested, throwing herself about like Apollo's spirit-horse? Did the god mount her in a state of shamanic frenzy? Or did she go into a gentler trance, more like the one I entered on Corfu? (I was simply lying on my bed, not thrashing about in any

way, except that my facial muscles tensed then locked as my vision progressed.)

If the Pythia spoke in tongues, then she was clairaudient, unlike myself who is clairvoyant. As Klimo explains, a clairaudient channel focusses on the mind's ear, unlike myself who concentrates on the mind's eye (35). The clairaudient translates what he or she hears into words, such as a voice, or preverbal thoughts and feelings. A clairvoyant, on the other hand, channels images (like those I received on Corfu) which, according to Klimo,

can appear as two-dimensional photographs, three-dimensional holograms, or moving sequences. They can represent concrete objects, recognizable events, abstract light patterns, or patterns of energy. (61)

As for myself, I can imagine the seated Pythia dressed in flowing white robes and staring up at the sublime statue of Apollo, who looks down at her with eyes that are both loving and serious. Melting ecstatically into his gaze, she shakes her laurel leaves as she begins channelling his prophecies and riddles. Yes, I used the word "melding" in "Helios and Athene" because it seemed more gentle than the word "surrender." "Full-trance" mediums surrender as did Plutarch's Pythia (Klimo 32). In such a state, "the medium or channel appears to fall unconscious or go into a trance, and someone or something else appears to occupy the brain and body and use it for speaking, writing, or moving about" (32). I, on the other hand, entered a milder trance, one in which I could still differentiate between what was within my mind and what was being projected from another realm onto the hotel wall.

Of all the images in my Corfu vision, the tripod is the most characteristically Delphic. Some feel that the Pythia

sat on a tripod placed over a rocky chasm out of which intoxicating fumes arose. (Geologists have never found such a fissure at the Delphi site). Nevertheless, the tripod, a deep bowl or cauldron supported by a sturdy three-legged structure, allegedly possessed magical powers such that when the Pythia touched it she experienced a violent effect "similar to falling in love" (Hoyle 47).

And, was the tripod a remnant of some earlier cult as Cook claims (2:210)? Did the Pythia, sitting in the cauldron of the tripod, ritually enact a fiery dissolution of her "normal" personality such that she might channel mantic utterances? Was she communing with the original Pythia's bones and teeth that certain Roman writers felt were kept in the tripod itself? If so, this suggests ancient shamanic rituals of dismemberment and the boiling of body parts, so that the initiate's bones may be symbolically "gathered and rearticulated" with "new flesh" and the seeker is given "inward eyes" to replace his/her outer ones (Ryan 69-70).

Some twenty-years after this post-war period, I will rework this shamanic cauldron image in my poem, "Tribute to the Angels," where it appears as an alchemical "crucible":

Now polish the crucible
and in the bowl distill

a word most bitter, *marah*,
a word bitterer still, *mar*,

sea, brine, breaker, seducer,
giver of life, giver of tears;

now polish the crucible
and set the jet of flame

under, till *marah-mar*
are melted, fuse and join

and change and alter,
mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary,

Star of the Sea,
Mother. (Collected Poems 552)

Do go and read Adalaide Morris. She has a good grasp of how my Borodino and Corfu visions provided me with many of the images for my later work. Let me know what you think of Morris. I had so hoped that the psychoanalyst Havelock Ellis would have better understood what I was about during our Greek trip together. But when I gave him my Notes on Thought and Vision, he didn't have a clue. Even my Imagist confrères, Pound, Aldington, and Lawrence, were uneasy with my clairvoyant talents. Do get back to me on the Morris; her understanding of my visionary texts is important and might help you develop your own visionary poetics. **HD**

Response to letters of July 15 and July 20, 1997

Dear Reader:

If, as Chandler has already mentioned, the forward thrust in autobiography generates new questions (113), these two letters return to an earlier line of enquiry—that which asks how H.D. dealt with negative male figures. I cannot heed H.D.'s advice to focus on the female and familiar, rather than on what is both male and remote. No, I will proceed with what H.D. seemingly dislikes, an overly reductive analysis of Apollo as the primary muse figure in her early poetry.

Glossolalia, a key word in this exchange, means to babble or speak in tongues. This term describes my July 15th letter's regressive return to the "first, and most obvious step in healing," to a therapeutic "catharsis" (Chandler 31). Especially in my letter's early drafts, voices prattle out a sort of brain-dump brought about by vacation anxiety. With a daughter to entertain and a husband and mother at odds, how will my work progress?

Although I set out to investigate Apollo, a second voice disrupts my line of thought—that of Athena. She will not be possessed by Apollo, as so many others have been. No, she will conquer and contain his creative power and passion.

Gimbutas, in The Language of the Goddess, shows Athena's story of origins to be a palimpsest in which the "Old European Bird Goddess" becomes overwritten by an Indo-European deity (318). "The belief in her birth from the head of Zeus, the ruling god of the Indo-Europeans in Greece," writes Gimbutas, "shows how far the transformation went—from a parthenogenetic goddess to her birth from a male god!" (318).

Gimbutas goes on with her discussion of Athena's absurd birth:

Zeus was a bull (in Indo-European symbolism the Thunder God is a bull), and Athena's birth from the head of a bull was nothing else but a memory of birth from a bucranium, which was a simulacrum of the uterus in Old European symbolism. (318)

On an autobiographical level, this overlay of Zeus and Apollo upon the much older Athena figure stands for my own desire to bury Irena under an on-going analysis of male muse figures. Rather than entering a cauldron of grief and rage, I will continue to examine what it means to be possessed by a negative animus. Rather than being "parthenogenetic," or self-creating, I prefer to remain "a person in crisis . . . immersed, trapped 'inside' his or her experience" (Chandler 41).

Chandler explains that in autobiography, "the overarching task the writers set themselves is to bring the two sides of the divided self back into congruence and thereby regain some measure of peace" (15). H.D.'s vision of an Athena who can encompass Apollonian will and aggression points to such reunion. But in my text and in many of H.D.'s, Apollo cannot be curbed. For example, in my July 15th letter, the feminine impulse is too devalued to contain him. In spite of my initial intent, I quickly abandon Athena's point of view for that of Apollo's, although snakes, birds, and other prehistoric goddess motifs continue to surround him.

In contrast to the regressiveness of the July 15th text, that of the 20th does raise certain questions such as: do I know what H.D. means about signs?; can she fulfil the role of the Pythia?; can a mother achieve the one-pointedness that serious art necessitates? Clearly, in both

letters, the H.D. character continues to ask and to answer questions, but is not a wilful presence. She gently reprimands me for pathologizing Apollo, but does not criticize me for forgetting to do the "old picture" assignment.

A gentle guiding spirit, H.D. mirrors, reinforces, but rarely insists. She does, nevertheless, take issue with my tendency to label Apollo in a rigid way. In so doing, she would agree with McNiff who writes that the emergent images in a work of art "are unique configurations that exist outside the context of descriptive categories" (99). Explaining the non-analytic approach used in his art therapy workshops, McNiff writes:

rather than labelling pictures from our frames of reference, we meditate on them, tell stories about how we created them, speak to them, listen to what they have to say, dramatize them through our bodily movements and dream about them. (3)

He believes that poems or paintings express themselves autonomously through their verbal or physical forms. We must learn not to label or analyse such imaginal presences. In so doing, we abandon them for theory and speculation. Rather than speak *for* an image, we must let it speak *through* us.

McNiff advises dialoguing with a painting or a poem because they "are typically far ahead of us in their expression, and our reflective faculties many not engage, or even glimpse what emanates spontaneously, and often unconsciously, through the medium" (85). An artistic rather than a scholarly daemon, H.D. would have me become more of a listener than an explainer. She is somewhat uneasy with psychoanalytic jargon because of how Freud used it to belittle her mantic gifts. She seems glad that I am doing

this doctorate from the inside, as self-portraiture. She would agree with McNiff that the actual doing of the poetic process can be demonstrated, but never encapsulated by theory. Nor should I rigidly prescribe heuristic procedures for others. "Experience also shows," concludes McNiff, "that the methods are themselves in constant transformation" (93).

July 25, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Have read some of Fontenrose as you suggested, specifically his The Delphic Oracle and Python, to see what light he sheds on our discussion of the terror of poetic inspiration as it appears in your early poetry.

As you must remember from your reading of E. Jung's Animus and Anima, a woman's animus is an inner personality of the opposite sex. If this animus is negatively aspected, it will act as "a law unto itself" thereby "disturbing" the status quo (2). A law unto himself, Apollo frightened the other Olympians wherever he appeared. "We should notice," Fontenrose writes, "that the Olympian gods trembled at the victorious Apollo's approach and leaped from their seats as he drew his bow" (Python 252-3). In certain of the mythic variants of Apollo's killing of the Python, the infant Apollo is the hero, while Zeus, the father of all the gods, has been severely wounded by the same serpent (252). Apollo was so terribly powerful that he not only killed the horrific serpent, but also, while a babe in arms, restored the by-then-impotent Zeus to his throne. Thus, all the Olympians trembled at his approach.

Clearly, Apollo troubled the status quo of your own creative output. As a negative animus figure or, at least, an ambivalent one, he becomes the perfect embodiment of your "héro fatal," that necessary agent of destruction by fire (DuPlessis 407). As Nietzsche once said, "I tell you: one must still have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star" (32). And McNiff cautions against art therapists who only stress what is "positive" and "good" in the artistic process. Instead, he explains, a client might need to tear apart such positive expressions because to create, they

"need chaos rather than order, depression rather than happiness, ugliness rather than beauty, destruction rather than creation, and aggression rather than tranquillity" (63).

Apollo, as the negative animus figure found not only in your work, but in your projection of him out onto your untrustworthy artistic similars, possibly served to catalyse your poetic process. As McNiff explains, "Artists need gnawing and goading demons to stir emotions and provoke primal expression" (90). Encounters with such "demons" reduced you to fragments, as DuPlessis writes, from which your "identity had once more to be painfully reconstructed" (Friedman and DuPlessis 407). Your Apollonian initiation on Corfu seemed to be playing out this chaotic drama. You were reliving the horror of being rejected by your Imagist brethren for having giving birth to an illegitimate child. Although highly promiscuous themselves, Lawrence, Pound, and your own husband, Richard Aldington, would tear you to shreds for your infidelities.

The severity of this crisis sends you searching for the answers with which to construct yourself anew, just as during your Corfu vision you feel you are drowning in the primaevial chaos of a watery cauldron in order to achieve rebirth. Fearing that this watery chaos will blur your vision, you say, I "am in a sense diving, head-down underwater." Nevertheless, you continue: "I must drown, as it were, completely in order to come out on the other side of things" (Tribute 54).

Treading through a post-World War I chaos, you must resurface with the right answers, for as you explain, "the wrong answer (as with the Sphinx in Egypt) may bring death" (161). Your Corfu vision must give you answers from which to rebuild your shattered self-worth and artistic identity.

Apollo then is a "goading demon" who precipitates the very crisis that will send you back to his Delphic oracle for answers (McNiff 90).

Fontenrose lists the sorts of problems that caused the ancient Greeks to turn to the Delphic oracle for guidance. Amazingly, many of these were those of your own in the early 1920s: plague was a primary cause, and you had just survived Spanish influenza. War was another, and you were suffering post-war trauma. Exile was a common motive; you were an expatriated American (your exile was self-imposed). Loss of family members was another common trauma. You were mourning your stillborn child and your dead brother and father, while your estranged husband was threatening to divorce you. And as an emergent writer and translator, you sought career confirmation, as many had before you (Fontenrose, Delphic Oracle 40). Thus, the questions that drew you to Delphi were "those that had been asked through the ages," as you yourself explain (Tribute 55).

"There were the question marks," you write of certain of the shadowy figures that you saw during your Corfu vision, that "series of the imperfect, reversed S of the scroll-pattern of the writing-on-the-wall" (107). In an earlier description of this vision, you depict these serpentine shapes in the following way:

there is a series of broken curves. Actually, they are above the ladder, not touching the angel who brushes past them. . . . The S or half-S faces the angel; . . . they are like question marks without the dot beneath them. I did not know what this scrollwork indicated; I thought at the time that it was a mere wave-like decorative detail. But now I think this inverted S-pattern may have represented a series of question marks, the

questions that have been asked through the ages,
that the ages will go on asking. (54-55)

Fontenrose argues that the verse oracle spoke in a way that was "simple in structure, short, mainly confined to the message" (Delphic Oracle 195). He states that such utterances were not that extraordinary, but rather cut-and-dried, and

confined to sanctions of laws and proposals, particularly on religious subjects, and to prescriptions of cult acts; and that exceptions, if any, were safe statements which anybody could make. (42)

In spite of their seeming simplicity, these mantic communiqués from Apollo were often gnomic, even deceptive. If we remember correctly, Apollo was often called Apollo "Loxias" (Hoyle 51). Thus, his unpredictable power shaped his oracular pronouncements and, to a large extent, poetry itself. A much more "primitive" and metaphorically cryptic form of expression than prose, the Apollonian discourse from which our modern notions of poetry spring was often used to make predictions about the outcome of battles and to honour dead heroes. For example, due to a misreading of the oracle's syntax, King Pyrrros of Epeiros ran amok on his Italian campaign. When he asked the oracle if he would win the war, she answered: "I say that you the Romans can defeat." Confusing the subject with the object of this prediction, the King went over-confidently into the fray only to find not the Romans, but himself to be the vanquished subject instead (Fontenrose, Delphic Oracle 67).

Another way the oracle could deceive was by the ambiguous use of "homonymous names, one being known to everyone, the other to hardly anybody" (68). Once, for example, the oracle instructed the Phocaeans to go forth and

"found Kyrnos (Corsica)," but they were soon forced to close down their colony. Apparently what the Pythoness had meant was to "found a cult of the hero Kyrnos" right in their own home town (68).

As Fontenrose continues, oracular deception can be pleasant as well as cruel. He tells the story of the philosopher, Parmeniskos of Metapontum, "who lost the ability to laugh after consulting" a certain seer. He then went to the Pythoness of Delphi for a cure. She told him, "Mother will give it to you at home" (69). Still he could not laugh when he returned to his village. Later, wandering by chance into the goddess Leto's temple, he started to laugh uncontrollably at the sight of her "ungainly image" (70).

But, for you, as it was for many, deciphering the clairvoyant omens received in Corfu from your Apollonian daemon became a desperate matter. As you state in Tribute to Freud, "I seem now so near getting the answer or finding the treasure, I feel that my whole life, my whole being, will be blighted forever if I miss this chance" (53).

To ascertain the right answers, you attempt a kind of divinatory seeing, a shamanistic heuristic that initiated your clairvoyant trance of moving light patterns. Lying receptively on your bed in a candle-lit room, you begin contemplating the nearby objects that throw shadows and light on the walls. Like one stretched out on their back to divine prophetic figures from a rack of passing clouds, you read these shadowy shapes in order to discern the non-ordinary aspects of these natural phenomena. For example, a three-legged stand for a lamp, which you call a "*Spirit-lamp*," projects a pattern on the wall that you interpret as that of the tripod of Delphi (Tribute 45, 46). And your S-

curves are suggested by "the scroll work of the mirror-frame" (54).

From this "writing-on-the-wall," you sought confirmation as a poet (107). You needed encouragement. And as we have seen, one of the primary questions that pilgrims asked of the Delphi oracle was, "Shall I succeed in X?" (Fontenrose, Delphic Oracle 36). Another traditional question that also seemed to be plaguing you was, "How shall I have X (or become X)?" (36), meaning how shall I have a child, or in your case, how shall I care for my newborn daughter and be a poet? Perhaps you were also asking, "To what god shall I sacrifice?" (39)—Athena or Apollo?

"Worship of the gods, desire to honour and please them," were what brought you and hundreds of other cultists to Delphi (40). In fact, the god Apollo seemed to be enticing you there himself. The animus often creates a feeling "of being irresistibly lured and led away into unknown distances of water, forests, mountains, or even the underworld," explains E. Jung (35). Thus Apollo, your devious guide, lures you across dangerous seas in search of yourself, while perversely threatening to destroy you in the process.

Hope I haven't gotten too psychoanalytic again. Fontenrose certainly has helped me put our discussion into more of a historical, even rhetorical, perspective.

Must sign off. It's a hot sticky night, and Zoë can't seem to sleep. She's called me for the second time because there's another mosquito in her room. Really must go, **CH**

August 10, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

Have been rereading our July correspondence and, yes, you are quite correct to assume that I often defined myself during the post-World War I period as a Cassandra. I can speak to you a bit more openly about my prose than my poetry—the latter, a more sacred genre, evades analysis. But in my early "roman à clef" entitled Asphodel, I likened Hermione, the stand-in for myself, to Cassandra—especially in her struggles with marriage and art.

Like Cassandra, Hermione defines her poetic role as that of a channel for divine inspiration. As she admits, this role is not an easy one:

Art is sweating and going blind with agony. If I weren't so sorry, didn't feel you so much Walter, I couldn't myself sit so still here, not saying anything afraid lest for some little breath I might move in some way, get out of key with something and the message wouldn't get through. Morse code. I am a wire simply. (Asphodel 28)

I fashioned this Walter character after Walter Morse Rummel, a German-American musician who promoted the Debussy repertoire in pre-war Paris. He did musical collaborations with us Imagists, and "His mother was a daughter of Samuel F. B. Morse" (209). Yes, I was impressed by Rummel and his connection with the inventor of Morse code. I used this code as a metaphor to explain how a poet must serve as a pure channel for art, not unlike a Cassandra through whom prophecies were spoken. Although I was not a gaga Futurist like William Carlos Williams, I did use this Morse code image in my Notes on Thoughts and Vision to express the

relationship of the artist to her subject. All artists were to become as "receiving centres for dots and dashes" (26).

Perhaps I was a bit evangelical, influenced as I was by D. H. Lawrence. Both he and I believed we were like the following:

Two or three people, with healthy bodies and the right sort of receiving brains, could turn the whole tide of human thought, could direct lightning flashes of electric power to slash across and destroy the world of dead, murky thought. (Notes 27)

Here, with "the right sort of receiving brains," we would "direct" those "lightning flashes of electric power" to "slash and destroy" the productions of a second-class mind. But what if the high voltage damaged the receiving wire? Cassandra, not unlike da Vinci, "went mad" (26). You did well to quote my lines that depict her being torn apart by an influx of Apollonian inspiration, as when she cries out:

What shaft, tearing my heart?
what scar, what light, what fire
searing my eye balls and my eyes with flame?
(Collected Poems 169)

Yes, people came "to fear / my virgin glance" and the "trance" I entered (170). Hermione, the protagonist of my Asphodel, speaks like a Cassandra who is cursed with the power of sight. "How could she help her vivid mind not seeing?" I wrote. "Her mind had been trained to see. Cultivated. For just this horror?" (116).

My own training "to see" began in my scientific family who continually peered at things through microscopes and telescopes—stars, flora, and fauna. During my Imagist apprenticeship, this emphasis on the act of perception continued to become the foundation for my clairvoyant

poetics.

Hermione-Cassandra knew she must "pay for beauty and seclusion" (175). She would struggle and suffer to focus the "dots and dashes" of her visionary gift:

Art. Isn't art just re-adjusting nature to some intellectual focus? The things are there all the time, but art, a Chinese bowl, a Chinese idol, a brass candle-stick make a focus, a sense of proportion like turning the little wheel of an opera glass, getting a great mass of inchoate colour and form into focus, focussing on one small aspect of life though really it is only a tiny circle, a tiny circle. You get life into a tiny circle by art . . . the shell by the shore, the one petal of a water-lily is a sort of crystal glass, a bright surface and you yourself staring at it, may make things in the air, pictures, images, things beyond beauty beautiful. (175)

Hermione-Cassandra would have to "pay" for this gift of sight, this "virgin glance." How could I be true to myself if I married? My own mother gave up her music and painting to knit in the dark, so that my father could use the reading lamp. But, to remain a virgin, an old maid, is to be forever outside the human community; I was stunned when my Philadelphia lover, Frances Gregg, suddenly gave up acting to marry Louis Wilkinson (213).

In Asphodel, the Shirley Thornton character was really the wealthy American Margaret Lanier Cravens who had immigrated to Paris to study piano with Ravel (214). When I first lived in England, Margaret and I were the only unmarried women left in our circles. And poor Margaret killed herself on June 1, 1912, the day before I was to come for tea.

I can lift words out of Asphodel effortlessly to narrate what in reality happened. As the news spread of Margaret's suicide, everyone was saying:

"She should have married—someone." She should have married. Then it would have been all right. Then she wouldn't have been a virgin, gone mad, simply, like Cassandra. Shirley [Margaret] was like Cassandra smitten by the sun-god. Music. Walter. (103)

We continued to ask ourselves "who had killed" Margaret (102). Certainly insanity ran in her wealthy Indiana family, but what else? She had escaped from her sheltered home to become an artist and patron of the arts in Paris. A woman solvent but alone, who somehow got entangled with my petulant ex, Ezra Pound (as so many did). Ezra is the George Lowndes character in my highly autobiographical Asphodel. In this scene, Hermione [H.D.] and George [Ezra] are visiting Shirley's [Margaret's] chic flat. Hermione is asking Shirley to play the piano, but George discourages her:

Hermione emerged from behind the shelter of the very grand baby-grand piano. "Shirley, we never ask you to play for us—" "Gawd, don't ask her—" Shirley looked up an odd twist to her fine straight eye-brows. A white flame of pain crossed her eyes, dark eyes, wide apart staring like a crystal gazer's. Why had George said that? Was he being rude simply? But now his rudeness seemed insanity, seemed blatant cruelty. His rudeness, his casual approach to both of them, for she was sure he had kissed, had long been kissing Shirley. (97)

This was so familiar. "Why don't you ever achieve your utterances?" Pound would taunt. "You are an oracle manqué" (39). How demeaning he was when he jeered, "You are a poem though your poem's naught" (74). Yes, Pound did his bit to kill poor Margaret.

How to avoid her fate? I was desperate after Margaret's suicide. I needed an anchor as every artist does. So I married Richard Aldington, a man some years my junior, although I could detect that his sincerity (he encouraged my poetry and translations as Ezra never could), was "overlaid with such indifference" (67).

I was torn between two conflicting voices—the one that bludgeoned me with the fact that "she was a coward, a woman who refused her womanhood," and the other that kept insisting, "clever women don't have children" (113). My first child—a girl conceived with Aldington—was stillborn during a World War I air raid. My husband enlisted, returning intermittently on leave as a shell-shocked sex-addict or, as we called them, a "military stallion" (145). We were experimenting with an "open" marriage, but somehow his bevy of women upstairs or housed in the next flat made me feel quite empty: "My husband has been faithless;" I am "ugly, hopeless" (136-7).

When the wealthy Scottish composer and music critic, Cecil Gray, invited me to stay with him in Cornwall, I went. I was no Penelope: I had no patience for what my traumatized husband was putting me through. I would go to Cornwall with Gray and write about it later. In Asphodel, the Gray-character appears as a symbol for Apollo as Van Eck once did. Here, Hermione reads an Apollonian omen into the way Gray grasps her wrists:

She had known he was there. But he had never taken form before, never taken her wrist, caught it, made a circle of fire about it, so that even now with her arm hanging naturally, under her coat, she could feel, feel . . . did it mean Darrington [Aldington] wouldn't come back? (139)

Living with Gray, I found myself pregnant. I quickly dismissed the notion of his being the baby's father. Gray, like Van Eck, was just a stand-in:

God was the lover and the beloved. God was the union of God with God. "If a swallow flies straight in, now without any hesitation, just in here to me, I'll have it." (154)

Of course, a swallow did fly into my room. From the many wheeling outside, God sent me a sign. This omen reassuringly foretold the coming of our immaculate conception:

This thing that is God's, this thing that is the child of some sun-daemon will be looked after. Of course God, her Lover, would look after her, all the same it was the Angel of the Annunciation, when you come to think of it, who was responsible for the fiasco, wasn't it? (157)

Pregnancy was, for me, a "fiasco." And poor Cecil didn't like being demoted from the Holy Father to the Angel of the Annunciation, but was too well-bred to protest:

"You know I only want—have only wanted—"He would say it again, he only wanted her wishes in the matter. But could he know her wishes? Gabriel of the Annunciation, cold and calm and proffering the lily, what do you know of god-head? (158)

I had to keep calm. No more bad marriages. So "what did the Virgin Mary do on this occasion?" After all, "God having

ordained this would not leave one of his prostitutes no, one of his concubines (a wise virgin anyway) empty, forsaken" (157). Could I count on Gabriel? I remember turning to Gray only to be met with:

The same quizzical, slightly frigid, slightly imbecile stare of the well-bred annunciation angel. He didn't understand. He couldn't. (163)

In spite of those flashbacks about the stillbirth, I would go ahead. If I didn't make it—a single mother, destitute and suffering from influenza at the birth of my daughter, if I didn't make it, then dying in childbirth was a time-honoured form of "legitimate suicide" (178). But for once, Apollo came through and sent Bryher to rescue Perdita and myself. **HD**

Response to letter of August 10, 1997

Dear Reader:

H.D.'s voice seems more clearly drawn and autobiographical in tone than it has been in a long time. Also, there is a welcome shift from the arid discussion of muse figures to one focussing on the artistic process. Nevertheless, I am ghost-writing a chapter from H.D.'s life, rather than drafting a poem about my own.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this is reflected in what H.D. is discussing—the fear that if a woman forgoes being a wife and mother for her career, she will become progressively more lonely, insane, or even suicidal as was H.D.'s friend, Margaret Lanier Cravens. Clearly, the artist must cultivate the hyper-sensitivity of a vibrating telegraph "wire" in order to channel the voices of those imaginal others (Asphodel 28). Risking breakdown or breakthrough, the overly-sensitized poet-seer must stay focussed "on one small aspect of life," as would a botanist studying flora or fauna under a microscope (175).

H.D. stresses concentrating not only on a period of formative crisis, but also on "a tiny circle" that recalls the telling fragments of Rich's wreck (175). Rich, a more radical Modernist, would emphasize fragmentation, while H.D. seeks the wholeness of each such luminous detail. Zooming in on "one small aspect of life," she sees "a sort of crystal glass, a bright surface" and, says that the artist "staring at it, may make things in the air, pictures, images" (175). This "bright surface" can also darken and grow destructive. Margaret Cravens, whose eyes H.D. compares to a hypersensitive "crystal gazer's," was finally driven to suicide by a more maleficent vision (175, 97).

H.D.'s discussion of her own pregnancy and relationship with Cecil Gray, Perdita's supposed father, harkens back to Gimbutas' notion of the Old European Goddess as a parthenogenetic force, a symbol of a woman's ability to create herself and other life forms without male assistance. H.D. fantasizes about such a virginal birth in her early novels, Asphodel, or Paint It Today. But her highly-autobiographical, single-mother protagonists often refer disparagingly to themselves as God's "empty" and "forsaken" "prostitutes" or "concubines" (Asphodel 157). Is this discussion masking my own anxious fantasies and low self-esteem?

some fissured space: my heart
 like a tumbled piece of sea glass,
 "Is it still too jagged?"

over gravestones
 and up towards the belfry
 like a devil breaking in

bloodying my wrist
 on a broken pane,
 or do I but dream it?

Leaden window
 throws its slipstream
 on the rattling casement—

fanfare of wind in the spruce
 and all that thrashes towards
 it.

Annihilating flash. Creative erasure. Or has it been choked down like the summer, vacationing with my workaholism? Co-existence costs so much: I write thirty new pages of my dissertation then free-write thirty more as background for the above poem.

My bed, still equipped with my childhood mattress, soft weblike womb where I collapse at night, contorts my spine until my neck vertebra pop out. The backless chair I work in, bent over and forgetful that I even have a body, further exacerbates my stiffening neck and aching trapezius muscles. "Your shoulder muscles are no longer strong enough to support your head," the physiotherapist explains while pocketing some \$500 US to crack out the kinks. Academically imbalanced, I return to my mother's and accelerate the pace

of my dissertation, while continuing to "murder" the above poem, "A(r)-rival at the Ball," in the rewrites.

Suggesting the above title a friend was pretty hard on the poem otherwise. She felt I have compressed the draft down too much thereby removing any sense of a speaker. In an earlier draft, the persona was the swan maiden. Later she was removed; the prince closes the window on her. She keeps knocking on the glass to get his attention (a gesture indicating where the process is going). I then write the prince out of the plot. Prince and princess--their crumpled bodies are disposed of in the waste basket.

Is this carnage of revision due to the fact that I cannot dialogue with either the prince or princess at this time? Significantly, the prince slams the window on the otherworldly swan maiden because, as my animus, he does not want to help my wounded femininity speak to those at the ball--family members, people of wealth and power, etc. In this early draft, the Prince is the "him" that finally appears:

"Is it still too jagged?"

the unrecognized guest
cutting her wrist
on a broken pane.

Blood-stained marble,
keeps him closing the window
to shut out the otherworldly

rattle of its casement—
wind in the spruce
and all that wanders to it.

I look forward to receiving your critique of this poem. Hope your summer was more restful than mine. CH

Response to letter of September 20, 1997

Dear Reader:

Drafted upon my return to Montreal, this September letter reflects on a difficult summer, but also evidences a greater sense of self-possession and confidence. Back at "home," I can reestablish my boundaries and get on with my dissertation. I begin "serious" work shaping a poem from the thirty pages free-written in Maine. More in charge of my life, I am also more emotionally available.

During the summer, I purged myself, spewing out free-writes that threatened to swamp me. I remained trapped within my inherited narrative. Escaping back to Montreal, I am now drafting a poem around the key image of the hovering swan princess who peers in at the ball. Focussing on this generative symbol, I would understand what it means to be marginal.

My September letter describes how alien I can feel. For example, stanza two of "A(r)-rival at the Ball" is based on a Kennebunkport dinner party for the share holders of my brothers' company, a function I attended with my mother in late August. In spite of the stylish, martini-sipping business crowd, family tensions are running high. One of my brothers refuses to speak with the rest of us. Problems having to do with money and power are rife. I feel estranged and wish to be elsewhere.

Consequently in this draft of "A(r)-rival at the Ball," the swan princess "cannot join them." She has been pulled out of the burning tableau to be victimized, or rescued by a "bird-headed" animus figure. Depressed and behind glass, she worries about her jagged (enraged?) heart. The borrowings from chapter three of Brontë's Wuthering Heights that appear

in stanzas four and five of "A(r)-rival" strain towards melodrama. Reminiscent of when Catherine Linton's ghost knocks on the window crying, "Let me in--let me in there!," these Gothic images suggestive of suicide will be cut away (20).

Exploring "the troths of denial," I let this "Swan Lake" heuristic lead me towards new realizations. In short, I am acting out what it means to be shut out of the writing process. Relentlessly pruning my poem, I finally remove "any sense of the speaker," rather than dialoguing with him or her, as McNiff would have me do (85). Through these "brutal" revisions, I manage to kill off the respective voices of both the prince and princess. Excluded or murdered, whatever may be the case, there is no persona left from which to speak. Thus, through my writing process, I am experiencing how self-destructive the controlling intellect can be.

September 23, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

Am sending this off to you right away, as you seem somewhat distraught. You always forget how much at risk you are when trying to "vacation" at your mother's, especially if your family comes along.

Now for some pointed feedback: I do not like your poem's title. Perhaps the friend who suggested it likes overly-clever puns and word-plays. I don't find them appropriate to this serious attempt to rewrite a fairy tale, using its plot to delineate your own rather tortured psychic landscape. Why not just stick with the simpler, "Outside the Ball." It does the job of situating us, without being distractingly cute.

Overall, I think the poem is coming along. The "finished" second stanza can stand alone in its own right. You are doing well to keep the first stanza simple, in order to situate the poem and introduce the speaker.

The third stanza is more problematic. I do like the "Bird-headed god," or "fine-boned, gliding stranger." I would remove the "ice palace, / crystal mountain" reference as it confuses where we are. Your use of three colons suggests a psychic layering that is hard for the reader to appreciate. You might do some free-writing to open this stanza up more. If you do, continue focussing your text in on the actual scene—the swan looking in at the window. Process-wise, it is interesting that this other-worldly maiden is having trouble remaining grounded in the actual setting of the poem. Why is it too hot for her? Why does she want to fly off to her "ice palace?"

My other quibble is with the fourth stanza. Do you need

Leaden window

throws its slipstream

on the rattling casement—

fanfare of wind in the spruce

and all that thrashes towards it.

Just a few additional thoughts that occurred when typing this up. The maiden probes "to find some fissured space." She wants to break back into society, attend the ball, and bag the prince. She also feels insecure because of her jagged heart. But her jagged heart is problematic. Perhaps just write another poem about this troublesome organ.

Am offering you my edit with the sea glass heart removed, as nice an image as it may be. If it was cut out, the transition between stanza three and four might go as follows:

Long ago some bird-headed god,
 or other fine-boned, gliding stranger
 reached his hand into this burning room
 and pulled me out. Shadowy
 face crowned with diamonds,
 I probe to find
 some fissured space

like an unrecognized guest
 bloodying her wrist
 on a broken pane.

Leaden window
 throws its slipstream
 on the rattling casement—

fanfare of wind in the spruce
 and all that thrashes towards it.

The other issue is of course what you want the two closing stanzas to mean. Can they resolve this poem in any way? They do convey the build up of energy waiting to burst through the window. The invading "slipstream" is a force to

contend with, here or in other poems. Perhaps if you resolve the more problematic stanza three, you will know how to end your poem. Hope this has been helpful. Best for now, **HD**

Response to letter of September 23, 1997

Dear Reader:

Here, the H.D. persona returns to a more fruitful discussion of how to draft a poem. Of course, my writing process continues to mirror the fact that my other-worldly swan persona is "having trouble staying grounded in the actual situation and setting of the poem." She would remain outside because of my "disorganized inner world" (Chandler 8). And the Gothic melodrama only serves to muddy her situation further.

When the artist dons the swan persona must she struggle with the "mythic patterns" that are implicit in it? And, as her writing process becomes a ritual enactment of the maiden's plight, must she struggle against becoming a similar voiceless, subhuman outcast? If she identifies too much with the voice that would—but can't—speak through her, can she continue on with the poem at all?

Fortunately my artistic daemon, H.D., seems more assured about what to do with this poem than usual. She generates many questions. Robert Lloyd writes that "a real question is a state of your being, a total state," which can bring the moment to crisis (35). One seeming authentic question that H.D. asks points to the jagged heart as an image of disequilibrium. Is my heart jagged because it has been wounded, or because it seethes with feelings that could hurt others, or both? My writing process echoes this uncertainty: I am unable to resolve this poem formally. Like H.D.'s "hot wave across her brain" (Paint It Today 41), a great force (rage?) threatens to "break taboos, penetrate forbidden territories, name hidden things, and challenge basic beliefs" (Chandler 111). Only a closed window checks

its explosive arrival. A thin sheet of brittle glass, suggestive of H.D.'s "ice-thin window-glass intellect," stops its volatile advance; the conflict continues (Tribute 117).

SAMHAIN: HALLOWE'EN

These letters from October 31 to November 19, 1997 were begun during the Celtic New Year, a festival affirming rebirth in the midst of darkness. This is the time when the veil between the worlds is at its thinnest. A doorway opens between the seen world of matter and the unseen world of spirit. The recent dead and other ancestors visit their loved ones and places are left for them at the feast and the fire.

He made harp pins of her fingers fair
with a hey ho and a bonny o

He made harp strings of her golden
hair

the swans swim so bonny o

He made a harp of her breast bone
with a hey ho and a bonny o

And straight it began to play alone
the swans swim so bonny o

Traditional British folk song

October 31, 1997

Dear H.D.,

I am surprised to learn that you will be travelling with my mother from Maine to attend Yaya's funeral. When the metal doors from the customs' area of the airport swing open, you emerge in your trench coat and sensible shoes, pushing my mother's wheel chair towards us.

After you settle in at the Holiday Inn on Sherbrooke, we meet for a quick snack while Mom naps. You seem not uncomfortable, but somewhat self-absorbed as you sip a demi-tasse of Greek coffee. The restaurant at the Inn is nothing but a glorified souvlaki joint for which I apologize, but you don't seem to mind.

Let me say, I appreciate you taking the time to listen because I have been in need of a good chat. Recently I have felt so bottled up inside. Yes, the summer holiday took its toll and then, coming back to Montreal I have not been able to establish a work rhythm. Immediately upon my late August arrival, I took off for Poughkeepsie to finish my yoga teacher's training. Then Yaya died.

You rub your long fingers together and shake your head, a few delicate shakes that stir your grey bangs slightly, saying, "I would never have undertaken such a cerebrally cumbersome project myself. Not only do you shape-shift back and forth between two opposite poles—poetry and prose—but must analyse and make public your own writing processes. The latter task alone would inhibit my creativity. I dropped out of college as soon as I could. Academia would have destroyed the artist in me."

"I know what you are saying. Often during the writing of this dissertation, I felt like someone trying to push an

eviscerated grand piano out of the ocean. Its vital parts had been removed. No longer able to play music on it, I was left struggling just to land the thing. Progress was minuscule. I'd push forward; an undertow would carry me out again."

"I, too, was extremely hard working," you add, "driven at times by a compulsiveness that verged on workaholism."

Taking a sugary sip of coffee, I say, "Am glad you brought this up. During August, I churned out some 30 pages on the Delphic oracle and then drafted 30 more in and around the poem, 'Outside the Ball.' Recently, when I showed this poem to a friend, he said that my compulsive rewriting of it was like a death wish. By reworking it obsessively, I was not writing other, better poems. Am sure on some level he is right, but I could not stop. In fact, I grew even more stubborn in my desire to make something of this poem after talking to him. Another friend just threw up her hands and said, 'my poems are gifts,' meaning that unlike me she rarely rewrites anything. Why do these comments irritate me, as do so many things at this time?"

"You are struggling with so much that your irritation is warranted," you reply. "Your first friend is on the right track, if not a little in extreme. But the second is too passive, don't you think? Certainly the great poems are a balance of self-effort and grace. Writing two hours a day, as I did, will enable you to hone your craft."

H.D., you are beginning to look tired, so I suggest you go upstairs for a rest. Tomorrow, Monday, will be the funeral. We have to be at Moshonas and Ouimet, on Park Avenue at around 10 a.m. From there, we will go by limousine to St. Michael's. Having flown in late Sunday afternoon, you and my mother have not yet been to the funeral parlour where many had come to pay their last respects to Spiro's mother.

In fact, I have visited her only once, because Spiro wanted me to stay with Zoë, and then I had to meet you and Mom at the airport.

As I mentioned earlier, you are more than nice to accompany her from Maine as you did not know Yaya. There she lies, her face gaunt with the corners of her slightly swollen lips stretched downwards, no longer able to conceal the nine months of suffering that preceded her death. Months ago, she went in for a long overdue heart operation, tried at one point to leave the hospital for her brother's, but immediately fell and broke a hip. She went back to hospital. Then not only her heart, but her lungs and kidneys started to fail, and when they tried to operate on a blood clot that had formed in her brain, she passed away.

According to Yaya's friend, Voula, Yaya had a number of dreams the week preceding her death in which her dead son, Billy, appeared. Before they operated on her, she told her eldest son Nick to prepare "Billy's bed" for her. Unfortunately, according to cemetery regulations, Yaya could not be buried with her son, as he has only been dead for four years. She had to be interred with her mother who died in 1954.

The limousine is wending its way up St. Joseph to Cote St. Catherine as the rain lets up, leaving the streets to steam and eddy with foggy patches. Colours intensify in the off-light; chrysanthemums and other late blooms stand quietly as one does after a storm. The richly perfumed air is a gentle foretaste of the incense the priest will shake over Yaya's open casket. We are seated in the front pew with the family. It is hard not to cry. My chest is overtaken by slight tremors of breath, shaking themselves, coming out, out . . . The priest and the lone singer are chanting a cappella, intoning music that rises then falls off to a near

moan.

Now we are in a procession, lining up to say our good-byes to Yaya. I go first, then you and Mom, mounting a platform near the altar, as the priest and singer go on chanting their lyric dirge. As I climb up, I worry about the unfamiliar ritual. A huge cross has been placed over the lower portion of the coffin, and then there are the flowers: a pillow of lilies from Spiro and myself, the orchids from Nick, and the beaming happy-face card made by Zoë that reads: "Good-by Yaya. We love you." Signed, "Zoë and Freya," (our daughter's dog, a touch that some of our more Orthodox relatives might not like). I stoop and kiss the ornate cross, and then Yaya's cool brow.

The sun is out, and everyone is riding up to the cemetery. The mansions bordering the vast graveyard ease our ride, surrounded as they are by grounds brimming with late summer shrubs and decorative trees. The site is soon upon us—a knoll canopied by oaks and elms. We are the first limo to arrive, so we help my mother out and up the wet incline. I hold on to her tightly so she will not fall and break more bones. At first the three of us stand on some planks, but we quickly realize we are in the way of the six pallbearers labouring the coffin up the muddy hillock. We move to the other side of the deep, earthen hole that has been tamed somewhat by a gold metal frame, part of the mechanism for lowering Yaya into the ground.

My own mother, at 81, seems suddenly frailer; she is mumbling something about how "It is so final." I hold her arm and, for moments, we rock together like incredulous children. The casket is being adjusted to fit the frame. The priest stretches out his arms and starts chanting again. Aunt Roula and Angie arrange bouquet after bouquet around the grave, while others start breaking off flowers, passing

them out to everyone. We crowd around to throw our flower along with a pinch of some seeds onto the descending coffin.

Why am I writing this to you? You were there and saw it for yourself. Some need to purge myself of what has happened? Some realization that my dissertation will soon be finished and that we also must part?

At any rate, I will close by sending you along two poems—the death wish one, "Outside the Ball," which has been trimmed back dramatically, and a new one, "White Drift," in which I am using the Swan Lake imagery to write an elegy for Princess Diana. What a fall this has been! **CH**

OUTSIDE THE BALL

I can (will?) not join them,
my alabaster neck like a pole
presses me against the icy pane.

Inside melts with the waxy reds
of candelabra, goblets of claret,
high-coloured faces of the dancers
clustered in their painted shoes
and berry-patterned hems. Sweat
beads the grapes and apples. Burnt
fruit stains a pudding,
as logs burst into flames.

Further inside a bird-headed god
is reaching his hand into a burning room
to pull me out—

and further—

bell-jar
of shaken snow
eddies all around
a swan

bought at a dollar store,

lens of glass
blurred with powdery gusts:

fanfare of wind in a spruce
and all that thrashes towards it.

WHITE DRIFT

*Dead the swan,
Mournful her mate after her;
Much feeling it gives me,
The sorrow that affects the swan.*

Creide's Lament for Cael

(Lehman 90)

For Princess Diana, 1961-1997

1

The truth, there was no place
to alight in his pastorals-Scotland
or along the rainy Thames. The prince
in a kilt, arranged his easel,
sitting me on a narrow bench,
a hamper of fruit, some dry wine.

My long body feels exposed on land,
so I'm flying off to Paris,
leaving behind a life that dissolves,
land-fog into sea-fog.
Carried slantwise like an over-large bird,
I am crossing the saltings. The Channel.

White glimmer of a beach
where grass curls in the ripple of tides.
Waves. A thunderous rush
of tires. Crowd. Crowded behind

and buzzing us like hornets,
angry insect life,
bikers
clicking. Closing in.

Peripheral. Thinnish pillars, paler
than mists in the half-light.
Tunnel of Delphic fumes,
whose oracle hisses my fate:
chasm that will unsluice
its walls against me.

2.

Wings, large with wind, drag
the keel of my body up, gaining altitude,
above the sump, the sunken mossy
run-offs, striving for perfection

alone, but the webbed feet
as they push at the water,
raise a foot-high splash,

breaking the glassy surface
into jagged slip-slops,
slivers of my reflection
swirl round in a wash—
round and round,
the wavelets rushing in.

3.

He had sketched me before,
 endangered, ornamental
 like the swans, *cygnus immutabilis*
 that float down the Thames.

On Upping Day, the swanherds
 gather, flanked by their rowers,
 to wield thin, longish hooks
 and ready the trammels. Netting
 "maiden" and "sire" before
 either can rise from the white drift,
 they brand beak, leg, or foot
 for the House of Windsor.

4.

Althorp's lake surrounds
 my secluded island. Flowery
 ropes twist over my stone-

"Oh Wild West Wind," your gusts
 carrying bits of pollen,
 dust and ashes, chafe
 my watery mirror. Stung
 by rain, the currents welt
 into frenzied whirls,
 like lips curled back

to suck
 and down what they hunger for.

5.

Bull rushes twist in their meadows
by an inky lake--blackness
one curls around, mummy,
shrunken bit of coal, something
of what the little match-girl wanted.

Facing backwards I was found
in the seat-well, waving arms
like sprawled wings. Incredulous
as a child needing a hug before sleep,

or like a startled bat
 veering left, right,
I could not find an opening;

if only on the far wall, a window,
or one could walk back and shove
 a block,
stopping a door open. End,
the tunnel: a moist, leafy night.

6.

Wills and Harry have come,
throwing themselves down
 in the sedge
to watch a family of swans.
Up-ended, the cob dabbles
digging at tubers and roots.
The dam, barking like a dog,
is calling her cygnets.
She gathers them to her

as the flat-bottomed skiff
ferries me across. In full plumage,
thinning hands clasped against
a black gown,
I posed for Lord Snowdon.
(The prince never
captured me.)

Mist condensing
into cloud, they rise now,
half a wing-beat apart--
their melodious, deep-throbbing ascent.

Response to letter of October 31, 1997

Dear Reader:

Again the H.D. persona enables me to explore the poetic process. About halfway through this October letter, I ask H.D., "Why am I writing this to you?" One possibility is that this fictionalized meeting with H.D. at my mother-in-law's funeral is helping me come to terms with mother-loss. And, by reenacting Yaya's church service and burial, I am imagining the funeral I could not attend—that of Irena's.

With this text, my dissertation shifts to prose fiction in the style of a docu-drama. My letter, then, is heightened by the introduction of the imagined H.D. character into an actual funeral. Such a dramatization is helping me deal with feelings brought about by my mother-in-law's death, feelings that connect back to the initial loss of Irena. Somehow it is restorative to retell the events surrounding the funeral to the confidant that H.D. has become.

Besides Yaya's funeral, other references to the dead appear. I refer to a "death marriage." I mention the deaths of my brother-in-law and of Lady Di. I describe how a friend calls my compulsive reworking of "Outside the Ball" a "death-wish."

I am working on my poetry, trying to do justice to the swan princess persona. In "Outside the Ball," her personality is in transition—moving from the earlier victim's discourse of "I cannot join them" to an admission that I "(will?) not" attend the ball. This exploration of in-between states, represented by the act of hovering at a window separating inside from out, calls to mind Stanislav and Christine Grof's comment in Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes A Crisis, that possession is

a "gateway phenomenon" (25). For example, if the possessive spirit, even in its demonic aspect, can be encouraged to emerge fully during an exorcism then profound personal and physical transformations can occur.

One possible interpretation of "Outside the Ball" is that it portrays stages of moving further "within" the swan princess' psyche, such that we confront images that have not fully emerged. As these images break into consciousness, they haunt us, demanding to be made more explicit. This demand for explicitness creates a dialectical process, in which images unfolding from the unconscious invite other images and ideas to converge around them. Are the images in "Outside the Ball" explicit enough? The swan from the dollar store could suggest demeaning entrapment, and the window, as already mentioned, could be the "gateway" referred to by the Grofs (25). But what of the powerful winged thing thrashing dangerously close to it?

Winging its way into my awareness, could it be a premonition that I am to receive a tragic gift—the "White Drift" poem? For some months I had been researching swans, their legends and mythic meaning, while struggling through draft after draft of "Logos" and "Outside the Ball," two poems whose images may never fully crystalize. Suddenly Princess Diana is dead, and the world goes mad with mourning. Although I rarely watch tv, let alone the Royals, I sit down and write her elegy in one sitting.

Certainly, Diana's death, along with that of her lover, Dodi, resolves my dilemma about how to dramatize the double-suicide that ends "Swan Lake." Beyond that, Diana embodies the swan princess perfectly. She has "made new" for us that Old European symbol of the Great Bird Goddess. As Gimbutas points out:

geese, cranes, and swans are encountered painted or engraved in Upper Paleolithic caves, engraved on bone objects marked with chevrons and parallel lines, or as ivory figurines. (3)

The springtime migrations of these water birds, writes Gimbutas, resulted in their becoming symbols for "the continuity of life energy, the well-being and health of the family, and the increase of the food supply" (317). She reminds us "that waterfowl was the main food supply from the Paleolithic" (317). And it is uncanny how many attributes of this ornithomorphic goddess converged in the office of the Princess that Lady Diana assumed. A "snowy white" virgin, a primary school teacher and a wealthy woman, Lady Di came to stand for the "continuity of" the royal line. As the mother of Prince William and Harry, she was devoted to ensuring their "well-being and health." And her considerable wealth (food) increased that of the Royals.

After months of reworking the "Swan Lake" materials, I still had not gotten sufficiently outside of my own stifling psyche. Lady Di's sacrifice was the catalyst, providing me with the perfect "swan princess," an unfortunately devalued representative of the Great Bird Goddess herself. Like so many other contemporary women, Lady Di suffered depression, eating disorders, self-mutilations, and suicidal tendencies. And, as Edelman, reminds us, "Both Princess Diana and Sarah Ferguson, the former Duchess of York, grew up with absentee mothers" (263).

November 3, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

Am glad we have met again as we once did on Parson's Beach in Maine. You must understand, of course, I was not physically present in the church, limousine, or graveyard. To get a better grasp of what has been going on, I urge you now to study the impact of Yogi Ramacharaka's occult writings on my early work. To do so may help you break free of your limited psychoanalytic interpretation of the poetic process, as well as from what you can perceive with only your outer senses. I believe you are ready to consider a metaphysical poetics that can open you to your inner senses and their potent visions.

Although my occult view of the creative process may seem couched in quasi-scientific terminology be patient. Ramacharaka and I were writing in a pre-World War I period when scientific discoveries such as the car, movies, telegraph, and telephone were viewed as miracles that would save mankind. Fascinated with this technology, as people are today with the internet, we used these inventions as metaphors to explain our theories of spirituality and of the poetic process. More practically, Ramacharaka's ideas will clarify how my being at Yaya's funeral had more to do with your sensitivity to my vibration than to my being present spatially.

As Ramacharaka points out in his Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism, a thought is a thing that can be seen by a "psychic sight" (78). He continues explaining that thought "is like thin vapour (the degree of density varying) and is just as real as the air around us or the vapour of steam or the numerous gases with which we are all acquainted" (78). He then points out, as I also do in my Notes on Thought and Vision (50), that the mind sends "forth thought emanations" (Fourteen Lessons 79). He uses three

metaphors to explain this throwing or "sending forth":
 some find the picture of the throwing off of
 light-waves an easy way to fix the idea in their
 minds. Others prefer the illustration of the
 throwing off of heat by a stove. Others find it
 easier to think of a flower throwing off a strong
 perfume. (79)

As you remember in my Tribute to Freud, I describe my
 Corfu vision whereby "light-pictures," not unlike frames
 from a film, were being screened on my hotel wall (41).
 "Dots of light" appeared, "forming lines that constellate
 excruciatingly slowly into a ladder, a Jacob's ladder if you
 will" (52, 54). What was coming through me at Corfu was not
 a daydream or a childhood memory, but an illuminated
 hagiography. Its illuminations manifested "with such vivid
 detail that they became almost events out of time" (42).
 This is why I describe the artist's mind as one that must be
 used for "concentrating and directing pictures from the
 world of vision" (Notes 50).

Morris, who I encouraged you to read earlier on, is
 right to point out that "projection is the master metaphor"
 of my technique (274). Morris sees this process serving to
 "connect the material, mental, and mystical realms" (274).
 "From the verb meaning *to throw forward*, projection is the
 thrust that bridges two worlds." Morris continues:

It is the movement across a borderline: between
 the mind and the wall, between the brain and the
 page, between inner and outer, between me and you,
 between states of being, across dimensions of time
 and space. (275)

Thus, when you "saw" me on the beach or at Yaya's
 funeral, I was but a display of thought-waves radiating out
 from my plane of consciousness towards your own. In his

Fourteen Lessons, Ramacharaka reminds us that someone like myself, who he describes as "a strong, vigorous thinker, whose thought is charged strongly with Prana" can create

Thought-Forms—that is to say, thoughts possessing such vitality that they become almost like living forces. Such thought-forms, when they come into one's psychic atmosphere, possess almost the same power that the person sending them would possess were he present, urging his thought upon you in an earnest conversation. (86)

Yes, I am in earnest, having manifested in response to your need. In fact, my thought-forms have come to your rescue a few times now. They drew you to attend Norman Austin's lecture, reintroducing you to my work when you were desperately seeking a doctoral topic. They initially inspired you to write this text as when I approached you on a Maine beach, and they reached out to comfort you at your mother-in-law's funeral. Ramacharaka reminds us that "those high in occult development frequently send thought-forms to aid and help their fellow-beings when in distress or need" (Fourteen Lessons 86).

How, you might ask, have you been able to channel my thought-forms throughout this dissertation? How does a writer call up inner visions from which to create? Your third or mind's eye, otherwise called the *ajna charaka*, can, as Ramacharaka explains, "receive astral impression from nearby" and "sense things occurring in the past or present" (98). To perceive "people, things, scenes and events far removed from the observer, and far beyond the range of physical vision" involves the use of an "astral tube" (100). This tube, which is highly developed in a person with psychic and artistic abilities, "acts as the lens of a

telescope and magnifies the rays received from afar, rendering them sufficiently large to be distinguished by the mind" (101). If you remember, I often appear to you out of the mists as a dot that, growing larger, comes into focus in your mind's eye. Ramacharaka calls the faculty that makes this possible and that he associates with the pineal gland, an "astral telescope," "astral telegraph," or "astral current" (102).

Ramacharaka uses this "astral telegraph" image to explain the transmission of such "telepathic thought vibrations" (Life Beyond 102). On such an telegraph apparatus, writes Ramacharaka, "we may find many messages passing in each direction along the same wire, each independent, and none interfering with the others" (28). He then uses this astral wire to explain how existence, like these many concurrently received telegraph messages, is composed of numberless interpenetrating planes. (To recast this in your high-tech terminology, you might liken his telegraph wire conceit to the network of simultaneous links and sites that make up the internet.) Awaiting our next incarnation, I live at one such site and Yaya at another. Ramacharaka writes of the simultaneity of this interpenetrating web of planes, or sites:

there might be a dozen worlds occupying the same portion of space, but each being keyed on a far different vibratory scale of matter, and yet none interfering with the other, the living things on each being totally unaware of the existence of those of the other. (29)

When the soul passes out of the gross body at death, it does not go to a "place situated somewhere in space,

containing beautiful mansions of precious stones," explains Ramacharaka (25). Rather, it resides on a "plane" which "is a condition or state of activity in the eternal energy of spirit in which the Cosmos lives and moves and has its being" (26). Each of these planes, conditions, or states consists of "a different degree of vibratory energy—but not of matter," he writes. "Matter is merely a very low form of vibratory energy" (29).

How, then, does one move from plane to plane?

Ramacharaka says one does so via an "increase or decrease of vibrations as evidenced in sound-waves, light-waves, or waves of electricity" (31-32). For example, you perceived me at Yaya's funeral because of a decrease in the vibration of your own thought-waves brought about by your state of mourning. The wavelike rise and fall of the dirge intoned by the priest further enabled my thoughts to merge with your own, allowing me to comfort you in your distress.

I hope this discussion will help you come to terms with Yaya's loss, making you realize that she, like myself, is always close at hand and will answer your every call. HD

November 5, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

Forgive me for deluging you with so many of my thought-vibrations. As you know, my transmissions to you must shortly end. This realization has stirred up intense thought currents that I am projecting onto you, because I am eager for you to conduct further research into Ramacharaka's impact on my early writing.

In my last letter, I explained how the Yogi's notions of interpenetrating planes of existence and of the transference of thought waves helped form my definition of art as an act of projection. Now I would like to discuss how Ramacharaka's image of these "spaceless planes of existence" led me to conceive of a written text as a palimpsest (Life Beyond 28)—the very genre in which you yourself are trying to write.

Deborah Kelly Kloepfer defines "palimpsest" as:

a parchment that has been written over several times, earlier versions having been imperfectly erased. It creates a strange, marginal writing that is both intentional and accidental; it must be excavated, sought after, at that very moment that it is seeping through unbidden. (Friedman and DuPlessis 185)

Not having read her Ramacharaka, Kloepfer fails to understand these "imperfectly erased" traces. Certainly, they are latent bits of memory that the present overwrites, but they also hint at something no longer physically materialized. The script on the parchment is all but gone. This is similar to Ramacharaka's idea of the "Ego," which must drop its physical sheath when it dies. It may, nevertheless, leave certain vestiges of itself behind, such as its personal effects, its oeuvre if it has been a writer, its death certificate, grave-site, etc. These are its

"imperfectly erased" remains. But the disembodied "Ego" still exists on one of a number of interconnected planes of consciousness that can be likened to an interpenetrating web of voices, some embodied and others disembodied, that comprise a textual palimpsest.

Perhaps I am being hard on Kloepfer because, although she makes no reference to Ramacharaka, she does describe my notion of a text as a palimpsest that is made up of intersections between historical, personal, psychological, and mythological states. For example, she explains that all the heroines of my three-part novel, Palimpsest, are haunted by an ancient past as, of course, I have been in my dual role of lyric poet and translator of classical texts (Friedman and DuPlessis 189).

Ramacharaka states that

occultists know that the ancient Egyptians—the Romans—the Greeks—the Atlanteans—the ancient Persians, etc., etc., are now living on this earth—that is the souls which formerly incarnated in these races, are now incarnated in some of the modern races. (Fourteen Lessons 240)

Personally, I have always felt connected to ancient Egypt and Greece, so much so that I once referred to a traumatic period during World War I as "that long pre-Egyptian past of 1917" (Palimpsest 109). My preoccupation with the past led me to adopt the personae of certain classical women. For example, in Palimpsest, there are "so many superimposed people" and places (159). One such persona is Hipparchia, a woman of the Greek intelligentsia who, although she is living in ancient Rome, senses all about her "Egypt in the shadow" (47). In section two of Palimpsest, Hipparchia reincarnates as Raymond Ransome, who I describe as being suffused with a "lightning of vivid thought that was her Athenian inheritance" (171). And, in the book's final section set in post-World War I Egypt,

another of my alter-egos, a Helen Fairwood, is taken to view the pyramids by a Captain Rafton whom I describe as an "authentic, Roman, officer of one of the flashy and distinguished legions of the middle-ageing procrastinator, Caesar" (175).

My wish has always been, as I wrote in my poem "May 1943," to "mend a break in time" (Collected Poems 493). I also mention in Palimpsest that "the present and the actual past and the future were . . . one" (166). Influenced by Ramacharaka, I continue, "All planes were going, on, on, on together" (Palimpsest 166). The problem, nevertheless, has always been that the present clouds the vision of the eternal present.

How is one to resolve such a temporal divide? Again, I drew upon an image from Ramacharaka—that of the mind seen as his crystal ball (Fourteen Lessons 103). In Palimpsest, I write that:

her mind was a glass that was set between this world, this present and the far past that was eternal. A glass, a lens, a living substance lies between ourselves and our final attainment. Antiquity. (163)

Mind of glass, "astral telescope," or "telegraph" all abet the sort of clairvoyance that can mend this rift in time. Ramacharaka describes two sorts of clairvoyance. There is a "space clairvoyance" that brings distant objects into focus as does a lens and also "past-time clairvoyance" whereby

the clairvoyant sees something which has occurred, perhaps ages-ago, and after all apparently records of it have perished. Ah, that is just the explanation—"apparently perished." Occultists know that nothing ever perishes, and that there are in existence on the higher planes of matter,

imperishable and unalterable records of every scene, act, thought, and thing that ever existed or occurred. (Fourteen Lessons 100, 106)

These records, which can be seen as a prototype for my palimpsest, are called the "akasic records" by Ramacharaka (Fourteen Lessons 107). (Akasa = ether in Sanskrit, so they are like a writing in, or on ether.) According to the Yogi, "these akasic records contain the 'memory' of all that has passed, and he who has access to them may read the past as he may a book"—or one might add, a palimpsest (107).

Another image I use to describe this palimpsest is that of a scroll. In part two of Palimpsest, Raymond Ransome experiences such a scroll unfurling in her mind's eye. While doing so, she realizes that these inner texts are from the temples of the Nile where they had already written these things in vast scrolls that reeled still off, off, off before her as if some cinematograph were unrolled and unrolling revealed new vistas, new surfaces of antiquity. (158)

And in part one of Palimpsest, Hipparchia falls into a fever-induced reverie in which

the world that unfolded before her shut-eyes, clear in perfect outline was like some long scroll unwound before her. O what use intellect when the brain, worn past endurance by beneficent Roman fever, finds this subtler implement? A scroll that unwinds before shut eyes, that reveals hill, wood, mountain, small lake, all minute and clarified like those very islands that she, giant Thetis, had towered among at Capua. (82)

Lying passively in a feverish, vision-prone state, Hipparchia shuts her eyes because light can block the inner senses. As the outer world recedes, she begins reading what has previously been erased from ordinary consciousness—those invisible yet simultaneously existent

mythic realms.

Through the ages, shaman, saint, and poet have perceived visions in the inner eye that others cannot see. In this "astral light," writes Ramacharaka, visions occur and the ancestors speak to us. He goes on to explain:

those who have developed time clairvoyance are able to see these reflections of the records as scenes actually occurring before them, just as one hears from the phonograph the voices of people long since passed out of the body, and just as others may listen to our voices centuries hence.

(Fourteen Lessons 107)

Forgive me for being so hasty as to project all of these occult ideas on you at once. I hope you will not dismiss them as the ravings of some senile old woman. Ramacharaka's work is the portal to my early poetics. Please don't forget that, **HD**

Response to letters of November 3 and 5, 1997

Dear Reader:

These two early November transmissions remain somewhat garbled no matter how much I have sought to edit them. Knowing the end is near, H.D. inundates me with her "thought-waves," urging her ideas on to me about the interconnection between Ramacharaka's occult philosophy and her early poetics. She also concerns herself with explaining how she "materialized" in Maine and at Yaya's funeral. In part, I am having fun bringing in more "outlaw" materials, such as the occult writing of Yogi Ramacharaka. Recent scholarly collections like Leon Surette and Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos' Literary Modernism and the Occult Tradition have begun to legitimize this line of inquiry. Their somewhat radical research views Modernism not primarily as a sceptical or secular movement, but as one motivated by a neo-pagan polytheism.

Thus, I am placing my own maverick dissertation in the company of this new scholarship, seeking as well to legitimize my year-long series of séances with H.D. Although she dropped many hints about her other-worldliness in earlier letters, she now plainly states that her ego has already passed out of the gross body at death. She stresses that she is an absent mother figure, aligned with Irena, Yaya, and all the other dead ones.

H.D.'s description of after-death states also helps me to come to terms with the recent loss of Yaya. For example, in discussing Ramacharaka's occult schema, she explains that the higher astral planes or states of "activity" where the dead reside are eternal yet within human reach (Ramacharaka, Life Beyond 26). This surrounding world of

spirit can speak to us through a poetic discourse that is not bound to linear, temporal structures.

Further, what is being justified is that the overall form of my dissertation is not unlike that of H.D.'s notion of a palimpsest—that act of writing over earlier imperfectly erased texts or life stories. As Chandler reminds us, life itself is untidy (136). We must deal with imperfect erasures, messy convergences, and with the unbidden as it seeps through. For example, I had set out to write about H.D.'s late epics in the light of Nel Noddings and Sarah Ruddick's theories of maternal discourse. I had wanted to find ways of bridging the conflicting roles of mother and poet. Little did I know that I must first write not about the mother-poet, but about mother-loss.

When H.D. says that there are "so many superimposed people" in Palimpsest, she could be describing how Yaya, H.D. and others have been superimposed over the Irena figure, or over the Great Goddess herself (159). Imperfectly erased, Irena's traces haunt my dissertation, as they might in an H.D. text. These unfinished erasures are the inner voices from the "mind behind her mind" channelled to us from other realms (Palimpsest 157).

Like H.D., I would write a palimpsest based on a "psychic *phanopoeia*" (Morris 281) with images drawn not only from the natural world of rational discourse, but from the realms of vision and spirit. My text would be one of shifting vantage points encompassing perceptions, memories, and visionary imaginings.

Such a palimpsest is a "hybrid form" that crosses "categorical boundaries" to find "new ways of describing experience" (Chandler 142). Driven as I am by the trauma surrounding Irena's death, I can not write in forms that

prohibit access to fantasies and imaginings. This means I need to write in fictional modes because they help me reconnect with my walled-off feelings. My shattered inner world will not permit me to communicate in a linear way. We can only write from the structures we have been given.

Chandler describes the autobiographical process: "first to record, then to interpret, and finally to expand is a pattern many autobiographers follow" (69). This process involves remembering as well as elaboration, expansion, and transformation. It consists of "a long extrapolation upon a few retrieved fragments" (69). As already discussed, H.D. describes this imaginative faculty by way of such occult images as a "crystal ball," or "glass" set between the worlds and likened to an inner or third eye, tropes that depict how the visionary imagination functions (Palimpsest 176, 163).

Ramacharaka defines the work of this "crystal" set in the mind's eye as that of both "space" and "past-time clairvoyance" states of creative reverie where one journeys to visit vividly imagined places, or earlier time periods (Fourteen Lessons 106). Of special importance is H.D.'s notion of a "past-time clairvoyance" that would recall events, or recreate personae that, as Ramacharaka says, have "apparently perished" from memory (106). They can be re-invoked and developed into "pictures from the world of vision," a phrase coined by H.D. that suggests "the old pictures" that she would have me engage (Notes 50).

This act of clairvoyant elaboration appears central to H.D.'s notion of a text as a palimpsest. Such a visionary text unscrolls like the frames of an unending film in which superimposed figures regularly dissolve into each other. This layering of imagery that either superimposes

contemporary figures over those drawn from childhood and mythic sources, or assumes classical masks for the author and her friends points to the fact that an H.D. text "must be excavated" to get at its underlying meanings (Kloepfer, Friedman and DuPlessis 185). If this is so, what does it say about Chandler's notion of healing? For Chandler, the therapeutic impulse is that of the excavator or archaeologist, while the artistic drive is primarily "architectural" (71). Are both H.D. and I chiefly concerned with an unending catharsis that results in a weak sense of closure?

At times, while sketching out the initial 400 pages of the rough draft of this dissertation, I felt caught within its unpoetic cumbersomeness. How could I extricate myself from its free-written sprawl and shape it? Chandler describes this first stage of the autobiographical journey as that of "the descent," a "stage of loss, degeneration, and increasing confusion" that must occur before regeneration can be achieved (20).

Is this extended fictional correspondence the only way I have to grope towards newer, more flexible forms? Like H.D., I am looking for ways to fix the unending process of self-becoming in the temporary status of the text. The patterns of the palimpsest are not only layered but circular. The past, present, and future blend together in the mind's eye as a site shaped like a crystal ball. This crystal ball metaphor suggests a mandala-like configuration rather than a linear narrative. For example, my own H.D. correspondence is contained within the Great Round of a year. And the casualness of my letter-like musings has allowed them to be cumulative and cyclical, a structure that follows the recursive snakelike path of poetic discourse that Coleridge described in Chapter Fourteen of his

Biographia Literaria (11). The repetitive cadences of my letters also reminds us of the rhythms "of housework, or child care, of domestic life in general" (Chandler 165). This more organic, seasonal structure "suggests closure, resolution, completion, healing" when it is positively aspected (165). It also suggests unresolved compulsions and unfinished thoughts. Which is it for me?

Perhaps a bit of both, but I am beginning to allow myself to finish a few poems—to play at being the architect as well as the archaeologist.

November 8, 1997

Dear H.D.,

Thanks for your encouraging letters, and for confiding in me about how much Ramacharaka informed your early poetics. I really feel privileged.

Have just returned from Fredericton, N.B., from a Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) conference on "Our Bodies/Our Lives." I gave a paper there on your work and, not surprisingly, on its connection to that of Ramacharaka. It was entitled, "Yoga and the Womb-Centred Poetics of H.D." It went well—too well—and has left me with the over-inflated idea that no one else has ever taken an extensive look at his Yogi books in relation to your writing. No one else has ever bothered to go through an inter-library loan search to find his quaint, turn-of-the-century occult tomes.

I was drawn to this topic because of my own life-long interest in yoga. While in Fredericton, I luckily got in touch with the University of New Brunswick English professor, Demetres Tryphonopoulos—the expert on Pound and the occult. I thanked him for inspiring my conference paper; I would never have risked writing on such an unusual topic, unless he had blazed the trail.

But where to go next? I know Ramacharaka is quite an influence, to which your own correspondence attests. For example, many of your images can be found in the Ramacharaka texts that Pound gave you in your late teens, such as the "jelly fish" (H.D., Notes 20 and Palimpsest 158, 163; Ramacharaka, Advanced Course 191); "crystal ball" (H.D., Palimpsest 176; Ramacharaka, Fourteen Lessons 103); "the telegraph apparatus" (H.D., Asphodel 28 and Notes 27; Ramacharaka, Life Beyond 28 and Fourteen Lessons 94, 102, 121). Arguments can be made that the title of your novel, Palimpsest, was influenced by Ramacharaka's discussion of

the "akasic record" (Fourteen Lessons 107). And one of the key images that appears in your first poetry collections, the flower in the storm (Collected Poems 5, 14, 20, 21, 24, 25, 36, 127, 136, 178), can be found in Ramacharaka (Life Beyond 189-90).

But what to do? The research that you are asking me to consider on yourself and Ramacharaka involves an in-depth, post-doc study in English, not in my discipline of creative writing theory. My advisor, who is highly supportive of my own non-conventional approach, is not a specialist in Modernist poetics. And here my paranoia comes to the fore with thoughts about Demetres' student, who confesses that she would really like to work on H.D.'s mystical experiences, but is afraid this might be too far out—will she take my embryonic conference paper and make a whole study out of it? And why, in the larger scheme of things, would it matter?

Before we parted, she told me I should try to present my paper at a coming California H.D. conference. How can I do this? I couldn't even get money from McGill to go to this near-by Fredericton one. Who is going to send me to California? Would I suffer those awful bouts of insecurity that made me stumble through my CRIAW Conference presentation because I had not shown it to anyone? There was no H.D. expert around to work with. Will Tryphonopoulos find my Ramacharaka idea original, or am I easy to shunt aside because I am working in Education? What do you think? At any rate, I wanted to send you a copy of my conference paper as well as a poem with a swanlike landscape of woods and wetlands that is being recycled from my earlier, February 28, 1997 "Hatching the Words" experiment:

WETLANDS (Working title?)

Bulrushes behind newly-built cottages,
winter homes for a few that the road
curves me past to the river—

light on water, I turn and look across
 to my mother's land
 where yesterday morning, the dog and I
 floundered,
 as if entangled by an unseen leash,
through snowy thickets to the sandy point,

but lost our way heading back. No
walker or bushwhacker had broken trail
 in some years.

Dense undergrowth
ends all trace of a trail,
in spite of how I try to keep
 the growl of the sea
at my back. Too distant, the summers
when Dad revved up the chain saw. Head bent,
deaf to its roar, he straddled

the racing blade, steadying it
 like a small tornado
 to bite through upstart brambles
 and shrubs
 He inched methodically towards the
 river,
without a stumble, a lost beat. Swatting
mosquitoes he guided the smelly,
 stuttering
 machine through the now quiet forest,
 scattered with deer spoor

the dog paws at before blazing
 ahead:
 swampy patches, drifts of snow.

I aim for what I think will be east
 of the neighbour's property
 to come out on the main road
 near the monastery,
 but, grasping at a false premonition
 like one blind-folded and spun
 around,

I find myself a mile west
 in a tidal marsh I'd never seen before—
 rushes, ice-edged pools of salt water
 and an old railroad
 bridge
 on a low elbow of land I wander along,
 hoping for a road, a way
 home—heading east,
 I've come out West to startle up
 ducks
 that flap north,
 with more certainty than
 myself.

I realized as I was typing up "Wetlands" that I had better do a key-word search on it, à la Anne-Louise Brooks (97). In so doing, I found that my poem repeats the word, "head," five times. I used the word to mean both the human head, as well as to head somewhere. I have gotten rid of most of these "heads," but what does this repetition mean? When operating solely from my intellect, I grow disoriented,

losing my way in the dense undergrowth of barely formed wishes and desires. Here, my energies fragment into numerous unfinished projects—a second poetry manuscript, a doctoral dissertation, a research paper on Ramacharaka, even some further yoga-related training.

I get lost on terrain that includes some five "heads," all simultaneously pulling in different directions. This terrain is "my mother's land." Am I continually spaced-out because the masculine principle, the father-animus in my poem, is absent? So what to do? What does my body want to do? What is my instinctive dog-friend sniffing out? Where is she leading me? On an adventure in this wild, inviting tidal marsh.

Have also enclosed another trail to be followed—my CRIAW Conference paper. See what you think. **CH**

The Influence of Yoga on the Womb-centred Poetics of H.D.
[Hilda Doolittle]

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In her Notes on Thought and Vision, the modernist writer, H.D. [Hilda Doolittle] defines two kinds of artistic vision—one centred in the head and one "in the love-region of the body or placed like a foetus in the body" (19). That the womb could be a site of a women's procreativity and creativity was a daring pronouncement for H.D. to make in 1919. To do so, she may well have drawn on Hindu thought, along with other "occult" philosophies, in order to challenge the commonly-held misconception that a woman, unlike a man, must choose between being an artist or a parent.

Donna Krolik Hollenberg, in H.D.: The Poetics of Childbirth and Creativity, contends that Notes on Thought and Vision

controverts the brain-uterus competition, current in Victorian medical circles, which was based on the theory that women's reproductive functions diverted creative energy from the brain and vice versa: that every mental effort of the pregnant woman could deprive her unborn child of some vital nutrient. (22)

This brain-uterus dichotomy stems from a combination of Darwinism and the bogus nineteenth-century science of craniology. Shari L. Thurer in The Myths of Motherhood explains that:

In his Descent of Man, Darwin theorized that man's struggle for a mate accounts for his superiority. According to the laws of natural selection, qualities of courage, perseverance, and intelligence in the male—qualities necessary to get a girl—would be passed on to men. Evolutionary success for woman, on the other hand, meant reproductive success. (211)

The pseudo-science of craniology added its support to the Victorian assertion of male intellectual supremacy. Craniologists, writes Thurer, presumed that

men were smarter than women because their brains are almost always larger. In the flurry of false scientism, apparently no one addressed the obvious question: If the possession of an outsized brain was the distinguishing feature of the master species, why was the world not ruled by whales? (213)

Also, there were Victorian superstitions about conception and pregnancy. Ideally a pregnant woman would strive for a state of mindless purity because

the maternal body could be a dangerous growth medium. Should mother think the wrong thoughts, especially at the point of conception, then the child could be branded for life—with a birthmark. Congenital malformations were understood to be proof of a mother's "illicit" thoughts (of another romantic interest perhaps?) (213)

But, what if one had produced a stillborn child just as she was establishing herself as a poet, as H.D. had done in 1915? Or if one had had a second child out of wedlock, as H.D. had done in 1919? World War I was in full swing, and H.D. had felt increasingly demoralized by the numerous, extra-marital affairs that were obsessing her shell-shocked

soldier-husband, the English writer Richard Aldington. H.D. sought support from the Scottish composer Cecil Gray, but soon found herself pregnant with his child. Exercising the Victorian double standard, her closest male companions—Aldington, Ezra Pound, and D.H. Lawrence—quickly abandoned her to die alone of influenza in a cold London flat. Unbelievably, H.D. was rescued by Bryher [Annie Winifred Ellerman]. Bryher's father, Lord John Ellerman, was, as H.D. would explain in a September 1918 letter to the American Imagist, Amy Lowell, "the richest man in England" (qtd. in Guest 109).

After the birth of Frances Perdita Aldington, on March 31, 1919, Bryher arranged for mother and child to retire to Cornwall for a period of recuperation. Here on the off-shore Scilly Islands, H.D. "experienced a moment of breakdown or breakthrough during which the physical reality of childbirth acquired suprapersonal, metaphysical dimensions" (Hollenberg 20). H.D. describes this altered state of consciousness and others that she underwent preceding Perdita's birth in her Notes on Thought and Vision, drafted with Bryher's assistance during their stay on the Scillys. In order to find the language and imagery to describe these visionary states, H.D. drew, consciously or unconsciously, on certain occult sources, one of which was the work of a Yogi Ramacharaka. I wish now to argue that H.D. turned to Ramacharaka's work in order to by-pass the troubling Victorian dichotomization of brain from uterus. She did so at a time of extreme crisis in order to overcome the shame surrounding the stillbirth of her first daughter and the illegitimate birth of the second, and as a way to address her struggle to combine the conflicting roles of mother and poet.

But who was Yogi Ramacharaka? The Sanskrit by-line was the pseudonym used by a lawyer-turned-yogi named William Walker Atkinson (Leviton 68). During the first two decades

of the twentieth century, at a time when such literati as Joyce, Yeats, and A.E. were investigating occult phenomena, Ramacharaka sought to popularize yoga by publishing some 13 books on the subject through his Yogi Publication Society situated in Chicago's Masonic Temple. Earlier on, Thoreau and Emerson had published translations of Hindu scriptures in The Dial and, at the turn of the century, Swami Vivekanada had begun establishing his Vedanta Society centers across America (Leviton 68). The title of Vivekanada's popular Raja-Yoga suggests a subsequent Ramacharaka title—A Series of Lessons in Raja-Yoga, which appeared in 1906.

Ezra Pound, who mentions a Ramacharaka book in a "footnote to the 'Plotinus' sonnet," most probably introduced H.D. to the yogi's work (French and Materer 41). In her End to Torment: A Memoir of Ezra Pound, H.D. mentions that during their on-again, off-again courtship, Pound brought her an "avalanche of Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Shaw, Yogi books, Swedenborg, William Morris, Balzac's Séraphita, Rossetti and the rest of them" (45-6).

The aim of these "Yogi books," which, according to Ramacharaka, was to call "attention to the mistake of the Western dual-mind theories," reappears at the opening of H.D.'s Notes on Thought and Vision (Fourteen Lessons 18). Attempting to resist the Victorian dichotomy of male brain and female uterus, H.D. postulates that there are not two, but "three states or manifestations of life: body, mind, over-mind" (Notes 17). Yogi Ramacharaka in his Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism, describes a similar trinity comprised of the "instinctive mind," the "intellect," and the "spiritual mind." "The "instinctive mind" concerns itself with "the work of our bodies" (23). The "intellect" is preoccupied with "self-consciousness," with what it means to "*know that he knows*" (Fourteen Lessons 32). And from the "spiritual mind" comes our "inspiration"

and intuition, otherwise called the "voice" of the "higher self" (Fourteen Lessons 45).

H.D. goes on to explain that her tripartite system is one whose "universal symbol is the triangle, or taken a step further, the circle, as the three [body, mind, and over-mind] seem to run into one another" (Notes 46). The Sanskrit word "yoga" meaning "union" suggests a balancing or interpenetration of these three states. And, as H.D. writes, the "aim of men and women of highest development is equilibrium, balance, growth of the three at once" (Notes 17)—the very aim of yoga itself.

Continuing to challenge the dualistic brain-uterus competition in her Notes on Thought and Vision, H.D. stresses that "the brain and the womb are both centers of consciousness, equally important" (21). Just before the birth of her daughter, H.D. received mystical visions emanating from these two centers. Here, she describes the opening of what the yogis call the third-eye or *ajna-chakra*:

All the spiritual energy seemed concentrated in the middle of the forehead, inside my skull, and it was small and giving out a very soft light, but not scattered light, light concentrated in itself as the light of a pearl would be. So I understood exactly what the Galilean meant by the kingdom of heaven, being a pearl of great price. (Notes 51)

Ramacharaka aligns the third-eye with the "pineal gland," which is "imbedded in the brain, near the middle of the skull, almost directly above the top of the spinal column." "Western scientists," he writes, "are completely at sea regarding the function, purpose and use of this organ." On the other hand, "yogis have known for centuries that" this is "the organ of 'telephatic' communication" (Fourteen Lessons 93-4). And, his following observation about the pineal gland is even more relevant to H.D.'s defense of women's creativity:

Some of the text-book writers, however, note the fact that this organ is larger in children than in adults, and more developed in adult females than in adult males—a most significant statement. (93)

What is "most significant" about this Ramacharaka passage is that it would help H.D. dismantle the Victorian belief in the superiority of the male brain. Not all of a man's brain can be deemed superior if its pineal gland is less highly developed than that found in a child or a woman's brain.

Along with this "pearl" of light, or photism emanating from her well-endowed pineal gland, H.D. goes on to experience her entire "over-mind" in a physical way, such that it seems to possess "the figurative attributes of a pregnant uterus" (Hollenberg 21). Here, perceiving it as a gelatinous "cap of conscious over my head," she likens it to

water, transparent, fluid yet with definite body, contained in a definite space. It is like a closed sea-plant, jelly-fish or anemone.

Into that over-mind, thoughts pass and are visible like fish swimming under clear water.

(Notes 18-9)

Again, there is a striking similarity between this passage and ones in which Ramacharaka describes an "astral body," or "physical Aura," which surrounds and upholds the human form (Fourteen Lessons 58-9). The yogi envisions this oval-shaped "Auric egg" as being "practically colourless (or possibly almost a bluish-white, resembling the colour of clear water" (58). H.D. also employs similar egg-shaped forms such as the oval "anemone" or skullcap that is "like,

water, transparent." Ramacharaka, in extending his womblike water metaphor, depicts the auric or subtle body as "being frequently flooded by the color of some passing emotion, feeling, or passion" (Fourteen Lessons 70).

Echoing Ramacharaka, H.D. employs the same sort of uterine imagery to bring about a synthesis of "over-mind," "mind," and "body." Her "over-mind" becomes a womb containing mental thoughts. And, this stuff of the mind takes on an embryonic appearance, as when H.D. compares it to "fish swimming under clear water."

Comparing her "over-mind" to a "jelly-fish," H.D. continues the motif of an oceanic, womblike unification. Not surprisingly Ramacharaka mentions a jelly-fish in his Advanced Course in Yogi Philosophy and Oriental Occultism when he writes:

There are intelligent beings as far above us in the scale as we are above the jelly-fish. And yet even the jelly-fish, and still lower forms, are within the circle of the Divine Love. (191)

Like the egg and water images, this "jelly-fish" provides a way to resolve the mind-uterus conflict. Although the Ramacharaka passage alludes to a hierarchy of higher and lower planes, it also stresses that all things are upheld by a "circle of Divine Love." H.D. uses a similar lowly "jelly-fish" to describe how, in a trance state, she felt her own "over-mind" extend its "long feelers" "down and through the body," as well as "out and about" (Notes 19). In so doing, H.D.'s "over-mind," which she also calls a "serpent," surrounds and permeates both her mind and body with its tentacles of "Divine Love" (40).

This all-pervasive "jelly-fish" or "serpent" suggests Ramacharaka's notion of "Atman"—a unifying pantheistic spirit that is

present everywhere, in everything. But not in the way of being shut off, or separate, or a piece allotted to every particular object. It may be described as "brooding" over the Universe and being in, under, around, and all about everything. (Advanced Course 275)

The "Atman," when it individuates to enter the gross body of a person, animal, or thing, is then referred to as the already-discussed "astral body." Ramacharaka says this subtle body is composed of a fine "ether," an image that suggests a synthesis of spirit and matter (Advanced Course 288). In Tantric circles, the primal aspect of this subtle body is the Kundalini, or eternal Serpent Goddess Energy. Sleeping coiled at the base of the spine, this serpent, when awakened, can bring about mystical phenomenon similar to that which occurred to H.D. As the Kundalini mounts the spinal ladder, it brings an end to "the meaningless personal conflicts of left and right, moon and sun, dark and light" and, one might add, brain and uterus (Elder 415).

For H.D., her "jelly-fish" experience leads to an additional altered "state of consciousness" that is "centred in the love-region of the body or placed like a foetus in the body" (Notes 19). In yogic terms, she undergoes the opening of one of her subtle body's energy centres, which could be either the *manipura chakra* situated at the navel, or the *svadisthana chakra* in the womb that has been referred to as "Her Special Abode" (Myss 69). H.D. does not seem to know these Sanskrit terms, and Ramacharaka, if he does, does not choose to use them. In his attempts to popularize yoga, he draws extensively on scientific and especially anatomical explanations. Thus, he delineates an energy centre in the area of H.D.'s "love-region." Situated at the "Solar Plexus," it is called the "Abdominal Brain." Ramacharaka goes on to explain:

It is composed of white and gray brain matter, similar to that composing the other brains of man. It plays a much more important part in the life of man than is currently supposed. . . . The name "Solar" is well bestowed, as, in fact, it does radiate energy and strength to all parts of the body, even the upper brains depending upon it for

energy with which to work. (Fourteen Lessons 126-7)

This passage would justify H.D.'s belief that the womb and the brain are equally effective seats of consciousness. Here, in the solar plexus region, is a store-house comprised of a "gray brain matter" that radiates "energy and strength to all parts of the body." This notion of an "abdominal brain" is in keeping with H.D.'s tendency to attribute properties of the womb to the brain and visa versa. In so doing she challenges the notion of male intellectual superiority, writing, "Should we be able to think with the womb and feel with the brain" (Notes 20)? And then, as if to assert the supremacy of the female womb that culminated in the mystical opening of her own "love-region," she asks, "Is it easier for a woman to attain this state of consciousness than for a man" (20)?

H.D. comes to conclude that artistic vision is of two kinds:

vision of the womb and vision of the brain. In vision of the brain, the region of consciousness is above and about the head; when the centre of consciousness shifts and the jelly-fish is in the body (I visualise it in my case lying on the left side with the streamers or feelers floating up toward the brain), we have vision of the womb or love-vision. (Notes 20)

Again, there is a radical reversal: "the centre of consciousness shifts" from the male head to the female uterus and, in so doing, radiant, creative energy, as Ramacharaka suggests, can float "up towards the brain," from another brain situated in the womb, or at the solar plexus. The mother artist, then, is no longer caught in the throes of a dangerous competition between her creativity and procreativity. Instead the lower body possesses an unlimited store-house of energy, waiting to be tapped, that can

revitalize her whole system.

Thus, the heterodox mystical tradition of the yoga that Ramacharaka was introducing to the West may well have helped H.D. work through the shame surrounding her own traumatic childbirth experiences. His "lessons in oriental occultism," reverberating as they do throughout her Notes on Thought and Vision, seemed to have enabled H.D. to controvert the brain-uterus competition. In so doing, they may have assuaged her feeling that she had sacrificed her stillborn child for her poetic career. Among other esoteric sources, Ramacharaka's series of "Yogi books" may also have inspired H.D. to regain confidence in herself as a mother who could go on to write poems and novels from the more devotional perspective of a bhakti yogini's "love-vision."

Response to the letter of November 8, 1997

Dear Reader:

Here, we begin to see the fruit of my H.D. correspondence that gets worked into my CRIAW conference presentation. In this paper, I am able to distil and interrelate a number of the past year's themes, such as yoga, H.D.'s poetics and biography, the conflicting roles of mother and poet, and the death of loved ones, this time in the person of H.D.'s stillborn daughter.

Nevertheless, the conference experience is nerve-racking, because the interdisciplinary nature of my study is at times more confusing than not. Where to go with a specialty in writing theory, an affinity for poetry, and a PhD in Education?

Fortunately, I can return to "Wetlands," a poem composed some nine months earlier. I am seemingly drawn to resume work on it because it expresses my current feelings of being lost in a pathless land. It feels good, as it always does, to have a new poem underway. Chandler would commend this desire to translate my confusions into literature. As she has already stated, "the writer is more nearly healed whose focus has begun to shift from the content of the experience to the problems of composition" (35).

November 19, 1997

Dear Charlotte,

Yes, I hope you will continue developing your CRIAW presentation topic. So many people have dismissed my Notes on Thought and Vision as some eccentric, near-to-impenetrable text—or worse, just as a set of incoherent jottings. They are not, and, as you have shown, much light can be shed on them via Ramacharaka's "Yogi book series." I did write these Notes to repair my self-esteem that was damaged from giving birth to a stillborn child. A failed mother, I withdrew from my husband, which only worsened his sex-addiction.

But to turn to your poem, "Wetlands," its title seems adequate. This text is quite different from the earlier "Swan Lake" ones. It flows quite freely and is more of a piece from the start, although I assume this is an early draft. Of course what this poem lacks, for all its fluidity, is a sense of layering or depth and, at times, risks being prosaic. For example, in a lines like "Lost in minutes: dense undergrowth / ends the trace of a trail," I would remove "dense," as most undergrowth is that and reach for a stronger verb than "ends" which seems flat. Also lines like "he inched methodically towards the river, / without a stumble, a lost beat" reads like prose. Perhaps you could try to find some words for trail-blazing—wood-cutter's talk, if you know what I mean.

You could also do some free-writing to open up the last three lines of the poem. Can you go in for a close-up of the startled ducks? What has not yet been said? What future events are implied by this closing moment? What feelings are associated with it? What disturbs you about it? What does it reveal about your life? The world?

Other than that I'd continue playing around with the line-breaks. I know you want a free flow rather than a

blockish stanza pattern, but try putting your lines back into the conventional block form just to double check what they are doing. For what it's worth, here's my quick rewrite:

WETLANDS

Bulrushes behind newly-built cottages,
 winter homes the road
 curves me past to the river—

light on water, I turn and look across
 to my mother's land
 where yesterday morning, the dog and I,
 as if entangled by an unseen leash,
 floundered
 through snowy thickets to the sandy point,

but lost our way heading back. No
 bushwhacker had broken trail
 in years.

Lost in minutes: tangled undergrowth
 effaces all trace of a trail,
 in spite of how I try to keep
 the growl of the sea
 at my back.

Too distant, the summers
 when Dad revved up the chain saw. Head
 bent,
 deaf to its roar, he straddled
 the racing blade, steadying it
 like a small

tornado
to bite through upstart brambles and
shrubs.

He inched methodically towards the
river.

Swatting mosquitos he guided
the smelly, stuttering
machine through the now quiet [not
sure??] forest.
[But now it's quiet], scattered with deer
spoor
the dog paws at before blazing ahead:
swampy patches, drifts of snow.

I aim for what I think will be east
of the neighbour's property
to come out on the main road near the
monastery,
but, grasping at a false premonition
like one blind-folded and spun around,
I find myself a mile west
in a tidal marsh I'd never seen before—
ice-edged pools of salt-water
rushes and an old railroad bridge
on a low elbow of land I wander along,
hoping for a road, a way home—heading
east,
I've come out West to startle up
ducks that flap north
with more certainty than
myself.

Response to the letter of November 19, 1997

Dear Reader:

This is the final letter of our year-long correspondence. It does not reach for heavy-handed summary, or tidy closure. On the contrary, H.D., who has the last word, trails off into the ether, offering me her rewrite of "Wetlands" as a parting gift. Self-portraiture, then, is generally a fairly open-ended genre. One of my models, Anne-Louise Brookes, prefers irresolution as closure. In fact, she provides us with multiple endings not unlike those aggregate units found in contemporary atonal music, or in abstract painting. She has entitled her final chapters to suggest that we are not being directed towards ultimate culmination, but rather, "A: Some End(ings)" (147); "B: Another End(ing)" (153); "C: Beginning Again: Doing Class" (154); and "D: Endings of Another Kind" (160).

In fact, Brookes, H.D., and I would all concur with Vita Sackville-West's remark: "I have come to the conclusion, after many years of sometimes sad experience, that you cannot come to any conclusion at all" (132). Chandler explains that the autobiographic impetus we have been tracking in this study usually results in:

generative questions that open up possibilities. They are often left open at the conclusion of a book, pointing the way to uncharted and yet explored territories—reminders that conclusions are always only waystations and that some questions can never be answered conclusively.
(116)

We can tentatively deem that some healing has taken place. I am no longer desperately seeking to secure

something in a scholarly labyrinth, nor am I adopting confessional, therapeutic, or analytic modes. Instead, the correspondence closes with a discussion of line-breaks and with the suggestion that the raw, free-verse sprawl of "Wetlands" could be put into block stanzas and more attention be paid to its scansion. In sum, I am being encouraged to assert more authorial control of my own poetic process.

As mentioned before, life tends to splay out like a wildfire. Burgeoning and messy in its mirroring of such life, autobiography leaves us with a series of unanswered questions. All of H.D.'s final questions begin with "what" which, as Chandler says, are those that ask for facts (116). In "Wetlands" I need more facts. For example, I could search out "specialized" words associated with cutting down trees and blazing trails, words that a woodsman like my father might have used. But these series of whats also reminds me of diving back into the wreck to find "the thing itself" (Rich, Poetry and Prose 54).

H.D. continues gently pointing me back towards the creative matrix of my thirteenth year when she asks, "what has not yet been said?," or "what disturbs you about it?" Such questions will not let me rest easy. In fact, I have already done some free-writing about Irena's deathbed scene that I will develop after finishing this dissertation. The work of this thesis has convinced me of the necessity of completing the "old pictures" assignment.

And at the close of this academic undertaking, I find myself journeying on alone. I am no longer under parental protection in "Wetlands." The father is dead, and the reassuring mother and guide that H.D. has been is no longer present. As the dissertation ends, I have accidentally stumbled off my mother's property and into a deep wood

accompanied only by my dog, Freya. So, I have come full circle: body, fierce guardian, nature spirit, Freya was my primary companion on the beach in Maine. She has returned to lead me further.

ENDING: A SWAN WITH THREE WINGS, OR A FINAL LETTER ABOUT LETTERS

Winged Words

Words made of air

I begin

But words good to hear

Sappho (31)

I step into S.B.'s empty studio and slowly descend towards the polished floor. I wait, with eyes closed, for some visceral sensation to move me outwards into space. I would become a vessel for the energy that is causing my legs to unwind my body upwards. My arms, emerging as if from underwater, reach towards a shore peopled with ghosts. I grope forward, pushed back by some and dancing with others, until they evaporate into eddies of mist. Alone, I sink down again floating as if suspended in water. Then, I go and silently journal with my bodyworker about the dreamlike experience we have just witnessed. Finally we talk: S.B. says she saw reflected in my closing gestures the image of a swan with three wings that has been left on a lake by her perplexed parents. This becalmed cygnet must now learn to navigate with her three appendages.

Among other things, this three-winged swan stands for my dissertation with its three types of letters written to three different addressees—to HD, to CH, and to "Dear Reader." Also, this oddball bird represents my aberrant text's attempts to synthesize three differing discourses—the expository, epistolary, and fictive. If we place these three genres side-by-side, the epistolary would be in the middle serving to mediate between the somewhat

more polarized extremes of poem and essay. As a site of mediation, the letter then can be called the swan's third wing.

Janet Gurkin Altman explains in Epistolary Approaches to a Form that a letter serves as "a connector between two distant points," for example, "as a bridge between sender and receiver" (13). The letter acts as an "instrument of rapprochement" and "dialogue," allowing me to intermix the fictive and expository into one ongoing mosaic (21). How, then, does the swan use her third wing as a tool for such mediation?

Before attempting an answer, I would like to mention another of S.B.'s observations about my authentic movement session—that the swan maiden's gestures are initiated by an absence: she moves in response to being abandoned by her parents to the lake. Likewise, the empty studio calls forth my longings to stretch into its tranquility, while compelling me, at times, to draw back from its threat of exposure. My dissertation, also, presents me with a series of such absences—that of Irena, H.D., my psychoanalyst, the Great Goddess, and others. Not surprisingly, a key word in both my own and Brookes' epistolary model is the word "absence."

Altman stresses that the letter is a discourse of absence. She writes that "the pairing of epistolary seizures with flashbacks" found, for example, in a novel like Saul Bellow's Herzog shows how the letter can become a "'medium' in the spiritualistic sense; it is the intermediary through which Herzog reestablishes contact with the shades of his past" (37). The third wing of the ethereal swan, then, acts like an Ouija board to channel the voices of the absent ones. It calls up a medial halfway state from which to ghost-write for the "obscure or famous dead" (Bellow 7).

H.D. speaks to me through the "medium" of the letter, while I write the letter-poem "Just Irena" to my dead nanny. Lalla-Ded and Lady Di address me from otherworldly realms via letter poems that call to mind similar ones written by H.D. in which she assumes the personae of such ancient Greeks as Phaedra, Hippolyta, and Cassandra.

Also the letter, like the evocation, calls out to an absent, often empowering addressee. In so doing, its blank pages provide a marginal space for receiving surprising communiqués. For example, the dialogic winnowing process by which the "I" of one letter evokes and then becomes the "you" of the next helps to unmask a central concern. Although questions about the mother-poet triggered this thesis, my hidden obsession with mother-loss soon begins driving it.

Whether the letter would reveal information from the past, the unconscious, or from other planes, both its writer and its addressee must always remain apart. As Altman explains, "For the letter writer **is** 'absent'—removed, however slightly, from his addressee and from the events to which he refers" (127-8). The separation between writer and addressee, like the empty space of the dance studio, creates a vacuum in which the desire to summon and be summoned starts up. Leaving Montreal, I write my yoga camp letters, which elicit an immediate response from the temporarily silent H.D. And H.D.'s supposed disappearance to Greece initiates my anxious, expository outpourings.

Let's turn now to the opening letter of this correspondence dated November 12, 1996 in order to study how it portrays the absence that exists between its writer (me) and its addressee (H.D.). Much can be ascertained from its first line which reads, "I am so glad to have met you on

Parson's Beach." As Altman reminds us about the letter writer, "The present is as impossible to him as 'presence'" (128). My opening consists of an admixture of present and past tenses. Sitting down at my Montreal desk to write H.D. this early November letter, I currently feel "glad" about our past meeting. I am happily reminiscing about an absence you encountered in the near past on a faraway Maine beach. This moment of letter writing, nevertheless, quickly slips into happenstance leaving me forever "out of phase with the time of the event narrated" (Altman 129).

In paragraph four of my opening letter, I shift into the present tense, where, "as the climbing sun burns off the last gauzy bits of fog enveloping your form, I begin to make you out." My reliance on this tense comes, in part, from being trained to begin a poem in *medias res*. But, is my tendency to shift from retrospective past to active present also brought about by the letter genre itself?

Altman describes the epistolary as anchored in a present tense like that of the diary. Unlike the memoir where the past dominates the present, the diary or letter would capture "psychological nuance and the details of everyday life," in order to evoke what she describes as the writer's "état présent" (21, 122). The letter prefers the present tense, explains Altman, because it is governed by "ritual acts of stocktaking," rather than by flashback and memoir (122):

To write a letter is to map one's
coordinates—temporal, spatial, emotional,
intellectual—in order to tell someone else where
one is located at a particular time and how far
one has travelled since the last writing. (119)

As such, my letter of November 12, 1996 charts my "coordinates"—location (Montreal in the Fall); feelings (pleasure, anxiety); thoughts (poetry, beginning the dissertation). In spite of this "moment of enunciation," I am still in an implausible epistolary situation (122):

Epistolary discourse is a language of the pivotal yet impossible present. The **now** of narration is its central reference point, to which the **then** of anticipation and retrospection are relative. Yet **now** is unseizable, and its unseizability haunts epistolary language. (129)

I destabilize the "unseizability" of my early November letter even further by suddenly launching into a discussion of Terri Degler's The Fiery Muse: Creativity and The Spiritual Quest. This rapid shift to the expository interrupts my poetic nostalgia. Of course, I am imagining, rather than remembering, my meeting with H.D. in Maine. This staccato segue from fantasized retrospective to book review jars "the pivotal yet impossible present" as well as my emotional equilibrium (Altman 129). "Glad" at first, I begin feeling "a certain anxiety" about beginning a dissertation that must speak from such opposing poles as that of the poetic and the expository. I do manage to curtail these uncomfortable feelings by resuming my H.D. fantasy.

Although tethered to an impossible present, the letter acts as a temporal palimpsest because, as Altman explains:

The meaning of any epistolary statement is determined by many moments: the actual time that an act described is performed, the moment when it is written down, the respective times that the

letter is mailed, received, read, and reread.

(129)

For example, I juxtapose feelings of emotional ambivalence with recalled readings of Milton and Dagler passages. The fictionalized beach reminiscences represent an even more complex build-up of "multiple temporal levels," involving active imaginings transcribed as they occurred (130). These experienced visualizations, nevertheless, consist of memories of past beach walks plus scholarly bits garnered from my recent readings of H.D. and her biographers. Although my fictive encounter with H.D. unfolds in the seemingly eternal present of the mind's eye, it is built-up of remembered events, places, and texts.

The meaning of this opening letter along with all the others "is determined by many moments," not the least of which are my own numerous re-readings of this thesis (129). I have done this type of re-reading as the epistolary character CH in response to HD's letters and then as the HD persona in reply to CH. Other such determining "moments" occurred when I drafted the "Dear Reader" letter to provide my readers with an analysis of my H.D. correspondence. I then reread my dissertation before writing its introduction. My academic committee has commented on its various drafts. These diverse readings will determine its various derived meanings. Each such perusal occurs after a hiatus that exists between the spelling out of my *état présent* and of other points in time when it will be reinterpreted (122).

My imagined meeting with H.D. on Parson's Beach depicts a writer eerily greeting an invisible addressee across a gaping void. H.D. begins as a "dot," one of the basic building elements of a piece of writing, a drawing, or a photograph. Such dots also call to mind "phosphenes,

neurally induced light patterns" that can result in the pointillist play of after-images seen between one's closed eyes (Matthews, Singing the Soul xii). Like a prismatic pattern, H.D. materializes on an empty beach, draws closer, but never makes physical contact. She seemingly pats my dog, a symbolic gesture indicative of the animal-body's importance to this text. We then discuss my present state: how am I to proceed self-confidently with my dissertation; how am I to discipline myself to write, etc? H.D. answers back primarily as a spectral voice, rather than an embodied character. Ending our first meeting by stating "I am a recluse," she retreats up the strand. Her hermit-like nature signals ongoing absence. She is a phantom that must be written to and ghost-written for. This first letter closes with the image of a new moon, symbol of my barely begun dissertation, which falls back into a sea of unconsciousness.

Fictive or real, epistolary exchanges must confront a central absence, and they do so, as Altman reminds us, through the workings of "memory, imagination, and hope" (131). For example, in my own fictionalized correspondence, I rely primarily on my imagination to recreate the deceased H.D. The letter writer, at best, can only address the image of a "you" and not the actual person, as one can in a face-to-face conversation. Even so, if two people meet, they often relate only to their preconceived images of each other. In epistolary discourse, such a fabricated audience is the norm. To whom am I writing this dissertation? What sort of images do I create of H.D. and my committee members who are my invisible audience?

The creation of epistolary characters relies primarily on what Altman calls "the language of the 'as if' present" (140). The letter writer's strivings to evoke an imaginary

audience involves the sort of "hope" that approximates Coleridge's already discussed act of "poetic faith" (ch.14; 6). As Altman explains:

Epistolary language, which is the language of absence, makes present by make-believe. The particular you whose constant appearance distinguishes letter discourse from other written discourse (memoir, diary, rhetoric) is an image of the addressee who is elsewhere. Memory and expectation keep the addressee present to the imagination of the writer, whose narrative. . .and narration. . ., through a frequent oscillation between past and future, likewise seize the present through illusion. (140-41)

In my H.D. correspondence, I "seize the present through illusion," by exploring such iconic representations as a Wyeth painting and a snapshot of Irena. Like a photographer attempting to play with light and shadow, I approach these images through continual shifts in perspective that emphasize how uncapturable they really are. I also work with intangible memory traces, especially those evoked by somatic procedures such as massage and dance therapy. Faced with a central absence, the letter writer must rely on the magician's slight-of-hand, while cultivating the detective's resolve to search out scant traces and cryptic signs. I came to base my image of H.D. not only on her photos, but upon references drawn from her biographers and from her own texts. For example, to authenticate H.D.'s return from Greece, I cited extensively from her masque "Hymus" in the letter of April 29, 1997. Here, I engineered H.D.'s re-entry into our dialogue by quoting her, a lot of her. In an earlier yoga camp letter of January 31, 1997, I not only

recite from the work of Lalla-Ded, but imitate her devotional poems. Playfully channelling this Kashmiri saint, I have her compose some vahks.

When there are scanty recollections, or none at all, one must create presence out of garnered scraps and faint traces. Like a dog nosing the ground, correspondents must be meticulous readers. As Altman mentions, "the epistolary form is unique among first-person forms in its aptitude for portraying the experience of reading" (88). To read a letter, she explains, is to participate in "*anagnorisis* or discovery" (99). And, "epistolary decoders" tend "to pore over specific words and shape new letters around quotations from old ones" (99).

Unquestionably, this final letter about letters arose in response to the word "absence," a motif found in my own and in Brooke's dissertation. Other texts of mine were shaped from themes decoded from earlier communiqués, such as that of possession, bewitchment, creative terror, or mother-loss. Not surprisingly, many of my epistolary characters exploit "the art of *explication de texte*" (Altman 99). Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck" states that words provide us with necessary maps or verbal charts to be decoded somehow (Poetry and Prose 54). H.D.'s poem "Pursuit" dramatizes tracking a missing person by reading how their feet have imprinted the sand and trampled the grasses (Collected Poems 11-2).

Unconsciously influenced by H.D.'s poem, I draft "Wetlands," a text about re-tracing the fading tracks of my deceased father. A diligent reader, H.D. also strives to achieve *anagnorisis* through her interpretation of a fire oracle in the cited Hippolyta poem (Collected Poems 139), as well as through the hagiography illuminating her Corfu wall

(Tribute 44-5). In fact, H.D.'s Imagism resulted from her being a scrupulous reader of the natural world. Not unlike her biologist grandfather, she would focus her art "on one small aspect of life" such as a "shell" or "waterlily," examining them as one might a specimen under a microscope (Asphodel 175). But unlike the scientist, she sees the artist cultivating the clairvoyant imagination of a crystal ball reader who can "make things in the air, pictures, images," stand-ins for the absent ones (175).

Other sorts of *explication de texte* occur, as when Brookes, S.B., and I attempt to read the body, its images and pain. I do close readings of my groundhog dream and of the Swan Lake myth, basing poems on these *explications*. H.D. provides me with an instructive reading of my "Just Irena" poem. I also begin free-writing in response to "old pictures" one and two. I then reread my entire correspondence in order to write the interpretive "Dear Reader" voice-over.

Another characteristic of epistolary discourse is that it involves "a kind of Super Reader, who reads, interprets, and censors the letters of most of the other characters" (Altman 94). This "*Divinité*" is one that "most closely approximates that of the omniscient narrator in third-person fiction" (Altman 94, 96). H.D. is such a "Super Reader." In her letter of November 13, 1997, she describes herself as a clairvoyant who can "see into your mind and read the past." But, the penultimate "Super Reader" of this dissertation is not H.D, but the much more theoretically driven writer of the "Dear Reader" letters, whose meta-commentaries remain unsigned and undated. Their lack of a date and individualized signature (all of the CH-HD exchange are signed and dated) suggests the omniscience of the theorist

who would summarize, synthesize, and question further.

We have already determined much about this dissertation's absentee-addressees, but what more can be said about my H.D. character? Certainly the central player in any correspondence is the confidant, a part that describes H.D. perfectly (Altman 47-86). Although our initial exchanges are somewhat wooden, I soon divulge information about my artistic struggles, my academic interests, and my childhood. To a lesser degree, H.D. discloses how offended she was to have her occult preoccupations dismissed by Freud.

H.D. is not a "Dear Abbey" counselling me on how to conduct my daily life. Otherworldly and philosophical, she nevertheless helps me synthesize a lot of autobiographical, academic, and artistic information. Inspired by the healer Isis, H.D. encourages me to awaken, expand, and uplift myself. She may err in being too predictably kind; not a gnawing or goading daemon, she never jolts or shocks me awake, preferring the less confrontational strategies of insinuation and indirection. As a friend in whom I have invested a lot of authority, H.D. rarely demands, censors, or seduces me into doing her bidding. A receptive parental guide, she suggests exploring the creative matrix surrounding Irena's death, but does not chastize me for undergoing what Altman refers to as an "epistolary blackout" (209). Such denial occurs when "a writer refrains from reporting an event" (209), as does Richardson's Clarissa who, for some time, cannot write about having once been raped. Similarly, I can not retell how I lost Irena, but H.D. doesn't reprimand me for this impasse.

Altman reports that epistolary authorities are generally of two sorts—"erotic and educational" (196). H.D. is decidedly the latter. The other educational figures

imbedded in this dissertation are the writer of "Dear Reader" and my academic committee members. Like a writer's log, the "Dear Reader" voice-over does not address me as the reader, as H.D. does, but turns outward to speak with my committee. As such, "Dear Reader" offers to translate what has taken place between H.D. and myself into academic parlance. Educational specialists, my committee members do not write to me as does H.D. Ironically though, both sets of addressees absent themselves from my dissertation. H.D. is dead and my committee members do not write me at all. They are, in fact, a sort of absent collectivity that eaves-drops on my H.D. exchange.

Having two sets of readers—H.D. and my committee—certainly complicates my thesis because, as Altman writes, "correspondence is essentially a private affair" (48). This is due to the fact that one must spend time "gaining the confidence or becoming the confidant" of the person to whom one writes (48). For example, the "Dear Reader" letters seem crisper because they address only one sort of audience--my committee. I experienced writer's block while drafting my H.D. correspondence, especially during the period that I imagined her to be in Greece. Was this because in writing to H.D., I was inadvertently addressing my committee as well?

The internalized voices that check-mated my efforts during the early winter of 1997 were those of certain persnickety English professors who had been critical of a paper I had presented on H.D.'s poetics in Orono, Maine. In my fantasies, they represented a committee (not my own) at its worst—one peopled by conservatives who would not endorse my aesthetically driven thesis. During the periods when I could not ghost-write for H.D., the authority invested in her as my confidant was being refracted through a darker lens--that of an imagined, highly critical group of

scholars. My writer's block resulting from the artificiality of writing one letter to two sets of audiences can best be described by what Altman calls a "*crise de la destination*" (115). Who is one addressing and why?

How then does H.D. compete with my other epistolary authority figures, such as the writer of "Dear Reader" and the members of my academic committee? An educational muse-figure, H.D. lacks the academic expertise of the others. An artist, college drop-out, lesbian, and occult practitioner, she clearly represents that part of myself that "can no longer comfortably" be defined "in terms of the stabilities [academic] institutions offer" (Chandler 19). H.D. stands for my unresolved struggles to make a place for my poetic self in academia. Remember how at the beginning of my dissertation I defined my poetic ability as a marginal force similar to that of Emily Brontë's. Like Brontë, I believed that "the living artist's turbulent presence is disruptive if not destructive to the dearest values of community" (Tayler 133).

In the early stages, I could only write poetry when I felt rebellious, exhausted, or too sick to undertake academic work. Gradually, I began integrating my poems into this text, using them as tools to explore my divided self. Surely, I was fighting the stereotype carried over from the New Criticism that defines a poem as an isolated art object, arresting for its beauty or its shock value, but of no practical use. Chandler's theories, of course, have helped me redefine the poem from being an impractical artifact to that of a tool valued aesthetically, as well as for its healing properties.

To return to an earlier writer whose views would support my own and those of Chandler, Wallace Stevens defined the value of poetry as that of being "a violence

from within that protects us from a violence without" (36). Stevens defines the poetic impulse as "the imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality" (36). He sees the poet's potency as one that "creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it, and . . . gives life to the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of [that world]" (31).

Seamus Heaney, in "The Redress of Poetry," offers this reading of Stevens that illustrates further the value of the poetic commission:

if our given experience is a labyrinth, its impassibility can still be countered by the poet's imagining some equivalent of the labyrinth and presenting himself and us with a vivid experience of it. (2)

For Heaney, "this redressing effect of poetry comes from its being a glimpsed alternative, a revelation of potential that is denied or constantly threatened by circumstances" (4). This, of course, is similar to Chandler's notion of an aesthetic of healing that allows us to move from the archeological excavation of past traumas towards an architectural reshaping of our individual autobiographies into "supreme fictions" that can provide those glimpsed alternatives of our potential selves (Stevens 31).

Heaney continues discussing this obsolete usage of the word, "redress":

"Hunting. To bring back (the hounds or deer) to the proper course." In this "redress" there is no hint of ethical obligation; it is more a matter of finding a course for the breakaway of innate capacity, a course where something unhindered, yet directed, can sweep ahead into its full potential.

(15)

And the "full potential" that poetry makes available to us is one grounded in the body, for as Jorge Luis Borges reminds us in "The Taste Of," a real poem evokes that "thrill," an "almost physical emotion" (272). Heaney calls this "the fluid, exhilarating moment which lies at the heart of any memorable reading," experienced as "the delight of having all one's faculties simultaneously provoked and gratified" (9).

Emphasizing the physical as well as the mental "faculties," Heaney's image of calling the hounds back on course reverberates with the dog's appearance at the beginning and end of my H.D. correspondence. Often found coursing with her nose to the ground, my dog symbolizes the poem as potent curative which can occur

when the spirit is called extravagantly beyond the course that the usual life plots for it, when outcry or rhapsody is wrung from it as it flies in upon some unexpected image of its own solitude and distinctness. (Heaney 16)

Chandler, another parental figure of sorts, enters my epistolary dialogue through the "Dear Reader" letters. Her voice helps me bridge the gap between my academic and artistic selves. Although the writer of "Dear Reader" seems more the academic conversing with others of her kind, she goes beyond merely attempting to justify my dissertation to my committee. She reconfirms just how healing the writing of poetry can be. And as my H.D. correspondence unfolds, I stop devaluing my poetic gifts and begin granting them more space to develop. This means I can move more adeptly back and forth between drafting poems and mini-essays.

The "Dear Reader" texts also show me turning momentarily away from H.D. to confide in my academic committee. For example, in my letter of June 25, 1997, I

point to one of H.D.'s major flaws—that my poetic muse is an absentee-mother figure. (Is this why she abandoned me so often?) Do I mention this somewhat troubling fact to round out H.D. as an epistolary character? Is she more appealing as a defective muse figure? Or does the good artist/bad mother split that my H.D. represents reflect my own unresolved conflicts concerning these polarized roles?

As you were promised a letter, not an extensive essay, I will close off by mentioning the problem of ending epistolary discourse. What, in fact, does it mean to sign-off, or cease corresponding? Altman speaks of the "potential finality," the "annihilation" inherent in the closure of each of my letters (148). Every letter, then, breaks off into a sort of mini-death. In the hiatus between call and response, the potential exist for the silence to be final. Many examples of this can be found in my dissertation. There were long anxiety-filled stretches when H.D. did not write back to me. And, around the time of Spiro's mother's funeral, H.D. began dropping hints that our year-long correspondence must soon end. Confusingly, H.D. then stresses that her interactions with the living will never cease. Calling upon Ramacharaka's occult theories, she points out that the higher planes of consciousness where she, Yaya, and Irena reside can always interpenetrate and communicate with our own. Thus H.D.'s ambivalent departure reflects another epistolary characteristic, that of open-ended closure.

Altman describes different possible closures that typify epistolary exchanges (143-165). The writer may purposefully stop the correspondence. The writer may die. The writer and addressee may meet in the flesh. Or, more commonly, the correspondence may be left in an open-ended, somewhat enigmatic state. I stop my H.D./"Dear Reader"

exchanges in order to finish my dissertation. But, as you can see from its length, I have had trouble finishing it. New texts keep availing themselves. New voices seem eager to join in. Ramacharaka enters near the end of my H.D. correspondence, while Stevens, Heaney, and Borges only jump aboard in this "final" letter. Significantly, H.D. never announces, "This is my last letter." She is long dead; we cannot end our correspondence by actually meeting each other. Rather our closure is open-ended. H.D. simply advises me on "Wetlands" before ascending to a higher plane for the last (?) time.

"There is a very real sense in which the epistolary text is never closed," writes Altman (162). This is because it "is regularly framed and reframed as part of an ongoing process of textual creation, transmission, and interpretation that is endless" (162). For example, I create my initial H.D. document. I interpret it for my committee in my "Dear Reader" commentary. I frame these texts with an introduction and with this closing letter about letters. And, as we shall see, there will be more attempts at framing and reframing.

Remaining true to the work of Anne-Louise Brookes, I have chosen multiple endings for this text. Do both Brookes and I sign-off and then inaugurate new gestures because we have unfinished business to complete? All of these letters have been unmailed ones. Clearly, I will have more truck with the phantoms evoked by this text. I am just learning to fly towards them on this surfeit of wings.

ANOTHER ENDING: DOING HEURISTICS

Contemporary composition and creative writing studies encourage the use of heuristics, deliberate techniques employed to shape and structure thought. Composition theorist Linda Flower's definition of heuristics as "discovery procedures" calls to mind the Greek word "heureskein," meaning to discover or find. These strategies are less "explicit" than rules, less "simple-minded" than formulae (36). Unlike step-by-step models, a heuristic can only "reduce the size of the problem" whose stumbling block is the complex, individualistic nature of the writing process itself (36). The drafting of a text, a highly unpredictable venture, can never be determined by "a set of directions," explains Lisa Ede (111). Poets like Behn and Twichell argue that at least a good heuristic can serve "as a scaffold" that "eventually falls away, leaving behind something new in the language" (xiii). And, Flower believes that these "efficient strategies" serve to "cut down the number of alternatives you must consider" (36). Effective heuristics are "powerful," she adds, because they have "a high probability of succeeding" (37).

Karen Burke LeFevre and Mary Jane Dickerson define heuristics as "procedures to generate material" that generally take the form of a "system of questions" (56). Examples considered are Kenneth Burke's Pentad (x) that examines literary works, Peter Elbow's analogy exercise (81), and Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike's tagmemic invention strategy (120). Ede's book, Work in Progress: A Guide to Writing and Revising, provides a veritable encyclopaedia of heuristics divided into various sorts: Strategies for "Invention," for "Planning and Drafting," for the "Revision Process" etc. (vii-viii).

Young, Becker, and Pike base their heuristic categories on the three following requisites: (1) they should help a writer access relevant material stored in his/her mind; (2) they should point to additional materials that can be obtained through observation, reading, etc.; (3) and they should suggest means for ordering the materials being generated (120).

Flower stresses the power of heuristics to reduce and, thereby, to shape "the size of the problem." LeFevre and Dickerson, on the other hand, extol heuristics for their capacity to generate ideas. Behn and Twichell, in The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises from Poets Who Teach, promise that the creative writing techniques in their collection will engage the writer "on at least several levels" (xiii). Ede, along with Young, Becker, and Pike, might describe these levels as ones that stimulate an outpouring of images while simultaneously providing for their arrangement.

Since this is an investigation of the poetic process, perhaps we should turn to a poet for some answers. I would like to reintroduce Gregory Orr's discussion of the four poetic temperaments. He argues that poets are born with one of four distinct temperaments. The temperaments of story and structure are "intensive" and concern themselves with "limits and correspond to our desire for and recognition of the role of law" ("Four Temperaments" 2). The "extensive" temperaments of music and imagination, on the other hand, spring from "our longing for liberty, the unconditional and limitless" (2). "Extensive" and "intensive," then, are different terms for defining the two basic characteristics of heuristics--that they promote the discovery of content as well as form.

An "extensive" tendency can foster an inspired outpouring of rhythmical phrases, images, and ideas. In so doing, this liberating impulse abets what Ede calls "*inventio*," a word from classical rhetoric meaning the "discovery" of the subject matter (112). Clustering, looping, and free-writing are examples of the sorts of informal strategies that generate such spontaneous bursts of writing. Ede also points to more formal tactics such as tagmemics, or the *topoi* that aim to "systematically probe a topic" (120). The ability of these formal strategies to generate as well as organize information reveals them to have both a liberating and a limiting tendency. Even more structured heuristics such as the thesis statement or the descriptive outline can define the parameters and curtail the scope of a text by "establishing a controlling purpose" and "developing a workable plan" (Ede 136).

For example, the "intensive" predisposition may lead a poet to demarcate the emotional centre of a developing poem and then find details, images, line-breaks, and stanzaic patterns to shape it further. This "limiting" tendency is "goal-oriented" and concerns itself with willful action rather than with the dreamy playfulness that the "extensive" heuristics often bring about (Ede 138). Such an "intensive" drive leads the poet who finds satisfaction in measurable patterns to write a sonnet, while helping the essayist develop a well-proportioned comparison and contrast paper.

Orr explains that the greatest poems combine the "extensive" and "intensive" impulses "with equal vigour" ("Four Temperments" 1). Poetic unity, he concludes, depends upon "the stability and dynamic tension that comes of a marriage of contraries" (2). Such a union "must fuse a limiting impulse with an impulse that resists limitation" (2). Orr's observations support Ede's and Young, Becker, and

Pike's definitions of a heuristic. All would agree that heuristics generate as well as order textual materials.

For example, Shakespeare often checks his extravagant imagination and musical genius by writing sonnets. In his "My love is a fever, longing still," he calls upon the sonnet's mathematical strictures to curb a cascade of conflicting emotions spawned by his troubled affair with the Dark Lady. Rhetorically demanding, the sonnet's first four lines often succinctly spell out the situation or theme to be addressed, something Shakespeare does so well:

My love is a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease;
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
The uncertain sickly appetite to please.

(Son.147:1243)

The second quatrain should complicate the first. To do so, Shakespeare focusses in on his frenzied ambivalence, limiting its volcanic potential to this concise close-up of a divided self whose desires threaten to annihilate all reason:

My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me, and I desperate now approve
Desire is death, which physic did except.

(Son.147: 1243)

In the third quatrain, the sonneteer attempts to resolve the complexities of the escalating conflict. Shakespeare's only solution is to accept himself as "past cure" and continue to distill his spleen's black humours into these eruptively tense lines:

Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
And frantic-mad with evermore unrest;
My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,

At random from the truth vainly exprest;

(Son.147: 1243)

The sonnet's closure demands further condensation: the couplet must achieve a terse summary. Marrying his "extensive" rage with the sonnet's "intensive" rhetorical, metrical, and rhythmical requirements, Shakespeare gives a final, caustic twist to these corrosive, closing lines:

For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee
bright,
 Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

(Son.147: 1243)

We have seen how the "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" impulses worked to unify Shakespeare's volatile sonnet, but how do they generate the content and shape the form of this thesis?

1. Mentor-mentee correspondence. I will not go on at length about the heuristic impact of the letter genre on this effort as the previous chapter has already done so. I would like to say that such a correspondence is liberating. By its agency, I orchestrated exchanges with a dead poet. In so doing, I was still unable to write extensively about my thirteenth year. I did, nevertheless, manage to express thoughts and feelings currently on my mind, as Young, Becker, and Pike believe heuristics capable of doing (120).

Also this mentor-mentee strategy fulfilled another of their heuristic requirements—it got me reading (120). In fact, four different motivations set me a'reading. I studied H.D.'s writings and biographies in order to make her a believable character. I pored over periodicals and books of literary criticism to learn more about Imagism. Too blocked to write poetry, I went off on procrastinating tangents, like the negative animus, or Delphic oracle. I also gorged myself on Emma Jung, Adelaide Morris, and Joseph Fontenrose,

texts recommended by H.D.

I wrote to H.D. about these readings and then imagined her reply. This writing, not unlike a two-voiced response journal, helped me sift through texts to glean out their essentials. Our two-part, "extensive" dialogue permitted me to review a book from differing perspectives. Exploring a text with one voice and then another meant that questions raised by the first pressured the second voice to attempt an answer. This called upon unexpected reserves even, if you will, a voice of inner wisdom. Such reading/writing, then, was a liberating impetus. It occasioned a spiralling flow of images, themes, even obsessions, that became a fertile seed bed from which to draft numerous poems and my conference paper.

How effective was the limiting impulse of this mentor-mentee heuristic? As already mentioned, writing about what I was reading served to focus my thoughts. Writing in a letter format also provided me with a ready-made audience. Envisioning H.D.'s face while drafting a letter fostered a conversational style. But such casualness often jarred with my intent to write a doctoral dissertation. Conflicted from the start about undertaking a fictional correspondence in an academic setting, I was not sure which limiting impulses to follow. Thrashing around for a model, I remembered the packets I had sent my Master of Fine Arts advisors. These packets, like my letters to H.D., were composed of epistolary, expository, and poetic texts. But, my MFA packets were much shorter and more structured than those mailed to H.D. Rather than run three discourses together, my original packets divided them into separate categories: an expository cover letter, drafts of 4 to 5 poems and, finally, 3 annotations of no more than 1-1/2 to 5 pages in length.

A typical H.D. letter collapsed discourse boundaries, running the three genres together. This merger resulted in bumpy transitions: jumping from an academic argument into a homey chat, I often felt hindered by a stolid block of quoted material. With practice, these unsettling modulations smoothed out, grating less upon reader and writer alike. This mix of poetic, epistolary, and expository modes, nevertheless, challenged me to make our exchanges read like letters. Some still seem less like "real" letters and more like musings that map a circuitous journey over multi-disciplinary terrain.

Less encumbered by messy discursive convergences, the "Dear Reader" letters confine themselves primarily to the expository mode. These analytic meta-texts were easier to draft because they were in response to the already-written H.D. correspondence. Better focussed from the start, the remarks made to "Dear Reader" achieved Young, Becker, and Pike's heuristic requisites: (1) they enabled me to do a close reading of my own composing procedures; (2) they enlisted theoretical texts to do so (2-3).

2. The Guide. Again, I have already written extensively about the guide's role in my letter about letters. In fact, there have been enumerable figures actively steering me throughout this study. For example, the theories of Anne-Louise Brookes, Marilyn R. Chandler, Shaun McNiff, Janet Gurkin Altman, and even Yogi Ramacharaka have lighted my way, as has the poetry of Emily Brontë, Adrienne Rich, and Lalla-Ded, to say nothing of the insights garnered from my thesis advisor, Anthony Paré, my academic committee, and a long list of supportive colleagues, family, and friends. Here, I will only investigate to what extent the two primary guides of this study—H.D. and "Dear Reader"—have expedited the discovery of its content and form.

Both H.D. and "Dear Reader" are educational authority figures. "Dear Reader" is more disembodied because she/he doesn't write back to me as does H.D. Both of these guides manifest primarily as voices. H.D.'s is an epistolary one, whereas "Dear Reader" appears as a helpful yet, at times, overly critical, internalized voice. Let us look at how liberating or limiting these two heuristic presences have been. As a symbol of poetic inspiration, H.D. not only rescued me from the botched beginnings of this dissertation, but offered comfort at Yaya's funeral. She also stirred me to write poetic fictions and draft poems. The inspiration she brought was coloured by her own preoccupations with classical history and literature, as well as with the occult. These her passions threw open a door to that betwix-and-between realm where the role of poet blurs into that of clairvoyant and shaman. In so doing, H.D. supported Ryan's belief that

art has been a necessary concomitant experience in most shamanic cultures from the Paleolithic times onward. Art and beauty join the shaman as psychopomps that lead to and express the formal source of human experience and are part and parcel of the transformation of consciousness. (176)

H.D., thus, granted me permission to let the poetic, shamanic, and oracular enrich what could have been a more dour doctoral undertaking.

An omniscient time-traveller, she introduced me to occult spheres, impelled me to recover long-buried memories and a nearly-forgotten undergraduate poem, while gazing ahead to recommend books published after her biological death. A liberating agent, H.D. symbolized the imagination's healthy disregard of time as we know it. But how could such a free-spirit assist me with the arrangement of this text?

Capable of changing hats, H.D. could rein in her flights of fancy and set to work crafting poems. Her technical critiques equipped me to revise texts. Beyond that, the way her biography intersected with mine enabled me to draw parallels and illuminate our common ground. When my story was "overlaid" with H.D.'s, I began to refocus my intent (Metzger 125). A few weeks into our correspondence, I started to identify with H.D.'s initial struggles to become a poet. This led me to shift my dissertation from a critique of her late epics to a more personal investigation of how her early poetry might shed light on my own emergent voice.

H.D. also empowered this study by motivating me to enter history. Introducing the notion of the "old pictures," she discussed what such imagery meant to her. In so doing, she situated me within both the Imagist movement and her own Modernist lineage.

In another sense, H.D.'s heuristic agency failed to limit my dissertation sufficiently. A symbol of poetic inspiration, she erred by being too gentle, too fickle and, finally, too reclusive. For example, she never goaded me on to write a better poem. And, she was wont to abandon me. When she left for her Greek vacation, my analytic side overstepped its bounds and took revenge. It did so by launching into a telling investigation of one of H.D.'s weak points—her tendency to project her creative assertion onto male muse figures. Did H.D. forsake me when confronted with this eruption of expository texts? Or did her leave-taking initiate this loss of proportion?

At first H.D. disliked doing theory, especially that of a psychoanalytic sort. The exception, of course, was Emma Jung. But in general, psychoanalytic criticism drove H.D. out of my dissertation more than anything. My poetry, too, tended to dry up or be scared off by any attempts to

pathologize it.

At the end of this dissertation, H.D. returns with a relish for metaphysical theory. Perhaps she is not against theory after all, as long as it does not reduce the artist to a psychopath, or the work of art to a textbook of symptoms. After my mother-in-law's death, H.D. writes to me with added fervour. Her outpouring of occult speculations serves to counter my earlier psychoanalytic ones. Here Orr's limiting impulse is at work balancing one extreme with another.

Part of my problem, as already mentioned, was my "*crise de destination*" brought about by a Janus-faced dissertation that looks one way towards poetry and the other towards the essay. Earlier, in a pilot study for my H.D. correspondence, I had created a similar fictive relationship with Sappho. To do so, I had written a number of sketches dramatizing my fantasized encounters with this ancient Greek poet. Set in contemporary Montreal, these vignettes had a vividness and fluency that my more analytic H.D. letters lack. Certainly, the imagination can more easily dream up a figure from the remote past about whom little is known than recreate one who has only been dead for 30 years. This aside, the agency of "Dear Reader" also limited me imaginatively. He/she as audience would manifest as a panel of academics bent on quashing my experimental undertakings. These make-believe figures frequented cheerless, book-lined rooms, and when confronted, would point their boney fingers and shake their hoary heads disapprovingly. Certainly, if H.D. erred as too gentle a daemon, "Dear Reader"'s worst face was that of a severely puritanical critic bent on squashing my poetic nature once and for all.

In a more positive light, "Dear Reader" stimulated a lot of fruitful speculations that fed my poetry. "Dear

Reader," as audience, sharpened my meta-critical responses. And if H.D. helped situate me in a poetic lineage, "Dear Reader" invited me to join an academic conversation where theories of composition and creative writing, feminist autobiography, art therapy, and Modernism were being enjoyably bantered about.

3: Bodywork. Ancient traditions of somatic therapies which use diets, herbs, baths, massage, dance, chants and songs to heal the sick appear in indigenous cultures worldwide. Sigmund Freud was one of the first in our contemporary period to notice how repressed emotions disguise themselves and appear as disturbing bodily symptoms. For example, Joseph Brueur and Freud called the somatic disturbances experienced by women hysterics "stigmata" (15, 88, 242, 244-45). More recently, two medical doctors, Ron Kurtz and Hector Presteria, published The Body Reveals: An Illustrated Guide to the Psychology of the Body, a book that attempts to interpret the meanings of such somatic disturbances. For example, they describes people with expanded chests as being distrustful and afraid of taking in energy or support from others (88-89). Similarly, in Emotional Anatomy: The Structure of Experience, Stanley Keleman associates the tendency of a person to collapse their posture—sinking the chest, sagging the abdomen, and protruding the pelvis—with the character traits of helplessness, obedience, despair, and apathy (136-45). Even more to the point, professor of pharmacology and biological psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center Dr. Saul Schanberg reminds us that any trauma may be remembered years later during a bodywork session because "memory resides nowhere, and in every cell. It's about two thousand times more complicated than we ever imagined" (telephone interview quoted in Knaster 124).

I refer to two types of bodywork in my dissertation. The first is Jin Shin Do, a form of Japanese acupressure massage. A Jin Shin Do practitioner like S. B. assesses tense areas of the body, feels out the energy blockages along meridians such as those of the heart, kidneys, stomach, etc., and also reads the wrist's pulse. Diagnosing the data so gained, she then uses her hands to apply pressure on weak, or blocked areas until their energy flow is re-established. It was during such a session that the "old pictures" came to me, recovered from the area around my heart that S.B. was massaging.

Jin Shin Do worked heuristically to help me find scenes and imagery from which to generate texts. In so doing, it did not lead primarily to an "extensive" rush of ideas and images. The released perceptions did not flood my consciousness in a filmic stream. Only three scenes were recovered as my bodyworker softened the musculature armouring my chest. They issued forth slowly, lingering for a minute or two before dissolving into the next.

These tableaux progressed from the Wyeth painting of "Christina's World" to a remembered childhood photograph, and finally, ended with emotionally raw recollections of visiting Irena in hospital. Layer by layer, as my bodily armouring loosened, the "old pictures" rose up before me. The first to appear was someone else's resonant image, and then came the remembered childhood snapshot. Suddenly, with the arrival of the third, I was plunged deep into memory's volatile cauldron. The painting, the photograph, and the recalled hospital visit became the "old pictures." As three distinct yet interconnected depictions, they arrived already somewhat formed, as might the setting of a dream. These somatically-released representations acted "intensively" by focussing my writing on an exploration of these episodes:

Christina in the harsh field; Irena seated on the backyard wall at the cottage; and Irena's last hours in hospital. Further, they offered up characters and a storyline for development.

Accompanying the release of these physically-impacted tableaux came an intense up-welling of grief and sadness. Perhaps this was why it was difficult to work with the "old pictures." For the most part, my PhD has been a lonely climb up an intellectual Mount Everest that offered little support for such a troubling emotional excavation.

The second bodywork heuristic that helped shape my doctorate was Authentic Movement. This somatic technique combining movement therapy and depth psychology was invented by a Martha Graham dancer named Mary Starks Whitehouse. Whitehouse mentored Janet Adler with whom my own bodyworker has trained. To do Authentic Movement, a Mover closes her eyes and suspends purposeful doing to let bodily impulses surface spontaneously. Rather than consciously willing bodily efforts, she waits for an inner energy to animate her. Often her improvised gestures are accompanied by feelings, images, or memories such as the preverbal image of the swan, the three-winged inspiratrice of this dissertation.

At the end of each session, the Mover attempts to translate these preverbal messages as does the Witness, another person who silently watches the Mover move. Also after the Mover has finished her twenty or so minutes of moving, she and the Witness can write or draw in silence, in order to bring the richness of the Mover's inner world further into consciousness through an accompanying medium. I, needless to say, like writing after an Authentic Movement session. Then Mover and Witness verbally share what the process has revealed to them.

Unlike Jin Shin Do, Authentic Movement seems more driven by an "extensive" impulse. Improvisation followed by free-writing limbers up both body and mind. The result can be an expressive outpouring captured in words or pastels. This "extensive" flow can be coaxed along even more if one writes in a certain way. To recapture the physicality of such a movement therapy session, one can avoid writing in complete sentences. It is better to reach for single words, or rhythmical phrases as one might in music. Also it helps to add "ing" to verbs to form gerunds. Gerunds keep things moving as does writing in the present tense.

Authentic Movement allowed me, then, to embellish upon a key image. The swan is clearly one of the symbolic threads knitting this text together. I had not talked much, if at all, to S.B. about this swan motif. Usually we refrain from intellectual talk. One day while struggling to write my conclusion, I went for a session with S.B. She witnessed my movement and described how my gestures evoked the image of a three-winged swan left alone by her perplexed parents on a deserted northern lake. This somatically-released swan image resonated with the many swans that had winged their way through my H.D. correspondence and its accompanying "Dear Reader" commentary. This revelation crystalized a fresh vantage point: the swan was to navigate with three-wings; I was to fashion a text out of the expository, epistolary, and poetic. This led me to structure my first conclusion around the theme of the three-winged swan of discourse.

4: Photograph (painting) heuristic. Maggie Anderson's exercise, "In A Dark Room: Photography and Revision" was chosen to start free-writes about "the old pictures" (231-235). Seemingly a ready-made discovery procedure, it followed up on H.D.'s suggestion to view these images from different angles and moments in time. My topic was

"Christina's World" by Andrew Wyeth (275). After describing this painting in detail, I explored it via the personae of Wyeth, his wife, and Christina. I also tried shifting vantage points from an upstairs window to the road, and then to the field.

The overall result was somewhat destabilizing. I ended up with a contact sheet of slightly out-of focus snap shots that I hurriedly spliced together. The eleven-part poem that resulted consisted of short, disconnected glimpses of Wyeth's landscape. Perhaps I spent too much time merely describing the painting. The result was a lot of details, but not much story to work with.

Sometimes, the heuristic cannot be blamed for everything. Extenuating circumstances along with the writer's state of mind can block the way. I could have jump-started free-writes from anyone of the telegraphic mini-stanzas of my "Christina's World." Instead I abandoned these "old pictures." This was early in my dissertation. I could not relax enough to dream a poem into existence and then spend time compressing its words towards the necessary intensity. Poetry was too alien an activity for this desperate grad student who needed an accumulation of pages to convince herself that her thesis was underway. And as I have said, the pressure to make a heroic breakthrough to my creative core was a hindrance.

5. The journey. Travel can be a powerful stimulant for a writer. A heuristic "happening," the trip can provide fresh experiences and unexpected encounters that elicit the authentic responses hoped for from a writing exercise. Unpredictable events provoke strong emotional reactions calling the traveller to speak out about, or write down, what is occurring. A voyage can also suspend the peregrinator in time. A long train ride, for example, can

bring on a meditative mood, while the rhythmical droning of the engine, or the clack, thud, clack of railroad ties can induce a poetic reverie. The journey, then, is an excellent liberator: my mid-winter excursions precipitated a flood of thoughts and images.

Other novel travel experiences precipitated a response as well. The pastoral isolation of the retreat centre, the demanding yoga routine, the four a.m. meditations, and the final frightening night in the deserted dorm were contributing catalysts. The intersection of such early spring holidays as Groundhog's Day, Imbolc, and Candlemas manifested in a configuration suggestive of a ritualized, three-dimensional poem. All of these factors converged upon my psyche which responded by producing the text of a disturbing dream.

6. The dream. Dreams, as inner journeys, can also liberate the imagination. My groundhog/cat dream provided fresh images and landscapes, as well as a cleansing upsurge of emotion. Its aftertaste of rebellion and the lingering hunger for poetry it evoked led me to draft two new texts. As well, my Candlemas dream produced two unlikely, yet haunting characters on whom to base these cat and groundhog sketches. These animal personae gave shape and sense to the violent up-wellings evoked by the dream. The heuristic was there, and the circumstances (inner and outer) were right.

Dreams have another property that LeFevre and Dickerson define as characteristic of heuristics; they raise questions (56). Often we wake up asking, "What does this dream mean?," "Who are these bizarre characters?," and "What am I to make of their violence?" Dreams also fulfil other heuristic requisites. A mysterious oneric event can cause the dreamer to question her own mind, or, at least, send her off to research some perplexing character or gnostic symbol. For

example, I took books on animal symbolism and biology out of the library to determine what the life and habits of the groundhog and cat might mean.

7. Key Word Analysis/ "Hatching the Words." Influenced by the work of Ashton-Warner (35), Brookes (82, 97), Chandler (97), and Rich (Poetry and Prose 54), this key word heuristic provided me with a diagnostic tool. Like a Geiger counter, key word analysis detected emotionally-charged images and ideas radiating out from underneath the surface of my dissertation. In so doing, this discovery/recovery procedure led back to the unfinished "Swan Lake" text.

"Hatching the Words" also evolved from this key word approach. I developed a number of questions that systematically unearthed key words and unpacked their mother lode of connotations. Some probed emotions and thoughts. Some granted permission to play with words and sounds. Others prompted drafts structured around temporal shifts and emerging personae.

Overall, this "Hatching the Words" heuristic had potential, but my timing was off. All too diligent a doctoral student, I could not commit to finishing a possibly extraneous, technically-demanding poem. Before I abandoned this enjoyable heuristic, I did manage to draft eight quirky, poetic riffs. Judged as random spurts of writing, they were quickly filed away. Months later, only two have been resuscitated.

8. The retelling of a fairy tale. As mentioned before, key word analysis uncovered productive questions that took me deeper. For example the word "possession" enable me to reformulate queries posed some nine-months earlier: how was my life like a "Swan Lake" romance? How did my autobiography intersect with this tale of bewitchment?

Previous to this dissertation, I had worked with a fairy tale heuristic found in Deena Metzger's Writing for Your Life: A Guide and Companion to the Inner Worlds (119-82). It influenced me to draft a prosaic verse account of "Swan Lake" from both the prince's and the princess' points of view. My rigid adherence to the plot line and archaic setting of this tale resulted in a fairly stale recount. Even so, I was familiarizing myself with "Swan Lake." Metzger feels we must live with a tale before we can make it our own (141). This may be why I stalled for nine fallow months before returning to my "Swan Lake" drafts. Such is the writer's recursive journey.

To re-engage the "Swan Lake" project, I rewrote its story in one sentence—"a young prince and princess can't grow up and marry, because he is bewitched by his possessive mother and she by her sorcerer-father." Sounding like a flat thesis statement, this was too demystified. I returned to Metzger who suggests rewriting a fairy tale in ten sentences and then picking four, or five of the most intense moments to explore further (142). This key episode analysis bore fruit by illuminating which "Swan Lake" episodes echoed those of my own story.

I selected the following scenes: Odette's metamorphosis from girl to bird; Odette outside the window staring in at the ball; and the prince and princess's drowning and rebirth. But how was I to turn these three incidents away from the linear progression of story towards the lyric compression of a poem? I looked again to Metzger who suggests that "inside every story, there is a smaller story" (106). Let's call it the Russian doll heuristic whereby dolls nest within dolls. For example, in my "Ugly Duckling" poem, we might describe Odette's metamorphosis from girl to bird as taking place during her sixteenth summer. It might

occur at night, at a given hour, say, Monday around 10:30 p.m. But a lyric poem must be further limited. Such an episode must be compressed down into that one small event called a "peripeteia," or "moment caught at the still point of a turn" (Welsh 82). The trick, then, is to slow down and magnify this transfiguring moment to achieved a "marriage" of stillness and motion (Orr, "Four Temperaments" 1).

My poem, "Logos," demanded a similar "marriage" of opposing impulses. This text originated from a poem begun a year earlier during my stay in a northern Cree village. Whenever I had tried writing about these James' Bay experiences, my rational mind would force limits on my imagination, demanding political correctness at all costs. The results were often overly romantic, or too static. Much later, after my Northern teaching stints had ended and my explorations of logos as a wind being had begun, I vaguely remembered having done a descriptive sketch of a sub-arctic wind howling through a Cree village on one of my mid-February visits. I dug it out from a dusty folder and set to work.

Liberated from the shackles of political correctness, my imagination redirected the northern wind to sweep down over vast stretches of muskeg and forest towards Montreal. The poem's "center of gravity" was beginning to shift and quicken (Ede 115). After numerous drafts, the wind started gusting through the city. This logos image was leading me to write ahead of my understanding. But where to? As I struggled to focus this city scape, voices began speaking out of the wind's roar. I continued to limit what I had liberated. In so doing, I forged boundaries and chiselled out contours through the use of lineation, cadence, imagery, etc., in order to differentiate one voice from the next.

"Outside the Ball," as already mentioned, was less successful. The princess' stasis outside the window was hard to turn towards "peripetaria." Struggling with this problem, the limiting impulse over-rode the liberating one. This limiting tendency can become too rational a force. As Heaney has warned us, the hounds of poetry must be held to a course "where something unhindered, yet directed, can sweep ahead to its full potential" (15). In extreme, the limiting impulse turns into the bully who forced my hand to edit the prince and princess out of their own poem.

This, of course, did not happen in "White Drift," a persona poem whose voice overtook me as if in urgent response to Princess Diana Spenser's violent death. Her tragic demise catalysed both limiting and liberating impulses to grace me with "White Drift." The poem, which nearly wrote itself, was the fruit of my apprenticeship to the "Swan Lake" story. The liberating impulse set in motion by free-written explorations of this ancient tale led to a fluid convergence of autobiographical and mythic motifs, which then burst out of their swirling course to join with a filmic flow derived from the non-stop TV coverage of the royal funeral. The simplicity of the poem's lineation, its central image of a swan in flight, and its journalistic rendering of events served to structure and propel the text forward. Finally, the Princess's voice narration gave shape and credence to "White Drift."

Such a persona poem strives to marry Orr's "extensive" and "intensive" impulses, or to join what Metzger refers to as "mobility of self" with "coherence of character":

A person is a momentum. . . . The strength of story depends on our ability to render this mobility of self without losing the focus or coherence of the character. (106)

Overlaying autobiography (mine) with fairy tale ("Swan Lake") with biography (Diana's), "White Drift" is the culminating palimpsest in this epistolary palimpsest. Clearly, such a sub-layered genre can result in an "extensive" multi-dimensionality, or web of interlinking relationships. At the same time, the palimpsest format can situate us more "intensively" on any one of its many interpenetrating planes of awareness. Such a palimpsest attests to the fact that we are multiple, that we consist of various voice registers, discourses, and levels of consciousness. For example, on a personal level, this palimpsest drew parallels between H.D.'s story and my own, thereby encouraging me to don the poet's mask and strengthen my resolve to become such a writer. On a literary level, this multi-layered effort helped me define myself as an inheritor of H.D.'s Modernist lineage. Culturally, it also allowed me to confront what my Jungian analyst friend R.Y. saw as one of my primary issues—the rejection of my "swanishly" white, North European background.

How have I come to recognize my own heritage? How have I begun answering the questions raised by my Cree students that precipitated this study: "Why don't you look into your own traditions?" "What suffering forced your families to come to our lands?"

Researching the life and habits of the swan, I started compiling a list of specialized words relating to this compelling bird. (This heuristic procedure is an excellent accompaniment to the already mentioned key word analysis.) I embarked upon what the poet James McKean calls a "language search" for "active and concrete verbs, the history of the names used for the object [in my case, the swan], and terminology that seems especially colourful" (44). McKean advises foraging for the terminology of a given activity or

subject in "encyclopaedias, etymological dictionaries, instruction manuals, and resource books" in order to renew "the metaphoric origins of words that have grown thin with abstraction" (44, 45).

Searching down on my knees in a dim, dusty aisle of the biology library, I happened upon a "Glossary of Words and Terms" in a long-forgotten tome by Norman F. Ticehurst entitled The Mute Swan in England: Its History, and the Ancient Custom of Swan Keeping. This led me to employ such words in my poem as "white drift," which refers to the catching of swans to verify ownership; the "swan-hook" and "trammel" that traps them; "Upping Day" when the "swan-herds" rounded up the "game of swans"; and of course, "cygnet," "cob," and "dam" (120-24). This "language search" also resulted in my discovery of two ancestral figures: William Husye, who was appointed in 1463 to a Fenland Commission formed "to enquire into all irregular practices regarding swan-keeping" (19); and a Lord John Hussey, who lost both his swans and his head in 1537 during the reign of Henry VIII (106).

The word, "tugen," a cape of swan skin and feathers worn by the Druidic bards, led me further (Philip and Stephanie Carr-Gomm 71). Out of the cyber-mists materialized a page called "Families of the Filidh." These Druidic families trained their members to be "fili," a role that encompassed "court poet /scholar /teacher/ seer" (O'Brien, "Misc. Poetry Terms" 1). One of the 19 families on this list was Ó hEoghusa, or Ó hEodhasa (O'Hussey) from County Fermanagh whose members served as Druidic bards to the Maguire chieftans (O'Brien, "Families" 1; Carney 5-40).

I then happened upon texts by the last two O'Hussey filidh whose suffering is of the sort that my Cree students and colleagues would have me address. Here in an Early

Modern Irish prose translation, Eochaidh Ó hEodhasa (c.1565-1613), court poet to Aodh Mag Uidhir, expresses great concern for his Lord's safety. Shortly thereafter, Mag Uidhir (Hugh Maguire) was killed by the invading English in a skirmish near Cork in 1600:

Too cold I deem this night for Hugh; the heaviness of its showerdrops is a cause of sadness; alas that our loved ones must suffer the venom of this night's cold. . . .

From above the tops of the clouds, the floodgates of heaven have been opened. It has turned small pools into seas; the firmament has spewed out its destructions. . . .

May neither he nor I regret his journey around

Ireland; may my calamity not come – may the thing that causes me peril pass from us.

If he should be harmed from the task he has attempted, namely to make a circuit of Munster – we have found none like him – what is it but the thread-cutting of life itself. . . .

And yet his remarkable, clear countenance is warmed when the side of each bright stone-worked castle is changed into a fiery stormy mist. . . .

Because of Maguire's circuit through the west of the land where the sunsets, there are many courts in flames; no new destruction this, and many the land without heir or great-grandson. (278-9)

The Irish nobility's defeat at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 brought an end to their 1,000-year-patronage of the filidh families. Consequently numerous dispossessed poet-scholars fled to the Continent. A younger Ó hEodhasa,

variously called Gilles or Bonaventure (c.1570-1614), took Franciscan vows and founded the Irish College of St. Anthony in Louvain, Belgium, where he "wrote the first catholic catechism in Irish" (Deane 325). In these few lines from a prose translation, Bonaventure keens for the death of his friend's son who was "skilful in battle, a warrior, a sage":

It is hard to sleep when a friend is hurt. For comrades not to hate the sorrow of a companion's injury is almost to be without the bonds of friendship.

Sleeping when a friend is hurt, who could do that? It does not show a pure heart to fail to carry each other's sorrow. (281)

Beyond these clannish discoveries, my palimpsest-like rewritings "intensively" situated me in a mythic mode, allowing an "extensive" numinous energy to enlighten the lackluster corners of my own little post-modern story. Like "the massive stone doorways" of Stonehenge that lead apparently nowhere (Carr-Gomm 110), Metzger's fairy tale heuristic served as a portal connecting the visible with the invisible, the human with the extraordinary. Its transformative power even graced me with an occasional sideways glimpse of that Old European Bird Goddess whose *enchanted* presence is wont to shimmer forth from that dragon-guarded treasure trove of folktale, fable, and myth.

Let's not forget that to be enchanted is not to be bewitched. The swan maiden, alas, was bewitched:

We now think of enchantment as a malign magic spell, but the original meaning of "to enchant" was "to infuse with song," which is what the ancient choirs of song once did, maintaining the interconnection between this world and the otherworld. (Matthews, Celtic Spirit 70)

I commenced work on "Swan Lake" in a state of disenchantment and depression. Dispelling a paralysing malaise, this fairy tale project gradually rekindled my belief in the possibility of mending "a break in time" (H.D., Collected Poems 493). Through my engagement with "Swan Lake," I would on occasion chance upon an enigmatic path leading towards a mytho-poetic present whose eternal resonances can vibrantly buoy up current events, mysteriously re-clothe contemporary images, and renew archetypal templates.

More than any other of the heuristics used to generate and shape this dissertation, my fairy tale inventions rejuvenated my poetic voice. Slowly over time, I stopped singing into my wounds and began singing out of them instead. In so doing, I let the voices of others dictate poems like "Logos" and "White Drift." My "Swan Lake" improvisations allowed me to try my hand at what the filidh were traditionally commissioned to do—document the course of events and compose elegies for the tribe. Through this ancient tale of swans, love, and ethereal song, I was able to place my own little story "within the context of the greater song" (Matthews, Celtic Spirit 70). I was no longer alone.

BEGINNING THE END: MAP OF A HOSPITAL ROOM

Chairs, a chair
scraping closer.
Hand over mouth
to keep it down.

Bed pan. Under the bed?
Beside the table? Dull,
half-moon shape
of a sleeping gland,
small boat becalmed.

Curtain pushes limply
along a track,
accordion emptying of air.

Table: glass of water,
bubbles collecting on its rim,
box of Kleenex on a tray
beside the uneaten Jell-o.

No longer, "Are you better?"
"Are you o.k.?" No longer.

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